UCLA Luskin Center for History and Policy

MUSEUM CONTINUITY DURING MEGA-EVENTS

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OVERVIEW

This report examines how museums and cultural institutions responded to periods of closure, restricted access, changing visitor flows, and operational disruption during major sporting events. Drawing on comparative case studies from London 2012, Paris 2024, and the Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup, it identifies institutional strategies that **enabled museums to remain publicly visible and culturally active despite changes to normal patterns of visitation**.

The clearest pattern across the case studies is that increased citywide visitation does not automatically translate into higher museum attendance. During mega-events, visitors often concentrate around competition venues, fan zones, and major event corridors, creating movement patterns that differ from routine tourism. Paris provides one of the clearest examples: despite exceptionally high visitor numbers across the city, t**he Musée du Louvre recorded 1.3 million visitors in July and August 2024, 14% fewer than during the same period in 2023** (Musée du Louvre, 2025; Museums Association, 2012). London showed a similar pattern, with sector reporting indicating that some central museums also experienced attendance declines during the Games period.

The strongest opportunity for museums and cultural institutions includes the non-ticket or between-ticket public. London, Paris, and Qatar each attracted millions of people to Games-related experiences outside competition venues. These visitors sought places to gather, spend time before, after, or between events, creating significant opportunities for museums and cultural institutions to engage audiences who might not otherwise visit.

In London, more than one million people watched the Games at city Live Sites, and official evaluation estimated that UK visitors attending non-ticketed Games-related events generated £149 million in overnight-visitor expenditure and £353 million in day-visitor expenditure. In Paris, the city counted 2.5 million visits to its 26 festival sites and 1 million visits to Club France. In Qatar, FIFA reported more than 1.8 million visits to the Fan Festival and substantial attendance at free fan zones (Greater London Authority, 2012; Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2013; Ville de Paris, 2024; FIFA, 2022; FIFA, 2023).

Across the case studies, the most effective institutional responses were distributed, networked, and short-form. In Paris, the Grand Palais relocated major activity to a temporary structure for several years. The Louvre and four partner museums built a shared free "puzzle adventure" linked to Paris 2024. Qatar Museums also standardized practical visitor information across its network, making museums easier to integrate into visitors' schedules before, after, or between matches (García et al., 2013; Musée d'Orsay, 2024; GrandPalaisRmn, 2024; Qatar Museums, 2022).

A practical lesson for LA28 follows from the report's analysis: **if a museum expects closure, restricted access, or major disruption, it can still plan for a continuity of presence.** Options from past case studies include temporary venues, satellite displays, collection loans into open partner institutions, neighborhood trails, thematic short visits, and licensed live-screening or watch-party formats where rights permit.

WORKING DEFINITION: MUSEUM ACTIVATION

For the purposes of this report, museum activation refers to the ways in which museums and cultural institutions maintain public presence, cultural participation, and institutional visibility during periods when routine operations, visitor behaviour, or access to physical sites are disrupted by a mega-event. Activation may take place within museums, through partnerships, or across distributed cultural settings beyond the institution itself.

KEY FINDING:

Museum visibility and museum attendance are not synonymous during mega-events. The strongest institutional responses maintained public presence through distributed programming, temporary activation, cross-institutional partnerships, and visitor experiences designed around Games-time movement across the city.

COMPARATIVE INSTITUTIONAL QUESTIONS:

Across the case studies, this report asks:

- How can museums remain publicly visible when access to their primary buildings is restricted?
- Which institutional strategies enable museums to remain culturally active beyond their physical sites?
- How can closures or disruption become opportunities for new partnerships and forms of public engagement?

LONDON 2012 OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES

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London 2012 demonstrates how museums can remain publicly visible even when visitor behaviour shifts away from traditional museum-going. Rather than concentrating cultural activity inside individual institutions, the Cultural Olympiad combined distributed programming, public-space activation, and museum partnerships that extended cultural participation across the city. The Cultural Olympiad framework explicitly included a network of big screens, or Live Sites, alongside the four-year cultural program (García et al., 2013). This meant that public viewing and cultural activation were treated as part of the host-city experience, not as an afterthought.

A relevant museum initiative within the Cultural Olympiad was *Stories of the World*, described in the official evaluation as "the largest youth participation program ever undertaken by museums in the UK", with thousands of young people recruited to reinterpret collections and co-curate exhibitions (Garcia et al., 2013). *Stories of the World* is a strong precedent for collection-based work that travels beyond a single building and uses distributed partnerships to stay visible.

The scale of the Cultural Olympiad is also relevant to understanding how cultural activity was distributed during the Games. The summary evaluation reports 117,717 activities across the Olympiad, with 33,631 concentrated in the 12-week London 2012 Festival period (García et al., 2013). It also stresses that a large share of the program consisted of education, training, and participation activity, and that combined-arts and outdoor work helped "bring art into unusual places and animate public spaces" (Garcia 2013). This is directly relevant for museums facing closure because it shows that public-space activation was a core delivery mode.

As per interviews conducted with London 2012 stakeholders, free public programming formed a substantial component of the Cultural Olympiad. The evaluation reports 15.4 million free audience or participant experiences in the London 2012 Festival alone, and 43.4 million public engagement experiences across the broader Olympiad (Garcia 2013). In other words, the Games-time cultural field was built at a scale far beyond ticketed arts attendance.

For non-ticket audiences specifically, the city's Live Sites were significant. The Mayor of London reported that over 1 million people watched the Games on big screens at the London Live Sites in Hyde Park and Victoria Park (Greater London Authority, 2012). The scale of activity also illustrates that public-space programming formed part of the core delivery model.

The post-Games economy evaluation extends this picture by examining expenditure associated with ticketed and non-ticketed Games-related activity. Audiences visiting ticketed events were mostly UK residents, 30% were attending as part of an overnight stay, and the average gross expenditure per domestic visitor was estimated at £125 per ticket for overnight visitors and £86 for day visitors. The evaluation further estimated £149 million in expenditure by domestic overnight visitors at non-ticketed Games-related events and £353 million by domestic day visitors at such events (Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2013). These figures indicate that non-ticketed Games-related activity formed a substantial component of the visitor economy.

For museums and cultural institutions, this supports consideration of non-ticket audiences as a distinct and potentially significant public during mega-events.

Museums Association reporting at the time stated that some London museums saw major attendance drops in the run-up to and early phase of the Olympics, with the National Gallery reporting a 40% attendance drop in the first week of August and the British Museum also losing large numbers of visitors in July (Museums Association, 2012). While these figures should be understood as sector reporting rather than official organizer data, they are consistent with evidence from later case studies showing that routine museum visitation can be displaced during mega-events.

LONDON 2012 TAKEAWAYS FOR LA28

The London 2012 case illustrates how museums can maintain public presence through distributed programming, partnerships, and public-space activation even when routine visitor behavior changes during a mega-event.

Distributed institutional presence emerges as one of the clearest lessons from the London case. Stories of the World illustrates how collections, interpretation, and public programming can be delivered across a network of museums and community partners, allowing institutions to remain publicly visible beyond a single physical site. Instead of waiting out closures, museums can ask, as stakeholders have shared with us during interviews: "how do we turn collections, interpretation, and public programming into a distributed offer elsewhere in the city?"

Shared institutional identity also proved valuable during the Cultural Olympiad. *Stories of the World* shows that museum consortia can produce a shared, youth-facing, co-curated program with strong identity while still allowing for institutional distinctiveness.

Non-ticket audiences formed a substantial part of the Games-time public. Institutions should plan for large and regional publics without venue tickets. London's Live Sites and the spending attached to non-ticketed events suggest there is real value in creating public viewing, drop-in interpretation, family activity, and low-threshold cultural offers for people who are spending on the broader event but not necessarily on museum admission.

Institutional collaboration usefully functioned as part of the delivery model. The London case illustrates how partnerships between museums, cultural organizations, and community groups expanded the reach of cultural programming while distributing responsibility across multiple institutions.

QATAR FIFA WORLD CUP 2022

The Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup illustrates how museums can position themselves within the wider visitor journey of a mega-event. The tournament took place within a compact host-city model that enabled visitors to move quickly between matches, fan zones, entertainment, and cultural institutions. In this context, museums became one component of a broader event ecosystem rather than stand-alone destinations.

Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup took place in a highly compact, event-saturated environment where fans were able to move quickly between matches and entertainment. FIFA reports more than 3.4 million stadium spectators, over one million international visitors, and more than 1.8 million visits to the FIFA Fan Festival, averaging 96.3% attendance capacity. It also notes that the tournament's compact format enabled visitors to attend multiple matches and entertainment activities within a single day (FIFA, 2022). During interviews with the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, staff indicated that cultural visits were most likely to succeed when they were presented as short, legible, and easily accessed before, after, or between other scheduled activities (such as matches).

The broader visitor economy also extended beyond competition venues. FIFA reports that more than 1.4 million fans traveled to Qatar and that, according to the host country, more than 530,000 people attended entertainment events each day throughout the tournament (FIFA, 2022). While these are organizer and host-country reported figures, they indicate the scale of audiences seeking activities outside stadiums.

The free public side of the tournament is particularly relevant to museums seeking to engage non-ticket publics. FIFA's sustainability report states that host-country fan zones in Al Khor and the Doha New Industrial Area showed all matches live on big screens and offered performances, activations, music, competitions, giveaways, and food and drink. Entry was free and fans did not require a Hayya card. Reported attendance was 141,939 at Al Khor and 559,524 at the New Industrial Area site. The report also records 99,316 visits to the Hayya Fan Zone in Lusail and 100,239 to Arcadia at Ras Bu Fontas (FIFA, 2023). These examples demonstrate how free public programming can create opportunities for cultural engagement among audiences without stadium access.

Qatar Museums published "A Football Fan's Guide to Qatar Museums", framing its museums, restaurants, and shops as "the perfect arts and culture break before, after, or even in between matches", and standardizing practical advice such as opening hours and advance booking. It also maintained dedicated tournament information online, including practical visit information, maps, calendar information, and audio guides available in multiple languages (Qatar Museums, 2022).

Interviews with planners involved in the World Cup further indicated that visitor-facing information was designed around short windows of availability between events. If a visitor had only an hour between activities, the most valuable cultural product was often not a new exhibition, but a clear, multilingual, low-friction route into the institution. This suggests that reducing the effort required to visit a museum can itself form part of the cultural offer during a mega-event.

The 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum also demonstrates how programming can respond directly to the reasons visitors are present in the host city. Its "World of Football" exhibition ran from 1 October 2022 through 1 April 2023 (overlapping with the World Cup period) inside the museum at Khalifa International Stadium (a venue which hosted World Cup games), directly tying sport spectatorship to an adjacent cultural venue (3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum, 2022). This case is an example of how an open institution can benefit from proximity to event flows, especially when content is concise and directly relevant to why visitors are in the city.

QATAR 2022 TAKEAWAYS FOR LA28

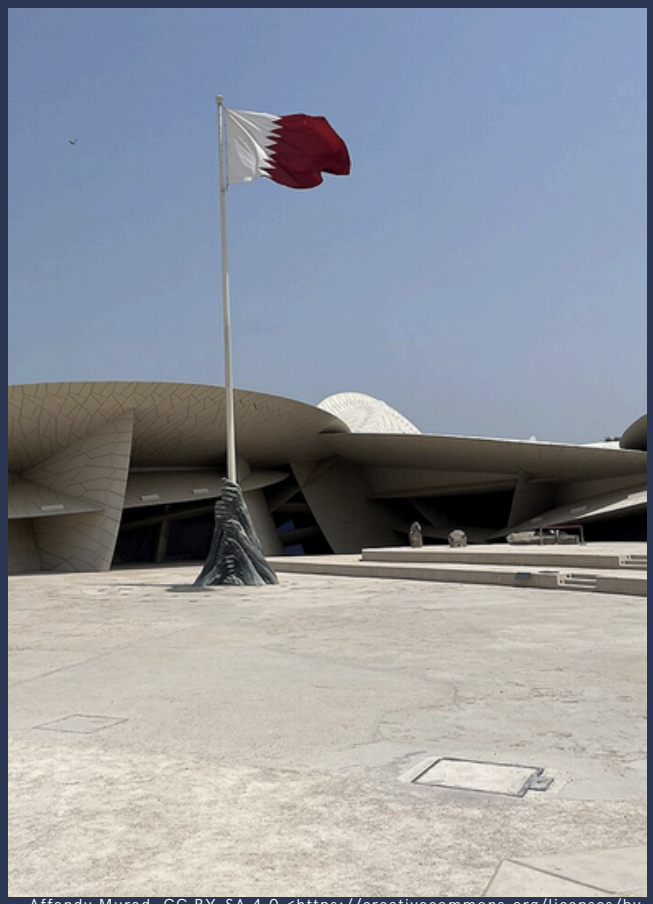
Open museums can be integrated into the visitor journey. The Qatar case suggests that cultural institutions are more likely to be used during a mega-event when they are easy to understand, easy to reach, and easy to fit around other scheduled activities. For LA28, open institutions may benefit from short formats, visible hours, multilingual wayfinding, simple ticketing, and messaging that reflects how visitors are already moving through the city.

Closed institutions can remain active by entering the fan economy through partnerships. Free fan zones, hospitality areas, and entertainment destinations may provide opportunities for collection-derived pop-ups, digital interpretation, reproductions of culturally significant objects or monuments, family activities, or small-scale retail when the main institution is closed or difficult to access.

Viewing parties work best when they are embedded in a wider public offer. The Qatar case suggests that screenings and fan-facing activities are more effective when the viewing experience is surrounded by other programming, food, interpretation, performances, or neighborhood activity.

Large non-ticket publics are measurable and economically meaningful. Paris and Qatar both posted very high attendance for festival and fan sites. For LA28, this means watch parties, fan-adjacent activations, and free public programs have the potential to become significant audience routes.

The most useful offers were short, visible, and legible. Qatar Museums framed the visit as something fans could do before, after, or between matches. For LA28, museums should therefore think in 15-minute, 30-minute, and 60-minute visit formats, beyond conventional half-day gallery planning.



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Networked offers are easier for visitors to use. The Qatar Museums network shows that joint visual and branding identity, shared wayfinding, and common storytelling can make culture easier to access during a crowded mega-event.

Routine museum attendance may become more selective and spatially uneven. LA institutions should budget and staff on the assumption that Games-time demand is selective, spatially uneven, and often displaced toward event corridors and adjacent zones rather than spread across the host city.

PARIS 2024 OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES

The Paris 2024 case study provides an example of how citywide visitation and museum attendance can diverge during a mega-event. The city reported 11.2 million visitors during the Olympic Games, but only 15.2% were international tourists. The largest share (44.6%) came from the Paris region, and a further 27.7% were day visitors (Ville de Paris, 2024). For museums, this visitor profile suggests that Games-time programming may need to address local, regional, and same-day publics as much as long-stay international cultural tourists.

The city also stated plainly that visitor patterns "differ from those observed during a traditional summer" and that "visitors go where the Games are held, particularly around the large fan zones and Olympic competition venues" (Ville de Paris, 2024). This provides one of the clearest official descriptions of Games-time movement patterns and helps explain why increased citywide visitation does not necessarily produce higher museum admissions.

Paris' non-ticket cultural and celebratory infrastructure was substantial: the city counted 26 festival sites, 2.5 million visitors to those festival sites, 42 days of programming, 2,320 sporting events, and 400 cultural performances. It also recorded 1 million visitors to Club France and 213,000 spectators at the Parc des Champions (Ville de Paris, 2024). These are city and organizer-reported figures, but they provide useful evidence of the scale of public activity taking place outside competition venues.

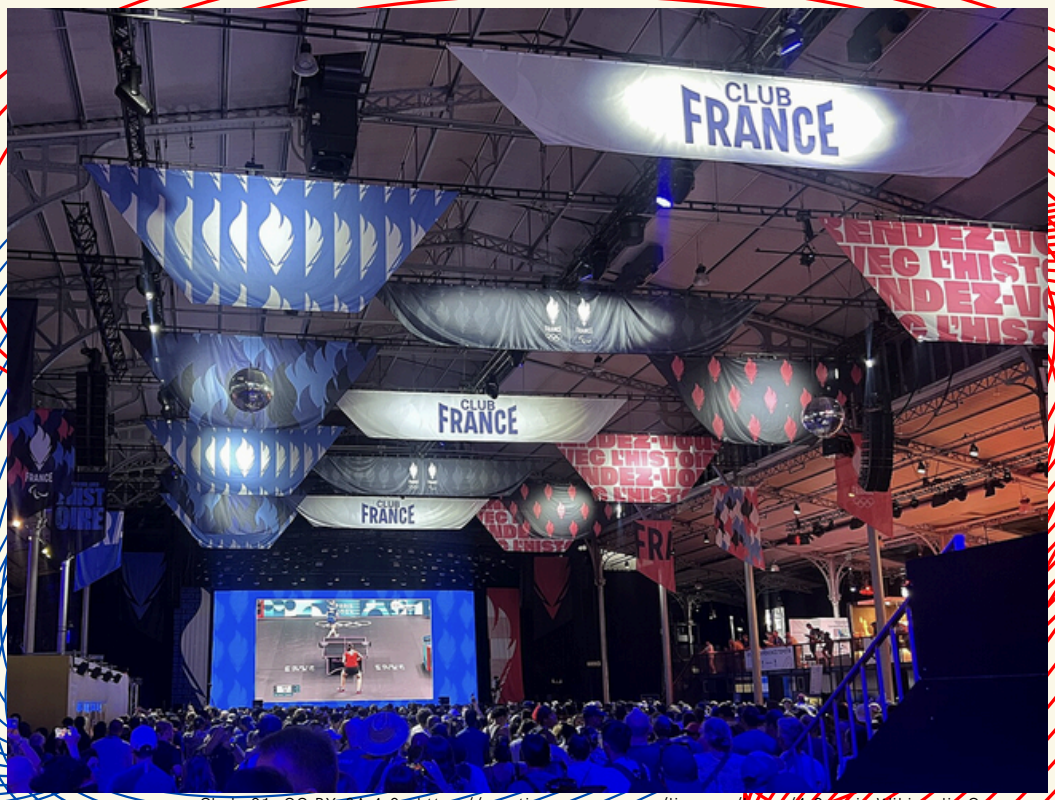
The Louvre's 2024 attendance illustrates the effect of Games-time disruption at museum level. The museum was located inside the official safety perimeter for the nine days before the opening ceremony and remained closed on 25 and 26 July 2024. It welcomed 331,760 visitors during the Olympic Games window and 275,000 during the Paralympic Games window, but its total attendance for July and August 2024 was 14% lower than during the same period in 2023 (Musée du Louvre, 2025).

The Louvre also developed programming that responded directly to the Olympic context. Its Games-related program included the exhibition "Olympism: Modern Invention, Ancient Legacy," Mehdi Kerkouche's workout tours, the Five Museums of the Games puzzle adventure, and the In the Words of Athletes interpretation programme. The Olympism exhibition alone drew 336,000 visitors between April and September 2024 (Musée du Louvre, 2025). This suggests that sport-linked interpretation and short-form programming can create meaningful public engagement even when routine attendance patterns are disrupted.

The "Five Museums for the Games" initiative is a relevant precedent in the Paris case study. Five Parisian museums: the Louvre, Musée d'Orsay, Musée de l'Orangerie, Musée du Quai Branly, and Centre Pompidou, created a free, shared, family-oriented puzzle adventure around a common story linked to Pierre de Coubertin (co-founder of the International Olympic Committee, widely known as the father of the modern Olympic Games) (Musée d'Orsay, 2024). Each museum hosted its own game trail, but the identity and narrative were shared across all five.

Temporary site activations can allow for museums to remain active during the Games period. The Grand Palais illustrates another approach to institutional continuity: during its renovation, the institution relocated major activity to the Grand Palais Éphémère from the beginning of 2021 through the Olympic and Paralympic Games period. The temporary venue enabled the institution to continue hosting art, fashion, and sport-related events while the main building was closed. The Grand Palais then reopened its main exhibition hall for Olympic and Paralympic events in 2024 and fully reopened in 2025 (Explore France, 2019; GrandPalaisRmn, 2024; GrandPalaisRmn, 2026).

Taken together, the Paris examples demonstrate several ways museums can remain publicly active during disruption: interpreting collections through the event context, participating in shared visitor routes, using temporary venues, and maintaining institutional visibility even when normal access is constrained.



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PARIS 2024 TAKEAWAYS FOR LA28

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Temporary cultural infrastructure can support institutional continuity. The Grand Palais demonstrates how an institution can remain publicly active during prolonged closure through a temporary venue with recognizable programming, which would preserve institutional visibility while major works or event-related restrictions are underway.

Shared museum initiatives can expand the visitor experience beyond individual institutions. The Five Museums initiative demonstrates how common narratives, shared branding, and multiple entry points can create a coordinated cultural offer while allowing participating institutions to retain their distinct identities. Models such as visitor passports, puzzle trails, or shared cultural routes may provide useful points of reference for LA28.

Games-time programming can usefully and directly respond to visitor behavior. Interviews with Louvre staff indicated that initiatives such as the workout tours and the Olympism exhibition succeeded because they aligned with the context of the Games and the limited time available to many visitors. Together with the Five Museums initiative, these examples illustrate how concise, event-responsive experiences can complement more conventional museum visits.

Institutional visibility and museum attendance may follow different trajectories during a mega-event. The Paris case demonstrates that museums located within highly visible Games environments may experience increased public exposure even when admissions decline. Under these conditions, institutions may wish to consider additional measures of Games-time success, including off-site participation, membership growth, digital engagement, partnerships, and future visitation, alongside conventional attendance figures.

Institutional continuity can be achieved through multiple operating models. Across the Paris examples, museums remained publicly active through temporary relocation, collaborative programming, reinterpretation of collections, and coordinated visitor experiences. Together, these examples illustrate the range of approaches available to museums facing disruption during a mega-event.

OPERATIONAL APPROACHES FOR LA28

The comparative case studies, together with interviews conducted with museums and cultural institutions preparing for LA28, indicate that institutions are likely to encounter a range of operational circumstances during the Games. These include temporary closure, restricted access, security perimeters, and changing visitor behaviour, while other institutions may remain fully operational and seek to engage Games-time audiences. The following guide presents planning considerations for both scenarios.

I. Museums and Venues Experiencing Closure or Restricted Access:

- **Secure a host site early.** The Grand Palais example demonstrates that temporary relocation can be effective when the host venue is established in advance and provides a recognizable setting for programming and public engagement. Depending on the institution, this could include another museum, a library, a school campus, a neighborhood arts center, or another civic or cultural venue.

- **Consider building a traveling program.** The case studies suggest that museums benefit from identifying elements of their collections, interpretation, and public engagement that can be delivered beyond the primary museum building. Portable exhibitions, object-based interpretation, digital layers, and short-format public programs provide different ways of maintaining institutional presence across partner venues and public spaces.

- **Join or create a neighborhood cluster.** A closed institution can collaborate with neighboring or thematically aligned institutions. A stronger format would include a shared neighborhood map, common hours where possible, one public-facing calendar, and one simple sentence explaining the cluster to visitors. The Five Museums initiative in Paris offers a relevant model for this kind of shared visitor route.

- **Treat fan zones and shared screens as cultural infrastructure.** Where screening rights and licensing allow, a museum can host or co-host viewings for non-ticket holders. Where rights do not permit this, it can still build a pre-match or post-match gathering nearby. The key is to add cultural value around the viewing moment, collection stories, neighborhood food, performances, local history, or artist-led interpretation. The London and Qatar cases strongly support the audience rationale for this even when the exact museum-hosting model varies

- **Use closure to redistribute collections and expertise.** A temporarily closed venue can remain active in the following ways: loan into open institutions, satellite displays in civic or community sites, co-curated reading rooms, or object-based trails in public space. London's museum-network approach and Paris's cross-museum Games program both support this direction.

II. Museums and Venues Remaining Open During the Games

- **Design a visitor experience for relatively short visits.** Develop offers that can be completed in 15, 30, or 60 minutes. The Qatar and Paris case studies suggest that many visitors will experience museums before, after, or between scheduled events rather than more traditional half-day experiences. Institutions may therefore wish to consider a range of visit formats that can accommodate different amounts of available time while remaining meaningful cultural experiences.

- **Practical considerations around the visitor experience are especially important.** During a mega-event, information such as opening hours, booking requirements, multilingual interpretation, transport guidance, accessibility information, and baggage policies becomes an important part of how visitors experience a museum. Clear, visible, and consistent communication can make institutions easier to incorporate into Games-time itineraries.

- **Respond directly to the event atmosphere.** The Louvre's workout tours and Olympism exhibition worked because they responded directly to the Olympic context. For LA28, open institutions should think in similarly direct terms: movement-themed tours, neighborhood-history trails, athlete or volunteer oral histories, and local community showcases.

- **Use institutional networks to extend cultural provision.** Museums remaining open during the Games may also have opportunities to support institutions experiencing closure or restricted access by hosting exhibitions, objects, public programs, or staff. The case studies suggest that collaboration across institutions can help sustain cultural activity across a wider museum network while broadening opportunities for public engagement.

Public Viewing and Fan Engagement

A strong museum or cultural-institution viewing format would combine four elements: a licensed or otherwise lawful screening component where possible, a small interpretive layer tied to the institution's mission, a social layer such as food or local performance, and an easy onward action such as a trail, exhibition visit, membership sign-up, or neighborhood map. This recommendation is inferred from the success of London Live Sites, Qatar fan zones, and the FIFA Museum's tournament screening and pop-ups.

The case studies indicate that public viewing and fan engagement are most effective when designed for clearly defined audiences. Families without tickets, nearby residents, spectators between events, volunteers, hospitality guests, and neighborhood communities each represent distinct publics with different expectations, time constraints, and patterns of movement. Programming that responds to these differences is likely to be more closely aligned with Games-time visitor behavior.

Methodological Considerations

The case studies draw on a substantial body of official documentation relating to city-run Live Sites, festival sites, fan zones, and organizer-led public programming. Comparatively fewer publicly available examples document museums hosting large-scale live match screenings during London 2012 or Paris 2024. As a result, the analysis places greater emphasis on well-documented museum strategies such as distributed programming, temporary relocation, networked initiatives, and visitor activation than on museum-led screening models.

Several of the attendance and visitor figures presented throughout the report are derived from organizer and city reporting. These sources provide the most comprehensive available data on Games-time activity and visitor patterns, but they should be understood as official host reporting rather than independent academic evaluation.

Finally, any museum considering live screenings or similar public-viewing initiatives for LA28 will need to undertake separate review of broadcasting rights, licensing requirements, insurance, security, permitting, and other operational considerations specific to its jurisdiction and venue.

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