

RE-CONFIGURING THE PLAYING FIELD: CHANGES TO THE COMPETITION TO HOST MEGA-EVENTS

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Abstract

Hosting rights for large international sporting events – such as the Olympic Games or the FIFA World Cup – are contested by local and national governments seeking international exposure, gentrification of urban areas, increased tourism, and economic development in their respective communities (Burbank, Andranovich & Heying, 2001). Recently the bidding process for these events has evolved to include a more diverse pool of applicant cities. For example, the bid competition for the 2004 Summer Olympic Games included applications from cities from emerging economies such as: Cape Town, South Africa; Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; and Istanbul, Turkey. The upcoming 2014 FIFA World Cup and 2016 Summer Olympic Games will be hosted by Brazil/ Rio de Janeiro, the 2010 Commonwealth Games were in New Delhi, India, and the 2010 FIFA World Cup were hosted by South Africa. These are all examples of large sporting events or mega-events hosted by an emerging economy, which are nations with social or business activity in the process of rapid growth and/or industrialization.

Previously, event hosts of this type were largely unseen, with the exception of the Mexico City 1968 Summer Olympics, Sarajevo 1984 Winter Olympics, and the Seoul 1988 Summer Olympic Games. The aim of this research project is to explore the evolution of the diversity of cities that are actively pursuing and engaged in the hosting of mega-events. Given the differences in the bidding process by the various international sport governing bodies for their premier events, this research project will focus solely on the bidding competition for the Summer Olympic Games. To explore this evolution towards the greater inclusion of cities from emerging economies, this project will draw from institutional theory; more specifically, we will examine change through the application of the theoretical framework of field-configuring events.

The concept of a field is central to institutional theory as it serves as a location in which to situate the relationships and interactions of institutional and organizational forces (Wooten & Hoffman, 2008). An organizational field, within the institutional theory literature, can be defined as a community of actors who coalesce around a common market, shared ideology or issue (Scott, 1995; Hoffman, 1999). Cities that are competitively pursuing hosting rights to mega-events constitute an organizational field given their frequent interactions with a similar group of actors and the shared issue of the selected event they are bidding to host. Field-configuring events are defined as temporary social organizations, which can include conferences, ceremonies, and competitions (Lampel & Meyer, 2008). By extension, field-configuring events are both the products and drivers of change in an organizational field. The application of this framework to the study of the cities competing to host a mega-event will allow for the identification of specific events that may have contributed to cities from emerging economies as viable host cities within the organizational field. In doing so, this project seeks to answer the question: why did the organizational field of cities competing in the Olympic bid process change?

In order to identify events that served as a trigger for greater inclusion of cities from emerging economies a document analysis was conducted. The data collection period spanned the timeframe of 1980 to 2010. The collected data include, but are not limited to: bid documents; IOC policy documents; report documents from external organizations (such as the United Nations); and newspaper articles. The data were read and reviewed several times before being manually coded to identify themes and patterns in the actions of key actors, which would be an indication change had occurred within the organizational field. The results from the data analysis identified two field-configuring events as the drivers of change in the field: first, the process which led to the adoption of Agenda 21 by the IOC, and second, the bid competition for the 2004 Olympic Games. The adoption of Agenda 21 by the IOC will highlight the ideological shift that was occurring within the IOC and the related community of actors, through the articulation of sport as a driver for social change and benefit. The bidding competition for the 2004 Summer Olympics, offers tangible evidence that the organizational field of competitive cities was transforming and new actors were being included. The application of institutional theory and the theoretical framework of field-configuring events to the study of why there has been greater diversity in the pool of applicant cities to host the Olympic Games, makes an important contribution to the academic literature through offering a new way of understanding the developments in bidding for and acquiring the hosting rights.

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