

A lasting legacy or a sporting failure? The legacy of stadiums after a major international sporting event

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Aim of abstract/paper - research question

Previous research has shown that several major sporting events do generate revenue in the area(s) in which they are staged, but they also result in major costs for the host cities and countries and the public expenditure on sports facilities for major events rarely creates a stimulus and/or a net impact on the overall economy. But do the new stadiums result in a lasting sports legacy?

Since major international sporting events have evolved over the last two decades to become more globalised, commercialised and commoditised, these events are now no longer only a matter for Western countries. Several countries and cities around the globe are applying to host a major event in the hope of getting economic, political and social benefits. But instead of examining such effects, we turn our focus to whether there is an existing internal sports legacy and a local sporting need for a brand new stadium.

Do stadiums get utilised after the event and is there a need for international sports federations to improve stadium requirements for major events?

The aim of this study is to examine whether stadiums built for a major international or continental sporting event are utilised after the event and to what extent. It is crucial and of interest to obtain this knowledge as billions of public funds is spent on these events and stadiums, but we are not certain whether the invested money is well spent or results in positive sports legacy.

Theoretical background

Several scholars have been studying the stadium phenomenon and the legacy of major sporting events in terms of economic effects, among them John Siegfried and Andrew Zimbalist, who find that public subsidies for sports facilities do not result in an economic boost or lead to a more vibrant local economy (Siegfried & Zimbalist 2007: 420-427). Victor Matheson states that public expenditures on sports-related construction or operation have, at best, zero net impact on local economies and that the investment on sports projects results, at worst, in true costs (Andreff & Szymanski 2006: 138), while Harry Arne Solberg and Holger Preuss have showed that major sporting events do generate revenue, but only revenue that covers the operating costs and not the investment costs (Solberg & Preuss 2007: 217). The sport legacies have, however, not been

examined or discussed by way of attendance to the same extent as in relation to economic issues and there is therefore a need for an additional perspective. This paper will contribute to the legacy and stadium discussion.

Methodology

The Danish Institute for Sports Studies/Play the Game used an index to study the extent to which stadiums built for major international sporting events are utilised. 'The World Stadium Index', which is based on the relation between attendance figures and the stadium's capacity, has made it possible to visualise the utilisation of stadiums and look beyond construction costs when comparing stadiums. Based on major international and continental sporting events such as the Olympics, Football World Cup and European Football Championship, 75 stadiums in 24 countries were included in the study. After the initial desk research, a questionnaire with questions mainly concerning attendance figures and numbers of events held after the major event was sent out to stadium owners and operators. Due to a low response rate (18.6%), qualitative questions and external sources were included in addition to the quantitative questionnaire.

Results, discussion and conclusions

The results of the study show that numerous stadiums have had major legacy problems after hosting a major international or continental sporting event. Several stadiums have had poor attendance figures resulting in a low index and external needs and requirements, which are temporary, are often prioritised over local sporting needs. There is an obvious need for a revision of stadium requirements in relation to hosting a major event. The international sports federations have to decrease stadium capacity requirements and be more observant of legacy issues when awarding a country and city an event. Due to present stadium requirements, only a few countries have the ability to host an event without making substantial investments in sports facilities, and it is neither sustainable from a sports nor an economic point of view for cities to have empty stadiums. It must be in the interest of both international sports federations and host countries and cities to create a lasting sports legacy.

References

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