

Smart Mega Events – How Have the IOC’s “New Norm” Requirements Impacted the Sports Facility Concepts of the Cities Bidding to Host the 2026 Olympic Winter Games? (Practitioner Contribution)

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Aim

The aim of this contribution to the parallel session is to evaluate and discuss how the “New Norm” guidelines (IOC, 2018) have impacted on the cities bidding for the Olympic Winter Games. Especially the abolition of the minimum venue capacity requirements by the International Sports Federations and the adaption of other requirements to the standards of IF World Championships level has greatly eased the sports facility demands on cities. The author will critically review and discuss the sports concepts submitted by the six cities.

Purpose and Background

The Olympic Winter Games 1994 and its legacy have been researched by the author for his dissertation on the sustainability of the event (Kaspar, 1997) within the framework of the event life cycle (Kaspar, 2014). The event life cycle concept puts the emphasis on the diligent management of the legacy post-Games in the areas of events management, venue management and sports tourism development. The theoretical framework of the event life cycle is based on publications by Hall 1992, Getz 1997 and Kaspar 2014 and discusses all stages of an event from the idea to the hosting and finally the post-event stage with the focus on events legacy, events strategy, the management of sports venues and the development of sports tourism.

The bid process for the 2022 Olympic Winter Games has seen five European cities dropping out of the race while the 2026 Olympic Winter Games bidding campaign just started within a new and more flexible framework, seeing three European interested cities (Graz, Milano/Torino, and Stockholm after Sion dropped out on 10 June), one North American (Calgary) and two Asian cities (Erzurum & Sapporo) in the dialogue stage. In 2018, the IOC has smartened the bidding requirements, especially the infrastructural requirements driven by the snow and ice sports federations and the operational requirements in the fields of transport and logistics (IOC, 2018). Cities may now offer bids that better suit their sports and city infrastructure as well as their long term legacy plans. Furthermore, the IOC openly invites cities to consider existing sports venues outside of the host country. This may finally result in what the author frames as “polycentric Games”, having not only a snow and a separate ice cluster, but maybe an ice canal venue in a third and the speed skating oval in a fourth cluster in a neighbouring country. This “New Norm” approach consequently reduces the burden to build new sports infrastructure. These polycentric Games (a term framed by the author advocating various – thus the word – poly – venue clusters) will also reduce the dimensions of both the Olympic as well as the media villages.

Design and Implementation

The sports facility concepts of the cities interested to host the 2026 Olympic Winter Games will have been developed by the summer of 2018. The following research questions will be discussed by the author based on an analysis of the sports venue concepts, developed by the bidding cities to that date:

- Have the sports facilities been designed in scope with the long term spectator capacity as the key focus?
- Have temporary venues been conceived as alternatives, where no post-use is foreseen?
- Has a polycentric approach been implemented for any venue where an alternative exists in the geographic area of the bidding cities?

Findings and Discussion

First, the contribution to the parallel session will give a very current insight by the author into how the interested cities have understood and adapted the new IOC requirements and how it has impacted their sports facility concept. Secondly, the concepts will be critically reflected by the author with sustainability and legacy as a key priority. Finally, general recommendations by the author for bidding cities regarding their sports facility concepts will be elaborated.

Conclusion and Implications

Especially the spectator elements (tribunes) must be downsized with the future demands in mind, as advocated by the “New Norm” (IOC, 2018). The city perspective should have the citizens in mind, including the transport or urban regeneration efforts. On the active and future events perspective, a clever sports events portfolio should generate the continuous activation of the sports venues based on an existing track record of hosting sports events. The author advocates that the post-Games ownership and management structure and its business and marketing plans are clarified way before the event in order to guarantee long-term sports and financial sustainability. Complementary, sports tourism products need to be elaborated for each facility for either kids, schools, clubs, citizens, athletes or tourists.

The author argues that in the future, more sports venue concepts need to be designed towards smarter mega events. If there is no evident post-Games use, temporary venues or a polycentric concept should be the preferred option.

References

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