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Chapter 4: Rise and Fall of the Mega Sport Events: The Future is on Non-Mega-Sport Events

Abstract

This contribution pleads for the organization of “non-mega” sport events (NMSE) in a global world. The analysis reveals that from an economic, tourism, social and sport participation perspective, NMSE’s are more likely to generate positive (or less negative) impacts and outcomes for host communities compared to “Mega” Sport Events (MSE). Economically, NMSE carry lower financial risk; they create better opportunities for flow-on tourism. Closer connectedness of the local population with NMSE increases the likelihood for sustainable social and sport participation outcomes. This makes NMSE more relevant as a means to creating durable benefits for host communities. More research is needed to start exploring the power of NMSE for host communities.

Short biography (6-9 lines):

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Introduction

Most research on impacts of events has focused on mega events, such as the Olympic Games (OG) or the World Cup Soccer, and the outcomes are not always positive. The OG or the World Cup are the largest sporting events with a tremendous global reach. In addition, the OG have a remarkably high positive image and a passionate audience, and the Olympic rings are one of the strongest global brands (Barney, Wenn & Martyn, 2004). Corporate partners are granted exclusive rights to this symbol. As such, the OG offer a dazzling global platform for transnational corporations to expose their brands, create awareness, inform the world, and stimulate consumption, all with the assistance of the efforts of elite athletes. These athletes are frequently positioned as ‘role models’, inspiring others to participate in sport, thereby promoting a so-called ‘trickle down’ effect (Hindson, Gidlow, & Peebles, 1994); a claim which is poorly substantiated (Weed, Coren, & Fiore, 2009). The “feel-good factor” that these types of events generate are temporary (Kavetsos & Szymanski, 2010), and the lasting effects for host communities can be negative both socially (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006) and economically (Kesenne, 2012). Thus, mega events have a tremendous global exposure and global power, but their sustainable impact is questioned.

Smaller sized non-mega sport events (NMSE) have been under researched when it comes to sustainable legacies. However, NMSE are more ubiquitous, and require tight local partnerships to stage the events. As such they have the potential and the power to reach out to people in local communities in a more profound way, compared to mega sport events (MSE). Therefore, NMSE may be more relevant to create durable benefits for host communities, as opposed to MSE; and at the aggregate level, NMSE provide more lasting global benefits. *The key question in this contribution is: “What makes NMSE uniquely different and more suitable to developing positive outcomes for host communities compared to MSE?”*

Events are known to have a variety of impacts including economic, tourism, social and sport participation impacts¹ In what follows, examples of impact, outcomes and legacies of NMSE and MSE are provided to demonstrate how NMSE (may) lead to more positive, sustainable outcomes for the people living in the host communities. After all, it is the residents' quality of life which is directly impacted by staging events.

Conceptual Framework

Definitions of NMSE and MSE events

There are no universal definitions or typologies of events. For the purpose of this contribution we define a MSE as an event that generates “very high levels of tourism, media coverage, prestige or economic impact for their host community” (Getz, 2012, 45), however, their impact and meaning reaches far beyond the event and the host city. A NMSE is also “major” event, but they are generally smaller in size, scale, scope and reach than their mega counterparts. For the purpose of this contribution, we define NMSE as the smaller version of MSE, being significant, one-off sport events, of short duration and out of the ordinary. Examples of NMSE are the Pan American Junior Athletic Championships, the European Junior Boxing Championships, or the World Badminton Championships (Gratton & Taylor, 2000).

Impacts, outcomes, legacies and sustainability

MSE and NMSE discussed in this contribution are temporal and trigger short- or long-term impacts (positive or negative) which lead to outcomes (positive or negative). When these outcomes are sustained, they become legacies. Preuss (2007) defines legacy as “all planned and unplanned positive and negative, intangible and tangible structures created by and for a sport event that remains for a longer time than the event itself”(p.86). ‘Tangible’ legacies are for example economic and infrastructure; ‘intangible’ legacies are for example: transfer of knowledge, image, reputation. Sport governing bodies responsible for staging mega-events

have recognized the importance of long-term legacy planning, in the hope to change the lives of local residents for the better.

In the last two decades, there is a call to shift the focus from merely ‘impacts’ to producing ‘sustainable outcomes’ (e.g., Chalip, 2006). Current literature often refers to the triple bottom line (TBL) approach in the context of sustainability, which posits that social, economic, and environmental issues are three intertwined components for sustained human development (e.g., O’Brian & Chalip, 2007b). Sustainable development refers to the needs of the present, without compromising the needs and wants of future generations. Thus, we focus on outcomes that are: (a) created through the event; and, (b) maintained for a longer period of time after the event in the host communities.

Economic Perspective

The overestimation of the benefits and underestimation the cost of hosting MSE, particularly during the bidding phase, has been well documented in the literature. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) have both followed a strategy of commercialising their ritualistic ‘assets’, exploiting media rights and sponsor partnerships to generate significant revenues for their organization (Foley, McGillivray & McPherson, 2012), while leaving the host communities with significant debts. Driven by a neo-liberal ideology, bidding for MSE is often part of a city’s pro-growth strategy with the intention to attract inward investments and create jobs. It is usually a dominant group of business elites, the so called ‘urban regimes’, that initiates the push for hosting events (e.g., Misener & Mason, 2006). One-off sport events create a typical temporary ‘shock’ in the economy (Dwyer, Forsyth, & Spurr, 2005). The demand for a range of products, services and facilities rises dramatically for a very short period of time. Economic-Impact-Analyses (EIA) try to capture the extent of this increased demand. Large, world class cities compete on a global scale for jobs, tourism, and investments, and want to host MSE as a

sign of global power. Events are promoted on the promises that they drive investments (public and private), jobs and tourism, but refrain to mention the opportunity cost (e.g., diverting investments from other project, crowding out regular tourists etc.). This is the reason why standard EIA overestimate the so-called 'economic benefits' since they only account for positive impacts while ignoring the negative ones (Kesenne, 2012). EIA operate under the assumption of free supply of inputs, disregard feedback effects and ignore resource constraints. Several sport economists have therefore proposed alternative methods to capture the economic impact of events, such as Cost-Benefit-Analyses or Computable General Equilibrium models. These methods reveal more realistic (and often 'negative') outcomes (e.g., Taks, Kesenne, Chalip, Green, & Martyn, 2011). The next section highlights why and how the outcomes of economic impacts are different for MSE compared to NMSE, and in favour of the latter.

Both types of events create (some) winners (e.g., usually the organizing committee, the hospitality industry, some businesses). However, negative economic impacts of MSE (e.g., tax payers debt) are dramatically higher for MSE compared to NMSE. There is evidence for example that the Olympics played a major role in producing the debt in Greece that spurred the country's economic downfall (Smith H., 2012, May 9). When we look at "winners" for MSE, Australia claims that their industry still benefits from hosting the OG in 2000 (Toohey, 2008). Obviously, there are always 'winners' when these types of events are hosted, and businesses can be one of them, but the number of losers is much higher (Kesenne, 2012). If we zoom in on the winners, it is the global audience of MSE, that brings in the big \$ signs through TV broadcasting, sponsorships, and other types of revenues (merchandising, tickets, etc.). It is the so called 'Ménage a Trois' (Thibault, 2009), that is the *Sport-Media-Business alliance*, also called the global sport media complex, that reap away the major benefits of MSE, leaving the tax payers with significant debt (Kesenne, 2012).

In a recent paper, Agha and Taks (submitted) assessed economic impact using a cost benefit approach (including five benefit and five cost drivers) and redefined event size and city size as continuums of resources allowing for a joint analysis of supply and demand. Using the concept of “resource deficiency” and bringing local economic conditions into the analysis, it was demonstrated that: (1) no city has the necessary resources to host a mega-event and will therefore never reach the optimal economic impact; (2) smaller events have a higher potential for maximum optimal economic impact compared to larger events; and, (3) smaller events have positive impacts in many more cities than larger events. Thus, evidence is beginning to show that NMSE may be more successful in generating positive economic impacts compared to MSE.

Tourism Perspective

In addition to stimulating economic development, cities hosting events are particularly keen about branding their city as a tourism destination. Two types of tourism should be distinguished: flow-on (i.e., at the time of the events) and future (i.e., sustainable) tourism. Both MSE and NMSE events attract visitors at the time of the event, thereby creating opportunities for flow-on tourism. However, the drastic difference in number of visitors may have reverse effects on flow-on tourism. For MSE, the enormous influx of tourists may crowd out regular tourists (Preuss, 2005), thereby negatively impacting the number of tourists partaking in classic tourism activities (e.g., visiting museums, sight seeing tours). Alternatively, large crowds and long waiting lines may hinder participating in certain tourism activities. NMSE also create opportunities for flow-on tourism activities (e.g., Gibson, Kaplanidou, & Kang, 2012; Taks, Challip, Green, Kesenne & Martyn, 2009), but the tourism industry has yet to learn how to capitalize on this opportunity and leverage NMSE to enhance tourism in the host community (Weed, 2003).

Because MSE attract global media attention, they are expected to brand their city as an ‘international’ tourist destination with the intention to render future tourism (e.g., Ritchie,

1984). Except for the summer OG in Barcelona, which saw the number of tourists grow post OG, there is no evidence that MSE have created sustainable tourism outcomes (Solberg & Preuss, 2007). Follow-up studies to actually measure these outcomes are usually missing, because they are extremely difficult to measure, since multiple externalities can affect tourism behaviour. Australia, for example, had great expectations to boost future tourism through the hosting of OG, but this strategy was counteracted by both, the September 11 attacks in 2001 as well as SARS in 2003 (Toohey, 2008), making it impossible to attribute any tourism gains or losses to the OG.

In summary, the tourism industry can potentially benefit from hosting events. However, the likelihood that NMSE create sustained future tourism is slim. This is particularly true if the event is not part of a larger event portfolio (Ziakas & Costa, 2011). NMSE have the potential to create new tourism opportunities, particularly for small and medium sized cities, which are likely not at full capacity, have room for growth, and can take advantage of these events to showcase unique features of the city or region.

Social Impact Perspectiveⁱⁱ

Social impact of events refers to “changes in the collective and individual value systems, behavior patterns, community structures, lifestyle and quality of life” (adapted from Hall as cited in Balduck, Maes, & Buelens, 2011, p. 94). However, accurate social impact assessments of events are missing. The well-intended rhetoric about the social outcomes are generally hoped for and desired, as opposed to being planned for (Chalip, 2006). Much of the evidence of the capacity of sport events to enhance social unity is on MSE and emphasize the feelings of euphoria, enhanced national pride, and unity. However, much of this research is anecdotal (e.g., Smith, A., 2009), and accurately measuring social impacts of events is extremely complex. Taks (2013) contrasted and compared social impacts and outcomes of MSE and NMSE, using four different perspectives: power relations, urban regeneration, socialisation, and human capital.

Overall, NMSE appeared to provide more positive social impact and outcome opportunities for local residents compared to MSE. This is based on the premise that NMSE create tighter social networks and connectedness of the local population with the event. . For instance, the nature of MSE planning does not start at the community level. The community reacts to plans presented to them (top-down-strategy), rather than being involved in creating them and taking part in each step of the process (bottom-up strategy). This bottom-up strategy installs a sense of ownership (Hiller, 2000), a solid foundation for carrying positive outcomes. Starting to understand how social impacts vary according to the size of events and the types of communities that host them, is a first step in increasing an understanding of what events actually mean for residents, who are directly affected by these events.

The concept of social capital may help explain why NMSE may have a more positive social impact on the quality of life of the residents in the host community. Community networks, relationships of trust and reciprocity, and social inclusion are central to social capital (Onyx & Bullen, 2000). NMSE seem to have a higher potential for the creation or reinforcing of horizontal social capital (i.e., horizontal ties among members of the community stimulating civic participation and high levels of social trust), and ownership. In contrast, MSE, reinforce vertical social capital (i.e., vertical ties between community members and elites), which represents a form of inequality between citizens. Misener and Mason (2006) offer four propositions as to how events can offer meaningful sources of social capital: (a) community values should be central to all decision-making processes; (b) various stakeholders, particularly community interest groups should be involved in strategic activities related to events; (c) collaborative actions should empower local communities to become agents of change; and, (d) open communication and mutual learning throughout strategic activities related to events must be maintained to minimize power brokering. All four propositions have a better chance to succeed for NMSE because of the tighter social networks and the greater likelihood that the

local population is connected with the event (Taks, 2013). Creating coherent networks within communities seems more plausible for NMSE, which are by default embedded in local communities. While bids for MSE, such as the OG or de WC are requested to demonstrate some type of meaningful social outcomes, their relative value of social ‘capital’ remains uncertain and are clearly a top-down strategy, ‘enforcing’ change in communities, including displacement of less powerful groups, forced evictions, and loss of affordable housing (e.g., Smith, A., 2012).

MSE events are primarily externally focused and commercially oriented, trying to gain a better market position in this global world. Their primary concern is not the people in the host community. However, MSE can contribute to creating ‘connectedness’ at the local level. Activities such as Olympic Torch relays, for example, boost pride and identity (Chalip, 2006); but note that these events again are much smaller in scale than the actual MSE. However, these extended activities of MSE need to do more than serving commercial needs and developing support for ‘Olympism’, else significant questions remain over the longevity of positive outcomes of these initiatives. Examples of sustainable, tangible social outcomes of MSE are Olympic parks, where people can gather and socialize many years after the OG (e.g., Atlanta 1996 OG; Kaplanidou, 2012).

Events allow local communities to create meaningful partnerships which have the potential to remain in existence long after the event is gone. However, long-term sustainability requires meaningful involvement of citizens at every stage. Again, this seems more plausible to succeed in the context of smaller events because of the bottom-up strategy. What is at stake here is that the structures created for a one-off event do not evaporate once the event is over, but that lines of communication and collaboration are sustained and maybe even strengthened after the event. In order for sport events to fulfill a local community’s needs, these needs will first have to be identified, and that too is easier to gather in the context of NMSE. Subsequently specific tactics and strategies can be put into place to create desired outcomes.

Sport Participation and Development

Sport participation and development can be considered as a component of social impact. Since “sport” is the core of sport events, stimulating sport participating is a plausible outcome. Claims that sport events will foster sport participation are found in bid documents of both types of events, and are based on the notion of the so called “trickle-down”, “demonstration” or “inspiration” effects, which suggest that the successes of elite level athletes will inspire others to become more active and get involved, resulting in increased levels of sport participation and physical activity. Evidence supporting this ‘trickle-down effect’ is mixed, and is mainly focused on major sporting events (Weed, Coren, & Fiore, 2009).

The OG, like no other event, attracts unprecedented interest from people around the world, but also from people within the host country with no interest in sport or the Olympics. Therefore, the OG can be considered a powerful tool to create awareness, especially for its core product “sport”. However, the most substantial sport related impact is an increase in passive involvement such as live and television spectating (Toohey, 2008); or that (a) those people who already do a little sport can be inspired to do a little more; (b) those people who have played sport before can be inspired to play again; and (c) some people might give up one sport to try another (Weed et al., 2009). Thus, large-scale events seemingly have the capacity to enhance sport participation, but the effects are limited at best and are more likely to retain existing participants than to recruit new participants into sport.

Opportunities for personal growth and skill development related to sport participation and development of local residents (e.g., through volunteering, officiating, organizing) are expected to be higher for local residents in the context of NMSE, since chances that locals take part in the planning and management of NMSE is far greater than for MSE. We found evidence for this in the case of the 2005 Pan American Junior Athletic Championships (PanAm Jacs; Taks, Misener, Green, Chalip, 2014), but not for the 2005 Canadian Figure Skating

Championships (Misener, Taks, Chalip, Green, 2015). The PanAmJacs enhanced the experience of local coaches and positively affected the number and development of local officials. These two outcomes have played a major role in the development of athletics in the region. In the case of the Figure Skating Championships, the national governing body (Skate Canada) brought in their own experts to execute more complex tasks instead of drawing from the local people. This is also common practise for MSE, which recruit experts from far away regions, thereby limiting opportunities for local people to execute meaningful roles and assigning residents with lower-end volunteering tasks that do not necessarily contribute to the development of the sport.

MSE systematically require either the upgrading of existing, or construction of new sport facilities, while this can, but is not necessarily the case for NMSE. Sport facilities for MSE, are high-end facilities, which seldom meet the sport participation needs of local residents. “White elephants” are detrimental outcomes of MSE. These are facilities which cost fortunes to built (see: <https://podio.com/site/budget-busters>), but remain unused post event because they do not meet the needs and wants of the local community. They carry extravagant maintenance costs and end up being closed (e.g., the Olympic facilities in Athens following the 2004 OG, see: <http://darkroom.baltimoresun.com/2014/08/athens-olympic-venues-in-ruins-ten-years-after-the-games/#1>). In the sporadic cases that facilities are being upgraded or built for NMSE, community needs are of utmost importance. This assures long-term use by residents, which is central for sustainable community development. Examples are a stadium built for the hosting of the 2005 PanAmJacs (mentioned earlier), which has played a major role in the development of local track and field athletes and programs, and also contributed to the development of other sports such as American football, and soccer (Taks et al., 2014).

Besides adequate sport facilities, other advantages of hosting of NMSE is that sport equipment, related items, financial surpluses are more likely to be donated locally (e.g., to sport

organizations or schools) after the event (Koemig & Leopkey, in Taks et al., 2014). The potential for creating partnerships between business and local sport organizations to enhance the sport experience for the local people is again, more likely in the context of a NMSE, given that this is organized from the bottom-up. Business partnerships at the level MSE events, are clearly at the global level, thereby circumventing the local level, unless other local initiatives are taken alongside the MSE (Chalip 2006; O'Brien & Chalip 2007). Overall, there is little evidence for sport participation outcomes from hosting events, and leveraging is essential (Taks et al., 2014).

Conclusion

Events are being organized regardless, so how can they be used to actually 'serve' the local community? In fact, what we did so far was looking at examples of event outcomes, whether they were positive or negative, sustainable or not. It must be acknowledged that most examples in this contribution are taken from MSE, and that many outcomes of NMSE are theorised or assumed. The reason is that, so far, little research attention has been given to NMSE, thereby lacking empirical evidence to substantiate these claims. This contribution calls for a shift in research attention from MSE to NMSE to start exploring the power of NMSE for host communities (e.g., Taks, Chalip, & Green, 2015). Positive outcomes of NMSE for host communities are more noticeable than for MSE, particularly economic and social outcomes. This makes NMSE more relevant as a means to creating durable benefits for host communities. In addition, there many more NMSE organised worldwide compared to MSE, thus, at the aggregate level, their impact may provide more lasting global benefits, as opposed to MSE. Based on the above, they have the capacity to be "big fish in small ponds", while mega sport events a rather "small fish in a big pond" when it comes to their potential or capacity of leaving a positive and sustainable legacy in the global world.

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ⁱ Note that “environmental impact” is not included here. While the 1994 Olympic Winter games in Lillehammer were the pioneers of the “Green Games” (Chappelet, 2008), Atlanta 1996 followed suit, but in 2000 Sydney was the first Olympics to include a section on environmental protection in their bid document (Toohey, 2008). While this is an important component with regard to impact and sustainability, and some progress has been made on environmental impact assessment (e.g., footprints) (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006), it will not be addressed here.

ⁱⁱ Parts of this section are retrieved from a previously published paper by Taks (2013).