Introduction to the Special Issue on Sport Event Legacies

Guest editor: Arianne C. Reis
School of Tourism and Hospitality Management
Southern Cross University
Hogbin Drive, Coffs Harbour NSW 2450 Australia
Tel: +61 2 6659 3696
Email: arianne.reis@scu.edu.au

Sport events today are among the most popular forms of organized entertainment, and are responsible for several impacts on the cities in which they occur. More than impacts, event organizers and public agencies that financially support these events claim that there are significant legacies derived from staging sport events in small, medium and large communities. These purported legacies range from long-term economic benefits accrued from a boost in visitor numbers (Preuss, 2004), to increases in sport participation rates within the host population (Frawley & Cush, 2011). Mega-sport events, in particular, have attracted significant attention from media and government bodies that tend to promote the positive legacies derived from the large scale public funding and private enterprise investments made in support of these events (Hall, 2001). This is particularly true in developing nations where mega sport events are frequently used as catalysts for infrastructural reforms (Cornelissen, 2004).

Although the theme of sport events, and particularly mega-sport events, has been extensively debated in the academic literature, most of the discussions have concentrated on the tangible impacts and legacies of these events, such as the economic impacts or the infrastructural legacies of sport events, with very little empirical research being produced in the area of intangible legacies (Poynter, 2006). Moreover, although there have been an increasing number of contributions in English-speaking journals coming from non-English speaking countries on this theme, there is still a paucity of research on sport event legacies derived from experiences in Asia, Africa and Latin America. This is despite the momentous surge of sport mega events being hosted in the so-called developing nations of the ‘Global South’. The Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008, the Delhi Commonwealth Games in 2010, the upcoming Sochi 2014 and Rio de Janeiro 2016 Olympic Games, and the 2014 and 2018 FIFA World Cup Finals hosted by Brazil and Russia respectively, demonstrate the allure and attraction that these events pose to emerging world economies, all seeking the exposure and alleged positive impacts these events may bring. However, as several researchers have pointed out, significant costs are also borne by hosts (Horne, 2007) and these need to be better scrutinized in the academic and non-academic literature if we are to truly advance our knowledge in this field and contribute to more socially-just and culturally-sensitive events.

Also of interest is the tendency for legacy research, particularly those studies used by government agencies and event organizers, to be purely based on quantitative surveys, with little consideration to the ‘on the ground’ life stories that can illuminate and open new avenues of understanding about what sport events, particularly large scale ones, can do to host communities.
These significant gaps in knowledge were the main motivation for this special issue. Although it is clear that nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America have long been hosts of sport events, and more recently have been increasingly chosen to host sport mega-events, the legacies of these events have not been sufficiently presented to and discussed at international fora. The reasons for this absence are certainly manifold, and we can only speculate about their origins. Coming myself from Latin America, I would argue that the language barrier is only one of the many difficulties encountered by scholars from non-English speaking countries in the ‘Global South’ to publishing research on this theme in international journals. Another consideration is the relative infancy of the systematic study of sport, recreation and leisure from a social science perspective in these countries, with many contributions to this field coming from scholars working from the more established fields of sociology, anthropology, economics, environmental planning, etc. The challenge of interdisciplinarity faced by scholars worldwide is certainly also felt by academics working in institutions in developing nations where resources and funding issues are even more striking and problematic. Cultural differences, not only in doing and communicating social science, but also in determining themes of research significance and their subsequent acceptance in international fora, can also interfere in the process of publishing and disseminating the work conducted in these countries. Despite these difficulties, the potential contribution arising from Asia, Africa and Latin America scholars towards a more refined and nuanced understanding of the impacts of sport events on host cities as well as the long-term legacies derived from them is incontestable. This Special Issue presents a modest contribution in this direction.

We open this special issue with a compelling argument to look beyond infrastructural legacies of large scale sport events and to go deeper into socio-political processes that are reconfigured because of these events taking place in a certain time and space. Carolyn Prouse investigates the pervasive rhetoric used by the Rio de Janeiro government to frame the occupation of favelas by military units to ‘pacify’ them in the lead up to the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games. The author argues that “it is important to understand the legacy of how different truth claims function in this discursive field and how different bodies and spaces come into being as threats”, concluding that there are different and competing discourses built around the ‘securitization’ of the city and that, therefore, ‘legacies’ are assimilated differently by the various actors.

The next article takes us to the 2010 FIFA World Cup, which took place in South Africa, but from a Zimbabwean point of view. We have all heard of the purported flow-on benefits of these events to neighbouring cities and regions. Dzingai Nyahunzvi explores this issue, asking the residents themselves if these benefits did really reach them and impact positively on their lives. More than that, Nyahunzvi compares the findings from his interviews of 30 residents with the official discourse produced by the ruling elite to conclude that there are significant differences between government and private enterprise rhetoric and local lived realities.

Although this is a small special issue, we are confident that the two excellent pieces included here justify the production of this issue of RASAALA on sport event legacies and that the contribution made by the two authors present novel readings of the current preferred jargon of sport mega-event supporters: their legacies.
References


