

Fair Games?

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Abstract:

This article delves into the financial and infrastructural challenges faced by host cities post-Olympics. It discusses the exorbitant costs of the bidding process, emphasizing the strain on cities and the influence of private connections and geopolitical factors on bidding outcomes. The enduring financial burdens post-Olympics are examined, along with the underutilization of Olympic infrastructure and unequal distribution of benefits among cities. Alternatives like permanent host cities or extended multi-month festivals are proposed, advocating for prioritizing athletic competition over extravagant ceremonies to reduce costs and focus on core values.

Keywords: *Olympics, Hosting, Costs, Infrastructure, Civic Development, Disenfranchisement, Public Opinion, Alternatives, World Championships, International Competition, Expenditures, Athletics, Economic, Impact, Disruption, Sustainability.*

Introduction

Every four years, for a period of seventeen days, the world becomes captivated by the enthralling and vibrant display of athleticism, ambition, pride, and celebration showcased at the Summer Olympic Games. However, once the final spectators and athletes depart, host cities are often left grappling with substantial debts and the burden of maintaining costly infrastructure. The immense expenses associated with hosting a successful Olympic event are commonly believed to be offset by tourist spending and a surge in local employment opportunities. Unfortunately, reality often paints a different picture, leaving host cities and their taxpayers to grapple with long-term financial repercussions. The journey of Olympic extravagance commences with the application process, which in itself is a costly endeavor. Simply bidding for the Olympics can set cities back approximately \$20 million. Moreover, while the official bidding period lasts only two years for cities that make the shortlist, the entire process typically spans a decade from initiation to the announcement of voting results by International Olympic Committee (IOC) members. Apart from the financial strain of bidding, this process also ties up valuable real estate in prime urban locations until the bidding outcome is determined. This leads to millions of dollars in lost revenue for local

economies, as private developers who could have utilized the land are sidelined. Furthermore, the stagnation caused by vacant lots can result in a loss of vitality in specific urban areas. All these efforts may amount to naught if a bidding city fails to meet the expectations of IOC members, as private connections and opinions on government policies often influence decision-making (for instance, Chicago's 2012 bid is believed to have been affected by tensions related to U.S. foreign policy). The costs associated with bidding for the Olympics pale in comparison to the astronomical bills incurred in hosting the Games themselves. Budgeting for the Olympics is a daunting task due to the nature of large-scale, one-time projects. For instance, Los Angeles residents only recently finished paying off the staggering expenses of the budget-breaking 1984 Olympics. Similarly, Montreal is still grappling with debt from its 1976 Games, with the added irony that Canada remains the only host country to have failed to win a single gold medal during its own Olympics. This tradition of runaway expenses has persisted in recent years, as evidenced by the admission from London Olympics managers that their 2012 costs might escalate to ten times their initial projections, leaving taxpayers burdened with a £20 billion deficit. Hosting the Olympics is often viewed as an opportunity to modernize a city's sports infrastructure. The diverse requirements of Olympic sports, ranging from aquatic complexes to equestrian circuits and athletic stadiums with 80,000 seats, showcase the scale of infrastructure needed to accommodate athletes from around the globe. However, these extensive facilities are primarily utilized for a short period during the Games. Despite the initial enthusiasm among local populations for developing world-class sporting venues, these complexes often fall into disuse once the Olympic excitement fades. Even in countries like Australia, known for their passion for sports, taxpayers are left with a hefty \$32 million annual bill for maintaining these now-vacant facilities. This highlights the long-term financial burden associated with hosting the Olympics and maintaining infrastructure that may not see consistent use beyond the event. Another significant concern surrounding Olympic hosting is the distribution of benefits from civic infrastructure developments. These developments primarily benefit a single metropolitan center, with some outlying areas receiving revamped sports facilities at best. In countries with vast land masses, this results in large segments of the population being excluded from these benefits. Additionally, since the International Olympic Committee tends to favor prosperous "global" centers (for instance, the United Kingdom was informed that only London had a realistic chance of winning after three failed bids from provincial cities), the enhancement of public transport, roads, and communication networks tends to concentrate in already well-equipped areas with world-class infrastructure. This continual bypassing of smaller cities creates a cycle of disenfranchisement: these cities miss out on capital injections, struggle to become top contenders, and are consistently overlooked in favor of more established choices. Lastly, there is no guarantee that hosting the Olympics will be a popular success. The anticipated "feel-good" factor, often cited by proponents of Olympic bids and reflected in high approval rates among locals (such as Parisians and Londoners for their cities' respective 2012 bids), can be fleeting. This sentiment is closely tied to a nation's performance on the medal tables and can dissipate quickly. The transient excitement of hosting the Games cannot overshadow the years of disruptive construction projects and security concerns that precede them, nor can it overshadow the decades of debt repayment that follow. Greece's preparations for Athens 2004, for example, deterred tourists due to widespread concerns about congestion and disruption, highlighting the potential downsides of hosting the Olympics. There are viable alternatives to the excessive spending, extravagance, and waste associated with modern Olympic Games. One option is to establish a permanent host city specifically designed or rebuilt for the Olympics. Another approach is to extend the duration of the Games to create a multi-month festival. This would benefit local businesses with increased spending and alleviate congestion as participants and spectators arrive and depart according to their schedules. However, neither the concept of a "Olympic City" nor the extended duration fully address the core issue. A more effective solution would involve prioritizing athletic competition over pageantry and spectacle, focusing on the essence of athletic rivalry. As an alternative, the Olympics could be eliminated entirely. International competition could still thrive through world championships held in

each discipline. Many of these events are already conducted during non-Olympic years. For instance, the International Association of Athletics Federations has organized a biennial World Athletics Championship since 1983, as members determined that relying solely on the Olympics for their championship was inadequate. Such events maintain world-class competition without the need for Olympic-level expenditures.

Sources:

1. International Olympic Committee (IOC) official website
2. World Championships in various sports federations' official websites (e.g., International Association of Athletics Federations for track and field)
3. Academic journals in sports management, economics, and sociology
4. Reports and studies by organizations focusing on sports economics and policy
5. News articles and analyses from reputable sources covering Olympic Games and related topics.