THE SUSTAINABILITY OF MAJOR EVENTS: ISSUES FOR PUBLIC POLICY

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IFPRA World Congress
Hong Kong, November, 2010
“Let’s not waste missiles on cities not important enough to have a professional sports franchise”
• Governments fascinated with role of sport & leisure to deliver social & economic benefits

• Communities face pressures from global economic, social and cultural changes
  • economic malaise & the erosion of traditional community life
  • events one strategy to leverage benefits
• Events key component of cultural milieu
  • contribute to liveability & attractiveness
• The post-modern city
  • de-industrialisation & new urban forms
  • focus on play & pleasure - urban spectacles
• Events as central element in positioning strategies
  • compete to host international events
  • continual renewal of infrastructure
  • “Glocalisation” – local communities compete on global markets for sources of tourism & related expenditures (Downward et al, 2009)
• Assumption that hosting events generates net economic & social externalities

• Debates traditionally focused on economic rather than social
  • detractors emphasize costs - supporters overstate benefits

• Taxpayers (and politicians?) left only with information at endpoints of the spectrum of possibilities
• No clear definition of the term ‘legacy’ (Preuss, 2007)

• Elusive term (Cashman, 2006)
  • perception that legacies are self evident & generally positive

  “assumption that legacy benefits will flow down to the community…as a matter of course”

  (Shipway, 2007)
• Facing economic, social & environmental risks
• Business-as-usual is not an option
  • shareholder, societal, stakeholder & ecological needs/interests
• Beyond CSR! (McIntosh, 2009)
• Develop new approaches to:
  • lifestyle
  • land use
  • development
  • industry/business
• Nature of sustainable society & environment is complex - across sectors & disciplines
  • energy production
  • materials
  • transport
  • agriculture
  • tourism
  • land management
  • construction & built environments
  (McIntosh, 2009)
People
Planet
Profit
People
• Bids highlight legacies for host community
  • commitment loses momentum after event

“Six months on, though, I’m struggling even to recall what the changes were supposed to be. ..... But why search for more than you’re ever likely to find? We have acquired some pleasant memories. Shouldn’t we leave it at that?”

Mackay (2001)
• “...strengthened social structure related to the strengthening of community volunteerism” - Calgary 1998 (Ritchie, 2001)

• “...a mass volunteer recruitment drive that could result in a volunteer culture across Britain” - London 2012 (Shipway, 2007)
Sydney Olympics highlighted the role of volunteers

“a great impetus post-Games to see some of the highly regarded volunteers make themselves available for other community projects”

Not evident this has occurred

Haynes (2001)
• Meta-analysis (Solberg, 2006)
  • majority of people welcome hosting events
  • level of support grew as event grew nearer - higher after event finished than first proposed
  • substantial proportion of people willing for events to be funded through public resources
  • benefits tended to outweigh the costs
  • information sources??
“Relationship between sport and social capital has an equal chance of being either positive or negative” (Nicholson & Hoye, 2008)

“…no evidence that high profile sporting events have a material influence on sports participation” (Crawford Report, 2009)
Planet
• Tourism Sector response to sustainability – isolated pockets with poor implementation (Gossling et al, 2009)

• Paradigm “nudge” rather than a paradigm shift

• “greenwash”; “veneer environmentalism or veneer sustainability” (Weaver, 2007; 2009)
While knowledge about environmental impacts is growing, research on leveraging events for environmental benefits is non-existent

(O’Brien & Chalip, 2008)
Profit
• Anticipated outcomes (especially economic) frequently not realized or below expectations
• Quantity & distribution of returns on public sector investment in sport events uncertain
  • no clear evidence that use of public funds results in sizable benefits
• “gloomy” data (Downward et al, 2009)
• Need for skepticism (Swindell & Rosentraub, 1998)

• Possible to assess expenditures during & immediately after sport events, but longer-term legacy is more elusive (Gratton et al., 2005).

• Ongoing stimulus may be required to sustain multiplier effects (Downward et al 2009)
**Ex ante**
- often misleading
- considerable variance in results (data/assumptions/who)
- incentives to win bids - strong interest groups

**Ex post**
- more reliable (consistent) - neutral researchers
- at best hosting events adds nothing statistically to employment or value of the economy (Downward et al 2009)
SUMMARY

- Economic benefits often discredited
- Non-economic benefits often anecdotal
- Increased community exposure, enhanced community image, urban rejuvenation questioned
SUMMARY

- Role models inspiring community health benefits uncertain
- Social and psychological impacts can exceed economic impacts
- Social and psychological benefits may be more valued by the community
- Little knowledge/emphasis on environmental issues
“…while a coherent theoretical case can be made for public sector investment in sports, the evidence in support of this case is relatively weak, and suggests considerable caution and planning being required to harness the spillover effects from the investments”

(Downward et al, 2009)
Economics and Politics of Tobacco Policy

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EIo6LRDgSoY
• Decisions about major events essentially political - not rational planning process
  • include little or no community input
  • policy makers use unfounded assumptions

• Powerful symbolism & ritual
  • difficult issue for politicians
  • anti-city/anti-nation?
• Emotional hold on the public - psychic income/civic totems
• Non-use value (e.g., National Parks)
• Media - influential & vested interest (externality)
• Benefits concentrated amongst those with political influence/power

• Negative externalities dispersed across majority of less influential taxpayers

• “groups that provide the most effective political support for politicians tend to gain” (Fort, 2006)
• Policy concerns rise & fall on political agenda
  • climate change?
• Sustainability considered important by public & industry
  • little evidence of substantial behaviour change
• Is leisure of the wealthy leading to the starvation of the poor? (Gossling et al, 2009)
  • developing countries bidding for events?
• Challenge the growth paradigm
  • small improvements offset by growth in events & tourism
• Data available to facilitate policy & management decisions inadequate
  • research on sustainable tourism policy is weak (Dodds & Butler, 2009)
  • sustainable events/tourism like an elephant
• Political cycle & focus is short term
• Consumer preferences & behaviours may drive change (response by government)
• Sport/event/tourism investment ‘foreign’
  • lacks linkages required for local economic growth
  • leakage
• If event systems tied to unsustainable external systems then change is difficult
  • different sectors moving at different speeds
• Limits to change may result from hard barriers (regulations, costs) & soft barriers (culture, knowledge, politics & risk perception)
• Sustainability should be seen as a transition or journey rather than an end point
  • not absolute but degrees of relative sustainability
• Shift to new paradigm in event impact/legacy planning & management
• More strategic approach - looking forward
• Leveraging of long term benefits rather than focus on short term outcomes (Chalip, 2006)
• Beyond “build it & they will come”
• Integrated planning across sectors
• Portfolio of events
• Concentrate on community engagement – sense of celebration & fun
• Event augmentations - learn, socialise
• Link to subcultures and coordinate related events (themes)
• Opportunities to engage/align with social & environmental issues
CONCLUSION

- Incremental change will not be enough
- Deep change is needed:
  - goals & practice of business enterprise
  - ways we relate to natural systems
  - ways we relate to each other, use time & build communities

(McIntosh, 2009)