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The Four 'Knowns' of Sports Mega-Events

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ABSTRACT *This article uses a piece of writing in* The Guardian *newspaper by the philosopher Slavoj Zizek ('The empty wheelbarrow', 19 February, p. 23, 2005) about the former US Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, as a framework by which to reflect critically on major international sporting events, or sports mega-events. It suggests that it is an academic's duty to look critically at the assumptions, beliefs and misrepresentations that are often suppressed, or, perhaps more accurately, repressed, about sports mega-events. The article is based on an analysis of research and writing about sports mega-events, some of which offer more comprehensive reviews of the literature. It is argued that in their enthusiasm to host and support sports 'megas', politicians, senior administrators of sport, corporate leaders and even some academics may often encourage the pretence that we do not know as much as we do about things that actually form the background to them. Information is used from studies of sports mega-events that have taken place, or are planned, in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe and North America to illustrate the four 'knowns', but the main focus is on the 'unknown knowns'.*

KEYWORDS: *sports mega-events; Olympic Games; Football World Cup; impacts; legacies*

Introduction

Detailed analysis of sports mega-events, such as the FIFA Football World Cup and the Summer Olympic Games, enables consideration of several overlapping and intersecting issues of contemporary social scientific interest.[1] Whilst there have been a number of earlier discussions about 'special', 'hallmark' or 'mega-events' (see, for example, Witt, 1988; Syme *et al*., 1989; Law, 1994), it is Maurice Roche's definition of them that commands our attention today. He states that mega-events are best understood as 'large-scale cultural (including commercial and sporting) events, which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance' (Roche, 2000: p. 1). Two central features of contemporary mega-

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events are, first, that they are deemed to have significant consequences for the host city, region or nation in which they occur, and second, that they will attract considerable media coverage. By this definition therefore, an unmediated mega-event would be a contradiction in terms.

For Roberts (2004: p. 108) what defines certain sports events as 'mega' is that they are 'discontinuous', out of the ordinary, international and simply big in composition. What Roberts refers to as 'megas' have the ability to transmit promotional messages to billions of people via television and other developments in telecommunications. 'Megas' have attracted an increasingly more international audience and composition. An estimated television audience of 3.9 billion people, for example, watched parts of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, and the cumulative TV audience estimate was 40 billion. A total of 35,000 hours were dedicated to its media coverage – an increase of 27% over the Summer Olympics held in Sydney in 2000 (see www.olympic.org/uk). The 2002 FIFA World Cup, staged in Japan and South Korea, provided even more – 41,000 – hours of programming in 213 countries and produced an estimated cumulative audience of 28.8 billion viewers (Madrigal *et al*., 2005: p. 182). It is these leisure industry 'supernovas' (Roberts, 2004: p. 112) that this paper focuses on.

Three or Four 'Knowns'?

Writing in *The Guardian* Slavoj Zizek (2005) noted that when the former US Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, engaged in a little amateur philosophy about the situation in Iraq in March 2003 he missed an important dimension. Rumsfeld stated the following: 'There are known knowns. There are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we know that we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we do not know we don't know' (to listen to this and other 'sound-bites' from Donald Rumsfeld visit the BBC Radio 4 website www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/news/bh/rumsfeld.shtml.). Zizek added that Rumsfeld forgot to add the crucial fourth term, '"unknown knowns", things we don't know that we know'.

Whilst Rumsfeld suggested that the main dangers in the confrontation with Iraq were the 'unknown unknowns', this article agrees with Zizek and suggests that it may be the 'unknown knowns' about something that may be more pernicious. This is as true for understanding sports mega-events as for military operations. The article suggests that it is essential to look critically at the assumptions, beliefs and misrepresentations that are often suppressed or even repressed – the 'unknown knowns' – of sports mega-events. Drawing on a review of research on sports mega-events that have taken place, or are planned, in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe and North America, the four 'knowns' are illustrated, with the main focus on the 'unknown knowns'. For a more comprehensive and detailed account of social scientific studies of mega-events in specific places, see Horne and Manzenreiter (2006).

Known Knowns

Since 1992, when the Summer and Winter Olympic Games took place in the same year for the last time, there has been a two-year cycle of sports mega-events.[2] The

Summer Olympic Games occur in the same year as the European Football Championships, organised by the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), whilst the Winter Olympics shares its year with the FIFA Football World Cup finals and the Commonwealth Games. Despite the decision of the Olympic Programme Commission of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in July 2005 to reduce the number of sports from 28 to 26 from the 2012 Olympics, it is evident that the size of the event, as well as the enthusiasm to host and participate in sports mega-events like the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup has grown in the past 20 years.[3] At the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles 140 countries were represented, 6797 athletes competed, and 221 events took place in 23 sports. By 2004 in Athens 201 countries were involved, and 11,099 athletes took part in 301 events in the 28 Olympic sports (Malfas *et al*., 2004: p. 210; www.athens2004.com).

The expansion and growing attraction of mega-events has been for three main reasons. First, new developments in the technologies of mass communication, especially the development of satellite television, have created unprecedented global audiences for events like the Olympics and the World Cup. This, in turn, has meant that the television revenues available to host cities have grown exponentially since the mid-1970s. Indeed, where the television rights for Montreal 1976 sold for less than US$30 million, only eight years later the rights for the Los Angeles Olympics brought in more than US$240 million, and by Sydney 2000 this had risen to over US$1 billion (Roche, 2000). Jacques Rogge, president of the IOC, told *The Financial Times* in May 2005 that he expected total television rights for the Olympic Games to rise to US$3.5 billion by 2012. Not surprisingly therefore representatives of the media easily outnumber the athletes – in Sydney in 2000 there were 16,033 (press and broadcasting) reporters and during the Winter Olympic Games in Salt Lake City in 2002 there were 8,730 reporters covering the performances of 2399 athletes (Malfas *et al*., 2004: p. 211).

Second, according to the IOC international sponsorship revenue for the 1980 Summer and Winter Olympics was nil (*Marketing Matters*, 2001: p. 1). The influx of serious corporate sponsorship money into the Olympics began with Los Angeles in 1984 and has provided another important source of income for host cities ever since. Together, these two 'revenue streams' – and we should remember that the strategic appeal of the Olympics to corporate sponsors is directly related to the size of the television audiences – have transformed the economic calculus associated with hosting the Games. We need only recall that, in the aftermath of Montreal's huge debts, Los Angeles was the only serious bidder for the 1984 Olympics; but now, both the Olympics and the World Cup have become extended extravaganzas of promotional opportunities (Whitson, 1998). Long gone are the days, as in 1966, for example, when FIFA could simply announce that the next four World Cup finals would be played in Mexico, Germany, Argentina and Spain (Katwala, 2000: p. 63).

Finally, a third reason why interest in hosting sports mega-events has grown is that just as they are seen as useful in the selling of all manner of commercial products, so too are they seen as valuable promotional opportunities for cities and regions, showcasing their attractions to global audiences and helping to attract tourism and outside investment. Elsewhere, Hannigan (1998) has identified the growth of 'urban entertainment destinations' (UEDs) as one of the most significant developments transforming cities throughout the developed world since the 1980s.

Hannigan argues that the 'fantasy city' of the late 20th and early 21st century has been formed by the convergence of three trends. First, through the application of the four principles of efficiency, calculability, predictability and control (or 'McDonaldisation' as Ritzer, 1993 described it), there has been a rationalisation of the operation of the entertainment industries. Second, theming, as exemplified by the Disney Corporation (or 'Disneyisation', see Bryman, 2004), produces new opportunities for commercial and property developers in urban areas. Third, accompanying synergies between previously discrete activities, such as shopping, dining out, entertainment and education, lead to 'de-differentiation' – what some analysts regard as a feature of 'post-modernisation'. These trends, alongside the pursuit of enhanced, or even 'world class', status by politicians and businesses, raise questions for some analysts about the social distribution of the supposed benefits of urban development initiatives, including festivals, spectacles and mega-events. Which social groups actually benefit, which are excluded, and what scope is there for contestation of these developments are three important questions that are often ignored (Lowes, 2002). We return to these in the sections below.

The production of spaces for urban play has been further assisted by developments in politics: in particular, what some have referred to as the growth of the 'competition state' (Jessop, 2002) and the 'entrepreneurial city' (Harvey, 1989). Urban and regional governments in many advanced capitalist economies compete with one another to offer incentives to private developers of sports and entertainment complexes, and even downtown entertainment districts, in the belief that this is the best (or only) way to bring investment, shopping, and vitality back to decaying downtowns. Gruneau (2002: pp. ix–x) argues that local politicians and media often focus on the interests and enthusiasms of the developers, property owners and middle class consumers as 'synonymous with the well-being of the city'. As a result, sectional interests are treated as *the* general interest, and ongoing 'class and community divisions regarding the support and enjoyment of spectacular urban entertainments' are downplayed, if not ignored altogether (Gruneau, 2002: p. ix–x).

Compounding the problem is the fact that developers have been able to extract public subsidies and tax holidays from governments desperate for their business, while the same governments have been cutting back, sometimes severely, on social welfare spending. Both neo-liberal, and in the United Kingdom what might be called after Tony Blair's New Labour project 'neo-labour', political ideas have meant different objectives for community development, and different definitions of the public good. There has been a shift away from notions of citizenship involving 'rights' to high-quality public services, towards ideals of consumerism in which the best cities are those that have 'world class' shopping. The growth of the 'global sport–media–tourism complex' (Nauright, 2004: p. 1334) also leads in some respect to greater secrecy and lack of transparency on the part of the organisations involved. For Zygmunt Bauman (1998: p. 8) this impact on democratic processes of consultation and discussion is part of the 'Great War of Independence from Space' of the last quarter of the 20th century. There has been 'a consistent and relentless wrenching of the decision-making centres, together with the calculations which ground the decisions such centres make, free from territorial constraints – the constraints of locality'.

Known Unknowns

Given all the unpredictability and uncertainties surrounding major international sports mega-events, why do governments and cities compete for the right to host them? What are the trade-offs and opportunity costs of doing so? Do such events ultimately deliver the benefits, economic and otherwise, that their proponents proclaim? The arguments for hosting sports mega-events are usually articulated in terms of sportive as well as economic and social benefits for the hosting nation. The general academic consensus regarding the impacts of mega-events is that there are both positive and negative outcomes. A review of the enormous amount of literature on the socio-economic, socio-cultural, physical and political impacts of Olympic Games concludes that 'economic benefits are the prime motive' for interests involved in hosting them (Malfas *et al*., 2004: p. 218). The positive impacts on employment (or rather unemployment), additional spending in the community hosting an event, visiting tourist/spectator numbers, the 'showcase effect' (Hiller, 1989: p. 119) of media coverage on an event locality, and some (usually unspecified) impact on the social condition of the host community are the main claims made for hosting mega-events. Yet research has pointed out significant gaps between forecast and actual outcomes, between economic and non-economic rewards, between the experience of mega-events in advanced and in developing societies.

Barcelona '92 is often cited as an exemplary Olympic Games. The Games attracted public investment of US$6.2 billion that helped redevelop the city and the province of Catalonia (Malfas *et al*., 2004: p. 212). Unemployment in Barcelona fell compared to the rest of Spain and the European average (p. 212). Yet in a detailed economic analysis of the resources, financing and impact of the Olympics Brunet noted that 'Barcelona '92 was unusual' (Brunet, 1995: p. 15). Only one other Olympics (Tokyo in 1964) had generated more direct investment. Improvements in transportation, particularly 'the circulation of motor vehicles' (Brunet, 1995: p. 20), was one of the major impacts of the Olympics on the urban infrastructure of Barcelona. The newly built Olympic Village also opened up the coast to the city in a way that had not occurred before. Brunet (1995: p. 24) estimated that there was an overall permanent employment effect of 20,000 extra jobs and that the Olympics acted as 'a protective buffer against the economic crisis' that affected much of the rest of Europe (Brunet, 1995: p. 23). There was some indication also that the citizens of Barcelona took advantage of the new sports infrastructure that was left after the event. The overall legacy of the '92 Olympics however focuses on the transformation of the urban and economic environment of Barcelona. Despite Brunet's findings questions about the quality, and duration, of the jobs created in Barcelona have been raised. The majority of the jobs created were low paid and short-term (Malfas *et al*., 2004: p. 212).

Sydney 2000 was proclaimed by the then IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch as 'the best Olympics ever', yet similar concerns about the actual distribution of the social and economic benefits and opportunity costs of hosting that Games linger (see Lenskyj, 2002).

To take a final example of the gap between forecasts and outcome, the FIFA World Cup in 2002 was the first ever to be staged in Asia. Predictions of an additional million sports tourists to watch the FIFA World Cup in Japan and South Korea in

May and June 2002 proved to be wildly optimistic. Japan attracted only 30,000 more visitors and South Korea reported the same number as the previous year (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2004: p. 197; see also Matheson & Baade, 2003). The 'legacies' – whether social, cultural, environmental, political, economic or sporting – are the 'known unknowns' of sports mega-events. They create the 'allure of global games' – perhaps especially for developing economies (Black & van der Westhuizen, 2004). At the same time it seems evident (known) that forecasts are nearly always wrong. Since the late 1970s (and the Montreal Olympics especially) a major concern in considerations of sports mega-events has been the gap between the forecast and actual impacts on economy, society and culture (Whitson & Horne, 2006).

In this respect there are several comparisons to be drawn between the study of sports mega-events and the analyses of Bent Flyvbjerg and his associates into the planning of *megaprojects* – such as major bridges, tunnels, canals, public transport schemes and prestige buildings (see, for example, Flyvbjerg *et al*., 2003). Flyvbjerg and his colleagues suggest that, with respect to the impacts of megaprojects, 'Rarely is there a simple truth…What is presented as reality by one set of experts is often a social construct that can be deconstructed and reconstructed by other experts' (Flyvbjerg *et al*., 2003: p. 60). They show how promoters of multi-billion dollar megaprojects, including sports stadia and other infrastructure, have consistently, systematically and self-servingly misled governments and the public in order to get projects approved (see Flyvbjerg *et al*., 2003: pp. 11–21 and 32–48 esp.).

The tendency to overstate the potential economic, as well as social, benefits of stadium developments and hosting sports events has been detailed by several academic researchers from the UK and the USA (see several of the contributions to Gratton & Henry, 2001a). With respect to megaprojects there is a similar fantasy world of underestimated costs, overestimated revenues, underestimated environmental impacts and over-valued economic development effects. As Flyvbjerg *et al*. (2003: p. 7) suggest, more often than not 'power play, instead of commitment to deliberative ideals, is often what characterises megaproject development'.

Unknown Unknowns

The phrase 'unknown unknowns' suggests that either we lack the information (at present) to know that we don't know something, or there are things out there that we cannot even begin to imagine. Certainly it would be possible to construct a rather lengthy list of different events, locations and associated risks, to do with security or commercial sponsorship, for example, that a sports mega-event could comprise and face. Academics and researchers need to be imaginative and ready and willing to respond to these. In so doing, 'unknown unknowns' become 'known unknowns' which can be subject to serious research and investigation. Another way this can be achieved is by reflecting honestly and openly about the fourth set of knowns – the 'unknown knowns', to which we shall now turn.

Unknown Knowns

'Unknown knowns' are things we don't believe we know or remember that we know. They are the things that we repress, possibly because they can cause us

anxiety. This form of social amnesia is best understood within the broader political/economic/ideological context in which debates about the distribution of the opportunity costs and benefits of hosting sports events and using sport as a form of social and economic regeneration have taken shape.

Claims and counter-claims are issued, with the emphasis of advocates typically on the *economic* impacts of hosting sports events (UK Sport, 1999; Roberts, 2004). As the UK Sport report *Measuring Success 2* noted, major international spectator events generate 'significant economic activity and media interest' (UK Sport, 2004: p. 11). But how that activity is distributed and who actually benefits are the key questions asked by sceptics. Social redistribution versus growth machine arguments about sports mega-events such as the Olympic Games revolve around the spin-offs.

In the UK and Australia the main stimulus for using sport for economic regeneration has been the hosting of international sporting events. In response to urban decline Glasgow, Sheffield, Manchester and Birmingham have invested heavily in the sports infrastructure so that each has a portfolio of major sports facilities capable of holding major sports events. In addition, three of them have been designated as a 'National City of Sport'. While the World Student Games held in Sheffield in 1991 was entered into without any serious impact study, it produced a loss of £180million, and the resulting debt has added 'just over £100 to annual council tax bills and will not be repaid until 2013' (www.strategy.gov.uk/2002/sport/report). Following several failed bids to host the Olympics in the 1980s and 1990s, and the embarrassment of having to relinquish the opportunity to host the World Athletics Championship in 2005, UK cities aimed to host lesser major sports events. The generally trouble-free success of the European football championship held in England in 1996 and the Commonwealth Games staged in Manchester in 2002 provided positive support for those with the aspiration to try again for one of the 'megas'. This, plus the enthusiasm of key politicians in an era of 'cultural governance', undoubtedly underlay the decision to put London forward in the race to stage the 2012 Olympics (Fairclough, 2000).[4]

In Australia a similar strategy of using sports events to promote tourism and regeneration has been adopted at state level – states provide cities with the funds to bid for international sports events. It was estimated at the end of the 1990s that 5% of Australia's tourism income of around US$16 billion was derived from major events (Gratton & Henry, 2001b: p. 312). Several Australian cities (including Adelaide, Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney) used sport as part of an economic development strategy in response to city/state rivalry – to establish a strong tourism industry. Cities in the USA have placed a huge investment in the infrastructure – such as stadium developments for the big four professional team sports. Such efforts at 'urban boosterism' saw more and more cities competing to offer professional teams facilities. Teams sat back and let bidding cities 'bid up the price'. By the end of the 1990s there were 30 major stadium construction projects in progress – nearly one-third of the total professional sports infrastructure in the USA. The total value was estimated at US$9 billion (Gratton & Henry, 2001b: p. 311).

Reviewing these attempts to use sport as a means of urban regeneration in the USA, Europe and Australia Gratton and Henry (2001b: p. 314) concluded, 'the

potential benefits…have not yet been clearly demonstrated'. Some places have been successful in harnessing social and urban regeneration plans to the sports mega-event. In this respect, as I have already noted, Barcelona was acclaimed throughout Europe and the rest of the world as how to do it. But even apparent winners have created problems for themselves.

The Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) investigating displacement, or forced evictions, resulting from the Olympic Games and other major international events estimates that 700,000 people were evicted to make way for the 1988 Seoul Olympics and 300,000 have already been forced to move ahead of the 2008 Beijing Games (http://www.cohre.org/downloads/Achieving_Housing_for_All.pdf). In Barcelona 400 homeless people were subject to control and supervision during the 1992 Games (Cox *et al*., 1994) and competition between high-income and low-income residents for the low cost housing promised after the Olympic athletes left town soon resulted in the most affluent gaining most. Most of the apartments that comprised the 'Nova Icaria' project were sold on the open market, contrary to a previously announced aim of subsidising housing for those on low incomes (see Vázquez Montalbán, 1990/1992; Hughes, 1992). Similarly in Sydney before the 2000 Olympics property prices and rent increases in the vicinity of Homebush Bay, primarily occupied by low-income tenants, led Lenskyj (2002) to critically assess the claim made by IOC President Samaranch that the Sydney Olympics were the best ever (see also Cox, 1999). Arguably therefore increased social polarisation remains one of the major 'unknown known' legacies of mega-events.

Much North American research suggests that sports mega-events and mega-projects (such as stadium construction) shift public resources to private corporations (Crompton, 2001; Baade & Matheson, 2002; Coakley & Donnelly, 2004). In a similar critique, Australian sociologist Helen Wilson has argued that as part of an increasingly global media system, sports mega-events spectacularise urban space 'in the interests of global flows rather than local communities' (Wilson, 1996: p. 617). Likewise, Hall questioned whether the people of Sydney really would benefit from hosting the 2000 Olympics: 'The irony is that government, which is meant to be serving the public interest, is instead concentrating its interests on entrepreneurial and corporate rather than broader social goals' (2001: p. 180). Cities seek to host, but nations and tax-paying citizens must support, and ultimately pay for bids to host mega-events.

Cashman (2003) identifies four periods during which the impact of the Summer Games on Olympic host cities can be debated. During the preparation of the bid and competition to win the right to host mega-events such as the Olympic Games 'bidding wars' are particularly apparent (see Sugden & Tomlinson, 2002, on the bidding wars surrounding the 2006 FIFA World Cup). This is also when overestimated benefits and underestimated cost forecasts are likely to be stated with most conviction and yet often prove to be wildly inaccurate. An email circulated by British Prime Minister Tony Blair a month before the decision was made about the 2012 Summer Olympics claimed, amongst other things, that 'A London victory on 6 July would mean: thousands of new jobs, a boost to tourism across the UK, the chance to host athlete preparation camps up and down the country' (tony.blair@reply-new.labour.org.uk).

We have already noted that claims about the impact of mega-events on employment need to be treated very warily. The key questions to be asked are: what kind of jobs are to be created – part-time or full-time, temporary or permanent, and for whom? Athlete preparation camps are most likely to be in the South East of England near where the vast majority of Olympic events are to take place. These locations can also be subject to bidding wars, for example, as happened in Japan during the 2002 World Cup when local authorities proffered lucrative inducements to national football associations of teams competing in the competition to establish training camps (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2004). As regards tourism, once again specific areas of the UK/South East England are likely to benefit, whilst displaced non-sports tourists may defer their visit to the capital during the event. Clashes with other sports fixtures and cultural events (for example, cricket test matches and the Edinburgh festivals) in August 2012 appear inevitable and will therefore likely lead to a reduction in visitors to them.

Even before the seven-year preparation period from the host being announced to the actual event, in addition to the infrastructure development, Lenskyj argues that attempts to 'manufacture consent' to an Olympic bid will be made by controlling mega-event related news in the media (Lenskyj, 1996, 2000, 2002, 2004). Pro-hosting organisations will attempt to 'engage' local residents in the bid. In the event of a successful bid control of mega-event news will be a high priority. In addition legislative changes are introduced to create an 'Olympic bubble' within which sponsors can enjoy relative immunity from ambush marketing – where brands and companies not officially sponsoring the event attempt to gain from it. Thus in the Queen's speech to MPs and peers at the state opening of the British Parliament in May 2005 enabling legislation was included that could be enacted in order to protect the investments of sponsors and advertisers (*The Guardian*, 18 May 2005). The London Olympics Bill (http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmbills/045/2006045.htm) contained proposals to establish an Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) and in compliance with IOC regulations to reduce ambush marketing. Following its publication the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) lobbied the British government in an attempt to alter the Bill. In addition to protecting unauthorised use of the words 'Olympics' and 'Paralympics', it would also ban advertisers from using the words 'gold', 'silver', 'bronze', 'London', 'medals', 'sponsor' or 'summer' in conjunction with 'games' or '2012'. Hence a slogan such as 'Come to London in 2012' could, in certain circumstances, be restricted to official Olympic partners or sponsors only and businesses that breached the law might face damages claims in a civil law suit (http://www.culture.gov.uk/global/publications/archive_2005/olympic_bid_myths.htm; Marriner, 2005).

Such forms of legislation help to create a climate of censorship (and in some cases self-censorship) in which some journalists increasingly act as cheerleaders and voices critical of the impact of the mega-event are marginalised. The website listed above that links to a factsheet clarifying restrictions on the use of Olympic words contains the phrase 'Olympic bid myths' – indicative of the sensitivity attached to handling commentary about the Games. Despite changes of personnel and rules, considerable secrecy and lack of transparency continue to pervade the undemocratic organisations that run sports 'megas' (Krüger, 1993; Hoberman,

1995). Those that challenge this, or write about it critically, may become *persona non grata* to the mega-event organisers. Certainly there has been an increasing reliance on protecting the image of the Olympics, the host city and the IOC in the past 15 years through the employment of public relations companies (*The Guardian*, 22 September 2005: p. 2).

Another 'known unknown' is the impact of mega-events on the beliefs and attitudes of the host population. During the mega-event the identities of local people are meant to conform to the (generally) positive stereotypes contained in pre-event publicity and the opening ceremonies. A mega-event is not only about showing a city off to the world, but it is also about putting the global on show for the locals (especially in the case of marginal cities; see Whitson, 2004). Mega-events thus invite a host city's, and even host nation's, people to take on new identities as citizens of the world (Whitson & Horne, 2006). After a mega-event has finished, questions start to be raised about the popular belief that sport can have a positive impact on a local community and a regional economy. Sport has been seen as a generator of national and local economic and social development. Economically it has been viewed as an industry around which cities can devise urban regeneration strategies. Socially it has been viewed as a tool for the development of urban communities, and the reduction of social exclusion and crime. Whilst hypothetical links exist between sport activities/facilities and work productivity, participation, self-esteem, quality of life, employment, and other variables, not as much rigorous research has been done as might be expected given the claims made. Often research has been conducted in advance of sports mega-events on behalf of interested parties. As Gratton and Henry (2001b: p. 309) suggest, 'In general, there has been inadequate measurement' of final and intermediate outputs as well as inputs.[5]

Analysis of sports policy and sport infrastructure in Japan over the past 20 years has outlined the changing role of public policy, the new faces of public private partnerships, and the impact of global sports on Japan (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2004; Manzenreiter & Horne, 2005). In the 1990s hundreds of cities, towns and villages announced 'sport' or 'health city' declarations in order to re-brand their local image and to fight rural migration and industrial decline. The hosting of sports mega-events such as the Football World Cup Finals provides multiple meanings for different groups of agents – as they happen, when they have taken place and, perhaps especially, as they are being bid for. Advocates of hosting mega-events will deploy a range of discursive strategies to win over public opinion internally.

In the case of semi-peripheral or developing societies, colonial and neo-colonial ties have shaped and continue to shape external relationships with sports mega-events as well. Neither the continents of Africa nor South America have staged an Olympic Games. The unsuccessful bid by Cape Town to host the 2004 Olympic Games was the first African bid for the Games (Swart & Bob, 2004). Cornelissen (2004) notes how discourse about 'Africa' was used ideologically by both South Africa and Morocco during the competition to host the 2010 Football World Cup that was eventually resolved in favour of the former in May 2004. The South African bid estimated massive benefits from the event, which many consider will be impossible to actually achieve.[6] In the final bid 12 locations were named as sites to host matches, but as in Japan and Korea in 2002 there are likely to be several of

these that do not obtain 'the requisite levels of tourism' (Cornelissen, 2004: p. 1307). It is thus likely once again that under-utilisation of the facilities built will mean that not all localities will obtain the benefits promised.

Bent Flyvbjerg (2005) has noted that megaprojects *can* be completed on schedule and within budget – the Guggenheim Bilbao Museum, the Pompidou Centre, and even further back the Empire State Building and the Eiffel Tower are examples of this. But the vast majority of megaprojects are not delivered anywhere nearly on time or within their estimated cost (*The Economist*, 11 June 2005: pp. 65–66).[7] It is becoming so evident that cost overruns are predictable that certain sections of government, as well as academics such as Flyvbjerg, have begun to consider this more seriously. The Department for Transport in the UK, for example, commissioned Flyvbjerg to investigate procedures for dealing with, in classic British understatement, 'optimism bias' in transport planning (Flyvbjerg in association with COWI, 2004).

The UK government strategy for sport, published in December 2002 by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, also appeared more cautious about the benefits of hosting sports mega-events following a number of well-publicised failures in recent years. This caution seems to have been forgotten in the bidding process for the 2012 Olympics, possibly because politicians develop a 'monument complex'. Despite the apparent endorsement of over 80% of the London and UK populations in favour of the bid (http://www.london2012.org/NR/rdonlyres/24931E48-9CF6-4A22-9D29-4321B11140E6/0/QuestionnaireResponseEnglish.pdf), other polls suggested substantially different figures when it came to actually staging the Olympics. One of the persistent public concerns is whether monuments can turn into 'white elephants' and end up costing considerably more than they are worth to maintain as happened most notoriously in Montreal in 1976, but also in Atlanta, Sydney and Athens.[8] The kind of detailed case study conducted by Mark Lowes (2002) of community opposition to another spectacular urban event – the Molson Indy Vancouver – provides one model for alternative research into sports mega-events. He focuses attention on the limits and possibilities of local resistance to attempts to relocate the event into public space. Yet opposition coalitions are another of the unacceptable practices, and ideas, that are rendered unconscious, or repressed, the 'unknown knowns', surrounding sports mega-events that need to be critically evaluated and researched.

Conclusion

It is a great achievement to bring any event together. It is a marvellous feeling to see plans materialise after months and sometimes years of planning. Hence the immediate response to the announcement from Singapore on 6 July 2005 in London and other parts of the UK (where there had been some criticisms from members of the Scottish Nationalist Party) were almost universally positive. After all, sports mega-events promise (albeit brief) moments of 'festive intercultural celebration' (Kidd, 1992a: p. 151). Yet, as I have alluded to here, mega-events are very seductive.

I can summarise this discussion by stating that sports mega-events are a significant part of the experience of modernity, but they cannot be seen as a panacea for its social and economic problems. Hence there is a need to maintain an independent position to assess these events. As Flyvbjerg suggests the key weapons against a culture of covert deceit surrounding megaprojects are transparency, accountability and critical questioning from independent and specialist organisations. Rather than simply become cheerleaders for them, boosters, rather than analysts, academics equally need to reflect critically on the effects, both economic and beyond economic impacts, that sports mega-events have. As Flyvbjerg *et al*. (2003: p. 108) note, 'there is no such thing as an entirely private venture for investments' with 'the magnitude and consequences' of megaprojects. The same is certainly true for sports mega-events such as the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup. Hence former Olympian Bruce Kidd's (1992b: p. 154) observation that 'Mega projects like the Olympic Games require a tremendous investment of human, financial and physical resources from the communities that stage them' reminds us that they are very properly the subject of public debate and accountability.

Where do we go from here? What are the policy implications of these observations?

Proper social impact assessments and full public consultation before submitting bids is required if mega-events, as megaprojects, are to regain public support and become more democratically accountable achievements (Flyvbjerg *et al*., 2003). Otherwise they remain based on dubious, unethical and possibly illegal practices. Guides to the measurement of the economic impact of major sports have been produced in consultation with academics in the UK (UK Sport, 1999, 2004) and independently in the USA (Chapin, 2002; Crompton, n.d.). At the very least, like Flyvbjerg *et al*. (2003: p. 20), I argue that cost estimates presented by promoters and forecasters about megaprojects and mega-events should not be taken at face value. Instead greater institutional checks and balances to control costs, including the formulation of penalties for transgression, such as financial penalties for cost overruns, as well as environmental and social impact assessments, need to be developed on the basis of independent research. This article does not outline such checks and balances, but by raising awareness of the existence of research-based criticism of non-economic, as well as economic, aspects of sports mega-events (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006; see also Vigor *et al*., 2004), it is hoped that these may in time be developed.

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Notes

1. These issues include centre–periphery relationships related to governance in world sport (Sugden & Tomlinson, 2002), power relations between nation states, supranational sport associations and the sports business (Butler, 2002), the media–sport–business connection (Jennings & Sambrook, 2000), and the cultural production of ideologies needed to cover emergent fissures when 'the circus comes to town' (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2004). See Veal and Toohey (2005) for a substantial bibliography of writing on the Olympic Games that includes some of this research.
2. The Winter Olympic Games is roughly one-quarter the size of the Summer Games in terms of athletes and events and so some might argue that it is not a true 'mega' (Matheson & Baade, 2003). It certainly qualifies as a 'second order' major international sports event.
3. Between 1980 and 2000 seven new sports and 79 events were added to the programme of the Summer Olympics. Twenty-eight sports have featured in the Summer Olympics since 2000, although the rare decision to scale down the number to 26 (removing baseball and softball after the 2008 Olympics) was made in July 2005 (www.olympic.org/uk). After 1998 the FIFA World Cup Finals expanded from 24 to 32 football teams.
4. Fairclough describes 'cultural governance' as 'governing by shaping or changing the cultures of the public services, claimants and the socially excluded, and the general population' (Fairclough, 2000: p. 61). This form of governance has featured in the political system of the United Kingdom for the past 26 years. Cultural governance also 'implies an increased importance for discourses in shaping the action – managing culture means gaining acceptance for particular representations of the social world, i.e., particular discourses' (Fairclough, 2000: p. 157). In this respect sport has become a most important feature of government intervention and regulation. This importance has been reflected in a number of initiatives and publications. Thus Tony Blair has continued the style of politics inherited from Margaret Thatcher, and to a lesser degree John Major. The Thatcher Governments between 1979 and 1990, for example, explicitly sought to create an 'enterprise culture' in which social and political well-being would be ensured not by central planning or bureaucracy but through the enterprising activities and choices of autonomous businesses, organisations and people. 'Enterprise' was a potent concept because it conveyed not just how organisations should operate but also how individuals should act – with energy, initiative, ambition, calculation and personal responsibility. The enterprising self was thus a calculating self, about her or himself and on her or himself. That the 'enterprising self' also appears to be a description of an active sports person is no coincidence. It is not unusual to find a particular kind of figure held up in high esteem at specific historical moments.
5. One of the main problems regarding the assessment of the costs and benefits of mega-events relates to the quality of data obtained from impact analyses. Economic impact studies often claim to show that the investment of public money is worthwhile in the light of the economic activity generated by having professional sports teams or mega-events in cities. Yet economic benefits are often expressed in terms of both net income *and* increased employment, whereas in fact increased employment results *from* additional income, not as well as. Economic impact assessments of mega-events also rely on predictions of expenditure by sports tourists, and again research shows that such studies have often been methodologically flawed. The real economic benefit of visitor numbers and spending is often well below that specified because of 'substitution', 'crowding out' and unrealistic use of the economic 'multiplier' factors. Another measure of economic impact – on the creation of new jobs in the local economy – has often been politically driven to justify the expenditure on new facilities and hence the results are equally questionable (see Matheson & Baade, 2003; Crompton, n.d.).
6. A total of 77,400 permanent jobs, income of 2% of South Africa's GDP and additional income from tax of US$ 550 million (Cornelissen, 2004: p. 1297).
7. Two recent examples of escalating costs and delays in megaprojects in Britain are the re-building of Wembley Stadium and the new Scottish Parliament building. After Wembley was chosen as the site of the new national stadium in 1997 delays and cost overruns have been a regular feature of the project. Initially costed at £185 million, work on the site was due to start in 1999 by when the stadium was expected to cost £475 million. In fact work did not get underway until September 2002 when the figure had reached £752 million. At the time of writing (October 2005) the costs are put at £757 million, making it the most expensive sports stadium in the world. It is still not certain however when it will be open for business. Such was the outcry about the spiralling costs associated with the building of the new Scottish Parliament building at Holyrood in Edinburgh that an inquiry was established. Originally estimated at between £10 and £40 million in the devolution legislation passed in 1997, costs rose to £55 million (1998), £109 million (1999), £195 million (2000) and £374 million (2003). The building was finally opened in 2004 at a cost of £431 million (www.holyroodinquiry.org).

8. The phrase 'white elephant' is purported to derive from the practice of the King of Siam (modern Thailand) to deal with threats to his rule by giving these sacred and therefore purely symbolic, but expensive, animals to rivals. The cost of maintaining the animal was more than they were worth.

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