



by Thomas Møller Kristensen

OLYMPIC GAMES SENT OUT TO SEA

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The closing ceremony signals the end of the Olympic Games.

That seems obvious and most of those involved quickly move on to pastures new.

Athletes pack their medals and set their sights on the next competition. Spectators start reliving the main highlights, whilst the gentlemen in the International Olympic Committee (IOC) can begin counting the income from yet another big economic success.

For the organisers, however, it is different. They hardly have time to receive the praise for presenting the games, and encouraging words do not keep them warm for long in the hard slog ahead for them. Because the organisers now have to deal with one of the biggest task – that of ensur-

A professor from Israel suggests building floating stadiums which can be used again and again

ing that the many facilities built for the games continue to be used.

A year on from the Olympic Games in Athens, local authorities and the Greek state are still arguing about who is responsible for the maintenance of the buildings left behind by the Games, and in Sydney living quarters for the athletes long ago turned into a ghost city with dilapidated houses and empty streets.

Huge rafts

Disgraceful and expensive, but outside the world of sport a real inventor type has put forward an idea for how to avoid such embarrassments in the future.

The Israeli professor, Michael Burt, simply suggests putting mega-events which attract massive audiences on floating stadiums. After the event the stadium can move on to the next city with a harbour and be the platform for the next football match, rock concert or bird show.

“Today we already have massive rafts with power stations, strategic storage of oil etc. Currently the US military is developing a three kilometre long landing strip for aeroplanes which can be moved module by module and put together wherever it is needed. All of this is technically possible so our imagination is the only limit,” explains Michael Burt who presented his visions to the sports conference *Play the Game* in Copenhagen.

Can be used again and again

The corner stone in a construction for Olympic Games will be an Olympic stadium measuring 300 by 400 metres and with room for 150.000 spectators. Depending on existing facilities within the host city this main arena can be surrounded by several smaller modules with facilities for different types of sport, living quarters for athletes or hotels.

“85 per cent of all countries in the world have access to the sea, and also from an economic point of view this model is fantastic. It would be

Michael Burt came to Copenhagen with a handmade drawing of his suggestion for a floating stadium that could revolutionise Olympic Games as we know them.

cheaper to build a traditional stadium but with a floating stadium you do not have to buy the land to build it on. That adds up if you think about land prices in places like New York or London. That alone makes up for a lot of the difference in investment, and the most important thing is that we can use the stadium again next week somewhere else instead of it standing empty," Michael Burt points out.

Five stadiums for the world

He got the idea for the floating stadium 20 years ago but did not develop it further before colleagues Yechiel Rosenfeld and Anna Sorkin offered to help him fine-tune and promote the plan which has only become more timely and feasible as research into space technology has led to the discovery of new and lighter materials.

The trio has looked at a world map and estimates that five floating stadiums can cover the Baltic Sea, the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean and Asia.

"Look at your own area. The Baltic zone with Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Germany has around 300 million inhabitants between them, and the sea is relatively quiet which will allow the fleet to move around without problems. Obviously it would need to be secured during bad weather but technology has already been developed for that," argues Michael Burt.

Discrimination

So far Michael Burt has not been in touch with the big sports federations or companies who could be interested in building and renting out such fleets. But he believes that the International Olympic Committee is obligated to take action to minimize the growing costs of hosting the Olympic Games.

"According to the Olympic Charter, all forms of discrimination are incompatible with the Olympic ideals. Nevertheless, economic discrimination is widespread as 80 per cent of all countries in the world can not afford to bid to host the Olympic Games," says Michael Burt.

"Even wealthy countries like Denmark, Finland and Norway will experience financial problems with a bid because the investments required would be enormous compared to the number of inhabitants. By building a floating stadium costs would go down, and I am sure that most people would prefer to rent a house rather than build one for the one day they have 500 visitors."



Across their differences all experts agreed that mega-events need careful planning to leave a positive legacy. From the left: Peter Mann, Robin Courage, Kim Schimmel, Harry Solberg and Lars B. Sorensen.

Mega-events could backfire

A positive legacy must be planned

by Kasper Lindberg

Way too often, host cities underestimate the costs and exaggerate the benefits when bidding for an event. This was the message of Harry Arne Solberg, Associate Professor of Trondheim Business School in Norway when Play the Game turned its attention to the social and economic impact of mega-events on host cities.

Last year, London won the race to capture the 2012 Olympics, beating Paris and New York to the finishing line. This shows that some of the world's largest cities still believe in the benefits of hosting major sporting events. But they may want to think twice according to the Norwegian economist Solberg.

"Sporting events are like big parties. They are a break from the daily routine. But they are also expensive. The costs are very often higher than the revenues," the Norwegian professor said.

The result of an over-optimistic approach could be "white elephants", the term used to describe huge stadiums built for mega-events that end up virtually unused or empty after the event.

As an example, Solberg mentioned Korea that hosted the 2002 World Cup finals in football. For that event the country built 10 new stadiums with a capacity of 40,000 or more spectators. The average attendance for a match in the Korean football league is 3,000.

Locals pay the bill

Kimberly S. Schimmel, Professor of sociology of Kent University in the US, pointed out that those footing the bill for big sporting events more often than not are local citizens.

"There is no tool more powerful to the urban development elite than sport to get con-

sensus for a policy of growth. Especially when sport is connected to a discourse of community commitment which is used as a vehicle for generating the sense that we are all in this together," Schimmel underlined.

The traditional claims of benefit that are marketed towards the public are false and act to justify cost, she argues. The reality of the situation is that "the sport industry elite are not defined by any locality, they are extra-territorial and most conspicuously beyond the reach of locals".

Legacy must be planned

In contrast, Robin Courage, director of TSE Consulting, emphasized the psychological benefits for a city of hosting a mega sporting event, saying that such events can unite communities and improve the love of sport. Lars Bernhard Jørgensen, director of Wonderful Copenhagen which is looking into the possibility of a Copenhagen bid for the 2024 Olympics, believes that such an event could create a common energy and a common focus.

Peter Mann, chairman of PMP Consulting, agreed with Solberg that there is indeed a lot of myth surrounding the benefits of sporting events. However, to ensure what he called the "legacy" of an event, a city will need proper planning, not only of the event itself, but of the preparations as well as the years to follow the event.

Positive examples of cities reaping the benefits of playing hosts are Barcelona, that experienced a major growth in tourism following the 1992 Olympics, and Manchester, where the 2002 Commonwealth Games helped revitalise a city marred by unemployment.