The globalisation of sporting events: Myth or reality?

Søren Bang, Play the Game 2013, 30 October 2013
The globalisation of sporting events: Myth or reality?

• Can we actually detect ‘an exodus’ of sporting events from the old strongholds of sport? Who is winning, who is losing events?
  • Mapping the hosting of all 816 allocated World Championships in Olympic disciplines from 1990-2022* - updated October 2013

• A special case: Mega-events and highly professionalised sports

• Factors behind the development – and why we should bother

* All World Championships from the year they were IOC approved for the Olympic programme.
World Championships in Olympic sports – 1990-1999

Europe, North America, Australia and Japan dominate.

Top 6: Germany 27, Canada 22, Italy 17, Switzerland 16, Japan 15, USA 15

(n=278)
World Championships in Olympic sports – 2000-2009

Russia and China enter the stage.

Top 6: Germany 34, Canada 27, USA 27, Japan 21.5, Italy 17, Spain 16

(n=314)
World Championships in Olympic sports – 2010+

Russia takes the lead. USA, Germany and Japan seem to lose ground. (n=224)

Top 6: Russia 14, Canada 13, France 12.5, Italy 12, Germany 12, Netherlands 11
World Championships in Olympic sports – 1990-2010+

Top 6: Germany 73, Canada 62, USA 53, Italy 46, Japan 43.5, France 37.5
The continental battle: Europe with Russia still dominates

But North America and Japan are hosting less events. Remaining Asia (China) are picking more up. Though not a dramatic change.
Wealth cannot explain everything...

Share of world population

But the Western countries and Japan are a little less dominant

Western and Japanese share of events since 1990

Source: The Word Bank 2013
Only 61 countries have hosted (or will host) World Championships in Olympic sports from 1990-2022
Some countries punch above their weight

Event per million inhabitants (2010+)

top 10*

Qatar 1,71
Denmark 1,53
Slovenia 0,97
Norway 0,82
Finland 0,75
Austria 0,71
New Zealand 0,69
Bulgaria 0,68
Netherlands 0,66
Latvia 0,65

* Andorra not included
Distribution of World Championships - conclusions

1. North America, Oceania and Japan seem to lose some of their traditional importance, while China and Russia especially are gaining some. But in most Olympic sports, **the world is not as globalised as we may think** – Europe is still a very dominant event host.

2. Economical strength or ‘hard power’ alone cannot explain the domination. **Cultural, historical and political factors are important** when many federations are placing their events.

3. The ‘threat’ from countries ‘where money seems to grow on trees’ is exaggerated when it comes to most smaller and medium-sized sports. Even small countries can become event hubs with modest investments. Denmark has gone into the top 10 in the last 10 years.
BUT: The biggest events are another story

The allocation of the Olympics, FIFA World Cups, World Championships in swimming and athletics – from 1990 onward – tells another story.

Source: Søren Bang, Idan, 2013
As well as some highly commercialised and professionalised sports

For example Formula One Grand Prix

Source: Søren Bang, Idan, 2013
The globalisation of sporting events – perspectives

- Only the biggest events like the Olympics, the FIFA World Cup and some highly commercialised sports are becoming truly global.

1. It questions the true universality of smaller and middle-sized sports.

2. It indicates that mega-events are to a higher degree about showing political power and importance on the global stage.

3. This creates some further political challenges for mega-events: The risk of megalomania, unsustainable events, corruption and detachment from the culture of sport.
Thank you!

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