

**Urban Future Initiative
Digital Roundtable
August 10-15, 2009
Moderated by: Samuel Assefa, Associate AIA, LEED AP**

Subject: Cost Benefits of Mega-events in the Context of Global Competition

Monday August 10, 2009

**Moderator Samuel Assefa:
Mon, 10 Aug 2009 08:48:18 -0700 (PDT)**

Western, post-industrial cities have often used revitalizing depressed inner cities, building needed infrastructure, and attracting international investment as the primary justification for hosting mega-events. However, financial windfalls and long-term economic benefits to the host city or nation rarely materialize. Despite the exuberant cost, and growing skepticism about long-term economic benefits of mega-events, municipal and national governments from developing countries are increasingly entering into fierce competition for hosting rights.

For example, for the 2004 and 2008 Summer Olympics, Istanbul, Cape Town, and Buenos Aires were finalists, Beijing hosting the 2008 event. Johannesburg is hosting the 2010 World Cup, Shanghai is hosting the 2010 World Expo, and Rio de Janeiro is a finalist for the 2016 Summer Olympics.

First Question: Within the context of developing countries, do the benefits of hosting mega-events in developing countries justify their cost?

Please feel free to consider any of the following aspects when exploring this question:

- Economic
- Globalization
- National Identity/Nation Building
- Infrastructure
- Environment
- Socio-cultural

**Response from Salwa Rashad and Alaa Khaled
Tue, 11 Aug 2009 01:03:56 -0700 (PDT)**

In the beginning of 2007, the Egyptian government started to evacuate villagers from Gurna in Luxor City in Southern Egypt. We headed there when we heard of this, as we often had gone there since the early 90s and we are aware of the special characteristics and atmosphere of Gurna. Any changes that could happen there without previous and thorough study may ruin its nature, the habits of the people, and the social structure of this place.

We went to investigate what was happening and to find out the planned future of this place. As the government looked at it as an open museum regardless of who was inhabiting it, our goal was to meet the people and interview them, getting closer to understand how they feel and how they see this transformation that was about to happen to their village and homes.

The first attempts by the government to change Gournā were in 1945, when an excavation uncovered the precious cemetery of the ancient founding Egyptian royal family buried in tombs inside the Gournā mountains. Between 1945- 1948, one of our leading architects, Hassan Fathy, was commissioned to plan and design a new village to which the people of Gournā would be moved. Ideally, the architect hoped to achieve this design by using methods in building and materials that could suit the climate in this part of Egypt, as well as considering their way of life and the space they might need. But this project failed because the materials that were used to make the base of the houses, such as limestone, could not offer much resistance. The land surrounding Gournā was agricultural and a lot of wastewater and underground water soon started to rise. Houses started to collapse from the bottom and the stone became fragile over time. Another thing that contributed to its failure was that the opinion of the people was neglected and discarded. They were not asked for their point of view on how they want their village and homes to be and how they wanted their spaces to function.

After years the government attempts were again revived for moving the people and transforming Gournā into a pure tourist place like many other places in Egypt that became surrounded by fences and walls. Egypt has been insulating its communities as if in a shell--places like Sharm el-Sheikh on the northern coast, New Cairo on the eastern side of the Greater Cairo region, or the Siwa Oasis which is located 800 kilometers deep in the desert, far from any urbanism.

The government still wanted to take advantage of Gournā's historic background, regardless of the habits of people who lives a Bedouin lifestyle. At one point, the government wanted to build a huge stadium for the Africa Nations Cup that had been nominated, but in the end the bid failed. This stadium would not have served the people or their need for hospitals and schools or workplaces to practice their particular handicrafts that over time have begun to disappear. Nor would it have saved the cultural heritage of the indigenous groups living in the desert as settled nomads.

The people of Gournā depend on agricultural cultivation, but many seek other kinds of work and professions related to tourism, such as open bazaars, tour buses and guide businesses, small hotels, and, one of the most popular professions, the carving of alabaster handicrafts or replicas of ancient Egyptian artifacts. Illegal professions such as the selling of original ancient Egyptian artifacts also have grown there.

When the people were moved from the Gournā by force they were not given the fair amount of money they deserved for losing their homes. They moved to another environment different then the one they lived in, with different respect for space. The new village is much farther from their workplaces, markets, jobs, and transportation.

It has been for the sake of "the future" held for the city of Luxor that all these investments have poured in and changed the structure of this place in all aspects.

Response from Xiangning Li

Tue, 11 Aug 2009 20:43:25 +0800

One year after Beijing 2008 Olympic, and one year before the opening of

Shanghai 2010 EXPO, it is now a good time to think about both positive and negative impacts of mega events in Asia on urban development, especially in a Chinese context. Taking into consideration the relative weakness in resources like infrastructure, financial ability, and environmental capacity, developing countries have to invest more in order to win the right to host mega-events. There have been continuous debates about the balance between cost and benefits. The judgments should not be made according only to the events themselves, or only in the short duration period of the events.

In the case of the Beijing Olympics, it is reported that the investment has been four times of the investment of Athens in the 2004 Olympics, and is 16 times that of Sydney in the 2000 Olympics. It exceeds the total investment into the Olympics in the past 108 years. As payback, Beijing achieved a large number of world-class sports facilities, and much new infrastructure including anew airport terminal (designed by Norman Foster) and a new CCTV headquarters (designed by OMA). Moreover, some historic districts of Beijing were restored. Some scholars have argued that after the Olympics, newly erected landmarks have changed spatial recognition of the urban structure (Zhu Wenyi, Zhao Jiantong, 2008). Beijing also greatly improved its citizens' identity and service consciousness. Soon after the Olympics, polls showed that the happiness index of Beijing citizens arose to the top among all Chinese cities.

The Chinese government announced that the income of Beijing Olympics reached 20.5 billion RMB, and the direct investment was 19.3 billion RMB. Even if the 1 billion surplus is accurate number, what about the 18.1 billion RMB of indirect investment? What if we think about the countless labor costs accrued all over China during the years of preparation for the Olympics? (Think of the labor utilized in just the opening ceremony)

Shanghai is also quite ambitious about the upcoming world EXPO 2010. It have allocated 5.28 square kilometers to the EXPO park and wants to create the largest EXPO with the most participating countries in history. Shanghai has made a plan for after-EXPO usage. Most of the park will be demolished and a huge redevelopment on this piece of land will help to balance the cost.

Response from Ismail Farouk

Wed, 12 Aug 2009 14:49:48 +0200

As you are all aware, South Africa is poised to host to the upcoming World Cup in 2010 and all major urban centers in the country are feverishly working on physical infrastructure upgrades in response to meeting the requirements as set out by FIFA.

Whilst it is acknowledged that new infrastructure is required, the process thus far has been geared towards generic plans, which support the gentrification of the city. There seems to be a single-minded focus on physical infrastructure upgrades and a lack of planning for poorer residents, migrants and informal traders, who are not considered part of the desire to re-imagine the city. Currently, the city of Johannesburg is experiencing a refugee crisis, which is being ignored by the city administrators.

One of the greatest challenges faced by South Africa is the need to provide safe and reliable public transportation. In Johannesburg a new bus rapid transportation system is being implemented, but the real challenge is the integration of the mini

bus taxi industry and its associated informal economic activities. Local taxi associations have been complaining, as they fear the Bus Rapid Transport system will result in increased competition for customers and space. Protests have been violent and this has not helped the image of the country in the global media.

Furthermore, in the suburb of Bertrams in Johannesburg, hundreds of poorer families face eviction because of the suburb's close proximity to the sporting infrastructure. See an eviction letter at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/ismailfarouk/2293506806/>

Also, look at this article written about evictions in Bertrams: <http://ismailfarouk.com/blog/2008/02/urban-regeneration-and-evictions...>

So there is significant tension between the urban development agenda and the needs of poorer families, and thousands of informal traders and taxi drivers, who all face an extremely uncertain future.

Response from Babak Afrassiabi and Nasrin Tabatabai
Wed, 12 Aug 2009 12:19:29 -0700 (PDT)

In the case of Iran we cannot recall any recent mega events. (Except 1979 revolution and the recent revolts!!) The country has been closed off for the last 30 years following the revolution. Mostly due to many internal political complications, organizing such events has not been possible. Most mega events in Iran took place in 70s as part of the Shah of Iran ambitious plans for modernization, which coincided with big events, costly celebrations, with pride and nationalistic tendencies. The seventh Asian Games (Asiad) held in Tehran in September 1974 was the first in a Middle Eastern country. The Ariyamehr (Now Azadi) sport complex was built especially for this event. As this complex was made in a remote, undeveloped area outside of Tehran it could not have any real impact on the life of people, such as displacement, gentrification etc.

Here is an article that gives some ideas about that event:
http://fpok.upi.edu/iran_and_asiangames.htm

Can we assume that historically most mega events have been a means for ideologically defined process of modernization, at least in developing countries? Besides the social and economical impacts of mega events on the deprived parts of society, which is more immediate, there is the political one that often functions on a symbolic level and as tools for states to implement a preferred culture and citizenship.

There may not have been any mega events in Iran, but big scale events have been organized often enough by the state to reshape and seize the city's public spaces on a symbolic and therefore psychological level. This may not be as immediate as social and economical impacts of mega events, but are certainly as real.

Follow-up Response from Alaa Khaled and Salwa Rashad
Wed, 12 Aug 2009 22:48:47 -0700 (PDT)

There is something we would like to point at. It is not directly involving mega events but can be considered in the same context. In older countries like Egypt, as an

example, the overarching history of national heritage and history is considered a true part of the image that these countries hold of themselves.

In the 90s, we can witness how globalization had a great effect and influence on forming the idea of national identity--no longer can these nations can take that role all by themselves.

In the case of El Gournah, there are other co-operatives who shape and form this concept, such as UNESCO, The International Bank, the American Association for International Development (IDA), the Tourism companies, and tourists themselves all have parts in evacuating this place from its people in order to preserve the monuments in this area, which are considered as belong to both national and international human heritage. This is the tangible change that is taking place now--in who is taking change of making one's own nation.