

Study on the Establishment of a Public Participation System for Large Sports Events

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Abstract: Large-scale sports events are closely associated with all stakeholders in the host city from preparation to hosting it. The positive attitude of residents in the host city is an essential basis for supporting large sports events. Therefore, public participation is an inevitable issue for large sports events. Currently, studies on public participation in large sports events are not comprehensive or systematic. The public participation system for large sports events has not been established or clear. Meanwhile, there is no unified and inclusive theoretical explanation framework. This study aims to establish a public participation system for large sports events and provides a reference for the theoretical research and implementation of such events.

1. Why Do Large Sports Events Require Public Participation?

The great importance attached to public participation is closely related to the governance dilemma large sports events face during development, the internal needs in the post-urban era, and greater attention from international sports organizations.

1.1. Public Participation Addresses Sustainability

A large sports event is a major event based on public policies with potentially high risks, because, first, "it is difficult to quickly release and reflect the large amount of 'asset value' advanced by the organizer for the event in a short time" ^[1] and second the unrealistic construction and planning for hosting large sports events, such as the Olympic Games, do not enable the sustainable and scientific development of the Olympic Games but bring about considerable burdens to the host country ^[2]. Horne (2007) ^[3] pointed out that public participation seriously restricts the sustainable development of large sports events. No or inefficient public participation will significantly weaken the scientific and democratic decision-making of sports events ^[4]. Nowadays, the participation of multiple subjects is one of the essential characteristics of governance ^[5]. As a result, the participation of the public, as one of the governance bodies, has become a strong governance means to solve the problem of sustainable development of large sports events.

1.2. Internal Needs of Public Participation in Sports Events in the Post-urban Era

As urbanization deepens, the overall image and value cognition of large sports events, such as the Olympic Games, are being reshaped. The public's willingness to participate in such events has become increasingly strong along with social democratization. Because of this, it is an irresistible trend for large sports events to give adequate attention to public participation ^[6]. For instance, Mowatt et al. (2015) ^[7] analyzed the boycott of Chicago's bid for the Olympic Games, and revealed that instead of being an absolute "anti-Olympic" attitude, the public opposition to hosting the Olympic Games implied their desire to participate in the discussion. Through dialog, the public intended to obtain more visible and shared benefits from the Olympic Games. Kolotouchkina (2020) ^[8] deemed that the pre-match strategic measures for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games indicated that Japan's traditional top-down management has begun to change dynamically to more open and inclusive public participation. Hence, public opinions should be solicited for large sports events so that residents can participate in their planning and management and large sports events will be held

in a more democratic and people-oriented manner.

1.3. International Sports Organizations' Emphasis on Public Participation

Public participation has become a vital reform direction of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Word frequency statistics showed that "engage/engagement/participation" appeared 41 times in total in the guidance documents of the reform and development of the IOC--the *Olympic Agenda 2020* (hereinafter referred to as the "*Agenda 2020*")^[9] and the *Olympic Agenda 2020 Olympic Games: the New Norm* (the "*New Norm*")^[10], with multiple fields involved, which demonstrates that public engagement and participation has become one of IOC's focuses of reforms. Reform suggestions are proposed in Articles 23 and 35 of the *Agenda 2020* from the "engage/engagement" perspective. Furthermore, public participation has always been a priority in the "Host City Contract". For example, requirements for the public participation of the host city are stipulated in the *Host City Contract Detailed Obligations (XXIV Olympic Winter Games in 2022)*^[11].

2. Establishment of a Public Participation System for Large Sports Events

In light of the nature and practical experience of large sports events, this study establishes a system covering four participation dimensions: participants, fields of participation, participation support, and the degree of participation.

2.1. Participants

The definition of the public is the basis for conducting public participation-related work, as it answers the question "who participates". Generally, the public refers to the group relative to the host. All individual citizens and citizen groups and organizations are covered, including public management departments, the public, experts, scholars, media, enterprises, communities, and social organizations^[12]. The public can be classified in multiple ways. Specifically, by the degree of association with the event and the impact of the event on the public, the public can be classified into direct and indirect participants, or into core stakeholders, marginal stakeholders, and non-stakeholder. The public can be classified into active, neutral, and passive public by the degree of public concern. A critical task of public participation-related work is to mobilize the participation enthusiasm of the neutral and passive public. The public is the main governance body of the event and beneficiary of the event's benefits or bearer of its costs.

2.2. Participation Content

The fields of participation answer the question of "what to participate in". It is generally believed that the public participates in the whole process of large sports events (bidding—organization—holding—post-event period). The types of participation in large sports events mainly include participation in decision-making management, participation in event work (event mobilization), and independent civilian participation. Participation in decision-making management primarily means that the public expresses their intentions, opinions, and suggestions on the event to assist in the decision-making related to the development and management of the event. Participation in event work mainly means that the public actively cooperates with all work of the event, participates in related activities, heightens the event's atmosphere, endeavors to spread the event's values and culture, deepens the impact of the event on the public, or introduces policies to promote residents' participation in sports, to raise social health capital and enhance mental health^[13]. Independent civilian participation first means supporting the holding of the event and actively participating in it, such as paying attention to event information, accepting the education of event culture, learning relevant knowledge, conducting folk cultural activities, and actively exercising. Second, it means non-institutional participation, such as protests and demonstrations against the event.

2.3. Participation Support

Participation support covers institutional support, material support, organizational support,

institutional support, and social support. Institutional support means all policies and mechanisms to ensure that the public effectively participates in large sports events, including legislation, justice, and administration. Material support refers to the material conditions on which public participation relies. Thanks to the rapid development of electronic communications, data networks, and information technology, the public has more ways and means to participate in sports events. Third, organizational support generally refers to organizers of specific work and the participation methods organized by them. Participation methods can be diverse, and vary by participation needs. Fourth, institutional support means the specific workflow and procedures created by participants for public participation, which is conducive to ensuring the orderliness of public participation. An example is the "Effective Decision-making Model for Citizen Participation" by John Clayton Thomas. Fifth, social support refers to the social environment, atmosphere, and support on which public participation relies, which ensures the social acceptance and inclusiveness of public participation in large sports events.

2.4. Degree of Participation

The degree of public participation is the assessment and understanding of the effectiveness of participation, answering how the public participates and how about public participation. The main indicators of the degree of public participation include: the representativeness and universality of the public, the bi-directionality of information flow, the sharing of decision-making power, the whole process of participation, and the final impact of the event.

First, the representativeness and universality of the public. The quantity, coverage, and area of public participation are dominant indicators of the degree of public participation. Nevertheless, quantity is a key variable that needs to be coordinated for participation in the decision-making and management of events. In terms of public events, such as large sports events, that are complicated and derailed from public life, decision-making by non-expert groups tends to be inappropriate and inefficient^[14], which may lead to increased decision-making costs due to the solicitation of general and comprehensive opinions. However, the public may reduce their support for the event, if they feel excluded from the event^[15].

Second, the bi-directionality of information flow. Bi-directionality means that the public can accept effective official information, while conveying their information to the organizer. The organizer gives corresponding feedback. Such a cyclical flow of information can strengthen the understanding between the organizer and the public. For instance, Rowe et al. (2005)^[16] classified public engagement into three categories, based on the flow of information: Public Communication, Public Consultation, and Public Participation.

Third, the whole process of participation content. The whole process means that all processes and phases of the event should be somewhat participated in by the public. Public participation in many large sports events focuses on post-event supervision and participation, and the public is often "informed" of such events. "Weak participation in decision-making and strong event mobilization" 1A have always been one of the shortcomings of large sports events.

Fourth, sharing of decision-making power. The sharing of decision-making power is mainly about assessing the participation in event decision-making and management, which originates from the Ladder of Public Participation proposed by Arnstein (1969)^[17] in 1969. Effective public participation must involve the "sharing of rights". Public participation aims to avoid non-participation, false participation, and participation in mere formality. The government is expected to share decision-making power to enhance citizens' substantive decision-making power. Therefore, "decision-making authorization" is genuinely effective public participation. Even so, public participation practice has revealed that sharing more rights does not correspond to better effects. Relevant public opinions may not necessarily align with the public interest. Excessive decision-making power for the public often makes it challenging to promote the implementation of policies^[18], which, on the contrary, affects the effectiveness of public participation.

Fifth, the final impact of the event. The event's impact refers explicitly to the positive and beneficial effects on the locals. Large sports events are held with sports competitions as the carrier.

Meanwhile, the preparation of the event and the legacy operations influence the local economic development, urban construction, living space, and cultural outlook, especially sports-related material and cultural impacts.

3. Conclusions

It is imperative to pay attention to public participation in large sports events, in the context of a higher awareness of democracy of residents and increasingly deep urbanization. It is suggested that future studies should exert more efforts for empirical research of public participation in large sports events, probe into participation policies, mechanisms, methods, and means pertinent to local and regional characteristics so as to improve the effectiveness of public participation in such events.

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