

Research Article

Risks, Challenges and Strategies of the Creation of China's "City of Events" – A Case Study of Hangzhou

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Abstract

From 2007, when Jinjiang proposed to build "China's first sports city", to the successful hosting of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, an increasing number of first-tier cities have regarded sports events as an important strategic layout for urban development. The construction of the "city of events" is proposed by the first-tier cities in China based on the national development strategy, serving the demands of the times for urban development, people's livelihood and well-being, economic growth and window display. Based on literature, expert interviews and case studies, the article analyzes the current situation of Hangzhou as one of the first "city of events" in Zhejiang Province, existing predicaments and potential risks, strategies and paths for risk aversion, and the risks and challenges of Hangzhou in creating a "city of events". The results show that there are risks such as lack of culture, imbalance of profit and loss, and lack of core strength in the creation of "city of events", and it is necessary to focus on multi-dimensional efforts such as sports characteristic positioning, professional events and mass sports cultivation to realize the differential order development pattern of sports events integrating urban characteristics, and thus deduce the action logic of the creation of "city of events". Diverse urban culture determines the difference in the development orientation of sports cities, and the idea of synergy, profit and loss balance, risk avoidance, and facing the future with a more positive outlook is the meaning and inevitable way of the creation of the domestic "city of events".

Keywords

Hangzhou, City of Events, Sports Characteristic Positioning

1. Introduction

From 2007, when Jinjiang proposed to build "China's first sports city", to the successful hosting of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, an increasing number of first-tier cities have regarded sports events as an important strategic layout for urban development. Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Nanjing, Chengdu, Qingdao and other cities have successively put forward the vision and goal of urban sports planning of "World Famous Sports City", "International Famous Sports City", "International Famous Sports City", "Asian

Sports Center City", "World Famous Event City" and "World Famous Sports City and National Sports Center City".

Different from the European and American sports cities, represented by London and New York, China's sports city construction is basically cultivated, following the principles of government guidance, market operation and social participation, hoping to lead the construction of urban infrastructure by hosting events, promote the enrichment of urban functions and the expansion of the pattern, and then transform into a

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regional node city and even a global city with extensive influence in regional competition [1]. As pointed out by Wang, C and Ru, X, how to solve the potential risks in the construction of sports cities and realize the “two-way rush” between sports events and urban development is the main problem discussed in this paper [2].

2. Conceptual Analysis of “Sports City” and “City of Events”

There has not yet formed a strict and clear definition of “Sports city” in the academic circles [3]. It is a comprehensive concept, including not only tangible sports facilities, teams and clubs, but also sports events, competitive sports strength, sports industry economy, sports heritage, sports culture, and many other aspects, not only from one or two levels and dimensions to rank sports cities. On the other hand, the “city of events” is a form of sports city, which is characterized by first-class cities, venues and events, and emphasizes the agglomeration of sports event resources [4]. It is characterized by a city that has held many high-level competitive sports events with international influence and local characteristics for a long time, and has a strong voice and popularity in the field of international sports events. The main evaluation criteria of Chinese and foreign sports cities emphasize public participation in sports, the level and number of sports events hosted, the publicity effectiveness of sports media, and the natural landscape, climate and environment of sports cities [5, 6].

3. Analysis of the Current Situation of Hangzhou as One of the First “City of Events” in Zhejiang Province

In the “2023 Global Sports City Index”, released in November 2023, Hangzhou ranked third in the ranking of sports cities in mainland China. However, in the “China Urban Life Sports Index List”, Hangzhou only ranked 8th, and there are still some deficiencies and shortcomings in Hangzhou from the five dimensions of urban life sports driving force, support force, core force, sustainability force and attractiveness [7, 8].

3.1. The Driving Force of Sports in Urban Life

The driving force of urban life sports mainly focuses on the scale, quality and vitality of the urban economy, and the higher the commercial activity, the more reasonable the industrial structure and the relatively superior geographical location, the more conditions that drive the development of life sports, which determines the foundation for the development of life sports. As the capital city of Zhejiang Province, Hangzhou’s GDP has exceeded 2 trillion yuan as of January 2024, ranking 8th in the country. According to the latest data from local statistical bureaus in 2023, Hangzhou ranks fourth with a budget

revenue of 249.01 billion yuan. In 2023, the Hangzhou metropolitan area plan will be approved by the state and officially promoted to a national-level metropolitan area, and it is also the third interprovincial metropolitan area in the country. Hangzhou has gradually entered the ranks of first-tier cities in China in terms of geographical location and economic scale, and needs to find an identity in first-tier cities such as Beijing’s political center and Shanghai’s financial center, echoing the country’s development plan to support Zhejiang’s construction of a pilot zone for sports digital reform and focus on cultivating 10 famous sports event cities with greater influence. In the work report of the 2024 Provincial Sports Directors Meeting of Zhejiang Province, it is pointed out that to implement the “1552” project and the “Ten Hundred Million” project, Hangzhou has a strong “sports driving force”, and the driving force for the creation of the event city is obvious.

3.2. The Sports Underpinning of Urban Life

The sports support of urban life is mainly analyzed and judged from the perspective of urban livable environment, facilities, cost and security. Only leisure cities with high urban living comfort, green cities with better natural conditions, and dynamic cities with a high proportion of young population have strong sports support. Hangzhou has a pleasant environment, and has taken the lead in building a “National Ecological City” among the provincial capitals in the country, and has won the titles of “National Ecological Garden City” and “National Beautiful Landscape City”. The net population inflow rate has also maintained a leading position in the country for many years. Since 2020, Hangzhou has had a net inflow of more than 3.5 million people, and has maintained a steady growth trend. In 2022, Hangzhou’s net population inflow ranked first in the Yangtze River Delta and second in the country [9]. However, in terms of living comfort, it lags behind Changsha, Chengdu, Xiamen, Dalian, Xi’an, Kunming and other cities, urban residents have greater living pressure, on the basis of per capita salary ranking among the top in the country, leisure time and sports costs lag behind other cities, and the sports support created by the city of events is obviously insufficient.

3.3. The Core of Sports in Urban Life

The core strength of sports in urban life mainly focuses on the main body, sports object and sports industry of the city, which is the focus of the city to carry out life sports, and the city with rich event resources, less life pressure, concentrated resource elements and better sports business environment has more advantages. Hangzhou did not enter the top 10 list, and it needs to be cultivated and built with great efforts. Although Hangzhou has hosted the Asian Games and various individual international events, there are obvious deficiencies in indicators such as living pressure, resource elements, and sports business environment. According to data from the Zhejiang

Provincial Bureau of Statistics, the added value of Hangzhou's sports industry in 2021 will be 31.2 billion yuan, accounting for 1.7% of GDP, higher than the regional and domestic averages, but the added value of the sports industry in developed countries can usually account for 2%-3% of GDP. According to China's goal, the sports industry will account for 4% of GDP by 2035 [10]. In other words, there is still huge room for growth in the market size of Hangzhou's sports industry. There is still a lot of room for the core power of sports created by Hangzhou's "City of Events".

3.4. The Sporting Appeal of City Life

The attraction of urban life sports mainly focuses on the self-awareness, service cognition and image cognition of urban residents. Cities with smarter, more convenient and safer sports services have an advantage. Hangzhou ranks third, with better quality and attractiveness of sports services, which matches Hangzhou's multi-year net population inflow city, China's livable city, and e-commerce business environment. As a "National Ecological Garden City", Hangzhou has been on the list of livable cities and the happiest cities in China for many years. In January 2024, Hangzhou's official announcement urban population has exceeded 10 million, entering the ranks of megacities. In 2023, Hangzhou will again introduce nearly 400,000 new college students under the age of 35. In fact, since 2016, Hangzhou's "gravitational pull" on the national population has been increasing, ranking first in the country in terms of net inflow of talents for many years. Since 2020, the net inflow of population in Hangzhou has exceeded 3.5 million people, and it has maintained a steady growth trend. In 2022, Hangzhou's net population inflow ranked first in the Yangtze River Delta and second in the country [7]. Hangzhou has obvious advantages in terms of sports attractiveness.

3.5. The Sporting Sustainability of Urban Life

The sustainability of urban life sports mainly focuses on the city's population, education, science and technology and international potential, and pays attention to the future sports development trend of a city. Hangzhou ranks ninth, and there is still a lot of room for improvement. Hangzhou has obvious advantages in terms of human settlements and quality of life, the public sports service system is relatively perfect, the quality of industrial development is relatively good, and the comprehensive development level is in the forefront, but Hangzhou is relatively weak compared with other large domestic cities in the field of education development, higher education resources, and public sports service investment [11]. According to the 2023 ranking of China's strong education cities, Beijing, Shanghai and Nanjing are among the top three cities with excellent educational resources and teaching quality, while Hangzhou only ranks thirteenth [12]. Hangzhou is clearly deficient in terms of sports sustainability.

Based on the analysis of the above five indicators, Hangzhou has basically met the standard of creating a "city of events", but there are also obvious shortcomings and potential risks.

4. Existing Predicaments and Potential Risks

At present, the development of urban sports in China is extremely unbalanced, and Beijing and Shanghai have the strongest international competitiveness in sports, ranking in the first echelon. Although Hangzhou already has certain basic advantages, there is still a gap between the overall international competitiveness and the internationally famous sports cities, and the development of the city's sports industry does not have international competitiveness, and it lacks the channels and discourse power to communicate with international information [13].

4.1. Ignoring Local Culture and "Family and Country Feelings"

Since the successful holding of the Beijing Olympic Games, Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu and other major domestic first-tier cities have successively carried out the grand layout and planning of international "famous event cities" and "event cities", benchmarking sports cities such as Europe and the United States, which will inevitably bring the problem of homogeneous competition, and hope to build internationally renowned events into the city's "golden business card", and actively host international large-scale comprehensive events. Internationally renowned events require a lot of infrastructure and capital investment, while the influence of comprehensive large-scale events follows the "law of decline", and the influence of the event will gradually decline over time. The hosting of sports events can improve the sports hardware facilities of residents in the short term, but in the long run, there are risks in whether large-scale sports events match the living environment and cultural characteristics of the region, whether the evaluation indicators can reflect the local culture and the sports habits of the masses, and whether they can be integrated into the elements of traditional Chinese sports culture.

4.2. The Development of Professional Events Is Not Perfect, and the Output and Efficiency Are Unstable

Different from the characteristics of sports cities in developed countries, the construction of sports cities in China follows the principle of government guidance and market participation, with planning and documents as the guide, supplemented by funds and infrastructure, which requires the coordination of multiple government departments and the full participation of the market. The development of professional

sports events in developed countries in Europe and the United States is relatively sufficient, following the principle of “events first, planning later”, domestic professional events started relatively late, the development is not mature enough, and the output benefits are not obvious. The success of the Los Angeles Olympics has made countries realize that hosting the Olympics can bring huge economic benefits, but the Montreal Olympics in Canada and the Athens Olympics in Greece have also saddled the two cities with huge debts. According to the Beijing News, Beijing has invested more than 300 billion yuan in seven years to prepare for the Summer Olympics, including the integration of urban infrastructure. According to data released by the Hangzhou municipal government, the total investment (including infrastructure construction) of the 2022 Hangzhou Asian Games reached 224.8 billion yuan, while the revenue was 4.644 billion yuan [14]. Large-scale events will have positive social benefits on urban construction, city image, and urban influence, but in the face of unknown sudden disaster risks such as the epidemic, they may also face short-term financial difficulties and economic downturn. How to achieve a balance between huge investment and intangible assets, and how to sustain the city’s influence and long-term development are the problems that must be faced and considered in the creation of China’s sports cities.

4.3. The Sports Population and Sports Industry Are Unstable, and the Core and Sustainability of Sports Are Not Strong

According to statistics, at the end of 2022, there were about 5.7 million people in Hangzhou who regularly participated in physical exercise (about 10.8 million in Beijing, 9.4 million in Chengdu, and 7.9 million in Guangzhou). In 2021, the total output of Hangzhou’s sports industry was 114.193 billion yuan, with an added value of 31.2 billion yuan over the previous year [15]. Compared with first-tier cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, there is still a certain gap between this figure and that of first-tier cities. The “peak gathering phenomenon” of large-scale sports events will cause urban prices to rise and traffic congestion in the short term, which may contribute to a sharp rise in housing prices in the long run, but the wage level will not increase due to major sports events, so it will increase the economic burden of urban residents to a certain extent. Taking the 2016 Hangzhou G20 Summit as an example, the average house price in Hangzhou in 2015 was 22,663 yuan/square meter before the meeting, and after the summit was held, the average house price in Hangzhou in 2017 was 31,568 yuan/square meter, and in 2018, it increased to 41,766 yuan/square meter, an increase of 84.3% in three years [16]. This has undoubtedly aggravated the living pressure of urban residents, especially the inflow population, hit the enthusiasm of sports participation, compressed the time for sports activities, and lowered the happiness index of urban life.

5. Strategies and Paths for Risk Aversion

According to the five dimensions of urban life sports driving force, support force, core force, sustainability force and attractiveness, domestic first-tier cities can benchmark against the table, inherit advantageous projects, make up for shortcomings, clarify the characteristics of the city in the creation of “event city”, avoid potential risks, and realize the differentiated development path of sports cities.

5.1. Excavate Characteristic Sports Projects to Realize the Beauty of Sports Events and Urban Life

5.1.1. The Development Path of Sports Digitalization

In the “14th Five-Year Plan for Sports Development”, the General Administration of Sport of China clearly stated that “Zhejiang will be supported to build a pilot area for sports digital reform”. In December 2021, the General Administration of Sports and the Zhejiang Provincial Government signed the “Cooperation Agreement on Supporting the High-quality Development and Construction of a Common Prosperity Demonstration Zone in the Sports Field of Zhejiang Province”, once again clarifying the path and measures of “supporting and guiding Zhejiang Province to build a pilot zone for sports digital reform” [17]. In the 2024 Zhejiang Provincial Sports Bureau Directors Meeting document, it is also clear that it is necessary to accelerate the digital transformation of sports venues and facilities in Hangzhou, develop a QR code system for public stadiums, create a number of smart stadiums, and build digital fitness venues and facilities such as smart fitness paths, smart fitness trails, smart sports parks, and smart fitness centers. Zhejiang has preliminarily built the overall structure of the “1+5+X” reform, focused on the construction of the “Sports Brain” version 2.0, and successfully created a number of major applications such as “Zhejiang Fitness” and “Zhejiang Province Athlete Technical Level Recognition Public Power Big Data Supervision”.

5.1.2. Integration into Regional Development Strategies

As the core city of the “Hangzhou Metropolitan Area”, Hangzhou should actively integrate into the integrated development strategy of the Yangtze River Delta, and the General Administration of Sports of the People’s Republic of China also pointed out in the “14th Five-Year Plan for Sports Development” that the construction of Hangzhou’s sports “city of events” should be actively integrated into the integrated development of the Yangtze River Delta and cultivate the Yangtze River Delta sports event brand with international visibility and influence. In January 2022, the three provinces and one city in the Yangtze River Delta (Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Anhui provinces) jointly issued the “Integrated Development Plan for the Sports Industry in the Yangtze

River Delta Region (2021-2025)” [18]. The creation of major sports cities in China should also be actively integrated into the national regional coordinated development strategy, integrate sports into the coordinated development of Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei and the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, and combine the regional coordinated development strategies such as the development of the western region, the comprehensive revitalization of the northeast, and the rise of the central region, gradually narrow the gap in the level of regional sports development, create various sports demonstration areas and functional areas with regional characteristics, and continuously help “rural revitalization” and “new urbanization”.

5.1.3. Develop Sports with Special Advantages

In the “14th Five-Year Plan” of the Zhejiang Provincial Sports Bureau, it stated that it would support Hangzhou (swimming and badminton projects) to take the lead in building a famous city with competitive sports characteristics. Hangzhou should take advantage of the opportunity of hosting the Hangzhou Asian Games, relying on Zhejiang’s unique mountain water resources and cultural conditions, and actively introduce and bid for various international and domestic competitions, especially the Olympic Games, National Games swimming, track and field, badminton, tennis, weightlifting, shooting, cycling, kayaking, sailing and windsurfing and other Zhejiang’s advantageous sports. Improve the quality and influence of high-quality international sports events such as the Football Club World Cup, the World Volleyball League, the World Women’s Volleyball Club League, the Dragon Boat World Championships, and the Long-distance Triathlon World Cup, and strive to iteratively upgrade. Strengthen the integration and cooperation of events in the Yangtze River Delta, and jointly bid to introduce more top international sports events [19].

5.2. Cultivate Local Professional Events and Achieve a Balance Between Sports Events and Fixed Investments

5.2.1. Policy Guidance for Professional Events

In the document “Several Opinions of the Zhejiang Provincial Sports Bureau on Promoting the Reform of Sports Events and Building a Modern Event Organization System”, it is pointed out that Zhejiang Province should comprehensively evaluate the influence and market value of the World Championships, World Cup and other events, and introduce a number of major international sports events with high visibility and wide market prospects. Strengthen the connection with international individual sports organizations or competition institutions, and settle in a number of Chinese competitions, sub-station competitions, tour competitions and point competitions for a long time [1]. In the “14th Five-Year Sports Plan”, the Zhejiang Provincial Sports Bureau also

made it clear that the implementation of the “Ten Hundred Thousand Project” of sports events in the province will be launched from 2024, that is, 10 major well-known international events, 100 national-level events, 100 IP events of “one city, one product” and “one county, one characteristic”, 1,000 provincial and municipal linkage events, and 10,000 sports events at all levels. By the end of 2025, the province will build 5-7 international, scientific and standardized event cities, and more than half of the counties (cities, districts) will be built into event agglomeration counties (cities and districts) [20].

5.2.2. Invisible “Flow” Promotes the High-quality Development of the Sports Industry

The “flow” brought by large-scale sports events needs to be further transformed into an “increment” of development, starting from sports consumption to drive the development of the cultural tourism industry, and then promote the high-quality development of the sports industry. It is necessary to use sports events to cultivate residents’ sports consumption habits and make participation in physical exercise a way of life for residents. At the same time, guide sports training enterprises to innovate the “Internet + training” model, develop sports services covering the whole life cycle, strengthen the research and development and manufacturing of family-oriented and intelligent sports equipment and equipment, accelerate the integrated development of sports and health services, sports tourism and other industries, and constantly improve and optimize the industrial system. Hangzhou should rely on its livable environment advantages, practice the development concept of “Jinshan Yinshan is lucid waters and lush mountains”, focus on the development of outdoor sports industry, and continuously meet the transformation of people’s sports needs and yearning for a better life from the layout of outdoor sports areas, the construction of outdoor sports facilities, the opening of natural resources, and outdoor sports events.

5.2.3. Recycling in Sports Venues

Large-scale sports events in the construction and maintenance of venues is a lot of expenditure, the hosting of the game should follow the concept of green cycle, as far as possible to upgrade the original venues, for the venues that have been built, in the “post-Games period”, should follow the “open to the public + youth amateur training + host post-Games large-scale professional games” model. General venues can be subsidized by the government for free and low-cost opening, and the venues and facilities, including the stadiums of colleges and universities, can be supported to achieve community-based facilities, and professional venues cannot be opened in the form of professional events and training bases. Hangzhou Olympic Sports Center should vigorously develop the sports exhibition economy and sports economy, Huanglong Sports Center can explore the development of night tour economy, such as Hangzhou E-sports

Center with market cohesion venues, it is necessary to strengthen cooperation with third-party operating institutions to achieve diversified operation and all-round development. At the same time, the cities can give full play to their digital advantages and explore online and offline intelligent service solutions. Relying on the advantages of the cultural and creative industry, we will develop sports media, sports marketing planning, sports exhibitions and other industries, and develop new growth points for the sports industry [21].

5.3. Implement the National Fitness Plan to Realize the Two-way Travel Between Sports Events and a Better Life

5.3.1. The Sports Scene Has Been Transformed from Stadiums to Community Sports

Good physical fitness is the foundation for the pursuit of a healthy life, and a stable sports population is the fundamental guarantee for the sustainability of sports. The transformation of the main contradiction in our society, sports with “barbaric physique and civilized spirit” are also important ways and means for people to yearn for a better life. In the “Zhejiang Province National Fitness Implementation Plan (2021-2025)”, by 2025, Zhejiang Province will build a “10-minute” fitness circle in urban communities, and during the 14th Five-Year Plan period, the province will build no less than 250 new sports parks, no less than 300 village-level national fitness squares, no less than 100 community multi-functional sports fields, no less than 800 social football fields, no less than 2,000 outdoor sports bases, no less than 3,000 people’s gyms, and the “trail system around Zhejiang” No less than 10,000 kilometers, no less than 50 provincial-level township (street) national fitness centers will be newly built or renovated, 30 mass skating rinks will be built, and 1,000 township (street) and national fitness venue equipment will be completed to make up for shortcomings, significantly improving the conditions of national fitness venues [22].

5.3.2. The Concept of Sports Has Changed from Physical Strengthening to Integrated Development

In the “National Fitness Plan (2021-2025)” issued by the General Administration of Sports of the People’s Republic of China, it is pointed out that it is necessary to promote the integrated development of national fitness, specifically to deepen the integration of sports and education, promote the integration of sports and health, promote the integration of sports and tourism, and create a social atmosphere of national fitness. The key to the integration of sports and education lies in the youth, the adolescent stage is the critical period of life “jointing and booting”, and it is also the golden time for the formation of sports habits, the school should ensure that students have 1 hour of physical activity time in and out of school every day, and support the development of youth sports clubs. The integration of sports and

health focuses on the health model of collaborative cooperation, exploring the establishment of scientific fitness clinics in community medical and health institutions, promoting research and innovation in sports and health, and promoting the projects and methods of exercise intervention for common chronic diseases. The integration of sports and tourism should strengthen the brand effect, promote outdoor sports projects such as ice and snow, mountains, and marathons in combination with urban characteristics, expand sports tourism products and demonstration bases, and help rural revitalization.

5.3.3. Create a National Fitness Atmosphere

As the founding city of the “City of Events”, it should actively popularize and promote the “National Fitness Day” to the people, use the influence of large-scale events to hold fitness events that the masses like to see, and effectively carry out people-friendly fitness events that meet the standards of mass participation, popularize health knowledge, and meet the sense of achievement of participation. Urban construction should take large-scale events as an opportunity to extensively arrange sports landscapes and sports elements, strengthen news publicity and public opinion guidance, disseminate sports and fitness methods and health concepts, encourage communities to cover social sports instructors, and do a good job in community health and fitness services. Taking Hangzhou as an example, before the Asian Games, a new book launch conference of “City of Events” was also held to witness the city’s sports culture in the form of a new book launch, tell the humanistic story behind the Asian Games, and enrich the Asian Games and sports atmosphere. Sports cities can also create a good sports atmosphere in the city through various forms such as “sports banks”, sports consumption vouchers, sports points, and sports and fitness demonstration counties (communities), combined with traditional Chinese sports such as martial arts and fitness qigong.

6. Conclusion

China is facing major changes unseen in a century and is on the journey of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The establishment of China’s sports city serves the major strategic layout of the country, and at the same time meets people’s yearning for a better life. The prosperity of the country and the development of the city should not be separated from the needs of people, and the creation of the “city of events” should also be based on the development of people. Diverse urban culture determines the difference in the development orientation of sports cities, and the idea of synergy, profit and loss balance, risk avoidance, and facing the future with a more positive outlook is the meaning and inevitable way of the creation of the domestic “city of events”.

Author Contributions

Zhaojun Li is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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