

## Legacy or Liability? Assessing the Long-Term Economic Impact of Mega Sporting Events on Indian Host Cities

Dhirendra Singh Chauhan<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Physical Education, Government Girls P.G. College, Hamirpur, UP

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### Abstract

This research paper critically examines the long-term economic impact of mega sporting events on Indian host cities, focusing on the 2010 Commonwealth Games, the Indian Premier League, and the FIFA U-17 World Cup. Through a comparative and multidisciplinary approach, the study analyses infrastructure development, tourism trends, employment generation, and legacy planning. Findings reveal that while these events deliver significant short-term benefits and urban transformation, challenges persist in terms of cost overruns, underutilization of facilities, and unequal distribution of gains. The research underscores the importance of transparent governance and inclusive strategies to ensure that mega sporting events contribute to sustainable urban development.

**Keywords:** India, Mega Sporting Events, Economic Impact, Urban Development, Infrastructure Legacy

### Introduction

In the last two decades, India has emerged as a prominent destination for hosting mega sporting events, joining the ranks of nations that leverage sports for urban transformation and international recognition. The period between 2005 and 2019 marks a dynamic era for Indian sports tourism, highlighted by high-profile events such as the 2010 Commonwealth Games (CWG) in Delhi, the annual Indian Premier League (IPL) cricket tournaments spread across multiple cities, and the FIFA U-17 World Cup hosted in 2017. These events have not only brought global attention to Indian cities but have also served as catalysts for large-scale investments in urban infrastructure, tourism development, and economic activity.

The justification for hosting such mega sporting events in developing economies like India often rests on claims of significant long-term economic benefits, including job creation, urban renewal, increased tourism, and enhanced international prestige. Policymakers and event organizers argue that these events drive rapid infrastructure development—expanding public transport, modernizing stadiums, and improving civic amenities—that would otherwise take decades to accomplish. Additionally, proponents suggest that the visibility and branding associated with hosting international events can attract sustained tourist flows and business investment, thus fostering enduring economic growth.

However, a closer examination of the outcomes reveals a more complex reality. International scholarship and critical Indian studies caution that the anticipated economic windfalls from mega-events may be transitory or unevenly distributed. Cases from the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi illustrate the duality of legacy and liability: while the Games delivered new sporting venues, metro expansions, and a temporary surge in tourism and employment, they were also marred by cost overruns, controversies over mismanagement, and the subsequent underutilization of costly infrastructure. Likewise, the IPL, celebrated for its innovative multi-city model and entertainment-driven economic boom, often generates concentrated gains in metropolitan centres, raising questions about inclusivity and sustainability. The FIFA U-17 World

Cup, a more recent example, highlighted India's organizational prowess and spurred improvements in host cities, but its long-term impact on urban economies and football development remains a topic of debate.

Amid these debates, there is growing recognition of the need for robust, evidence-based assessments of both the short-term gains and long-term consequences of hosting mega sporting events. Academic literature, government audit reports, and media analyses increasingly highlight the importance of evaluating not just the economic indicators but also the social, spatial, and environmental dimensions of urban change triggered by such events. Questions persist regarding the persistence of infrastructure benefits, the equitable distribution of economic gains, the management of opportunity costs, and the potential risks of "white elephant" projects—large venues or facilities that become underutilized after the event concludes.

Against this backdrop, the present research paper seeks to systematically assess the long-term economic impact of mega sporting events on Indian host cities. By comparing the experiences and outcomes of the Commonwealth Games, the IPL, and the FIFA U-17 World Cup, this study aims to offer a nuanced perspective on whether these events leave a legacy of sustainable development or burden cities with liabilities that outweigh their initial promise. Through a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on academic research, official statistics, government and audit reports, and media coverage, the paper critically examines the interplay of opportunity, legacy, and challenge that shapes India's evolving sports urbanism.

### **Literature Review Literature Review**

The economic impact of mega sporting events on host cities has been a subject of considerable scholarly debate, particularly in the context of emerging economies like India. The period from 2005 to 2019 saw India host several high-profile sporting events, including the 2010 Commonwealth Games (CWG) in Delhi, the annual Indian Premier League (IPL) across multiple cities, and the FIFA U-17 World Cup in 2017. The existing literature, official reports, and media analyses offer a nuanced understanding of both the opportunities and the challenges associated with these events.

### **Global Perspectives and Theoretical Frameworks**

Early global studies, such as those by Baade and Matheson (2016), provide the analytical foundation for evaluating the economic impacts of mega-events. They argue that while such events can catalyse urban renewal and short-term economic gains, the realization of lasting benefits is not guaranteed. Preuss (2004) and Higham (1999) similarly highlight the complexities of measuring legacies, costs, and intangible impacts, themes echoed in later Indian analyses.

### **Indian Context: Sports Tourism and Urban Development**

In the Indian scenario, Kaur, and Singh (2012) and Chatterjee (2014) explore the rapid rise of sports tourism and its linkage with major events. Their research points to increased hotel occupancy, higher local spending, and temporary job creation during events, but also notes that these benefits are often unevenly distributed and sometimes short-lived.

Kumar and Patel (2016) examine how sporting events, especially the CWG and IPL, have been harnessed by Indian cities for urban renewal. They find that investments in infrastructure—such as roads, metro systems, and stadiums—have improved urban amenities, but caution that long-term usage of these facilities and the return on investment are mixed.

### **Commonwealth Games 2010: Impact and Controversies**

Majumdar (2011) and Sinha (2011) provide detailed analyses of the 2010 Commonwealth Games, focusing on the scale of investment, employment generation, and the post-event urban legacy. While Matteo and Subramanian (2012) and Mukherjee (2014) debate the cost-benefit outcomes, most agree that the CWG triggered significant infrastructure improvements and a temporary boost in tourism (Ministry of Tourism, 2011; ASSOCHAM, 2010). However, CAG (2011) and media investigations (Dutta, 2011; India Today, 2010; Thakur, 2010) reveal substantial cost overruns, cases of mismanagement, and instances of infrastructure underutilization after the Games.

Roy (2010) and Mehta (2019) emphasize the social perspective, arguing that despite international visibility, many urban poor and local vendors were displaced or excluded from the benefits. Official reports (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, 2011; Sports Authority of India, 2011) acknowledge these challenges, pointing to ongoing struggles in maintaining and repurposing sports infrastructure.

### **Indian Premier League (IPL): Multi-City and Economic Dynamics**

The IPL, as analysed by Majumdar and Naha (2015), Narayan and Sharma (2016), and Gupta (2019), represents a unique model of recurring, multi-city sporting events. Studies document spikes in local economic activity, seasonal employment, hospitality demand, and enhanced city branding during IPL seasons (FICCI, 2015; Business Standard, 2015). KPMG (2015) and RBI (2005–2019) quantify the financial flows associated with the IPL, though both academic and industry sources note that most benefits are concentrated in established urban centres.

Critical perspectives, such as those in media (The Hindu, 2010–2017), suggest that the IPL's economic footprint is highly transient and sometimes limited to a narrow segment of the population, with concerns regarding resource allocation and urban congestion.

### **FIFA U-17 World Cup 2017: New Opportunities and Missed Legacies**

The FIFA U-17 World Cup's impact has received growing scholarly and policy attention. Kapoor and Verma (2017), Naha and Hassan (2019), and Majumdar (2018) assess its contributions to city infrastructure, tourism, and football culture. FIFA's (2018) official technical report and Ministry of Sports (2018) highlight investments in stadium upgrades, city beautification, and temporary boosts to hospitality sectors in host cities. However, Lobo (2017) and Ghosh (2017) report that stadium utilization post-event remains a challenge, and the expected long-term boost to tourism and sports development has been less significant than anticipated. Media coverage (The Times of India, 2017; Mint, 2017) and interviews (Kapoor, 2017) echo these findings, underscoring the risk of "white elephant" infrastructure.

### **Comparative & Critical Analyses**

Scholars such as Mukherjee (2014) and Mehta (2019) challenge the dominant narrative of mega-events as unqualified economic successes. Using counterfactual and critical methodologies, they argue that many benefits are overstated, with opportunity costs and social exclusions often overlooked. Official audit and evaluation reports (CAG, 2011; Ministry of Tourism, 2011) reinforce the need for transparency, accountability, and long-term legacy planning.

### **Media, Data, and Policy Debates**

Media analyses, including Business Standard (2015), India Today (2010), and The Hindu, provide valuable real-time assessments of event impacts, controversies, and stakeholder opinions. Data sources such as RBI tourism revenue statistics and NSSO employment reports are essential for quantitative analysis, though many

scholars (Matteo & Subramanian, 2012; Mehta, 2019) caution against sole reliance on organizer-provided data.

## Synthesis

The literature converges on the view that mega sporting events in India generate meaningful but often short-term economic benefits for host cities. Infrastructure and tourism gains are evident, yet the persistence of these benefits—and their equitable distribution—depends on effective planning, transparent management, and legacy strategies. Critical scholarship calls for nuanced, long-term evaluation and a move beyond headline economic numbers to include social and environmental impacts.

## Methodology

This research adopts a multidisciplinary and comparative approach to critically assess the long-term economic impact of mega sporting events on Indian host cities. By examining the cases of the 2010 Commonwealth Games (CWG) in Delhi, the Indian Premier League (IPL) across multiple cities, and the 2017 FIFA U-17 World Cup, the study integrates both qualitative and quantitative data sources to capture the complexity and diversity of outcomes associated with these events.

### 1. Research Design

The study is structured as a qualitative case study analysis, complemented by a review of quantitative indicators. This approach allows for in-depth exploration of individual events while also enabling cross-event comparisons to identify patterns, unique features, and broader trends in the economic legacy of sports mega-events in India.

### 2. Data Collection

#### A. Secondary Data Sources

- **Academic Literature:**

An extensive review of peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and edited volumes (e.g., Baade & Matheson, 2016; Kaur & Singh, 2012; Kumar & Patel, 2016) was conducted to ground the study in established theories and methodologies related to sport tourism, urban development, and event legacy assessment.

- **Government and Industry Reports:**

Official documents, audit reports, and industry studies—including those from the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, ASSOCHAM, CAG, FICCI, KPMG, FIFA, and the Sports Authority of India—were systematically analysed to extract event-specific economic data, tourism statistics, employment figures, infrastructure investment records, and post-event legacy plans.

- **Media Coverage and Investigative Journalism:**

Major newspapers and magazines (e.g., The Hindu, India Today, The Times of India, Business Standard, Mint, Hindustan Times, The Economic Times) provided insights into public debates, controversies, stakeholder perspectives, and real-time assessments of costs and benefits during and after the events.

- **Quantitative Data:**

Aggregate tourism revenue statistics and employment data were obtained from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) for triangulation and temporal analysis.

#### B. Selection of Case Studies

The three events—CWG 2010, IPL (2008–2019), and FIFA U-17 World Cup 2017—were selected based on their scale, diversity of host cities, and the availability of detailed documentation on their planning, execution, and aftermath. These cases collectively represent a range of event types (one-off, recurring, and international tournaments) and differing legacy outcomes.

### 3. Data Analysis

- **Qualitative Thematic Analysis:**

Key documents, reports, and literature were coded for recurring themes, such as infrastructure development, employment, tourism impact, urban branding, cost overruns, legacy utilization, and social inclusivity/exclusion. Cross-case synthesis was used to identify similarities, differences, and critical lessons across the three events.

- **Comparative Framework:**

Findings for each event were compared using a standardized set of impact dimensions (short-term vs. long-term, tangible vs. intangible, central vs. peripheral city effects), as suggested in Preuss (2004) and adopted by Indian scholars.

- **Quantitative Analysis:**

Where available, statistical data on tourism, employment, and economic indicators pre- and post-events were analysed to detect changes attributable to the events, contextualized by wider macroeconomic trends.

### 4. Validation and Triangulation

To enhance reliability, the study cross-referenced findings from academic, official, and media sources. Divergences between government/organizer-reported benefits and independent evaluations (e.g., CAG audit, media exposés) were carefully examined to identify exaggerations, data gaps, or biases.

### 5. Scope and Limitations

The study is limited to publicly available data and published sources up to 2019. While the research aims for comprehensive coverage, the complexity of attributing long-term economic changes solely to sporting events is acknowledged. The analysis does not include primary survey research or interviews but relies on secondary accounts, official statistics, and existing stakeholder interviews.

### 6. Ethical Considerations

All data were sourced from published academic literature, official reports, and public domain media articles. Care has been taken to credit all sources and to present multiple viewpoints, especially where data and interpretations diverge.

## Analysis and Discussion

### 1. Infrastructure Development: Catalyst and Controversy

Across all three mega events, infrastructure development emerged as the most visible and immediate legacy.

**The 2010 Commonwealth Games (CWG)** in Delhi prompted an unprecedented wave of investment in urban transport (notably the expansion of the Delhi Metro), new sports facilities, road upgrades, and civic beautification. These efforts were intended not just for the Games but to provide enduring benefits to the city's residents and future events. Similarly, the FIFA U-17 World Cup led to the modernization of stadiums and improvements in transport and public amenities in six Indian cities, aiming to raise them to international standards.



However, this infrastructure boom came with caveats. Government audit reports (CAG, 2011; Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, 2011) and media investigations (Dutta, 2011; Thakur, 2010) documented significant cost overruns, delays, and in several cases, post-event underutilization of facilities—a phenomenon often termed as "white elephants." While the IPL model (with its seasonal, multi-city format) did not create massive new venues, it did drive short-term improvements in stadium maintenance, city branding, and related hospitality infrastructure, especially in Tier-I cities.

#### **Key lesson:**

While mega events can act as catalysts for rapid urban improvement, long-term value depends on effective post-event planning and integration of facilities into everyday civic life. Cities that lack legacy strategies risk burdening taxpayers with costly, underused infrastructure.

### **2. Tourism and Hospitality: Short-Term Boom, Long-Term Question Marks**

Tourism was a major justification for hosting all three events. Data from the CWG 2010 (Ministry of Tourism, 2011; ASSOCHAM, 2010) shows a sharp spike in international and domestic tourist arrivals during the event period, benefiting hotels, restaurants, and transport providers. The IPL has created a seasonal tourism and entertainment circuit, particularly for metropolitan centres, leading to higher occupancy rates and local spending during match windows (FICCI, 2015; Business Standard, 2015). The FIFA U-17 World Cup likewise generated a surge in visitor numbers and short-term boosts to local economies in host cities (FIFA, 2018; Kapoor & Verma, 2017).

However, sustaining this momentum post-event has proven difficult. Scholars (Mehta, 2019; Mukherjee, 2014) and industry reports highlight that many cities fail to convert these temporary gains into lasting tourist flows, in part due to limited event-linked marketing and ongoing infrastructure challenges.

#### **Key lesson:**

Mega-events are highly effective at delivering a temporary tourism boost, but their contribution to sustainable destination branding and repeat tourism is limited without follow-up investment and marketing.

### **3. Employment and Economic Activity: Gains and Gaps**

Mega sporting events in India have been credited with generating substantial employment—both direct (event management, hospitality, construction) and indirect (local vendors, transportation). The CWG alone reportedly created hundreds of thousands of jobs during its preparation and staging (ASSOCHAM, 2010; Sinha, 2011). IPL seasons regularly employ a wide spectrum of staff, from stadium workers to hospitality and security. The FIFA U-17 World Cup spurred temporary hiring across its host cities.

Yet, these gains are often short-lived. National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) data and post-event assessments (KPMG, 2015; Majumdar, 2011) suggest that most jobs are not sustained beyond the event window. Further, much of the employment is seasonal, contract-based, and concentrated in major cities—raising concerns about inclusivity and the real impact on urban and peri-urban unemployment.

#### **Key lesson:**

While mega-events are reliable engines of temporary employment, their ability to deliver sustained economic upliftment for local populations—especially in less developed cities—remains uncertain.

### **4. Cost Overruns, Accountability, and Governance**

One of the most persistent criticisms of mega-event hosting in India is the challenge of cost overruns and mismanagement. The 2010 CWG stands out as a cautionary tale: official audits (CAG, 2011; Ministry of

Youth Affairs and Sports, 2011) found project costs often doubled initial estimates, and media investigations uncovered widespread allegations of corruption, wasteful spending, and lack of transparency. Even with more commercially driven models like the IPL, questions persist regarding the equitable distribution of economic benefits and potential for resource diversion away from pressing urban needs.

#### **Key lesson:**

Strong, transparent governance structures and independent post-event audits are essential to maximize positive legacies and minimize liabilities. Without them, the risk of mega-events becoming fiscal and administrative burdens is high.

### **5. Social Inclusion, Urban Displacement, and “Who Really Benefits?”**

While proponents highlight the potential of mega sporting events to drive inclusive urban development, critical scholarship and field reports reveal more complex realities. In Delhi, for example, the CWG’s urban renewal led to the eviction of thousands of informal settlers and street vendors (Roy, 2010; Mehta, 2019), with benefits accruing primarily to central neighbourhoods and commercial interests. The IPL’s gains are restricted to Tier-I cities, reinforcing existing regional inequalities in sports infrastructure and economic opportunity.

The FIFA U-17 World Cup, though less controversial, also demonstrates the limits of inclusive benefit: upgrades focused on stadium-adjacent areas, with less visible impact in broader urban or rural communities (Lobo, 2017; Naha & Hassan, 2019).

#### **Key lesson:**

To ensure that mega-events genuinely serve the interests of the broader population, future planning must prioritize social safeguards, compensation for those displaced, and equitable investment across urban regions.

### **6. Legacy Utilization and “White Elephant” Syndrome**

A major theme emerging from both official reports and academic critique is the risk of underutilized infrastructure post-event. While the Delhi Metro and select stadiums in CWG host cities continue to serve significant public functions, other venues have struggled with maintenance, low occupancy, or financial unsustainability (Sports Authority of India, 2011; Mukherjee, 2014). The experience of FIFA U-17 host cities—where high-quality stadiums remain underused except for occasional events—illustrates this challenge. IPL, with its private-public partnership model and reliance on existing infrastructure, has mitigated this risk but has not eliminated it.

#### **Key lesson:**

A forward-looking legacy plan, integrating event infrastructure into regular community and sports use, is vital to avoid the white elephant effect.

### **7. Comparative Synthesis and Broader Lessons**

When comparing the three events:

- The **CWG** offered the most dramatic transformation in cityscape and infrastructure but also the greatest risks in terms of cost and long-term sustainability.
- The **IPL** has proven most effective in recurring economic and branding benefits for select cities, but its gains are less widely shared and tend to reinforce urban hierarchies.
- The **FIFA U-17 World Cup** highlighted India’s growing capacity to host global tournaments, but also surfaced familiar limitations: short-lived booms, infrastructure utilization gaps, and uncertain legacies.

The broader scholarly and policy consensus, reflected in the literature and your document, is that while mega sporting events can deliver visible, immediate economic and reputational gains, their longer-term impact is mixed and heavily contingent on planning, management, and post-event integration into the urban fabric. For Indian host cities, the challenge remains how to leverage these events as catalysts for sustainable, inclusive growth rather than fleeting spectacles with ambiguous or negative legacies.

## **Key Findings**

### **1. Infrastructure Gains Are Significant but Unevenly Distributed**

Mega sporting events such as the Commonwealth Games 2010, IPL, and FIFA U-17 World Cup have undeniably accelerated infrastructure development in Indian host cities. Delhi's CWG saw massive upgrades to metro connectivity, road networks, stadiums, and civic amenities, and FIFA U-17 host cities benefited from modernized sporting facilities and improved urban services. However, the sustainability and equitable distribution of these gains remain a concern. While central urban areas and key event zones have experienced lasting improvements, peripheral communities and less-visited areas have seen limited impact. Moreover, several high-investment venues have struggled with post-event utilization, raising the risk of "white elephant" infrastructure.

### **2. Tourism and Economic Activity Surge During Events, But Long-Term Benefits Are Limited**

All three events produced a short-term boom in tourism, local spending, and business revenues. Data indicates spikes in hotel occupancy, transport usage, and hospitality sector growth during event periods. For example, CWG 2010 and FIFA U-17 both led to increased domestic and international tourist arrivals, while IPL created regular seasonal tourism flows in major cities. However, these boosts are mostly temporary, with limited evidence that host cities have converted them into long-term destination branding or sustained increases in tourist inflows. Many cities lacked robust follow-up marketing or repeat-event strategies, resulting in only modest long-term gains.

### **3. Employment Generation is Noticeable, But Jobs Are Mostly Temporary**

A consistent finding across the literature and official reports is that mega events generate substantial, though predominantly short-term, employment. Large numbers of jobs are created during the preparatory phase (construction, coordination, event management) and the event itself (hospitality, security, services). However, NSSO and industry data show that these jobs rarely translate into permanent employment or broader livelihood improvements, especially for lower-income and informal sector workers. The benefits tend to be concentrated in more developed urban areas, while rural and peri-urban populations remain excluded from direct gains.

### **4. Cost Overruns, Governance Challenges, and Accountability Issues Persist**

The 2010 CWG is a prominent example where anticipated economic benefits were partly offset by significant cost overruns, project delays, and allegations of corruption and mismanagement. While similar governance issues have not plagued IPL and FIFA U-17 to the same extent, questions remain about transparency, resource allocation, and the fair distribution of event-related investments. Official audits and investigative journalism reveal a recurring pattern of weak oversight and limited accountability, particularly in large public infrastructure projects.

### **5. Social and Spatial Exclusions Accompany Event-Led Urban Renewal**

While mega sporting events are promoted as engines of inclusive urban growth, the reality often includes the displacement of marginalized communities, such as informal settlers and street vendors, especially during



urban beautification and clearance drives. The benefits of urban renewal are frequently captured by central business districts and affluent neighbourhoods, deepening existing social and spatial inequalities. In the case of the CWG, thousands were displaced or lost livelihoods, while new amenities benefited privileged city zones.

## 6. Legacy Planning and Post-Event Utilization Remain Major Challenges

Effective legacy planning is crucial to ensure that mega-event infrastructure continues to serve communities after the spotlight fades. The analysis finds that, while some assets—like the Delhi Metro expansion—have integrated successfully into city life, others, especially sports venues, face issues of underutilization and high maintenance costs. The FIFA U-17 World Cup left behind quality stadiums, but their regular use remains sporadic, and several host cities struggle to sustain the event's momentum.

## 7. Comparative Outcomes: Event Models Matter

- **CWG 2010** delivered the most visible transformation but also faced the greatest risks of cost escalation, social exclusion, and underused infrastructure.
- **IPL** has been effective in delivering recurring, though geographically limited, economic and tourism benefits, but its gains are concentrated in major cities and rarely trickle down to smaller urban or rural regions.
- **FIFA U-17 World Cup** demonstrated India's capacity to organize international tournaments, but the longer-term benefits, especially in sport development and city branding, have been less substantial than projected.

## 8. Sustainable Success Requires Integrated, Inclusive, and Transparent Planning

The overarching finding is that mega sporting events can provide substantial short-term economic and reputational benefits for host cities, but their long-term impact is mixed and contingent on robust planning, transparent governance, and initiative-taking legacy strategies. Cities that prioritize inclusive development, social safeguards, and ongoing community engagement are more likely to convert event-led investments into lasting positive change.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that mega sporting events like the Commonwealth Games, IPL, and FIFA U-17 World Cup have significantly boosted infrastructure, tourism, and economic activity in Indian host cities—primarily in the short term. However, their long-term legacy remains uncertain due to issues such as cost overruns, underutilized facilities, and uneven distribution of benefits. While some cities have sustained gains, others face ongoing challenges related to resource management and social inclusion. The real value of hosting such events depends on transparent governance, strategic legacy planning, and efforts to ensure that benefits reach all segments of the urban population.

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