

# Stakeholder Views of Mega-Event Infrastructure Legacies and Tourism Development Imperatives in Emerging Economies

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**Abstract:** This study explores the post-event realities of mega-event stadia through a dual lens of infrastructure legacy contestations and tourism development imperatives. Focusing on the DHL Stadium, Cape Town and Mbombela Stadium, Nelspruit, which were both constructed for the 2010 FIFA World Cup, the study draws from data collected through 22 semi-structured interviews with municipal officials, stadium operators, tourism stakeholders, and community representatives. Guided by a conceptual framework integrating legacy theory, resilience thinking, and tourism development strategy, the findings reveal persistent tensions between initial legacy narratives and actual long-term outcomes. Both stadia, while structurally intact, suffer from underutilisation, limited tourism integration, and fragmented governance arrangements. Respondents consistently emphasised the absence of anticipatory legacy planning, institutional fragility, and weak stakeholder coordination as key factors undermining legacy resilience and tourism leverage. The study argues that in the Global South, mega-event infrastructure legacies are not only uncertain but politically and economically contingent. Realising long-term value requires a recalibration of legacy discourse from celebratory symbolism to grounded functionality and sustained investment in governance, community access, and tourism system integration. The study contributes to a more critical and context-sensitive understanding of legacy dynamics, with implications for future mega-event infrastructure planning and post-event sustainability in emerging contexts.

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**Keywords:** Infrastructure development, infrastructure legacy, mega-event stadia, tourism development

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## Introduction

This study considered contested infrastructure legacy impacts of mega-events and tourism development imperatives in the Global South, with a specific focus on South Africa's 2010 stadia in Cape Town and Nelspruit. Sport mega-events such as the FIFA World Cup and Olympic Games are a crucial component in promoting developmental agendas and have featured prominently on the agendas of countries of the Global South in the last few decades, with contemporary discourse indicating robust engagements by these countries in the mega-event complex. Such mega-events are often postured as catalysts for infrastructure transformation, economic development and international visibility (Bama & Tichaawa, 2016; Bama, 2018). Furthermore, the prime intention of such sport mega-events is to leverage their

catalytic infrastructure development impetus for their tourism development agendas (Preuss, 2015, 2018; Koch & Valiyev, 2016; Stewart & Rayner, 2016; Hemmonsbey & Tichaawa, 2018, 2019; Bama & Tichaawa, 2020, 2021; Bama, 2025). A central component of this narrative is the promise of long-term infrastructure legacies, among which purpose-built stadia are the most visible and resource-intensive investments; often justified through their perceived utility for tourism, sport and community use. Alegi (2008) therefore avers that, in the run-up to South Africa's hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, it was projected that the country stood the chance of presenting itself as a modern, technologically advanced, business-friendly, tourist destination. South Africa, in 2010, hosted the FIFA World Cup, the first ever hosted on the continent since its inception (Swart & Bob, 2012; Bama, 2018, 2025). In preparations for the hosting of the event, many stakeholder factions held the view that hosting of the event stood the chance of fast-tracking developmental projects, often related to stadia, transport and telecommunications, and by implication, that it would transform the image of the cityscape with the resultant effect of attracting increased tourism (Kassens-Noor & Kayal, 2016; Bama, 2025; Ribeiro et al., 2025). Yet in practice, the realisation of these legacies remains contested, uneven, and deeply context-dependent. Specifically, in the case of the 2010 stadia, contentions that enormous resources, both financial and physical, had been committed to ensuring their readiness for the events were rife. In this regard, Bama (2018) contends that South Africa spent around R17 billion in constructing and upgrading stadia, a figure which Molloy and Chetty (2015) assert constituted the largest portion of the financial investment for the 2010 FIFA World Cup event preparations.

Legacy outcomes in the Global South context are often shaped by limited institutional capacity, fragile urban governance, and volatile development priorities. To this end, mega-event legacy discourse highlights that while considerable scholarly enquiry has explored infrastructure and economic impacts of mega-events from the perspective of the Global North, few studies have systematically explored how such legacies are perceived and managed in post-event emerging economy contexts, particularly through local stakeholders' perspectives (Bama, 2018; Preuss, 2018; Bama & Tichaawa, 2021). The case of South Africa's 2010 FIFA World Cup is emblematic in this regard: While the country gained global visibility and some infrastructural gains, scholars remain sceptical about the sustainability and inclusivity of those outcomes (Tomlinson et al., 2011; Preuss, 2018). These perspectives are important for understanding how infrastructure of this nature performs in practice, how it connects with tourism systems, and how communities interpret their relevance over time. Consequently, integrated strategies are needed to maximise the legacy outcomes of such events. By adopting selected stadia across

South Africa that were constructed for the hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, this paper considers stakeholder views in relation to the debates surrounding the legacy impacts of mega-event stadia in the context of the Global South while paying attention to issues around their sustainability. Among these, the DHL Stadium in Cape Town and the Mbombela Stadium in Nelspruit exemplify contrasting legacy trajectories shaped by differing urban scales, governance contexts, and post-event utilisation patterns. Drummond and Cronje (2019) opine that the DHL stadium in Cape Town is often cited as a high-profile example of stadium 'white elephant' risks, having been expensive to build and struggling with consistent use and cost recovery in the post-event years, until the DHS Stormers moved in as anchor tenants in 2023 (Molloy Chetty, 2015; Cape Town Stadium, 2024). Meanwhile, Mbombela Stadium was intended to serve as a premier large-capacity venue for the Mpumalanga province (City of Mbombela, 2009), something critics have questioned as to whether it has achieved sustained tourism, sporting, or community integration commensurate with its cost (Freschi, 2011; Street et al., 2014).

Furthermore, there seems to be mounting evidence which challenges the ability of sport mega-events to produce sustainable, positive legacies, prompting further research on whether legacy is indeed mutable in the context of stadium infrastructure development (Bama, 2018; Brittain et al., 2018; Sroka, 2021). Following calls for mega-event legacy impact research to be conducted over time, this study considers the stadium infrastructure contestations and tourism development legacy dimensions with specific reference to both of these aforementioned stadia. Fifteen years after the 2010 event, both stadia face widely differing utilisation patterns, management challenges and integration into local tourism economies. In pursuing this objective, the study is structured in the following manner: The literature review and theoretical underpinning put mega-event legacy in context for the study concerned, while it discusses key concepts around legacy within a developing context, particularly in the context of stakeholder reflections on infrastructure legacy, institutional resilience, and tourism development imperatives. By so doing, the study anticipates a contribution towards influencing a more grounded and context-sensitive understanding of post-event infrastructure legacies in emerging economy settings, where the stakes of investment and risks of obsolescence are often magnified. The study's qualitative multi-case study methodological framework is highlighted in the subsequent section, and, thereafter, a descriptive and thematic presentation of the study's findings is elaborated upon and discussed, based on in-depth analysis of the data. Lastly, the study's implications are outlined before the study concludes with remarks and recommendations for future research.

## **Literature review**

### ***Stakeholder theory***

Stakeholder theory serves as a critical lens for understanding the divergent interests, expectations, and power dynamics among actors involved in mega-event infrastructure projects. Originally expounded by Freeman (1984), the theory has evolved into a core analytical tool for evaluating how discussions impact and are shaped by a broad constellation of stakeholders beyond shareholders, including communities, government institutions, private developers, and tourism actors (Harrison & Wicks, 2013). Contemporary scholarship suggests that stakeholder theory, as a concept, has been applied in the domain of tourism in relation to strategic planning and sustainability imperatives of managing tourism destinations (Hardy & Beeton, 2001; Hall, 2012). In the context of mega-events, stakeholder interests can range from financial returns and political capital to community well-being and long-term urban value creation. Misalignment among these interests can exacerbate legacy failure (Preuss, 2015). Particularly in the case of emerging economies like South Africa, stakeholder salience is relevant given the potential weaknesses of institutional processes and the often top-down state-driven approaches to legacy planning (Bob & Swart, 2010; Bama, 2025).

Stakeholder theory provides a diagnostic and normative basis for assessing how inclusive, accountable, and sustainable mega-event infrastructure outcomes are negotiated and implemented towards tourism development imperatives. As defined by Bourne (2016), stakeholder engagement was implemented through stakeholder identification, prioritisation, visualisation, and engagement through effective communications. Additionally, such stakeholders' engagement was aimed at establishing their views, perceptions and indications, as well as assessing their interests regarding their perceptions of the sustainability trajectory of the stadia infrastructure deployment and management in the context of tourism development imperatives (Bama & Tichaawa, 2021; Sroka, 2021). The key stakeholders in the current study included the residents, stadium tenants, stadium management, municipalities involved in stadium management, and the government departments within the host cities of Cape Town and Mbombela.

### ***Mega-event legacy and stadium infrastructure***

The hosting of mega-events, it has been stipulated, comes with the need to invest in the creation of infrastructure that is required for the hosting of the event, such as stadia (Groothuis & Rotthoff, 2014). Preuss (2007) defines legacy as all planned and unplanned, positive and negative, tangible and intangible structures created by and for a sports event that remain after the event. Legacy, as a concept, particularly within the mega-event complex, has gained prominence and attracted

critique for its ephemeral nature of economic booms associated with such events. Stadium infrastructure, while often celebrated for its symbolic value, faces increasing scrutiny for post-event underutilisation, often dubbed the 'white elephant syndrome' (Baade & Matheson, 2016). In emerging economies, these risks are intensified due to constrained public resources, overestimated demand projections, and weak urban integration strategies (Pillay & Bass, 2008). For example, while Cape Town Stadium was envisioned as a legacy anchor for urban renewal and tourism, debates over cost recovery, event regularity and access persist more than a decade and a half after the event. Comparative case studies have shown that unless stadia are embedded within broader urban development and community engagement plans, their utility and value diminish rapidly (Gaffney, 2014). The concept of legacy remains dangerously easy to manipulate in host city discourse (Centre for Events & Festivals [CEF], 2022). While such body of work has addressed infrastructure, tourism and urban development more broadly, fewer studies focus clearly on the stadium asset and its long-term legacy in tourism development, promotion and emerging-economy contexts.

Sroka (2021) acknowledges the existence of a relatively vibrant literature on infrastructure investments and legacies in a mega-event context. Some focus directly on infrastructure and cost overruns (Matheson, 2013; Flyvbjerg et al., 2016), economics (Baade & Matheson, 2016) or mega-events as a broader phenomenon and systemic problem (Davies & Mackenzie, 2014; Müller, 2017). These mega-events have been justified as catalytic in terms of their ability to engender urban transformation and other tourism-related legacy benefits (Müller & Gaffney, 2018; Hemmonsby & Tichaawa, 2019; Kim et al., 2019). Conversely, Sroka (2021) argues that even where stadiums have viable post-event use, the public return on investment is generally poor, with sporting tenants brought in on attractive lease terms and often without the revenue-generating power to match the scale of construction costs, as well as being a poor fit for hosting a more diverse portfolio of events. Extant academic literature asserts that stadiums fail to create economic growth in a city or region (Coates & Humphreys, 2008; Humphreys, 2019). Event proponents have been noted to use the hosting of mega-events along four integral dimensions, in relation to which scale should be considered: Visitor attractiveness (tourism development); mediated reach; cost, and transformative impact (Müller, 2017; Hemmonsby & Tichaawa, 2018, 2019). Consequently, stadium infrastructure legacy should, therefore, be considered as a high-risk strategy for justifying exorbitant expenditures on sport mega-events with no dedicated focus on research that informs the existence and process through which sport mega-events enhance the attainment of legacies (Zimbalist, 2017; Byers et al., 2019). Such literature, related to sport event legacies suggest that stadium-related legacy planning should

be adopted at the inception stage of the events and that legacy implementation teams be constituted and funded post-event to ensure that the legacy plan is executed and monitored in the events' aftermath, especially legacy considerations around infrastructure linked to stadia (Bama & Tichaawa, 2020; Vronidou, 2022; Reis et al, 2023).

Mega-event boosters have often provided positive legacy projections of their intentions towards hosting mega-events, particularly in relation to the infrastructure investments anticipated (Reis et al., 2023). Infrastructural development contestations and tourism development imperatives are, therefore, gaining prominence among participants seeking to deliver sustainable mega-events (Preuss, 2015; Humphrey & Fraser, 2016). To this end, opponents have variously indicated that such infrastructure investments sometimes come with huge financial burdens. For example, Hlabane (2012, cited by Bama & Tichaawa, 2021, 10) avers that figures presented by Sturgess and Brady (2006, 28), for the FIFA World Cup event co-hosted by Japan and Korea in 2002, indicate "a combined sum of US\$ 4.5 billion was spent on stadia alone". official figures placed the total expenditure for the event in South Africa at R37 billion, with the lion's share of the amount, an estimated R24 billion, having been spent on the stadia and precinct programmes, comprising two-thirds of the total spend (Cottle, 2010; South Africa 2011; Molloy & Chetty, 2015). Such contentions suggest that the sums allocated for building stadia have been increasing, and that these numbers are expected to rise in the future (Sroka, 2021). Additionally, a plethora of studies have indicated that the impacts of sport stadia on local economies, particularly related to the infrastructure-tourism development nexus, have not been in alignment with related theory (Alm et al., 2012; Groothuis & Rotthoff, 2014; Byers et al., 2019; Kassens-Noor et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2019; Bama, 2025). To situate the discussion and debates in context, the perspectives on mega-event stadia, legacy, and tourism development are discussed next.

### ***Mega-event stadia legacy and tourism development***

Mega-event hosting necessitates investment into the creation of infrastructure such as stadia (Groothuis & Rotthoff, 2014). Contemporary mega-event hosts have been known to erect multipurpose facilities in a bid to leverage multisectoral usage to engender the usability of the stadia. The hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa was the first of the first-order mega-events to be staged on African soil within the context of the developing economies (Bama & Tichaawa, 2016). Among the multitude of studies that have focused on examining the concept of legacy, the majority concur that mega-event legacies are the outcomes that could be linked not only to the permanent sequel, but also to the adaptations to, changes or

readjustments to normality as a function of the outcomes of the event (Chappelet & Junod, 2006; Black, 2007; Cornelissen, 2007; Preuss, 2007, 2011, 2013; Smith & Fox, 2007; Cornelissen et al., 2011; Cashman & Horne, 2013; Bama & Tichaawa, 2015; 2016; 2020; 2021; Hemmonsbey & Tichaawa, 2019; Reis et al., 2023; Bama, 2025). Tourism development has been highlighted as a key legacy objective of mega-event infrastructure. Stadia are envisioned as multipurpose venues that drive tourism flows through sport, concerts, and heritage branding (Sroka, 2021). Despite the mounting evidence that many of the stadium-linked legacies have failed to materialise, the perennial sport-event-cycle has continued, with little policy learning taking place (Girginov, 2011; Leopkey & Parent, 2012; Tomlinson, 2014; Grix & Brannagan, 2017). According to Smith (2014), while some facilities catalyse increased visitation, local business opportunities, and urban branding when integrated with complementary attractions and mobility infrastructure, others, by contrast, become isolated assets disconnected from tourism value chains with weak linkages to broader tourism circuits.

Additionally, it has also been noted, variously, that the provision of stadium infrastructure also portends positive and negative legacy impacts on the host communities of mega-events post-events. For example, legacy infrastructures such as stadia, in the aftermath of mega-events, are considered capable of generating positive outcomes for hosts, such as image enhancement, urban regeneration, increased awareness, and tourism resource development. Conversely, the negative stadium infrastructure legacy outcomes could include, for example, the high costs for stadium maintenance, negative socio-economic impacts, and societal and cultural problems (Almeida et al., 2014; Grix & Brannagan, 2017; Reis et al., 2023). This points to a critical need for resilient tourism planning, destination integration, and stakeholder alignment to ensure sustainable infrastructure utilisation (Lu & Lin, 2021; Sroka, 2021). Tourism literature emphasises that mega-events offer host cities the opportunity to enhance their attractiveness, media exposure and visitor flows (Knott & Tinaz, 2022; Alshikhy et al., 2025; Bama, 2025). Research on sport tourism destination attractiveness, particularly in emerging economies, identifies key drivers such as event legacy, facility quality, and stakeholder collaboration (Daniels & Tichaawa, 2024; Moradi & Norouzi Seyed Hossini, 2025).

Cezne (2014) contends that, historically, mega-events have managed to transmit powerful messages, playing a multitude of both explicit and implicit roles. The heightened consideration of such potential is encapsulated by Erten and Özfiliz (2006, 525) in their analysis and commentary in relation to the potential of mega-event stadia when they state that “[S]tadia have always been significant urban elements for many reasons like the extent of the area that they occupy in a city, their size, their function, the spatial relations they motivate.” Extant scholarship contends

that the development of stadia in the mega-event literature is pursued based on the critical component of the legacy infrastructure and tourism that are associated with the hosting of such mega-events (Sroka, 2021; Vrondou, 2022; Reis et al., 2023). In the case of the 2010 FIFA World Cup hosted in South Africa, a plethora of researchers postulate that the stadia were extremely costly to build, with costs rising from the initial estimates of R2.5 billion to R8.4 billion, and then, finally, to over R10 billion by the time of their completion (Desai & Vahed, 2010; Jory & Boojihawon, 2011; Maharaj, 2011; Tichaawa & Bama, 2012), with final assessments indicating that stadium construction and upgrades programme for the 2010 FIFA World Cup cost the South African government R16.16 billion (Hlabane, 2012).

In this era of global urbanism, the intricate relationship between capital accumulation and urban spatial transformation in the context of mega-events remains contested and uncertain (Lin & Xu, 2019). Specifically, infrastructure legacy debates and tourism development-related discourses linked to stadia constructed for such events are scant. For instance, according to Ren (2017), existing studies do not venture enough into the complex elements of institutional contexts that underpin the structure of event-driven urbanisation and its outcomes. While the extant literature on mega-event infrastructure legacies provide contentious and competing interpretations (Lin & Xu, 2019), the current study delves into these conundrums and provides fresh insight into how these stadium-related infrastructure legacies could be comprehensively identified by future host communities, within the developing context, but more importantly how these could be harnessed in the context of the tourism development impetus they portend.

### **Methodology**

In examining the perceptions of stakeholders in relation to mega-event stadia development and their tourism development implications, the study adopted a qualitative approach for data collection, analysis and interpretation. The study was based on the DHL Stadium located in Cape Town and the Mbombela Stadium located in Nelspruit. Figure 1 presents an illustration of the geographic representations of all nine host cities of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, also noting the case study areas under investigation. The justification for purposively choosing these stadiums was based upon the premise that they capture variations in urban and tourism contexts within the same national legacy framework. Cape Town's DHL Stadium, located in a major metropolitan tourism hub, and Mbombela Stadium, in a smaller regional city, provide a contrast in terms of scale, tourism market maturity, event volumes and infrastructure embedding. Moreover, these stadiums were newly constructed for the purpose of the event and drew sharp criticism in terms of their choice of location (Swart & Bob, 2009). Such contrast enables the identification of how legacy

resilience and tourism imperatives are conditioned by local context, institutional capacity and urban characteristics (Bama, 2018). Primary data were collected between the months of May and September 2025 via semi-structured virtual interviews with 22 [10 based in Cape Town and 12 based in Mbombela] key resource persons within municipal government structures, stadium management authorities, tourism representatives, local business representatives and resident organisations. To facilitate the interviews, an interview guide consisted of structured questions around four domains: (1) perceptions of infrastructure legacy, (2) infrastructure resilience and institutional adaptability, (3) tourism development outcomes and mechanisms, and (4) stakeholder coordination and governance roles.



**Figure 1.** Geographical location of the 2010 FIFA World Cup host cities and case study areas (adapted from Bama & Tichaawa, 2020).

Each interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes, conducted via video conferencing on Microsoft Teams or Zoom technology, given the scheduling and travel limitations. Interviews were recorded with participants' informed consent. The collected data were subsequently transcribed verbatim from the interviews. Thereafter, the transcripts were imported into the NVivo qualitative analysis software for systematic coding. An inductive-deductive approach was adopted whereby initial open coding identified emergent themes from the data, after which codes were mapped to the conceptual framework's dimensions. Through iterative coding, category refinement and cross-case comparison, patterns within the two stadia contexts were identified. Throughout the process, the transcripts and themes

were constantly checked against the recordings and the notes made by the researcher, to ensure transferability, credibility and confirmability (Bama & Tichaawa, 2021; Abrahams & Bama, 2023). Key findings emanating from the interviews are discussed below. The findings, as collated, are elaborated upon both in terms of the thematic annotations. Discussions accompany these presentations, looking at the potential implications of the responses collated.

## Results

Following the content analysis of the interview transcripts, the data were grouped according to the varying conceptual categories and discussed in line with the emergent themes. The analysis generated four overarching themes relevant to the conceptual framework: (1) infrastructure legacy outcomes, (2) institutional and operational resilience, (3) tourism development linkages, and (4) stakeholder engagement and community perception. Themes are illustrated using verbatim excerpts from interview participants and, where relevant, triangulated with the conceptual framework. Key differences and similarities between the two stadia are highlighted to foreground how local context shapes legacy trajectories in emerging economy settings.

### Demographic profiles of respondents

The study drew on semi-structured interviews with 22 key informants (KPI001–KPI022) purposively selected across two South African cities, Cape Town and Mbombela, each of which hosted 2010 FIFA World Cup stadia.

**Table 1.** Summary of profile of the interview participants (*n*=22)

No.	Participant ID	City	Stakeholder Category
1	KPI001	Cape Town	Municipal Official
2	KPI002	Cape Town	Stadium Management
3	KPI003	Cape Town	Tourism Authority
4	KPI004	Cape Town	Local Business Representative
5	KPI005	Cape Town	Community Leader
6	KPI006	Cape Town	Sports Federation Representative
7	KPI007	Cape Town	Event Organiser
8	KPI008	Cape Town	Municipal Finance
9	KPI009	Cape Town	Tourism Practitioner
10	KPI010	Cape Town	Urban Development Advisor
11	KPI011	Mbombela	Municipal Official
12	KPI012	Mbombela	Stadium Management
13	KPI013	Mbombela	Tourism Authority
14	KPI014	Mbombela	Local Business Representative
15	KPI015	Mbombela	Community Leader
16	KPI016	Mbombela	Sports Federation Representative
17	KPI017	Mbombela	Event Organiser
18	KPI018	Mbombela	Municipal Finance

19	KPI019	Mbombela	Youth Representative
20	KPI020	Mbombela	Cultural Sector Stakeholder
20	KPI021	Mbombela	Tourism Practitioner
22	KPI022	Mbombela	Urban Planner

Participants were drawn from diverse stakeholder categories, including municipal officials, stadium managers, tourism authority representatives, local business leaders, sports federation members, event organisers, community leaders, youth representatives, and cultural sector actors. This diversity ensured a multi-perspective understanding of post-event legacy processes. Eleven participants were based in Cape Town and 11 in Mbombela, allowing for balanced city-level comparisons. Stakeholders also varied in terms of institutional affiliation (public, private, and civil society sectors) and operational scope (strategic, operational, or community interface roles). The sample was purposively aimed to capture both governance-level insights and grassroots community perspectives, particularly on how the infrastructure has been repurposed, managed, and integrated into tourism and local development strategies 15 years after the 2010-event.

### **Stadium and infrastructure legacy perspectives**

Several studies considering the legacy impacts of mega-event stadia have highlighted the duality of expectations and outcomes that they usually portend. Such studies suggest both positive and negative outcomes, particularly in the emerging economy context (Molloy & Chetty, 2015; Ray, 2017; Bama & Tichaawa, 2021). Outcomes from the data collected highlighted that stakeholder perspectives across both case study areas revealed divergent patterns in the material and symbolic legacy of the stadia. In Cape Town, for instance, participants noted that the stadium remains structurally sound and visually iconic, often cited as a landmark in the city's urban landscape. Furthermore, participants stipulated that the stadium is largely integrated into the fabric of the city, as it has been used for promotional and marketing purposes. To this end, a stadium management official (KPI002) from Cape Town stated:

*The stadium provides a tool for the promotion and marketing of the city and country as a whole... the amount of advertising the city gets out of the Rugby Sevens tournament, for example, is simply phenomenal, and makes the stadium a powerful tool for positioning the city as a preferred tourism and events destination.*

Infrastructure creation for sport mega-events is a unique publicity platform and opportunity for place marketing, as well as an outstanding branding opportunity for nations (Berkowitz et al., 2007; Knott, 2014; Knott et al., 2012; Knott et al., 2015). In this regard, some participants concurred with the highlighted potential of utilising stadium infrastructure for strategic purposes. For instance, the positioning of the DHL stadium between the iconic Table Mountain and the Atlantic Ocean supports this view. One of the participants (KPI009) stated that:

*The location [of the stadium] in front of Table Mountain, the Atlantic Ocean, the surroundings and, as the results show, it is a marvellous place*

*and makes the stadium a powerful tool for positioning the city as a preferred tourism and events destination.*

As such, Allen et al. (2013) assert that sport mega-events are increasingly recognised as powerful agents in the imaging, re-imaging and branding of cities and nations. While such an agreement was noted, literature on public stadium subsidies generally undermines arguments for economic benefits (Sroka, 2021); some of the key participant informants nonetheless highlighted that the utilisation of the stadium has not matched previous expectations. Participant noted that while it has hosted occasional international sporting fixtures, concerts, and cultural events, the stadium still operates below capacity for most of the year.

As noted by one of the participants (KPI006) regarding the DHL Stadium in Cape Town:

*The [stadium] infrastructure is world-class, but the volume and frequency of events are far lower than what was projected back before 2010. Additionally, the cost of maintaining that level of facility is enormous.*

This response highlighted a common theme across participants, representing a major challenge in terms of the operational and maintenance of these stadia, as encapsulated by another participant, who, in their observation, highlighted the issue of resilience. Participant (KPI012) observed that:

*We've not fully succeeded in that yet. Certainly, the income does not cover the cost of operations. And, essentially, the reason for that is that we don't yet have enough usage of the stadium for high-income-producing events. We have the structure and the city support, but the model is not self-sustaining. The constant pressure to justify the cost, especially when events don't break even.*

Institutional and operational resilience here considers the stadium governance structures, funding models, and operational mechanisms to support ongoing utilisation and maintenance. Until as recently as 2021, the DHL Stadium in Cape Town was owned and managed by the municipality. As such, some respondents [perhaps unfamiliar with the changing management model] noted that persistent tensions were a fixture among political leadership, operational teams, and commercial partners.

Given efforts at establishing public-private partnerships, even though short-lived or transactional rather than strategic, respondents described operational processes as reactive rather than adaptive, with few mechanisms in place for long-term scenario planning or multi-stakeholder governance coordination. As such, participants noted that institutional weaknesses were more pronounced in Mbombela, highlighting a lack of dedicated stadium management personnel, unclear accountability structures, and a minimal events portfolio, with no standalone strategic plan or budget. To this end, one of the stadium officials (KPI016) stated that:

*No one really owns the stadium. It is in our books, yes, but there's no long-term strategy or even a dedicated manager with the mandate to reposition it. There were some viability considerations, but only at a superficial level, because that wasn't really driving the decision-making.*

*Sustainability planning and the implications for post-event utilisation were lacking. And so, the viability was not tested... It was simply assumed that it could be viable, [and] that there would be enough use afterwards.*

Consequently, funding for maintenance and refurbishment was identified as inconsistent, with deferred maintenance a growing concern, particularly for Mbombela. Respondents' views further confirmed concerns about the absence of institutional memory, frequent turnover in city management, and limited interdepartmental collaboration, all of which weakened the adaptive capacity of the stadium institutions to respond to shifting post-event realities (Mosime, 2016). Humphrey and Fraser (2016) note that the hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa led to an oversupply of stadia, when considered in the context of the stadium's capacity, and the attendance and utilisation figures, suggesting that from a sustainability and resilience perspective of stadium infrastructure, appropriate strategies are required.

Feedback of this nature corroborates and concurs with previous studies on mega-event infrastructure sustainability in South Africa, which established that the costs of operations and maintenance of stadia in South Africa (DHL in Cape Town, Moses Mabhida in Durban, and Nelson Mandela in Gqeberha) ranged between R55 and R80million in annual costs. These figures explain perhaps why, in the pre-event context, there were huge contestations in both the media and academic circles as to the sustainability of these facilities (Bama, 2018; Bama & Tichaawa, 2021). Some of the participants from Mbombela noted that the stadium is sometimes referred to as a 'white elephant' given its minimal usage beyond sporadic local football matches and government events (Molloy & Chetty, 2015). In particular, the location of the Mbombela Stadium, nestled in the periphery of a smaller city with limited commercial event demand, was cited as a key barrier to sustained use. As such, a municipal official (KPI011) from Mbombela observed that:

*Construction of the stadium was never just about the hosting of a tournament, but rather about building a legacy - a legacy in terms of, amongst others, infrastructure development, ... Nonetheless, we struggle to justify the facility's upkeep. It is not well integrated into the tourism offering, and most event planners often bypass us for better-connected cities.*

These findings support suggestions that legacy planning has often been viewed as a peripheral issue, and that in this case, legacy was considered minimal or retrospective as there was little evidence of structured post-event programming strategies, anchor tenants, or financial sustainability planning at the time of construction, corroborating prior scholarship on the issue (Baumann & Matheson, 2018). From a longitudinal perspective, previous research on the Nelson Mandela Stadium in Gqeberha has also highlighted similar concerns, where it was found that legacy planning was more superficial than integrated into the planning of the stadium construction (Bama & Tichaawa, 2020). Such absence of long-term alignment was frequently mentioned as a missed opportunity to convert the infrastructure into a sustainable legacy asset in the long-term. Hints at stakeholder consultation were therefore evident because stakeholder voices have the potential

to offer insights into the successful planning of future mega-event stadium infrastructure legacies.

### ***Infrastructure legacy and tourism development linkages***

Tourism is closely related to the branding and marketing of destinations, with certain types of events noted to possess potential for encouraging repeat visitations through the positive images of the destination's legacy infrastructure often being broadcasted during the period of the event as well as through the number of visitors that are attracted by the allure of the event itself (Swart & Bob, 2009). To this end, stakeholder views on the tourism development contributions of the stadia revealed a gap between aspirational legacy narratives and actual integration into the tourism economy. From an aspirational standpoint, one was reminded of the words of the then CEO of the South African Rugby Union, who noted in relation to the stadia infrastructure allure that:

*Iconic venues in iconic locations – whether it be on the fringes of the Kruger National Park, in the vibrant heart of the country in Gauteng, or in the Mother City of Cape Town – South Africa will offer visitors an unrivalled experience in a country that will guarantee a tournament like no other. Our stadia allow us to place more tickets on sale than ever before; a South African Rugby World Cup would make available 2.9 million seats – 400 000 more than the highly successful England 2015 tournament.*

This contention was consistent with current strategies and provided positive linkages with the suppositions of the proponents of the stadium projects, that the edifices could be used to leverage future mega-events.

Across both study areas, respondents noted that the stadia were justified, in part as tourism assets which, in their views, mostly remained underexploited. For instance, with the respondents from Cape Town, the symbolic and branding value of the DHL Stadium has been sustained, particularly through panoramic imagery of the stadium in promotional materials, which Drummond and Cronje (2019) consider as a 'soft' benefit of the stadium. Nonetheless, respondents highlighted that tourism-related programming such as stadium tours, event packaging, or regular sporting and event fixtures remained sporadic, concurring with rhetoric that there was no consistent plan regarding leveraging the tourism potential of the stadia in the long term. As such, with regard to the DHL Stadium in Cape Town, one of the residents (KPI008) noted that:

*The stadium is iconic, no doubt. But tell me what the legacy was other than infrastructure. There was no real legacy planning... no integration with community priorities.*

In concurrence, another participant (KPI015), from the community around the Mbombela stadium, noted that:

*The stadium is iconic, yes. But from a tourism point of view, it is not leveraged in a consistent or strategic manner. Most visitors [only] see it from afar.*

According to Bama (2018), in the case of the stadia, events hosted in the stadia were themselves tourist attractions, and, if properly leveraged, packaged and distributed, such could engender positive outcomes for both event organisers and facility owners alike.

Furthermore, local tourism stakeholders pointed to the lack of integration between event calendars, tour operators, and destination marketing initiatives. The absence of a dedicated sport tourism strategy was repeatedly identified as a missed opportunity. In the instance of Mbombela, the situation was more acute. Most participants indicated that the stadium has failed to contribute meaningfully to tourism development. Limited international visitation, weak destination branding and lack of event infrastructure coordination were cited as barriers. A participant (KPI013) from the local tourism bureau in Mbombela remarked that:

*It's not even on our list of tourism sites anymore. There's nothing happening there that draws visitors, and it does not fit into the region's tourism strategy.*

Across both study areas, the findings suggest that even though stadia are physically present, they remain peripheral in local tourism systems, particularly in Mbombela, without an anchor tenant. Participants linked this disconnect to governance fragmentation, lack of post-event-tourism planning, and weak institutional collaboration between sport, tourism, and urban development, which aligns with extant literature that often planning was superficial in substance (Drummond & Cronje, 2019). According to Azzali (2017), it is imperative to adopt a change of perspective, putting legacy and the post-event use of stadia in the foreground by instituting the careful planning of infrastructure usage, with a conscious focus on integration and convergence from both a physical and a social perspective.

### ***Stakeholder engagement and community perception***

Stakeholder engagement and perceptions of local community value emerged as cross-cutting issues affecting both stadium legacy and future sustainability. Across both case study areas, participants expressed concern that initial consultations during the planning and construction phases were limited, top-down, and largely symbolic. Post-event, this pattern has persisted, with minimal community involvement in legacy planning or ongoing stadium development and usage. In Cape Town, for example, respondents noted some attempt at community programming and limited access for local sport groups, but these efforts were described as intermittent and under-resourced. Several community representatives expressed ambivalence about the stadium's presence, with one of them (KPI004) noting that

*It's beautiful, but it doesn't feel like it belongs to the communities around it. We don't use it unless there's a major event, even then, it's usually priced out of reach.*

For Mbombela, the discontent appeared more deep-seated and entrenched. Local business owners and community leaders described that stadium as physically and socially removed from the urban core, with little visibility or integration into

everyday life. A community leader from the local community (KPI020) noted that:

*We were told it would bring jobs, tourism, and events. But after the 2010 [FIFA World Cup], it has been mostly quiet. Most people or visitors don't know what happens here now, if anything at all.*

The lack of sustained stakeholder dialogue and participatory planning mechanisms was seen as a key constraint on stadium-legacy realisation, tourism development impediment and resilience building. Participants stressed that without meaningful engagement, particularly with the local tourism stakeholders and surrounding communities, efforts to reposition the stadia as long-term public assets would remain futile. Moreover, a sense of symbolic disconnection has undermined local ownership, further weakening the infrastructural legacy potential and social resilience capacity of the stadia.

### **Discussion**

The study examined the infrastructure legacy and tourism development imperatives of mega-event stadia in an emerging economy context, using the DHL Stadium in Cape Town and the Mbombela Stadium in Mbombela as case studies. The study's outcomes emphasise the need to extend beyond singular interpretations of legacy as static or universally beneficial. Conversely, findings highlight that legacy outcomes are contingent on the spatial context, institutional adaptability, and integration with broader tourism and development systems. From an infrastructure resilience and tourism development perspective, even though both stadia remain intact more than a decade and a half after the 2010 showpiece, their functional integration into the urban and tourism fabric is limited. These findings concur with Preuss' (2007) legacy framework, which in the study context distinguishes between planned and unplanned stadium infrastructure legacies, and between tangible infrastructure and its long-term tourism development impact. The consistent underutilisation of Mbombela Stadium, and the sporadic programming of activities at the DHL Stadium, reflect a disconnect between initial aspirations and the lived post-event reality, an observation consistent with critiques by Bama and Tichaawa (2021) and Knott et al. (2022) confirming that the absence of clearly defined long-term legacy objectives, coupled with limited legacy governance structures, undermine the stadia's ability to achieve their tourism development objectives, foster infrastructure resilience, and evolve into everyday functional public assets.

Though not a core objective of the enquiry, an emergent thrust related to the application of a stadium infrastructure resilience lens sharpened the distinction between physical and institutional sustainability. Although the stadia remain operational, the exhibition of low adaptive capacity in terms of their management structures is consistent with Gao (2025), who avers that the resilience in infrastructure systems relating to stadia requires governance coherence and resource flexibility. In both case study contexts, weak intersectional coordination, fragmented mandates, and budgetary strain limited the venues' ability to respond to changing post-event conditions. Mbombela Stadium's reliance on ad hoc management and the absence of dedicated anchor tenants personnel exemplify what Baumann and Matheson (2018) described as infrastructure lag in emerging

contexts: Assets that survive physically but stagnate institutionally.

Despite being positioned as catalysts for long-term tourism, the stadia remain peripheral to local tourism systems. This concurs with Li and McCabe's (2012) argument that legacy should be assessed not only in terms of infrastructure delivery, but also in terms of the integration of that infrastructure into the destination experience and branding strategies. The lack of stadium-based tourism products, such as tours and event packages, limited collaboration with tourism stakeholders, and low visibility (particularly in Mbombela) in destination promotion all reflect a missed opportunity to embed the venues into the tourism economies where the tourism economy may be otherwise strong, as in the instance of Cape Town.

Perhaps the most consistent cross-case finding was the limited stakeholder engagement and lack of community integration. This finding undermines both institutional capacity and the social legitimacy of the infrastructure. Community perceptions of disconnection, exclusion, and symbolic alienation, particularly in Mbombela, echo concerns raised in post-event literature about mega-projects reinforcing urban inequalities rather than resolving them (Swart & Bob, 2012; Bama, 2025). Without a participatory planning approach or community co-ownership, legacy stadium infrastructure risks becoming not only underused but also politically and socially fragile. These findings validate the conceptual integration of legacy, resilience, and tourism development as a framework for analysing post-event infrastructure. They also highlight that in emerging economies, the successful convergence of these domains depends on anticipatory governance, cross-sector collaboration, and community anchoring. Legacy is not simply what is left behind, but what is actively maintained, adapted, and embedded over time.

## **Conclusion**

The study examined the infrastructure legacy outcomes, institutional resilience and tourism development linkages of two mega-event stadia in South Africa, 15 years after the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Using semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, and predicated on the conceptual framework integrating legacy theory, resilience thinking and tourism imperatives, the study highlights significant lacunae between initial expectations and long-term realities.

While the stadia remain physically intact and symbolically present in their respective urban landscapes, their practical contribution to post-event tourism development and sustained public value has been limited. Consequently, the findings underscore the importance of moving beyond a static conception of legacy and adopting a more dynamic understanding centred on institutional adaptability, stakeholder engagement, and tourism system integration. To enhance the long-term value of mega-event stadia in emerging economies such as South Africa, legacy planning must be embedded from the outset of the project lifecycle. Rather than treating legacy as a retrospective concern, infrastructure initiatives should include detailed legacy-use scenarios, transition strategies, and repurposing plans during the design and planning phases. This should be supported by dedicated budget lines

for post-event operations, allowing for smooth handover and long-term continuity. Furthermore, multi-level governance structures must be strengthened to improve coordination across stadium management entities, tourism authorities, and community stakeholders. Fragmented governance has been shown to undermine both institutional resilience and tourism integration. As such, establishing a lead legacy agency with a mandate for infrastructure legacy and tourism development would enhance accountability, foster strategic coherence, and improve operational efficiency.

The absence of long-term planning mechanisms, weak governance structures, and limited alignment with local tourism strategies have constrained the stadia's ability to function as resilient, tourism-enabling infrastructure. Mbombela Stadium in particular, illustrates the vulnerabilities of legacy infrastructure in secondary cities with limited demand, capacity and political prioritisation. Community anchoring and access should be prioritised. Programmes that encourage community participation, such as access for local sport clubs, events and cultural initiatives, can help foster a sense of shared ownership. This not only improves the social legitimacy of the infrastructure but also ensures that the stadium contributes to local well-being and public value beyond elite events. In addition, tourism programming must be purposefully integrated into stadium operations, including stadium tours, multi-event packaging, and collaborative marketing with nearby tourism attractions to maximise their contribution to the visitor economy. From an emergent thematic perspective, investment in adaptive capacity is also critical to infrastructure resilience, including the ability to adjust to evolving community needs and fluctuating fiscal resources. Diversified revenue streams, flexible partnership models, and mechanisms for periodic reassessment of stadium use will enable these facilities to remain relevant and functional over time. Ultimately, this study contributes to the literature on legacy by demonstrating that in emerging economies, infrastructure legacy is shaped as much by institutional and governance conditions as by physical design. For mega-event investments to yield long-term tourism and development value, legacy resilience must be planned, not presumed.

### **Limitations and future directions**

While the study contributes useful insights into stakeholder perceptions of mega-event stadium infrastructure legacies and tourism development imperatives in emerging economies, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study adopted a qualitative multiple case-study approach focussing on the DHL Stadium in Cape Town and the Mbombela Stadium in Nelspruit. Although these stadia provided valuable contrasts in terms of urban scale, governance arrangements and tourism integration, the findings cannot be generalised to all 2010 FIFA World Cup host

cities or other mega-event contexts beyond South Africa. Furthermore, the study relied on semi-structured interviews with 22 purposively selected stakeholders, generating rich and context-sensitive insights from actors involved in stadium management, tourism governance, and community structures. However, the findings remain dependent on participant perceptions and retrospective reflections which may have been shaped by institutional positions, personal experiences and differing interpretations of legacy outcomes over time.

Conducted fifteen years post the hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup posed challenges relating to institutional memory and access to archival operational records. Some actors involved during the planning and implementation phases of the event were no longer directly associated with the stadium projects, limiting access to accounts of detailed legacy planning processes. Additionally, the study predominantly centred stakeholder narratives and did not incorporate quantitative indicators such as tourism arrival statistics, stadium financial performance data, or longitudinal economic measures linked to stadium utilisation. Future studies should therefore focus on longitudinal and mixed-methods approaches across multiple host cities to generate broader comparative insights into the sustainability and adaptive resilience of mega-event infrastructure in emerging economy contexts.

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