



Community benefits of major sport facilities: The Darebin International Sports Centre

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ABSTRACT

Community benefit is a term used frequently in an Australian government context to justify the construction of sport facilities that require initial and ongoing financial support from the community. The purpose of this research is to investigate the community benefit derived from the development of a new sport facility, in this case the Darebin International Sports Centre (DISC), Melbourne, Australia and examine community (user) perceptions to verify claims that the venue delivers a range of community benefits. Interviews were undertaken with both facility users and key stakeholders at the venue, and the data was qualitatively analysed to identify specific incidents and coded into concepts to identify predominate themes or patterns: social/psychic impacts; community visibility and image impacts; developmental impacts and political impacts. The findings of this study indicate that, from a user perspective, DISC provides an extensive range of noneconomic benefits such as increased accessibility, exposure, participation and success. The majority of facility users stated that the development of DISC has had a positive effect on their sport, sporting community and sporting experience.

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1. Introduction

Community benefit is a term used frequently in an Australian government context to justify the construction of sport facilities that require initial and ongoing financial support from the community. There appears to be an understanding that such facilities will be subsidised by public monies as the benefits these facilities provide the community outweigh any financial costs. Whilst good financial management is still a key consideration of a facility's development and operation, local government has traditionally been involved in providing facilities for the community that private sector organisations would not consider viable businesses. Many sport and recreational facilities fall into this category, being owned and often operated and subsidised by local government because of the benefits they provide the local community. It is important to note that the sport franchises and public–private partnerships that often form the basis of major sports stadia construction consortiums in North America are nowhere near as prevalent in Australia. In Australia facilities are primarily funded by the relevant state government in partnership with local government and state sporting organisations (SSOs).

The purpose of this research is to investigate the community benefit derived from the development of a new sport facility, in this case the Darebin International Sports Centre (DISC), Melbourne, Australia and examine community (user) perceptions to verify claims that the venue delivers a range of community benefits. DISC is wholly owned and operated by local

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government and provides sporting opportunities that are accessible to local residents and sporting clubs as well as elite athletes and national teams. Discrete operational areas of DISC are managed by the resident licensees: Darebin City Bowls Club (DCBC) – a local lawn bowls club; CycleSport Victoria (CSV) – the State sporting organisation for cycling; and Football Federation Victoria (FFV) – the State sporting organisation for football (soccer), in accordance with licence agreements with Darebin Council. DISC is the home of the Victorian State Lawn Bowls Centre, Victorian State Cycling Centre, and Victorian State Football Centre and provides elite lawn bowls, cycling and football facilities for training and competition.

2. The benefits of sport

It is generally accepted that participation in sport provides an extensive range of benefits to individuals and the collective community. Internationally, government agencies are quick to point out that participating in sport and recreation contributes to: community health and wellbeing; confidence-building and empowerment; social integration and cohesion; national and cultural identity; and a reduction in crime and vandalism (Long & Sanderson, 2001; Sport and Recreation Victoria, 2008; Canada, 2005; Sport England, 2002; VicHealth, 2008).

The subsequent funding of sports infrastructure, be it stadia or arenas, has often been justified because of these benefits and the universal perception that sport is good for individuals, the community and the economy. Benefits can be in the form of economic impacts, which have tied the flow of money in the economy and include such things as spending by fans at events, by players in the community, and money generated by spin-off business; or noneconomic impacts which include social and community impacts, such as the communal experience of attending or participating in sporting events or the community identity, pride and sense of belonging one feels by identifying with a local team.

2.1. Economic impacts

In the United States (US) in the 1990s, over forty major league facilities were constructed, with the number of minor league and collegiate sports facilities numbering in the hundreds. Over this period, over US\$9 billion dollars was spent on major league facilities, with approximately 55% of these funds coming from public sources (Chapin, 2002). It has also been reported that the total spent on major league facilities in the 20th century in the US was estimated at over US\$20 billion, with approximately US\$15 billion having come from taxation revenue (Keating, 1999); however, Crompton (2004) ascertains that the public sector's share is closer to 64%.

The vast majority of literature that canvasses the benefits of sports facilities to date has focused on the economic impact of professional stadia and arenas for major league sports in North America. This literature has been dominated by two types of studies: (1) economic impact analyses undertaken for a specific proposed or existing sports facility or team and (2) longitudinal or cross-sectional studies of the impact of sport facilities on cities. According to Chapin (2002), the first subset is dominated by consultant prepared reports that indicate that teams and facilities have a substantial (often overstated) impact on the local economy. The second subset is dominated by scholar prepared studies that almost universally conclude that, on economic terms alone, sports facilities are not wise investments. Indeed, Eckstein and Delaney (2002) agree that there is growing evidence that there is “little economic windfall from publicly funded stadiums” (p. 235). Walton, Longo, and Dawson (2008) have also questioned the legitimacy of public subsidies.

Chapin (2002) confirms that “economic costs and benefits have garnered the lion's share of attention in the literature” (p. 2). The economic impact of sports facilities has received the majority of attention from scholars in large part because project proponents have usually justified public expenditures on stadia and arenas on purely economic grounds. The literature on the economic impacts of sports facilities appears biased, with consultants usually determining that teams and sports facilities have a sizable economic impact whilst scholarly studies almost unilaterally conclude that sports facilities do not provide a net economic return to the community (Crompton, 2001).

Noll and Zimbalist (1997a) support this common view and acknowledge that independent studies of sports facilities invariably conclude that they provide no significant economic benefits and state that a new sports facility has an extremely small (perhaps even negative) effect on economic activity and employment. Coates and Humphries (2003a) also confirm that many authors of academic literature have found no economic impact of professional sports facilities and franchises on income and employment and have found that in fact some research identified a negative impact of professional sports on urban economies (Baade, 1996; Baade & Dye, 1990; Baade & Sanderson, 1997; Rosentraub, Swindell, Przybylski, & Mullins, 1994). Gratton and Henry (2001) make the comment that the research has often been politically driven to justify the expenditure on new facilities and the validity of many of the results is questionable. Clearly, there is a large body of growing evidence that indicates there is no economic benefit, and sometimes even an economic cost, associated with the development of stadia and arenas.

2.2. Why are there no economic benefits?

Coates and Humphries (2003a) attribute the lack of economic benefit attributable to development of sport stadia to the finding that household spending on sports is “highly substitutable” (p. 8) for other forms of entertainment spending. Sport does not induce residents to increase their total spending, they simply maintain their level of entertainment spending but alter the allocation of this spending towards sport-related spending and away from other close substitutes. Noll and

Zimbalist (1997a) agree that nearly all spending at stadia is simply shifted from other forms of entertainment like restaurants and movies.

Other economic studies have shown that earnings and employment in the United States' amusements and recreation sector (the sector of the economy containing professional sports) rise and earnings and employment at eating and drinking establishments and retail trade establishments fall with the size of the professional sports environment in the cities (Coates & Humphries, 2003a). Further studies by Porter (1999) and Porter and Fletcher (2002) reported little or no increase in hotel occupancy rates, retail sales, or airport traffic in cities that hosted major events (i.e. Super Bowls and Olympic Games) in the US in the past ten years. Visitors attracted by a new sports facility or major sporting event may occupy hotel rooms and eat meals that would have been purchased by visitors who came to the city for other reasons, and the direct spending on sport made by these visitors would have gone to other entertainment establishments.

There may also be costs associated with developing new sports stadiums. Money spent subsidising these sports facilities may come at the expense of other important and highly productive public services. For example, there "may be fewer police on the street, fewer firemen, less frequently repaired streets and highways, a weaker education system, and so on" (Coates & Humphries, 2003b, p. 9). This can in turn increase the cost of living for the broader community.

It is evident that a considerable amount of public money is spent on developing major sport facilities despite the fact that these funds could be spent on a myriad of other high priority and equally worthwhile city projects. Governments deem the development and subsidisation of sport facilities as justified because the benefits they provide the community appear to outweigh any financial costs, even though the evidence indicates that there is no economic benefit derived from the development of major sport stadia and arenas. Consequently, the noneconomic benefits provided by these projects must be significant to warrant this level of spending on sport facilities.

3. Noneconomic impacts of sports facilities

According to Chapin (2002), noneconomic impacts are best categorised as:

- (1) social/psychic impacts – which generally refer to the enjoyment provided by sports and sports facilities to citizens in a community;
- (2) community visibility and image impacts – which capture the concept that a city or locality may experience benefits from being associated with a major sports facility or team;
- (3) political impacts – which refer to the political costs and benefits that flow from a sports facility; and
- (4) developmental impacts – which refer to physical redevelopment of the area immediately surrounding and in the district encompassing a new sports facility (Chapin, 2002).

These four categories of non-economic impacts of sport facilities will be used to frame both the following review of extant research literature and the subsequent findings from this research project.

3.1. Social/psychic impacts

Crompton (2004) refers to the internal benefits received by many community residents who do not attend sporting events, but nevertheless, strongly identify with the event (e.g. Olympic Games), teams or athletes involved as psychic income, and argues that this is likely to be the key to the justifying the public subsidy of major sporting facilities. The civic pride that is experienced by host city residents is a significant noneconomic benefit that is well documented (Chapin, 2002).

Many residents experience feelings of: enthusiasm, satisfaction and pleasure when a major sporting event is held in their home town. This was verified in a study by Waitt (2003), which examined the host city residents' enthusiasm towards the Sydney 2000 Olympics. His study found that the majority of respondents perceived the benefits associated with hosting the event outweighed any costs, and residents generally supported the high levels of public expenditure spent on the event. Elation was particularly evident among those living in Sydney's western suburbs, those with dependent children, those from non-English backgrounds, or those who perceived the event's wider economic benefits as outweighing personal costs. Three altruistic themes recurred in participant responses, namely "community and national spirit, international promotion, and future business investment" (Waitt, 2003, p. 209). Among the participants, these were commonly perceived benefits of the Sydney Olympics and potentially would not be dissimilar to the perception of residents experiencing the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games (M2006). The lawn bowls event for M2006 was held at the Darebin International Sports Centre and DISC users may report comparable experiences which this study attempts to determine.

3.2. Community visibility and image impacts

Another significant noneconomic benefit associated with the development of major sports stadia is the increased community visibility and enhanced community image that accompanies these developments and identification with elite sporting teams and players (Crompton, 2001). Chapin (2002) also supports the view that locales where major sports facilities are developed experience enhanced visibility and recognition, and residents experience increased levels of civic pride as a result of the growth of their town's profile and exposure in the community (Chapin, 2002).

A study conducted in Cincinnati, US by [Smith and Ingham \(2003\)](#) investigated whether sports can regenerate community, and found that when asked about the sense of community in their immediate locales, people were able to discuss the concept of integration or linkages between people rather lucidly. The focus of most participants' sense of integration was more closely linked with their surrounding neighbourhood (place) rather than the city as a whole (space).

[Smith and Ingham \(2003\)](#) also found that building stadia for professional sports contributed to the development of schisms along class, urban/suburban, and fan/non-fan lines, demonstrating that public subsidisation of professional sport not only does not (re)generate a community as-a-whole, but indeed may further divide residents depending upon their situated interests. Like [Johnson and Sack \(1996\)](#), they found that more people seem to have a sense that the power of decision-making is held by a relatively small elite who gets what they want regardless of the opinion of sub-ordinate groups that also will be affected.

As the research literature in this area of facility development is largely based upon those providing for elite sport and entertainment leagues and franchises, it is important to note that for many sport facilities, any benefits accrue to those elite sport communities alone. However, it may be argued that sport facilities that have services and facilities designed to service both the elite and general sporting communities will provide a range of benefits to a broader base of the community, and may result in the development of social capital, that is the advantages of connections or social positions, and trust within a community ([Putnam, 2000](#)).

3.3. Developmental impacts

[Chapin \(2002\)](#) points out that one element of noneconomic impact literature has largely been overlooked, that noneconomic impacts can take the form of both benefits and costs. Even though development benefits are possible there are also development costs, such as sporting club relocations, the paving of valuable urban land for car parking or the loss of residential amenity from sporting activity at the venue resulting from increased litter, noise and light pollution, and traffic congestion.

3.4. Political impacts

[Johnson and Sack \(1996\)](#) point out that when “studies do include commentary on intangibles (noneconomic benefits), they erroneously assume that all intangibles will represent positive outcomes” (p. 378). For example, whilst sports facilities can generate political goodwill and collaboration across numerous levels of government and sport organisations, the political capital required to push these facilities through the process can take away from other important initiatives. This view is supported by [Waitt \(2003\)](#) who examined the changes in enthusiasm between 1998 and 2000 towards the Sydney Olympics and advised that for some public expenditure on sports and transport infrastructure may never be justified. In Sydney, this was particularly the case among many elderly respondents who held negative attitudes and possibly resented the government's spending on major sports facilities. They preferred to see less public money spent sport facilities and more on welfare facilities such as hospitals ([Waitt, 2003](#)).

In their investigation of New Haven, US, [Johnson and Sack \(1996\)](#) used a case study approach to document the noneconomic impact of the city's choice to construct a tennis facility to host an international tennis tournament. They identified that political impacts were among the most important of the noneconomic impacts, and concluded that for this project, the political costs were considerable, requiring substantial energy and time from administration to see the project through ([Johnson & Sack, 1996](#)).

3.5. Examples of noneconomic impacts

[Delamere, Wankel, and Hinch \(2001\)](#) have documented a comprehensive range of noneconomic benefits and costs associated with community festivals, having drawn on an extensive range of literature in their research to develop a scale that measures resident attitudes towards the social impacts of community festivals. Examples of these social benefits include: establishing community pride; family activities; social interaction; recognition of community; building leaders and voluntarism; facilities/cultural legacies. The identified noneconomic benefits and costs of community festivals identified by [Delamere et al. \(2001\)](#) could also be applicable to major sports events and activities undertaken at sporting facilities. Festivals are events, and as such are linked directly to facilities, as facilities are needed to house events and events to give facilities purpose.

4. Community benefit

In the literature, community benefits are featured as a subfactor of noneconomic (or social) benefits. According to [Delamere et al. \(2001\)](#), community benefits include: “celebration of community; enhancement of community identity; image and uniqueness; development of a sense of community togetherness and wellbeing; improved quality of life; personal wellbeing and pride; individual and community and recognition; development of leaders within the community; and the sharing of ideas among community groups” (p. 19). Less recognized intangible community benefits also include: renewed

community spirit; better inter-regional cooperation; production of ideas; production of cultural values; (affectionate) popular memory; education; experience and additional know-how (Gratton and Preuss as cited in Mangan, 2008, p. 1869).

Community is a difficult concept to define, especially since its connotations change with time and context. The term 'community' or an individual's sense of community elicits "a feeling of closeness and camaraderie with a group of other people, usually geographically proximate, who are not necessarily related through kinship" (Smith & Ingham, 2003, p. 253). A particular individual's understanding of community cannot be readily identified, as one's experiences, thoughts, values and beliefs that inform their view of community is unique and impossible to replicate. A person's idea of what constitutes a community benefit is subjective and based on what is important and relevant to them and therefore cannot easily be defined. Walton et al. (2008) agree that positive benefits such as civic pride, prestige, community spirit, and legacy of sporting facilities (collectively referred to as intangible gains) tend to be overlooked, largely because they are difficult to measure.

There has been little, if any, research undertaken that specifically focuses on the noneconomic impacts associated with the construction of sport facilities. The literature on noneconomic benefits is limited and has generally concluded that these are present and often positive, but hard to quantify (Crompton, 2001). As noted earlier, sport facilities that have services and facilities designed to service not just elite sports can also provide a range of benefits to the broader community, and may result in the development of social capital by serving as a social meeting place facilitated by sport participation.

For the purposes of this study, a community benefit is defined as any noneconomic benefit identified and communicated by the research participants.

5. Method

A case study and user perception approach was used to determine the community benefit derived from the development of the DISC. The analytical technique of explanation building was applied, as the goal of the study was to analyse the data by building an explanation about the case (Yin, 1989). This was primarily achieved by interviewing key stakeholders and users of DISC in order to qualify and record their view on the impact(s) that have resulted from the development of the DISC. Interview questions were designed to elicit detailed responses from participants on their understanding of community benefit. Participants were asked to define and qualify community benefit, articulate and evaluate their experience of DISC, and assess whether DISC has met their sporting needs and expectations. Interview questions were developed to reflect the following broad themes:

- conceptual understanding of community benefit,
- determining the impact DISC has had on the interviewee and their respective sport and sporting community,
- determining the interviewee's perception of the impact that DISC has had on the broader, non-participating community, and
- delivery on the expected outcomes by DISC.

The questions were informed by earlier research on the impact of sports stadia development drawn academic literature.

All interviews were undertaken using semi-structured interview questions. The in-depth interview questions were often modified or expanded upon during the interview in order to achieve responses to discussion points arising from the conversation.

The population for the study comprises the following:

- i. *Stakeholder interviews*: In-depth semi-structured interviews with licensee staff and executive volunteers (board and commission members) (Interview $n = 6$) and
- ii. *Facility user interviews*: Intercept interviews with facility users (a minimum of 10 participants from each resident sport) (Intercept $n = 48$).

5.1. Stakeholder interviews

Pre-arranged, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two representatives from each of the sport organisations (or licensees) based on DISC including:

- Darebin City Bowls Club – the Club Manager and a Board Member who represented the club's interests in the project reference group responsible for design of DISC;
- Football Federation Victoria – the Venue and Event Coordinator and Head of Business Affairs; and
- Cyclesport Victoria – Operations Manager and a Board Member who represented the club's interests in the project reference group responsible for design of DISC.

These participants were targeted for the study because they were involved in the planning, development and operation of the Darebin International Sports Centre and had a comprehensive understanding of the centre and their sports operations.

5.2. Facility user interviews

Intercept interviews were conducted with a cross section of facility users to ascertain whether their perceptions were consistent with licensee views on the community benefit derived from the development of DISC. DISC facility users were randomly approached across a range of days and times and invited to participate in the research project. DISC users were approached whilst accessing facilities such as the outdoor bowls greens, indoor bowls green, velodrome, football pitches and bar-bistro, in an attempt to sample a cross-section of facility users. Forty-eight intercept interviews were conducted of DISC users in total, achieving a minimum of ten interviews per sport (19 interviews for bowls and cycling plus 10 interviews for football). DISC users constituted participants drawn from the following user groups: sports club members ($n = 33$), casual users ($n = 6$), licensee staff ($n = 7$) and group booking participants ($n = 2$). Clubs and associations represented in the intercept interview data collection included: Darebin City Bowls Club, Thornbury Bowls Club, Northcote Cycling Club, Brunswick Cycling Club, Preston Cycling Club, Blackburn Cycling Club, Old Melburnians Soccer Club, Richmond Soccer Club, Monash University Soccer Club, and the Secondary Catholic Sports Association.

The gender and age group of the participants were not predetermined as participants interviewed were reflective of the groups at DISC on the day of the interview. The intercept interviews generally took 15 min to conduct and were completed during the site visit at time of intercept.

The process of data analysis was two-fold: firstly, the intercept interview data was complied and tabulated – common or reoccurring segments of data were grouped together and their frequency quantified to identify predominate themes or patterns in the data; and, secondly the transcripts from the in-depth interviews were examined for specific incidents, and organised or coded into concepts. The process of open coding aimed to identify concepts that seem to fit the data, where data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Events, happenings, objects and interactions that are found to be conceptually similar in nature or related in meaning are grouped under more abstract concept terms ‘categories’. Closely examining data for both differences and similarities allows for fine discrimination of differentiation among categories.

During the open coding process, the researcher looks for emerging patterns and themes in the data, and this constant comparison process facilitates the identification of concepts. This allows the researcher to “make the progression from merely describing what is happening in the data to explaining the relationships across incidents” (Goulding, 2002, p. 69).

Organisational documents have also been examined to identify any relevant secondary data that supports or contradicts the findings of the primary data collected for this research project. The key findings from the primary and secondary data sources are discussed, analysed and qualified in the following section.

6. The impact of DISC

Overall FFV and CSV stakeholders and football and cycling facility users believe the development of DISC has had a profoundly positive impact on their sport and sporting community. This was also the case for DCBC stakeholders and users, although not to the same extent. This study confirms that, from the perspective of key stakeholders, DISC provides an extensive range of noneconomic benefits for their organisations such as increased accessibility, exposure, participation and success. Like DISC stakeholders, a majority of facility users stated that the development of DISC has had a positive effect on their sport, sporting community, and sporting experience. Generally users felt that: DISC has met their sporting needs; they would recommend DISC to others; and the broader Darebin community was better off for the construction of DISC. These results will be discussed in more detail under the four key impacts outlined earlier in Section 3.

6.1. Social/psychic impacts

A diverse range of DISC facilities were utilised by the facility users surveyed. The bar/bistro and change rooms were the most commonly utilised areas; this is a reflection of the fact that they are shared facilities that are accessed by representatives from all three resident sports. The data indicates facility users often utilise more than one area of DISC, not just the sporting components of the venue. High usage of social and communal areas such as the bar/bistro, function room and meeting rooms supports the notion that the venue provides a social benefit – a meeting place for the community which “decreases the isolation of people” (Intercept C03).

Facility users also indicated that they engaged in an extensive range of sporting activities and events at DISC. Facility users participate in these events as athletes, spectators, officials, staff and volunteers and the diversity of events and activities and the data confirms that sporting opportunities are accessible to local residents and sporting clubs as well as elite athletes and national teams. Major events, such as the Australian Open (lawn bowls), Commonwealth Games and National Cycling Championships, provide the local community with regular opportunities to access premier sporting events. One user noted that DISC “allows me the opportunity to watch the elite of my sport and appreciate the efforts of others competing” (Intercept B10). The enjoyment and engagement spectators receive from watching elite sport is just one of the many social benefits reported by the facility users who participated in this study.

Generally, DISC users believed that the broader community (non-users) had also benefited from the development of DISC, although they often had difficulty identifying and articulating these benefits. Some broader based community benefits

identified included: improved local amenity and public safety; enhanced community pride and image; and increased social opportunities and leisure options for residents.

Social/psychic impacts of DISC's development cited by stakeholders included increased participation and social cohesion, and creation of a "better lifestyle" for the community (Interview C). One stakeholder confirmed that DISC provides a social function, providing a venue where "people come in and grab a coffee, sit up in the stands and watch what's on . . . it (DISC) has become a community meeting point" (Interview A). Many facility users felt that the social components of DISC would appeal to local residents as an accessible, safe and attractive alternative to cafes, restaurants and other community meeting places as well as providing free spectator access to elite sports facilities and activities. There was a perception that despite a heavy emphasis on elite sport at DISC, the non-elite sports community and local residents had also benefited from this development.

6.2. Community visibility

A number of DISC stakeholders indicated that the development of DISC had increased the profile of their sport and organisation and therefore increased their community visibility. By providing the CSV and FFV with a *home* for operations inclusive of international standard sporting facilities, DISC has enabled the State sporting bodies for cycling and football to be associated with the best cycling and football facilities in the State. This has improved the visibility and reputation of these organisations within the community.

CSV and FFV representatives confirmed that the development of DISC has delivered significant benefits for their sports. The establishment of CSV and FFV headquarters at DISC along with the construction of an ICU accredited cycling track and three FIFA accredited synthetic pitches has enabled the sports to increase their profile and provide extended training, coaching and competition opportunities for their sporting community and general public. As one football stakeholder comments DISC provides a:

. . . home base for us. People know that this is our home now, and it gives us some leverage, even in terms of when we are trying to run events, because it is the home of football. We get a lot of people approaching us about using the venue and trying to associate themselves with the home of football – it's created additional sort of brand image that increases our image to the people out there. I think it's just an extremely valuable resource that we can use (Interview C).

Despite this sense of place reported by FFV stakeholders, in November 2009 the FFV moved out of DISC because of a lack of office space, and relocated their administration headquarters to the central business district of Melbourne. They continue to have a presence at DISC, retaining the lease for management and operation of a small retail area, the football pitches and an associated sporting pavilion, but Bowls Australia (the national sporting body for lawn bowls) has since moved into their vacated offices. It is unknown what impact the relocation of FFV headquarters has had on people's perception of DISC as the home of football in Victoria.

FFV stakeholders confirmed that the facilities on offer at DISC have provided the FFV with "a marketing tool to get additional people out here" and participating in football programs (Interview C). This is supported by a number of facility users who perceive DISC has heightened the community's awareness of sport and increased sporting participation. This is reflected in comments such as DISC has "increased participation and promotion of sport, leading to an increase in community involvement" (Intercept C07) and "easy access to facilities has increased sport exposure and participation" (Intercept C05).

The quality and nature of the indoor cycling track and football pitches at DISC are real selling points as far as attracting existing athletes to the venue and new participants to the sports. The development of DISC has provided the sport of cycling with the only permanent indoor velodrome in the State. CSV attributes the development of DISC to an increase in track cycling membership in Victoria and one CSV stakeholder commented the venue "gives us another string to our bow as far as bringing on track cyclists because prior to the DISC being built we didn't have available to us a board indoor track for the riders to train" (Interview A).

Many facility users also commented on the accessibility of sporting facilities at DISC. A number of facility users commented that the ability to utilise an indoor cycling track, indoor bowling green and synthetic pitches (all with lighting) 24 h a day, seven days a week, all year round, provided their sport and sporting community with many benefits in the areas of sport development, event programming, and revenue generation. Several facility users also commented that DISC provided the local community with the opportunity to access high-quality sporting facilities and witness elite sportsmen and women competing 'in their own backyard'. One lawn bowls intercept interview participant commented that "the Darebin community is far better off for DISC being built. The people of Darebin have many more (leisure) options" (Intercept B17).

Several facility users, reinforced key stakeholder views, and agreed that a major benefit of DISC is that it provides a *home* for their sport. One football intercept interview participant believed that DISC had provided a "central venue (which) has given football a *home* for youth development" (Intercept F02). A number of cycling participants commented DISC "meets the needs of a high class events venue/training facility, plus provides a *home* for CSV"; and "has allowed cycling to finally have a *home* which for the first time in Victoria's history allows training/competition 24/7 in a world class facility" (Intercept C19). Another user commented that the cycling track "will go a long way to helping the sport (of cycling) thrive" (Intercept C04).

Several facility users attributed improvements in individual and collective sporting performances to the development of DISC. Comments such as: improved the game; helped with training; better safety, less injuries; develop skills – all support the view that the development of DISC has made a contribution towards improving sporting performances. One participant commented the development of DISC “has allowed for regular weekly track cycling indoors and under lights – has lifted the standard of Victoria’s performance” (Intercept C16). Specific populations or sub-communities were also identified as benefiting from the development of DISC including children and parents; the elderly; the isolated and obese.

From the perspective of facility users, the community benefits derived from the development of DISC were similar to those identified by the key stakeholders, and included: improved access to quality facilities, programs, events, elite athletes and coaches; increased sport exposure, profile, membership and participation; increased community engagement and social integration; increased visitation to the municipality and local businesses; and provision of a safe sporting and social environment.

6.3. *Community image*

Several stakeholders observed that the development of DISC had affected an image impact, confirming that the municipality had benefited from being associated with a major sports facility. This was demonstrated in a comment made by one stakeholder who stated “I certainly feel it’s put Darebin on the map and it’s made the suburb more noticeable” (Interview E).

The development of DISC has also provided the cycling and football State sporting bodies with administration headquarters and exclusive rights to the best cycling and football facilities in Victoria. CSV and FFV stakeholders maintain that the development of DISC has improved the image and profile of their organisation and sport. This in turn has increased track cycling membership and football participation.

The benefit of having a world class, indoor cycling venue that operates all year round has allowed CSV to provide an extensive range of community cycling events and programs as well as elite racing and training opportunities. Cycling clubs travel from all over the State to access the venue and according to CSV stakeholders, this has directly resulted in the venue earning the respect of the cycling community, an increase in cycling participation and improved cycling performances. DISC is “world class so it can host those major events and (has) earned the respect from the cycling community Australia-wide” (Interview D). CSV stakeholders believe DISC has enhanced the image of cycling as evidenced by the comment “there is no doubt that DISC has now provided us with the opportunity to now expand on the good position we have put ourselves in and to take the sport further and enhance track cycling here in Victoria” (Interview D).

Like CSV and FFV stakeholders, DCBC stakeholders cited a number of benefits associated with the club’s relocation to DISC and one DCBC representative commented that new members to the club “see massive advantages” in being based on DISC and confirmed the indoor green is “fantastic and it’s a great asset to have as a club” (Interview B). The positive impacts derived from the development of DISC as perceived by DCBC stakeholders and users included: new and improved ancillary facilities, provision of the indoor all-weather green, extended club operating hours and improved access, and improved spectator opportunities. All of these impacts can improve the club’s and the sport’s image within the community.

6.4. *Developmental impacts*

The developmental impacts of DISC were not as apparent to stakeholders and facility users; no developmental impacts were identified, despite the fact that the development of the State Lawn Bowls Centre was a deciding factor in the strategic opening of a new Henselite lawn bowls retail business directly across the road from DISC.

6.5. *Political impacts*

A potential political impact resulting from the development of DISC is the perceived poor quality of the outdoor greens by a number of DCBC representatives (Intercept B01, B02 and B06). Some users commented the perceived quality of the outdoor greens has had a negative impact on the club’s reputation and ability to attract new members and this view may have political implications for Darebin Council and the DISC funding partners responsible for overseeing the design and development of the bowls greens.

6.6. *Perceived costs*

Cycling and football stakeholders and users generally reported that the development of DISC has primarily delivered positive benefits to the community – few, if any, significant costs were identified by cycling and football participants. This is in contrast to lawn bowls participants who generally identified a range of both positive *and* negative impacts resulting from the development of DISC. DCBC stakeholders expressed more ambiguity about the overall value of DISC to its members and the bowling community, and identified that from the club’s perspective, operating the State Lawn Bowls Centre has had some costs. The observation was made that older members of the DCBC feel that they have “lost their club” and that state-level (i.e. Royal Victorian Bowls Association and Victorian Ladies Bowls Association) and national-level (Bowls Australia) needs take precedence over DCBC member needs (Interview B).

DCBC's management responsibilities appear to have weighed heavily upon the club which has struggled to make the adjustment from independently operating a local lawn bowls facility to managing a State Centre. This assessment is supported by the *DISC Annual Review Report 2005–06*, which identified that “whilst football and cycling operations are prosperous, the Darebin City Bowls Club has not experienced a significant increase in club membership and/or club operations and is struggling financially” (City of Darebin, 2006a).

The DISC management structure is complex and the organisations with direct management responsibilities – Darebin Council, DCBC, FFV and CSV – are subject to a range of stakeholder expectations and scrutiny. DISC licensees, whilst still being directly accountable to their members, sponsors, consumers and funding agencies, are also accountable to Darebin Council, which provides them with the facility in which they deliver their sport and house their operations. Darebin Council is in turn accountable to the local community and DISC funding agencies, and must ensure DISC delivers a community benefit to residents and the State of Victoria. The effectiveness of the DISC management model relies on the licensees being able to successfully balance the needs of various stakeholders with the interests of their own organisation. This study has identified that the more professional and better-resourced organisations are better positioned to manage competing interests and demands from both internal and external stakeholders.

A significant number of lawn bowls stakeholders and users portrayed contradictory assessments of the value of DISC to their club and the community – they experienced a range of positive and negative impacts resulting from the development of DISC, and some indicated that the potential value of DISC has yet to be realised. Negative impacts resulting from the development of DISC as perceived by DCBC stakeholders included: loss of club identity and discrete clubrooms, increased responsibility and financial burden on club, and potential conflict between club and key stakeholders.

In contrast to the cycling and football participants who felt DISC had provided their sport with a home, a significant number of lawn bowls stakeholders and users felt that the development of DISC has robbed them of a *club* environment they enjoyed prior to the development of DISC. Several lawn bowls members stated the “shared facilities detract it from being a bowls-specific club” which makes DISC “less fun than dedicated clubs” and “takes away from (the club) atmosphere” (Intercepts B06 and B08).

Facility users generally felt there were minimal costs or negative impacts associated with the development of DISC, and any concerns resulted from perceived inadequacies in the provision of ancillary facilities and services rather than opposition to the development itself. The costs identified by intercept interview participants primarily came from bowls users and included: dangers associated with increased traffic; underutilisation of bowls facilities; multi-use nature of venue detracts from a club environment; and the alleged poor quality of physical infrastructure has adversely impacted on bowls club membership and reputation. Overall, lawn bowls stakeholders and facility users reported mixed views regarding the impact that DISC has had on their club and sport. Even though DCBC stakeholders identified that the development of DISC has negatively impacted on the club, generally the majority of lawn bowls participants perceived that the benefits of the development outweighed the costs.

Overall, study participants acknowledged that DISC definitely provides a community benefit for their sport and sporting communities, but they were not certain of the value DISC provides for the greater community, i.e. non-users.

6.7. The value of DISC to the community

From the perspective of CSV and FFV (and to a lesser extent DCBC) stakeholders and facility users, it is certain that the development of DISC has positively contributed to the development of their sport and provided numerous benefits for their respective sporting communities.

“If you are here at a night time and see the kids running around and you see the car park full and you see people in the social room over there – you got there thinking this place is great, this place is buzzing, this place is working. So to answer your question – yes significant financial outlay has been worth it” (Interview F).

Avid cyclists, footballers and lawn bowlers can access international standard facilities, such as three FIFA accredited synthetic pitches, an ICU accredited indoor timber cycling track and an indoor bowls green – the only public facilities of this type in the State. This point of difference provides the resident sports with the opportunity to attract new participants (both active and passive) to DISC and has increased the profile of track cycling, football and lawn bowls in the community. Major events that have been held to date at DISC include: Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games Lawn Bowls; State Football Championships; Tri Nations Cup (lawn bowls); 2006 Asia Pacific Lawn Bowls Championship; 2008 ABN Amro Australian Open (lawn bowls); Sid Paterson Grand Prix (cycling); Australian Madison Championship (cycling); Oceania Cycling Championship; and Melbourne Victory vs. Victorian State Team Exhibition Match (football). Such events ensured that in the 2005–06 financial year alone, an estimated 67,000 people visited DISC (City of Darebin, 2006a). Clearly the Darebin and wider communities are accessing this sporting facility.

The value of DISC is conveyed by one stakeholder as:

“The sports development opportunities presented at this facility haven't been matched yet in other municipalities ... (DISC) is a reasonably safe place to be, it's got high visitation numbers, there are families present, it poses the right environment ... I think that you'll find that going forward it will continue to be a real hub ... a sporting complex that is going to continue to provide more opportunities for the local community. So has it been value for money” (Interview F).

These comments highlight the vested interests the stakeholders have in ensuring that the needs of their sport and sporting communities are met. The stakeholders have been instrumental in the development and operation of DISC, and consequently, they are unlikely to ever concede that their involvement has failed to deliver a positive outcome for their sporting communities. From the stakeholders' perspective, it would seem incongruous that any sportsperson would not be a proponent of the development of sporting facilities. From these (and other) comments it is apparent that many stakeholders have primarily focused on: (a) the immediate needs of their sports and (b) servicing their existing members and sporting community. There has been little, if any, serious consideration or strategic priority given to the active recruiting of new members or the marketing of DISC facilities and services to non-users. If they had done so, they may have been able to articulate a deeper, more sophisticated understanding of the concept of community benefit and the potential value of such facilities to the broader community.

Whilst, from the perspective of key stakeholders, the development of DISC has definitely brought a range of benefits to their sports and sporting communities, they were not so definitive on whether DISC had delivered a benefit to non-sporting members of the community (non-users). One stakeholder made the following comment regarding rate payers: 'I think they are probably better off but that's coming from a biking person so they might have a different opinion in terms of where their rate money (should) go' (Interview D).

It was also noted that the 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games Lawn Bowls event held at DISC has brought some kudos to the City of Darebin and the local community. The perceived image benefit associated with DISC being a Commonwealth Games venue may have enhanced Darebin's profile and standing in the broader community by stating that DISC:

"... is an icon, ... a jewel, and *that's what the local community needs to understand* – this is not just the local park, this is a bit more, a bit more high priced item now. It's a Commonwealth Games venue – you can't take that away from it" (Interview F).

This statement implies that the local community should be grateful to the resident sports for providing an elite sporting facility and sporting opportunities in the municipality. There is an assumption that everyone should place an equally high value on elite sporting facilities, which due to the unique experiences of individuals, is unrealistic and unachievable.

Although the large majority of facility users believed DISC had delivered many benefits to their sports and sporting communities, some facility users like the key stakeholders, were not sure if DISC provided a benefit to non-users as evidenced by the comments: 'unless the resident is involved in one of the three sports, apart from the bistro, it's not exactly providing a necessary and useful facility' (Intercept C17); and 'the community are probably no better off unless they play bowls, play soccer or ride bikes. They probably see their rates going up and ask why' (Intercept C18).

It can be argued that major sports facilities that are primarily used for the benefit of elite sports and commercial entertainment, may benefit the elite sports community but do not increase social capital in the local community, and may indeed detract, creating divisions. However smaller sports facilities that combine the needs of elite sportspeople for both their training and competition requirements (such as DISC) also provide usable facilities for local people of all ages and abilities and where this is so, they can increase stocks of social capital in the local community.

Generally, stakeholders and facility users highly value the development of DISC and believe the venue offers a range of benefits to the greater community. However, the real value of DISC to the community cannot be fully appreciated without some understanding of the financial costs (both from a capital and from a recurrent perspective) of the development.

7. Conclusion

Given the considerable amount of public money spent on developing major sports facilities, the noneconomic benefits provided by these projects must be significant to warrant this level of spending. In the case of DISC, over AU\$20 million dollars was spent developing the State Lawn Bowls Centre, State Velodrome and State Football Centre, and this study confirms that, from the perspective of most stakeholders and users this was money well spent.

A particular individual's understanding of *community* cannot be easily identified, as one's experiences, thoughts, values and beliefs that inform their view of community is unique and impossible to replicate. A person's idea of what constitutes a *community benefit* is subjective and based on what is important and relevant to them and therefore cannot easily be defined.

DISC stakeholders tended to view community benefit of DISC in terms of providing an accessible sporting venue that provides an extensive range of quality facilities and programs for people of all ages and abilities. Stakeholders generally agreed that DISC provides social, health and fitness opportunities for the community and identified a range of community benefits they attributed to the development of DISC such as: increased participation and social cohesion; creation of a better lifestyle for the community; enhancing Darebin's profile in the community; as well as increasing the number of visitors to the municipality and local businesses (i.e. economic impacts). Although stakeholders identified that DISC provided economic benefits, these were not explored, as the purpose of this study is to investigate the noneconomic benefits associated with the development of sport facilities.

This study confirms that, from the perspective of cycling and football (and to a lesser extent lawn bowls) stakeholders and facility users, DISC provides a range of noneconomic benefits such as increased community visibility, enhanced community image and a range of social/psychic income benefits. Generally, DISC stakeholders and users agree that the community

benefits associated with the development of DISC outweigh any costs, supporting the assertion that the noneconomic impacts have justified the spending of public money on sport stadia and arenas.

A number of study participants were convinced that DISC provides a range of community benefits for their sport and sporting communities, but were not certain of the value DISC provides for the greater community, i.e. non-users. A limitation of the study is that the perceptions of non-users have not been investigated and assessments on the value of DISC to the community have been presented from the perspective of DISC stakeholders and users. Like other subsidised government facilities and services such as libraries and maternal and child health centres, non-users tend to place a value on sports facilities within their municipality due to the fundamental belief that participation in sport can be beneficial to individuals as well the *collective community*.

It is also evident that study participants have a vested interest in ensuring that the needs of their sport and sporting communities are met and are unlikely to concede that their involvement has failed to deliver a positive outcome for their sporting communities. From their perspective, it would seem incongruous that any sportsperson would not be a proponent of the development of sporting facilities. The research indicated that there has been little, if any, serious consideration or strategic priority given to the active recruiting of new members or the marketing of DISC facilities and services to non-users. If they had done so, they may have been able to articulate a deeper, more sophisticated understanding of the concept of community benefit and the potential value of such facilities to the broader community. Stakeholders tended to think about the community in terms of their existing sporting community (i.e. current cyclists, footballers and bowlers), rather than in terms of non-users and the potential market they represent.

Although the results of the study provide an interesting insight into community benefit from the perspective of DISC stakeholders and users, it would be useful to undertake further research focusing on non-users to determine if their views mirror those of the study participants. The idea that non-users value sports facilities due to the fundamental belief that participation in sport can be beneficial to individuals as well the collective community requires testing in order to substantiate this assumption. By qualifying non-user, as well as stakeholder and user, perceptions of the community benefit derived from the development of the DISC will determine a more comprehensive understanding of the real value of this asset to the community.

As the large majority of research into the benefits of sport facility development has traditionally focused on the economic impacts of such developments, further study of noneconomic impacts, and more specifically the community benefit derived from sports stadia, makes a contribution towards remedying this imbalance.

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