

Sport: The neoliberal 'cultural glue' of Melbourne, Australia

Alistair John

College of Health & Life Sciences,
Brunel University London

In Melbourne, a self-proclaimed and industry awarded 'sport city', the use of public resources to support elite sport during the past three decades has been widespread. The decision to focus public investment on elite sporting events has been framed by an urban entrepreneurial approach to governance that supports a policy agenda of investing public funds to present the city as an ideal location for capital investment. The aim of this paper is to outline the role of (elite) sport as a form of 'cultural glue' which has supported the Victorian Government's neoliberal agenda of creating an environment (social, cultural and physical) conducive to commercial activity. A (con)textual analysis of newspaper articles was conducted in conjunction with interviews of influential cultural producers of the 'sport city' – most notably state premiers, members of parliament, CEOs of public sports trusts and newspaper journalists. Four case studies guided the examination of urban entrepreneurialism and the re-regulating state: a) Australian Open Tennis Championships at Melbourne Park; b) bidding for and hosting of multi-sport events; c) the Australian Formula One Grand Prix and; d) the construction of two urban sports stadiums. Four key themes emerged which illustrate reregulation of the neoliberal Victorian state: (i) the use of public resources, particularly land and taxes, for entrepreneurial activities; (ii) the representation of domestic and international cities as threats to Melbourne's 'sport city' status; (iii) a lack of public consultation and; (iv) the creation Quango's, along with the passing of specific state laws, to drive and permit neoliberal activities.