

WHITE ELEPHANT SYNDROME IN WINTER SPORT INVESTMENTS: WHEN SNOW MELTS BUT COSTS REMAIN

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Abstract: *Across the world, many sport facilities including stadiums, arenas, ski jumps, ice rinks, and Olympic venues have been constructed as symbols of progress, prestige, and international visibility. Despite their advanced engineering and high construction costs, a significant number of these facilities remain largely underutilized after major events, reflecting a phenomenon widely known as white elephant syndrome. White elephant syndrome is an informal term used in management, economics, and public policy to describe projects or investments that are expensive to build and maintain yet generate limited long-term value and are difficult to repurpose or abandon. In the context of sport facilities, it refers to large-scale infrastructures that deliver minimal sustained social and sporting benefits while continuing to impose substantial economic, environmental, and operational burdens on public authorities. Winter sport facilities are particularly vulnerable to this syndrome due to their seasonal nature, high maintenance requirements, and strong dependence on climatic conditions. Facilities designed primarily for mega-events often exceed local and regional demand, resulting in long-term underutilization. To mitigate these risks, investment decisions should be guided by demand-driven, flexible, and sustainability-oriented planning rather than prestige-based or political motivations. Comprehensive needs assessments and realistic long-term cost-benefit analyses are essential to ensure alignment with participation levels and post-event usage. Additionally, the development of multi-purpose and adaptable venues, the use of temporary or modular structures, and the regional sharing of highly specialized facilities can significantly reduce the likelihood of white elephant outcomes. Incorporating environmental considerations, climate adaptation strategies, and legacy planning further enhances long-term viability. In conclusion, white elephant syndrome in winter sports reflects not a failure of sport, but a failure of strategic planning. The central challenge is no longer how impressive facilities appear, but how sustainable, functional, and socially relevant they remain over time.*

Key words: *sport facilities, winter sports, white elephant syndrome, cost-benefit, long-term benefit*