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Case study 5.1
Why Redevelop Melbourne Park?

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Melbourne Park (incorporating Rod Laver Arena, Hisense Arena and the Melbourne Park Function Centre) is an important part of Melbourne’s sporting complex – the Melbourne and Olympic Parks (MOP) Precinct. Melbourne Park is host to the Australian Open Tennis Championship (AO), which is held annually each January. Melbourne Park is nested within the MOP Precinct with AAMI Park (hosting professional football and rugby codes), Olympic Park Stadium (hosting athletics), the Westpac Centre (host to the Victorian Institute of Sport and a professional Australian Football League team) and numerous training fields for use by sporting teams and the public. The MOP Precinct is adjacent to the Melbourne Cricket Ground (an international standard event venue that also includes the National Sport Museum), and is within 1 km of the Melbourne City Centre and within 5 km of other international standard event venues such as the Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre and the Etihad Stadium.

Melbourne Park has proven to be an important hub in Melbourne’s sport precinct – not only for the AO but also for its multi-purpose use in other events hosted in the city. The complex was crucial to Melbourne’s successful hosting of the 2006 Commonwealth Games. In that instance, Hisense Arena was transformed into an international standard track cycling venue, and the offices of Tennis Australia were used for Commonwealth Games venue operations staff because of the centrality of Melbourne Park within the sport precinct. One year later, when Melbourne hosted the 2007 FINA World (Swimming) Championships, Rod Laver Arena, Melbourne Park’s Centre Tennis Court, was transformed into an international standard swimming pool.
Melbourne Park became the core venue for the event, hosting both the opening and closing ceremonies.

Sports zones can give a city national and international visibility and coherence - and assist to develop new tourist and business areas for cities (Smith, 2010). Francis and Murphy (2005) suggested that Melbourne is a good example of a 'sports city'. That is, Melbourne has taken a holistic approach to the inclusion of sport facilities in its urban planning and integrated them to develop an international profile as a tourist destination. Furthermore, hosting multiple events has meant that it has developed a reputation as being a vibrant and exciting place to live, as well as a prosperous city in which to locate and do business. Melbourne's Event Strategy (which relies on its sport infrastructure) has contributed to Melbourne being ranked third in the world on the Economist Intelligence Unit's 2009 Liveability survey.

Melbourne's position as a leading destination for sports events means that it will always face the threat of competitors. Evidence suggests that Melbourne's competitors are nearby and watching Melbourne's every move. During 2008, it was revealed that Sydney, Australia, was secretly trying to secure the AO. Sydney argued strongly that Melbourne Park was outdated. A newer facility could be offered at Homebush Bay, where the 2000 Olympic Games were held. In addition, other cities through the Asia-Pacific, such as Shanghai, have also shown interested in the AO. Melbourne Park's age provides its competitors with a timely opportunity to 'muscle in' on Melbourne and lure the event to rival cities. It is, however, in the best interests of the Victorian State Government to ward off such threats. In 2009, the AO attracted more than 600,000 spectators to Melbourne Park, with one third of those attending from interstate and overseas. Furthermore, the event generated more than $160 million for the Victorian Economy. The AO has been described as one of the highlights on Melbourne's sporting calendar and, for the month of January, it is the biggest sporting event in the world.

The nearby competitors are correct in emphasising that Melbourne Park is a tired facility compared with similar facilities around the world. For 21 years, Melbourne Park has been an integral part of the cluster of sports facilities that has assisted Melbourne to position itself globally as an exciting sport and tourist destination. However, it has undergone little renovation during that time. It still has the look and feel of a facility that was built in the 1980s. Recognising the importance of Melbourne Park in both its urban and tourism development strategies, in 2010 the Victorian State Government committed $363 million to the first stage of a long-term redevelopment plan for the
venue. The redevelopment is aimed at securing the AO for Melbourne until at least 2036.

Aligned with Victoria’s urban planning strategy ‘Melbourne 2030’, Melbourne Park will be developed in association with a range of entertainment facilities. The Minister for Sport stated: ‘As well as extending the life of Rod Laver Arena, Margaret Court and Hisense Arena, our $363 million investment will also help open up opportunities for other sports, such as netball and basketball, as well as concerts and other events’. The redevelopment project will transform the 21-year-old facility into a state-of-the-art sport and entertainment complex designed to not only benefit the sport of tennis but also position the MOP Precinct as a multi-sport and entertainment complex.

The Victorian Government could have sat idle and let Melbourne Park continue to mature as a sport venue and potentially head into decline. Instead, the redevelopment of Melbourne Park is designed to not only further improve the standard of the facility but also strengthen Melbourne’s position as a tourist destination in an increasingly competitive marketplace. The redevelopment will better link Melbourne Park to the other sport and recreational venues in the MOP Precinct, and will also link the Precinct to the vibrant business and retail sectors in the City of Melbourne. Tourists to Melbourne, like most tourists to other metropolitan destinations, seek a mix of leisure activities. Investing in a strategy that integrates opportunities for tourists to attend events, enjoy retail experiences and visit cultural attractions, while enhancing the urban environment for its residents, makes good sense in such an intensely competitive market.

_Literature cited in this case study is included in the list of references at the end of this book._

The concept of a sport centre gives rise to the concept of the sport tourism centre, sport tourism destination or sports resort. The attractiveness of sport tourism centres may draw upon the uniqueness of different sports regions that exist within a country (Rooney & Pillsbury, 1992). By definition, a sport tourism centre requires the presence of sports facilities and resources as well as tourism infrastructure and services (Standeven & De Knop, 1999). ‘To the visitor the amenities appear to be related to each other; the whole is more attractive than each separate amenity’ (Dietvorst, 1995: 165). Sport tourism centres have the capacity to accommodate significant inward travel flows at a destination. An established tourism economy in the form of national and/or international transport nodes, an