Stadiums: Past, Present and Future

A. Stadiums are among the oldest forms of urban architecture: vast stadiums where the public could watch sporting events were at the centre of western city life as far back as the ancient Greek and Roman Empires, well before the construction of the great medieval cathedrals and the grand 19th- and 20th-century railway stations which dominated urban skylines in later eras.

Today, however, stadiums are regarded with growing scepticism. Construction costs can soar above £1 billion, and stadiums finished for major events such as the Olympic Games or the FIFA World Cup have notably fallen into disuse and disrepair.

But this need not be the cause. History shows that stadiums can drive urban development and adapt to the culture of every age. Even today, architects and planners are finding new ways to adapt the mono-functional sports arenas which became emblematic of modernisation during the 20th century.

B. The amphitheatre of Arles in southwest France, with a capacity of 25,000 spectators, is perhaps the best example of just how versatile stadiums can be. Built by the Romans in 90 AD, it became a fortress with four towers after the fifth century, and was then transformed into a village containing more than 200 houses. With the growing interest in conservation during the 19th century, it was converted back into an arena for the staging of bullfights, thereby returning the structure to its original use as a venue for public spectacles.

Another example is the imposing arena of Verona in northern Italy, with space for 30,000 spectators, which was built 60 years before the Arles amphitheatre and 40 years before Rome's famous Colosseum. It has endured the centuries and is currently considered one of the world's prime sites for opera, thanks to its outstanding acoustics.

C. The area in the centre of the Italian town of Lucca, known as the Piazza dell'Anfiteatro, is yet another impressive example of an amphitheatre becoming absorbed into the fabric of the city. The site evolved in a similar way to Arles and was progressively filled with buildings from the Middle Ages until the 19th century, variously used as houses, a salt depot and a prison. But rather than reverting to an arena, it became a market square, designed by Romanticist architect Lorenzo Nottolini. Today, the ruins of the amphitheatre remain embedded in the various shops and residences surrounding the public square.

D. There are many similarities between modern stadiums and the ancient amphitheatres intended for games. But some of the flexibility was lost at the beginning of the 20th century, as stadiums were developed using new products such as steel and reinforced concrete, and made use of bright lights for night-time matches.

Many such stadiums are situated in suburban areas, designed for sporting use only and surrounded by parking lots. These factors mean that they may not be as accessible to the general public, require more energy to run and contribute to urban heat.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Questions 18–22

Complete the summary below.

Choose ***ONE WORD*** from the passage for each answer.

Write your answers in boxes ***19–22*** on your answer sheet

Roman amphitheatres

Check answers

The Roman stadiums of Europe have proved very versatile. The amphitheatre of Arles, for example, was converted first into a **18**_____. , then into a residential area and finally into an arena where spectators could watch **19**_____. . Meanwhile, the arena in Verona, one of the oldest Roman amphitheatres, is famous today as a venue where **20**_____. is performed. The site of Lucca's amphitheatre has also been used for many purposes over the centuries, including the storage of **21**_____. . It is now a market square with 22. and homes incorporated into the remains of the Roman amphitheatre.

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