Social and Cultural Impact of the London 2012 Olympic Games: a lecturers’ and students’ perspective

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Introduction

• Olympic Games (OG)
  ▪ World’s most prestigious sporting occasion
  ▪ Significant catalyst for urban regeneration (Jones, 2001)
  ▪ Large scale cultural event with dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance
  ▪ First class opportunity to create a forum for understanding, respecting different values / traditions and celebrating cultural diversity (Roche, 2000)
  ▪ Raise the profile of the host nation and contribute to the ‘feel-good’ factor of the host city’s population
Literature Review

• Sustainability of *social* and *cultural* impact of OG reported (Shipway, 2007), but most research has been limited to researching the economic impact of OG
  - Economic growth, business activities and tourism-related revenue (Gratton & Dobson, 1999)
  - Expenditure and economic profits associated with the Games (Matheson & Baade, 2004)

• Frey, Iraldo & Melis (2007) noted that the contribution of the OG to long term urban and regional development strategies clearly deserves more attention
Social Impact of Olympic Games

- Effect / consequence of an event on human life, behaviour and interactions between individuals (European Communities, 2007)

- Long-term social consequences on the host city /region include:
  - Strengthening local values and traditions (Hall, 1992)
  - Generating patriotism and cultivating a sense of community belonging (Waitt, 2003)
  - Feelings of excitement and national pride (Jarvis, 1995)
  - ‘Physic income’ (Emery, 2002)
Cultural Impact of Olympic Games

- Effect or consequence of an event on the acquisition or possession of knowledge that enriches the mind (European Communities, 2007)
- Cultural events during an OG contribute to the image of the host city while promoting accessibility and inclusion for diverse cultural groups (Humphreys & Plummer, 1993)
- Unique opportunity to promote Olympic values such as respect, tolerance, participation, fair-play and solidarity (Frey et al., 2007)
Purpose of study

• Public views must be considered in the planning of any social or cultural activities that are aimed to directly benefit the local community

• The purpose of this study was to assess the views of sport and tourism lecturers and students on the social and cultural impact of hosting the 2012 Olympic Games in London
Methodology

- Descriptive research approach (survey)
- Purposive sample of 100 respondents
  - students, n=70; age range: 18-24 yrs
  - lecturers, n=30; age range: 25-55 yrs
- Questionnaire included an equal number of close- and open-ended questions
  - Designed to allow respondents to produce standard responses and elaborate on their views
Methodology

- SNAP version 6.0
  - Close-ended questions
  - To identify the percentage of positive, negative, and non-responses
- Thematic analysis
  - Open-ended questions
  - To identify data units (statements and sentences) and cluster them into common themes (Biddle et al. 2001)
Results: Social Impact of the 2012 OG

- Olympic facilities will benefit community
- Olympic village will create affordable housing
- OG will provide short-term employment
- OG will provide long-term employment
- OG will provide educational opportunities
- OG will promote social inclusion of disadvantaged groups

Disagree
Agree
Results: Cultural Impact of the 2012 OG

OG will create sustainable cultural activity

OG will raise awareness of UK culture

OG will create a cultural legacy

OG will promote cultural integration

Disagree

Agree

1. Opportunity for social integration and urban regeneration
2. Improved sporting facilities will increase the number of sports clubs/societies
3. Boost to national morale and patriotism, legacy for the community
4. Cynicism and inconvenience for many people
5. Money would be better spent on the National Health Service
Diagram 2. Respondents’ views of the cultural impact of hosting the London 2012 Olympics. Frequency percentage (%) of responses; 1=18, 2=12, 3=11, 4=2, 5=2.

1. Opportunity for interacting, extending understanding and learning from different cultures

2. Bringing people together for one purpose will add to London’s international reputation and diverse culture

3. Improved sport and health ethic and youth culture

4. Sponsorship by commercial giants will increase cultural imperialism

5. National culture will suffer from under-spending, to compensate for debts created by the Olympic Games

Positive

Cultural impact

Negative
Discussion: Respondents’ positive perceptions

- Excitement and enthusiasm about the wide range of employment and training opportunities that will be created in the run up to the 2012 Olympic Games
- Sense of national pride that London will be the host city
- OG will bring about social and cultural benefits that will create a legacy for the community
Discussion: Respondents’ concerns

- Concerns about sustainability of benefits
- Scepticism about cost of unnecessary vanity projects and their implications for tax increases
- Concerns about short-term employment opportunities
- Olympic Village will not create affordable housing for the local community
- Cultural activities will not be sustainable after the Games
- Lack of awareness about existing strategies devised by the government and stakeholders aiming to address such shortcomings
Conclusions

• The government and LOGOC need to raise public awareness in relation to planned social and cultural developments / opportunities in the run up to 2012 emphasising sustainability strategies

• Preferred communication routes such as television, radio and the internet to broadcast 2012 related education, skills and training initiatives with higher frequency

• Such approaches will eradicate concerns, fears and misconceptions, instil further positivism and enthusiasm in the British public and enhance community spirit
References


