

Middle-aged mom vs. the blue suit from downtown: Understanding marketing strategies for the Vancouver Olympic plebiscite and the link to regime theory

Anthony G. Church, Laurentian University

**Socio-cultural
Session 26**

**Saturday, May 31, 2008
2:15 PM - 2:40 PM**

**Presentation (25-minute)
Abstract 381**

On February 23, 2003 the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Bid Corporation received the endorsement of 64% of voters in a municipal plebiscite intended to gauge the interest of the community in pursuing the 2010 Olympic Winter Games. Never before had a potential host city provided its consent so late in the bidding process and the triumph of the 'Yes' side provides an excellent opportunity for a study of the marketing strategies used and how the entire process relates to regime theory and the mega-event strategy pursued by many large urban centres.

In an ever increasing effort to pursue global tourism dollars, many large urban centres have decided to bid for international sport spectacles that would provide the host community with the desired global exposure. At the same time, these communities are often faced with a level of organised resistance with claims of elitism and further marginalisation of the disenfranchised.

An examination of the marketing approach taken by proponents of the Olympics in Vancouver provides some important lessons for future bid groups and sport managers alike. Similarly, the relationship between, what Logan and Molotch (1987) have dubbed, the urban regime and the image portrayed by the 'Yes' side provides scholars with an excellent opportunity to examine the relevance of regime theory and how the realities of the regime were confronted during a contemporary political event.

This presentation will rely heavily on the work of Logan and Molotch related to urban political economy and on Stroker (1995) and Lauria's (1996) recent conceptualisations of urban regime theory. As for related literature dealing with the Olympic Games and urban regimes, the work produced by Burbank, Andranovich and Heying (2001) provides an excellent foundation of knowledge upon which to expand.

The purpose of this presentation is too not only provide a detailed accounting of the marketing strategies used by both sides during the lead up to the Vancouver plebiscite, but also to present evidence that urban regimes are learning from past organised resistances to mega-events and adapting their approaches accordingly. This presentation will present the changing face of urban regimes and lead to a better understanding of an evolved form of regime theory.

Much of the research has already been conducted through archival data and has ranged from following media accounts of the Vancouver plebiscite to analysing financial documents of organisations associated with the plebiscite. There are also some secondary sources through which personal interviews were conducted with individuals intimately involved with the plebiscite.

While the pursuit of mega-events is still undoubtedly the domain of the urban elite, the fact is that, as this presentation will demonstrate, the pre-event resistance and post-event criticism prevalent in the past can, as evidenced in Vancouver, be seriously undercut by a calculated marketing strategy. Therefore, the content of this presentation has great significance for mega-event opponents and proponents alike, as well as for sport management scholars.