Media Discourse and Mega-Events in Emerging Economies

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Mega-events are short-term, high profile events, which “have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal, and international significance” (Roche, 2000, p. 1), and are usually promoted in terms of their tourism and economic impacts (Hall, 1992; Getz, 1997). These events are often evaluated in terms of expenditures on facility preparation, visitor rates and spending, their fit with government policy, and as part of the process of capital accumulation (Burbank, Andranovich, & Heying, 2001; Hill, 1992; Ritchie, 1984; Whitson & Macintosh, 1996). Historically, mega-events have been restricted to cities in the western hemisphere or developed world, due to the costs associated with staging the event, infrastructure requirements, and the need for political stability to facilitate organization among various state and non-state actors (Hiller, 2000). However, in recent years international sport organizations, such as the IOC and FIFA, have positioned themselves as agents of global change, institutions that have the ability to leave legacies of regeneration for the host of their premier event. As a result, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of cities from emerging economies participating in the bid process for mega-events (i.e. Buenos Aires, Cape Town, Istanbul, and Rio de Janeiro).

To address the shift in the types of cities actively participating in the bidding process for mega-events, this paper will examine the discourse and representation of the bid cities for the 2016 Summer Olympic Games found within global media sources. The aim will be to determine if there are differences in which the event bids from emerging economies are debated in the global media, compared to the bids from major western hemisphere cities. In other words, did the fact that one bidding city represented an emerging economy affect the manner through which media commentators and other stakeholders interpret the efficacy of their bid in relation to the other bidding cities? The 2016 Summer Olympic Games bids were selected as the case study for this project, given that of the four finalist cities, three of the cities could be considered traditional, northern cities in established economies (Chicago, Madrid, Tokyo) and one a southern hemisphere city (Rio de Janeiro). Data were collected from global media sources, focusing on editorial and commentary articles. Media articles were selected as the primary data source for this project, given the media’s ability to convey key messages, to broadcast the attitudes and behaviours of key stakeholders, and to capture the value and beliefs of their target audience (c.f. Bryant & Miron, 2004; Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992).

The basic assumption of framing theory is that context informs our behaviours, actions and understanding. Frames are definitions of a situation that include organization and subjective elements (Goffman, 1974). Gitlin (1980, p. 6) defined frames as “principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters”. Two prominent areas within sport research where framing analysis has been utilized include sport and gender roles (e.g. Messner, 1988; Wright & Clarke, 1999), and the public subsidization of sports stadia (e.g. Buist & Mason, 2010; Delaney & Eckstein, 2008). To expand upon the use of frame analysis in the academic sport literature, this paper examines the way in which the media framed the bids for the 2016 Summer Olympic Games, and the extent to which the fact that Rio de Janeiro represented a bid from an emerging economy influenced the ways in which the merits of each bid were assessed. The results from this study will provide insights into how the global media has framed mega-event bids from emerging economies, and establish if the merits and criticisms of bidding cities are couched in terms of a new competition that includes cities that have traditionally not sought to host mega-events in their respective cities.