Residents’ Perceptions of the 2011 Pan American Games in Guadalajara: What Benefit and for Whom?

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Destinations and governments around the world have made the hosting of major sporting events a key objective (Bull & Lovell, 2007) as these events can bring a variety of impacts to the region in terms of economic, reputation, political image, infrastructure, and local pride (Ritchie, 1984). Over the past twenty years, an extensive amount of scholarly literature has been published about the impact of mega-sporting events. These studies have focused on economic impact (Crompton, 1999; Mules & Faulkner, 1996); social and environmental dimensions (Collins, Jones, & Munday, 2009; Kim & Petrick, 2005; Ritchie, Shipway, & Cleeve, 2009); legacies (Preuss, 2007); and, how to leverage these events (Chalip, 2004, 2006; Chalip & Leysn, 2002). Most studies have examined the impact of events within the context of developed nations such as Australia, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Canada and the United States (Bull & Lovell, 2007; Gratton, Shibli, & Coleman, 2005; Kirkup & Major, 2006; Ohmann, Jones, & Wilkes, 2006; Parent, 2008; Ritchie, Shipway & Cleeve, 2009). More recently, scholars have investigated the impact of mega-sporting events occurring in less developed nations such as South Africa and India (Dimeo & Kay, 2004; Lakshman, 2008), but also in cultural contexts other than the West such as Korea, Japan and China (Horne, 2004). Understanding the impact of mega-sporting events on different cultural, social and economic contexts is important as it sheds new insight into the perceived benefits these events bring to areas that are affected by deeper economic, political and/or societal problems. It also tests the assumptions about what we know in regards to the benefits and challenges of staging these events.

Drawing from theories of sport for development (Lytras & Peachey, 2011) and stakeholder theory (Clarkson, 1995; Freeman, 1984), this study examines the impact of the 2011 Pan American Games as perceived by residents of Guadalajara, Mexico. We follow the recommendations of Bull and Lovell (2007) and Ohmann et al. (2006) who highlighted the importance of surveying residents’ when examining the impact of major sporting events. Resident perceptions and their approval of the event are critically important because they assist in legitimizing the venture and because organizers and local governments claim to act on their behalf (Bull & Lovell, 2007). The Pan American Games in Guadalajara offers a platform for examining the impact of a mega-sporting event within a less developed nation. Although Mexico is not a developing country, its current social, cultural, and economic landscape exhibit contrasting realities, thus highlighting the importance of this study in terms of the perceived impact the Pan American Games have on the people of Mexico. Mexico is a member of the exclusive Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); is the 13th largest economy, while concomitantly up to 50% of its population still lives in poverty (Wilkinson, 2011). Furthermore, the current war on drugs in Mexico is transforming and destabilizing much of its civil, political, cultural and economic life (Buckman, 2010). In the context of a nation with these contrasting realities, this study attempts to answer the following research questions: (a) what benefits will the 2011 Pan American Games bring to the city and the people of Guadalajara? (b); which stakeholders will benefit the most from these Games?; and (c) which stakeholders are deemed most critical to the success of the Pan American Games by residents?

The study uses the stakeholder identification framework developed by Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997) to assess residents’ perceived importance of stakeholders’ attributes of power (utilitarian and normative), legitimacy, and urgency. Based on the operational definitions of these attributes, utilitarian power is addressed by identifying those who provide the most critical resources; normative power by those who have the capacity to influence the agenda of the Pan American Games; legitimacy by the importance of a given stakeholder to be heard; and urgency by the importance of a stakeholder to be heard first. Brenner and Cochran (1991) noted the type of stakeholder, its values, its relative influence on decisions and the nature of the situation are all relevant information for predicting organizational success. According to Mitchell et al. (1997), the significance of stakeholder identification is that most stakeholders possess at least one of these attributes, and the perceived salience of a stakeholder will be affected by
the variation of these attributes in a given context.

A total of 500 residents of Guadalajara in Mexico were contacted to complete a pencil and paper questionnaire that asked them to rate on a 1 to 5 scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree) the perceived benefit of the Pan American Games. Items in this section were drawn from Ritchie, Shipway and Cleeve (2009), including items in the category of ‘positive social impact’, ‘negative impact’, ‘economic impact’, ‘transport issues’; and ‘impact on safety’. In addition, residents were asked to rate and identify the degree of importance twenty-one stakeholder groups have on the success of the Pan American Games. Stakeholder categories were drawn from Parent (2008) and identified based on a panel of experts. Stakeholders in the study included: Government Agencies (federal, local and municipal), Sport Organizations (PASO, CONADE, COM, NGBs, COPAG, and CODE) Community Groups (local residents, sponsors, and politicians from PRI, PAN, PRD, and Green Party), Delegations (athletes) and Media (Channel 4, Channel 7, SKY TV, El Informador newspaper and Mural newspaper). Finally, residents were asked to identify the meaning of success, as measured by (a) the potential economic benefit the Pan American Games bring to the city of Guadalajara; (b) the degree to which the Pan American Games operated in a smooth and effective manner; (c) the degree to which the Pan American Games took place without any major security issues; and (d) the degree to which the Pan American Games attracted a large number of spectators from within and outside of Mexico.

Data collection was completed with a rate of return of 85%; of the 500 surveys, 221 (44%) were completed by students enrolled at the University of Guadalajara, while 204 (40.8%) were completed within a non-university population using a snowballing sample. At the time of submission, this study was still ongoing as results and discussion sections were still in progress. The results of this study will contribute to advancing theory and practice in sport development and stakeholder theory as applied to mega-sporting events within the context of less developed nations.