

**A Meta-Analysis of the Social Impacts of the Olympic Games**

*Thomas Aicher, University of Cincinnati*  
*Brianna Newland, Victoria University*

**Socio-cultural**

**Saturday, June 1, 2013**

**20-minute oral presentation  
(including questions)  
(Room 406)**

**Abstract 2013-296**

**3:40 PM**

Nelson Mandela once said, "Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to unite in a way that little else does." Sport, in all of its forms, is embedded globally into most cultures, uniting the world through celebratory events such as the summer and winter Olympic Games. Nations often use mega events, like the Olympics, as a platform to highlight their communities' available assets in order to raise awareness or change perception about the destination (Getz, 2012). Significant investments are made just to compete for the bid; and a successful bid is viewed as more than just an opportunity to host the Olympic Games (Longman, 2001). There are many positive and negative outcomes to hosting a mega event, like the Games, so sport managers must have a strong understanding of both to ensure that positive impacts are maximized, while mitigating the negative.

Researchers who have investigated the impact events of events on host communities tend to focus on the triple bottom line impacts: economic, environmental, and social (Hirtz & Ross, 2010). Because of the implications for dedicating public resources to mega events, the majority of the research conducted has centered on the economic impact events have on the host community (Kim & Petrick, 2005; Preuss, 2006). However researchers have begun to see the value in assessing environmental and social impacts. Social impacts of sport tourism have arguably received the least amount of attention in the current literature (Fredline, 2006; Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006; Ritchie & Adiar, 2004), and could potentially have the greatest impact on a host destination. For instance, studies have demonstrated that hosting major events, such as the Olympics, have had a positive impact on community identity (Waitt, 2003). However, because of the limited empirical research on social outcomes, the touted impacts are often presumptive and largely overstated (see IOC, 2012).

Overall, the research evaluating the perceptions of individuals within the host community of hosting a major event has been positive; especially among local business leaders (Hirtz & Ross, 2010). However, longitudinal studies have established mixed results on whether the perceptions become more positive (e.g., Waitt, 2003) or less positive over time (Ritchie & Lyons, 1990). Some of the perceived benefits include enhanced (a) sense of community; (b) community identity and pride; (c) community self-worth; (d) quality of life; (d) levels of sport participation, (e) level of television exposure and (f) ability to meet new people (Burns, Hatch, & Mules, 1986; Collins, Henry, & Houlihan, 1999; Hirtz & Ross, 2010; Kim & Petrick, 2005; Kim et al., 2006; Lilley & DeFranco, 1999; Ritchie et al., 2009; Waitt, 2003). Alternatively, negative perceptions included (a) disruption of daily routines, (b) noise and over-crowding, (c) increased levels of crime, (d) increase in the cost of living, and (f) improper use of public funds (Deccio & Baloglu, 2002; Fredline, 2004; Ritchie et al., 2009; Tosun, 2002).

Secondary data analyses have largely developed evidence to suggest hosting major events have a negative social impact on the host community. The majority of the investigations have found hosting major events has a negative impact on the working poor or migrant populations (Broudehoux, 2007; Macartney, 2005; Pocha, 2004; Shin, 2009) as well as insufficient public funding for public transportation and housing (Marshall, 1996; McDonough, 1999; Monclus, 2003, Dodds, 2004) and an increase in crime (Decker, Verano, & Green, 2007).

The purpose of this investigation was to review, summarize, and expand theoretical explanations regarding social impacts of mega events in an attempt to identify future research opportunities. To do this, firstly, a systematic meta-analysis of the current literature was undertaken to determine trends in social outcomes. Secondly, an evaluation of the past Olympic reports was conducted to assess the reported social impacts of hosting the winter or summer Olympic Games.

Method

It should be noted that this research is still in progress. For the first phase, the meta-analysis method used was based

## **2013 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2013)**

on the guidelines provided for systematic reviews (e.g., Chalmers & Haynes, 1995). Studies were included if they provided quantitative or qualitative information on the social outcomes of the Olympic Games and were published as full papers, research notes in peer-reviewed journals and/or conference proceedings. Studies were excluded if they have been published as abstracts (Knipschild, 1995). Emerging themes in social impacts were coded from the literature (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the second phase, all public documents and reports were reviewed from the following organizations: the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Olympic organizing committees, government entities that reported on the Olympics, and various media outlets reporting on the Games. A content analysis was conducted based on the broad themes identified in the first phase. Pattern coding was then used to code the emerging patterns within the themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To ensure data quality, the researchers independently searched and then discussed possibilities for alternative explanations and comparisons were then made among the investigators' conclusions (Johnson, 1997).

### **Expected Outcomes**

Previous researchers have indicated Olympic reports tend to over-emphasize the positive outcomes from hosting the event and trivialize the negative outcomes (Decker et al. 2007). Therefore, we expected the Olympic reports would contain a greater amount of content dedicated to the positive social impacts the event has been found to create. Alternatively, the media outlets surrounding the games were expected to have mixed results of positive or negative impacts. For instance, media outlets associated with the host country or city may also focus more on the positive to prevent a negative image of the city, while non-local media may be more critical of the events. This may be particularly true in the Beijing 2008 Games as the media is state owned and operated.

### **Significance of Findings**

This current investigation is critical to the sport management discourse due to the significant investment by host destinations and other key organizations responsible for hosting a mega event. In order to nurture this investment, key organizations must consider the broader value (beyond economic impacts) of such sport events, and focus on the potential social impacts hosting these events engender. It should be noted that the positive and negative impacts are not mutually exclusive. For instance, while the development of new infrastructure is viewed to offer more opportunity to participate in sport, often the space is not accessible or permitted for public use for sport participation. Additionally, community leaders often boast that the new infrastructure redevelops dilapidated areas in the community, but fails to recognize that those of low socio-economic status are displaced in the process (Shin, 2009). This creates the need for better understanding of the both the costs and benefits of hosting the games in order for sport managers to develop better strategies to abate costs and intensify benefits.

This study will also add to the current literature by developing stronger theoretical and methodological foundation of the current trends in the social impact literature. Thus far, the literature has utilized various theoretical and methodological approaches, as well as has been published in various disciplines that has prevented for a focused discussion about the social impact of sport events. This investigation brings together the current literature and will identify common themes, methods, and thus, a broader understanding of the social impact of mega-events. In addition, we will also ascertain future directions for research and implications for sport event managers.