Olympic Games Legacies in Non-Host Cities: A Case Study of Athens, Georgia

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Recognized as the largest event in the city’s history, the ‘Centennial’ Olympic Games were held in Atlanta, Georgia from July 19 to August 4, 1996. As a result of being awarded the event, Atlanta revitalized many existing facilities, constructed new ones, gentrified despondent neighborhoods, and advanced its international prestige (French & Disher, 2007). As demonstrated by the case of Atlanta, and many other Games, hosting a mega-sporting event has the ability to transform a city. With such a capability, events of this magnitude have significant importance to the international governing bodies, local organizing committees and host-city residents (Preuss, 2015). Due to the potential impacts from hosting the Olympic Games, extensive research has concentrated on the provision of sport event legacies. However, because of the magnitude and scope of the event, other stakeholders are also involved in the planning and implementation process (Parent, 2008). For instance, non-host cities, also referred to as ‘satellite hosts’ (Cai, Hu, Xie, 2004) or ‘peripheral communities’ (Liv, Broom, & Wilson, 2014), play a critical role in the hosting of the Games by providing support and accommodating the overflow of visitors. Despite their importance, a trivial amount of research has yet to focus on the sport event legacies non-host cities experience, resulting in a gap in the literature. As such, the purpose of this paper is to explore the legacies accrued in non-host cities that are associated with the hosting of an edition of the Olympic Games. While doing this, it will also address the evolution of sport event legacies as well as the issues and barriers associated with the non-host city development and sustainability of legacies in these areas.

In previous years, research on sport event legacy has primarily focused on its various forms (e.g., infrastructure and economic impacts), specific case events (e.g., Sydney 2000, Beijing, 2008 and London, 2012) and legacy measurement and assessment (e.g., Preuss, 2007; Girginov & Hills, 2008). More recently, literature has further explored the management and governance of Games' legacies (e.g., Girginov, 2012; Leopkey & Parent, 2012a; Parkes, Lettieri & Bogle, 2015). However, there is a sparse amount of literature surrounding the topic of non-host cities experiences with very few exceptions (e.g., Deccio & Baloglu, 2002; Karadakis & Kaplanidou, 2012; Liu, Broom & Wilson, 2014; Ritchie, Shipway & Cleeve, 2009). In 2002, Deccio and Baloglu examined the non-host residential perceptions of Garfield County, Utah. Through the use of telephone surveys, findings suggested that the majority of residents were indifferent to being impacted by the 2002 Winter Olympics. However, they were very supportive of Garfield County being promoted as a tourist destination. Therefore, the study concluded, “when faced with activities that would benefit the community, respondents were very receptive” (p.54). Similarly, Ritchie, Shipway and Cleeve (2009) explored the residential perceptions of Weymouth and Portland prior to the 2012 London Games. Specifically, these non-host cities were focused on as they planned to host the sailing and windsurfing events. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of the Olympic-related tourism development based on the sociodemographic of the residents. Findings revealed that the closer residents lived to the event sites, the more negative they felt due to expected traffic and overcrowding. Karadakis and Kaplanidou (2012) researched how legacy programs impacted residents during the hosting of the 2010 Winter Games. This specific research gathered data from 48 Vancouver and 54 Ottawa residents to compare and contrast host and non-host city residential perceptions. There was an overall consensus that environmental legacies were most important to both cities. These results countered Deccio and Baloglu (2002) as they acknowledged that non-host residents had very minimal interest or concern towards environmental components. More recently, Liu, Broom and Wilson (2014) conducted an empirical study which focused on the Shanghai non-host city residents’ perspective five years after the 2008 Beijing Games. The result of this study indicated that identity and culture were perceived to be the most important legacies. Different from other literature provided, the researchers contributed these findings to the dissimilar economic and cultural backgrounds of the Chinese civilization.

In order to achieve the purpose of this study, a case study that concentrated on a non-host city was built. The implementation of a case study in this endeavor permits an in-depth study of this particular phenomenon (Yin,
2014). Athens, Georgia was the focus of this investigation due to its multi-purpose use when preparing and hosting the Atlanta 1996 Games. Prior to the Games, the University of Georgia was the training site for international teams including Australia and Sweden. During the Games, Athens hosted soccer quarter final matches as well as rhythmic gymnastics and volleyball competitions. As a result, representatives from the media, spectators, and Olympic tourists from around not only the state of Georgia but the entire southeast made their way to the city. Archival materials (e.g., service records, organizational records, maps and charts, lists of names, survey data, and personal records) collection is currently underway and interviews are currently ongoing with an estimated completion will be completed in of winter 2018. Collected data will undergo a content analysis of Open and axial coding using Atlas.ti software (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2013). This will help with the identification of major developing themes with regards to the non-host city’s legacies.

Early analysis supports the notion that non-host cities are impacted through the spillover effect which is described as indirect or unplanned results (Deccio & Baloglu, 2002). Preliminary emergent findings reveal a number of key event stakeholders involved in the process including the University of Georgia, local venues, community groups and hotels. In addition, the varying roles of non-host cites (e.g., media housing, pre-Games team training, housing of event competitions) as well as enhancements to infrastructure, volunteer opportunities, tourism and economic impact have been noted. By bringing to light the use of a non-host city during the Games, future directions can be predicted and improvements can be made when hosting such an event. For example, more positive sustainable legacies could be strategically planned and implemented in the non-host cities which, in return, would increase the overall benefits when hosting the Games. With the Olympics in the forefront of identifying non-host city legacies, improvements in mega-event planning and management may be a result of this study.

In conclusion, upon careful examination of the event-legacies in the non-host city of Athens, Georgia, this study will demonstrate that non-host cities are impacted by the Games and legacies are accrued as a result. The findings is would benefit both academic knowledge and sport managers by providing adding to a broader understanding of the topic of legacy within the context of mega-sporting events, and the Olympic Games in particular.