

(SP) ATHENIANS' PERCEIVED QUALITY OF LIFE AFTER THE ATHENS 2004 OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES AND THE EXTENT IT IS ATTRIBUTED TO THE HOSTING OF THE GAMES

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Introduction

Despite the fact that the notion of quality of life has more widely emerged in the late 1960's and early 1970's (Land, 2001), writers have been speculating on the specific issue since the golden era of Ancient Athens. It was the philosopher Plato who first introduced the term "good life". Aristotle introduced the concept of quality. They both tried to find out ways in which public policy could nurture this notion. It is in the last 30 years that science has seen many attempts of measuring 'quality of life' in many parts of the world and in relation to various factors (Hagerty et al., 2001). Research on quality of life can be divided in two main categories. The first category involves health-related quality of life (e.g., Michalos et al., 2000; Michalos & Zumbo, 2001, 2002) and the second (e.g., Bramston, 2002; Chipuer et al., 2003) includes the determinants of well being (e.g., availability of food, clothing, shelter, potable water, legal aid, education facilities, health care and income).

During the last years, there has been a great debate on the impact of the Olympic Games on the host cities. There is a continuously growing attention and awareness over the positive and negative impacts of the Olympic Games in a host city. The general belief is that the Olympic Games should make the host community and the city environment better rather than worst (Cashman, 2003). However, no research has been conducted on how the Olympic Games affect the perceived quality of life of the citizens of the host city.

Given that Athens was the city that hosted the Olympic Games of 2004, the purpose of our study was to examine the extent to which this great socio-economical event affected the perceived quality of life of the citizens of Athens. Specifically, first, the ten areas of quality of life most affected by the hosting of the Games are presented. Moreover, gender differences are examined in terms of the extent to which their current quality of life is attributed to the hosting of the Games. Finally, differences among educational levels are also examined.

Methods

Data were gathered for a random sample of 398 citizens of Athens and its suburbs. A questionnaire was developed for the purposes of the study based on existing literature and a pilot study contacted in advance (e.g. Mercer, 2001). The first part of the questionnaire included questions age, gender, marital status, place of residence, educational level and job status. The second part consisted of 47 questions on various aspects of quality of living that were answered using a Likert Scale, which ranged from 1 to 5. The Likert Scale depicted the level of the quality of life, starting from 1 (very low) until 5 (very high). Each question had to be answered twice, once for the current perceived quality of living and a second time for the extent this perceived quality of life was attributed to the hosting of the OG in Athens in 2004. The reliability of the scale was found to be $\alpha=.97$ at this second phase, while α ranged from .87 to .91 in the first phase and in the follow-up phase contacted 8 months after the Games.

Results

Results indicated that the ten (10) most affected areas of quality of life were: airport services, hotel and tourism facilities, foreign countries relations, tourism services, transportation services, sports and leisure facilities, restaurant availability, telecommunication services, ease of country entry and exit and currency services. In addition, although there were no differences in terms of age, gender, marital status, place of residence, educational level and job status when looking at the perceived quality of life that the participants experienced at that moment, there were statistically significant differences between men and women and among educational levels on the extent to which this perceived quality of life was attributed to the hosting of the Olympic Games of 2004. It seems that women and people with University degree attributed greater extent of their current quality of life to the hosting of the OG in Athens in 2004 than the other groups. There was also an indication that people from different places of residence had different, but not statistically different opinions on the extent to which this perceived quality of life was attributed to the hosting of the Olympic Games of 2004.

Discussion

Athens by hosting the OG 2004, developed infrastructure necessary not only for the effective operations of the OG but also for the quality of life of the citizens of Athens and its suburbs.

Developing infrastructure such as sport facilities, telecommunications, and transportation systems may have a long-term positive effect on people's quality of life. It also depends on how this infrastructure will be exploited, maintained and expanded by the government policies for the good of its people. Participants with university degrees are more able to see the medium and long-term effects of the Olympic developments. The differences found in this study between genders and among educational levels are unique in the literature and therefore, it is suggested and it is intended by the authors to continue this piece of research with the third phase which will be held 3,5 to 4 years after the Games, closer to the next Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008. Moreover, cross-cultural research would also be scientifically and practically useful in preparing for or hosting of the Games.

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