

AN ANALYSIS OF TURIN'S OLYMPIC LEGACY

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INTRODUCTION

The physical legacy of an Olympic Games is evident from the sport venues which are either constructed or refurbished, accommodations built, new or improved transportation systems and other infrastructures of the host city and region. While Olympic cities intend to use these facilities to host other large scale-events, attract sport tourists, and stimulate economic development, their success in doing so is mixed.

Describing the post-Olympic condition of Calgary, Ritchie observed (2000), "Each Olympic Games, while drawing on the legacy of its forerunners, reflects a unique set of circumstances. The characteristics of the host region and its people, the prevailing international situation, and the evolving nature of the event itself all combine to produce a set of impacts which can be anticipated but which are difficult to predict accurately."

In a landmark study, Ritchie and Lyons (1990) asked residents before the 1988 Winter Olympic Games whether they felt in general it was a good idea for Calgary to host the event. Nearly 85 percent responded positively which increased to 97.8% after the event. Ritchie (2000) concludes that to maximize the event's legacy Olympic facilities must be available to the public, before and after the event.

In the case of the 2002 Winter Olympic Games, a pre-post study of 2,629 Europeans (Germany, France, UK, Italy, and Holland) was performed in 1999 and 2002 to gauge destination image perceptions (State of Utah, 2003). Knowledge of Salt Lake City as the host city of the 2002 Winter Olympic Games increased dramatically as a result of the Olympics, from 1 in 5 respondents in 1999 to 1 in 3 respondents in 2002. Winter sport tourism has flourished in Utah; the 2004-05 ski season was the best on record based on skier visits, surpassing the record established the year before (State of Utah, 2006), and Utah's 13 ski resorts hosted 4.1 million skier days during the 2005-06 season. Utah registered 3.0 millions skier days in 2000.

The purpose of this study is to describe the post-Olympic condition of Turin following the 2006 Winter Games. A second purpose is to describe the influences of the 2006 Winter Games on the two main areas, Turin and the Alp Valleys, separated by 80 to 100 kilometers. The metropolitan area of Turin hosted the ice competitions (hockey and skating sports), and the Alp Valleys hosted all the other sports: Alpine skiing, cross country, ski jumping, bobsleighting, snowboard, etc. The small city of Pinerolo (40 km from Torino) hosted the curling competitions.

METHODS

A longitudinal study of Torino residents (2002-2007; n=900 interviews per year; N=4,500) are presented to reflect the attitudes of the population toward the 2006 Winter Olympic Games over time. Noteworthy are shifts in public perceptions corresponding with the identity change for Torino from the "capital of the Fiat company" to an Olympic city now devoted to culture, sport and tourism.

RESULTS

Research results following the 2006 Winter Olympic Games from two surveys (May 2006 and March 2007) confirm previous trends, though some issues were diffused across the sample due in part to media reports of high costs for infrastructure development and sport facility construction. On one hand, public perception was favorable toward city renovations of old abandoned districts, restored museums, new tourism and cultural

offices, and major infrastructure developments (railway connections and subway systems) that accelerated by the Games. On the other, less favorable public impressions resulted from Torino managing new and costly facilities (mainly devoted to ice sports) with some having to be converted for new uses (i.e., international fairs, concerts, other sports, etc.). There is a perception that the Olympic legacy in Torino has been more favorable than in the Alp Valleys, though the future of the ice facilities is still being debated.

DISCUSSION

Post event, the sentiments of residents toward an Olympic Games largely affects local tourism development. Positive perceptions may stimulate support for increased tourism development while negative sentiments might create a backlash against future tourism growth and subsequent event bids. Cashman (2003: 16) argues that there is a need to "...plan for the immediate post-games period when there is often a great sense of loss experienced by many members of the host community, even a post-games depression." If an Olympic Games is to serve as a sustainable economic catalyst, post-event planning must occur during the pre-event stage.

Our discussion will consider the main issues linked to the Torino 2006 Winter Olympic Games, and the perspectives of residents and other stakeholders in Torino and regional communities regarding the tangible (sport venues, media, athlete villages, infrastructure, etc.) and intangible (symbols, public opinion, local identity, etc.) legacies of the Games

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