

ATHENIANS' PERCEIVED QUALITY OF LIFE BEFORE AND AFTER THE ATHENS 2004 OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES: EXPECTATIONS AND REALIZATION

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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 who 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 have 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, limited research has been conducted on how the Olympic Games affect the perceived quality of life of the citizens of the host city (Kriemadis, Leivadi & Yiannakis, 2004, 2006).

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 10 areas of quality of life most affected by the hosting of the Games are presented. Second, a comparison was made between data collected during the first phase (one year before) the Games and the second phase (1,5 years after) the Games to determine if Athenians' expectations have been realized. Moreover, variables such as gender, education and place of residence are examined to determine their effect on the perceived quality of life differences before and after the Games.

METHOD

Data were gathered for a random and representative sample of 350 (1st phase) and 398 (2nd phase) 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). The reliability of the scale was found to be; $\alpha = .87$ during the first phase, $\alpha = .91$ in the follow-up phase contacted 8 months after the Games and $\alpha = .97$ during the second phase.

RESULTS

Results indicated that in the ten (10) most affected areas of quality of life (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) significant differences were found between the first phase (one year before) the Games and the second phase (1,5 years after) the Games. These significant differences however were in the opposite direction than expected. Athenians perceived their quality of life to be worse after the Games than it was before the Games. The same result was also revealed when comparing their expectations for the after the Games and their actual perceived quality of life after the Games. Moreover, there were no differences in terms of age, gender, marital status, educational level and job status when comparing before and after the OG quality of life. Finally, significant differences were found when taking into consideration place of residence. That is, residents of the municipality of Athens and north Attica considered their quality of life to be almost the same before and after the OG, residents of west Attica considered it to be slightly worse while residents of east Attica reported a significant change in their quality of life after the OG (mean difference = 14,41).

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 but also depends on how this infrastructure will be exploited, maintained and expanded by the government policies for the good of its people. It is not therefore surprising that the differences found in this comparison were on the negative side, meaning that people perceived their quality of life to be worse after the Games than they were expecting it to be. It is suggested and it is intended by the authors to continue this piece of research with the third phase that 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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