

# UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF LEGACY OUTCOMES FOR OLYMPIC GAMES HOST CITY RESIDENTS' QUALITY OF LIFE

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## Abstract

### Aim of paper

The topic of this research focuses on the perceived legacy outcomes among residents the Olympic Games host cities overtime. For the International Olympic Committee (IOC) the concept of legacy has become of great importance and the need to expand research in this area has been clearly identified (International Olympic Committee, 2003, 2007). Despite its acknowledged importance by the IOC, there is lack of research in understanding the importance of the various legacy aspects from the residents' quality of life perspective over time. Thus the purpose of this study was to identify which legacy outcomes are deemed important in year 2010 for the four recent summer host cities residents' quality of life.

### Literature review

Legacy has been defined in terms of "structures" both tangible and intangible that remained after the event has concluded. Tangible structures include infrastructures related to transportation, sport, tourism, and environmental protection whether newly constructed or improved (Preuss, 2007). Intangible structures focus on legacy outcomes such as diffusion of knowledge, social change, governance reform and lifestyle changes such as physical activity and attitude change toward exercise adoption (Kaplanidou & Karadakis, 2010). Legacy outcomes are also viewed through the lenses of economic, environmental and socio-cultural changes. The conclusion of the Games leaves a host city in a post-euphoria phase and thus a potentially positive attitude toward the legacies of the Games. As the time goes by, it is not clear which legacies remain important for the residents. This study explores this issue. Methodology, research design and data analysis In order to understand how the residents of the past host cities evaluated the importance of Olympic Games legacies for their overall quality of life, data were collected from convenience samples of residents from the four recent Olympic Games host cities residents: Atlanta, Sydney, Athens and Beijing. The last four summer Games were chosen because the legacy concept became one of

the IOC's foci more intensely with and after the Atlanta Games. Approximately 200 people from each city were contacted either via phone, e-mail (web survey) or intercepts at a mall (Beijing only). Four different questionnaires were created for each of the cities. The questionnaires were initially created in English. For Atlanta and Sydney the English version was used. For Athens and Beijing, the questionnaires were translated in Greek and Chinese (and then back translated from these two languages for reliability purposes). The questionnaire items included questions about the importance of the Olympic Games legacy aspects for residents' quality of life. The questionnaire items regarding the legacy outcomes were generated from the examination of the official final reports from each city in order to be specific and relevant for each study. Demographic questions were asked at the end of the questionnaire. Data collection took place during July 2010.

## Results

Overall in terms of importance for quality of life for Atlanta residents, the top five ranked items (on a five point scale where 1=not at all important, 5= extremely important) were: Beautification of certain parts of Atlanta (M=3.85); technological upgrades in telecommunications (M=3.84); the Centennial Olympic Park (M=3.84) and pride from having hosted the Olympics (M=3.79). For Sydney, the top five ranked items were: The promotion of our culture to the world (M=4.18); The ability to use the stadiums constructed for the Games (M=4.15); The wider inclusion of people with disabilities (M=4.15); Accessible pathways for strollers and wheelchairs (M=4.11); Strong recognition of the Australian culture worldwide (M=4.1). For Athens, the top five ranked items were: The new airport E. Venizelos (M=4.49); Metro expansion (M=4.44); Road network expansion (M=4.37); More wheel chair friendly buses (M=4.32); Suburban railway (M=4.22). For Beijing, the top five ranked items were: Four new subway lines (M=4.1); Road network expansion (M=4.09); New options for public transport (M=4.07); New airport terminal at Beijing (M=4.0); Suburban railway (M=3.99).

## Discussion and implications/conclusions

The results suggest that the tangible infrastructure aspects are important for the quality of life for all host cities but more important for recent host cities than the older ones. Residents of remote past Olympic Games host cities (e.g., Atlanta) indicated that emotional benefits and some of the infrastructure that resulted from the Olympic Games are important for their quality of life. The emotional connection therefore seems to be more important for the quality of life of host city residents as time passes from the hosting of the Olympic Games.

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