

# **(SP) DOES EVENT IMAGE DIFFER BETWEEN LOCAL AND FOREIGN SPECTATORS? THE CASE OF THE ATHENS 2004 OLYMPIC GAMES**

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## **Introduction**

The image of a sporting event such as the Olympic Games (O.G.) is an important concept that has been examined in the literature only in correlation with sponsor corporate images (e.g. Ferrand & Pages, 1996; Musante, Milne & McDonald, 1999). However, there has been no distinction between perceptions of local spectators and foreign spectators (visitors) as to whether the image of the sport event is different. The image of a sport event could contain cognitive (beliefs) and affective (emotional) items (Keller, 1993). According to Dimanche (1996) the hosting of a large scale event provide benefits for the community which lead to community satisfaction and word of mouth. In addition, positive event image perceptions could lead to positive word-of-mouth and re-visitation to Greece for foreign spectators (Ritchie & Yangzhou, 1987). It is essential, therefore to understand which components of a sport tourism event image are important to local spectators (residents) and whether they differ from those of the visiting spectators. If images differ, then event marketers should develop promotional efforts which target the group with lower event image perceptions.

## **Methods**

Data were collected during the 2004 O.G. in Athens, Greece, using an onsite survey at the Athens Olympic Sport Complex where the opening and closing ceremonies and eight other major sporting events (e.g. track and field, swimming) took place. Olympic spectators were intercepted every 20 minutes. The primary investigator and another trained interviewer collected the data during the course of the first 10 days the O.G. was hosted. Two questionnaires were used. One in English and one in Greek. The English questionnaire targeted the English speaking spectators visiting Athens for the Games while the Greek questionnaire was designed for the Greek spectators. The questionnaire items on the event image utilized modified cognitive and affective image scales used by Baloglu and McLeary (1999) that measured destination image. These items were chosen because there was lack of a sport event image scale in the literature and because the O.G. is a tourist attraction and it can be considered a destination for spectators. The 11 cognitive event image items were measured on a seven-point scale where 1=offers very little and 7=offers very much. The affective component of the event image consisted 5 seven-point semantic differential items based on opposite adjectives. In total, 376 Olympic spectators were intercepted and 291 (224 English, 67 Greek) agreed to participate in the research yielding a response rate of 77.3%. The lower number of Greek spectators is justified because during the first ten days of the event, most of the Greek people were away on vacation.

## **Analysis & Results**

In order to test the differences between Greek spectators and English speaking spectators with regard to their O.G. image perceptions, independent sample t-tests were performed using SPSS 12.1. The results are depicted in table 1.

**Table 1: Event image comparison between foreign and Greek spectators**

<b>Olympics image--Affective items</b>	<b>Spectators</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>t-</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
	Foreign	221	6.17		
Dull-Exciting	Greek	65	6.21	-.22	ns
	Foreign	215	6.03		
Unpleasant-Pleasant	Greek	63	6.39	2.03	<b>p&lt;.05</b>
	Foreign	214	5.79		
Gloomy-Cheerful	Greek	62	6.35	2.99	<b>p&lt;.05</b>
	Foreign	216	4.39		
Distressing-Relaxing	Greek	63	5.19	2.98	<b>p&lt;.05</b>
	Foreign	216	6.37		
Unfriendly-Friendly	Greek	64	6.62	-.69	ns
<b>Olympics' image--cognitive items (facilities and overall environment)</b>	<b>Spectators</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>t-</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
	Foreign	216	5.92		
Friendly and interesting people	Greek	63	5.50	2.27	<b>p&lt;.05</b>
	Foreign	215	5.64		
Quality of infrastructure	Greek	63	6.23	3.27	<b>p&lt;.05</b>
	Foreign	215	5.78		
Personal safety	Greek	63	6.39	3.58	<b>p&lt;.05</b>
	Foreign	213	5.66		
Good opportunities for buying souvenirs	Greek	61	5.52	.66	ns
	Foreign	211	4.65		
Appealing food services	Greek	59	4.44	.84	ns
	Foreign	212	5.22		
Standard hygiene and cleanliness	Greek	61	5.70	-2.61	<b>p&lt;.05</b>
	Foreign	213	6.12		
Interesting sport attractions/entertainment	Greek	62	5.98	.91	ns
	Foreign	211	5.93		
Venue design	Greek	62	6.22	-1.90	ns
	Foreign	214	4.90		
Good value for money	Greek	62	5.46	-2.93	<b>p&lt;.05</b>
	Foreign	209	5.35		
Unpolluted unspoiled environment	Greek	62	5.46	-.51	ns
	Foreign	213	5.89		
Good sport venue atmosphere	Greek	61	6.18	-1.87	ns

Significant differences are noted for most of the emotional items. The Greek spectators had significantly higher emotional image perceptions with the event in terms of how pleasant, cheerful and relaxing the O.G. were during the actual hosting of the event. Both English speaking spectators and Greeks found the O.G. to be exciting and friendly. As far as the

cognitive items are concerned, Greek spectators had significant different perceptions in terms of how friendly and interesting the people at the O.G. were (Greek spectators had lower perceptions), the quality of the O.G. infrastructure (Greeks had higher perceptions), personal safety (Greeks had higher perceptions), standard hygiene and cleanliness (Greeks had higher perceptions) and good value for money (Greeks had higher perceptions).

## **Discussion**

Local spectators have feelings of pride about the staging of a mega event such as the O.G. in their country (Neirotti, Bosetti & Teed, 2001). Consequently, the results on the affective dimensions of the scale were not surprising. However, English speaking spectators felt that the O.G. were less pleasant, less cheerful and less relaxing. Event marketers could potentially use other events and more personnel and volunteers to provide a relaxing, more cheerful and pleasant atmosphere for the foreign spectators. For the cognitive items, event managers should work on promoting a better or objective image of the O.G. in order to succeed in meeting expectations of foreign visitors especially with regards to the O.G. personnel friendliness, the quality of the O.G. infrastructure and the quality of the safety and security services. Another interesting item is that both Greek and foreign spectators had low perceptions of the food services during the Games. Potentially, the “packaged” food offered in the venue clashed with the good image of the Greek cuisine and services for both groups. Finally, one last recommendation is with regards to the price sensitive the foreign spectators show about O.G. pricing. Event marketers should promote packages and ticket “combos” before the O.G. to attract more people and reverse negative word of mouth regarding pricing.

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