

WINTER OLYMPIC TOURISM: AN HISTORICAL & CONTEMPORANEOUS ANALYSIS

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INTRODUCTION

Although sharing the Olympic name with the summer event, the Winter Games are a very different animal. Their organisational requirements, the economics of hosting the Games and the nature of their tourism impacts vary considerably from the Summer Games. Preuss (2004) believes that the Summer and Winter Games are so different that they do not bear comparison: “They [the Winter Games] are an independent event and, in this book, are considered only occasionally”. Essex and Chalkey (2002) note that there is far less research on the Winter Games than on the Summer Olympics. In fact, it is probably fair to say that there is a dearth of academic analysis of the Winter Games. This is somewhat surprising because, although the Winter Games might exist in the shadow of the Summer Olympics, they are still a significant event in their own right, with substantial economic and tourism implications.

METHODS

This paper examines the relationship between the Winter Olympic Games and tourism through two related approaches. The first is an historic analysis, utilising historical reports of the organisation, development and perception of the Winter Games up to the year 2000, examining the role tourism played in the development of the Winter Olympic Games. The second approach is a contemporaneous analysis of the way in which tourism planning features in more recent editions of the Winter Games. Long-range research from Calgary 1988 (Ritchie, 1999) is taken as the starting point for an examination of the way in which 20th Century Winter Games (Salt Lake City 2002, Turin, 2006, and Vancouver 2010) have planned, and are planning, to “leverage” the tourism impacts of the Games. This approach comprises a secondary analysis of a range of documentation, including consultancy reports, senate hearings, stakeholder group minutes, public policy reports and academic analyses.

RESULTS / DISCUSSION

Early hosts of the Winter Games were established winter sports resorts which already had the requisite infrastructure to host the Games (eg, St Moritz, 1928 & 1948; Cortina d’Ampezzo, 1956). Unsurprisingly, the event was seen as part of tourism development strategy for such resorts, and both Essex and Chalkey (2002) and Preuss (2004) note that St Moritz developed very rapidly and still benefits today as a leading winter sports resort as a result of having been an Olympic host. There were also very few accommodation developments for these early Games, with the focus being on the use and/or “winterisation” of existing hotel and cottage accommodation. From the 1960s onwards, infrastructure developments benefiting tourism came to the fore. Squaw Valley (1960), for example, was a resort “created” to host the Winter Games. Similarly, there have been significant transport infrastructure developments. At Sapporo in 1972, for example, infrastructure investment included two airport extensions which had long term benefits for tourism. However, the fact that commercial winter sports resorts reaped considerable tourism benefits from hosting the Winter Olympics was problematic for the IOC. Chappelet (2002) notes that Avery Brundage (the IOC president from 1952 to 1972) considered cancelling the Winter Games permanently because they were “too closely linked to the ski industry in terms of both the equipment that was blatantly highlighted and the booming real estate around skiing areas”. Ritchie (1999) in advising the Salt Lake City (2002) organising committee noted that: extensive and detailed planning and building alliances are essential; Olympic development should build on existing products; and a successful event and successful tourism promotion are not necessarily related outcomes. Travel Utah had a

1000 day plan for tourism to the 2002 Games in Salt Lake City, which it considered to be long-term. However, Vancouver (2010) has developed a tourism “scenario” that commenced in 2003 and runs through to 2020. Salt Lake City’s plan only commenced 150 days before the Games and, as such, many tourism opportunities in the pre-Games pregnancy (Weed, 2007) period were missed. Turismo Torino developed a seven year tourism plan (2002-2008) for the Turin Games of 2006, and clearly recognised the benefits that could be realised in the pregnancy period. The objectives for Turin were similar to those of the 1992 summer Games in Barcelona in terms of raising the profile of Turin to compete with other Italian cities such as Milan. All three of the 20th Century Winter Games have recognised the importance of a “leveraging” approach to Olympic tourism, where the focus is on maximising opportunities rather than measuring benefits. Furthermore, the recognition of the importance of leveraging has increased from Salt Lake City to Turin to Vancouver, with IVC (2002) commenting that: “In order to achieve the higher tourism growth scenarios and capitalise on long-term opportunities, British Columbia’s tourism industry will require significant marketing resources and a co-ordinated effort. Tourism benefits will not materialise automatically. They must be earned by a focussed, adequately funded and skilfully executed marketing programme”. Leveraging Olympic media coverage is also considered. Turismo Torino, for example, employed an “Olympic Turin” promotion programme that focussed on generating positive stories about Turin in the non-sports media in the pre-Games period. The full paper discusses the respective strengths and successes of these tourism strategies.

CONCLUSION

There is a long history of an association between the Olympic Games and the ski industry, with early Games often having a spin-off in terms of promoting the winter sports resorts in which they were staged. In fact, the nature of the Winter Games is such that there is a much more significant “active” sports tourism legacy (in terms of sports participation tourism and luxury sports tourism – see Weed & Bull, 2004) than for the summer event where the sports tourism legacy is much more clearly centred on “passive” or “vicarious” sports tourism linked to sports event tourism. Of course, hosts of both the Winter and Summer Games attempt to leverage Olympic media to generate positive images of themselves as a general tourism destination, and in this respect they both benefit from an association with the Olympic Rings.

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