

## The image impact of second-order mega-events: a case study of the 2014 Commonwealth Games

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### Aim

The overall aim of this research, located within the critical realist research paradigm, and underpinned by social representation theory, is to evaluate the domestic image impact of hosting the 2014 CG for the city of Glasgow, and in doing so, determine the extent to which hosting this event represents an appropriate strategy to improve the city's domestic image.

### Literature review

In 2014 the city of Glasgow played host to the XX Commonwealth Games (CG) – the largest multi-sports event to ever take place in Scotland. The CG do not possess the global reach of the Olympic Games or FIFA World Cup thus their scale and impacts are not as great as these top-tier mega-events. Nevertheless, the CG maintain international appeal, require significant investment, infrastructure, and resources, and consequently, have significant impacts for the cities in which they are staged. Indeed, for cities that tend to bid for these 'second-order mega-events' (Cornellisen, 2004, p. 40), they are often the largest events that such cities can feasibly host (Maennig and Zimbalist, 2012). As such, and much like their larger counterparts, second-order mega-events like the UEFA Euro Championships and the CG, are imbued with 'tremendous symbolic significance' and are often used to 'reposition or solidify the image of a city, region, and country' in an attempt to attract inward investment and tourism (Gratton & Preuss, 2008, pp.1927-1928). Accordingly, among the stated aims of 2014 CG stakeholders (e.g., Scottish Government, 2008) is reference to how the event could potentially be leveraged to improve perceptions and enhance the images of Glasgow and Scotland, and vice-versa, how the image of the CG could be reinforced by Glasgow hosting the event. Thus through an analysis of UK resident perceptions, this research seeks to establish whether the image of Glasgow or the CG were enhanced by the staging of the 2014 event.

### Methodology

Data was collected pre- and post-event through repeated applications of an online questionnaire, the main element of which required UK-based participants (pre: 170; post: 98) – recruited via both convenience, and exponential, non-discriminative snowball sampling – to submit free-association responses to the inductor terms: Glasgow and 2014 Commonwealth Games. The data gleaned from the

questionnaire was then used to construct the social representation field of each of the inductors, pre- and post-event, using only those elements cited by at least 15% of participants. Subsequent hierarchical cluster analysis, utilising a modified similarity matrix (x-1), was aimed at determining the internal structure of the generated fields; that is, the strength of the connections (or psychological distance) between the terms contained therein. The social representation fields and structures were then compared to determine whether any pre- and post-event changes occurred, and then checked against one another (i.e. place and event) to determine whether or not any co-branding took place.

### Results and discussion

The findings of this research suggest that both Glasgow's image and that of the 2014 CG underwent noteworthy improvements pre-to-post-event. First, Glasgow's pre-event social representation field, comprised of 20 elements, contained a number of negative associations which were not included in the post-event field; for example, negative perceptions concerning Glasgow's residents, references to Glasgow being a busy or crowded place, and associations with poverty and deprivation. In particular, that references to poverty and deprivation drop-off Glasgow's post-event field will interest the city's governors given that such associations can deter potential tourists (Gratton & Preuss, 2008). Accordingly, Glasgow's post-event field, comprised of 17 elements, has a more positive composition, representing a conclusive image improvement pre-to-post-event. In terms of the 2014 CG, participants were much less knowledgeable, generating only 11 associations both pre- and post-event. Although there was some variation in the associations that make up these fields – seven out of 11 associations endured pre-to-post-event (e.g., references to sport, athletes, medals and national pride) –, both can be considered generally positive. Perhaps most indicative of how the CG was received by participants pre-to-post-event, is the significant increase in those who regarded the event as enjoyable and successful. Although the Games were perceived in a somewhat positive light to begin with (i.e., pre-event), the 2014 CG field also has a more positive composition post-event. However, despite both improving images, and supporting previous work undertaken in the field (e.g. Bodet & Lacassagne, 2012), the findings of this research do not reveal any overt co-branding processes to have occurred between place and sporting event, thus the degree to which the improving changes in Glasgow's image were brought about directly by the 2014 CG (or vice-versa) is somewhat unclear.

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