



Impact of the Games on Olympic host cities

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1. Introduction

An Olympic Games leaves a large stamp on a host city and this impact on has increased since 1984 as the Games have become larger involving more athletes and sports and a greater media and sponsor presence. There are also now higher expectations about the delivery of the Games. After the International Olympic Committee (IOC) chose to make the environment the third strand of Olympism in 1994, cities have been expected to deliver cleaner and greener Games. Following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the USA, security and insurance costs have increased dramatically.

Staging an Olympic Games represents a long and expensive commitment of a city to this mega event. The impact can be divided into four separate periods:

1. the preparation of a bid and the winning of the right to host the Games;
2. the seven year period of preparation for the staging of the Games;
3. the short period (16 days in 2000) when the Olympic Games are staged followed by the Paralympic Games;
4. the much longer post-Games era.

There are also many types of impact to consider:

- alterations in design of the city;
- changes to the physical and the built environment;
- the representation of a city and country and its culture;
- improvements in air, road and rail transport;
- increased costs and taxes;
- changes in governance and public decision-making;
- innovations in politics and political relationships;
- potential increased tourism and business activity;
- the creation of new sporting venues which have potential for post-Games community use;
- the potential of greater community consultation, involvement and even protest;
- the involvement of the community as volunteers and torch-bearers.

2. Debates and controversies

The impact of an Olympic Games on host cities is a matter of continuing debate and controversy. There are many continuing issues and questions about the impact of the Games. Below are six areas of continuing debate.

2.1. The decision to bid for the games - does it represent 'manufactured consent'?

While an Olympic bid is made on behalf of all the people of a city, the majority are only indirectly consulted as to whether they want their city to bid for an Olympic Games and what they want to achieve in the process. A bid is usually framed in terms of some community benefit — such as urban renewal, improved transport or better sporting facilities — which it is claimed will counter the potential costs and burdens to the community. Public opinion polls are usually cited by the bid proposers as proof of public support for a bid.

Bid books, produced by Organising Committees, talk up the public support for the Games and dismiss any potential opposition. The *Sydney Bid Book* claimed that there was 'universal enthusiasm' for the Sydney bid and added that 'support within New South Wales for the Sydney 2000 Bid' was at 90 per cent and continuing to grow' (Sydney Olympics 2000 Bid, 1993:53)

Another tactic of bid organisers is to incorporate key personnel from minority groups — such as indigenous communities, ethnic communities and welfare groups — who may potentially provide opposition to an Olympic Games and even organise protest movements — to demonstrate wide community support. Two critics of the bid process, Douglas Booth and Colin Tatz, have argued that this process does not amount to real consultation, it represents 'manufactured consent' (Booth and Tatz, 1994).

2. 2. Community consultation about the impact of the games

This is a related issue about the degree of community consultation during the preparations for the staging of an Olympic Games. Fast-tracking of venues and other Olympic projects are common practices because of the enormity of the task of preparing for the Games in a short time frame. As a result there is usually limited community consultation and the over-riding of local concerns are justified as being in the city and national interest.

Some measure of community opposition is a feature of all contemporary Olympic Games. Even though the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games were judged to be successful and well supported by the people of the city there was some opposition to the Games in the lead-up period. The Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (SOCOG) in addition was frequently criticised by the media and the public of being excessively secretive and high-handed.

Community opposition to the Games in Sydney focussed on the construction of particular facilities. The Bondi Beach Volleyball Stadium was a controversial development because it closed off a substantial section of a popular surfing beach for some six months and there were fears that it would cause environmental damage to the beach. The development of the Ryde Pool, the venue of some preliminary water polo matches, closed a public pool for two years and converted part of a public park into a private leisure facility (Owen, 2001).

There were complains from local government, the third tier of government in Australia, that the views of local councils were not adequately canvassed. Auburn Council one of the poorer municipalities in Sydney, believed that its ratepayers had to bear an unfair burden for the creation of Sydney Olympic Park, which lay within its boundaries (Owen, 2001). It was suggested at the Mosman Council forum on the impacts of the Olympics that 'local authorities have been largely locked out of the [Olympic] decision-making process' and 'have received very little information on key issues like anticipated transport flows' which are vital for 'the formulation of local transport plans' (Cashman and Hughes, 1999a:32).

2.3. Positive versus negative impacts on host cities — weighing the balance

The costs and benefits of an Olympic Games are matters of continuing debate before, during and after the Games. It is virtually impossible to know the true cost to a city of hosting an Olympic Games because there is no accepted way of assessing expenditure. Olympic budgets are both political, contentious and notoriously unreliable. To present Olympic expenditure in the best possible light host cities often hide certain items or shift them to other budgets. Olympic infrastructure costs may appear in the government's public works budget rather than the Olympic budget. Presumably there is a fear that the disclosure of the full costs of staging an Olympic Games might diminish the degree of public support for this event.

The stated benefits for a community from the staging of an Olympic Games are often equally vague. These benefits are usually uncoded and their value inflated. After an Olympic Games there is limited assessment as to whether any proposed benefits have been realised.

The supporters of an Olympic Games argue that these benefits will outweigh any negative impacts such as overcrowding, increased costs and taxes and disruption due to Olympic-related building. There are, in addition, hidden and unanticipated burdens that might appear if the Games are perceived to be unsuccessful leading to criticism of a city or if there are unexpected burdens, such as a terrorist attack.

2.4. Spreading the costs and benefits of the games

There has been much discussion about who benefits most from the Games in the host city – and the host country for that matter – and whether the costs and burdens are shared equally. While it is clear that the Games can produce tangible benefits for government and business, and the tourism industry in particular, the non-tangible benefits for the community are less self-evident, other than the privilege of participating in the Games in one way or another. A lot depends, in this instance, on whether the promises to the community at the time of the bid – better sports facilities and urban infrastructure – are actually kept.

It has been argued by radical scholars, such as Lenskyj, that some groups, such as the underclass, the homeless and low cost rental groups, are worse off as a result of an Olympic Games. She contended that Olympic 'legacy benefits accrue to the already privileged sectors of the population' while the disadvantaged bear a disproportionate share of the burden (Lenskyj, 2002:131).

2.5. Community anti-Olympic lobbies

Toronto, which bid unsuccessfully for the 2008 Olympic Games, spawned one of the more prominent anti-Games lobbies, 'Bread not Circuses'. This coalition of left and green groups argued that the Games adversely affected the poor, the homeless and the environment. The lobby also contended that to pay for the Games money was taken from the health, welfare and environment budgets, where it was most needed. This group argued that public money should be spent on necessities – 'bread' – rather than on luxury sporting festivals – 'circuses'.

After the defeat of the Toronto bid, 'Bread not Circuses' have shifted its attention to the Vancouver bid for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games.

Almost every contending Olympic city now has an anti-Olympic alliance which makes use of the Internet to promote its Olympic critique. PISSOFF – People Ingeniously Subverting the Sydney Olympic Farce – was the web site of a Sydney-based lobby.

The IOCC Coalition, The Impact of the Olympics on Community Coalition, which was set up in conjunction with the Vancouver/Whistler (Canada) 2010 Winter Olympic Bid represents a new type of community coalition in that it defines itself as a community watchdog rather than an anti-Olympic group. The IOCC declares that it is an 'independent organisation dedicated to ensuring that environmental, social, transportation, housing, economic and civil rights issues associated with the are addressed from a community perspective'. The aim of this coalition is to make sure that community issues are prominent and to promote, as its web site suggests, an 'Olympics for all'.

While there has been a proliferation of community anti-Olympic and watchdog groups, there is very limited empirical evidence of their support base. It is difficult to assess their significance and whether they speak for anyone other than radical fringe groups.

2.6. An erosion in human rights in the host city?

Because so much is at stake when an Olympic Games are held – the city and the country needs to look its best – the staging of an Olympic Games can lead to an erosion of human rights for the citizens of that city and country. The demands of tighter security also provide the justification for an organising committee or a government to introduce laws to restrict individual liberties particularly during the Games so as to eliminate any 'negativities' that might be seized upon by the international media.

The organisers of the Games also claim that the host city needs to ensure the safety of the public, athletes, visitors, media and dignitaries. However, while host cities want to be secure but they don't want security to be overbearing, nor do they want the city to appear like an armed camp. It is likely that such a future erosion of human rights could become even greater as a result of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001. Security in

Salt Lake City was tighter than ever before. It is unlikely that US citizens will complain about extra powers for their security forces or curbs on their freedoms. This will be seen as the 'price of freedom'.

In the lead-up to the Sydney Olympic Games, the New South Wales State Government introduced special legislation designed to give police and other security forces powers beyond those under which they normally operate though this legislation was defined as 'temporary'. Under this legislation police were given greater powers to question and search citizens in the central business district. The Australian Secret Service, ASIO, also had its powers of surveillance – power to tap into phones for example – increased. The Freedom of Information Act was suspended for Olympic-related matters.

There is the danger that this erosion of civil liberties, during an Olympic Games, may be extended and provide the excuse for 'temporary' measures to remain in place for the longer term.

2.7. The size of the games and legacy issues

From 1980 to 2000 there was an unprecedented expansion in the size of the Games: seven new sports and 80 events were added to the program. There were many, including IOC President Dr Jacques Rogge, who believed that the Olympic Games had become too large, thereby imposing an increased burden on host cities. As a result only wealthier cities can afford to stage an Olympic Games.

In an effort to counter 'gigantism', the IOC decreed that no new sports would be added at the Athens 2004 Olympic Games and effectively capped the size of the program. At the Legacy Conference in November 2002 Dr Rogge spoke out against Olympic 'luxury' projects that would become 'white elephants' after the Games preferring developments that would be sustainable after the Games and have some post-Games use.

During 2001 Dr Rogge queried whether Sydney should have constructed an Olympic Stadium to seat 110,000 persons given that the Stadium was downsized after the Games to 80,000. This he suggested was an unnecessary expense.

3. The Impact of an Olympic Games on a host city varies during four periods

3.1 The bid period

To win a bid to host an Olympic Games a city must develop a plan that is attractive both to the IOC but also to host community and key interest groups in the host city. Unless there is strong support across the board for an Olympic bid – bipartisan political support and an absence of active lobby groups against the Games – the bid is bound to fail.

To win a bid contest against other cities, a bid plan will be enhanced if it promises that the impact of the Olympic Games will not be detrimental to the city and the country in question, that the Games are affordable in financial, social and cultural terms. Bid books document how the host city will achieve benefit and avoid excessive burden to its citizens. Thus an Olympic bid may include promises to improve life in the host city, such as the environment, the airport and transport system, and other 'big ticket' items.

The bid promises of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games were based on some commitments to the host community. A core promise was that 760 hectares of degraded land at Homebush Bay would be remediated to become the site of state-of-the-art sporting facilities in an area of Sydney where they were most needed. There were also promises of improved transportation including the construction of a railway loop to Sydney Olympic Park would reduce the traffic burden generated by the Olympic Games and encourage more people to travel by public transport.

Another important aspect of the bid period is that a city needs to ensure that money spent on the bid is not wasted if the bid is unsuccessful. (For every successful bid city there are up to a dozen unsuccessful bid cities, though an unsuccessful bid may prove successful at a later date).

The motivation for a bid usually comes from government and business who view the Games as a way of enhancing the global status of the city (and country) leading to business opportunities, tourism and generally promoting the city globally. James Weirick noted that 'the

Sydney Olympic experience is only partially to do with sport and the Olympic Movement'. He added that 'the main impulse behind the Games is to promote Sydney as a "global" city' (Cashman and Hughes, 1999:70).

It is important that the bidding city garner broad support from the many communities and interests within a city. The experience of Berlin, Innsbruck, Stockholm and possibly Toronto show that the existence of well-organised Olympic protest groups and the evidence of disunity are detrimental to a bid's chances.

3.2. The seven year period when the games are organised

This is a difficult period for the Olympic organisers to manage because the euphoria of winning a bid soon dissipates as a city grapples with the various problems that have to be overcome in a short time frame.

Some of the problems in the lead-up period include:

a) Raised expectations

Winning a bid is also like winning an election to govern a city or a country. During an election many promises are made which are not always possible to realise. Olympic cities like governments cannot implement or afford to pay for all their promises. In the process, many individuals or groups will be disappointed that some core promises have not been realised. Others, who had hoped to secure a Games contract or obtain an important post in the Games structure, will be equally disillusioned.

b) Politics

Politics in the bid city is intense because the stakes are high, there are many contracts to be won and reputations to be enhanced. Politics is also complex, because there are so many local, national and international relationships involving government, the Olympic Movement, business, media and sponsors. Undoubtedly the political landscape of a bid city is transformed for a decade.

Politics in an Olympic city is often robust and volatile. Sydney's experience from 1993 was not atypical: there were a number of resignations and changes in personnel in the organising committee in the following years. This occurred because of the strained relations between Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (SOCOG) and other Olympic-related bodies – the Australian Olympic Committee, the Olympic Coordination Authority and the New South Wales Government. Sydney's answer to its political problems was to invest power in one person, Michael Knight, who became both Minister for the Olympics (Minister in the New South Wales Government) and president of the SOCOG in 1996. Public squabbling and even brawling over the rich plums of Olympic politics has a negative impact on the community respect for the organisers of the Games.

c) Environment

Sydney's green promises at the time of the bid – the 'green Games' – were more ambitious than any previous Olympic Games: they related to energy and water conservation, waste avoidance and minimisation, recycling of water, transportation, the improvement of air, water and soil quality and the protection of significant cultural and physical environments. While the ideal of the 'green Games' was an attractive one, it proved difficult to deliver – because of cost and the short time frame – to the satisfaction of environmental groups, such as Greenpeace Australia and Green Games Watch 2000, a watchdog group set up by the state government to monitor the delivery of environmental initiatives. There has been a continuing debate about the effectiveness of the remediation of Homebush Bay whether toxic waste there had been properly treated (Cashman and Hughes, 1998).

d) Olympic city as a building site: inconvenience and disruption

The citizens of a host city are usually well prepared for changes in the way the city operates during an Olympic Games. Some who do not wish to participate in the city celebrations opt to leave the city for the duration of the Games.

The host city population are less well prepared for the continuing changes in the city's built environment that occur in the seven years before the Games. The construction of Olympic venues, major changes in urban transport infrastructure and large projects of urban renewal, produce many unexpected inconveniences for those who live in an Olympic city.

e) Hidden costs and agendas

In some instances the building of Olympic venues can deprive citizens of a local community of access to public facilities for months on end. The creation of a 10,000 seat Beach Volleyball Stadium at Bondi Beach resulted in the partial closure of the Beach and the Bondi Pavilion – used for local cultural events – for six months from May to October 2000. The announcement that this sport would take place at Sydney's most famous and popular beaches led to local protests that community resources had been alienated for a large-scale temporary mega event. It was the view of Olympic Co-ordination Authority that the local council should bear any costs 'for the benefit of being Australian, as part of the Olympic Games' (Owen, 2001:27).

f) Unexpected external crises

No matter how well a city organises an Olympic Games, preparations can be seriously affected by outside problems, which make the organisation of the Games more difficult and diminish the potential public support for and enjoyment of the Games. Sydney's preparations were damaged by scandals from late 1998 and 1999 that were associated with the Salt Lake City Winter Games and related IOC scandals. The US terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 dramatically changed the context and added to the costs of the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympic Games.

g) Negative publicity

During the seven lead-up years an Olympic city is closely scrutinised by the international media, which frequently publishes negative stories about the problems a city may have in staging the Games and broader social and political problems within the society.

h) Dealing with the problems

Because of the above problems an organising committee needs to be open and transparent as possible. Media management, including damage control, is also important. There was, for instance, frequent media and public criticism of SOCOG because the organisation was considered excessively high-handed and secretive in matters relating to the Games.

Although SOCOG eventually delivered what were described by President Samaranch as the 'best-ever' Games, many citizens of the city had grave concerns about a positive outcome six months before the Games. Olympic crises became staple media fare because damaging stories were allowed to proliferate. The ticketing fiasco of 1999 was one of the many damaging controversies when it was revealed that only a fraction of the tickets for some prime events were available for sale to the public. Before that there was equal rancour about the marching bans controversy when it became known that the majority of the members of the marching bands, who performed at the Opening Ceremony had been recruited from overseas. Sydney's succession of scandals and controversies is typical of the experience of Olympic cities.

- i) By contrast the torch-relay and volunteers were 'good news' stories providing the means to not only involve the public – and give them some ownership of the Games – but also to counter negative media stories. The torch relay has enhanced the community involvement and ownership of the Olympic Games. The torch relay takes the Olympics to many communities both in the host city and nation and many individual torch-bearers are selected by community committees (Cahill, 1999).
- j) The problems of SOCOG were the subject of a long-running and clever television comedy, *The Games*, which satirised the organising committee as bumbling and inefficient. This program demonstrated how Australians appropriated the Games, using humour to poke fun at those who took the Games too seriously. This was an important way in which the Games were incorporated into Australian popular culture and was another way in which members of the host community gained access to the Games.

3.3. The staging of the games

While the staging of the Games is the time when there is the most impact on a city, it is a period when citizens feel less burden associated with the Games. First of all, those who chose to remain in the city, are well prepared for what to expect and how they can travel to the Games. Others, have the choice to travel to another city or overseas.

During an Olympic Games there are many opportunities for the people of the host city to participate in an Olympic Games: as paying or non-paying spectators – watching the marathon, triathlon or cycling along the streets of a city – as volunteers or paid workers, by hosting Olympic guests. There are also designated live sites where large numbers of people can congregate to watch giant screens.

If the Games are successful, the people of the host city can bask in the fun and glory of the event. In Sydney in 2000 there was a festival atmosphere for the two weeks of the Games. However, if there are problems of transport or information dissemination or a security, this positive mood can quickly dissipate.

3.4. The post-Games period

There has been inadequate attention paid to planning for the post-Games period and the legacy of an Olympic Games. Bid cities focus to such a large extent on winning the bid, planning for the Games and staging a successful Games that the post-Games period has been neglected.

There is a need first of all to plan for the immediate post-Games period when there is often a great sense of loss experienced by many members of the host community, even a post-Games depression. Marking the Olympic and Paralympic Games and anniversary events are important ways of dealing with such feelings. Sydney held an 'Ignite' Festival in September 2001, to mark the first anniversary of the Games. On 15 September 2001 the relocated cauldron was re-lit and its flame was maintained for the duration of the festival held over three weekends.

Equally important is to decide on what should be done with the Games infrastructure, particularly the new venues created for the Games. More attention needs to be paid as to whether there can be some ongoing return and community benefit from Olympic precincts and venues. If such facilities do not have a significant post-Games use they can become 'white elephants', and a burden to the taxpayers.

There is also the practical question of deciding to whether to maintain state of the art Olympic venues after the Games and, if so, making them cost effective. Sydney's Aquatic Centre is a

good example of a dual purpose venue in that it housed both the best facilities for elite sport as well as 'sport for all venue', which included play areas for children. The future of the Main Stadium, by contrast, is more problematic. There is the initial cost of reconfiguring the Stadium, reducing its capacity from 120,000 to 80,000 and then there is the problem of finding sufficient tenants to make the Stadium cost efficient (Searle, 2002).

There is also a need for greater management and investment in the legacy of the Games. Since a city on behalf of its community has invested significantly in global promotion, it is important to reap the tourism, business and other benefits. This can only be accessed with a well-developed plan supported by research which enables a city to gain ongoing benefits and to reduce possible ongoing burdens.

Another issue relates to the intellectual property of the Games. What becomes of the knowledge gained in staging mankind's greatest peacetime activity? The archives of the Games are a valuable resource for the people of a city and a nation and need to be stored and organised in a way that makes them easily accessible for future generations. The knowledge gained in staging the Games is a valuable asset for the host community and should become one of its important exports, being on-sold bringing in valuable capital. It also is a very valuable part of a city's and country's history.

The cultivation of the memory of an Olympic Games is another way in which there can be some return for the host city community. The creation of an Olympic Museum, for instance, will ensure the memory of the Games and provide a focal point for the sporting, intellectual and organisational legacy of the event. The marking of the Games, whether in street names or commemorative plaques, are other worthwhile initiatives. The Olympic cauldron at Sydney was removed to a nearby park to become a public sculpture with a waterfall cascading from its side. Included in this public sculpture are the names of all the medallists of the Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

4. Conclusions

There is a growing contemporary awareness that an Olympic Games can have many positive and negative impacts on an Olympic city and its environment. There is an growing belief that an Olympic Games should leave a host community and the city environment better rather than worse off. Scholars such as Bruce Kidd have argued that each candidate city should 'conduct a social impact assessment and a public consultation before submitting its bid' (Kidd, 1992:76–7).

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Related web sites

Bread not circuses

<http://www.breadnotcircuses.org/>

IOCC (Impact of the Olympics on Community Coalition)

<http://www.olympicsforall.ca/>

PISSOFF (People Ingeniously Subverting the Sydney Olympic Farce)

<http://www.cat.org.au/pissoff/>

Green Games Watch 2000

<http://www.nccnsw.org.au/member/ggw/about/>

Gamesinfo.com

<http://www.gamesinfo.com.au/>

Sydney Olympic Park

<http://www.sydneyolympicpark.nsw.gov.au/>

Impact of the Games on Olympic host cities

The impact of an Olympic Games on a host city is a matter of continuing debate and even controversy. Staging an Olympic Games represents a long and expensive commitment of a city to this peak sporting festival. The impact can be divided into four separate periods: the winning of the right to host the Games; the seven year preparation period; the staging the Games themselves and the post-Games period. There are particular challenges faced in each of the four periods.

There are a wide range of views about the impact of the Olympic Games on host cities. Some consider that the Games are a worthwhile investment in the global future of a city whereas others regard such a commitment as problematic because the Games have become too large and costly. There is also much debate about the benefits versus the burdens of hosting an Olympic Games. Some, such as radical scholar Helen Lenskyj, contend that the benefits and burdens are unequally shared. There has also been discussion about whether there is adequate consultation of the host community before a bid is launched and whether hosting the Games leads to an erosion of human rights in the host city.

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