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Optimising the potential of mega-events: an overview

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the reasons that mega-events rarely realise their potential for host destinations and to suggest issues that need to be addressed in rectifying this issue.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper is based on a synthesis of the literature as well as the substantial event-related experience of the authors.

Findings – The key reason that mega-events do not generate the expected benefits for the host destination is that event organisers and destination managers adopt a short-term perspective rather than seeing mega-events as part of a long-term strategy for the destination. Even the planned legacies are often not realised as resource constraints in the lead up to the staging of the event often results in resources being shifted away from planning for legacies and being allocated to helping cover the more immediate needs of the event.

Research limitations/implications – If the mega-event knowledge portal that is proposed in this paper to help improve the overall contribution that mega-events make to host destinations is developed, it will prove to be a fertile source of data for longitudinal research in the field of mega-events.

Originality/value – As so many mega-events fail to deliver the expected benefits for the host destination, this paper provides some useful insights into the key issues that need to be addressed in order to help overcome this problem.

Keywords Benefits, Sporting events, Festivals

Paper type General review



Introduction

Mega-events can generate a raft of benefits and costs for the host destination, both in the shorter and longer terms, and are commonly regarded as catalysts for development (Cornelissen and Swart, 2006; Swart and Bob, 2007). As a result of the fact that they involve so many different stakeholders and are time sensitive, the manner in which they

have traditionally been managed has often not been optimal. Whilst governments and communities seek to attract and develop mega-events for a wide range of reasons, the key objectives tend to be economic with particular focus on the generation of foreign exchange earnings, increases in gross domestic product and employment and unlocking new economic development opportunities. This can be expected to shift if contemporary views on economic and social values change, as recently suggested by President Nicolas Sarkozy. It can also be expected to shift further as the transformation to a Green Economy takes hold in the coming decades.

Mega-events have traditionally been the preserve of developed nations but over the last decade, an increasing number of developing countries have recognised the potential of mega-events to act as catalysts on their paths to sustainable development. South Africa, for example, has secured several important global events since the country was democratised, including the 1995 Rugby World Cup, the 20th Africa Cup of Nations in 1996; the 2001 United Nations World Conference on Racism; the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development; and the 2003 Cricket World Cup.

The legacy of the Rugby World Cup, the first mega-event after the advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994, was global publicity showing South Africans uniting behind the national team across deeply entrenched social divides. The image of Nelson Mandela wearing a Springbok rugby shirt and cap, presenting the Webb Ellis trophy to the white South African captain, Francois Pienaar, endures in minds of all South Africans. The event eventually inspired, some 13 years later, the movie “Invictus”, starring Morgan Freeman as Nelson Mandela and Matt Damon as Captain Francois Pienaar, thereby strengthening the global legacy of the event.

In 2009 alone, South Africa witnessed eight of the world’s top soccer teams competing for two weeks in the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) Confederations Cup. The British and Irish Lions toured the country whilst eight Indian Premier League cricket teams were successfully hosted at short notice (Saunders, 2009). The 2010 FIFA World Cup™ that was hosted in South Africa from 11 June to 11 July 2010 is another example of the opportunities provided by mega-events. These opportunities include: exposing the country (South Africa) and the continent (Africa), to the world; massive new investment in infrastructure (e.g. stadiums, accommodation, airports, roads, public transport systems) by both the private and public sector; an upgraded safety and security net and criminal justice system; the introduction of new information and communications technology.

In the hosting of mega-events, there are often a number of challenges and competing interests that need to be addressed. Much of these revolve around public perceptions – globally and locally – and therefore transparent and responsive management is required. Lamenting on the need for transparency, Del Olmo (2004) writes: “we cannot forget that when a mega-event is organised, the money that really flows into a city is, in the first place, public money that falls into the hands of private businessmen. It is difficult to understand how the city expects to obtain incomes by organising a mega-event, and how little the urban government cares”. It is therefore important to streamline stakeholders’ expectations in a transparent manner. The Human Sciences Research Council 2007 survey of South Africans’ perceptions of the value of the 2010 FIFA World Cup™ showed that even before the real build-up for the event in the country started, that 50 per cent of the respondents believed that the event will bring sustainable economic growth and new jobs, whilst a third expected personal

benefits (Tomlinson *et al.*, 2009, p. 4). The alignment of expectations was amplified by Pillay and Bass (2009) who considered whether the upcoming event can reduce urban poverty and then concluded that a pro-poor approach cannot be independent of pro-growth concerns and that the legacy of the event must be realistically defined.

Mega-events

Whilst mega-events are often regarded as a recent phenomenon, they actually have a long history dating back to tribal conclaves and religious festivities. For the purpose of this paper with its strong links to sport, 776 BC is identified as a milestone when the first Olympic Games were staged in Greece (Swadling, 2002). Throughout the ages, festivals and events have been important elements of community life in most cultures and with the boom in international tourism since the commencement of the “jet age” in the mid-twentieth century, they have become key ingredients of the tourism product for many destinations. However, it has really only been in the last 30 years that the role of mega-events as catalysts for destination development and destination branding has become more widely recognised. The 1992 Olympic Games hosted in Barcelona is an excellent example of a mega-event being used in the re-development and re-positioning of a destination. The wider recognition of the destination development potential of mega-events has led to a proliferation in the number of mega-events on offer and substantial competition between destinations for the right to host many of these events.

Although there are various definitions for mega-events (Ritchie, 1984; Jago and Shaw, 1998; Hall, 2006; Humphreys and Prokopowicz, 2007), this paper will consider mega-events as large-scale events marked by global publicity, attracting substantial international visitation and associated with large-scale economic, social or environmental impacts. Mega-events can include three main categories of events, namely, sport, cultural and business. Whilst the fundamentals for each of these three categories of mega-events is very much the same, mega-business events have a range of outcomes that extend beyond those of mega-sport and mega-cultural events. Business events play an important role in generating export sales and fostering innovation, which extends beyond the outcomes usually associated with sport and cultural events. The focus of this paper is on mega-sporting events, but most of the arguments and recommendations apply equally to the other two categories of mega-events.

Mega-events have become an integral part of strategies designed to promote cities as tourism destinations (Law, 1996). An early example of a destination that has focused on mega-sporting events in order to build its brand and underpin its tourism industry is Melbourne in Australia. During the 1970s and 1980s, Melbourne’s economic and tourism performance experienced substantial decline and by the early 1990s was commonly regarded as Australia’s “rust bucket”. From a tourism perspective, Melbourne had no unique natural or manmade attractions upon which a tourism brand could be based and its tourism market share was slipping. As Melbourne had substantial sporting infrastructure and a long history of staging successful sporting events, a decision was made by the new Kennett Government to use events as Melbourne’s competitive edge. Rather than relying on the occasional one-off mega-event, Melbourne put together an annual calendar of mega-sporting events supplemented by some one-off events. Melbourne now has a strong international reputation for hosting successful mega-sporting events, its sporting infrastructure has expanded considerably, and its tourism market share has demonstrated impressive growth (Tourism Research

Australia, 2009). This has also been a factor in the international perception of Australia as a sports nation and also its global tourism brand.

Mega-events have traditionally been seen as a component of tourism and have appeared as such in national and regional tourism plans. More recently, however, the fundamental importance of their contribution has been recognised with an increasing number of strategic plans giving events equal billing with tourism by titling their plans "Tourism and Event Plans" (Tourism Victoria, 2006, "Ten year tourism and events industry strategy").

Impacts of events

Mega-events have a wide range of potential positive and negative impacts for the host destination and they are both short- and long-term. They can help "re-prioritise urban agendas, create post event usage debates, often stimulate urban redevelopment, and are instruments of boosterist ideologies promoting economic growth" (Hiller, 2003, p. 449). Although there is now substantial competition between destinations to host mega-events, there are "significant gaps between forecast and actual outcomes, between economic and non-economic rewards, between the experience of mega-events in advanced and in developing societies" (Horne and Manzenreiter, 2006, p. i).

Based on an extensive review of the literature and many years working with mega-event organisers and host destinations, Tables I and II have been compiled, which present many of the potential positive and negative impacts, respectively, that can be produced by mega-events for the host destination.

Tables I and II indicate that the potential positive and negative impacts of mega-events are quite diverse and both short- and long-term in nature. It is also clear that there can be both positive and negative impacts within a single category,

Impact	Description	Source
Economic	Short term cash injection; increased sales by local businesses; foreign exchange earnings from international visitors; job creation; poverty alleviation	Getz (1994), Mules and Faulkner (1996), Dwyer <i>et al.</i> (2000)
Business leveraging	Increased sales and investment	Crompton and McKay (1994), O'Brien (2006)
Destination branding	Setting or changing the image of the host destination	Jago <i>et al.</i> (2003), Smith (2005), Donaldson and Ferreira (2007)
Induced tourism	Increased visitation after the event due to promotion generated by the event	Dwyer <i>et al.</i> (2000), Getz (2008), Macfarlane and Jago (2009)
Regional development	Act as a catalyst for regional development	Ryan and Lockyer (2001), Crompton <i>et al.</i> (2001), Cornelissen and Swart (2006)
Legacies	Enhanced infrastructure; enhanced skill base	Dickinson <i>et al.</i> (2007), Cornelissen (2007), Smith and Fox (2007)
Social	Enhanced community pride; increased sport participation	Burns <i>et al.</i> (1986), Fredline <i>et al.</i> (2003), Henwood and Pretorius (2008), Cornelissen (2007), Nadvi (2008), Pillay and Bass (2008)
Environment	Increased environmental awareness	Sherwood <i>et al.</i> (2005)
Climate	Increased focus on minimising carbon footprint	DeLacy and Lipman (2010)

Table I.
Potential positive impacts
of mega-events for host
destinations

Table II.
Potential negative
impacts of mega-events
for host destinations

Impact	Description	Source
Economic	Increased prices for services and housing; draws resources from other sectors; impacts upon the exchange rate; legacy infrastructure that is a financial drain on the host destination	Matheson (2002), Blake (2005), Dwyer <i>et al.</i> (2005, 2006a, b), Madden (2006), Jago and Dwyer (2006)
Social	Congestion; noise; crime; reduced funding for community sport due to focus on elite sport	Matheson and Baade (2003a, b), Fredline <i>et al.</i> (2003), Pillay and Bass (2008)
Development	Inappropriate development; the local community feels disenfranchised due to fast track planning approvals on development	Baade and Matheson (2004), Crompton (2006), Matheson (2006, 2008), Coates and Matheson (2009)
Image	Tarnished brand and reduced destination pride due to problems at the event	Jago <i>et al.</i> (2003), Coates and Matheson (2009)
Environment	Excessive energy and water usage	Sherwood <i>et al.</i> (2005)
Climate	Excessive carbon footprint	DeLacy and Bergin-Seers (2009)
Security	Terrorist target due to high media profile	Nadvi (2008), Donaldson and Ferreira (2007)

such as economic effects. This observation underscores the fact that mega-events must be well planned and managed if they are to maximise their net contribution to a host destination.

In order to effectively plan and manage mega-events, it is crucial that they be evaluated on a regular basis as if you “don’t measure it, you can’t manage it”. Using a risk reduction approach, if there is a high likelihood of an adverse impact taking place, then there is an obligation to take early action to minimise such impact. For example, an offset program should be organised to counter the evident carbon footprint increase from air and ground travel as has been done by the organisers of the 2010 Canadian Winter Olympics and the 2009 UNFCCC Copenhagen Climate Change Summit.

Mega-event evaluation

Unfortunately, the economic evaluation of mega-events has often fallen short of “state of the art” assessment standards. Not only has the focus tended to be on the short-term economic impacts of events, but the evaluations that have been undertaken have often been accused of being overstated by adopting overly optimistic assumptions in the economic modelling and ignoring many of the associated costs.

The type of model employed in event impact assessment will determine the size of multipliers that underpin the estimates of changes in output, value added, and employment resulting from the staging of a mega-event. Researchers now emphasise that it is unrealistic to estimate multipliers from input-output (I-O) models that assume no capacity constraints and consequently no impact of the event on wages or prices. The assumption of constant prices alone makes these models unsuitable for event assessment generally and particularly for mega-events (Blake, 2005; Dwyer *et al.*, 2005, 2006a, b). As a consequence, government funding agencies in many destinations no longer place any credence on the event evaluations that are produced using traditional methods such as estimating the multiplier effects using I-O modelling (Victorian Auditor General, 2007).

It is crucial that state of the art assessment techniques, such as computable general equilibrium (CGE) models be used to estimate the economic significance of a mega-event since the estimates produced will inevitably influence resource allocation decisions (Dwyer *et al.*, 2005, 2006a, b; Jago and Dwyer, 2006). CGE models recognise that relative prices of land, labour and capital may change due to an event, causing businesses to change the composition of their inputs. When there are capacity constraints, the prices of inputs and wages will increase in the face of an increase in demand. These price rises, including (for some destinations) any upward pressure on the exchange rate due to increased foreign expenditure associated with an event, will limit the extent of economic expansion associated with the event, reduce destination price competitiveness, and may even lead to contractions in economic activity in some sectors. This may pose a particular problem for developing countries with floating exchange rates given the potentially adverse effects of currency appreciation on traditional export and import competing industries.

In many countries world wide, there is chronic unemployment/underemployment, and their reduction is a potential gain from the hosting of a mega-event. A factor in favour of hosting mega-events in developing nations is the widespread availability of unemployed or underemployed labour. In the presence of underemployment, the opportunity cost of labour is zero (Matheson, 2008). Therefore, if an increase in inbound tourism, for example, leads to additional economic activity and thus to less unemployment (or underemployment) in the destination, there will be a net benefit to the economy. The workings of the labour market are particularly relevant to mega-event economic impact assessment (Dwyer *et al.*, 2006a, b). If the demand for labour increases and there is unemployment in the economy, the real wage stays constant, unemployment will be reduced, and economic activity will increase significantly. On the other hand, if the response to an increase in demand for labour is a wage increase, which can take place even though there is considerable unemployment, the impact on unemployment will be much less, as will be the impact on overall economic activity.

The potential for mega-events to generate additional income and employment also provides opportunities for wealth re-distribution through facilitating the entry of disadvantaged individuals into the market economy. The development agenda for the 2010 FIFA World Cup™ contains a special commitment to achieving “shared growth” in tourism. Initiatives which could apply to any developing destination include required professional services for business development, embracing quality certification, debt and equity finance, appropriate business planning, packaging, legal advice, and marketing and technology support (Rogerson, 2009).

It is, however, often not generally realised that a focus only on economic impacts is too narrow in scope to provide sufficient information to policy makers and government funding agencies. Where practical, a more comprehensive approach should be employed to fully embrace triple bottom-line evaluation by giving the required weighting to social and environmental impacts; in other words, externalities should be priced in addition to economic impacts (Jago and Dwyer, 2006; Victoria Auditor General, 2007). This flags the potential importance of cost-benefit analysis (CBA) in event evaluation (Fleischer and Felsenstein, 2002; Shaffer *et al.*, 2003). CBA is necessary for any destination to answer the question: do mega-sporting events provide a boost to the host nation's economy that justifies the substantial costs and risks? On the basis of a CBA, it is possible for decision makers to make judgements as to whether the economic benefits of an event are greater

than the costs, including the costs of externalities. This type of assessment also allows one to judge whether the event would represent the best use of the funds to promote wider sustainable development objectives, when funds are limited and alternative calls on funds exist (Dwyer and Forsyth, 2010).

Contribution to destination development

For developing countries, winning the right to stage a mega-event can be a catalyst for destination development and provides a base for creating an international profile that will help attract visitation in the longer term (Cornelissen and Swart, 2006). The local organising committee (LOC) of the 2010 FIFA World Cup™, for example, set out to achieve improvement of Africa's global image by establishing the African Legacy Programme in November 2006. This program is a joint responsibility of the LOC and the South African Government, with the latter providing the bulk of the budget for the Legacy Projects (FIFA, 2010).

In addressing the gathering of the 2010 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, South African President Jacob Zuma highlighted South Africa's 2010 FIFA World Cup readiness stating that "It is an opportunity to tackle stereotypes and preconceptions about the continent, and explore new frontiers of interaction and cooperation. It is an important milestone in the regeneration of the continent" (Zwane, 2010).

Similarly, the UK bid for the 2012 Olympics and Rio's successful bid for the 2016 games contained strong legacy commitments which related to national socio-economic and sustainability goals that extend beyond the sports arena.

Funds can often be attracted from external agencies to help construct the infrastructure necessary to host such events. Although funds are invariably required to build or expand the sporting infrastructure that is available to stage the mega-event, much of the new infrastructure that is generally required involves the airport, roads, public transport systems, tourism accommodation and telecommunications, all of which are fundamental components of travel and tourism. They also have long term benefits for the host destination and act as a lasting legacy of the event.

Mega-events also provide opportunities for destinations to address existing income and wealth differentials. Substantial local employment is generally created in constructing the infrastructure required for a mega-event and economic benefit is created for local businesses supplying goods and services in support of this development. The employment created, skills developed and cash injected to local businesses during the construction phase can help respond to short-term economic needs, contribute to longer term poverty alleviation and increase the skills base of the workforce in the host destination.

The preparation/construction phase for a mega-event can attract substantial external investment to the host region by both the private and public sectors and generate many jobs. However, if the benefit is to be long lasting then both the construction of facilities and the event itself need to be seen as part of a long-term destination development strategy. Where destinations see the mega-event as an end in itself rather than as a catalyst for development, they simply miss the full potential from hosting the mega-event. What is often required is a shift from the "end goal" mindset to a "milestone" mindset.

There are substantial opportunities to generate local employment during both the construction and operational phases of mega-events. In developing countries, however,

many of the skills needed for other than the lower level labouring positions are not readily available and labour is brought in from outside the country. As a consequence, the skill legacy of these mega-events is often not great as the skilled staff leave the country after the tasks have been completed. For countries to maximise the skill legacy of mega-events and to enhance the range of long-term employment prospects for local people, it is essential that skills training or apprenticeship type programs are put in place so that there is a real transfer of skills from external experts to local workers. Many of the skills acquired as part of this process will have application well beyond the events industry and will help enhance expertise within the host destination. This is particularly relevant for the poorest countries where this kind of capacity building can provide essential skills for infrastructure and service delivery that can help in broader long-term nation building. Whilst impact assessments of mega-events tend to stress the potential quantity of jobs created, the types and quality of those jobs must not be neglected. It is critical, therefore, that skills development of local people for management positions be an important part of the capacity building program, not just for the more menial positions.

If the building of infrastructure needed to host a mega-event is seen as part of a longer term development plan for the destination, then it is more likely that community consultation will have already taken place. This means that there are enhanced prospects to deliver development that is in line with community needs and lasting legacies are more likely to result from the mega-event. Ideally, private sector funding can help to complement public sector outlays on facilities development. A major criticism of the hosting of mega-events that is often made is that fast track planning processes are enacted in order to meet the building timelines required to stage the mega-event. The opportunity for community consultation and for objections to be raised about the proposed development is often removed under fast track planning schemes adopted for mega-events. Not only does this risk alienating the local community but it can lead to developments that are not in line with community needs and interests.

A major objective of the planning for the 2010 FIFA World Cup is to spread the opportunities offered by this event widely, so as to include small tourism enterprises rather than just the large ones that control and dominate South Africa's tourism economy (Rogerson, 2009). For the first time in the history of the World Cup, an agreement has been made with MATCH Events Services, the FIFA agency, that 10,000 of the estimated 55,000 rooms to be contracted for the 2010 FIFA World Cup are to be reserved for non-hotel rooms that will be offered by small tourism establishments and will include bed-and-breakfasts, guesthouses and backpacker lodges. Moreover, as part of its commitment to a development agenda, the South African Government has initiated an active support program for assisting and upgrading opportunities for emerging tourism entrepreneurs through the Tourism Enterprise Partnership (Rogerson, 2009).

It is clear that mega-events can have very positive impacts on a host destination's urban space but they can also diminish the quality of life of some groups in the community. As mega-events are often used to re-develop rundown parts of the host destination, lower socio-economic groups who live in these rundown districts are often relocated to other regions sometimes with little or no voice in the matter. Whilst these forced relocations are seen as being in the greater good for the destination, they can cause serious trauma for those being relocated. This occurred during the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta where disadvantaged groups were forced from their homes or living spaces and in some cases even forced from the city (Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions

(COHRE), 2007). Clearly, such adverse impacts can be avoided through event planning that takes a long term perspective and constructs “safety nets” for those who might otherwise be disadvantaged. Some groups can be relatively disadvantaged simply because of their location. For example, Blake estimated that the economic welfare of people living in and nearby London would be positively affected by the Olympics 2012 whilst those living elsewhere in the UK would suffer reduced economic welfare (Blake, 2005). Depending on the inter-industry affects, people working in traditional export and import competing industries may be disadvantaged by a mega-event held in the destination relative to those in more tourism and event related industry sectors (Dwyer *et al.*, 2006a, b).

Whilst the construction of sporting facilities needed to host a mega-event will result in legacies for the host community, there are many examples around the world where the facilities constructed to meet the needs of hosting the mega-sporting event are too large or of inappropriate design to be used by the local community subsequent to the event (Matheson and Baade, 2003b). Maintenance of these facilities alone can become a serious drain on community resources and some facilities remain unused long after the mega-event has concluded. This again supports the need to ensure that the hosting of a mega-event is seen as part of a long-term development plan and that legacy issues are well considered in the planning process. It may be that some of the facilities required for the mega-event should be temporary so that they can be dismantled at the completion of the event so as to avoid facilities that are under-utilised or not used at all. For the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, it was recognised that there would not be the longer term need for a very large stadium in Atlanta. As a consequence, some of the stands required in the stadium to host the Olympics were removed after the Games resulting in a stadium of a size consistent with the needs of the host community. Similarly, the 2000 Barcelona Exposition had a serious shortage of hotel space and therefore brought in a number of cruise ships to serve as temporary hotels. This “out of the box” idea has been copied at subsequent events, including the Athens Olympics and the Copenhagen Climate Summit.

The cost to provide the infrastructure needed to host many of the mega-sporting events on offer is typically very high, often well beyond the resources of a developing country. As there may not be the post event demand for a large increase in sporting facilities within a single country, there may be the opportunity to share the hosting of the mega-sporting event across a number of countries as sometimes occurs with world soccer (Japan and Korea), rugby (the UK and France) and cricket events. Not only does this share the cost of hosting the event and enhance the post event utilisation of facilities, but it increases the size of the population seen to be hosting the event. It also allows countries who would individually never have the opportunity to host such an event to be part of the “halo effect” in tourism terms generating visitor arrivals, revenues and brand strengthening. This may well promote regional integration and foster business development over time.

Key issues influencing the impact of mega-events on destinations

Role of the media

The interest in mega-sporting events extends well beyond the actual attendees at the event, indeed, there is an enormous thirst for information from consumers around the world as to how certain athletes or teams fare in the event. Media organisations pay vast

amounts of funding for broadcast rights in the expectation that advertising programs during the broadcasts will attract a premium rates.

As a consequence, the media plays a very important role in the dissemination of information and this creates strong potential for tourism interest. For mega-sporting events such as the Olympics or the FIFA World Cup, the media contingent at the event is substantial often involving several hundred members of the media. The cumulative number of viewers for the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa is expected to be 32 billion.

As the media often arrives at the destination well before the commencement of the mega-event and often has substantial time outside the activities of the event after it commences, the media will invariably seek additional stories from the destination itself. Whilst this can generate invaluable publicity for the destination if the media portrays positive stories, it can pose serious problems for the destination if the media focuses on negative dimensions of the destination.

As “bad news sells”, the media will often look for negative stories, which is why the plight of disadvantaged groups within the host community often receive media attention during mega-events. As indicated earlier, in the construction of facilities for the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, some disadvantaged and minority groups were relocated against their will to other regions so that redevelopment could occur. Some of the international media who went to Atlanta to cover the Olympics focused on this relocation issue and generated international publicity that tarnished Atlanta’s reputation – at least in the short term.

Not only is it important that a host destination does everything possible to ensure that there are not community frictions caused by hosting the mega-event but it is crucial that the host destination has a large supply of well developed stories for distribution to the media on the positive dimensions of the destination that the host wishes to promote. As many in the media welcome assistance in meeting their copy requirements, there is a good chance that many elements of the stories prepared by the destination will be utilised. It is important to manage media relationships very carefully if a destination is to derive maximum benefit from the media exposure generated by a mega-event.

Building on the work that Tourism Australia (formerly the Australian Tourist Commission) undertook prior to the Sydney Olympics in 2000, many destinations now have substantial visiting journalist programs (VJPs) whereby groups of journalists are invited to visit the host destination well in advance of the event commencing. As part of these VJPs, journalists are shown around the destination and provided with stories and film clips to promote the assets of the destination that can be utilised by the media before, during and after the event being staged. This helps to increase the international coverage of the destination generated by the mega-event. Such coverage is greatly helped by the role of multimedia such as Google Maps, and the like in promoting the destination and enhancing the visitor experience.

Some destinations use the hosting of a mega-event as part of a process to reposition themselves in the “eyes of the world” with the expectation that international media coverage of the event will convey this message. The very positive media coverage that the 1995 Rugby World Cup received helped in South Africa’s quest to re-engage the international community and acted as an affirmation of the arrival of the “new” South Africa (Henwood and Pretorius, 2008). In a similar fashion, the extensive media

coverage of the Beijing Olympics in 2008 helped demonstrate China's capacity to "host the world" and that it was keen to engage with other countries.

However, there is always the chance that some type of serious mishap can occur during the staging of a mega-event either at the event itself or in the host destination. Examples of this were the bombing in Centennial Park and the transport difficulties during the Atlanta Olympics in 1996. Protesters in Tibet and their supporters around the world, actually used the global interest in the Beijing Olympics to attract media interest to their cause before the games. Given that there are so many members of the media present during the event, any such problems will get international coverage very quickly. It is essential, therefore, that there is a media management plan to address potential problems. This will greatly reduce the chance of the media communicating incorrect information and further exacerbating an already difficult situation. This highlights the need for contingency planning at all stages of the event (prior, during and post) and the development of comprehensive crisis management strategies.

Whilst media attention has large potential benefits for a host destination, it is a double edged sword and can cause serious problems if not well managed.

Technology

Advances in technology are enhancing the manner in which spectators both at the mega-event itself and at home can engage with the activity that takes place in the event. These advances are most pronounced in presenting coverage of events via television and on the web. Improving umpiring decisions, providing immediate action replays and interpretations of the event are all tangible ways in which technology is being used to enhance the access and enjoyment of mega-sporting events.

The increased use of event live sites where large screens in the host destination away from the stadia and, indeed, at remote destinations away from the host city can greatly increase the size of the audience that feels engaged in the event (Fleischer and Felsenstein, 2002). Similarly, the use of handheld technology, the advent of You Tube, the massive impact of social media and the spread of broadband has helped to extend the coverage of mega-events dramatically.

Security

As a result of the enormous international media attention that many mega-events receive, they have increasingly become targets for the activities of protest and terrorist groups. The activities of these groups can range from demonstrations and blockades through to bomb threats, bombings, kidnappings and killings. Even though these activities are seen as more recent phenomena, it should be remembered that the Munich Olympics in 1972 saw 11 Israeli athletes killed by terrorists, and TV networks engaged the world very quickly in the tragedy.

A recent example of the impact of terrorism on a mega-sporting event was when a bus carrying Togo's national football team in Angola came under fire on its way to the prestigious Africa Cup of Nations (Togo's soccer team attacked in Angola, 2010). This event received substantial negative international media coverage and resulted in the Togo team pulling out of the event and a number of other teams considering such a move. Attacks on cricketers have resulted in Pakistan's exclusion as host for major cricket events, which was a tragedy for an impoverished country. According to Kennelly (2005, p. i), the "literature on current trends in terrorism suggests that many features

of modern, globalised sport may increase its desirability as a target to some terrorists in the future”.

As the consequences of such activities are so serious for a host destination, great effort is now expended to prevent such problems occurring. This has resulted in the cost of security provided for mega-events increasing enormously and if such costs continue to escalate, they risk becoming a disincentive for destinations even bidding to host mega-events. The 2004 Olympic Games in Athens were the first games held after the terrorist attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001 (so called 9/11). This tragic event prompted drastic changes to the steps needed to minimise terrorism and the heightened security required for the Athens Olympics put the host destination under great financial pressure. Security measures alone cost Athens USD 1.5 billion (Matheson, 2006).

Security has a special dimension where the event is of a quasi political nature and organised protests put major strains on policing organisations and add massively to the costs. (See for example, the Seattle Trade Talks, the Copenhagen Climate Summit and the Davos World Economic Forum where the entire village is locked down for a week).

Optimising the contributions

It has been shown in this paper that whilst mega-events have enormous potential to underpin the sustainable development of destinations and to help develop an international tourism brand, such potential is rarely realised. This section summarises some of the factors that will enhance the prospects for a destination to derive maximum value from the staging of a mega-event.

Mega-event should be part of a long-term development plan

The hosting of a mega-event should not be seen as an “end in itself” but rather part of a longer-term development plan or positioning strategy. If a destination has a long term development plan in place, the hosting of a mega-event can act as a catalyst for bringing forward development opportunities. This applies particularly for developing countries where the outcomes will more likely have greater lasting benefits since infrastructure required for the mega-event will be part of a larger development framework.

Mega-event should be part of a long-term marketing plan

For developed countries, hosting a mega-event can play an important role in helping to brand or re-brand a destination. It is important for the branding/marketing opportunity sought from hosting a mega-event to be seen as part of a longer term strategic marketing plan for the destination as opposed to a one-off marketing event. Private sector operators can also leverage mega-events to do their own branding.

Although some destinations are becoming more strategic in their use of events, “the focus is still operational and *ad hoc*, resulting in missed opportunities” (Pugh and Wood, 2004, p. 61). After the staging of the mega-event, there is often merit in developing an ongoing suite of events that will utilise the infrastructure built for the mega-event and enhance the profile and reputation of the destination over time.

Community engagement

As local community support is crucial for the success of mega-events, it is important that they are actively engaged in the planning and management of the events and have a major voice in the types of legacies that will be pursued. Too often, the hosting of

a mega-event is not part of a longer term development plan and as such, planning tends to occur “on the run”, which limits the level of community consultation and engagement that can take place. The most successful events world wide are those that engage the local community. The more the community understands the benefits that can accrue from the event (what is in it for them), the more likely they are to be supportive of it and provide the appropriate level of hospitality to visitors.

Legacies

Legacies are crucial and must be factored into the planning for mega-events in a substantial fashion. The Olympic movement paid little more than lip service to this dimension until recent times when legacy was introduced as a formal part of the bidding process. However, this dimension is still jettisoned at the first sign of trouble in terms of timelines or budget constraints. It is important to recognise that legacies can be physical in terms of infrastructure but they can also relate to skill development, enhanced image, climate responsiveness, community pride and ultimately transformation to the green economy. Legacies have the potential also to promote trade and to foster closer business ties between destinations over time. If legacies are to be realised, there needs to be a separate group to the event organising body responsible for legacies and this group must have a separate budget that cannot be transferred back into the event operations budget when funds become tight.

Holistic evaluation

There is a need for holistic evaluation of mega-events in order to assess the range of benefits and costs that are delivered by a mega-event. This will likely be achieved via CBAs. Even though an individual event may not be hosted in a destination again for some considerable time, the learnings from the evaluation can be used in the running of subsequent events to ensure that their potential is maximised. In these evaluations, it is important that costs and benefits are considered rather than simply impacts. The social return from events and their contributions towards sustainability are important factors.

Corporate engagement and public/private partnerships

As a result of the scale, cost, infrastructure synergy and increasingly global media coverage, mega-events have become focal points for broad scale public/private partnerships (PPP) and corporate sponsorship engagement. A PPP describes a government service or private business venture which is funded and operated through a partnership between government and one or more private sector companies. In some types of PPP, the government uses tax revenue to provide capital for investment, with operations run jointly with the private sector or under contract. In other types, capital investment is undertaken by the private sector under contract with government to provide agreed services. Government contributions to a PPP may also be in kind (notably the transfer of existing assets for use by the partnership). The government may also provide a capital subsidy in the form of a one-time grant, so as to make the partnership more attractive to the private investors. In some other cases, the government may support the project by providing revenue subsidies, including tax concessions or by providing guaranteed annual revenues for a fixed period. PPPs fall very much in the realm of evolving public procurement practices and as such are subject to international and national regulatory regimes.

Effective involvement of the media

As there is so much global interest in the outcomes of mega-events, they generate a massive concentration of national and global media with all of the challenges and opportunities this brings. The management of communications is a huge part of the planning and execution of such events with logistical, physical and technological demands at the highest level.

It is critical that there be a comprehensive media framework in place as well as an interface with tourism and trade branding to ensure the development of stories and film clips for the media to use in order to maximise the chance of positive publicity. The media plan will also prove to be vital if there is a serious mishap during the event.

Mega-event knowledge portal

The issues discussed in the previous section are important to be addressed in seeking to maximise the contribution that mega-events can make to a destination. Knowledge that is acquired by one destination in relation to the hosting of a mega-event needs to be shared with other destinations so that the operation of mega-events continually improves and the contribution that they bring to destinations is enhanced.

As many of the mega-sporting events move from one destination to another, opportunities are often lost to build corporate knowledge about the management, impacts and legacies of these events. As a consequence, many mistakes are repeated and there is limited opportunity to replicate strategies that proved successful for previous events. Whilst a number of the key event “owners” such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and FIFA are now trying to build knowledge from one event to another, little has been done to consolidate such knowledge across events. There is a need to explore the opportunity to create a web-based repository of knowledge (portal) about mega-sporting events under the auspices of an international body. This portal could be accessed by destinations seeking to bid for events and in managing events they have won the right to stage in order to enhance both short- and long-term outcomes.

Data and knowledge would need to be captured from a wide range of contributors including event organisers, host destinations, sporting bodies, consultants and academic researchers. Frameworks would need to be developed to make the knowledge accessible and lists of expertise could be included that could be used to assist destinations interpret the findings to ensure that the learnings are effectively utilised.

Whilst there would be substantial challenges in consolidating event related information from a wide variety of sources in the vast array of categories of mega-sporting events, the benefits for destinations at all stages of development would be considerable. For the proposed knowledge portal to have any chance of becoming a reality, it would need to be developed and maintained under the auspices of an international body that could muster the support of major events across a wide range of categories and sport codes.

Conclusion

Although mega-events have the potential to make substantial and lasting contributions to host destinations, these contributions are rarely realised. One of the main reasons for this under-performance is that organisers tend not to see mega-events as part of a long-term strategy for the destination. The result is missed opportunities to generate long-lasting benefits from mega-events.

Legacies of mega-events are generally important elements of the decision to bid for the right to host a mega-event and contribute substantially to the overall net benefit of a mega-event. The fact that resource constraints in the lead up to a mega-event often results in diverting resources away from legacies to the operational division means that the hoped for legacies of the event are often not delivered. This can lead to increased disillusionment amongst the host population about the net benefit of hosting the event.

In order to facilitate the transfer of mega-event operational knowledge from one destination to another and to enhance the overall contribution that mega-events can make, it is proposed that the development of a mega-sporting event knowledge portal would be a substantial step forward. Such a portal would help build knowledge in an accessible form and reduce the likelihood of destinations having to “reinvent the wheel”. For a knowledge portal to be successful, support from the key event agencies such as IOC and FIFA would be important.

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