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Host Residents' Support of the Summer 1996 Olympic Games

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ABSTRACT

Hallmark or mega-events have been widely hailed as opportunities to enhance the awareness and appeal of tourist destinations. Because hallmark or mega events such as the Olympic games hold the market potential for national and international tourism development, studies of host residents' support of the Olympic games hold special significance. The purpose of this study was to examine Atlanta, residents on their perceptions of the State of Georgia hosting the 1996 Olympic games. Pre and post Olympic comparisons of residents showed strong support for Georgia hosting the Olympic games, limited change is willingness to attend Olympic events, and statistically significant differences for perceived economic benefits, improvement in citizen pride, and to a lesser extent, increased future tourism benefits.

INTRODUCTION

There has been little systematic effort in the past to monitor and report the impact that a hallmark event such as the Olympic Games has upon the host city and its residents (17). Hallmark or mega-events have been defined as one time or recurring events that enhance the awareness and appeal of a tourist destination (16). Mega-events of this type hold the market potential for national and international tourism development (6, 7, 10, 11, 15). The Olympic games are possibly the greatest of all hallmark events. The varied activities surrounding the games are powerful opportunities for image enhancement with national and international visitors, and at the same time creates pride for the local citizenry. In recent years, researchers have begun to examine resident's perceptions of the impact of Olympic games. This is particularly important since residents can have

both positive and negative influences on the experience of visitors to their community.

In a study that examined Canadian residents' attitudes of the 1988 Winter Olympic games in Calgary, results indicated a generally high support for hosting the Olympic games (17). The two most important reasons Calgary residents supported the Olympic games were its potential to promote/increase awareness of Calgary, and to increase tourism. This reflected the strong realization of the significance of the games to the development of Calgary as a travel destination (18). Despite the strong support for hosting Olympic games in general, problems of cultural change and anxiety, social stress in the host community, and social dislocation resulting from changes to the pattern of economic production, may be identified in a wide number of case studies undertaken in a variety of cultures and social settings (7). This was evident in a study of Seoul, South Korean residents where most respondents indicated a concern about the commercialization of cultural values and traditions through the Olympics (11). Given the vast potential for cultural change, community development, global media attention, future tourism enhancement, host community involvement, and subsequent citizen pride, the need for systematic research and analysis has been advocated (3, 5, 7, 10, 11, 16).

In addition to research on the general impact of the Olympic games, because of the growing prominence of women in tourism and tourism-related activities, the need to examine gender influences on the Olympic games takes on an even greater significance. According to the Statistical Abstract of The United States: U.S. Bureau of Census, men and women vary in their attendance at sporting events – there was a 14% difference between men and women attending sporting events in 1992 despite a much narrower gap between the number of adult males and females living in the U.S. The Olympic games, as a leisure phenomenon is also important from a gender perspective. According to (8), gender is an essential stage of scholarship that offers relevance for the present and future understanding of women's leisure because it incorporates the social meanings of roles, unequal power, and cultural expectations.

The purpose of this research was to examine Atlanta residents on their perceptions of the state of Georgia hosting the 1996 Olympic games, and to examine their perceived benefits of these games. Pre and post Olympic comparisons of non-metro Atlanta and metro Atlanta residents, and males and females were analyzed. Percentages, chi square and t-test results were reported.

METHODOLOGY

The participants for this study were chosen from metro Atlanta and non-metro Atlanta. Metro Atlanta residents were defined as those living with the five counties of Fulton, Gwinnet, Dekalb, Cobb, and Clayton, while non-metro Atlanta residents were defined as those living outside of these areas. Residents' perceptions of the Olympic Games were collected as part of the Summer 1996 Georgia State Poll conducted by the Applied Research Center at Georgia State University, Atlanta Georgia, USA. A database purchased from Survey Sampling, Inc. provided a randomized list of Georgia telephone numbers. Survey Samples, Inc. maintained a database containing more than 3,300 telephone directories of listed household numbers. Duplicate telephone numbers were purged from this list automatically. All the working exchanges (first three numbers) and working blocks (next two numbers) were identified. Each exchange was assigned to a specific county proportionate to the esti-

mated number of households in each county. The numbers that composed the sample were randomly selected from the targeted area based on the stratification. Finally, Survey Sampling, Inc. eliminated business telephone numbers by removing known Yellow Page numbers from the sample (9).

Once a number was selected for the sample, it was entered into a computer-assisted telephone interviewing system. Trained interviewers called each of the approximately 2,400 households identified in the sample pool of numbers between 8 and 16 times in an effort to reach them. Once the phone was answered, the interviewer asked for the person over 18 who had the most recent birthday. From this point on, this person was identified as the qualified respondent in this household. The selection of the person over 18 with the most recent birthday ensured the randomness of the selection process. At the end of the survey, in addition to the demographic data collected, the respondent was asked, "How many persons over 18 live in this household?" The information obtained from these questions was used to create a category for weighing the number of phones and adults in each household. The weighting took into account the likelihood of particular residence being called by the Applied Research Center. In addition, the data set, once collected, was weighted to better reflect the actual population of the state of Georgia. The proportions from the 1990 U.S. Census were used for this weighting procedure (9).

A total of 2,400 subjects were utilized to generate the required minimum number of completed interviews. At the end of the poll, a simple response rate was calculated by using the number of completed interviews divided by the number of completed interviews, plus the number of refusals, plus the number of uncommitted call backs. For this study, no attempt was made to track the responses of the same individual over time as in a longitudinal panel-study. The examination of new, but similar individuals over time was classified as a trend study (2, 14, 19).

Two questions were designed as follows: (1) "If you still live in Georgia in 1996, do you expect to attend one or more of the Olympic events as a spectator?" (response options: yes, no) and (2) "All things considered, do you think it is a good idea for Georgia to host the 1996 Olympic games?" (response options: yes, not). Respondents were then asked questions that described the potential benefits of hosting the Olympic games in Georgia. The benefits questions were as follows "People often mention many different benefits that are associated with the 1996 Olympic games. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is a very small benefit and 10 is a very large benefit, please rate how much benefit you think the state and its citizens will receive in the following areas as a result of hosting the games." The benefits items used were adapted from Richie's (1984) Olympulse research and included the following: (1) international recognition, (2) increased future tourism, (3) economic benefits, (4) Olympic facilities development, (5) enhanced image or reputation of Georgia, and (6) increased citizen pride. However, for the purpose of this paper, only the first three items were analyzed.

The data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages, chi-square, and t-tests. Pre and post Olympic comparisons were made to determine if any changes existed in Georgia residents' support, plans to attend any of the events, as well as their perceptions of the benefits that would occur because of the games.

RESULTS

As Table 1 indicates, in response to the question, *is hosting the Olympic games a good idea?* in the *pre-Olympic poll*, males responded **yes** (81.4%) and **no** (18.6%) while in the *post-Olympic poll* they responded **yes** (92.3%) and **no** (7.71%). In the *pre-Olympic poll*, females responded **yes** (78.%) and **no** (22%) while in the post Olympic poll they responded **yes** (96.5%) and **no** (3.5%). Metro Atlanta residents responded **yes** (75.7%) on the *pre-Olympic poll* and **no** (24.1%). On the *post-Olympic poll*, the responses were **yes** (97%) and **no** (3%). 81.5 % of non-metro Atlanta residents responded **yes** on the *pre-Olympic poll* while 18.5% responded **no.** On the *post-Olympic poll*, the responses were **yes** (93.3%) and **no** (6.7%).

Table 2 indicates chi square results for both gender and residence. In all the analyses, the chi square results showed statistically significant differences in pre versus post Olympic perceptions.

Table 3 shows the results of those who expressed a *willingness to attend* (pre-Olympic) and those who *actually attended* (post-Olympic) the Olympic games. On the *pre-Olympic poll*, 32.9% males responded **yes** while 67.1% responded **no**. 24.3 females responded **yes** while 75.7% responded **no**. On the *post-Olympic poll*, 36.1% males indicated they actually attended the games while 63.9% indicated they did not attend. 30.9% females indicated they attended while 69.15 indicated they did not attend. On the *pre-Olympic poll*, 32.9% metro residents indicated a willingness to attend while 67.1% indicated **no**. Of the non-metro residents, 22.1% indicated a willingness to attend while 77.9% indicated **no**. On the post-Olympic poll, 46.6% of metro residents indicated they actually attended while 53.4% indicated **no**. 25.6% non-metro residents indicated they actually attend while 74.4% indicated **no**.

The chi square results shown in table 4 indicates a statistically significant difference between pre and post-Olympic females. There were no differences between pre and post-Olympic males, metro residents, and non-metro residents.

Table 5 shows mean scores on a scale of 1 10 (with 10 being the highest) for responses to *perceived economic benefits of the Olympic games*. On the *pre-Olympic poll*, males had a mean score of 7.2 while females scored 7.4. On the *post-Olympic poll*, the scores were 6.6 and 6.6 for males and females respectively. On the *pre-Olympic poll*, metro residents had a mean score of 7.2 while non-metro residents scored 7.3. On the *post-Olympic poll*, the mean scores were 6.7 and 6.6 for metro and non-metro residents respectively.

Table 6 shows mean scores for responses *to perceived increased citizen pride as a result of the Olympic games*. On the *pre-Olympic poll*, males had a mean score of 7.2 while females scored 7.5. On the *post-Olympic poll*, the scores were 7.6 and 8.4 for males and females respectively. On the *pre-Olympic poll*, metro residents had a mean score of 7.1 while non-metro residents scored 7.4. On the *post-Olympic poll*, the scores were 8.0 and 8.1 for metro and non-metro residents respectively.

Table 7 shows mean scores for responses to *perceived increased tourism benefits as a result of the Olympic games*. On the *pre-Olympic poll*, males had a mean score of 7.1 while females scored 7.3. On the *post-Olympic poll*, the scores were 6.7 and 7.3 for males and females respectively. On the *pre-Olympic poll*, metro residents had a mean score of 7.1 while non-metro residents scored 7.3. On the *post-*

Olympic poll, the scores were 7.2 and 7.0 for metro and non-metro residents respectively.

Table 8 shows t-test results for perceived economic benefits, citizen pride, and increased tourism benefits. The results indicate statistically significant differences for both gender and residence on the economic benefit and citizen pride questions. On the tourism benefit question, there were statistically significant differences for males only.

DISCUSSION

Although it was impractical to track the responses of the same individuals over time, the longitudinal panel study method applied in this study proved useful in delineating trends in the results of this study. The first set of results shows a consistently positive change, both in terms of gender and residence, in perception of the state of Georgia hosting the Olympic games. Whereas in the pre-Olympic poll 18.6% males and 22% females indicated no support, in the post-Olympic poll, these numbers dropped to 7.7% and 3.5% respectively. It was interesting to note that female post-Olympic support was stronger than male support. A contributing factor may have been the strong presence and performances of female athletes at the games. In fact, the 1996 Summer Olympic games was dubbed the "game of the woman" (20). It was also believed that one of the great hits of the games was the media attention given to the achievements of female athletes (13). Also, metro Atlanta residents' post-Olympic support was stronger, perhaps because they were more likely to receive direct benefits because of their proximity to the Olympic sites. The fact that only females showed a positive statistically significant change on the pre-post Olympic attendance question is further evidence of the influence of females on the games. The relative stability in the number of residents who actually attended the games versus those who expressed a willingness to attend may be attributed to factors such as the cost of tickets, traffic congestion, and social caring capacity reaching its threshold. Thus, it could not be concluded that this was a sign of diminishing support or indifference in support for the games, but rather economic factors, quality of life issues, and perceived liability issues.

Mean scores for perceived economic benefits were lower on the post-Olympic poll than the pre-Olympic poll. This may be attributed to the fact that perceptions on the pre-Olympic poll were based on the promotion of events while post-Olympic perceptions were based on actual experiences of the events. The opposite trend was true for perceived increased citizen pride. This was perhaps so because the opportunity to showcase the state and its culture on a global stage that was saturated with the media became a priority of residents. The changes in perceived future tourism benefits were minute, with only males showing a statistically significant difference in pre-post Olympic perceptions. The fluctuating and stable perceptions on the three benefits items may be further explained by the social exchange theory. Social exchange is a general sociological theory concerned with understanding the exchange of resources between individuals and groups in an interactive situation (4). The benefits derived from the exchange may be perceived by residents as outweighing costs. Thus, perceptions may change to a more positive disposition, despite initial opposition stemming from having the Olympic games, or the opposite effect may be true (1). In the case of perceived benefits, this could be associated with the concept of *virtual exchange of values* (an exchange of values over time) (pre-Olympic) and *actual exchange of values* (obligations have been incurred and immediately) (post-Olympic) (12). Such a way

of thinking of the benefits of the Olympic games can attain a certain level of equilibrium (12).

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine residents' perceptions of the State of Georgia hosting the 1996 Olympic Games. The results showed that in general, support for the Olympics was strong prior to the games and grew stronger following the games. This was consistent with findings by Ritchie and Altken (1885) in their study of Canadian residents in Calgary. This was not surprising considering the potential of the Olympic Games to enhance community development, cultural exposition, and future tourism. In addition, other legacies such as new facilities, and new employment opportunities may have influenced the positive perceptions of residents. Also, pre-post Olympic gender support continued to show consistency. The relative stability in those who actually attended compared to those who expressed a willingness to attend could not be directly linked to diminishing interest or indifference for the state of Georgia hosting the Olympic games. It is recommended that further analyses be done to assess the impact of variables such as race, education, and economic status on residents' support for the State of Georgia hosting the Olympic Games.

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TABLE 1

RESPONSE TO GEORGIA HOSTING OLYMPIC GAMES

Variables	Pre Olympic			Post Olympic		
	n	% Yes	% No	n	% Yes	% No
Males	354	81.4	18.6	233	92.3	7.7
Females	446	78	22	314	96.5	3.5
Metro	295	75.7	24.1	202	97	3
Non-metro	504	81.5	18.5	344	93.3	6.7

TABLE 2

PRE AND POST OLYMPIC COMPARISON BY GENDER AND RESIDENCE

Is It A Good Idea For Georgia To Host The Olympic Games?			
Variables	**Chi Square Value**	**DF**	**Sig.**
Male	14.67	1	.00013
Female	59.87	1	.00000
Metro	48.96	1	.00000
Non-Metro	26.99	1	.00000

TABLE 3

WILLINGNESS TO ATTEND AND ACTUAL ATTENDEES

Variables	Pre Olympic			Post Olympic		
	n	% Yes	% No	n	% Yes	% No
Males	362	32.9	67.1	238	36.1	63.9
Females	465	24.3	75.7	320	30.9	69.1
Metro	303	38.3	61.7	204	46.6	53.4
Non-metro	524	22.1	77.9	355	25.6	74.4

TABLE 4

PRE AND POST OLYMPIC COMPARISON BY GENDER AND RESIDENCE

Do you Expect To Attend Or Did You Attend One Or More Events?			
Variables	**Chi Square Value**	**DF**	**Sig.**
Male	.67	1	.41056
Female	4.20	1	.04035
Metro	3.43	1	.06378
Non-Metro	1.42	1	.23199

TABLE 5

ECONOMIC BENEFIT

Variables	Pre-Olympic			Post-Olympic		
	n	X	SD	n	X	SD
Males	367	7.2	2.5	225	6.6	2.5
Females	450	7.4	2.5	308	6.6	2.4
Metro	306	7.2	2.4	200	6.7	2.3
Non-metro	514	7.3	2.6	333	6.6	2.5

TABLE 6

INCREASED CITIZEN PRIDE BENEFIT

Variables	Pre-Olympic			Post-Olympic		
	n	X	SD	n	X	SD
Males	367	7.2	2.2	233	7.6	2.6
Females	454	7.5	2.4	313	8.4	2.2
Metro	307	7.1	2.3	200	8.0	2.3
Non-metro	517	7.4	2.3	347	8.1	2.4

TABLE 7

INCREASED FUTURE TOURISM BENEFIT

Variables	Pre-Olympic			Post-Olympic		
	n	X	SD	n	X	SD
Males	368	7.1	2.2	228	6.7	2.4
Females	456	7.3	2.4	312	7.3	2.4
Metro	310	7.1	2.3	198	7.2	2.3
Non-Metro	518	7.3	2.3	342	7.0	2.6

TABLE 8

STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN PRE VS POST OLYMPIC PERCEIVED BENEFITS

Benefit	Variable	t-value	2-tail Sig.
Economic	Male	2.59	.010
	Female	4.18	.000
	Metro	2.34	.020
	Non-Metro	4.21	.000
Citizen Pride	Male	-2.02	.044
	Female	-5.51	.000
	Metro	-3.98	.000
	Non-Metro	-3.84	.000
Tourism	Male	2.00	.046
	Female	-.14	.887
	Metro	-.84	.400
	Non-Metro	1.92	.056