

# How events can promote a destinations image tourism essay



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In an era that is faced with the perceived consequences of economic, social and cultural shifts variously labeled 'post-modernity', 'globalization' and 'the post-industrial revolution', an increasing number of urban authorities in the UK and beyond have adopted strategies of 're-imagining' their cities as 'creative cities' and/or attractive locations for footloose capital. The production of spectacular urban events has frequently played a central role in such strategies (Harcup, 2000: p. 215). Therefore this essay evaluates how and why an event can be used to promote a destination image with Birmingham serving as a case study. It also focuses on the strategies deployed by Birmingham and how the city has used a combination of 'mega sport events', and event bids to further its reputation as tourist destinations (Smith, 2006: p. 77).

The transformation, enhancement and promotion of urban image have emerged as central planks of the entrepreneurial governance of western cities. Both the number of cities engaged in place promotion and the variety of media used has grown in recent years (Barke & Harrop, 1994: p. 93-114). The economic rationale behind these efforts is to attract jobs, tourists and residents to replace declining former manufacturing economies (Harvey, 1989: p. 3-17, Dicken and Tickell, 1992; Haughton and Lawless, 1992; Decker and Crompton, 1993). Consequently, place promotion has been widely posited as a tangible part of the urban development process. Place marketing has thus become much more than merely selling the area to attract mobile companies and tourists. It can now be viewed as a fundamental part of planning, a fundamental part of guiding the development of places in a desired fashion (Fretter, 1993: p. 165).

Images play a fundamental role in determining the success of tourist destinations (Smith, 2006: p. 77). Destination image is defined as not only the perceptions of individual destination attributes but also the holistic impression made by the destination. Destination image consists of functional characteristics, concerning the more tangible aspects of the destination, and psychological characteristics, concerning the more intangible aspects (Echtner & Brent Ritchie, 2003: p. 43). Within destination image research the concept of branding is used in two different ways. The first involves analyzing the relationship between cities and established consumer brands. In recent years the distinction between cities and such brands has been eroded due to various initiatives which aim to use brands to boost city images and vice versa (Smith, 2006: p, 79). The second way branding is used in destination image literature is as a broader concept, imported from marketing theory. In such analysis the focus is not the relationship between destinations and established brands, but on creating a destination brand using various conceptual models and schema. This type of brand building can also be linked to sport events. Indeed, several cities have deployed sport as the main theme of their branding (Smith, 2006: p. 80). Many types of attractions are identified and promoted as potential lures for tourists but traditionally tourist destinations have been categorized into natural or man-made attractions. Ritchie identified another attraction category which can enhance destination image and therefore tourist appeal. The category to which Ritchie refers is that of 'hallmark events' which are defined as, 'Major one-time or recurring events of limited duration developed to primarily enhance the awareness, appeal and profitability of a destination in the short and/or long term. These events rely for their success on uniqueness, status,

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or timely significance to create interest and attract attention'(Ritchie, 1984: p. 2-11)The examples of typical 'hallmark events' illustrated by Ritchie are international trade fairs, culturally unique events and sporting events which capture a market interest larger than those of local enthusiasts (Riley & Van Doren, 1992: p. 268).

One such city that benefits from 'hallmark events' as a reimagining theme is Birmingham. The term "reimagining" refers to attempts by urban destinations to purposefully reconfigure these ideas and conceptions (Smith, 2005: p. 219). Whitelegg (2000: p. 83) identifies, sport has been used as a central component in this restructuring of the urban image. In the UK, Birmingham has adopted an economic strategy based on attracting major sports events to their area as a catalyst to stimulate economic regeneration (Gratton & Henry, 2001: p. 39). Birmingham was the host city in Euro 96 and has been designated as the 'National Cities of Sport'. Birmingham's sport-led regeneration strategies were motivated by destination image considerations (Smith, 2002) and thus provide illustrative examples of sport reimagining (Gratton & Henry, 2001: p. 35). There is significant evidence that the city has deliberately used sports events to enhance its image (Loftman & Navin, 1996; Smith, 2005a).

Over the past 20 years, Birmingham has aimed to become a city capable of attracting and entertaining visitors. This ambition has been supported by several major sport initiatives, including the city's bid to host the 1992 Olympic Games, an annual 'Super Prix' motor race around the city's streets, and the construction of the National Indoor Arena (NIA). This Arena has enabled the city to stage a number of high-profile sport events, including <https://assignbuster.com/how-events-can-promote-a-destinations-image-tourism-essay/>

Davis Cup tennis and international indoor athletics. According to several commentators, Birmingham's image changed markedly because of the implementation of these and various other initiatives introduced during the 1980s (Lister, 1991). Smyth, (1994: p. 180) observes that during this period Birmingham used a 'tripartite thrust' of business tourism, arts, and sports to promote the city. The city asserts in its Strategic Plan 2005-2010 that 'developments in the arts, sport and leisure have been a key part of Birmingham's renaissance over the last twenty years, helping to establish and sustain Birmingham's image as a modern and creative city' (Smith, 2005: p. 12). Thus it seems Birmingham sees modernity and creativity as two connotations that sport event initiatives may have helped to cultivate. According to the city's Principal Officer-Sport (now Chief Executive of UK Sport) Richard Callicott, the mere association of sport with the city can generate positive feelings, such as excitement (personal communication, 1999). Callicott also feels that sport initiatives can become effective agents of image change, provoking associations with 'dynamism, excitement, internationalism, athleticism', and a 'warm welcome' (Smith, 2006).

A research was conducted to evaluate the value of sport reimagining by establishing if and how sport initiatives affect city images. This research attempted to establish what effects strategies adopted by Birmingham have had on city images held by potential tourists. To ascertain these effects, three main research areas were addressed. First, it was important to evaluate the extent to which potential tourists were aware of the initiatives that had been implemented, as it was assumed that initiatives could have little effect if tourists were not conscious of their existence. Second, the

research evaluated if specific sport initiatives adopted in the city had affected the city image Third, more general information was sought from participants regarding their interpretation of urban sport initiatives. This information was required to identify some of the characteristics of sport reimagining that facilitate, or obstruct positive image change (Smith, 2005: p. 222).

A semi structured interview was conducted which explored more detailed images of the city and the attitudes and meanings generated by associating sport with a city (Smith, 2005: p. 223). Interviews were conducted with 'potential tourists', rather than tourists who had already decided to visit a particular destination (Smith, 2006: p. 85). The findings of the present study suggest that recent sport initiatives have not been a significant agent of Birmingham's recent image change. None of the interviewees cited recent sport events when justifying why their image of Birmingham had changed over recent years, whilst only two interviewees specifically mentioned sport events when detailing their holistic images of Birmingham. No interviewees cited the city's bid for the 1992 Olympic Games in the unprompted section of the interviews, suggesting that this bid has had little influence on Birmingham's contemporary holistic image. Only one interviewee suggested that events had affected their image of the city. In a question relating to another city, this person indicated that they recognized Birmingham's general efforts to attract sport events and felt that they had contributed to the enhancement of the city's image. Other recollections of recent sporting events in Birmingham were not always as positive. Therefore, although

events can provide important synecdochical images, these representations are not necessarily positive (Smith, 2006: p. 85-86).

In general, the synecdochical effects of Birmingham's event re-imaging are unremarkable. Birmingham's sport initiatives do appear to be widely acknowledged by potential tourists. However, the actual impact of the National Indoor Arena and the Olympic bid on the city's image, though evident, is unspectacular. More encouragingly, the National Indoor Arena has stimulated positive synecdochical images of Birmingham for some potential tourists. This effect has been facilitated by positive perceptions of the NIA's immediate surroundings and its exposure via the popular television programme, *Gladiators* (Smith, 2006: p. 87). Birmingham has also revealed its long-term commitment to hosting sport events through its stated intention to bid for the 2022 Commonwealth Games.

For destinations ranging in size from small towns to countries, event tourism is increasingly becoming a key aspect of their overall tourism development efforts. Sport initiatives appear particularly proficient as tools for connoting that a city is more 'interesting' (Smith, 2006: p. 94). These positive readings of sport event re-imaging have been enabled by the positive meanings attached to the concept of sport in contemporary culture. Despite diverse individual attitudes to sport, this shared interpretation allows sport event imagery to generate consistently positive meanings amongst potential tourists, generating the capacity to enhance holistic city images. Sport has the potential and the capacity to influence holistic images, both directly, through the development of new synecdochical images, and indirectly, via the meanings generated by city-sport event associations. Therefore, it is <https://assignbuster.com/how-events-can-promote-a-destinations-image-tourism-essay/>

useful to revisit these key ideas to explore whether they help to explain if and how sport initiatives affect city images (Smith, 2006: p. 94).