

Never mind the sport, let's manage the destination

In case you hadn't noticed, London is bidding with four other cities to stage the Olympic Games in 2012. Winning the Olympics has become a complex social and political contest, quite as complex as succeeding in the sports field, with tourism and hospitality benefits and costs being claimed on all sides. Carole Favre evaluates London's chances of becoming the Barcelona of 2012.

THE BIDDING PROCESS to host the Olympics is more and more like a military campaign. The Games are said to offer so many benefits that numerous cities are now almost literally fighting to stage them.

However, this wasn't always the case. It is only since the line of successful Olympics—starting in Barcelona, then Sydney—that competition has become so ferocious. Until then the Games, were not seen to be a key catalyst for economic, social and environmental change. Montréal was a financial disaster and it is only thanks to Barcelona's success in reversing this outcome dramatically that the event is now so coveted. The city showed great competence at using the Olympic product to develop a brand of its own, emerging as one of the last ten years' most popular weekend-break European destinations. Moreover, one wonders how London will be able outshine the symbolic legacy of the Barcelona Games—they were the first to welcome both South Africa and the newly independent former Soviet states back in the international sports arena.

Long-term thinking brought long-term benefits

This year saw the re-launch of the British Olympic bid since the 1948 London Games were overshadowed by austerity and the Games of 1940 and 1944 did not

take place in wartime. Following the success of the Barcelona Games, more cities have shown an interest in hosting this event with, on average, nine contestants at each bid over the last decade.¹ It is claimed that the two-year selection process to hold the 2012 Olympics is already the most competitive of all, especially since well established destinations such as New

2003 saw the first increase in 10 years of London's international market share, it is essential to implement a strategy that will sustain these figures

York, Paris or Madrid together with London, and an emerging Moscow, were selected to proceed to the second stage of the bid.²

Managing the destination

Although sport is high on the list, when it comes to destination management, the stakes and objectives are rather different.

Urban regeneration, media coverage and infrastructural development all contribute to 'putting the destination on the map' and develop tourism, a sector worth £15 bn to London.⁴ Since 2003 saw the first increase in 10 years of London's international market share, it is essential to implement a strategy that will improve these figures, especially in the context of

Table 1 London's ten reasons for wanting to host the Games

- 1 It's a chance to bring the greatest sporting and cultural event in the world to the most vibrant city on earth
- 2 The Games would be a catalyst for the biggest physical, environmental and social transformation of London for generations.
- 3 The Games would form part of a rejuvenation which will create thousands of new businesses, jobs and homes.
- 4 The Olympic Park would be set within 1,500 landscaped acres to form one of Europe's largest areas of urban parkland.
- 5 Six major new sports facilities would be built.
- 6 The Games would boost top-level sport in the UK and encourage sports participation at all ages – promoting a more active and fitter nation.
- 7 The Games would be great for UK business – from constructions projects to tourism
- 8 The whole of the UK stands to benefit from top sport events and tourism
- 9 The Paralympic Games will improve the way London functions for people with disabilities
- 10 Our children will be inspired for a lifetime by some of the best models for achievements and endeavour.³

strong international competition.⁵ The leisure market offers a perfect opportunity to achieve this.

Sport (not unlike tourism) has transcended its hedonistic appeal to become a real business, especially since many sports in recent times are not the domain of amateurs, but paid professionals:

*money is the name of today's game [...] and major corporations pay huge sums in sponsorship to be associated with sport.*⁶

On a larger scale,

*governments throughout the world see leisure and tourism as a source of employment, particularly where structural changes in the economy have led to job losses.*⁷

- ❑ In England, sport-related activities account for 2 percent of the workforce; *people spend £2.7 bn each year participating in sport [...] and £600m on attending spectator sport events.*⁸
- ❑ In 1996, 'England's hosting of the Euro football tournament earned £205m'.⁹
- ❑ In 2004, the British Beer and Pub Association estimated that they 'lost out on £100m worth of extra sales' after England did not progress past the quarter finals.¹⁰

Although the Olympics are expected to 'inspire many younger people to take part in sport, with resultant health benefits', the main drive for the Olympics is the legacy of facilities and infrastructure that they offer.¹¹ World-class venues will attract world-class events and media coverage.

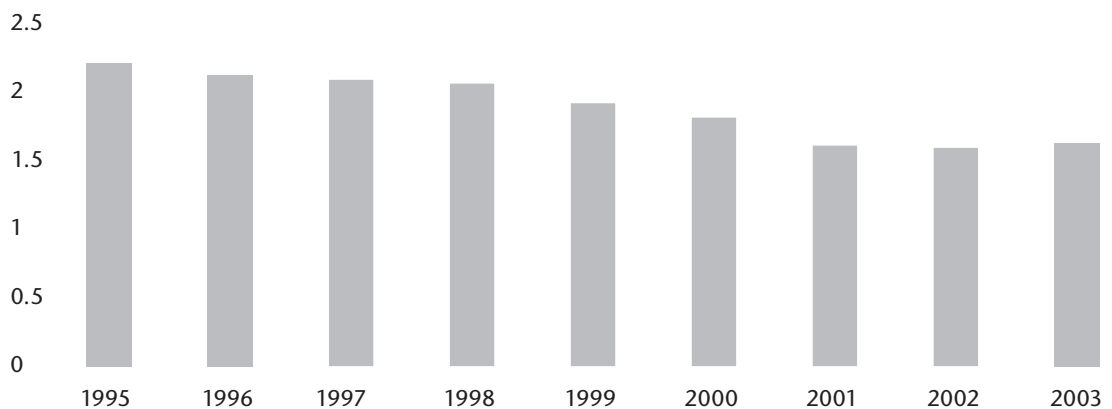
Crossroads for London

Although London is a very established destination, it must relentlessly compete to sustain and optimistically increase market share.¹² Most would agree that it has reached stagnation.

To rejuvenate, few 'beauty tricks' are at hand. Since many cities recycle the same procedures to attract tourists (i.e. European Capital of Culture title or building architectural landmarks), 'the competitive battleground lies in staging experiences'.¹³ Indeed,

we have entered the Experience Economy, a new economic era in which all businesses must orchestrate memorable

Figure 1 London's share of international tourist arrivals 1995–2003



Source: World Tourism Organisation, International Passenger Survey

events; these 'have been termed "image builders" of modern tourism'.¹⁴

Unquestionably, few experiences can rival the feeling of 'being part' of the oldest and largest sporting event in the world. While the Olympics transcend national boundaries they are also a showcase for national pride and international recognition. Consequently they are the

*social nodes of a transnational culture, of a 'global village' and as such they have long provided focal points for tourists [...] that are seeking experiences and intercultural participation.*¹⁵

However, these experiences are becoming increasingly more complex to stage. Now that tourism has become intertwined with the Olympics, the Games contribute to creating the cultural identity of a destination. As Holcomb explains, the city is a product and as such must develop a brand.¹⁶ Since marketing for the tourism product is intangible and sold before it is tested by the consumer, destinations—when manufacturing an event—benefit from the opportunity to create (or refine) a culturally attractive and distinctive image to draw visitors.

These potential visitors are not namely the audience at the Games, but the viewers in front of their TV sets; the Sydney Games were transmitted to '3.7 bn viewers in a record 220 countries'.¹⁷ The Olympics now offer the best conceivable media coverage to market a destination.¹⁸ In the US (which provides 32 percent of the major markets' arrivals to London), it is the 'top

the marketing was carefully orchestrated to eliminate the tourist stereotypes (siestas, bullfights) and promote Spain as a land of 'passion'

property in televised sports, regularly producing 17 days of top ratings'.¹⁹

In the case of Barcelona, the marketing was carefully orchestrated

to eliminate some of the tourist stereotypes (siestas,

Table 3 Key economic benefits and costs of the Games

	Benefits	Costs
Pre-Games phase	Tourism Construction activity	Investment expenditure Preparatory operational costs (including bid costs) Lost benefits from displaced projects
Games phase	Tourism Stadium and infrastructure Olympic jobs Revenue from Games (tickets, TV rights, sponsorship)	Operational expenditure associated with Games Congestion Lost benefits from displaced projects
Post-Games phase	Tourism Stadiums and infrastructure Human capital Urban regeneration International reputation	Maintenance of stadiums and infrastructure Lost benefits from displaced projects

bullfights, slow movement) [...] and promote the widely held image of Spain as a land of 'passion' in addition to the 'sun'.²⁰

Internationally well-known artists such as Picasso,

Unquestionably, few experiences can rival the feeling of 'being part' of the oldest and largest sporting event in the world

Dali or Miro, as well as singers (including Caballe and Carreras) and the royal family were rallied to create the Spanish product. Although Barcelona ran the risk of being immersed in this national brand, great care was taken to develop a Catalanian identity.²¹

In contrast, London has positioned itself as a modern, cosmopolitan city and thus is relying more on the melting pot of the fifty ethnic groups it hosts rather than its Englishness.²² This cultural distinctiveness is unlike that of a more traditional Barcelona; this could be a problem in terms of branding (especially if compared to New York).²³ However, the English capital 'has twice as many museums as Paris and New York' and this is certainly an asset to build upon.²⁴

Most importantly, and what makes the city unique in comparison with the other candidates, is its fusion of old and modern world known landmarks. According to Stephen Norris, who was the Conservative candidate in the 2004 London Mayoral elections

the Olympics will be a showcase that will advertise everything that is good about the capital to a massive global audience²⁵

but most notably

*there will never have been an Olympic Games, nor is there likely to be in the future, where the venues are so condensed into such a unique area.*²⁶

Probing the economic benefits

As London is dubbed 'the powerhouse of the UK economy' the Olympics are expected to act as an economic and social catalyst for change across the country.²⁷ However, it is argued by Bellman that 'at a metropolitan level, the economic impact of hosting the Games is much more significant than when considered in the context of the national economy'.²⁸

Table 2 Summary of economic impacts

	Estimated net economic impact (US\$ bn)	Size of economy	GDP % impact
Barcelona	\$16.6	\$577.3	2.9%
Seoul	\$2.6	\$182	1.4%
Sydney	\$4.3	\$429.1	1.0%
Atlanta	\$5.1	\$7,388	0.07%

Nonetheless, the Games can benefit destinations up to ten years before and after they are staged, with tourism attracting the most substantial long-term earnings and being 'the only activity whose impact may be felt in all three phases'.²⁹

Table 4 Revenues in Barcelona

The Barcelona Games generated earnings against an estimated cost of £6 bn. However, revenues during the Games must be differentiated from the revenues they will generate in the future. The Barcelona games were characterised by a surge in revenues (75 percent more than the Seoul Olympics) made up in the large part of contributions from sponsors and television rights.³⁰

1 Television rights

'...without the enormous audience, the source of finance [...] would simply not be forthcoming'.³¹ Television income, which had been negligible at the Rome games in 1960, for Barcelona brought 54.1m pesetas to the host city.

2 Contribution from sponsors

In the case of Barcelona, this made up for an unprecedented 30.5 percent of revenues, which was 3.7 times higher than for the Los Angeles games.³²

The revenues (see Table 4) generated by the Barcelona games cannot compare with the income raised by the 88 percent surge in visitor numbers from 1990 to 2000 and the further economic impacts it spawned.³³ Understandably, the impacts would not have been sustained if adequate infrastructure hadn't been provided to optimise benefits.³⁴

This was achieved through regeneration: the political and economic underlying theme of the Olympics and fundamental to Barcelona's approach. The city wanted to 'promote a great urban transformation that would improve the quality of life'.³⁵ Roost and Sassen note that

*now that most people in the highly developed countries reside in suburbs, the large city has assumed the role of exotica. Modern tourism is [...] centred on [...] some version of the urban scene fit for tourism.*³⁶

With better sport facilities but most importantly, transport infrastructure, new venues or housing, destinations become more attractive. However, Szymanski and others argue that the Games didn't set in motion the regeneration process; this happened because

*from 1986, the European Union began pouring in huge amounts of funds to rebuild (Barcelona) as a significant European city. Therefore it made a lot of sense to hold the Games there. The infrastructure benefits were already there.*³⁷

In the case of London, the discrepancy between the various figures valuing the Games' benefits leads to questions about their credibility (see Table 5).

Table 5 London's forecast benefits: outlook variable

Some predictions value the extra income from tourism between 2011 and 2013 between £280 and £610m.³⁸ Incredibly, the Arup report (used by many journalists and the government in its official literature) suggests *taking into account a conservative estimate on the additional tourism that the Games bring in during the Olympic year, the Games could make £82m or lose £145m.*³⁹

It is hard to see how these figures could be the foundations of realistic expectations. It also mentions that *9,000 jobs would be created in the UK, the Exchequer would get £10m additional income and 4,000 new housing units would be built.*⁴⁰

This is in complete contradiction with figures quoted by Cook, which indicate that 'regeneration is set to create around 40,000 jobs, 30,000 homes and 1,000 businesses'.⁴¹

But others affirm enthusiastically that the Games would bring

*an additional £70m of benefits to London [...] plus the creation of around 3,000 full-time jobs in the East End.*⁴²

All these figures are extremely vague and their validity must be questioned. For example, following the Sydney games, 'it is estimated that £2.5 bn of the overall £4 bn benefits to Australia came from tourism'.⁴³ However, a more careful look at the data indicates that visitor numbers fell last year and hotel occupancy declined to 67 percent.⁴⁴

However, certain benefits can be identified, even if they remain hard to value accurately.

Regeneration and the transport challenge

It is estimated that 'more than a million extra people would be expected to visit London during the Games' 17 days'.⁴⁵ However, no one can demonstrate that London will attract this number of visitors.⁴⁶ The Games might drive away tourists, for fear of overcrowding and a possible rise in prices. It will certainly put off Londoners because of traffic congestion; a survey reported by the *The Birmingham Post* indicates that 'nearly half of the public believes that Britain's transport wouldn't cope if the country hosted the Olympics'.⁴⁷

The pledge, made by the bid chair, that 'London's transport system will be the best in the history of the Games' does little to alleviate this scepticism.⁴⁸ Even if the number of underground trains is set to increase, with *other plans including an extension of the Docklands Light railway [...] and improvements to services on the Hammersmith and City Lines,* the completion of the new Crossrail line to ease traffic between East and West London has been postponed until after the event.

However, the perspective of 'regenerating' the East End, 'where large swathes of contaminated and derelict land' will be transformed should convince the most reticent.⁴⁹ Since 'the IOC is now considering the environment critical in any future host city's bid' the Games could provide the opportunity for London, to build a 'green' brand.⁵⁰ As 'the world's cleanest large

city, with the lowest pollution levels of 20 cities with populations above ten million' the city could even attract more families.⁵¹

However, although the case for regeneration is attractive, many stirred by the negative impacts of various Games (including those of Barcelona) are opposed to the project. The cost of the Olympics to local communities, the Games' failure to engage the country and therefore improve infrastructures in those areas that need it the most, are but a few of the arguments

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presented. Past experience has shown that the best intentions rarely materialise in long lasting community-friendly projects.

Table 7 Negative impacts

The campaign to host the Olympics in London has failed to win the hearts and minds of everyone. Past Games, even those deemed very successful, have given reason for concern. They have generated various social problems due to their cost.

Creation of regional/local divisions

London would be the only area to benefit from investment in infrastructure to the detriment of other poorer cities:

*the infrastructure to support the Games and the periphery activities will exacerbate regional disparities and add further heat to an already overheated South Eastern economy.*⁵²

Hackney Council is opposed to the Games as 'it doesn't

The Achilles heel of the London bid, particularly in a contest with Paris is uncertainty about how the transport system will cope with the Olympics and the evening rush hour. While the bid talks up the capacity of the Jubilee line and the St Pancras–Stratford section of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, railway experts are still not convinced. Here is the District Line at Earls Court, some building work in progress, but a scene that has changed little since 1920. (John Aldridge)





want any major venues within its borders'.⁵³

Diversion of lottery funds from good causes

The Lottery will provide £1.5 bn for 2005–2012 to finance the London bid and the Games. Furthermore, the new Olympic Lottery games, which are estimated to raise £750m, will be diverted from other good causes, as people will play the new games rather than existing ones. The Department for Culture Media and Sport estimates 'that around 50 percent of the £750m—or £55m a year over seven years—might represent money diverted'. Voluntary and community organisations accomplishing vital work across the UK are set to suffer the most.⁵⁴

Contribution to increasing crime and prostitution

'Since [Barcelona's] economic success, petty crime rate has rocketed'.⁵⁵ This fact is widely advertised and will eventually (if it does not already) deter visitors from travelling to the destination.

During the Sydney Olympic games, thousands of sex workers packed the streets and bars, taking advantage of a massive boom in the trade.⁵⁶

Reduced local economic activity

For Stratford inhabitants, the Olympics would produce the relocation of an estimated 350 local businesses.⁵⁷

Loss of pride in the destination

Barcelona appeals as a European destination but not as a Spanish city anymore: 'the Olympics brought all the multinationals in, like McDonald's. Barcelona spent an absolute fortune on itself, very wisely, beautifying and tarting itself up'. This makes the destination appealing to visitors but how do local inhabitants feel about a town losing its identity?⁵⁸

Failure to address the concerns and problems of local residents

The Olympic roadshow gave a worrying picture of the local support to the bid. Eastenders' reaction was typified as follows:

I am totally against the Olympic games taking place in east London [...] this is a poor area and the money should be spent on other things like new housing, creating jobs and fighting crime. It's also not fair that Londoners should pay more council tax.⁵⁹

Rise in the cost of living for those being 'regenerated' (often poorer communities)

From 1986 to 1992, the cost of living in Barcelona grew '20 percent above that in the rest of Catalonia'⁶⁰ Ken Livingstone has budgeted for a £20 per annum increase of the council tax if London is awarded the Games.⁶¹

Risk of creating 'white elephants'

Many wonder of what will happen to the new sport infrastructure being built. Winterbottom states that 'the actual stadium might be dismantled (after the Games)'.⁶²

Political pay-offs

On the other hand, the feelgood factor is often quoted as an essential side effect of the Olympics. While countries win more medals when they host the Games the event creates a

true collective memory [...] and means that we can have faith in the human condition [...] showing that people are still anxious to live moments of joy.⁶³

This could certainly bring a greater social cohesion to the East End.

Finally, there is much to gain politically by showing how a Labour government could 'deliver' the dream to disillusioned voters.⁶⁴ This could not only provide national recognition but also international credibility.

The backdrop of London's sensational historic stage set has already given designers working for the Bid a lot of fun. Here is an artist's impression of the equestrian arena around the Queen's House at Greenwich. How many Olympic stand designers can call in Inigo Jones? Opposite a panorama of the whole Olympic site from the athletes' village. (Back the Bid.com)



According to Ken Livingstone *if London wins [...] it will put the UK on the world stage, not just as a tourist destination, but as a modern city capable of delivering major projects and hosting major events.*⁶⁵

This could, in turn, attract important investments and even if those remain difficult to estimate, it is certain that the Games will leave an unrivalled legacy.⁶⁶

Nonetheless, it is doubtful that London and Barcelona offer a realistic contrast. The former is an already established destination; the latter was not and therefore had much to gain from hosting the Games. Barcelona is *a small city, compact, accessible, its limits clear; London is [...] congested, haphazard [...] with feeble and uncoordinated transport.*⁶⁷

Even though 'public support for the bid reaches 80 percent', we should not forget that London 'can't match Barcelona for sunshine or waterfront'.⁶⁸

Conclusion

Although no one can remain emotionally detached from watching the sporting triumphs and human exploits achieved during the Olympics, the rationale behind a bid is far from altruistic. It is driven mainly by the appeal of return on investment.

o For tourism, the Olympics offer the opportunity to

increase and refine a profile that will, in the long-term, bring in tourists and thus money.

- Politically, the Games offer a way to raise funds which otherwise wouldn't be available, to undertake much needed urban regeneration (especially in transport and housing) and help build the city as an attractive destination. The event also creates jobs and new businesses (all contributing to tax revenue).
- When it comes to sport, state of the art facilities can be expected to attract domestic as well as international visitors at subsequent events.

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It is no wonder that London is so seduced by the prospect of hosting the Games. It does indeed bring many attractive benefits. However, many are hardly quantifiable and would be limited principally to the city. Most critically, the Games must be seen to bring long-term benefits, not white elephants. Hosting memorable Olympics is one thing, ensuring that tourists and the local community will continue to enjoy and utilise the newly built infrastructure is another.

The challenge for London is to be sure that the return from hosting the Games is worth the expense.

The World Cup, to name another international sport event, would undoubtedly fit better with the English brand, which is already incredibly strong in soccer thanks to clubs such as Manchester United, Liverpool and Arsenal (not to mention players like Owen and Beckham). It would be cheaper to stage and the facilities are already there. However, it would not sustain Ken Livingstone's and the Prime Minister's glorious Olympic dream, which would be a PR coup for Labour. Nonetheless, since football preoccupies the nation's sporting psyche and is the monopoly of satellite broadcast, it would be a blessing to see a broader range of events offered a higher sporting profile on public service television.

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- 33 O Del Mar 'Advantages flow to hosts; the benefits... ?TITLE WORDS MISSING?' in *The Times* (16 May 2003) p 54. This also includes business tourism. Barcelona 'achieved a 21 percent per annum compound growth in international convention delegates between 1992–1997' making the 'Olympics widely recognised

- as a strong driver for a city's convention market (see LaSalle Investment Management op. cit.).
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- 61 Visit London *Visit London major revamp of annual awards scheme* (2004) Available at <http://www.visitlondon.com/> (Accessed 23 August 2004)
- 62 Winterbottom (2003) cited in Blitz *et al* op. cit.
- 63 Pricewaterhouse Coopers op. cit.; Aafla - Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles *Barcelona* (1992) Available at <http://www.aafla.org/6oic> (Accessed 08 July 2004) pp 23-24, All Info about London op. cit
- 64 This would be welcomed after disasters such as the Dome, the 'costly and messy debate over the building of the new Wembley stadium and the spiralling costs and delays over the Jubilee Line extension' Blitz *et al* op. cit. It would certainly give Ken Livingstone more credibility as a future Prime Minister.
- 65 All info about London op. cit.
- 66 'Australian companies won ten percent of capital spending projects for Beijing's 2008 Games and Atlanta gained inward investments in 1999' Blitz *et al* op. cit.; Pricewaterhouse Coopers op. cit.
- 67 B Sewell 'Keep the Games out of London' *The Evening Standard* 11 February 2003 p 11
- 68 *The Birmingham Post* (2003) op. cit.; R Moore 'The toughest Olympic challenge is regeneration' *The Evening Standard* 1 July 2003 p 39



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