

**THE PERCEIVED ROLE OF COMMUNITY
INVOLVEMENT IN THE MEGA-EVENT HOSTING
PROCESS: A CASE STUDY OF THE ATLANTA 1996 AND
SYDNEY 2000 OLYMPIC GAMES**

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CERTIFICATE

I certify that this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being submitted as part of candidature for any other degree.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me and that any help that I have received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

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ABSTRACT

Whilst not exclusively a tourism phenomenon, mega-events such as World Fairs/Expositions, Olympic Games, and World Cup Soccer finals, have come to be recognised as major factors in many tourism development, urban revitalisation and urban imaging strategies. Consequently, these events have the ability to significantly impact upon the economic, political and social (both sociocultural and psychological) fabric of the cities and regions that host them. Furthermore, in recent decades there has been a noticeable increase in the desire for a simultaneous growth in participatory democracy and expertise in decision-making in many western societies. These factors have contributed to the emergence of community involvement, and its optimal role in the planning and hosting of such events, as one of the more contentious issues debated in contemporary tourism literature. It should be noted in particular that much of the publicised rationale for hosting mega-events is based upon their potential benefits to the host community.

In order to contribute to the body of knowledge on mega-event planning and management, the present study was initiated to investigate the perceived roles of community involvement in the mega-event hosting process. More specifically, by examining the Atlanta 1996 and Sydney 2000 Olympic Games as case studies, the study sought to identify discrepancies between the *perceived* roles and levels of host community involvement at different stages in the hosting process, from the point of view of the *host public*, *community/welfare groups* and *organisers* in both locations, and whether the level of *perceived* involvement influenced support for hosting the Games.

The methodology consisted of an initial review of literature examining *event and planning theory* and *Olympic Games: background and theory*. An *Event Typology* was developed and a definition for *mega-events* was provided. In addition, six basic stages in the event hosting process (*inception*, *pre-bid*, *bid*, *pre-event*, *event* and *post-event*) were identified and incorporated into a *Generic Model of the Mega-Event Hosting Process*. Questionnaire surveys were utilised as the major method of data collection for the empirical study.

Findings indicated that the *public* in both host regions perceived levels of *actual* involvement to be lower than the *ideal* levels in both the pre-bid and post-bid periods. However, the differences between the *actual* and *ideal* levels of involvement were considered to be greater by Sydney residents. Unfortunately, poor response rates from *community/welfare groups* and *organisers* in the Atlanta region meant that it was not possible to determine if there were any discrepancies between the *perceived* roles and levels of host community involvement at different stages in the hosting process. However, results did indicate that the Sydney *bid/organising committee* respondents perceived *actual* levels of involvement to be higher and *ideal* levels to be lower than the public of Sydney. In both *host public* surveys, relationships were detected between residents' perceived levels of community involvement and levels of support for hosting the Olympic Games. In essence, residents who perceived *actual* community involvement to be *non-existent* in either the pre-bid or post-bid period (except for the Atlanta pre-bid period) showed significantly lower levels of support for the Games, during those same periods and at the time of the Games/survey, than other residents.

Perhaps the most significant finding, however, relates to the fact that whilst members of the Atlanta and Sydney *host public* believed in the concept and benefits of community involvement in the planning process, the knowledge or reassurance that there *were* opportunities to become involved, via participation of various forms, was of greater importance than actually doing so. This finding strongly supports the *rational choice theory*, which proposes that individuals have a tendency to resist participating in collective decision-making. This tendency has been described as the *free rider problem*. It is believed that people, in general, are reluctant to participate in a process to deliver a collective good if they are reasonably assured that others will participate and be successful in obtaining the desired result. Application of the *Generic Model of the Mega-Event Hosting Process* allows a more accurate identification of how, and at what stages in the process, stakeholders' perceptions concerning various aspects (eg. community involvement) of hosting a mega-event, can change.

Further research aimed at determining the extent and implications of the *free rider problem* and the effectiveness of different levels of involvement and forms of participation at the various stages in the hosting process would be beneficial to event organisers and other stakeholders.