
OLYMPIC LESSONS FOR THE GREEK TOURISM INDUSTRY

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Abstract: Sport and tourism are two sectors with much in common; their activities are growing increasingly closer and nowadays they have become strongly dependent on one another. Close cooperation between them, especially when it comes to mega-events such as the Olympic Games, can have extremely positive impacts for the hosting country. The aim of the present paper is to examine how the Olympic Games of Athens 2004 gave important lessons to the Greek tourism industry, so as to consolidate the organizing country as a tourism destination depending mostly on post-Games management of both brand image and tourism potential.

Keywords: sports tourism, mega-events, Athens 2004 Olympic Games, Greek tourism industry.

INTRODUCTION: SPORT TOURISM AND MEGA-EVENTS

Tourism and sport are two activities that have become integrated elements of modern western culture and parts of present-day lifestyles in almost every developed country. They both constitute complex networks of activities with

complicated value chains and many different role players. Tourism is the number one industry of our time, as its contribution to the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2003, based upon calculations that include the direct and indirect effects of tourism expenditure, is estimated to be US\$ 4.217,7 billion or 10.4% of total GDP (WTTC 2004). As the Deputy Secretary-General of World Tourism Organization (WTO) in 2004 Dawid de Villiers has pointed out: *“Tourism is the leading export industry (larger than petrochemicals, or automotives); it is one of the biggest employers in the world, employing more young people and women than any other industry; it consists of more small and micro businesses than any other sector; it is a leading service-sector economic driver, and so on”*. International tourism developed quickly and became a characteristic of the 20th century. Its growth has been spectacular and its future looks incredibly positive (Villiers 2004): international arrivals have grown, in real terms, from a mere 25 million in 1950 to over 700 million in 2000, representing an annual growth rate of 6.9% per annum over 50 years. Domestic travel represents a movement of people several times greater (Ignatis 2004). Notwithstanding the fact that the past few years –2001 to 2003– have been the most difficult years ever for the industry, the future looks very bright. Tourism has bounced back with renewed strength and international arrivals are expected to double over the next decade – although not with the same rate for all destinations.

On the other hand, sports are without doubt the number one industry after tourism within the leisure sector. The impact of the professional practice of sports has become a worldwide phenomenon and athletes from various sports become global heroes and role models for dress, behaviour and attitudes. Moreover, amateur and leisure sport are becoming increasingly important in a society full of stress where individuals search for alternative ways to relax and develop their personality (Ignatis 2004). Sport activity has gained popularity throughout many European countries, particularly since the ‘60s, whilst statistics indicate that, nowadays, more than 50% of the population participates actively in some form of sport (Tiphonnet 2003): women, apparently seem to be more involved than ever before, youth participation starts much earlier, while seniors continue an active life much longer. Moreover, the appearance of new activities, games and sports bring about personal satisfaction, achievement awareness, wellness and social benefits.

Although travel with the purpose to participate in a sport oriented activity is not new –people in ancient Greece travelled to participate or just to watch the Olympic Games and other athletic events– “sport tourism” is considered to be a modern phenomenon, as the term was first mentioned in the late ‘60s or early ‘70s to describe the special form of tourism which was combined with sport activities (Sport Tourism International Council - Research Unit of Greece). Sport tourism has

been defined in a number of ways. Cave (2003) has defined it as comprising one of the following: (a) involvement in a major event often referred to as a mega-event either as a competitor or as a member of a “supporting family” such as the governing bodies, officials or the media; (b) participation as members of a college or club sports team who wish to play opposition in a foreign country; (c) attendance at a sporting event, large or small scale, as a spectator (these activities can have a significant impact on both domestic and international tourism, although spectator participation at small-scale events is predominantly a domestic activity); (d) a tourist activity, which includes an element of sports activity to a greater or lesser extent. This category might include activities such as water sports, golf or flotilla cruising etc. As it is obvious, there is a “grey area” between what might be considered as sport tourism and what is more akin to an activity based holiday pursuing a favourite pastime. According to Villiers (2004), in tourism a distinction can be drawn between spectator sport and leisure sport. In addition, the concept “tourism sport” refers to a tourism activity with sport as the attraction, while “sport tourism” refers to sport as the activity and tourism as the result. For the purpose of the present paper we shall follow Gibson (2003), who defines sport tourism as *“leisure-based travel that takes individuals temporarily outside their home communities to participate in physical activities, to watch physical activities, or to venerate attractions associated with physical activities”*.

Between sport and tourism there are many parallels and similarities and both can benefit from closer cooperation (Villiers 2004): First of all, the two sectors are subjected to changing trends –often caused by the use of new technologies or changes in consumer behaviour. They are also both affected often by political developments and neither can survive in climates of instability and conflict or where security issues prevail. Moreover, both activities have major economic impacts, with tourism contributing substantially to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of both developed and developing countries. As Tiphonnet notices (2003:103), *“the holiday ‘setups’ and ‘package offerings’ assist the tourism industry in promoting traditional sport activity with creative novelty and adventurous activity to meet the inherent demands. In this context, the resort sector does qualify as an interested partner in sport tourism development”*. As such, skiing, water sports, golf, diving, tennis and other sports facilities are commonly found in a variety of resorts that offer varied experiences ranging from beginner status to advanced levels.

Major international sporting events such as the Olympic Games, Football World Cups, or even Wimbledon Tournament, the Tour de France, and so on, are known as “mega sport events” that attract a great number of spectators and make people travel from afar to share in these experiences, creating huge tourism flows. According to Roche (1994:7), *“mega-events are short-term events with long-term*

consequences” – economical, socio-cultural and environmental. The benefits of staging such mega-events for host destinations, in the long term, are thought to be important infrastructures, repeat visitation of spectators, and increased investment and tourism, as a result of the related media exposure that has effects on destination image. Hall (1989) has suggested that mega-events can change the way host destinations are perceived and that they provide the new “middle class tourist” with the impetus to visit hosting countries in the future. Consequently, it is after the end of the special event, that some of the expenditure associated with the staging of it can be recouped, through new income from tourism, particularly during non-peak periods (Chalip, Green and Hill, 2003).

The Olympic Games are certainly the most important sports event in the world and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has always sought to position them as more than just a sporting event. The Olympics are promoted as a means to enhance international solidarity and cooperation, advance education and culture and instil higher values both in competitors and spectators; the IOC calls this concept “Olympism” (Muller, 2000). Hall (1992:37) states that there are several reasons that cities vie to host the Olympic Games: a sporting legacy, global recognition, funding for capital projects, and economic stimulus *“that comes from the preparation for the event, the event itself, and the tourism opportunities which follow the event”*. French and Disher (1997) include, as well, significant urban development as a motive for promoters to host the Games. It becomes obvious, that the Olympics are somewhat unique, also, because they constitute the most expensive event to stage, requiring major investments. As Cave (2003:3) underlines, *“the involvement of public sector bodies responsible for sport and tourism is also essential to any successful bid as the marketing of the destination needs to be seen as part of the overall bid strategy and a bid needs to be part of an integrated overall destination development strategy which may not be wholly dependant on the bid being successful”*. Furthermore, government involvement is essential where capital-intensive facilities and guarantees are required.

The symbiotic relationship between sport events and tourism that has already been mentioned, was the motivation for the WTO and the IOC to sign a Cooperation Agreement, the aim of which is to promote a better understanding of the two activities and to strengthen the cooperation and links between them. The first *World Conference on Sport and Tourism* was organised by the two organisations in Barcelona at the beginning of 2001, while several regional conferences in different cities of the world followed in the subsequent years. As Villiers (2004) noticed, the achievement of the World Conference on Sport and Tourism was its ability to make it clear that these two separate worlds have a great

deal in common and that closer cooperation can develop more synergies that would benefit both sectors as well as host countries and communities.

ATHENS 2004 OLYMPIC GAMES: THE GREAT CHALLENGE

The holding of an Olympics in Athens has been a controversial issue, although in some respects, no city on Earth could have a stronger claim to the Games, given the fact that Greece is literally their homeland: the original sport event was first held in ancient Greece, in the central Peloponnesian city of Olympia as far back as 776 B.C, while the first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens in 1896. For the Games to be finally held again in Athens, the Greek government has been behind two bids. The first was for a centennial holding of the Games in 1996. That bid failed because it had little to support it other than the “historical right” argument. As Washington Post reported (2001), *“Greece was a weak member of the European Union and the Athens infrastructure was woefully inadequate for the Games. The bid for 2004 was won in a much more promising situation, with Greece on track to join the European Monetary Union and Euro zone, with major infrastructure works under way, in particular expansion of the Athens Metro and the construction of the new Athens International Airport and connecting roads”*. Modern Greece, with a population of 11 million, would be the smallest country to host the Olympics since Finland in 1952 and putting on the Games would be a great challenge, as this mega-event has already become a vast enterprise that requires a modern infrastructure and major human and financial resources. Greece hoped to make the 2004 Games special by connecting them with the original games. By including an expanded cultural program, organizers wanted to communicate to the world the Olympic spirit, which essentially sees sports as a way to promote constructive human interaction and attenuate conflicts. But more than that, it was hoped that the Games would improve the life of Greeks in general, boost the economy, improve the infrastructure and raise country's image in the world.

Athens constitutes one of the largest metropolitan centres in the Mediterranean and it is the largest city in the Balkan Peninsula. However, the *“unforgettable, dream games”* as the IOC President Jacques Rogge characterized the Athens Olympics in his speech in the Closing Ceremony, could have turned into a “nightmare”. In particular, the fact that five months before the opening ceremony of the Olympics in Athens, at least half of the city's projects for the games were still unfinished –according to some members of the Greek parliament and the media – has been a deeply embarrassing situation for a country proud of

its classical legacy. But, in the end, against all the odds, *“the triumphant applause from the vast majority of the international mass media (...) and the praise from those who before the games never lost the opportunity to exercise peevish criticism has been the best evidence of Athens’s success in organising the 2004 Olympics”* (Ta Nea, 2004). Despite the cost, despite the anguish and technical difficulties in materialization, despite the temporary upset in every day life and transportations, the “victory” of the Olympic works has been confirmed. As for the final cost, the price tag, inflated by chronic delays, massive security and cost overruns went way over budget, causing the bill for the Games to reach an estimated total of \$13 billion¹ (International Herald Tribune 2005).

The Olympic Preparation project comprised the construction of 57 basic Olympic Works (Seimanidi – Velliou 2004): 24 of them concerned sports venues, 14 were road construction works, 3 were transport works, 2 were communication works, 8 were building works and 5 were energy works. The works and sports facilities created for the Games do not simply fulfil the required specifications but they are admittedly the best ones at international level. Apart from that, hundreds of small scale necessary works were built for the Olympic Games. The total basic Olympic works were supplemented by important works of infrastructure that were not directly related to the Olympic Games, but enhanced national social overhead capital. In fact, Athens experienced a real re-building, just like Barcelona did back in 1992, when a new city was built in order to cope with the requirements of the Olympic Games. Greece has acknowledged the temporary nature of most of the economic effects of the Olympic Games. However, the investment in facilities and the infrastructure constructed to meet the needs of such an important event offer great opportunities and include other social and economic benefits for the country. As Costa and Glinia (2004:284) point out, there exist short term and long term returns from the Games in Athens and four other Olympic cities: Thessalonica, Patras, Heraklion and Volos:

(a) Short term: visitors from outside the city, investments, economic impact for business, employment benefits.

(b) Long term: returns from investment in physical capital (including hospitality and gastronomy sectors), returns from investment in human capital (upskilling),

¹ Security alone cost Athens \$1.4 billion, as the games were the first held in the summer after the September 11th, 2001, attacks and came just five months after terrorist train bombings in Madrid that killed 191 people.

continuous visitation by tourists, productivity improvements, international direct investments, business development from infrastructure and related services

More specifically, the impacts on tourism from organizing a mega-event such as the Olympics have been for Greece –and not only for Athens– the followings (Kartakoullis et.al 2003):

- a. The attraction of high-income tourists and the creation of a new generation of tourists willing to repeat their visit to the host country.
- b. The creation of a favourable tourist image for the destination country.
- c. The creation and modernization of the tourism infrastructure.
- d. The unique opportunity of the host country to profit from the presence of the international media and send out various messages to the rest of the world.
- e. The creation of a skilled work force in the organization, management and funding sectors, with a special emphasis on hosting special sport and tourist attractive events.

The first bet –that of the successful Olympics– has already been won in the best possible way². What still remains is a second, equally important wager, which

² A report by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) has criticized the Olympic Games in Athens for falling short of environmental commitments, scoring it an overall 0.77 on a scale of 0-4. This ecological NGO evaluated the environmental wins and losses of the Athens Olympics based on the Sydney 2000 Olympics benchmark for "clean and green" games. They gave Athens high marks for improving the mass-transport network and removing large advertising signs but said that in most other areas it had fallen far short of Olympic ideals. The WWF said authorities have failed to incorporate green energy, water-saving programs, and recycling into their plans and that natural areas, including the mountains of Parnitha, Hymettus, and Penteli, are now "trapped" within Olympic constructions and road networks. The IOC, however, has insisted that respect for the environment was a priority. "We have worked closely with the Athens Organizing Committee to ensure environmental protection measures were considered right from the start," said IOC spokeswoman Giselle Davies. She also stated: "We note that just today, the Greek Environment and Public Works Ministry placed orders worth euro5.7 million with the municipality of Athens for implementing projects that include environmental measures such as tree planting,". Among the good things to emerge from the games was the improvement of public transport within Athens, WWF said. "The speeding up of major transport infrastructure works, such as the metro, the introduction of a fleet of gas-powered buses, the urban rail, and the tram make a positive contribution to the public transport services" (G-Force/Global Forum for Sports and Environment, WWF 2004).

is making use of the legacy of the Olympics and of all these achievements for the future. The aim of the present paper is, based on secondary data, to sum up the most important "Olympic lessons" for the Greek tourism industry so as to consolidate the country as a future tourism destination based on the legacy of the Games. Furthermore, Greece's experience could prove to be useful to other countries that will organize the Olympics in the future. The secondary data were derived from a number of sources including statistical bulletins, governmental publications, library records, newspaper articles, on-line data, and data from previous research case studies.

FACTS AND STATISTICS ON GREEK TOURISM INDUSTRY

When we talk of tourism in Greece today, what we really mean is 13-14 million foreign tourist-consumers (compared to 10-11 million domestic consumers), who spend their money on transport (air tickets, ferries, road-based transport etc.), accommodation (hotels, guest houses, rented rooms, camp sites), catering (restaurants, the food industry and small catering businesses, etc.), leisure (entertainment, cafes, clubs, etc.) and visits to various attractions (museums, parks, etc.) (Kondokolias 2004:79). Tourism constitutes a significant economic activity which occupies a dominant position in the Greek economy and is undoubtedly the sector which reaped the most benefit from the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. Modern Greece "traditionally" attracted before the Games more than 12 million foreign visitors each year (which means more than one tourist per inhabitant) and it ranks among the top 15 tourism destinations in the world. Seasonality was –and remains– the main characteristic of the Greek tourism product that has relied on the traditional triptych of sea, sun, and antiquity for decades (Ignatis 2004). In more detail, since the 1960's, Greece has been a popular sun, sand and sea destination combining a stunning landscape, temperate climate, the longest coastline in the Mediterranean, clean waters, tradition in hospitality and a cultural history of 3.000 years mirrored in numerous archaeological sites, monuments and museums. After three decades of rapid growth in tourism, Greece has maintained and increased its numbers in attendance, but the quality of tourism and the money spent per tourist is not as expected. This is apparently related i) to the economic policy of the tour operators, ii) to the competition of neighbouring tourism destinations and iii) to other more complex reasons (Costa and Glinia, 2004:283). At the moment, the Greek tourism product seems to be going through the maturity phase of its life cycle, meaning that it is quite vulnerable to the competition caused by other Mediterranean tourism markets. The fact that the increase in Greek tourism income does not correspond

to the increase of international arrivals in Greece confirms the negative situation the Greek tourism market is experiencing, mainly because of the competition with the neighbouring countries' tourism markets (Ignatis 2004:65).

After the successful organization of the 2004 Olympic Games it is anticipated that Greece will figure on the agenda for many more millions of tourists in the next 10 years and that it will be ranked even higher on the list along with the most renowned and attractive destinations. As the Ministry of Tourism stated, the most essential point is that the Olympics acted as the catalyst for a deeper and more realistic analysis of the Greek tourism product and brought about the redevelopment of the Greek tourism policy. An effective tourism strategy must combine competitiveness, viability and strong business management. The Greek Government, having recognized this fact, developed the cornerstone of its strategy on three pillars: "growth – culture – environment"³ and the results are starting to appear.

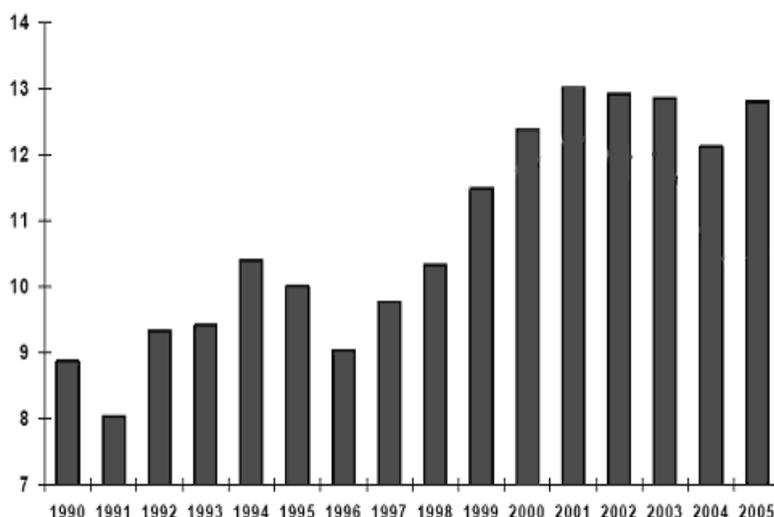
In 2004, when the Olympic Games of Athens took place (the Games were held in Athens, Thessaloniki, Patras, Volos and Iraklio) the number of tourist arrivals was 13.4 millions, whereas just a year before – 2003 – has reached 14 millions (one million concerns arrivals from Albania) (Diagrams 1, 2). Though, it should be mentioned that in the same year, the number of workforce directly or indirectly related to the tourism sector were almost 660.000 and represented 16.5% of the country's total employment. According to surveys committed by the Greek Ministry of Tourism Development the reasons for this phenomenon could be summarized as follows (Zopounidis and Gaganis, 2005): increased prices during the Olympic Games, negative publicity regarding safety, preparation and speculation matters, as well as the negative attractiveness that hosting the Games in Greece caused to countries such as France. Other reasons that caused arrivals in Greece to reduce were: promotion of new destinations (e.g. Bulgaria and Croatia), promotion of attractive tourism packages in competitive countries such as Turkey, the low financial rates and the high unemployment rates in traditional tourism outgoing countries such as Germany (phenomena that reduced the available tourists' income), as well as the growing European demand for cheaper destinations outside the Euro-zone. It should also be mentioned that euro's marking up caused the total tourism product to become more expensive. However

³ Growth will be based on new incentives for investment, simplification of the regulatory measures involved (i.e. simplification of procedures and the provision of tax incentives) and measures to make it easier to carry out large-scale investment packages and the development of new markets.

this fact did not affect competitive countries to record satisfying arrivals, whereas Greece despite the Olympic Games managed only to decrease in arrivals. The following year, 2005, tourism arrivals increased in Greece, probably in favour of the valuable heritage the Olympic Games left to the country concerning public works and hotel infrastructure (Table 1), promotion and upgrade of the services provided and finally, because of the “aggressive” promotion policy of Greek tourism abroad.

Diagram 1: Number of arrivals in Greece, 1990-2005 (in millions)

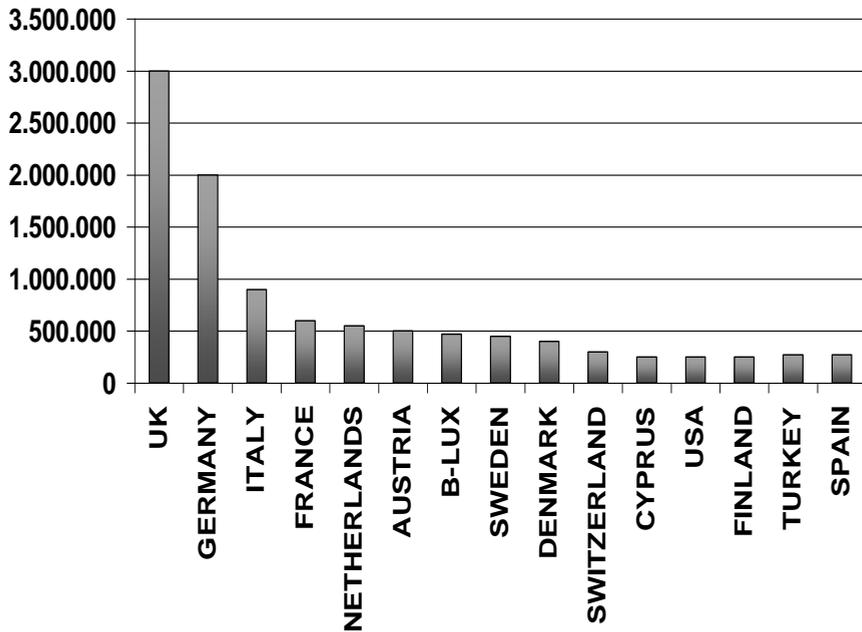
(Arrivals from Albania and cruises are excluded)



UNWTO, EOT, ESYE, ITEP

Source: Adaption from Sampaniotis (2006:8)

Diagram 2: Visitors in Greece by country of origin (2003)



National Statistical Service of Greece

Source: Hellenic Center for Investment (ELKE).

In 2005, according to the Bank of Greece, revenues from tourism amounted to €11bn (6.1% of the GDP), presenting an increase of 6.7% as compared to 2004, while arrivals also increased by 6.8% (Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Economy and Finance, 2007). By capitalizing on the Olympic Games success and the repositioning of the country in the world map, Greece is currently running an international advertising campaign that aims to give a significant boost to the tourism industry with central slogan “Explore your senses in Greece” (Greek Ministry of Tourism Development - Greek National Tourism Organisation/ GNTO⁴).

⁴ The Greek National Tourism Organisation supervises and promotes the Greek tourism product. GNTO is a public entity supervised by the Ministry of Tourism. Since 1950, GNTO has been responsible for the tourism sector. GNTO has its headquarters in Athens and operates offices across the country as well.

Highlights from a recent study indicate the followings (THR, International Tourism Consultants, Spain 2005, cited in Hellenic Center for Investment):

- Approximately 95% of visitors to Greece are satisfied.
- The majority of tourists to Greece had not considered other destinations in their decision.
- The friendliness and hospitality of the Greek people are the elements which tourists value most.

Table 1: Number of hotels and beds in Greece, 2005

| Classification | Hotels | Beds |
|-----------------------|---------------|---------------|
| AA | 155 | 56.888 |
| AA | 944 | 173.431 |
| B | 1.712 | 159.351 |
| C | 4.496 | 233.315 |
| Other | 1.729 | 59.065 |
| Total | 9.036 | 682.05 |

Source: Hellenic Chamber of Hotels

Furthermore, according to another survey⁵, Athens and Attica are considered safe destinations for holidays, while the culture and friendly behaviour of Athenians are

⁵ These were the findings of a research carried out on behalf of the Municipality of Athens and the Attica Region as part of the Regional Operational Program. The study was carried out in Attica (El. Venizelos

considered as very positive factors within our tourist product. The cost to quality of service ratio, the taxis and environmental issues (traffic congestion, pollution, and a deteriorating natural environment) are negative aspects of the city which mar the overall image visitors take away with them. The reasons for visiting were: history and culture (78.5%), sun/sea/beaches (39.9%), peace and relaxation (35%), fun (16.3%), visiting friends (4.5%), good prices (3.2%), good food (1.8%). 61.1% gave holidays/tourism as the purpose of their visit, 28.9% said it was for business purposes, 15.9% came to visit friends/relations, 5.3% for conferences, 1.1% for educational purposes and 0.9% for trade fairs. Total levels of satisfaction reached 90.6% (very satisfied 37.8%, quite satisfied 52.8%). 51.2% of respondents who had visited Athens in the past declared themselves to have been more satisfied or much more satisfied than they had been by their previous experience (much more satisfied 16.5%, more satisfied 34.7%, the same degree of satisfaction as the last time 38.6%). Accommodation services were given a high satisfaction rating, although there were some concerns about the price-quality ratio. The same was true for the catering services too, for which, while overall satisfaction was generally at a good level, it appears that costs were high and a major cause of negative feedback. Tourists were found to have been satisfied with public transport, although visitors were not so satisfied with the taxi services. 79.3% of the respondents stated that they were certain or likely to visit Attica again in the future. 88.9% said they would be willing to recommend the destination to others (Kondokolias 2006).

Besides the improvement of services and other policies, one of the ambitious plans Greek tourism authorities have initiated for the period 2000-2010, is the development of certain types of alternative tourism. This competitive policy has given priority to sport tourism, as 2004 Olympic Games incited interest for investments and other sport businesses. According to Costa and Glinia (2004: 284-286), the sport tourism market in Greece comprises four distinct areas of business: a) Olympic Games and other sport events b) resort hotels and "All Inclusive" clubs c) outdoor activities agencies and d) sport tourism marketing programs. Sport tourism in Greece is very much related to ecotourism and health tourism niches, but entrepreneurship in this area is only at the beginning and comprises multipart co-operations and initiatives. Meanwhile, the Greek government is trying to exploit

Airport) by Leo Burnett Athens and the research company Metron Analysis with a sample of 2000 foreign tourists who visited Athens and the Attica region (13-27/10/2005). The survey focussed on the level of satisfaction tourists derived from their accommodation, entertainment, the prices for services they had used and, more generally, their opinion for the tourist product in Attica.

the legacy of the modern stadiums and other installations, which will remain under state ownership, hoping to recover some of the money spent, by hosting major conferences and other sporting events –we should not forget that the Olympic Stadium has been awarded the Champions League final in 2007.

OLYMPIC LESSONS FOR THE GREEK TOURISM INDUSTRY

The most significant economic impact the Games have is usually the impact on the national and international tourism of the host city and country. The event of the Olympics has offered Greece a unique opportunity to showcase the country as a modern tourist destination, combining its traditional strengths as an open museum of ancient Greece and a wonderfully sunny land with world-class facilities (Ignatis 2004:1). Looking back in the recent history of the Games, one could isolate several cases of host cities the main interest of which was to seize the opportunity of hosting the Games in order to stimulate the growth of tourism⁶. Of course, the promotion of a host city and country through the Games is a complex and difficult task that requires a very well coordinated strategic marketing plan, which, if done properly, it can induce the arrival of thousands of international travellers. Hosting the Olympic Games brings long-term effects to the respective economy's International Tourism Market, that begin once a country has won the right to host the Games and last several years after the Games have occurred. In the case of Athens, this period covers the years from 1998 to 2011 (Kartakoulis et. Al 2003). This part of the present paper study critically examines what the Greek tourism industry has learnt from the organization of the Olympic Games and how it can take advantage of it.

⁶ Cave (2003) reports that the Barcelona Olympic Games generated spending of more than £ 15 billion and prompted a 15 year regeneration of the city with the benefits of a new marina area and an improved cruise terminal to be very important. The emphasis on urban regeneration has resulted in Barcelona becoming a leading short break destination for European holidaymakers in recent years, and its accessibility through the growth of low-cost airlines has added to the tourist numbers. In Atlanta, urban regeneration and infrastructure improvement, which was wholly privately funded, formed a major part of the bid strategy. This ultimately provided large dividends in terms of the growth of business in the city. In terms of sporting success the event was less successful with venues spread over a large area, although the major sporting legacy was the main stadium, which has now been transformed for professional baseball. On the other hand, Sydney, and Australia in general, set a good example of a host city-country that successfully leveraged the Games for tourism and managed to position its tourist product, both leisure and business, among the top in the world (Ignatis 2004:2).

The Hotel Sector of Athens/Greece: special forms of tourism and e-commerce

The hotel sector in Athens and Greece, as shown in the study carried out by Ignatis (2004), has experienced major changes in order to tackle the challenges of the post-Olympic tourism period: confronting the seasonal nature of Greek tourism, enhancing Greece's competitive advantages in tourism and promoting other tourism fields, to name just a few challenges. The pre-requisite for the hotels' successful Olympic preparations, has called for close co-operation between government bodies and the hoteliers, something apparent in the so far existing communications and decisions. Large hotel units have proceeded with their strategic planning towards the post Olympic tourism trends; as such, noteworthy cooperations can be seen among the Athens' hotels, as well as investment decisions on behalf of multi-national companies regarding Greek hotels, aiming to lead into a deeper penetration of the widely enlarged post-Olympic Greek tourism market. The study (Ignatis 2004) focused on the business and investment interest that the Olympic Games would bring upon the hotel sector in Athens and Greece. Businessmen have actually realized that Greece has moved well beyond the period where it was exclusively considered as a sea-sun-sand destination. Business opportunities have already been apparent and, now are expected to be multiplied.

The challenge faced is the prolongation of the Greek tourism season and how to make Attica a recreational region and not just a stop-over on the way to more popular destinations (such as Mykonos, Crete and the rest of the islands). The development of theme tourism seems to be an answer. GNTO's strategic planning is already moving towards this direction and the strengthening of the Greek thematic tourism has four main points (Ignatis 2004:60-61):

- The building of hotel infrastructure for exhibition-convention tourism, which may solve the problem of excessive accumulation of hotels in Attica.
- The development of winter tourism, by reorganizing skiing resorts.
- Sports tourism (golf, training centres for teams, etc.).
- The improvement and strengthening of spa tourism, in which Greece has an advantage thanks to its more than 800 hot springs.

As in Barcelona and Sydney, the Olympic Games of 2004 were expected to boost the tourism demand for special forms of tourism. This has been exactly the

pathway that the big hotel chains have pursued as the renovation programs, the operational interventions and the planning they have undertaken aimed to provide the adequate service and facilities to the business and conference visitors, visitors interested in the sea and so on (Pilavios, 2001). Some of the most significant business actions regarding this matter are as follows (Ignatis 2004:61): The Aldemar Hotel Group, with 5,000 deluxe and first-class beds, was oriented towards the creation of special tourism facilities in its units, in co-operation with the Royal Mare Thalassa aquatic therapy centre –one of the most modern in Europe– in order to ensure top quality services. The Grecotel Group is the biggest chain of hotels in Greece, with 22 hotels in Crete, Rhodes, Mykonos, Corfu, Chalkidiki, Peloponnesus, Athens and Thessaloniki. Its total capacity is 11,000 beds and employs more than 3.500 people. Grecotel has won over 65 international prizes so far, not only for the quality of its services, but also for its contribution to the upgrading of Greek tourism products. The plans of the group have included a new investment near Olympia, where bungalows and centers for multi-thematic recreation were to be built. The Maris Hotel Group, owner a four-star hotel (Silva Maris & Bungalows with 600 beds) and two five-star hotels (Bella Maris Hotel & Bungalows, 540 beds), as well as the Creta Maris Hotel & Bungalows, 1.100 beds (the first hotel in the Mediterranean to get the ISO 9001 certificate of quality) has proceeded with the construction of a convention centre with a capacity of 4.500. As the Ministry of Economy and Finance underlines 3 years after the Olympics (2007): *“Tourism infrastructure was greatly upgraded as a result of hosting the Olympic Games and Greece is now perfectly equipped to meet high accommodation standards. Greece is gradually establishing itself as the ideal choice for hosting conventions, international exhibitions and other events as well as for major investments in the tourist industry, such as the development of big hotel complexes or the creation of specialized facilities attracting specific groups of tourists”*.

Information offered through hotel web sites serve as a means for increasing the effectiveness of marketing and eCommerce of hotel businesses. The objective of a research carried out by Vrana et.al (2004) was to examine and measure the quantity and type of information provided through Athens hotel web sites. What has been made clear is that Athens hotel companies make little use of the Internet as a means for marketing or contacting, informing and making business with potential customers since only a small percentage of the Athens hotels employ web sites⁷. Most of the surveyed hotels offer some information

⁷ Following the search methodology 498 hotels located in the continental part of the Prefecture of Attica were recorded. These consisted of: 24 class L, 55 class A, 83 class B, 223 Class C, 79 Class D and 36 Class E hotels. Out of these 498 hotels, 142 (28.5 per cent) had their own website available to users,

services in their sites, but the full potential of this technology is not used. The Athens hotels web sites serve mostly as a means for providing contact information and advertising in general but not for making online transactions. In most of the cases they provide Customer contact information uniformly, but offering facilities information depends on hotel category. These findings are in agreement with those of Deimezi and Buhalis (2003) who concluded that the Greek tourist industry is still at an embryonic stage and does not make extensive use of the potential offered through Internet technology –something of a great need to change, so as, especially smaller and independent hotels from all over Greece, to improve their marketing and e-Commerce.

Destination Image and the role of the Media

Image and reputation are identified as potentially influencing visitor loyalty likelihood towards the tourist destination. However, the precise nature of the relationships between destination's reputation and image and the understanding of their effect on potential visitor behaviour remains a challenge for both academia and tourism marketers alike (Christou 2005). A vital lesson that has emerged from Athens' experience is that the host country needs to focus hard, and early enough, on addressing international concerns in the media to overcome negative perceptions –perceptions that *"have stuck to the Athens Games like wet clothing"*. It's not enough for government officials to hold press conferences and just say that everything is going on is well. "They needed to be ahead of the curve," says Scott Rosner, an expert on sports business who lectures in Wharton's legal studies department. "But this (Olympic organizing) committee has turned out to be far more reactive than pro-active. The PR strategy was far too generic" (Knowledge@Wharton 2004).

Furthermore, a study carried out by Hede (2005) provides insights into the efficacy of the telecast of a mega-event in developing positive attitudes towards a host destination. *"It seems as if the telecast was the impetus for improving attitudes towards Greece as a tourist destination for a considerable proportion of the*

the features of which were analysed. All the hotels of Attica that are sorted to the L Class, had their own website. In Classes A, B, C these percentages were 60 per cent, 46 per cent and 20 per cent respectively. A percentage of just 3 per cent of D Class hotels had their own website, while no E Class hotel was identified with a website.

sample⁸. While the telecasts are generally focussed on the sports, it is clear that the images of the host destination, albeit that these are a secondary aspect of the telecast, were absorbed by the viewers in this sample and that these were then used as a basis for attitude change. This information highlights to destination marketers that it is important to carefully consider how the destination is projected in the telecasts. It is therefore important to consider this issue in the early stages of the event planning so that strategies can be put in place to harness the tourism benefits of staging such events in host destinations” (Hede 2005:198). Across the sample, 38.7% of respondents indicated that their overall attitude towards Greece as a tourist destination changed as a result of their consumption of the telecast of Athens 2004. Considering that the attitudes of participants in the current study improved, not as a result of firsthand experiences at the destination, but as a result of their vicarious experiences of the destination through consumption of a media telecast of a special event, the results provide insights to the efficacy of this particular telecast in developing positive attitudes with regard to Greece as a tourist destination. The GNTO should try to exploit in the best possible way the international media potential, by emphasising on television spots and on the creation of special travel documentaries for telecasting abroad. The key issues that emerged for the four clusters in Hede’s study (2005) were the appearance of Greece; culture and history of Greece; capacity, or “hostability”, of Greece to stage the Athens 2004; and infrastructure in Greece.

Small Scale Event Sport Tourism and the optimal development of Olympic infrastructure

Specialized organisations such as the Hellenic Olympic Properties⁹ and the Tourism Development Co.¹⁰ have been established to ensure the optimal

⁸ The focus of this study was the media telecast of the Athens 2004 Summer Olympic Games. The study explored the efficacy of the Australian telecast in developing positive perceptions and attitudes of Greece as a tourist destination and was origin-based—in that a survey was undertaken of a sample of Australian residents (n 5 350). Participants were segmented based on their post-consumption perceptions of Greece. Four segments were identified and labelled—‘extremely positive’ (n 575), ‘highly positive’ (n 5.153), ‘positive’ (n 583) and ‘negative’ (n 529). Statistical differences were found between the segments based on whether attitudes towards Greece had improved as a result of their consumption of the media telecast of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games.

⁹ Hellenic Olympic Properties (www.olympicproperties.gr) operates under the aegis of the Ministries i) of Finance and ii) of Culture and was established to manage the portfolio of the 22 new Olympic venues. High priority development sites, comprised of indoor and outdoor facilities with large properties are

development and use of Olympic and tourist infrastructure. For instance, the Olympic Tae-kwon-do facility on the Faliro coastal front is being redeveloped into an international convention centre. The legacy of the Games also includes the development of an investment-friendly environment. For example, the Olympic properties, i.e. buildings and sports venues with state-of-the-art equipment, will be used for a number of purposes relating to business activities, leisure and the hosting of major sports and cultural events (Ministry of Economy and Finance 2007).

Sport tourism can be combined with sport events, training or individual sports and in Greece this form of tourism has high potential for development. The majority of sports centres that are available after the Olympic Games can be utilised for sports tourism. Taking advantage of the good climate, foreign athletes and sports organisations are able to prepare for major sports events in our country. Most of the literature and economic studies of sport tourism focuses on mega sporting events such as the Olympic Games or World Cups. On the one hand these events are undoubtedly very important, as indicated above, while on the other hand we should not forget that they are largely one-off events to a particular country or city and that they carry a significant burden of costs (Cave 2003:10). The significance of the economic success of smaller scale sports events should not be overlooked and every year all over the world *“thousands of people travel significant distances to watch their favourite sports on a regular basis”* (Gibson et. al. 2003:181). These events are of considerable economic significance and, given that they require little or no additional infrastructure investment, should be considered as offering greater benefit to the local community. We have already mentioned that apart from the official mega-events, there are less important events that attract the local visitors, sometimes attract important sponsors and increase the fame of the destinations. A number of studies or researches undertaken into small-scale events show that such sports bring benefits to host communities which

located in the most rapidly growing area of greater Athens. It is intended that the use of these properties should promote Greek civilization and sports while stimulating business and economic growth and creating sustainable development in the surrounding area.

¹⁰ Tourism Development Co. (www.tourism-development.gr) is a leading Greek real estate asset manager, facilitating contact between the public and private sectors in order to assure the most advantageous property development. The Company's main scope of activity is to manage and administer state owned tourism property and to secure optimal development through financing. The state owned tourism property portfolio, managed by Tourism Development Co., numbers over 350 assets scattered throughout Greece. This portfolio consists of business units – casinos, marinas, hotels, organized beaches, natural springs, camping, ski resorts, golf courses, etc. – and underdeveloped sites.

might not otherwise have attracted visitors, and the predominant benefits were in terms of local spending on accommodation, food, drink and also retail shopping (Cave 2003:10). For these reasons supporting the National Sport Federations and coordinating local tourism authorities are considered to be of vital importance. For example, a combination of several extreme sports promoted as mini-Olympiad takes place every year in Konitsa, Northern Greece with a participation of about 400 athletes. The program includes 38 km rafting, 42 km mountain biking and mountain marathon running, as well as four days parapente flying (Souliotis, 2004). The financial benefits derive from visitors' services, participation fees and sales.

Volunteerism, social responsibility and touristic consciousness

Volunteerism is a great project that has succeeded and is likely to have a lasting impact on Greece, as a lost sense of social responsibility has started acquiring again roots to grow in Greek society (Ioannides 2002)¹¹. A major effort in the direction of volunteerism, that has been done and ought to be continued by the National Sport Federations in coordination with the GNTO, would help in the creation of social capital and could cause a change in the opposite direction that can definitely have positive results in the development of a "touristic consciousness" for the Greek hosts. Involvement Volunteering is a unique, cost effective way for people of all ages to gain practical experience; or to learn from practical experience while helping others as real volunteers, and meeting the local people and their culture when travelling in their own or in a foreign country.

Regardless of the type of volunteer service or environment, volunteers are made up of different people, from different backgrounds, usually having many different cultures (Arai, 2000/2001). When these people come together as volunteers to provide a common service under a "common roof" to an organization or an event such as the Olympics, they not only have to abide by standards and

¹¹ Although it may be argued that volunteerism at the Olympic Games has a rich history with many athletes, officials, and organizers volunteering time and efforts, the concept of "Olympic volunteer" is fairly young. It was not until the Olympic glossary of the Official Report of the Barcelona Games that the concept Olympic volunteer was first defined. This definition states that the Olympic volunteer is "a person who makes an individual, altruistic commitment to collaborate, to the best of his/her abilities in the organization of the Olympic Games, carrying out the tasks assigned to him/her without receiving payments or rewards of any other nature" (Karlis 2003). Athens 2004 trained 45,000 volunteers for the Olympics and 15,000 for the Paralympics. In 2000, the Sydney Olympic Games utilized 47,000 whereas, in Atlanta, the 1996 Olympic Games relied on the efforts of 60,422 volunteers.

regulations of the host National Olympic Committee, they also have to learn to appreciate and work with each other, despite cultural differences. Indeed, Olympic volunteers are called upon to work with so many cultures at a time and look as if they were one. As each volunteer is accustomed to a different “way of life,” it may be difficult to have all volunteers interact in a socially cohesive fashion; but this is a challenge that the host National Olympic Committee and the Olympic Movement must be prepared to contend with (Karlis 2003). In general, the psychological benefits from the Olympics to Greece have taken different shapes: from community pride, to a sense of coming together, satisfaction of a job well done, cooperation between residents, or the “Olympic spirit”.

CONCLUSION: AREAS FOR ACTION AND MEASURES

The opportunity for a city to host the Olympic Games constitutes an enormous economic social and cultural commitment, as it is the world's biggest sporting event. It is an opportunity that, if properly managed and marketed, will bring a number of positive long-term benefits to the rest of the country as a whole (Kartakoulis *et.al.* 2003). To enhance the competitiveness of tourism, the Greek tourist product must, on the one hand, acquire an even greater share of the international tourist market and, on the other, upgrade the quality of its supply. It also needs to be enriched and diversified. Furthermore, it must incorporate an increasingly larger part of domestic production of goods and services through the strengthening of the role of the workforce and entrepreneurship and modernising the infrastructure provided by public administration and the mechanisms by which tourism policy is implemented (Kondokolias 2004:81).

Greece's successful hosting of the Olympic Games was internationally acknowledged and gave the country a boost in its image, reflecting its modern, confident and dynamic profile (Christou 2005). The Olympic Games have given to the Greek tourism industry competitive advantages, mainly through the infrastructural legacy that they left. Athens and Greece as a whole have been engaged to a long term strategic commitment the main characteristics of which are (Ignatis 2004:67):

- The gradual disconnection from mass tourism that has been proven to be a low return business.
- The attraction of middle and higher income visitors through higher quality product development in order to maximise profits.

- The gradual disconnection from seasonality through new forms of theme tourism.
- The empowerment of hotel human resources and the improvement of its technical support.
- Continuous marketing research aimed at identifying potential gaps and opportunities.

With all the above as guidelines for the period 2004-2010, the Greek plan is implemented along six main axes (Kondokolias 2004:81):

1. Improving the quality of supply,
 2. Enriching and diversifying the total tourist product,
 3. Educating and training the workforce,
 4. Enhancing entrepreneurship
5. Promoting and advertising Greece using new tools and modern methods,
6. Modernising the infrastructure provided by public administration and the mechanisms by which tourist policy is implemented.

After the Athens Olympics, the world recognized in Greece a country that can meet large-scale challenges, a country that “can do wonders.” But for the wonders to continue, especially in the field of sports tourism, there is a need for the development of research programmes and studies in the particular area and related fields. In Greece, sports tourism does not exist as an established academic field and at the moment there are no undergraduate or postgraduate programmes in the Greek Universities or Polytechnics (Sport Tourism International Council - Research Unit of Greece). There are however, modules related to sport and tourism. Three years after the Olympics, Athens has invested billions of dollars in its buildings and transportation system. Hotels have been upgraded and restaurants have improved their menus and service. Greeks are full of pride. The issues and questions that have arisen from 2004 Olympics, as already indicated, are many. For the final answers, we will have to ask again in 5-10 years.

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