REIMAGING THE CITY:

The Value of Sport Initiatives

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ABSTRACT

A growing number of post-industrial cities are utilizing sport initiatives to present an attractive image to potential tourists. Despite insufficient evidence of, and explanations for, image effects, it is widely assumed that these initiatives have the capacity to enhance city images. The aim of this paper is to explore the value of sport as a reimaging theme for the contemporary city destination. This assessment is based primarily on evidence regarding the effects of sport reimaging initiatives adopted by three UK cities - Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield. The findings suggest that, although sport reimaging does exhibit some advantageous qualities, there are also significant problems associated with this mode of place marketing.

KEYWORDS:

Sport, cities, image, destination marketing

RUNNING HEAD SUGGESTION: SPORT REIMAGING

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years cities have deployed various products, themes and resources to compete for a share of tourism and other external capital. For example, some cities have emphasized their qualities as cultural centers (Griffiths 1995) or their locational advantages (Barke and Harrop 1994). Others have highlighted historical events or even mythical and fictional associations to compete in an increasingly symbolic space-economy. However, evoking parallels with Athenian and Roman antecedents, several cities have employed sport to further their reputations and it is the analysis of this 'sport reimaging' that provides the focus for this paper. In qualifying the use of the word 'sport', Williams states that his work focuses on 'high profile spectator sport, or sport as display, not sport as play' (Williams 1997:74). This paper adopts a similar perspective and the subsequent use of the term should be interpreted as a reference to this dimension.

Sport reimaging refers to a process whereby a municipal government, either alone or in partnership with private sector agencies, deliberately exploits sport to modify the image of a place. Most large cities will utilize sport to some extent in promotional literature and other tourism marketing activities. However, sport reimaging involves a more comprehensive approach, where sport is used as a central theme of a city's reimaging efforts. For example, Kurtzman notes that Perth, Australia, has marketed itself as the 'City of Sporting Events', while Lake Placid has attempted to position itself as the 'Winter Sports Capital of the United States' to attract tourists (Kurtzman 2001:19). Comparable examples are apparent in the UK, where several cities, most notably Sheffield, have employed their recent designation as 'National Cities of Sport' in tourism marketing initiatives.

Alongside the inevitable use of associated slogans and publicity material, sport reimaging typically involves bidding for, and staging, sport events (Hillier 2000; Whitelegg 2000). Major sport events are typical of what tourism researchers have termed 'special' or 'hallmark' events. These events are defined by Ritchie as major one-time or recurring events of limited duration, developed primarily to enhance the awareness, appeal and profitability of the host location (Ritchie 1984:2). Sport events are viewed by many cities as particularly effective for this purpose, as they can generate substantial media exposure. The alleged symbolic capacity of sport stadia means that they are also used in sport reimaging, either in association with, or independently of, specific events. Indeed, the construction of spectacular 'flagship' or 'prestige' sport facilities (Loftman and Nevin 1996; Loftman and Spirou 1996; Smyth 1994) is often justified by their supposed capacity to connote various qualities from machismo (Schimmel 1995), to modernity (Nielsen 1995) and progress (Rowe 1995).

The aim of this paper is to evaluate if and how sport can provide a valuable reimaging theme for city destinations. Although several authors (Loftman and Nevin 1996; Loftman and Spirou 1996; van den Berg et al. 2000; Whitelegg 2000; Whitson and MacIntosh 1993) have examined the relationship between sport and city image, the vast majority of this work focuses on the use of sport reimaging, rather than the resultant image effects. In this paper the intention is to evaluate the value of sport reimaging initiatives by identifying whether they actually affect tourist images of city destinations. Furthermore, the paper aims to explain any image modification observed by identifying the characteristics of sport initiatives that facilitate, or obstruct, positive city image change.

THE VALUE OF SPORT REIMAGING

As Pearce asserts, image 'is one of those terms that will not go away, a term with vague and shifting meanings' (1988:162). Although the term has traditionally been used to refer to the artificial reconstruction of an object or scene, it is increasingly used to refer to something's reputation or character (Williams 1976). Diverse interpretations are also apparent in tourism studies, where images of destinations are regarded as perceptual (Mayo and Jarvis 1981), affective (Baloglu and Brinberg 1997), visual (Mackay and Fesenmaier 1997) or social phenomena (Selwyn 1996). Although these interpretations are often based on variant philosophical positions, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. It is possible to interpret image as encompassing both cognitive and evaluative dimensions, involving eidetic (visual) representations and linguistic associations formed at both the individual and social level. As Alhemoud and Armstrong state, tourist images are 'ideas or conceptions held individually or collectively of the destination' (1996:76).

City 'reimaging' refers to attempts by urban destinations to purposefully reconfigure these ideas and conceptions. Such efforts have allowed post-industrial cities to adjust to dramatic economic and political shifts that have undermined established industrial sectors. However, reimaging is not merely a function of contemporary urban governance; it also represents a certain set of ideologically-loaded ideas and concepts. Indeed, reimaging is essentially a discourse, grounded in neo-liberalism (Healey 1997) or new right capitalism (Philo and Kearns 1993) formed in reaction to the policies of the urban left. This discourse perpetuates the notion that places are commodities that should compete with one another for a share of inward investment.

Many cities have adhered to the central tenets of this discourse and have attempted to 'reimage' themselves as entertainment centers by providing a mix of spectacles, events and attractions for urban tourists.

As Whitelegg identifies, sport has been used as a central component in this restructuring of the urban image (2000:803). The events, celebrities, iconic structures, spectacles and ephemeral consumption associated with contemporary sport means that it is viewed by cities as a potent vehicle for post-industrial adjustment. Accordingly, many cities have used sport to stimulate and symbolize the urban transition that the reimaging discourse envisages. This symbolic dimension seems particularly important. Although cities have deployed sporting imagery throughout urban history, recent societal shifts may have increased the symbolic capital associated with this particular aspect of popular culture. Indeed, it is perhaps no coincidence that sport reimaging is more prevalent in the contemporary era where popular and mass cultures are regarded as more legitimate, the source of prestige and where they are positioned further up the symbolic hierarchy (Featherstone 1991).

One of the most oft-cited examples of sport reimaging is the attempt by Indianapolis, USA, to reimage itself as a white-collar tourist center (Euchner 1999; Schimmel 1995). Euchner attributes the alleged success of Indianapolis's sport reimaging to its 'early commitment to the sports strategy' (1999:228). However, the serial reproduction of this strategy and heightened expectations of urban sport provision since Indianapolis's pioneering tactics means that the use of sport initiatives to differentiate cities is becoming increasingly difficult. Indeed, rather than providing a distinctive image, the development of sport facilities is considered by some

commentators to be fundamental contributor to the process of urban homogenization (Harvey 1989; Whitson and Macintosh 1993). The inefficient redistribution of resulting benefits is another common criticism of sport reimaging. Although Indianapolis's initiatives may have enhanced the city's image, Schimmel (1995) notes that underlying social problems remained largely unresolved. Similarly, the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta have been criticized for prioritizing image concerns at the expense of community development (Whitelegg 2000). It is alleged that this was primarily due to the over-involvement of private sector enterprises whose own image objectives were prioritized (Whitelegg 2000). Therefore, regardless of important concerns concerning the translation of image benefits into community benefits, even the positive image effects of sport reimaging are not necessarily felt by the cities themselves. This parallels Jennings'(1996) conclusion that the image benefits of staging major sport events are usually accrued by international political and commercial business interests, rather than host cities.

Although sport reimaging has been the subject of a considerable amount of research, there is a relative lack of empirical research into its specific effects. Recent work undertaken by Chalip et al. (2003) regarding the effects of sport event media on the image of Australia's Gold Coast is a welcome attempt to address this deficiency. Chalip et al. view sport reimaging as an exercise in co-branding, where success depends upon the relationship between the image of the destination and the image of the event staged. This approach is reflected in other literature that also uses branding as a framework to illustrate the use and effects of mega-events (Brown et al. 2002; Jago et al. 2003). Chalip et al. conclude that a destination's image is affected by sport events that they host, but that the effects will depend upon the compatibility of the

destination image with the event staged. For example, the researchers found that images of the Gold Coast's natural environment were affected negatively by a Motor Race staged in the destination. This was because of the incompatibility of this type of event with this particular dimension of destination image (Chalip et al. 2003). The potential for such negative image effects is also highlighted by Higham's pessimistic assertion that cities staging major events 'stand to lose more than they can gain in terms of destination image' (1999:84). Therefore, it is important to recognize that the effects of sport reimaging on destination images may be positive, negative or indeed, negligible. The lack of any discernible image change was something noted by Mossberg and Halberg (1999) in their research into the impact of the 1995 World Athletics Championships on international travelers' images of the host city, Gothenburg.

Ritchie, in collaboration with various authors, has also produced research that assists understanding of the effects of events on destination image (Ritchie 1984; Ritchie and Lyons 1990; Ritchie and Smith 1991). Ritchie and Smith's (1991) research regarding the city of Calgary, the host of the 1988 Winter Olympic Games, suggests that a sport event can influence people's awareness and image of a city destination. However, the authors suggest that cities must anticipate a certain rate of image and awareness decay if steps are not taken to keep links with sport visible (Ritchie and Smith 1991). Ritchie and Smith also cast doubt upon the specific tourism benefits of any image change. One of the parallels between their work and that of and Chalip et al. (2003) is the conclusion in both studies that image change does not necessarily translate into tourist visitation. For Ritchie and Smith, even if destinations do experience sport-induced image advancement 'it is not immediately obvious that this will translate into

increased visitation levels, tourism receipts and/or other forms of economic development' (1991:9). This is reaffirmed by Chalip et al.'s research where 'no direct effect of [sport] event media on intention to visit was found' (2003:228).

Apart from the work of Chalip et al. (2003), there is little empirical research that suggests how city images are affected by sport initiatives. Therefore, it is useful to review more general research that addresses how destination images can be effectively modified. By comparing these ideas to the characteristics of the sport initiatives employed by cities, it is possible to assess the value of sport reimaging. Interestingly, sport does appear to demonstrate several qualities that can be equated to influential agents of image change. These apparent justifications for sport reimaging are discussed below and in subsequent sections of this paper they are evaluated further using findings from the author's own research.

Communications theory suggests that the source of a message helps to determine the effects that it will have on its audience (Fiske 1990; Lasswell 1948). Applying this principle, Gartner suggests that 'autonomous' image formation agents are the most effective imaging vehicles, because of their high credibility and high market penetration (Gartner 1993; 1996; 1997). Autonomous image formation agents are those which are not directly controlled by a tourist destination, such as new coverage or images emanating from popular culture. Therefore, the tendency for urban sport initiatives to be communicated via these agents, rather than through conventional destination marketing techniques, may add to its value as a reimaging theme.

Credible image change may be secured by using credible image formation agents, but it can also be attained by employing credible themes. Gartner asserts that 'effective

image change depends on an assessment of presently held tourism images' (Gartner 1993:207). Therefore, to formulate an effective image enhancement strategy, it is important to locate reimaging strategies within existing belief systems, especially as people may tend to avoid contradictory information or what Gartner terms 'cognitive dissonance' (Gartner 1993:205). Accordingly, effective reimaging strategies may be those that advance existing images, rather than those that impose an instantaneous revolution. Post-industrial cities often have long-established associations with sport events, high-profile teams and stadia. For example, Holt (1989) suggests that sport was an intrinsic urban function of British cities in the 19th Century, identifying that by 1900 'every large city had its football, cricket or rugby ground, many had several large stadia' (1989:159). Karp and Yoels feel that this facet of urban culture has endured to the present day, arguing that 'sport is surely a pervasive feature of everyday urban life' (1990:7). Therefore, there is nothing new or revolutionary about associating sport with these urban areas. By strengthening, renewing and developing these associations, cities can perhaps communicate a congruent image to potential tourists.

The 'imageability' of sport initiatives may also allow them to penetrate images of city destinations. The concept of imageability was first explored by Kevin Lynch (1960) and refers to the quality in a physical object that gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer. Lynch's ideas can be linked to more recent debates, where it is observed that authorities have encouraged strategies that aestheticise or focus on the visual consumption of public space (Lash and Urry 1994; Zukin 1998). Sport stadia may have the capacity to become 'imageable' elements of the urban environment, as several commentators indicate that they provide 'potent

landscape features' (Stevens and Wootton 1997:52). For example, Raitz (1987:5) states that sport stadia provide cities with buildings that are distinctive and which evoke a strong sense of place. This view is echoed by Bale who observes that 'it is the floodlights of the stadium, not the spire of the cathedral that more often than not act as urban landmarks and points of reference'(1993:3).

The imageability of sport initiatives may allow cities to develop new synecdochical images. Synecdoche refers to where a part comes to represent the whole, and the development of synecdochical images is a crucial part of city reimaging. As we are unable to contain the unbounded spread of large cities in an all-encompassing image, we often recall the city through images of memorable features (Donald 1997). This process generates synecdochical images, where a whole city is represented by a single icon. Because of their symbolic capacity, media exposure, contemporary significance and popular acclaim, sport initiatives may provide synecdochical images for cities. Indeed, some commentators imply that the concept of synecdoche is specifically applicable to sporting icons. Karp and Yoels state that 'just as New York's skyline, San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge or the French Quarter in New Orleans both identify cities and become the source of people's identification with the city, so do sport teams' (1990:91).

Alongside credibility, continuity and imageability, it is also recognized that an individual's 'existing needs and desires' are an important part of the image formation process (Ashworth and Voogd 1990:81). Images are selective representations and what people choose to perceive is usually related closely to what they care about (Mayo and Jarvis 1981). Therefore, the popularity of sport in contemporary society

may allow sport initiatives to infiltrate tourist images more effectively than reimaging strategies based on more obscure themes. According to Whitelegg sport has 'an unrivalled capacity to capture the attention of huge numbers of people' (2000:802). Again, this would seem to increase the potential value of sport as a reimaging theme for city destinations.

Study Methods

The aim of this research is to evaluate the value of sport reimaging by establishing if and how sport initiatives affect city images. To provide sufficient evidence to meet this aim, the strategies adopted by three English cities were analyzed. This research attempted to establish what effects strategies adopted by Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield 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 three case study cities had affected city images. 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 reimaging that facilitate, or obstruct positive image change.

A combination of semi-structured interviewees and structured questionnaires was used to generate the required information. The structured questionnaire was primarily used to explore prompted awareness of sport initiatives, the inclusion/non-inclusion of sport initiatives in simplified representations of the three cities and images of the

cities as sport destinations. The semi-structured interviews explored more detailed images of the cities and the attitudes and meanings generated by associating sport with a city.

The selection of research participants The research aimed to assess the effects of sport initiatives on the images of 'potential tourists', rather than tourists who had already decided to visit a particular destination. To address the difficulty of defining who should be included within this nebulous sample set, potential tourists were defined as adults residing in areas of England where an overnight stay in each of the case study cities was a realistic possibility. This meant selecting participants from residential areas that were far enough away from the cities to discourage day excursions and over-familiarity, but near enough to encourage short-break custom. Using information regarding the average distance traveled by domestic tourists to UK short-break destinations (Beioley 1991), circular zones of a standardized distance (76 miles) were created around each of the three cities (see Figure 1). The intention was to ensure that participants residing in districts within these zones would not be involved in the research. Research participants were then selected from three districts located at strategic points at the edge of these exclusion zones (see Figure 1). Choosing sites on the edge of the zones, rather than further afield, allowed residents to be questioned about all three cities, as Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield were guaranteed to be at distances that would encourage overnight visitation. The aim was to select participants from districts located at the exact points where the arcs of the exclusion zones meet. This is how Sample Electoral District 1 (Fenland) and Sample Electoral District 2 (Darlington) were identified (see Figure 1). However, as the Manchester and Birmingham exclusion zones arcs meet at a rural location outside England, a different district along the Birmingham arc was selected. This provided a

site that was in England, and one that allowed a degree of contextual variation as it meant that research was conducted in one urban district (Bristol), one rural district (Fenland) and one district exhibiting both rural and urban characteristics (Darlington). In each of these three districts, 60 respondents completed questionnaires and 18 separate individuals were interviewed. Therefore, in total, 180 questionnaire respondents and 54 interviewees participated in the research. Individual participants were selected from three specific electoral wards within each district. These wards were selected on the basis that they provided the best opportunity within each district to access a broad range of individuals from different socio-economic groups. Once these wards had been identified, potential participants were chosen by selecting names randomly from the relevant electoral registers.

Although the total number of people involved in the research was relatively small, the aim was to provide valid findings by generating a sample that was closely representative of the English population. To meet this objective, a quota sampling technique was employed in conjunction with the random selection of participants from electoral registers. The quotas were based on the age, gender and socio-economic profile of the English adult population. The latest census data was used to calculate the pro-rata number of individuals from each gender, age and socio-economic classification required to produce a representative sample of 60 questionnaire respondents and 18 interviewees in each Sample District (details available on request). Once the required number of participants of a certain gender, age group or socio-economic class had been obtained, no further individuals displaying those characteristics were included in the final sample. This quota sampling, coupled with the refusal of some individuals to participate in the research,

meant that the researcher was required to identify and approach a quantity of potential participants far in excess of the target sample of 180 questionnaire respondents and 54 interviewees. A further disadvantage of this technique was that it became very difficult during the latter stages of fieldwork in each district to find participants who would match the very specific characteristics needed to fill the remaining gaps in the quotas. This problem resulted in some minor discrepancies where the socio-economic profiles of the participants do not exactly match that of the English population. Nevertheless, the methods used ultimately delivered a sample that reflects the gender, and age profile of the English adult population, and which generally reflects their socio-economic characteristics.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

To allow a key target audience to be included in the research, questionnaires were also distributed to a sample of sport tourists attending five sport events in other English cities (see Figure 1). These events were selected as the sports on view could alternatively be experienced in Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield. The location of the events was also an important consideration. Three of the cities in which these events were staged, Gateshead, Bristol and Peterborough, are all located close to the districts chosen to provide samples of general tourists. Events in London and Newcastle were also selected, as these are the two largest English cities located outside the designated exclusion zones. Resource constraints and the restrictions caused by the difficulties associated with administering detailed questionnaires at sport events meant that only small sample sizes could be obtained. There was no specific intention to obtain a representative sample of the English population,

although by randomly selecting 15 spectators at each event, the study did aim to recruit participants who were broadly representative of urban sport tourists.

The three cities

The case study cities are good examples of where regeneration has been undertaken to stimulate post-industrial revival; and, as Loftman and Nevin (1996) identify, sport and tourism are prominent themes in the regeneration strategies pursued by all three cities. Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield's sport-led regeneration strategies were motivated by destination image considerations (Smith 2002) and thus they provide illustrative examples of sport reimaging.

Birmingham The recessions of the late 1970s and 1980s devastated Birmingham's economy and it is estimated that 191,000 jobs were lost in the city between 1971 and 1987 (Loftman and Nevin 1996). To counter the effects of this 'crisis' and to diversify its economy, the city adopted an ambitious regeneration strategy that was typical of market-driven approaches in the 1980s. The strategy involved the portrayal of Birmingham as an international city, able to attract, interest and entertain visitors. This ambition was supported by several major sport initiatives. For example, Birmingham bid to stage the 1992 Olympic Games and constructed the US$84million National Indoor Arena (NIA). Significant investment in sport facilities has enabled the city to stage a number of high profile sport events, including Davis Cup tennis and international athletics.

Manchester The 20th Century decline of Manchester's traditional industries (textiles, engineering and steel) intensified during the 1970s and early 1980s. Taylor et al.

(1996) estimate that 207,000 manufacturing jobs were lost in the Greater Manchester region between 1972 and 1984. The city's response has been to bolster its profile and competitiveness using several high profile schemes. Many of these initiatives have followed a sporting theme, including bids for the 1996 and 2000 Olympics and the construction of associated facilities, such as the National Cycling Centre (NCC) and the Manchester Evening News (MEN) Arena. Partly due to these initiatives, the city was awarded the 2002 Commonwealth Games that were staged in the city between July 26 and August 4 2002. This event prompted the development of an area in East Manchester as a 'Sport City', incorporating a 45,000-seat stadium and a series of smaller sport venues. It should be noted that the fieldwork for the present study was undertaken before the Commonwealth Games took place and before the new stadium was officially opened. Therefore the post-Games effects are not addressed in this paper.

Sheffield During the 1970s and 1980s, Sheffield's manufacturing base was severely eroded and the city lost 60,000 jobs between 1978 and 1988 (Dabinett 1990). In response to its declining economic fortunes, the city has pursued a sport-led strategy that was initiated, and dominated, by the staging of the 1991 World Student Games (WSG). Approximately $221 million of public money was spent on developing the facilities required to stage the event (Foley 1991). This investment resulted in the construction of the $77million Ponds Forge [swimming] Complex in the city center. It also provided Sheffield with a new $51million indoor arena and a 25,000-seat athletics venue in the Don Valley, the area that had suffered most from the city's deindustrialization. Since the Games, the city has attempted to use these facilities and its official designation as a 'National City of Sport' to promote the city to tourists.

Research findings

The large amount of qualitative and quantitative information collected about three different cities from the various different sample sets means that it is difficult to provide a comprehensive review of all the results in the space available here. Instead, a brief review of findings relating to each city is provided which identifies the awareness levels associated with specific initiatives, as well providing evidence of their image effects. Statistical analysis in this section uses a confidence level of >95% to refer to 'significant' values. Subsequently, more general findings are discussed and attempts are made to link results to the theoretical ideas identified previously. Findings are derived from the three groups of research participants; the representative sample of questionnaire respondents (n=180; hereafter referred to as the representative sample); the representative sample of semi-structured interviewees (n=54; hereafter referred to as the interviewees) and the sample of sport spectators attending events (n=75; hereafter referred to as the sport spectator sample). Although it is recognized that this latter group comprises of individuals with diverse sporting interests, to allow succinct and clear reporting of results, they are subsequently treated as a homogenous sample set.

Birmingham Birmingham's sport initiatives do appear to be widely acknowledged by potential tourists. A large proportion of both the representative sample (81%) and the sport spectator sample (81%) are aware of the NIA, and 52% of both sample sets are aware that the city bid for the 1992 Olympics. However, the actual impact of the NIA and the Olympic bid on the city's image, though evident, is unspectacular. Only 16% of the representative sample and 19% of the sport spectator sample consider

Birmingham to be a city they closely associate with sport. Even those who do consider Birmingham to be a sporting city do not appear to have been influenced by recent initiatives. Statistical tests (Spearman's rho) performed on questionnaire responses found no significant relationship between tourists' awareness of these initiatives and their sporting image of Birmingham. The NIA was perceived to have strengthened the city's links with sport by a number of the interviewees, but Smyth's (1994:182) assertion that the NIA 'has lent credibility as a flagship to the city as a center for sport' is not supported by the findings here. Questionnaire responses suggest that Birmingham has developed a good reputation for its provision of indoor arenas, but evidence from both the questionnaires and the interviews indicates that this is primarily due to the influence of a more established venue on the edge of the city, the National Exhibition Centre.

More encouragingly, the NIA 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. Images of 'dynamism, excitement, internationalism and athleticism,' were envisaged by the Birmingham City Council (Personal Communication with Policy Officer – Sport 1999), but the interviewees provided no evidence that the sport initiatives have encouraged such connotations. Furthermore, the recent initiatives were not cited by any of the 54 interviewees when they discussed how and why their image of Birmingham had changed over recent years. The NIA appeared as a cognitive element in some general images of the city, but again this does not appear to have been translated into image enhancement. Overall, the study findings suggest that, despite their widespread acknowledgement,

the NIA and the city's Olympic bid have exerted only limited effects on Birmingham's image.

Manchester The study found that a large proportion of potential tourists are aware of Manchester's Olympic bids. Awareness amongst the sport spectator sample (87%) and the representative sample (74%) is high, which provides a good foundation for image enhancement. The NCC and MEN Arena are widely acknowledged by the sport spectator sample (awareness levels of 57% and 35% respectively), but these facilities have not penetrated the representative sample to the same degree (NCC 27% and MEN Arena 33%). However, the study findings indicate that Manchester has developed a strong image as a city of sport amongst potential sport tourists and the general public. 74% of the representative sample and 75% of the sport spectator sample cited Manchester as a UK city they closely associate with sport. However, results indicate that Manchester's sporting image is dominated by, and largely the result of, the city's links with football. This is supported by statistical analysis of the quantitative data. Apart from the city's MEN Arena, there is no significant correlation between any of the recent initiatives and the tendency to select Manchester as a sporting city. Football also dominated the images communicated by the interviewees, although several did suggest that the Olympic bids had encouraged them to think that the city has impressive sport facilities.

Although some interviewees felt that Manchester has become a 'serial' bidder for major events, the interviews revealed that these efforts are generally regarded favourably by the interviewees. Sport provides an important synecdochical image for the city, but again these images are dominated by football related icons. Indeed, the recent initiatives were not cited by any of the 54 interviewees when they revealed

what they associated Manchester with, or their visual images of the city.

Nevertheless, several interviewees who felt that Manchester's image had improved over the past ten years indicated that such perceptions had been partly engendered by the recent sport initiatives. These symbolic effects were predominantly causally, rather than symbolically linked to the sport initiatives, as interviewees inferred that the Olympic bids had resulted in the physical regeneration of the city.

Sheffield The findings from this study suggest that Sheffield's sport initiatives have delivered only modest image enhancement. This is largely a result of the limited awareness levels of the WSG and affiliated facilities. Only 8% of the representative sample and 20% of the sport spectator sample had heard of the Ponds Forge Complex. Similarly, only 28% of the representative sample knew that the city had staged the WSG. The sport spectator sample did exhibit greater awareness, with 49% of this sample aware that the city had staged the WSG. Furthermore, 67% of the sport spectator sample were aware of the Don Valley Stadium, compared to only 34% of the representative sample. Similarly, 71% of the sport spectator sample had heard of Sheffield Arena compared to 54% of the representative sample. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) t-tests reveal that for each of Sheffield's four initiatives, a significant difference exists between the awareness levels of the representative sample and the sport spectator sample. This suggests Sheffield's initiatives are appreciated amongst a knowledgeable target audience, but have not penetrated the wider tourism market to the same degree.

Frustratingly for Sheffield, where awareness was exhibited, the initiatives do appear to have resulted in enhanced perceptions of the city's sporting image. The results of

Spearman's rho tests reveal that there are significant relationships between an awareness of each of the four recent initiatives and the tendency of the representative sample to select Sheffield as a city they closely associate with sport. This contrasts with results from Birmingham and Manchester, where in similar tests only one recent initiative - Manchester's MEN Arena - produced a statistically significant correlation. The semi-structured interviews also revealed that several people felt that the initiatives had strengthened the links between the city and sport. Despite such perceptions, potential tourists remain largely unappreciative of Sheffield's sporting reputation. Only 13% of the representative sample and 12% of the sport spectator sample selected Sheffield as a UK city they closely associated with sport. The analysis of Sheffield's image also revealed that the synecdochical impacts of recent sport initiatives were negligible, although a small number of interviewees did cite them when qualifying perceptions of general image improvement. Those who were aware of the initiatives were impressed by the new facilities and felt that they symbolised a modern city that was progressive and ambitious.

An analysis of theoretical justifications for pursuing sport reimaging
To establish how, rather than merely if, sport can provide a valuable reimaging theme, it is useful to relate findings from the interviews with some of the supposed qualities of sport cited previously. The communication of reimaging through credible agents was cited in the literature review as a justification for sport reimaging and the research findings seemingly confirm this. Most interviewees were aware of the sport initiatives because of their exposure in print and broadcast media produced independently of the cities. The findings also suggest that this type of media coverage enables sport reimaging to penetrate a wide audience. This was exemplified by the

views of interviewee 43 who stated that 'I mean it [sport] has an effect on everyone, I mean I am not a follower of sport or anything, but it's there all around you, it's every day and you can't avoid it'.

Nevertheless, evidence from the interviews suggests that care must be taken when assessing the implications of this apparent 'credibility'. Even if Gartner is correct to assume that autonomous agents are the most influential contributors to image formation, this does not mean that they are necessarily the most appropriate reimaging mechanisms. The disadvantage of these autonomous agents is that cities are unable to control the emphasis of the messages communicated. Relying on independently produced agents may project credible and penetrative sporting images, but they may not be necessarily those which a city wishes to stress. For example, the research found that Manchester's image is dominated by football due to autonomous media exposure, but that these entrenched images obscure the recent reimaging initiatives. Interviewee comments also revealed that the relationship between city images and sport relies on the performance of resident sports teams, which largely determines the extent of a city's sport-related media coverage. For example, when asked about the link between cities and sport, interviewee 10 stated 'I think success tends to bring strong links'. This epitomizes the relative powerlessness of municipal authorities in determining the specific presentation of sport images, as sporting success is usually beyond their immediate control.

It was also contended previously that sport reimaging might be an effective agent of image change because it helps to evolve existing images rather instigating revolutionary new ones. A large number of the potential tourists in all the sample sets

did associate Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield with sport and these links were mainly based upon established sporting associations. Such observations seemingly confirm the continuity achieved by using sport as a reimaging theme. However, the findings do not necessarily indicate that perceptions of established sporting links improve the efficacy of recent reimaging efforts. In a large number of instances, established sporting links overshadowed recent initiatives, reducing their image effects. This discontinuity is further exaggerated because the new initiatives did not capitalize on established sporting images, but involved more diverse themes. Indeed, the sport reimaging in Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield emphasized sports largely unconnected to the sporting images held by potential tourists, which are dominated by associations with football and, to a lesser extent, cricket. Therefore, although the general sporting theme of the recent initiatives did not result in cognitive dissonance, there was dissonance between different sporting sub-themes. This suggests that it is problematic to regard sport as a congruent reimaging theme per se, as each individual strategy places an emphasis on specific sports at the expense of others.

A further concern for cities is that while the majority of the interviewees did not deem sport reimaging incongruent, tenuous or contradictory, a significant number did find the idea of a 'sporting city' difficult to comprehend. For some this was a result of a lack of interest in, or knowledge of, sport, but for others it was because that they simply did not think that any city was intrinsically associated with sport. Some interviewees felt that sport was a universal feature of all cities, rather than a distinctive element of some, whilst others struggled more fundamentally with the idea that sport could provide a meaningful representation of a city. The consternation

exhibited by a large number of interviewees when they were asked about cities that they closely associate with sport is illustrated by this quote from one interviewee:

> *I don't really think I associate any city with sport…it's not something that you think about, I mean some cities you associate with, I don't know, say music - I mean when you think of Vienna you think of music - but I don't honestly associate any city with sport (Interviewee 40).*

Although some potential tourists were more easily able to designate sporting cities, the general unease surrounding this matter casts doubt upon the previous suggestion that sport is an effective reimaging theme because of the existing congruent relationship between sport and the city. This congruence was challenged further by interviewees' acute awareness that cities were deliberately trying to strengthen links with sport to realize economic objectives. In some instances, this awareness engendered a certain cynicism among interviewees who felt that the cities were trying to be 'seen' to be interested in sport, rather than being inherently blessed with sporting qualities. Potential tourists' awareness of the intentions of sport reimaging, and their apparent difficulty with the concept of sporting cities, suggests that it is problematic to justify sport initiatives because of their 'natural' extension of existing sporting images.

The interviews also revealed that recent initiatives have not become important elements of potential tourists' images of Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield. This seemingly contradicts the supposed imageability of sport initiatives. Despite their widespread acknowledgment, few of the new initiatives in Birmingham,

Manchester and Sheffield were used synecdochically by potential tourists. Only the NIA in Birmingham, and to a lesser extent Sheffield's Ponds Forge Complex and Arena, were used in this manner by any of those interviewed. Recent sport initiatives appear to have largely failed to usurp the widespread use of industrial synecdochical images. However, findings suggest that it is the characteristics of the recent initiatives adopted by the case study cities, rather than the intrinsic impotency of sport initiatives in general, that has restricted their imageability. Alongside the use of established sporting icons to represent Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield, interviewees indicated that they employed sport events and facilities as synecdochical images for other city destinations. Interviewee 38 stated that 'I always remember a place through an occasion. I think about places because the things I have done there or things I have been to and sport is a good example'. Sport initiatives can provide imageable urban phenomena, but the combination of events, event bids and indoor arenas developed in Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield have not been particularly effective for this purpose.

The prevalent awareness of many of the case study sport initiatives, especially Manchester's Olympic bids and Birmingham's NIA, demonstrates that sporting phenomena can capture the attention of a large number of potential tourists. However, this is not necessarily a direct result of sport's popularity as suggested previously. Indeed, there was a general positive regard for urban sporting links, despite the stated personal disinterest in sport communicated by a large proportion of the interviewees. This suggests that it is not necessarily sport's popularity that increases its efficacy as an imaging vehicle, but rather its penetration of, and its shared meaning in, contemporary culture. The penetration of sport was demonstrated

by the general feeling that sport had become a more important and more prominent phenomenon in recent years. There was also a general acceptance by potential tourists of the positive meaning of sport, despite individual differences in levels of interest and specific interpretations. For example, interviewee 34 stated, 'it just feels positive, even though I don't really like sport, you still have to say it is a positive thing for a city to be associated with.' Connotations of progress, regeneration and ambition have been generated by the sport initiatives via the production of indexical signs. Sport initiatives also suggested to interviewees that a city was more 'interesting'. Therefore, although sport may not be popular amongst the majority of potential tourists, its positive meaning in contemporary culture and its exposure in contemporary society does assist its potency as an imaging theme.

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to assess the value of sport as a reimaging theme for city destinations by analyzing the effects of strategies employed by three English cities. A mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods have been used to assess if and how the images of potential tourists have been affected by urban sport initiatives. The widespread awareness of sport facilities and sport events amongst potential sport tourists and potential tourists in general emphasizes that sport can be an effective promotional vehicle for cities. Furthermore, sport initiatives appear to have the capacity to influence city images in a variety of different ways. They seem to have influenced the sporting reputations of the case study cities, particularly Manchester and Sheffield, and the pervading positive interpretation of urban associations with sport means that some wider symbolic effects are also evident. Its dissemination through credible agents and a degree of congruence with existing images provides

further evidence that sport can be an effective imaging theme for the contemporary city destination. However, the preceding analysis also identifies certain problems with sport reimaging. These include the lack of control cities seem to exert over sporting images, the obviation of sport reimaging by existing sporting links and the deficient imageability displayed by recent sport initiatives. Disconcertingly for cities employing sport as a focal image, a large number of potential tourists also find it difficult to comprehend what a 'city of sport' actually is. Therefore, although a number of the proposed positive characteristics of sport reimaging were seemingly validated by the research undertaken, the research also revealed some problems with these ideas which question their validity as justifications for sport reimaging.

In qualifying this rather mixed appraisal of sport reimaging, it should be recognized that this study has merely looked at one aspect of these initiatives - the effect on potential tourist's images of the city destination. Potential tourists are merely one of a number of target audiences for sport reimaging. Moreover, reimaging itself is merely one of several broad justifications for implementing urban sport initiatives. If the present study had focused on other effects such as physical regeneration, inward investment or participation levels in sport, then the resulting evaluation may have been very different. The limitations of the research should also be recognized in qualifying the findings. Some of the quantitative data analysis cited here is based on small sample sizes and there are obviously limitations to this type of approach. However, the concerted attempt to generate a representative sample of potential tourists provides reassurance that the results obtained provide valid indicators of the image effects of sport initiatives. As May states, 'a large, poor quality sample, which

does not reflect the population's characteristics, will be less accurate than a smaller one that does' (May 1997:86).

Alongside the empirical findings, this paper has identified theoretical justifications for sport reimaging and used them to create a framework through which urban sport reimaging can be evaluated. The resulting discussion assists understanding of sport reimaging, but it also contributes to the wider understanding and effective analysis of destination images. Applying and exploring ideas concerning continuity, credibility, imageability and popularity can assist other investigations into the effects of reimaging efforts based on themes other than sport. Furthermore, the identification of key issues such as the difficulties controlling sporting images, the deficient imageability of recent initiatives and the problematic mix of 'new' and 'old' sporting themes can aid future destination marketing and urban tourism planning activities.

Perhaps the most important contribution of this paper to the understanding of urban reimaging is the way it combines an analysis of the production of urban reimaging with an evaluation of its consumption. As Jackson and Thrift note, although there is a burgeoning amount of research on place marketing by municipal authorities, 'often such analyses engage in a critical deconstruction of advertising material with too little attention to the diverse circumstances of its actual consumption' (Jackson and Thrift 1995:223-224). This study has attempted to provide a comparatively rare example of research into tourists' responses to reimaging. This type of approach, plus the concepts, ideas and discussion included in the study should assist further research in this field.

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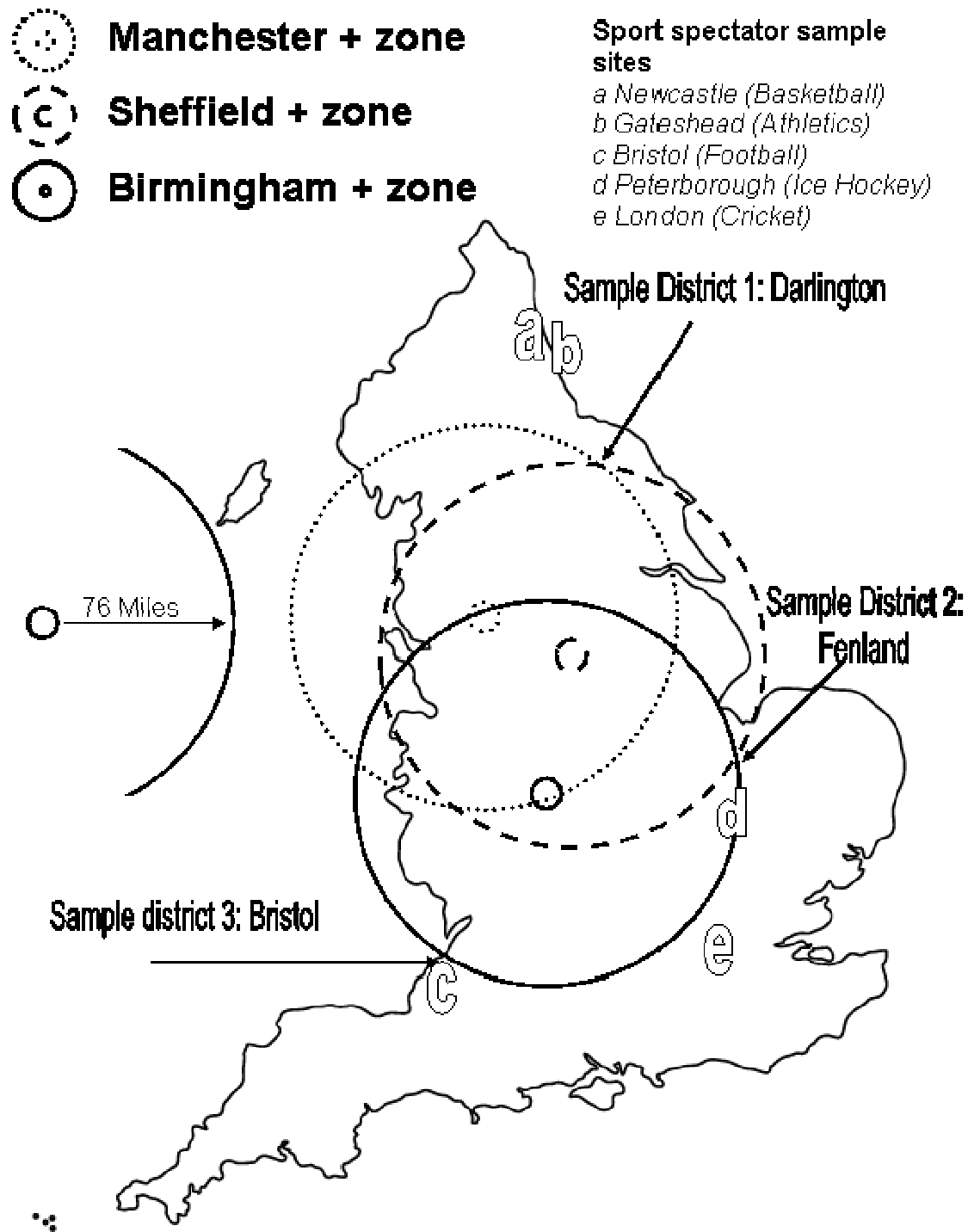
Figure 1. The rationale for the selection of potential tourists (Sample Districts 1-3) and potential sport tourists (sample sites a-e).