

Leveraging Benefits from Winter Olympic Games, Beijing 2022 through Leveraging Strategies

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Abstract

As a mega sports event, the Winter Olympic Game plays an important role in the social, economic and cultural development of the host country, including the improvement of local infrastructure and the holding of future events. Due to the impact of the world pandemic, there was the possibility of events being postponed or canceled, and the stakeholders of mega sports events had been affected to varying degrees. Theoretical analysis and case study are used as research methods in this paper to conduct a qualitative analysis of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics so as to leverage the benefits of this mega event. This paper evaluates the impact of the world pandemic on the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics through a series of academic literature and case studies, as well as how the stakeholders of the event can deal with these challenges, and provide a feasible plan for the next mega sport event. The implementation of the strategy of attracting tourists through ecological restoration and legacy strategies includes the use of heritage to reduce the cost of events, to attract tourists, and to extend the length of stay of tourists, so as to achieve event leverage.

Keywords

Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games, Mega Sport Event, Event Leveraging, Pandemic, Leveraging Strategies

1. Introduction and Synopsis of the Event

Sports events have always been a hot topic studied by scholars. The modern Winter Olympic Games, originated in the late 19th century, is a mega sport event held on a four-year cycle and aimed at promoting the harmonious development

of human beings through sports. It has a significant impact on tourist destinations, including upgrading the host country's infrastructure, promoting economic development, building prestige and speeding up cultural exchanges (Lai, 2018: p. 153). In 2015, announced by Thomas Bach, President of the International Olympic Committee, Beijing China won the right to host the 24th Winter Olympic Games in 2022 (MacAloon, 2016: p. 811). Henceforth, Beijing became China's first city to host both the Summer (which is held in 2008) and Winter Olympics. It was held from 4th February to 20th February, 2022 with 7 major items, 15 sub-items, 109 small items in three venues in Beijing, Yanqing and Zhangjiakou. As the host of the 2022 Winter Olympics and the capital of China, Beijing is rich in history, culture and venues. Yanqing and Zhangjiakou, on the other hand, are located in the north-western region of Beijing, which have been developing both tourism industry and ski industry over the past decades and performed successfully (Xin & Kunzmann, 2020: p. 84). There is no doubt that the cooperation between these three cities would inevitably be conducive to regional economy and people's livelihood as it would attract a mass of athletes, sports fans and tourists across the globe. However, influenced by the COVID-19, the Games had been confronted with new challenges. Due to the pandemic and travel restrictions, the author was unable to go to Beijing to experience the Beijing Winter Olympics in person, which made it a big challenge to obtain the first hand data. Nevertheless, based on relevant literature and new resources, this study aims to discuss the main effects of the pandemic on the forthcoming event, the following changes and adjustments it brought as well as several leveraging strategies and the expected benefits so as to provide lessons and plans for stakeholders of the future mega events.

2. Impact of COVID-19 on the Event and Stakeholders Involved

COVID-19, the world pandemic, occurred in early 2020, has had a huge impact on tourism and events, which has been a huge challenge not only for Beijing Organising Committee for the 2022 Olympic Winter Games, but also all the stakeholders like athletes and event media. Many events have been postponed or canceled due to the political, health, psychological and other concerns brought by the epidemic. For example, the one-year-delay Summer Olympics in Tokyo 2021 has placed a huge financial burden on the Japanese government (Hoang, 2020: p. 129).

2.1. The Impact of COVID-19 on the Event

The pandemic has imposed a huge impact on the event. Due to the pandemic, the one-year delay of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic games just shortens the preparation cycle for the 2022 winter games, affecting their benefits and even resulting in heavy losses (Li et al., 2021: p. 65). And according to the interview of Zhang Jiandong, executive vice president of the Beijing Winter Olympics Organising

Committee, affected by the pandemic, the production and transportation of imported equipment such as new ice-making system, snow pressure machine and ice pouring truck may lag behind. Meanwhile, foreign experts and technicians necessary for equipment installation and debugging and site certification might have difficulty in reaching China (Xu et al., 2020). This has led to slow progress in the construction of the Olympic infrastructure, which means additional labor costs and increased communication and coordination costs may arise. As it would be held in the spring of 2022, with relatively low temperature and dense population, and the risk of virus infection and outbreak was relatively high, which would also increase the preparation burden of the organisers for medical disinfection costs.

2.2. The Impact of COVID-19 on the Stakeholders

Sponsors and the news media have also been affected. Sponsorship, as market economy develops, has become a common means of business. The strong combination between the Winter Olympics and the sponsorship companies can expand the social impact of both sides, enhancing the effect of advertising, and improving economic benefits (Yang, 2008). However, the delay of the Tokyo Olympics has affected the publicity time and effect of the Beijing Winter Olympics sponsors. The “golden time” for sponsors’ publicity has been shortened, which may lead to the increase of related costs or the decline of expected revenue.

The participating athletes and coaches, who have trained for the 2022 winter games for a long time, will be directly impacted by the pandemic. The game has been postponed or canceled due to uncontrollable factors such as the continuous mutation and spread of the virus. For those athletes and players, the postponement of the games may indicate their retirement as well as the eternal loss of opportunity, no matter how well they had prepared (Taku & Arai, 2020: p. 625). For those coaches, they are less likely to devote enough time and energy to their players since they are limited to stay at home. In conclusion, their mental and physical status has also been affected due to the disruption of the training routine in particular some of the limited field sports, such as skiing.

Finally, for the host city, the spread pandemic in international community may reduce the number and mental status of national tourists coming to and participating in the games on the site. The host region could also face shutdowns or limits in varying industries for this reason. All these would produce a negative effect on the sustainable development of the hosting cities.

3. Changes and Adjustments of the Event

As mentioned above, the evolution of the pandemic has brought huge challenge for both the event and the stakeholders, which means changes and adjustments of the event including the program, the timing, and the scale must be taken. The four types of a mega sporting event legacy identification proposed by Preuss helps explain these changes and policy adjustments related to Olympic games

such as Field A, which includes changes that occurred not because of the event (Chen et al., 2019: p. 7). For example, International practice calls for a series of test events 10 to 24 months before every Olympic Games, and the Beijing Games were no exception. However, many test events such as the Grand Prix final, the Short track Speed Skating World Cup in Beijing and the Speed skating World Championship of the Beijing Winter Olympics have been canceled due to the pandemic (Li, 2020). Although the original opening time has not been changed, training schedule for both programme and players may be adjusted to different degrees. Therefore, the scale of the publicity activities and the number of viewers would definitely be reduced if the pandemic continues to deteriorate. Some important events and meetings also have been restructured. For example, the World Broadcasters Conference was held online. To be specific, the changes of the games were directly related to the interests and decisions made by key stakeholders such as the organisers, the audience, the sponsors, etc. Politically speaking, the organiser's response to the impact of COVID-19 on the Winter Olympics directly influenced the national image as well as the host cities' image. Culturally, the number drop of the tourists may do little help in the export of local culture and tourism industry. Economically, the impact of the pandemic may result in production stoppage in various fields. Therefore, it became a necessity for stakeholders to make corresponding decisions in enhancing China's national image. It has been recognised that mega sports events such as the Olympics plays an important role in projecting the international image of a host country or region (He et al., 2020: p. 2). Holding the Winter Olympics in Beijing would help promote the popularity of winter sports in China, accelerate the pace of construction of winter sports facilities, as well as the overall development of competitive sports and mass sports in China. It also shows the rich cultural and social connotation of China and is more conducive improving the image of China as a more progressive, open and civilized country.

4. Leveraging Strategies and the Advantage of Strategies

4.1. Attract Tourist by Ecological Restoration

The first strategy relates to destination marketing through ecological restoration. Due to the inefficient management, many tourist destinations are being ignored more often in this highly competitive modern world. By creating its unique brand, destination marketing has been adopted by many stakeholders, the purpose of which is to raise awareness of a destination and accumulate visitation from others (Jago, 2003: p. 5). The Winter Olympics may cause damage to the environment, such as land use change, air pollution and other damage to the natural environment (Yeerkenbieke et al., 2021: p. 3). To better serve city's high-quality development and effectively develop the strategy of destination marketing, the host organisers and the local government have speed up the construction of green stadiums, organised low-carbon activities and advocated green and low-carbon production and lifestyle in Beijing-Zhangjiakou region. Further

measures should also be conducted to protect the wetland while constructing infrastructures of urban land such as the stadiums (Huang et al., 2019: p. 2376). Meanwhile, the two parties will implement the overall work plan of ecological restoration so as to increase the ecological restoration of mountain competition areas, and ensure that the construction is completed simultaneously with the venue. Besides, the improvement of infrastructure including the hotels, indoor and outdoor stadiums for athletes to rest and train should be ensured. The Tokyo Games of the past were discredited by the shabby accommodation provided to the athletes. With the spread of interest in the concept of sustainable development, the importance ecological restoration has been gradually recognized. Ecological restoration, as the highlight of the host city will definitely attract the interest of ecological tourism or green tourists as well as raise the public awareness so as to build the image of the host city.

4.2. Lengthen Visitor Stay and Reduce Event Costs through Utilizing the Legacy

The second leveraging strategy relates to the implementation of the heritage strategy, namely the preparation and completion of venues before and after the use of the plan, in the purpose of forming the Winter Olympics heritage as soon as possible. Beijing has hosted a very successful Summer Olympics in 2008, which left a very rich Olympic legacy, especially that of the venues and the accumulated rich experience in hosting the games. At the same time, Beijing also embraces a well-based infrastructure as the existing venues in Beijing can meet the needs of most of the ice events and the opening and closing ceremonies. According to *Xinhua News* (2021), Beijing 2022 uses twelve competition venues, five of which are existing and seven new. Four of the existing venues are used for the 2008 Olympic Games. There is no doubt that the reuse of 2008 Olympic stadium in the pre-competition will phase to reduce the large cost of new venues. In addition, after the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, Olympic venues such as the Bird's Nest, Water Cube and Wukesong Stadium have achieved good economic and social benefits by opening up to the public and hosting various events and activities, such as the Bird's Nest concert. These different events will also help event organisers attract visitors from different aspects, thereby boosting interest in the Beijing Winter Games. Compared to Beijing, although there is no Olympic legacy Yanqing and Zhangjiakou, organisers can effectively utilize local resources to maximize the impact of the 2022 Winter Olympics. For example, the advantageous geographical position of Zhangjiakou Chongli county fully meet the conditions for hosting the Winter Olympics with its proper terrain, altitude, temperature, humidity, slope, orientation, wind and precipitation. In the past ten years, Snow events have developed rapidly in Chongli, and now there are hundreds of trails, which has laid a good foundation for the hosting of the Olympic Games (Xin & Kunzmann, 2020: p. 84). All these abundant resources can be utilized effectively to make the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics a complete success. According to Wang (2021), the newly-built winter Olympic stadium will attach-

es great importance to the post-games utilization from the very beginning. For example, the National Speed Skating Stadium will become the Center of Excellence of the International Skating Union after the competition. It will host various ice sports events all year round and extensively carry out mass ice and snow sports, which will extend the economic effects of the Olympics for a certain period of time.

Therefore, judging from what the organiser and the stakeholders of Beijing Winter Olympics 2022 has done, two leveraging strategies are evident: to attract ecotourists and green tourists by ecological restoration, thus creating a green city image; and to reduce costs and extend the stay of tourists by forming the legacy of 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics as soon as possible to strengthen the reuse of the facilities and the equipment.

5. Conclusion

A mega-event of Olympic scale is of national significance, and is expected to unite and benefit the whole country. Through the discussion of the background of the 2022 Beijing Olympic Games, the effects of the pandemic and the changes and adjustments it may brought, this report also puts forward the corresponding leveraging strategies and the expected benefits. With the ongoing pandemic, further exploration and leveraging strategies should be conducted and adopted to ensure the success of the games and pass on the Olympic spirit across the whole world and the generations.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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