

Commonwealth Games: How could sport tourism benefit Birmingham?

By Dr Nicholas Wise, Assistant Professor, Tourism Planning and Development at Arizona State University.

Dr Nicholas Wise is hosting our ‘Sport and Regeneration post-Brexit – The Commonwealth Games’ panel at this year’s online Centre for Brexit Studies Annual Conference ‘Global Birmingham – Beyond Brexit’, taking place on Wednesday 23 September 2020. He will be joined by Paul Faulkner, Professor John Harris, Professor Calvin Jones and David Grady. Find out more and register for FREE tickets [here](#).

Regeneration is about change. When cities and regions prepare to host large-scale sporting events, much of the change comes as an investment in new infrastructures for the purpose of image renewal and economic benefit. Regeneration has been a part of urban policy agendas for decades now in the UK and cities have continually invested as a way to maintain their competitiveness, attract visitors and recreate an image to overcome and negative burdens associated with the past.

Many of the issues that are also associated with regeneration is the stark contrasts that are created between those who can access new spaces (in a sense afford to consume in these spaces) and those who cannot. Much emphasis is thus places on economic impacts for the purpose of generating profits so to satisfy investors who were attracted by regeneration plans.

Cities such as Glasgow, Liverpool and Belfast have experienced extensive investments in new facilities along their river fronts or waterfronts. Many of these developments have been to enhance the city image, and for Glasgow much of this regeneration recently was for the purpose of hosting a sporting event.

Birmingham has much to learn from Glasgow as they navigate their plans to regenerate the city and build new venues. The challenge of sport-led regeneration is making sure that there is an element of change that is socially dedicated to ‘sport’. As noted, many consider

regeneration from the standpoint of economic and tangible impacts, but despite all the plans to build and construct, there is still a local population that remains and is there through the whole regeneration journey, before, during and after the event.

Therefore, alongside the tangible efforts to build an image and attract investors is the need to focus on ensuring that local residents can also experience intangible change. The four points outlined here provide some insight into how the social impacts of regeneration can be assessed and considered, and sport plays a key role in this:

1. Awareness: gain initial perceptions and general knowledge of sport policy
 - a. Clear policies on social benefits for local residents
 - b. Mutual understanding and tolerance between stakeholders
 - c. Local population is involved and supports sport initiatives

Key questions include: Who are the key stakeholders? and What is the extent of local knowledge?

2. Enthusiasm: measuring sport experiences and involvement
 - a. Local population is benefitting from new infrastructure and venue development
 - b. Mentorship or educational programmes exist to train and involve locals
 - c. Encouragement of local enterprises
 - d. Establishment of volunteer programmes

Key questions include: Who is involved?, What programmes exist? and Are experiences co-created?

3. Participation: consideration of new sporting opportunities and insight on place and community
 - a. Plans to minimise inclusion and exclusion
 - b. New opportunities for young people, students, elderly and disabled
 - c. Pride in place and satisfaction (civic pride)
 - d. Sense of community and identity

Key questions include: Where are key community areas and social spaces? and Why do people feel a particular way about new and transformed spaces for socialising?

4. Futures: Implementation of legacy and social impact strategies to ensure a sporting legacy
 - a. Venues and facilities are co-managed to support local resident use
 - b. Legacy training and participation incentives for locals
 - c. Local population is aware of legacy agendas and benefits

Key questions include: Who is influencing legacy; What power relations exist and possible solutions that will engage people going forward, as this is also an important of local community capacity building

Some key points that policy makers need to consider then when regenerating spaces for large-scale sporting events is to try and consolidate these understandings around awareness, enthusiasm, participation and thinking toward the future.

From the point of hosting a sporting event like the Commonwealth Games in the UK post-Brexit, it can be argued that the event and the participants it should not have much of an impact because the Commonwealth member nations are all outside the European Union (with the exception of Malta and the Republic of Cyprus). Even if the event were a mega-event. It is really yet to be determined how Brexit will impact on sport-led regeneration, but projects and policies are often decided locally and nationally in the UK.

For Birmingham, like Glasgow, it could have an overall positive impact on the city image and will likely propel the city into the international spotlight (among the Commonwealth member nations who will send athletes). In the lead up to the event it will be important that Birmingham uses the event as a way of enhancing their place and destination brand and promote attractions to increase the exposure.

But while we think about the attraction of sports tourism and the potential is can gain in terms of basic economic activity and new visitor spend, we also need to think back to the previous question and that is about the benefits locally to the people and the community and

creating opportunities locally as well as for the purpose of new tourism activity. That will need to be the ultimate impact of sport-led regeneration for the city of Birmingham.

Brexit will likely be a major focus of discussion in 2022 as the city plans for its future beyond the European Union, and considering that the host city just backed the Brexit vote with 50.4% of voters voting in favour to Leave. In July and August 2022 the city of Birmingham will welcome athletes, families and visitors from the member Commonwealth Nations.

The Centre for Brexit Studies Annual Conference ‘Global Birmingham – Beyond Brexit’ is bringing together industry experts and big names from across the West Midlands and wider UK. Keynote speakers include Sir Vince Cable, Former Leader of the Liberal Democrats, Anand Menon, Professor of European Politics and Foreign Affairs at King’s College London and Director of UK in a Changing Europe and Fiona Allan, Artistic Director and Chief Executive of Birmingham Hippodrome. Other panel discussions alongside our Commonwealth Games debate, include Manufacturing, HS2 and Future of the West Midlands. [Find out more and register for FREE tickets here!](#)