

## 9 Sporting a new image?

### Sport-based regeneration strategies as a means of enhancing the image of the city tourist destination

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#### Introduction

Over the past decade, several cities in the UK, including Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield, have made determined efforts and devoted considerable resources to bidding for, and staging major sporting events and constructing prestige sport facilities. Despite other proposed benefits, including urban regeneration and local economic development, an important justification for the implementation of these schemes is the supposed resultant enhancement of the city's image. Indeed, the use of sporting initiatives as a means of city image enhancement is explicitly recognised by the authorities involved, as well as by several academic commentators. As Loftman and Spirou (1996: 28) state, rather than concentrating on the detailed financial implications of sport stadia, civic leaders tend to focus on the city's image and the future direction of the city. Therefore, recent sporting developments in cities are often motivated by, and justified by, the desire to forge a new image for a city.

The use of sport as a means of enhancing place-image is, however, by no means an exclusively contemporary phenomenon. Reiss (1981) identifies Los Angeles as a city that implemented a sport-based image enhancement strategy in the early part of the twentieth century.

After World War I a handful of visionary movers and shakers decided to advance their city's reputation for the purpose of encouraging the expression of tourism, commerce and migration. The key to their plan was the construction of a huge outdoor sports facility where great sport spectacles and festivals would be staged.

(Reiss 1981:50)

Despite such historical precedents, it could be argued that since the mid-1980s, the concept of sport reimagining has been embraced by a large number of developed cities with a new intensity and purpose. These cities, many of which have been severely affected by the restructuring of the international division of labour and the resultant collapse of their manufacturing sectors, have been forced into competition with one another as centres of consumption (Harvey 1989). This has

significantly intensified the need to project a positive image of the city to an external audience of potential visitors and consumers. As a result, many cities have indulged in what has become known as place marketing (Madsen 1992), which involves striving to sell the image of a place so as to make it more attractive to economic enterprises, tourists and inhabitants (Philo and Kearns 1993: 3). Due to the contemporary dominance of the media and the popularity and exposure devoted to sport, it has become common for cities in the US, and increasingly in the UK, to use sport as a vehicle for city image enhancement.

Although there are notable exceptions (e.g. Edinburgh's staging of the 1986 Commonwealth Games) it would appear that the strategy of using sport events and prestige sport facilities as a means of image reorientation has primarily been implemented by 'industrial' cities. These cities are the product of industrial development and as Law (1996) affirms, their industrial character and image is a barrier for the evolution of their tourist industry (Law 1996: 2). The problem as Tim Hall notes, is that the word 'industry' and the identities and images that it evokes are highly problematic for the promotion of cities within the context of the post-industrial urban economy (Hall 1997: 216). According to Hall it evokes 'a whole series of negative, unfashionable images' (Hall 1997: 216). These 'industrial' cities have therefore attempted to develop associations with more positive concepts, in order to attract capital and people in the present period of intensified urban competition (Harvey 1989: 92). The media coverage devoted to sport, its intrinsic popularity in contemporary culture and its supposed positive connotations have therefore resulted in the adoption of sporting initiatives by industrial cities as a means of image enhancement.

As many commentators have recognised (Thorns 1997, Harvey 1989, C.M. Hall 1997), the explicit aim of a large proportion of city-imaging work is to enhance the way in which the city is perceived by prospective urban tourists. The focus in this chapter is on this tourism element of reimagining, and it is the intention to analyse exactly how the formation and structure of cities' images as urban tourist destinations may be affected by the adoption of sport reimagining strategies. After relating strategy of 'sport reimagining' to the contemporary cultural context, we will go on to examine the qualities of these initiatives which may enable them to influence city images. An attempt to conceptualise city images will then be made, which will seek to illustrate the way in which sport may be able to enhance the image of the city as a tourist destination. Finally, the implications of this conceptualisation will be discussed.

### **Sport, tourism and image enhancement**

To compensate for the decline in manufacturing employment experienced by many cities, municipal authorities have begun to compete with one another for a share of urban tourism. In this new urban economic climate, where the attraction of large numbers of consumers into a city becomes imperative, it is unsurprising that cities have attempted to develop an impressive sporting infrastructure and event schedules in order to capitalise on the growing sport tourism market. As well as attracting people into a city to watch specific events, the potential for sport stadia

to be developed as all year round visitor attractions has also been increasingly acknowledged. This is mainly a US phenomenon with regard to the development of 'Halls of Fame', but there are examples of successful European models, including tours and museums at prominent football stadia, most notably the case of the Nou Camp stadium in Barcelona, which attracts 500,000 visitors per year (Stevens and Wootton 1997). However, there is evidence to suggest that the development of sporting products within the city has taken on a much wider significance than simply attracting more sport spectators and sport tourists into urban areas. As Law (1993: 94) states, there is a tendency to see sport as more than simply a local amenity or visitor attraction. For many municipal authorities, sport epitomises a new era and a new direction for cities suffering a post-industrial identity crisis. Therefore, in the UK, cities such as Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield have implemented sport initiatives to present a more attractive image to potential urban tourists. These sporting initiatives have typically involved bidding for and staging major sporting events and constructing major sporting arenas within which to stage them (Loftman and Spirou 1996). These two main facets of urban sport reimagining are examined in more detail below, starting with the use of sport events as a means of image enhancement.

### ***Sport events***

Sport events are typical of what have been termed special or hallmark events by tourism researchers. 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). As this definition implies, special events are deemed important promotional tools which can be used to boost the image of a city as tourism destination. Indeed C.M. Hall (1992), describes events as the image builders of modern tourism. Sport events are viewed by many cities as particularly effective for this purpose, as they generate substantial media exposure. The ultimate example is the Olympic Games, an event so intrinsically associated with place promotion that Philo and Kearns (1993) have described it as the ultimate expression of place marketing. Cities have therefore attempted to stage major one-off and/or regular programmes of sport events as a means of presenting an attractive image to an exterior audience. Examples include Sheffield, which hosted the 1991 World Student Games and has since hosted over 300 national and international sport events (Kronos 1997).

The importance of sport events in the contemporary city may be placed in a wider urban context where it has been observed that cities have sought to become centres of consumption through the 'organisation of spectacle and theatricality' (Harvey 1989: 92). The importance of sport to this emerging 'spectacular city' is outlined by Bourdieu (1978) who states that 'it cannot be ignored that the so called popular sports also function as spectacles' (Bourdieu 1978: 340). It has been recognised that cities, rather than relying on the consumption of goods, have emphasised the consumption of experiences and pleasure, or what Harvey terms 'very ephemeral services in consumption' (Harvey 1989: 285). Staging major sport events is seen not only as a means of generating such consumption, but as an

important way of symbolising the transition of the industrial city towards this envisaged role. In this contemporary urban context, popular and mass culture are regarded as more legitimate sources of prestige and cultural and symbolic capital. Accordingly, popular forms of culture such as sport are also being viewed as a more legitimate means of representing the city to an external audience. Therefore, the use of sport events may be a perfect example of the way in which traditional forms of cultural consumption are being revamped to cater for wider audiences, 'with the emphasis upon the spectacular, the popular, the pleasurable and the immediately accessible' (Featherstone 1991: 96).

### ***Sport facilities***

It is important to recognise that alongside promotional campaigns and the staging of special events, the process of reimagining frequently involves the construction of new spaces of consumption, often centred on spectacular 'flagship' or 'prestige' projects (Smyth 1994, Loftman and Nevin 1996). These flagship developments are innovative, large-scale projects which provide a focal point and catalyst for tourists and media coverage (Barke and Harrop 1994). According to Harvey (1989) the production of these spectacular urban spaces provides cities with symbols of urban dynamism, enabling the city to exploit conspicuous consumption in a sea of spreading recession. Sharon Zukin concurs and views this process as a means of producing a vibrant symbolic economy from which a legible image can be abstracted, connecting the city to consumption rather than production (Zukin 1993: 45). Several cities in the UK have developed sporting arenas as flagship or prestige projects. Examples include the National Indoor Arena constructed in Birmingham, Manchester's Nynex (now M.E.N) Arena and Velodrome and Sheffield's Don Valley Stadium, Arena and Pond's Forge swimming complex. Like the staging of special events, these developments attract sport tourists into the city, but are ultimately seen to have a more fundamental impact in terms of projecting an image of transformation, enabling cities traditionally associated with industrial production to shake off 'the last traces of its 19th century self' (Westwood and Williams 1997). Indeed, as Schimmel (1995) states, sporting arenas are perceived to be symbols of success, of urban machismo and vibrancy as well as providing multi-functional leisure facilities. This distinction between the functional use and perception of sport tourist products and their role as symbols is very important in terms of image impact and will be expanded upon later in this chapter.

### **The cultural context**

In analysing the specific nature of sporting initiatives and their proposed impact upon city images above, it becomes apparent that the use of such strategies can be seen to be both an example of, and a vehicle for, certain cultural shifts which commentators have observed in the post-industrial urban arena. In terms of examining the concept of consumer images of the city, it is particularly useful to link urban sport reimagining to literature and debates concerning shifts in consumption patterns in contemporary society. David Harvey notes two major shifts in the

arena of consumption. The first of these involves the mobilisation of fashion in mass markets as a means of accelerating the pace of consumption across a wide swathe of lifestyle and recreational activities, including new leisure and sporting habits (Harvey 1989: 285). A second trend is the shift away from the consumption of goods and towards the consumption of services. In effect this means the consumption of entertainment, events, happenings and distractions. As Harvey (1989) argues, if there is a limit to the accumulation and turnover of physical goods then it makes sense for cities to turn to the provision of ephemeral services in consumption. This is the process by which the city becomes a 'spectacle'. The role of sport in this process should not be underestimated, since sport events form a crucial part of the spectacular city and because of their popularity and exposure, can transmit a positive image of the city to wide and receptive audience of consumers.

The contention is that post-industrial cities have moved towards becoming centres of consumption, play and entertainment which are 'saturated with signs and images to the extent that anything can become represented, thematised and made an object of interest' (Featherstone 1991: 101). As Featherstone implies in his use of the term 'anything', the means by which spectacular cities have utilised imagery to generate symbolic or cultural capital has become increasingly diversified. Post-industrial cities have become regarded as centres of cultural production, not simply because of their association with the high arts, but also associations with the mass cultures. Therefore popular cultures, of which sport is an important part, have become regarded as 'more legitimate and the source of prestige and further up the symbolic hierarchy' (Featherstone 1991: 106). Cities, traditionally associated with industrial production are therefore able to transcend perceptions of low cultural capital by utilising sport and other more popular cultural forms as a means of transmitting positive imagery to potential tourists.

An important point to recognise when considering city marketing strategies or the deliberate manipulation of a city's image is that much of the imaging is aimed at the 'better off' (Bramwell and Rawding 1996) or 'the right sort of people' (Harvey 1989). Without a full appreciation of contemporary shifts in consumption trends and in the increasingly commodified sport 'industry', this would appear to lessen the appropriateness of sport as an urban reimagining tool. Traditionally, sport in cities has been associated with the urban working classes, hardly the image that would be deemed to attract 'right sort of people' to cities which already possess enduringly strong working-class reputations. However, the increasing gentrification of sport and the corresponding confusion of hierarchical consumer tastes and interests may mean that in the contemporary era, sport may be regarded as a more effective means of attracting the affluent sectors of the tourist market. Whereas it would be inherently contradictory in previous cultural eras to promote a city's sporting pedigree alongside more traditional forms of cultural capital, the contention here is that not only is this now an appropriate partnership, but one that can be effectively sold to a new market of more eclectic, rounded tourists whose tastes aren't necessarily confined to the different ends of an orthodox cultural spectrum.

Alongside the enhanced legitimacy of sport as a means of representation in an era in which the distinction between high and mass culture has become increasingly confused, there are other related indications which may point to the suitability of

sport as an imaging 'tool'. Sport reimagining is an attractive compromise for cities which are seeking to attract the affluent consumer, but which are also attempting to avoid the comprehensive desertion and suppression of local tradition and history. Sport has long been an important part of the British city. This means that an emphasis on this urban feature as a vehicle for image enhancement may be a less controversial means of representation than other initiatives, which similarly attempt to reorientate the city towards being a site of pleasure and play. For instance, it may avoid the sort of controversy highlighted by Glasgow's imaging scheme earlier this decade, which revolved around the city's designation as the European City of Culture 1990. This imaging campaign was criticised by some people who clearly felt that the image presented was 'not one sedimented down the years in Glaswegian consciousness, but one which encourages thinking about Glasgow in new terms, i.e. without having reference back to external reality' (Boyle and Hughes 1991: 221). Although sport reimagining can also be accused of being selective in terms of its representation of a city, 'sanitising the real working class culture and cultural history' of cities such as Manchester and Sheffield (Boyle and Hughes 1991: 225), there is little doubt that sport has played a fundamental role in the development and daily life of these cities throughout the twentieth century. This may mean that sport is accepted as a more 'realistic' representation of these cities, not only placating sensitive residents, but as will be discussed later, presenting a more 'realistic' and therefore believable image to a critical external audience.

Whatever the status of sport in relation to culture and cultural capital, sport has clearly flourished in the post-industrial economy (Rowe 1995). Within this arena, sport has become an important part of the way in which cities have attempted to create, espouse and transmit images of the city as a reinvigorated centre of spectacle, pleasure and play. As has been touched upon, the proliferation and circulation of images is now an integral part of the way in which contemporary city can be understood. The city is at the very centre of this phenomenon. Cities are where social images are most prominently on display, where advertising and promotion are most intense and where the conspicuous act of consumption is most significant (Lyon 1994). However, cities have also invested in images themselves in an attempt to turn themselves into centres of consumption. The links between image and cities are therefore inextricable. In fact some would argue that there is no such thing as the city, only an imagined environment, an image which represents a series of practices, relationships and institutions. This is the city that concerns us here. The city of the mind. However, despite the influence and appropriateness of sport as a means of capitalising on the contemporary importance of urban imagery noted above, it still remains unclear as to what this concept of city image is, and more specifically how sporting initiatives may be able to influence the way in which potential consumers (i.e. prospective tourists) construct an image of the city in their minds. These concerns are addressed below.

### ***Deconstructing the tourist image***

In the development of tourism within a city, image is perceived as crucial. As Fakeye and Crompton state, tourist images are particularly important because they

transpose a representation of an area into the potential tourist's mind and give him/her a pre-taste of the destination (Fakeye and Crompton 1991: 10). Within tourism research it has been recognised that the images which exist in individuals' minds may have as much to do with an area's tourist development success as material and more tangible tourist products and resources (Hunt 1975). Therefore, in emerging urban destinations such as Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield, alongside developing attractive tourist products and infrastructure, a primary consideration must be to project a positive destination image. The value of sporting initiatives may be that they have the potential to fulfil both of these objectives.

Despite the protestations of academic commentators and municipal authorities concerning the fundamental role of sporting strategies in enabling city image enhancement, it remains unclear whether and how sport reimagining may be able to achieve this objective. Despite research relating to the impact of sporting initiatives on the external awareness of cities as visitor destinations (Ritchie and Smith 1991), there exists little or no research concerning the exact impact of those initiatives on tourist images. More specifically, the author is unaware of any investigations which attempt to explain these impacts. The purpose of the rest of this chapter is therefore to outline how sport reimagining may be able to influence city image enhancement and to make suggestions for the effective measurement of these proposed impacts.

### ***The concept of destination image***

To enable the evaluation of the influence of sport-led strategies on city image, it is first necessary to discuss what is meant by the term 'image' and exactly how and why sport may be influencing this vague concept. Traditionally, image relates to the reconstruction of a scene or object in literature, art or film. This application of the term is utilised in some academic fields (for instance the sub-disciplines of behavioural geography and environmental psychology), where it is conventional to refer to image as consisting of a mental reconstruction of a place, in this context the city, in a person's mind. However, as Raymond Williams (1976) points out, this traditional use of the term has been overtaken by the conception of image as perceived reputation or character. In effect image has become a jargon term of commercial advertising and public relations. It is argued here that it is perhaps most valuable and prevalent to use an amalgam of the different usages, in order to investigate comprehensively the concept of place image, as the two definitions are by no means mutually exclusive. As Echtner and Ritchie state, image should be regarded as the perceptions of individual attributes as well as more holistic impressions or mental pictures of a place (Echtner and Ritchie 1993: 3).

### ***Sport and the formation of destination images***

As has already been outlined, sport allegedly envelops a symbolic function in supposedly promoting an impression of transition and prestige. This theme is developed below, where it is proposed that sport reimagining strategies involve symbolic and other specific qualities that may enable them to successfully influence the way in which destination images are formed.



Place images are formed from a variety of sources, most notably direct experience of the destination and important secondary sources such as the press, promotional material, television, radio, film and literature (Gunn 1998, Gartner 1993). One of the most important categories of secondary agents noted by Gartner is that of autonomous image formation agents, which consist of independently produced reports, documentaries, movies and news articles (Gartner 1993: 201). Gartner states that because of their perceived high credibility and market penetration, these agents may be the only image formation agents capable of significantly enhancing an area's image in a short period of time (Gartner 1993). The relevance of this observation for sport reimagining is that sporting initiatives generate and encompass autonomous image formation agents. The transmission of sporting links is predominantly through factual reporting and 'unbiased' news transmissions. Although deliberate promotional campaigns involving sport are used by cities, the majority of information received by potential tourists about sport in the city is via what Gartner would regard as very credible and unbiased sources. Staging major sport events and constructing prestige sport facilities generates publicity and news coverage as well as resulting in media exposure from the coverage of the sporting events themselves. This may result in sport providing a credible, and therefore effective means of enhancing the image of the city tourist destination.

Gartner also asserts that 'effective image change depends on an assessment of presently held tourism images' (Gartner 1993: 207). In formulating an effective image enhancement strategy, it would seem valuable to know what images already exist of the destination, especially as people may tend to avoid contradictory information or what Gartner terms 'cognitive dissonance' (Gartner 1993: 205). Prospective tourists 'seek information that agrees with their beliefs and they try to ignore information that does not' (Mayo and Jarvis 1981: 35). This suggests that to be effective, it is important for imaging strategies to evolve from the current images held, rather than to instigate an instantaneous revolution of the destination image. This has important implications for emerging urban tourist destinations. It may be naive to think that potential tourists will accept hyperbolic imagery about industrial cities, proclaiming them to be attractive places to visit. In the UK, cities such as Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield have had a long tradition of hosting regular and one-off sport events and have become intrinsically associated with high-profile teams and stadia. Therefore, there is nothing revolutionary about associating prestige sport with these urban areas. However, by strengthening, renewing and developing these associations, cities can use 'major sporting activities ... to project a high status image of the city via media coverage which may help attract visitors' (Law 1993: 94).

It is also recognised that an individual's 'existing needs and desires' are an important factor affecting image formation (Ashworth and Voogd 1990: 81). Pocock and Hudson (1978: 19) cement this strong relationship between image and personal interests by defining image as 'the sum of direct sensory information as interpreted through the observer's value predispositions', implying that it is a person's own interests, motivations and values that help determine the form of their place images. The perception of cities is very selective, what people choose to perceive is very



closely related to what they care about (Mayo and Jarvis 1981: 28). If this is indeed the case, then sport's popularity may mean sporting initiatives can be more easily accepted into potential tourist's image of the city. As Whitson and MacIntosh (1993: 236) state, the popularity of professional sport and of world events clearly extends beyond a small group of people. Figures from the General Household Survey show that in 1986, 11 per cent of adults had visited a spectator sport event in the previous four weeks and that in 1996 this figure would be 13 per cent, with a further 1 per cent rise by the year 2002 (LIRC 1998). The figures relating to armchair sport spectating are even more encouraging in terms of the amount of people who are interested in watching sport events. For example in 1996, 3.5 billion people watched the Atlanta Olympics – almost one third of the world's population (LIRC 1998). Furthermore, in the US the eight most watched television programmes are all sport events (LIRC 1998). The sheer scale of interest in sport and its obvious popularity may therefore add to the penetration of the sporting imagery. Mullin *et al.* (1993) also indicate the relationship between personal interest and image. As the authors identify, the marketer's goal is to create a balanced or consonant relationship between the image of the city and the consumer's self image so there is an overall consistency (Mullin *et al.* 1993). Therefore, if a person has an interest in sport, the promotion of a city through this medium may be particularly effective. This is not only because a person may want to visit the specific events/facilities at first hand, but because the image of the city and the person's self image are consonant. Each image reinforces the other so that a very positive relationship builds up between prospective tourist and the city.

A final point about the specific qualities of sporting initiatives which may enable them to have a disproportionate influence on destination image formation, concerns 'imageability'. This concept was first explored by Kevin Lynch and refers to the quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer (Lynch 1960). With reference to more recent debates, it is observed that authorities have encouraged strategies that aestheticise or focus on the visual consumption of public space (Zukin 1998: 825, also Lash and Urry 1990). In effect the contemporary trend is to capitalise on Lynch's notion of imageability and deliberately construct urban features and spaces which have the capacity to generate a significant reaction from the observer. It is proposed here that the sport stadia developed in local economic development strategies have the potential to be significantly 'imageable' elements of the urban environment and as such should be regarded as providing 'potent landscape features' (Stevens and Wootton 1997). As Raitz (1987: 5) states, sport stadia provide cities with buildings that are distinctive and which evoke a strong sense of place. This view is echoed by Bale (1993: 3) 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'. As has already been mentioned, this visual element of destination image is very important and often neglected within tourism research (Echtner and Ritchie 1991, 1993, MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997). Seen in context with the factors mentioned earlier concerning the penetrability, legitimacy and popularity of sporting strategies, the coverage of major events transmit 'images of large scale,

dramatic, often aesthetically memorable stadia into our living rooms' (Stevens and Wootton 1997). This means that the development of sport facilities may be able to provide a city with important visual symbols which create a memorable and positive image in the mind of the tourist.

### ***Conceptualising the city image and city product***

Sporting initiatives may therefore provide a credible, realistic, popular and penetrative means of influencing the way in which destination images are formed. However, in order to enhance our understanding of the potential of sporting initiatives to influence the structure of city destination images, it is necessary to conceptualise the city and analyse how it is promoted and perceived by potential tourists. Therefore as well as examining the influence of sport in influencing the image formation process, it is also necessary to indicate how sporting initiatives may become a constituent of the form and nature of city image themselves.

As Shaw and Williams (1994) have argued, one way in which to consider the different dimensions of tourism in cities is to view the urban environment as a product (Shaw and Williams 1994: 202). The conceptualisation of the city product has been attempted by, among others, Jansen-Verbeke (1986) who states that cities contain primary elements (which incidentally incorporate sporting events and facilities), consisting of major tourist attractions, supported by secondary tourist elements involving retail and catering facilities. However, the term tourism product can be used at two distinct levels, one at the specific level and the other at the total level – the complete experience (Smith 1994). This argument is reaffirmed by Lash and Urry who observe that although tourists may consume various tangible products, they also consume the core product of a place (Lash and Urry 1994: 215). Therefore, when referring to the city as an urban tourism product, as well as involving the consumption of particular attributes or functions of the city, the city as a holistic entity can be consumed. It must therefore be recognised that the city as a tourist product is therefore bought, sold and imagined on different levels.

This multi-level conceptualisation of the city tourism product is important when examining the potential of sporting initiatives to enhance the image of the city tourist destination. The city destination includes specific products such as the provision of sport in general, and on an smaller scale still, individual attractions such as indoor sporting arenas. These products can be bought and sold separately from the holistic unit. It is important to recognise that these different product levels all promote and generate distinct images which are vitally important to the urban tourism system.

The importance of image in this multi-level city tourism product is therefore paramount. Indeed it could be argued that city tourism product only exists as an image. In terms of the holistic image of the city this argument is particularly prevalent. As Shields (1996) states, while we may speak of the reality of 'the city' as a thing or form, the notion of the city as a holistic unit is ultimately just a representation (Shields 1996: 226). The 'city' is a just a name we ascribe to give a series of diverse practices, relationships and spatial forms. The material reality of

the product is therefore not as important as the way it is imagined. Hunt (1975) affirms this argument in asserting that 'whether or not an image is a true representation of what any given region has to offer the tourist, what is important is the image that exists in the mind of the vacationer' (Hunt 1975: 1).

The crucial point is that just as the city destination can be thought of as a multi-layered phenomenon, it should be recognised that potential tourist's images of the city also exist on different levels. In terms of destination image, the distinction between the city as a whole and specific products is just as relevant. An example may be a city with a poor overall image but which is still perceived as a place with excellent sport facilities and as an attractive venue for high-quality sport events. To appreciate the image of this city as a tourist destination, it must be considered on both levels. The city tourist product is therefore essentially a series of connected, but stratified product images, and it is argued here that to be able to understand the impact of sporting initiatives, it is necessary to recognise this product image stratification.

The conception of the city destination as existing on different product image levels, concurs with Echtner and Ritchie's (1991, 1993) observations about destination image. Echtner and Ritchie assert that destinations are perceived both via individual attributes and holistic impressions. Using this conceptualisation, it can be proposed that sporting initiatives may be influencing tourist images of the city in two different, but related ways. First, through developing the attribute-based image component – by sporting initiatives developing perceptions of an important tourism product within the city. Second, sport reimagining may replace vague or negative images of the city as a whole with different holistic impressions and associations. The intention in the rest of this chapter is to develop this tentative observation in order to produce a framework which may explain how sporting initiatives are incorporated into the image of the city tourist destination. The conceptualisation outlined by Echtner and Ritchie (1991, 1993) explains the different components present in images of the tourism product. What it does not do is explain exactly how these components may be influenced by imaging strategies and other external factors. Suggestions will be made below to develop this important consideration.

### ***Dissecting city images***

As can be ascertained from the tentative conceptualisation that has been outlined, it is proposed that the image of the city exists on two main levels. This simplified representation of the form of city images is partly inspired by the Gestalt psychological tradition which dictates that with perception, the whole is greater than the sum of the related parts. Therefore, although it is relevant to consider city images as an amalgam of the perceptions of different aspects of the city, the human mind also tends to consider places with a unified wholeness that differentiates them from each other and the background from which they appear (Mayo and Jarvis 1981). Therefore although the city can be perceived through its individual attributes and functions, there also exists another level of perception which

considers the city as a unified whole. These two different, though inextricably intertwined levels of city image are explained further below alongside the implications of this basic conceptualisation for the impact of sport reimagining strategies.

*Functional/operational image enhancement of the attribute based image of the city*

First let us consider what is termed here the attribute-based image component, where the city is perceived as offering a series of different functions and features. A tourist image of the city may mean that a city is imagined as a place which offers certain identifiable tourist products. This image level is very much a functional perception of the city in question, where the person imagines what features and aspects would be present in a city and how the individual may utilise these attributes for their own specific purposes. Appleyard calls this form of perception an operational processing of information, which consists of the perception of 'goals, barriers, noxians and other elements related to purposeful action' (Appleyard 1973: 109). The implementation of sporting initiatives may have an impact on this city image level by enhancing the perception of a city's sport tourism product. The attribute based image of the city as a sporting destination may therefore be enhanced, which may influence a certain section of the tourist market. As a result of the construction of major sport facilities and the staging of sport events, urban sport tourists may be influenced by the imaging in a functional and operational sense.

Without wanting to devote too much attention to the subject, it should be stated that there are problems in defining the term 'sport tourist'. The most widely used definition is that provided by C.M. Hall (1992b), who sees sport tourism as travel for non-commercial reasons to participate in, or observe sporting activities away from the home range. However, care must be taken to avoid excluding viewing sporting infrastructure or sporting exhibitions, activities which despite their growing popularity, do not appear to be recognised in Hall's definition. For the purposes of the argument here, urban sport tourists can be loosely defined as those people who actively seek to use, view, visit, or spectate at, the sporting infrastructure of a city during their stay. The sporting element of their visit may be the primary reason and motivation for travelling, or part of a broader package of tourism products in the city which they wish to sample. Therefore, in this segment of the urban tourism market the links between sport and the city are taken much more literally. Sporting initiatives are perceived as a specific function and attraction of the city. The construction of major sport facilities and staging high profile events means that the city may develop an image as a sporting destination, where visitors can go and experience the urban sport tourism products at first hand. This obviously involves spectating at sport events, but may also include sport participation in competitive and non-competitive environments, sport based visitor attractions such as sporting museums and guided tours of certain stadia. Several cities in the UK have attempted to enhance their images in this manner. Stevens and Wootton (1997)

see Sheffield as a city which has developed a successful sport tourism product based on its stadia infrastructure. This conception of sport as an ‘experienceable’ tourism product and therefore a means of promoting the city as a tourist destination is clearly discernible in the tourist literature produced by the cities of Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield. This trend is perhaps most clearly exemplified by promotional literature produced by Marketing Manchester, who provide a hypothetical itinerary for the would-be sport tourist (Figure 9.1).

As can be seen from this example, the new prestige sport facilities developed in the city are being explicitly used as a means of enhancing the image of the city as a place within which to experience prestige sport events. The intended image impact therefore relates to an enhancement based on the operational or functional representation of the city. This image enhancement can be seen to be distinct from another means by which sport may enhance the image of the city destination.

*Symbolic image enhancement of the holistic image of the city*

The holistic image component differs from the attribute-based image in that it consists of overriding general perceptions of the city as a whole. Attempting to simplify the urban environment into a unified whole enables a tourist to organise information and derive meaning from the complex and diverse contemporary city, which otherwise is inaccessible to the imagination. The holistic image is therefore a very important facet of the tourist decision making process. As Law (1996) states, some people do travel to a city for a specific purpose, but if we return again to the doctrine of Gestalt school of psychology, it could be argued when considering the city tourism product that the sum is often greater than the parts. As Law argues, ‘when visitors are asked why they went to London or Paris, many do not reply that it was because they wanted to visit the Tower of London or the Louvre, but rather that they just wanted to go there’ (Law 1996: 19). When considering the potential influence of sport reimagining on this holistic manifestation of city image, it is

**‘Inspired Sport’**

*Morning – Visit Old Trafford and the Manchester United Museum, together with a behind-the-scenes tour of the world’s greatest football club.*

*Afternoon – Lunch at the Kilhey Court Hotel or De Vere Mottram Hall followed by a round of golf on their championship golf courses.*

*Evening – A sporting choice of superb venues, experience Manchester’s Velodrome, Britain’s national cycling centre and the fastest cycle track in the world or Europe’s largest events arena, the Nynex arena in Manchester with its resident, world renowned ice-hockey and basketball teams.*

Figure 9.1 Extract exemplifying the promotion of sport as urban tourist attraction

Source: (Marketing Manchester Visitor and Convention Bureau 1998)

argued that rather than simply enhancing the way the city is viewed as a sporting destination, sport may have the potential to produce a more positive holistic image of the city. Where image enhancement concerns a city traditionally associated with industrial production, the level of city image can be influenced by a general enhancement replacing vague or negative images with more positive holistic impressions. What may result is an enhancement of the holistic image, based on abstract notions and symbolic representations, rather than any notion of sport as a function of the city.

This form of enhancement is a connotative means of image development, as it involves what is implied or suggested in addition to the sport tourism products, beyond their literal or explicit sense. The implication is that sport tourism products, like other consumer commodities, may have developed the capacity to take up a wide range of imagistic and symbolic associations which overlay their initial use-value (Featherstone 1991). Therefore, the city has begun to promote itself like other consumer goods, not just as a functional product that has certain attributes and qualities which may be experienced through its purchase, but through more abstract imagery associating it with positive concepts and emotions. It has been observed that in the contemporary era, surfaces and styles become more important, creating a 'designer' ideology. Jean Baudrillard argues that consumption should be understood as a process in which only the signs attached to the goods are actually consumed and hence commodities (in this case the city) are not valued for their use, but understood as possessing a certain meaning (Campbell 1998: 103). As Strinati (1992) states, when people shop in supermarkets, they are as interested, if not more interested, in the packaging and design of the goods on sale as the goods themselves. If this is indeed the case, then it could be said that we are increasingly consuming signs and images for their own sake. This may be of particular relevance to sport reimagining, for as Rowe (1995) argues, sport is inherently reliant on images and symbols rather on the production of use-valuable commodities per se. The implication here is that the use of sport as an imaging tool may provide a city with an attractive image, even though the recipients of the imagery may not view that element of the city in an operational sense. The image enhancement is based on a symbolic, abstract level of signs and symbols which influences the way in which people imagine the city, regardless of their interest in spectator sport. Sport provides the packaging, the image, rather than a specific function and feature of the city.

This argument is particularly relevant to sport reimagining because the proposed image enhancement is not necessarily explicit in nature, as it does not have to directly refer to the functional dimension of the city. It is the connotations attached to the sport events and the facilities that are as important as the facilities and events themselves. Prospective visitor images of the city may be enhanced by the staging of a major event or construction of a sporting arena despite the fact that they have no intention of sampling the sport tourism products within that city. As Hall (1997: 205) states the reimagining and representation of a city 'relies on both material and symbolic resources'. The development of sport facilities and the staging of events has a material outcome in terms of the provision of a specific tourism product, but the effects of the initiatives are not confined to this immediate

impact. The city may become a more attractive destination because of the positive associations derived from the sporting initiatives, not the sporting initiatives per se, which may improve the way in which the city is viewed as a whole. According to Rowe (1995) these sporting connotations 'emerge out of the repetitive assertion of sporting values such as universalism, transcendence, heroism, competitiveness, individual motivation and teamship' (Rowe 1995: 138). Through this connotative process, the reimagining of the city through sport would appear to have the potential to influence the holistic element of destination image.

A good illustration of this symbolic image enhancement may be the sport reimagining implemented by the city of Manchester. This city in the North West of England made two unsuccessful bids for the Olympics (for the 1996 and 2000 Games), but despite this apparent failure, successfully used the bids as a focal point for the reorientation of the city's image. Although the mega-event never took place in the city and the majority of the proposed sport facilities were not built, it is generally regarded that the city's holistic image was improved greatly as a result. In effect the mere association with sport in general, and more specifically the Olympic Games themselves, replaced vague or negative perceptions of the city with more positive perceptions. Rowe's assessment of Manchester's Olympic bid concurs with this interpretation, perceiving that the city was keen to host the 2000 Olympics because of 'all its connotations of new era advancement' (Rowe 1995: 137). Manchester has used the legacy of the bid in the form of for example images of sports facilities in promotional literature, in an attempt to connote a new era for the city, illustrating the symbolic and abstract purpose of much sport reimagining. The image enhancement in this instance does not utilise the functional value of the bid in providing an improved sport tourism product, but on a more abstract, symbolic level which has enabled the holistic image of the city to receive a much needed boost. As Rowe (1995) asserts, such examples 'illustrate sports work as a metaphor and its articulation with other practices and values constitute an attractive capacity to popularise sometimes obscure notions of progress' (Rowe 1995: 138).

Two major ways in which sporting initiatives may influence the images of cities have therefore been identified. One relates to an operational image enhancement based on the improved perception of the city as a sport tourism destination and another to an impact on the holistic image resulting from a connotative interpretation of symbolic and abstract imagery. Recent debates in critical sociology would promote the importance of the symbolic over the functional, and the connotative over the denotative when considering the contemporary arena of consumption. However, it may be that the success of urban reimagining strategies depends on capturing and utilising both forms of image enhancement. The example of Manchester illustrates the fact that sport products can be utilised simultaneously as a means of enhancing both the functional and the holistic elements of destination image, applying both connotative and denotative imaging. Despite the obvious danger of over-simplification, the different means of image enhancement noted would appear to provide a useful means of conceptualising the proposed impact of sporting initiatives on city images. However, to understand the importance of



this conceptualisation it is necessary to discuss the implications resulting from it. These will now be considered.

### ***The importance of conceptualising destination image***

#### *Research implications*

The identification and appreciation of holistic and operational image enhancement is important because it is only through such conceptualisation that it may be possible to measure the true impact of sport-led urban reimagining strategies. Research that attempts to evaluate image enhancement must consider the tourism product at a variety of scales in order to fully appreciate the possible impact of a sport-based strategy. City image research must acknowledge that the image of the city as a whole may be enhanced by a sport-led strategy, but that the initiatives implemented may also develop perceptions of improvements to a particular product (sport) within the city. This attribute-based image enhancement may take place even if holistic impressions remain largely unaffected. Therefore even if cities such as Sheffield and Manchester fail to develop desirable holistic city images, they may at least be able to develop images and reputations as sporting destinations offering an impressive sport tourism product. The use of examples from Manchester to exemplify both forms of image enhancement provides evidence that sport reimagining may have the potential to enhance both destination image components, thus developing the capacity to influence simultaneously different sectors of the tourist market. The key point is that image research must analyse these different strata of destination image in order to measure comprehensively any proposed image enhancement resulting from sporting initiatives.

Furthermore, the complex nature of any possible image enhancement the development of holistic images derived from symbolic imaging indicates that traditional image measurement techniques need to be made more flexible in order to allow the appreciation of such effects. While it may be acceptable to measure attribute-based images using conventional structured questionnaires and rating techniques, measuring holistic image enhancement requires the promotion of the use of less structured interviewing. As Echtner and Ritchie state 'to fully capture the components of destination image – attribute, holistic, functional, psychological, common and unique – a combination of structured and unstructured methodologies must be used' (Echtner and Ritchie 1993: 5). To understand the meanings attributed to certain initiatives and to explore the way in which sport reimagining is interpreted it is essential that the subjects of any research are allowed to express their perceptions on their own terms. Despite the acceptance and appreciation of such methodological implications in some contemporary geographical analysis, the relatively immature discipline of tourism has yet to embrace the methodological recommendations noted here. There is a recognition within the discipline that symbols, signs and holistic images are important parts of destination image, but as yet the methodologies used to examine the concept have not been modified accordingly.

A final note concerning methodological implications is that an attempt here has been made to analyse how image enhancement strategies may impact upon the images held by prospective urban tourists. It is vital that more research attempts to link strategies of urban representation with the effects of these initiatives on the way in which the city is imagined. Therefore, rather than simply analysing the ways in which cities are being represented, there should be more concentration on the way in which deliberately manipulated imagery is received and interpreted by consumers. Despite the burgeoning literature on the promotion of city images and associated changes in urban form, there has been little or no mention that the implications of these changes to external images of the city which exist in the minds of the prospective urban tourists would matter a great deal.

### *Marketing implications*

The conceptualisation outlined above may also facilitate the future imaging of the city in targeting imaging strategies at specific segments of the tourism market. It is generally acknowledged within the tourism literature that place images must be designed to meet the needs of target markets (Kotler *et al.* 1993: 99). In sport reimagining, that obviously requires attracting the attention of sport tourists. However, it is necessary to realise that the most effective imaging may be that where 'the product is simultaneously sold to different customers with different needs and motives for visiting' (Page 1995: 216). This point is reaffirmed by Cunningham (of Proctor and Gamble) in analysing the marketing of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. Cunningham asserts 'you are looking for a multi-faceted message that can appeal to different audiences with a different agenda' (Armstrong 1998). Although sport facilities and sport events may attract a significant amount of people into the city, the amount of money spent on such initiatives means that for image enhancement to be cost-effective they should ideally influence a more general audience. The success of sport-reimagining may therefore rely on the dual form of image enhancement noted above, where sport tourists and a more general audience can be influenced. This argument is recognised by Hughes (1993) in the case of Manchester. Hughes states that the city's desire to develop leisure tourism has been aided by the Olympic bid through enhancing the awareness and image of the city, which may directly stimulate sport tourism but which may also 'encourage a flow of tourists unconnected directly with the Olympics' (Hughes 1993: 160). By recognising the different levels on which city images exist, more effective marketing can be employed, directing sport tourists towards the sporting products that the city has to offer, while using the symbolic capital generated by the sporting initiatives to impact upon a wider audience – aiding the 'circulation of images that influence climates of opinion and mentalities' (Zukin 1996: 45). This connotative imagery may result in a more positive image of the city in the minds of urban tourists, or at the very least pave the way for the acceptance of more positive imagery in the future by negating negative and vague impressions of the city.

However, there is a danger that unless this 'multi-selling' of the city is properly managed, the positive impacts could be negated. For instance, it has been recognised

that city marketing authorities tend to adopt a composite view of the city and its place product in selling the destination to potential visitors (Page 1993: 195). As Bramwell (1993) asserts, cities' marketing efforts are often disproportionately skewed towards the promotion of a city's overall image, rather than targeting specific visitor groups. The danger for cities implementing sporting initiatives may be that in aiming to enhance both the image of the city as a sporting destination and the holistic image of the city, they fail to do either to a significant degree. There are certainly indications from the cities of Birmingham Manchester and Sheffield that sport reimagining strategies have been implemented as a means of promoting the city to an ill-defined general audience, with less attention being paid to targeting specific imagery at the sport tourism market. This approach may mean that the cities are failing to capitalise on the market segment that may be most influenced by sport-based reimagining.

Sporting initiatives may therefore have the potential to enhance the way in which the city is viewed generally and as a sporting destination. However, in order to capitalise on this, marketing strategies must be formulated around the implementation of sporting initiatives which are targeted at specific market segments. This should include emphasising the attribute-based image of the city as somewhere to experience high quality sporting action in impressive arenas, as well as using sport to enhance the overall image of the destination. To maximise the benefits of this holistic image enhancement, cities may need to focus on the tourist market specifically, rather than presuming that imaging strategies will automatically and simultaneously project an attractive holistic image to investors, residents, governments and tourists alike.

### *A note of caution*

The overriding tone of this chapter has been very positive, perhaps a little overly so. Essentially, this is because the arguments have centred on the *potential* of sport reimagining, rather than any objective assessment of a strategy's success. It is, however, necessary to identify briefly the limitations of sporting initiatives in achieving city image enhancement.

Concern has been expressed by Ritchie and Smith (1991) that any image enhancement may be short-lived once the initial impetus of the sporting initiatives has receded. This is a valid and important point. However, it could be stated that as long as the initial catalyst that is provided by sport is capitalised upon, either through further sporting initiatives or more diversified imaging strategies, then this inevitable image decay does not necessarily have to be a major problem. It should also be recognised that the very fact that so many cities are using sport as a means of image enhancement may result in a reduction in the intended impact. This may be part of a wider place marketing issue, where it has been observed that places seeking to differentiate themselves as marketable entities end up creating a serial reproduction of homogeneity (Harvey 1989). In implementing sporting initiatives, places may be failing to distinguish themselves from their competitors. This problem is further emphasised when related to the more general field of

marketing. According to guidelines proposed by Kotler (1994), when attempting to develop a product image, companies should seek to identify sources of competitive advantage, choose an effective position in the market, identify the major differentiating attributes available to firms and consider the best means of communicating the firm's position in the market. The media exposure generated by sport means that this latter factor is a strong feature of a sport-led reimagining strategy. However, in terms of the other three recommendations it could be argued that the use of sport as an imaging tool means a city may fail to differentiate itself from its competitors and prevent it from occupying a distinct position in the market. As Whitson and MacIntosh (1993) argue, the implementation of a sport-led reimagining strategy may come more and more to mean simply reaching the standards of facilities and entertainments that are expected in any city by potential tourists. For the development of an attribute-based image, this may not necessarily be a major problem, as meeting these standards will attract sport tourists and sport events to the city. However, for promoting a distinct and memorable holistic image, the serial reproduction of images and associated developments may prove to be an obstacle to the successful reimagining of the city.

## **Conclusions**

The media, municipal authorities and academic commentators often glibly refer to local economic development strategies as providing a means of enhancing the image of a city. Though this may indeed be the case, up to now few attempts have been made to suggest how and why this image enhancement may be produced. What this paper has tried to do is rectify this situation by looking at what city images may consist of and how their structure may be affected by sport-based reimagining strategies. This has been achieved through the conceptualisation of the city tourism product, the different components of destination images and the different effects that an imaging strategy may have. The city tourist destination exists as a series of product levels ranging from the holistic unit to the individual attractions, that all promote and generate images. It has been proposed that sport reimagining may have the potential to be a successful urban reimagining strategy because sport has the ability to influence both the holistic and attribute based image of the city through the transmission of connotative and denotative images respectively. The different effects on image generated by sporting initiatives mean that they have the potential to 'multi-sell' the city to both sport tourists and a more general audience. If this multidimensional image enhancement is implemented properly in cities such as Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield, then the reimagining of the city as a tourist destination may prove to be successful in the long term. For tourism development in industrial cities, the real value of sport reimagining may be as a catalyst for image enhancement and tourism development. If this can be capitalised upon, it should provide the basis for the further diversification of the city tourist destination image. Already the indications are that Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield have been able to utilise sport in this manner, generating a more positive image of the city as a holistic entity through sporting initiatives.

At the same time they have developed their images as sport tourism venues and have contributed to the critical mass of attractions that should help these cities to become significant leisure-tourist destinations (Hughes 1993: 161).

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