

Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes

Spreading Tourist around Host Countries of Mega Sport Events: a Strategy to Overcome Over-tourism in Host Cities

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Abstract

Purpose – The study aims to recommend initiatives that can be adopted to overcome over-tourism in host destinations of mega sport events.

Design/methodology/approach – The study adopts a qualitative research design that involved 20 semi-structured interviews with key informant stakeholders of the London 2012 Olympic Games. An exploratory case study approach was used to investigate strategies used to leverage tourism benefits in host destinations, and we used thematic analysis to present strategies to overcome over-tourism in host cities.

Findings – This study emphasises the need for spreading tourists beyond the host city as a main strategy. To do so, three main initiatives were recommended: (1) Spreading domestic tourism outside the host city, (2) Showcasing destination beyond the host city and (3) Promoting regional collaboration.

Research implications – This research provides tourism practitioners and DMOs in host destinations of mega sport events with advanced strategic insights to capitalise on mega sport events. We suggest considering the events as a “*theme*” through event planning process in order overcome potential over-tourism in unique host cities.

Originality/value – As over-tourism is mainly researched from impacts points of view on visited destinations, this study argue that over-tourism can be generated by mega sport events. The paper offers an extended insight into overcoming over-tourism by implementing strategic event tourism leveraging initiatives that can be extended in use to reach geographic areas beyond host cities of mega sport events.

Keywords: Over-tourism, Mega Sport Events, Host City, Non-host City, Olympic Games

1. Introduction

Sport event tourism have always been an important pillars of the tourism sector (Daniels *et al.*, 2003; Mhanna *et al.*, 2017; Schulenkorf and Schlenker, 2017). This is because it is associated with a vast variety of tourism products offered in event destinations. An important category of tourism involves attending sporting events as the primary factor for travelling to host destinations (Faulkner *et al.*, 1998; Gibson *et al.*, 2003; Kriemadis and Kartakoullis, 2009; Weed, 2001). In the last few decades, mega sport events such as the Olympic Games became a determining factor for travel that is capitalised on by host destinations to enhance their image worldwide and appeal to the wide range of visitors (Chalip *et al.*, 1998). Therefore, because of the sports function in such destinations, visitor activities are enhanced or created to produce autonomous formulas of travel and tourism (Higham, 2007; O'Brien and Chalip, 2008). The Olympic Games as a mega sport event is a complex project and subject to destinations' tourism development strategy (Broudehoux and Sanchez, 2015), and requires long-term strategic planning (Chalip, 2004; Higham, 2007; Preuss, 2007; Mhanna *et al.*, 2017), to generate significant tourism impacts (Chalip, 2004; Essex and Chalkley, 2004).

Securing the right to host the Olympic Games brings public and private sector interests to execute development projects that thought to distribute significant impact within and beyond their host cities (Roult *et al.*, 2015; Smith, 2012 & 2014). Since London in 2005 won the bid to host the 2012 Games, there was an obligation to strategically design initiatives to ensure long-term tourism legacy for the UK as a host nation, particular that London was considered a unique tourism destination. In the early stages of planning for the London 2012 Olympic Games, setting strategic objectives by different stakeholders within host cities and beyond proved to be a challenging exercise. Aptly, there was an intention not only to benefit London as a host city, but also to have a long-term tourism strategy for the whole of the country. However, such objectives normally face ideological, economic, social and political challenges due to the nature of stakeholders' conflicting interests (Raco and Tunnet, 2010 references). In such phenomenon, the power of the large Olympic project may connect beneficiaries of various interests (Horne and Manzenreiter, 2006). Bramwell (1997), Cashman (1999) and Getz (1991, 2008) all wrote about the importance of setting core objectives, with coherent coordinated leveraging activities before hosting the event.

However, major stakeholders such as the local organising committee of the Olympic Games (OCOG) may negatively affected such long-term vision by giving much attention to the 16 days of event operation and satisfying strategic partners and sponsors rather than contributing to a forward-looking strategy (Mhanna *et al.*, 2018). Getz (2008) and Preuss (2007) voiced related concerns in their research and called for joint-up approach by mega events stakeholders. Given the practical nature of this research and its implications, we reflect on such concern and we respond to research calls in this context (Smith, 2014; Mhanna *et al.*, 2017 and Wynsberghe, 2016). We present the case of the London 2012 project, where tourism and non-tourism stakeholders attempted to adopt a forward-looking strategy that is in line with clear goal set of leveraging tourism beyond the host city. This paper contributes by presenting analysis of stakeholders' leveraging initiatives to benefit destinations beyond host cities from event tourism activities, and simultaneously contribute to overcoming over-tourism in host cities.

Structurally, the following sections provide a background of over-tourism and its potentials in major cities. We draw on potential over-tourism issues in host cities of mega sport events as a rationale for this research to explain how stakeholders have to up their game despite the challenges they face and the limitation of capitalising on mega sport events. The methodology adopted to gather information from key stakeholder informant of the London 2012 Olympic Games is then presented. After presenting our findings and discussing the initiatives explored in this research, we close by articulating the main contributions of this research within recent mega-event contexts, reflect on the paper's implications and propose future research in this area.

2. Background and Rationale

Watching sport is a unique and exciting experience (Depledge, 1997; Gibson, *et al.*, 2003; Weed, 2006). Event sport tourism became a niche sector for the tourism market as it is demonstrated by the mass tourism promotion of host cities (Chen, 2012; Kim *et al.*, 2010). Cities hosting the Olympic Games for instance may target specific market segments during the planning of the Games (Bramwell, 1997; Chalip 2001; Getz, 1997; O'Brien and Chalip, 2008). Therefore, understanding sport tourist market can be significant in the development of destination tourism (King *et al.*, 2015). Indeed, the Olympic Games is one of the most widely researched events within sport tourism. However, the event *per se* may not be the main attraction for tourists.

This means that event may attract visitors for whom watching sport is not the primary purpose of being in the host city (Chalip, 2004; Jarvie; 2008), which may cause an increase in the number of visitors in the lead up to and during the event's short period of time.

Sport and tourism authorities in host cities of the Olympic Games have to establish a set of conditions to warrant avenues for tourism development (Agha *et al.*, 2012; Faulkner *et al.*, 1998). The build-up to such mega-event must involve coordinated leveraging initiatives by which sport and tourism stakeholders can effectively promote the host destination not only for sport competition spectators but also the event non-attendees (Chalip and Leyns, 2002; Chalip, 2004). Such strategic event leveraging demands a clear understanding of tourism development that goes beyond the period of the event itself and its host city (Dickson *et al.*, 2011; Mhanna *et al.*, 2017; Smith, 2014). Numerous studies were dedicated to measuring sport event tourism impacts (e.g. Getz, 1989, 1991; Hall, 1992; Kang and Perdue, 1994; Carvalhedo, 2003; Chalip & McGuirly, 2004; Dwyer *et al.*, 2004; Blake, 2005; Solberg and Preuss, 2007). Several other studies focus on other aspects of the impacts by measuring and predicting trends (Burns *et al.*, 1986; Ritchie, 1984, 1996; Mules and Faulkner, 1996). Unlike such previous focus, Sydney 2000 Olympic Games was a starting point to shift the focus from the immediate impact of mega sport events towards a more prominent pre-orchestrated leveraging initiative (Dickson *et al.*, 2011; O'Brien and Chalip, 2007).

The Olympic Games have always influenced travel (Neirotti *et al.*, 2001; Currie and Delbosc, 2011). This type of sporting events can be used to predict interest and intent to travel (Chalip *et al.*, 1998; Neirotti *et al.*, 2001). For example, in an attempt to investigate the motivations of tourist to visit the host cities of Barcelona 1992 and Atlanta 1996 Olympic Games, Delpy (1992, 1997) found that although such events are orchestrated for global media broadcasting, for those visiting host cities, nothing compared with the enjoyment of "being there" (see International Olympic Committee, 1997). Therefore, as high number of domestic and international visitors will potentially target host cities, this may raise over-tourism concerns. This is because such increase in tourists' numbers can bring negative impacts to host cities. It can be argued that the exploitation of event sport tourism can disrupts the capabilities of host cities to cope with such phenomenon. To successfully and sustainably overcome this and to use mega sport events as a catalyst to development the tourism industry, host destinations have to accommodate for additional tourist activities within the host cities and beyond (Choi and Murray, 2010).

Over-tourism occurs when destinations suffer the strain of tourism (Butler, 2018; Richardson, 2017; Seraphin *et al.*, 2018a). Therefore, host cities may reach their carrying capacity, meaning the maximum limit of tourism development (Canestrelli and Costa; 1991; van Der Borg *et al.*, 1996). Singh (2018, p. 415) added '*The presence of overtourism can be suspected when local people cannot walk on the street without rubbing shoulders with crowds of tourists*'. Furthermore, the challenges of over-tourism phenomenon are perceived in different forms such as pollution, littering, damaging the freshness and amenity of tourism attractions, traffic congestions; degradation of landscapes, vandalism and concerns amongst local people (Seraphin *et al.* 2018b; Singh, 2018). When locals have concerns about such challenges, they stop enjoying their place due to the exceeding number of visitors (Singh, 2018). Therefore, they avoid contact with them particularly with the current behaviour of visitors who are 'flocking' to some destinations (Seraphin *et al.* 2018ba; Seraphin *et al.* 2018b; Milano, 2017). Indeed, Venice is a good example of such phenomenon. Milano (2017) referred to it as "Venice Syndrome" and added that it is a "*phenomenon of tourism saturation and the exodus of local residents to the surrounding urban centres*" (p. 9). This issue can be measured by tourism stakeholders through the host communities' perceptions and attitudes towards such phenomenon. Therefore, stakeholders and DMOs can build on this to absorb tourist development before negative impacts are perceived in order to reduce such impacts on the carrying capacity of host cities (Muler-González *et al.*, 2018). Host cities have to determine their ability to cope with amounts of tourist flow in advance before hosting the Olympic Games for instance. To avoid uncontrolled tourism in host cities, acknowledging the carrying capacity is a valuable tool when planning to overcome the problems (McCool and Lime, 2001; Zelenka and Kacetl 2014). In this context, it is important for tourism stakeholders and DMOs to understand and recognise the support available for tourism development and leverage it. Normally, mega-event host cities are unique tourism destination with various types of attractions and tourism products. Hence, non-host destinations within a host country maybe struggling in the development of tourism. Nowadays, much of the attention is given to host cities, despite the claims that these types of events contribute to the economic development of host countries. There need to be a capitalisation on types of attractions and augmented activities beyond host cities as a tool to overcome potential over-tourism. Then, the questions arise: how do such destinations really look upon the development of the tourism industry? And how to overcome over-tourism in host cities?

Several studies have been conducted on host communities' perceptions towards the impact of tourism (e.g. Madrigal, 1995; Lindberg and Johnson, 1997; Andereck *et al.*, 2005; Choi and Murray, 2010; Garau-Vadell *et al.*, 2013; Sharpley, 2014). Indeed, tourism can bring consequences such as overcrowding to host cities (Andereck *et al.*, 2005; Zhou and Ap, 2009). For instance, cities may experience crowding as a result of over-tourism in the lead up and during mega sport events, which can lead to locals' negative perception toward the tourism industry (Zhou and Ap, 2009; Muler-González *et al.* 2018). However, current studies mostly take the economic point of view into account and limited studies have concentrated on other viewpoints, such as strategies to overcome potential over-tourism in already crowded cities that host mega sport events. Few studies have been done on leveraging what stakeholders beyond host cities can do for the tourism development (e.g. Beeseley and Chalip, 2011). Therefore, stakeholders beyond host cities may face significant challenges in terms of sustainable tourism due to their geographical delimitation.

Host cities may experience a complex flow of visitors that can lead to over-tourism (Zhou and Ap, 2009), which can be driven by media exposure when prompting the city (Andranovich *et al.*, 2001). As a result, during the Olympic Games, the city may experience traffic congestion, accommodation shortfall and other impacts from over-tourism. As discussed above, there is a growing body of literature which adopts a critical approach towards the impacts of events on host communities. Much of the research on mega sports event has focused on maximising the number of visitors and their spending patterns as an indicator of the economic activities to impacts on host cities. However, Bull and Weed (1999) argued that whilst tourism related to the Olympic Games in major cities is evident, the potential "elsewhere" might be less appreciated. This is reinforced by the fact that there is a lack of research on potential tourism "elsewhere" beyond host cities. Without doubt, the challenge for mega sport events' stakeholders is to identify exact tactics for leveraging opportunities within the host destination. From sport tourism market perspective, promoting host cities, their tourism capabilities, their tourism infrastructure requirements and the associated tourist experience may stand in significant contrast. Thus, Chalip and Costa (2005) added failure to achieve careful collaborative planning among stakeholders can be problematic. Based on the discussion above, because host cities may face an over-tourism issue as a result of hosting mega sport events, identifying strategies to overcome such issue deserve more attention from academics and practitioners. We recognise the paucity of research over-tourism within this context and the imitated work on event leveraging beyond host cities to overcome. Studies, such as that of

Seraphin's et al. (2018a and 2018b) illustrate the need to apply ambitious and imaginative strategies to assure a destination socially sustainable instead of the reduction of the tourist activity. Thus, using the London 2012 Olympic Games, this paper attempts to address such gaps and presents leveraging initiatives perceived to be useful to overcome over-tourism in host cities.

3. Methodology

This study followed an interpretivist epistemological perspective because it involves stakeholders' perceptions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). The ontology of subjectivism was used in order to garner details of a situation to understand its reality within a qualitative exploratory study design (Guba and Lincoln, 2005; Yin, 2009). The preliminary step involved identifying key stakeholders of the London 2012 Olympic Games who could be considered for capturing data on the tourism impacts of such mega sport event. To do this, the authors applied a purposive sampling strategy (Walliman, 2011). By applying Mitchell *et al.*'s (1997) Stakeholder Salience Model, we shortlisted key informant practitioners in leading organisations that had commitments and roles during the staging of the event. As the aim of this research is to explore strategies used to overcome over-tourism in a host destination of mega sport events, we construct meanings from practitioners' point of view in relation to this paper's aim and reflect their perspectives (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011; Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). Primary research was gathered through 20 qualitative semi-structured interviews with informants who held managerial or organisational roles related to the London 2012 Olympic Games. Interviewees held roles at VisitBritain, VisitEngland, UK Trade and Investment, Tourism Alliance, London and Partners, London 2012 sponsors, UK Olympic research centres and local councils.

Following previous studies into over-tourism, research questions were framed around strategies perceived to overcome over-tourism in host cities of mega sport events (London in this case), allowing those practitioners to provide both facts and their perception of such strategic initiatives (Mason, 2002; Oppenheim, 2000; Yin, 2009). We decided to end data collection due to reaching saturation based constant and iterative thematic data analysis (Holloway and Wheeler, 2010; Spencer *et al.*, 2003). Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed in NVivo and simultaneously were printed off in order to undertake manual

thematic analysis. Existing literature provided a backdrop but did not direct the coding process of the data, thus the analysis process was structured in a way to reveal practical strategies that can be used to counter a phenomenon of over-tourism. Subsequent readings led to final presentation of the data in the section that follows.

4. Spreading tourist around the host country

The Olympic Games in London was considered as a catalyst for tourism development. Practitioners interviewed for this research argued that as London is a unique city and already getting high numbers of visitor, it can be critical to shift tourism away from the host city. Initiatives to leverage immediate tourism in non-host UK destination can be a tool to avoid over-tourism and can be incorporated in the strategic planning of the event (Mhanna *et al.*, 2017; Berg *et al.*, 1995; Bramwell, 1997; Chalip, 2004; Preuss, 2007). The data revealed that it can be useful to spread tourists around the host country due to the fact that the Olympic Games was already considered a “fast-track” tourism development factor (Preuss, 2004), in the UK government agenda. The next sections present key initiatives discussed with key stakeholders/practitioners that can be helpful to overcome over-tourism in the host cities of mega sport events:

4.1. Spreading domestic tourism outside the host city

Growing domestic tourism in England was the main objective of VisitEngland by capitalising on showcasing factor of the Games (VisitEngland, 2010). In the lead up and during the event, different regions of England were showcased to a wide range of UK audiences and therefore, the result VisitEngland’s campaign have been very positive (Discussed with VisitEngland Interviewee). Furthermore, Olympics Games may displace tourism in the host city (Mhanna *et al.*, 2017). Indeed, this can be an element to entice regional and domestic holidays. If tourists undertake such domestic visitations rather than holidaying overseas or in the host cities, economic impact in such destinations will be leveraged not only in England, but also in the whole of the UK.

Influencing tourists’ decision for domestic tourism is a difficult task. Efforts were made at the UK level to encourage staycations so that also the money can be retained in the local economy. In this case, whilst this contribute to overcoming over-tourism in London, there is no leakage

of economic impacts out of the country's economy. Mainly, the impact will be on domestic labour, local supply and resources (Argued by Tourism Alliance Interviewee). Therefore, as this is a difficult task, domestic tourism products and activities were needed in advance to attract domestic tourism. In Weymouth and Portland, to avoid seasonality effects as the Olympic Games took place in summer 2012, a strategy for long-term domestic tourism based on innovative thinking was adopted. This means that by running tourism activities before the summer Olympic and attracting domestic tourists to destinations away from the host city, this can lead targeted tourist to persuading them to avoid the host city during the Games. For instance, regions that have been based on the summer seaside activities like Weymouth and Portland were encourage capitalise on all-year-round tourism activities that grow the domestic market (Added by VisitEngland Interviewee).

This finding demonstrates the importance of tourism stakeholder's advance thinking to overcome over-tourism by offering continuous activities in different regions of the host country. This initiative may inspire tourists to stay domestically and avoid overcrowded host cities of mega sport events. This is in line with Jaakeon (1986) and Minnaert *et al.* (2007, 2009) who referred to the tourism social dynamics that outdoor and other tourist activities offer in their physical space. Host countries of mega sport events with improved urban, rural and coastal infrastructure can offer access to various tourism activities away from the host city. Thus, tourists who decide to holiday domestically during an Olympic event for instance will consider the passive recreation for domestic tourism (Perkins and Thorns, 2001). Moreover, the initiative discussed in this section suggests that in order to overcome over-tourism, a change in holiday taking patterns can be influenced. Tourists who were initially going to visit the host city during the Olympic Games can be enticed to recognising the range of good tourism product offered by non-host regions.

4.2. Showcasing destination beyond the host city

In light of the previous section, whilst London "the unique city" already receive high number of visitors, it is also already showcased on the global stage. In the lead up and during the London 2012 Olympics, the city offered continuous events for accredited and non-accredited media to experience London and its attractions within London boroughs (Discussed with London and Partners). However, another initiative found in this research was that tourism stakeholders did set up a series of activities and tours for non-accredited media to visit, write

and broadcast about attractive locations in various UK regions outside London. VisitEngland and VisitBritain arranged several media trips around the South-East and the Lake District for example. Furthermore, Olympic national teams that were spread around the country for training camps in the lead up to the Games were accompanied by their media teams. Thus, tours and events for non-accredited media were key factors for showcasing different regions in the UK as host country of the Olympic Games (Jutbring, 2014). Spreading media teams in different parts of the country was an initiative to overcome potential over-tourism by attempting shifting tourists' attention from the host city via advertising and reporting stories from various regions, cities and towns (Added by VisitEngland and VisitBritain).

Indeed, this initiative in London and other parts of the country was considered a re-positioning factor of the UK for domestic and international tourism. Journalists can add colour to their reports by finding useful stories and visuals from different parts of the host country (Chalip, 2004; Chalip and Heere, 2014; Jutbring, 2014). From a tourism perspective, the UK Government gave attention to non-accredited media early enough to capitalise on this factor. There was a push towards encouraging tourism stakeholders in different regions and tourism attractions to offer prepared stories to the visiting non-accredited media to enhance the showcasing exposure of their destination (Discussed by UKTI, VisitBritain and VisitEngland). Using such tactic before and during a mega sport event can be introduced to future host cities and countries as a tourism strategic planning initiative to prepare for potential over-tourism in host cities. Certainly, this can enhance the event's appeal to target markets, which reinforce the destination's image in the domestic and international market (Brown *et al.*, 2002; Chalip, 2004; Blain *et al.*, 2005; Hede, 2005; Weed, 2008). Consequently, communities and tourism stakeholders beyond the host cities of mega sport events are considered as "host nation". Therefore, their collaboration with the host city is a critical factor in attracting visitors to their destinations and contributes to the mission of overcoming over-tourism in host cities.

4.3. Promoting regional collaboration

The first two initiatives above require the alignment of stakeholders' activities in order to maximise their influence in overcoming over-tourism in host cities and thus promoting for domestic and international tourism. A collaborative approach between host city and regional stakeholders is essential within an arranged pre-event joined up approach. As shown in subsection 4.2, encouraging domestic tourism around a host country is one initiative to avoid over-

tourism in the host city of London. Therefore, collaboration amongst domestic stakeholders is an essential supporting initiative to achieve this objective (Agree by all stakeholders). For instance, domestic stakeholders such as VisitEngland, English Heritage, Natural England and Sport England all campaigned to promote domestic travel (Added by Tourism Alliance). Such collaborative approach was orchestrated in London; while London and Partners worked with London stakeholders on promoting London attractions, VisitEngland worked with English destination stakeholders on destination marketing activities, which led to promoting their regions, cities and towns (Discussed by London and Partners and VisitEngland).

Thus, there was a need for a destination marketing platform where materials can be created and shared jointly between government bodies and tourism stakeholders in different regions (Agreed by all stakeholders). This could help maximising the impacts of the two initiatives above and contribute to avoiding over-tourism in London. Interestingly, there was a weakness in the collaborative approach due to the initial lack of co-ordination in the decision making process. This is because one of the central government priorities was increasing the number of international tourists from emerging markets such as China. Decisions were made by one Government department with a limited attention to the capability of London to cope with such a sudden increase number of visitors. Working in partnership and lobbying was a challenge (Discussed by VisitEngland). Discussions with Government Ministers took place, but the impact was limited as tourism stakeholders concentrated on briefing on the real value of tourism outside London and how it interrelates with other sections of the UK tourism economy. It is observed that non-tourism stakeholders can play a central role in the host country's tourism strategy. However, more work was needed on co-ordinating activities with tourism stakeholders to promote destinations beyond the host city. UK Trade and Investment for instance worked collaboratively with VisitBritain on shared missions overseas to improve inward investing and inward tourist numbers in various cities and towns of the UK (Discussed by UKTI and VisitBritain informants). This required regional partnership with business organisations, major visitor attractions and major hotels and regional DMOs (Added by UKTI informant). This means that in host destinations of mega sport event, regional stakeholders with different tourism products can work together with major country's stakeholders on international missions to attract visitors to their destinations. This contribute to both shaping the host country's image globally as well as reinforcing initiatives to overcome overcrowding the host city with visitors (Agreed by all stakeholders). Consequently, this wide collaboration style on overseas missions can be adopted at regional level in a host country. For example, in

Weymouth and Portland, with regard to hosting the sailing event of the Olympic Games, different stakeholders determined to work together to develop the 2012 Legacy Unit (Discussed by Tourism and Events Stakeholder at Weymouth and Portland). Mega sport events can be seen as an opportunity for destinations in a far proximity from the event host city (Smith, 2015), to establish a collaborative approach (All stakeholders). Forming such alliances amongst stakeholders as in the example from Weymouth and Portland was based on capitalising on the Olympic Games long-term legacy project to action the destination's tourism development programme. This include traffic and transport, local business tourism and regeneration.

What is interestingly emerging here is that forming regional tourism partnerships should not be temporal and led by the event period (Mhanna *et al.*, 2017; Smith, 2015). This is because the tourism objective of “*spreading tourists around the host country*” can be to mutually take tourism forward, and thus contribute to reduce the impact of over-tourism in host cities. This is also a call for both public and private practitioners to work together and look at potential funding in order to collectively brand non-host destinations for tourism (Voiced by all stakeholders). This finding agrees that partnership serves multiple purposes (March and Wilkinson, 2009; Verbole, 2003; Pavlovich, 2003; Dyer, 2000; Davis and Spekman, 2004; Wilkinson, 2008), and it is in line with early studies undertaken by Boivin (1987), Gunn (1988) and Stevens (1988) who recommended that joint destination marketing can benefit the various social objectives of both public and private tourism stakeholder.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

It is becoming apparent that mega-event destinations can succeed in growing tourism both domestically and internationally as such events attract large number of visitors (Grix, 2012; Ziakas, 2018). However, the problems that may emerge is that destinations being unable to satisfactory handle the sudden increased numbers and in a way that does not provoke resistance from local residents of event destinations (Colomb and Novy, 2016; Muler-Gonzalez *et al.*, 2018). Some mega-event destinations with tangible heritage attractions such as London in this case may already be suffering from an over-tourism phenomenon. We argue that the issue of over-tourism generated by events such as Olympic Games for instance adds a new dimension of intangible heritage as a cause of opposition by the permanent residents of the city. Indeed, tourists come to host destinations of the Olympic Games in waves and the host community became mobbed with people that cities historic atmosphere had been lost. There is a need for

a collective effort by destination stakeholders early in the planning stages of mega-events to understand the capacity limits unique host cities in order not to threaten their authenticity (Koens *et al.*, 2018; Muler-Gonzalez *et al.*, 2018; Seraphin *et al.*, 2016). A wave of tourists in this context want more activities and things to do, and tourists normally travel in groups to visit exactly the same places at the same time. In order to reduce such pressure, Butler (2017) recommended creating new destinations or improving the resilience of existing one. In this regard, the challenge is to forecast issues that may arise as a result of the sudden increased number of visitors to host cities. Furthermore, it is essential to identify potential new destinations or attractions with additional activities (Butler, 2018), within the host country and to make them capable of accommodating the growing number of visitors. This will involve, DMOs and stakeholders shifting the emphasis from attracting more visitors to host cities of mega sport events to making other destinations within the host country capable of handling current visitors effectively, thus future leverage for tourism in destinations at proximity from the event site.

Therefore, this paper unpacks important initiatives that can be implemented by tourism stakeholders to overcome over-tourism in host cities of mega sport events. We provide practical recommendations on how to influence holiday decision making in order to spread domestic tourism beyond Olympic host cities. We also reflect on the role of re-positioning regions, cities and towns away from mega event city such as London. In this context, the research also provides actionable tactics that local and national DMOs and business tourism organisations may wish to use in similar conditions that may arise in the planning of future mega sport events. Despite the sometimes conflicting interests of tourism stakeholders and varied objectives associate with the Olympic Games project, this case proves that without national and regional joined-up collaborative approach, the task of overcoming over-tourism in a host city can be a difficult task. Tourism and non-tourism stakeholders in host cities and beyond, have to collectively amplify their voice in order to empower their opportunities from mega sport events that can be beneficial for the whole host nations. Unlike the traditional ad-hoc reactive approach of facing challenges in host cities, we argue that overcoming over-tourism in host cities require early planning and forward thinking for positive impacts and legacies for host countries (Mhanna *et al.*, 2017; Smith 2014; Ziakas, 2014).

The interviews reported here have shed light on the case UK as the host country of the London 2012 Olympic Game. *Spreading tourists around the host country* may face the challenges of

potential short-term measures, if stakeholders' collaboration was a reaction to face the challenge. Ok-Lyu and Hyoung-Han (2017) recommended that DMOs and tourism stakeholders can be in control such challenges by advanced acknowledgment of types of tourism products and destinations' additional augmentations that can be bundled with a particular mega sport event. In this context, if non-host destinations beyond the host city managed to jointly tailor their tourism products with the Olympic project and proactively showcased them, the strategy of spreading tourists around the host country to avoid over-tourism and crowding the host city may prove a success. Mhanna et al (2017, p. 161) echoed this: *"Perhaps stakeholders could interact more with the event, setting and circumstances at an early stage of the event planning process to overcome potential challenges. In other words, there needs to be some sort of matching between the event itself, leveraging strategies and what stakeholders exactly seek to achieve..."*. We strongly argue that within the coherent and joint-up strategy this paper recommend, proactivity throughout the event planning process may be fundamental for host destinations to be ready with tactics to deal the challenges of over-tourism in unique host cities. Therefore, stakeholders who may find themselves facing such challenging situations, will be equipped with tactics to shift the demand from host cities towards other regions cities in the hoist country.

This paper demonstrated the values in adopting the concept of *'event-themed'* leveraging (Smith, 2013 and 2014; VanWynsberghe, 2016; Mhanna *et al.*, 2017). We find this vital the context of long-term mega event projects because it offers an effective lens for future mega sport event to identify strategic initiatives and apply them throughout the event planning process. Indeed, the results of this research propose forward thinking steps for practitioners to re-direct flows of host destinations' visitors beyond the host cities. However, we still have to note that in future mega sport event scenarios, initiatives to spread flows of tourists beyond host cities as a way to overcome potential over-tourism, are to be considered in conjunction with future host destinations' tourism policy and tourism development criteria in order to account for contextual differences. It can be claimed that, through stakeholders' engagement with our proposed initiatives, the findings in this paper promote and open up spaces for practitioners in host cities and beyond to identify their destinations in conjunction with mega sport events.

This study proposed three main initiatives to overcome over-tourism within a strategy of spreading tourists around the host country of mega sport events. Using the London 2012

Olympic Games in this context of mega sport event research, it would be one of the required steps toward investigating initiatives to overcome over-tourism by different academics and practitioners from different backgrounds. Further research is required, particularly that mega event such as the Olympic Games involve a large number of stakeholders and beneficiaries who may wish to voice their ideas of tourism development needs when destinations win the right to host such events. We recommend expanding our work by other scholars and practitioners in this area, and we acknowledge that this paper may presents a starting point. Follow-up research is still necessary to establish more balanced views from various host destinations.

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