



# Trade Hot Topics

## The Commonwealth Games: A role for economic diplomacy in the Commonwealth?

Brendan Vickers\*

### 1. Introduction

International sport mega-events, such as the Olympic Games, the FIFA World Cup and the Commonwealth Games, are occasions not only for sporting competition at the highest level but also for diplomacy, place branding and promoting trade, investment and tourism in the host location. The quadrennial Commonwealth Games is the most important regular opportunity for the 71 nations and territories of the Commonwealth to demonstrate its collective identity to the citizenries of its members and to the broader world. Over a billion television viewers were estimated to have watched the opening ceremonies of the 2014 Glasgow Games.<sup>1</sup>

The Commonwealth Games are the largest multi-sport competition to be held outside of the Olympics. Since their inception as the British Empire Games in 1930, the Games have evolved in parallel with the Commonwealth's own identity, from imperial organisation to post-colonial federation to voluntary association of independent and equal sovereign states united by shared values, culture and interests. For the Commonwealth, making a successful endeavour of the Games on an ongoing basis is and should be a top priority. Yet the process

of evaluating the success of a Commonwealth Games is both challenging and contested.

The XXI Commonwealth Games take place at Gold Coast, Australia, in April 2018. Like the previous renditions of the Games, this sport mega-event – together with business networking initiatives like the 'Trade 2018' platform at Gold Coast – could contribute to promoting greater trade, investment and tourism in the Commonwealth, especially for the host location; fostering new trade in cultural goods and services; and triggering positive branding for the Commonwealth.

Although the Commonwealth is not a formal trading bloc, the 53 members enjoy a formidable trade advantage. Historical ties, familiar administrative and legal systems, the use of largely one language, English, as the means of communicating with foreign partners and large and dynamic diasporas have contributed to strong trade relationships among its members. Commonwealth countries, on average, tend to trade around 20 per cent more and generate 10 per cent more investment with each other. There are also considerable untapped economic opportunities: intra-Commonwealth trade in goods and services and productive greenfield

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1 Kellaway, R. (2014) 'Eyes of the World on Glasgow as Scotland Hosts Commonwealth Games Opening', Express, 24 July 2014, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/491099/Commonwealth-Games-2014-Opening-ceremony-Queen-Rod-Stewart-Susan-Boyle-TV-audience-baton>, accessed 28 February 2018.

investment is projected to exceed US\$1 trillion by 2020, while trade in goods and services alone should reach close to \$700 billion by that time.<sup>2</sup> It is within this context that sport makes an important contribution to strengthening the social, cultural and commercial bonds of the Commonwealth.

Together with sport, trade and investment contribute in turn to progress on broader Commonwealth priorities, such as peace and security, prosperity and sustainable development. The Commonwealth Secretariat advocates for sport to be used as a vehicle for peace and development. The Secretariat works with member countries to develop policies and action plans that link sport to outcomes in areas such as health, education, gender equality and social inclusion, at community and national levels.

This issue of *Commonwealth Trade Hot Topics* examines how hosting the Commonwealth Games can contribute towards the broader economic development priorities of member countries, and proposes some practical recommendations in relation to meeting the diplomatic and operational challenges of hosting a successful Commonwealth Games.

## 2. Commercial trends in the global sports industry

The market for sporting events was estimated to be worth around US\$80 billion in 2014, including revenues from tickets, media rights and sponsorships, according to a study by AT Kearney.<sup>3</sup> When sporting goods, apparel, equipment and health and fitness spending are also taken into consideration, the sports industry generates as much as \$700 billion per annum, or 1 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>4</sup> The same study finds that, between 2009 and 2013 – a typical sports cycle that included the Winter Olympics and World Cup in 2010 and the Summer Olympics and the UEFA European Championships in 2012 – sports market revenues increased almost \$18 billion (7 per cent compound annual growth rate), with a peak of \$78.2 billion in 2012, when London hosted the Olympics and Poland and Ukraine hosted the

European Championships. At a rate of 7 per cent per year over that period, the sports market grew faster than GDP in nearly every country and many times more in some major markets, such as the USA, Brazil, the UK and France.

Over the most recent four-year sports cycle, from 2013 to 2017, revenue of sports events is expected to continue to grow, with projected revenue of US\$90.9 billion by 2017, an increase of \$15 billion. As the largest multi-sport competition to be held outside of the Olympics, the Commonwealth Games would also contribute to – and benefit from – this rising spending trend in the global sports market, including culture, leisure and other recreational expenditure.

## 3. Sports diplomacy and the Commonwealth Games

Effective sports diplomacy is a prerequisite for any international sport mega-event to be judged a success. The sports diplomacy required to produce an international sport mega-event is emblematic of the 'new diplomatic studies paradigm' – a way of understanding diplomacy better, both contemporary and through history. This approach understands diplomacy as:

- characterised by the essential diplomatic processes of representation, communication and negotiation;
- focusing on economic, social and cultural issues as much as traditional high security issues;
- involving multiple types of actors (governments, multilateral organisations, civil society organisations, transnational firms, global media, etc.);
- involving multiple levels of actor (e.g. metropolitan and regional as well as national governments);
- requiring mediation of differences between public and private interests;
- mandating constant communication with citizenries and populations ('public diplomacy').<sup>5</sup>

Sports diplomacy as it relates to mega-events like the Commonwealth Games takes two forms:

2 Commonwealth Secretariat (2018) *Strengthening the Commonwealth Advantage. Trade, Technology, Governance*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

3 AT Kearney (2014) 'Winning in the Business of Sports', <https://www.atkearney.com/communications-media-technology/article?/a/winning-in-the-business-of-sports>, accessed 16 March 2018.

4 The market for sporting goods and licensed products, which includes sports apparel, equipment and footwear, is estimated to be worth US\$310 billion; the market for sports clubs, including fitness clubs, yoga classes, personal training and the like, is worth \$105 billion. Other sports revenues, which include infrastructure construction, food and beverage, and greyer areas such as betting, are worth between \$100 billion and \$200 billion.

5 Pigman, G.A. and Vickers, B. (2012) 'Old Habits Die Hard? Diplomacy at the World Trade Organization and the "New Diplomatic Studies Paradigm"', *International Journal of Diplomacy and Economy* 1(1): 19–41; Pigman, G.A. (2014) 'International Sport and Diplomacy's Public Dimension: Governments, Sporting Federations and the Global Audience', *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 25: 94–114.

the 'specialised diplomacy of international sport' – which is the representation, communication and negotiation required to host an international sporting competition; and the 'international sport-as-diplomacy' – the people-to-people diplomacy that takes place when competitors, spectators and businesspersons from different countries and nations are brought together for the Games by a shared love of sport. A third form of sports diplomacy – the use of international sporting events by governments as a venue for diplomacy – also takes place at the Commonwealth Games, even if Commonwealth member governments tend to have fewer political differences than do attendees at global events such as the Olympics.<sup>6</sup>

Staging a successful Commonwealth Games is a process that requires multiple public and private actors first to make and implement policy decisions and then to engage in the specialised diplomacy of international sport. Byrne periodises the diplomatic and business cycle of a Games into four segments: bidding, bid implementation, hosting the Games, and the legacy period.<sup>7</sup> To facilitate working together over the period required to bid and implement a successful Games bid, host the Games and generate the Games' intended legacy for the host country and region, governments and local organising committees (LOCs) of bid cities, national governments and sporting federations, the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF), which acts for the Commonwealth to organise the Games, and large firms and other private actors that sponsor the Games all must participate effectively in ongoing diplomatic representation, communication and negotiation, with awareness of their accountability to their constituents in the citizenry. Potential bids lacking popular support are unlikely to be viable from the start. For example, organisers of a bid by Boston in the USA for the 2024 Olympics withdrew in the face of mounting public opposition to the public expenditure priorities that the bid would have entailed.

Byrne argues that the diplomatic relationship between the CGF and the host city is central to producing a successful Games. The two entities have an asymmetric relationship, she contends, characterised by shared and divergent interests over the course of the four-phase cycle of each Games. The CGF overall holds the preponderance

of power throughout the bid phase and the first part of the bid implementation phase, but leverage over the host city shifts as the Games approach and over the legacy phase.

Byrne highlights some of the challenges in North-South diplomacy within the Commonwealth, focusing on the bid evaluation and awarding process and the monitoring of bid implementation. Of 20 Commonwealth Games held to date, only 3 have taken place outside of the six developed country members: Kingston, Jamaica (1966); Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (1998); and New Delhi, India (2010).

The record of the specialised diplomacy of international sport in staging 20 Commonwealth Games illustrates its importance in creating the space for all-important sport-as-diplomacy to take place: at the Games themselves. For the Commonwealth as an institution and as a community, the interactions between competitors and between in-person spectators are key to sustaining the Commonwealth's identity, even if they are difficult to measure. However, other important elements of each Commonwealth Games' success do lend themselves to measurement by different means.

#### 4. Three metrics for measuring the success of a Commonwealth Games

Measuring the achievement of any sport mega-event is challenging for several reasons, one of the most significant of which is that, for host cities, it is all but impossible to gauge how economic growth and other metrics of development would have proceeded had the event not taken place. The performance of cities that lost bids for a particular event over the same period of time could provide a very approximate measure, provided that other variables specific to these locations can be isolated and neutralised.

Another challenge lies in the fact that conducting even a straightforward cost-benefit analysis of hosting an event requires inherently political decisions about which expenses are to be counted as costs and which revenue streams as benefits. For example, is a major transit upgrade that will improve the competitor and visitor experience but that the region needs anyway to be counted as a cost of the event, in full or in part? Another way

6 Murray, S. and Pigman, G.A. (2014) 'Mapping the Relationship between International Sport and Diplomacy', *Sport in Society* 17(9): 1098–1118.

7 Byrne, C. (2014) 'Relationship of Convenience? The Diplomatic Interplay between the Commonwealth Games Federation and the Commonwealth Games Host City', *Sport in Society* 17(9): 1204–1219.

to measure the success of an event is to compare the costs and benefits of the same event as it takes place in different locations over time, such as the Commonwealth Games quadrennially over the past three or four decades. Yet even comparative data for the same event may be complicated by varying approaches to the accounting of costs and benefits by different host cities.

Cities that take the decision to bid to host an event such as the Commonwealth Games do so in the hope of realising a range of economic, social and cultural objectives. Given the challenges of assessing achievement, it makes sense to break these objectives down into three broad categories: (1) straightforward economic objectives; (2) social, cultural and development objectives; and (3) place branding, trade and investment promotion, and tourism promotion objectives. The metrics for measuring achievement in each of these three categories of objectives vary somewhat, so assessing them separately may yield more useful results. We consider each in turn below.

#### ***Economic objectives***

In this category fall potential benefits and costs that are most readily identifiable from a business perspective involving public and private entities. Cities that bid and are awarded the right to host a Commonwealth Games face a series of upfront costs, which are intended to generate revenue during and after the Games. Prior to and during the bid phase, a city must study the feasibility and desirability of making a bid, take the decision to go ahead and design and produce a bid that meets CGF specifications. This process requires the municipal government to negotiate and coordinate with national government, national sporting organisations and federations, and sponsoring firms and private entities on the apportionment of costs and fundraising obligations.

An LOC joining together public and private supporters of a bid may take the lead role in this process. For example, for the 2018 Games, the Gold Coast City Council agreed with the Queensland Government and the CGF to provide buildings and grounds for events economically by using or upgrading existing facilities to the greatest extent possible. The LOC agreed to provide additional seating and temporary lighting at a number of

facilities, making it possible to return facilities easily to community use after the Games.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to constructing new or upgrading existing sporting venues for the Games, public costs may include upgrading regional transit infrastructure, costs for meeting social objectives (see below) and marketing expenses. Private costs include commitments to build or expand accommodation in anticipation of expected revenue from the Games. Ultimately, whether a bid is 'worth' making is an inherently political decision that a municipality must make in consultation with local constituents and stakeholders after evaluating expected costs and benefits according to the accounting conventions they decide to adopt.

Once the bid is awarded, this multi-actor diplomatic process of coordination must continue to ensure milestones for the completion of facilities and other preparations for the Games set by the CGF are met in a timely fashion. During the hosting phase, coordination and operational expenditures reach their peak, as all parties work closely to ensure the Games are a success. Once the Games begin, anticipated revenues accrue to the region's hospitality and retail industries, and increased tax revenues begin to refill public coffers. In the legacy phase, once the Games are over, public and private sporting and accommodation venues and facilities may be converted for ongoing community use or repurposed, entailing some additional costs and an ongoing stream of business and tax revenues. It is the position of both the CGF and the Commonwealth Secretariat that the legacy planning and phase must begin when the Games are awarded.

Research appears to suggest that cities decide to bid for events with the size and scope of the Commonwealth Games for different reasons. For example, major cities in Commonwealth developing countries - including bidding cities (Abuja, Durban, Hambantota) or successful host cities (Kingston, Kuala Lumpur, New Delhi) - may see a Games bid as an opportunity to boost straightforward economic development and growth. In Commonwealth developed economies, a Games bid can also provide an opportunity for regional capitals or major cities (e.g. Brisbane, Gold Coast, Christchurch, Glasgow, Manchester, Birmingham, Edmonton, Victoria, Hamilton) to stimulate regional economic growth.<sup>9</sup>

8 Tate, A. (2017) 'Commonwealth Games 2018: Gold Coast Venue Preparations Are "On Time and On Budget"', *The New Daily*, 4 December, <https://thenewdaily.com.au/news/state/qld/2017/12/04/gold-coast-venue-qld/>, accessed 25 February 2018.

9 Black, D. (2008) 'Dreaming Big: The Pursuit of "Second Order" Games as a Strategic Response to Globalization', *Sport in Society* 11(4): 467-480.

For cost reasons alone, bids may not be economically viable even before counting potential returns. A workable and sustainable agreement on the apportionment of financial responsibilities among public and private stakeholders is crucial to a bid's success in bringing revenue to both. The 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games cost £543 million, of which the public share, funded primarily by Scotland's Parliament, was £424.5 million. The final cost of the Glasgow Games was £37 million under its projected budget, owing to higher than expected sponsorship and ticket revenue.<sup>10</sup>

Judicious public investment can bring significant benefits to a region's private industry. For example, the 2018 Gold Coast construction budget is A\$657 million, 90 per cent of which was awarded to south-eastern Queensland businesses.<sup>11</sup> A successful bid can generate added gains to the public and to the private sector by changing political incentives for scheduling infrastructure expenditures in key areas such as transit. The recent awarding of the 2028 Summer Olympics to Los Angeles has resulted in agreement among local authorities to move forward the completion dates for a massive build-out of the Los Angeles basin's rail transit network.<sup>12</sup>

### **Social, cultural and development objectives**

Hosting sport mega-events like the Commonwealth Games offers an opportunity to realise or accelerate the realisation of broader social objectives that might not otherwise be possible. At one end of the spectrum, for developing countries, social objectives such as poverty reduction may be indistinguishable from mainstream economic development planning. At the other end of the spectrum, in developed countries, social objectives may focus on projects with a broader range of types of returns on investment than straight economic growth. Regeneration of blighted urban precincts, job creation and training for disadvantaged populations (including awarding construction and service contracts to minority-owned contractors), promoting healthy lifestyles through sport, improving access to facilities and infrastructure for people with disabilities and conversion of competitor housing into affordable community housing are all examples of social projects that

hosting a Commonwealth Games can facilitate. Cultural objectives, such as holding festivals that celebrate local culture to coincide with the Games, often are part of municipal governments' mandates to promote culture, and at the same time they may blend with a municipality's place branding and promotion objectives (see below) by entertaining visitors and showing a region in its most favourable light. Over half a million visitors attended events at the Glasgow Festival at the 2014 Games.<sup>13</sup>

Social and cultural objectives can be realised over all four phases of a sport mega-event. Examples are including potential beneficiaries in the bid process, ensuring construction jobs go to disadvantaged individuals, creating a Games volunteer programme accessible to all, and developing ongoing adaptive sport programmes using facilities refurbished for the Games. Key to understanding the planning, implementation and evaluation of social and cultural objectives is that their success cannot and should not be measured by the same metric as straightforward economic objectives.

Smith and Fox conducted an extensive study of the achievement of social objectives at the 2002 Manchester Commonwealth Games, focusing on the 2002 NW Economic and Social Single Regeneration Budget Programme, a project comprising a series of initiatives linked to the 2002 Commonwealth Games and designed to promote social regeneration in Manchester's region of north-west England. Smith and Fox praise these initiatives for being 'event-themed' rather than 'event-linked', in the sense that most of them were focused on the legacy phase of the Games, designed to be sustainable on their own over the long term, and were intended to benefit from their association with the Games rather than being dependent upon the Games for their success. Consciously using a mix of quantitative and qualitative metrics for evaluating the Manchester regeneration projects, Smith and Fox document specific quantitative social achievements of the regeneration projects:

- 220 jobs created;
- 3,092 trained people obtaining a recognised qualification;

10 Elkes, E. (2017) 'How Much Does It Cost to Host the Commonwealth Games?', *Birmingham Mail*, 5 July, <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/how-much-cost-host-commonwealth-13280953>, accessed 25 February 2018.

11 Queensland Government, Budget Highlights, GC2018, <https://budget.qld.gov.au/budget-highlights/gc2018/>, accessed 25 February 2018.

12 Tinoco, M. (2018) 'Metro Board Approves Mayor's Plan to Speed up Transit Projects in Time for LA Olympics; Including Transit in the Sepulveda Pass', *Curbed Los Angeles*, 25 January, <https://la.curbed.com/2018/1/25/16931052/transit-projects-olympics-28-approved>, accessed 28 February 2018.

13 Glasgow 2014 XX Commonwealth Games Post-Games Report.

- 8,473 businesses helped across the region;
- 913 voluntary organisations supported;
- 2,607 people encouraged into voluntary work.

Smith and Fox's interview research documents 'softer' and harder to quantify accomplishments, such as the raising of confidence, self-esteem and aspirations of participants from disadvantaged populations, development of regional pride and improved interactions between people in racially divided communities.<sup>14</sup> The official post-Games report of the 2014 Glasgow Games highlighted among its social achievements 50 national and 80 supporting legacy projects, 700 affordable, sustainable new homes made available from competitors' accommodation, nearly 18,000 Games volunteers drawn from over 50,000 applicants, £198 million invested in new sports facilities, and £5 million raised for the United Nations Children's Fund in a UK charity drive tied to the Games.<sup>15</sup>

Another important consideration, in light of the shared values and principles inscribed in the Commonwealth Charter, is the human rights impact of the Games. The CGF has published a human rights policy statement and is a leading member in the Mega-Sporting Events Platform for Human Rights (MSE Platform). The MSE Platform is an emerging multi-stakeholder coalition of international and intergovernmental organisations, governments, sports governing bodies, athletes, unions, sponsors, broadcasters, and civil society groups.

#### ***Place branding and trade, investment and tourism promotion***

One of the most potentially significant achievements of a successful sport mega-event is the raising of the image of the host city, surrounding region and country by extension, as an attractive destination for trade, investment and tourism. For example, Byrne argues that, as with other host cities, the awarding of the 2018 Games to Gold Coast has provided a major opportunity to revive the region's 'flagging brand'.<sup>16</sup> Government plays a part in place branding, irrespective of the Games, in that a significant component of a government's public diplomacy consists of promoting exports, trade and tourism. Hence, to achieve maximum effect, the public diplomacy efforts of national, regional and

local governments need to be coordinated with the LOC's marketing of the Games from the start.<sup>17</sup>

While the core specific expenditure Games-related place branding by the LOC may be the marketing of the Games to potential sponsors, advertisers and visitors, its promotional impact extends far beyond the duration of the Games. In this sense, the benefits it generates are indirect, though no less significant for being so: tourists who visit in subsequent years, investors who later invest in a local business or build a plant for their own out of region or foreign-based firm, businesses that discover new markets for their products around a Games host city or that start buying products made in and around that city. The World Trade Organization classifies tourism as trade in services under the General Agreement on Trade in Services Supply Mode 2, in which consumers go to the site where the service is provided to receive the service purchased. Attributing incremental change in investment and trade to the Games is challenging.

Expenditure for promotion and marketing in advance of the Games generates returns directly by attracting spectators and visitors to the Games. It also contributes to the extensive media coverage of the Games, the host city and the surrounding region that takes place, as well as social media buzz from competitors, spectators and visitors, which in turn promotes the brand of the host city and region in the period following the Games. The prevailing media narratives about the Games and the host city and region before and particularly during the Games may take varying forms and in so doing generate more or less positive public perceptions of the Games and the host city. However, Mishra's analysis of media narratives surrounding the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi suggests that developing countries and host cities confront place branding challenges that developed countries may not.<sup>18</sup>

#### **Conclusion**

Sport is a valuable asset that makes an important contribution to strengthening the economic, social and cultural bonds of the Commonwealth. The reach and impact of the Commonwealth Games exemplifies this. Together with sport, trade and

14 Smith, A. and Fox, T. (2008) 'From "Event-Led" to "Event-Themed" Regeneration: The 2002 Commonwealth Games Legacy Programme', *Urban Studies* 44(5-6): 1125-1143; Byrne (2014).

15 Glasgow (2014)

16 Byrne (2014).

17 Pigman, G.A. (2014) 'International Sport and Diplomacy's Public Dimension: Governments, Sporting Federations and the Global Audience', *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 25: 94-114.

18 Mishra, S. (2013) 'Projections of Power, News Framing, and India's 2010 Commonwealth Games', *Howard Journal of Communications* 24(2): 178-193.

investment contribute in turn to progress on broader Commonwealth priorities, such as peace and security, prosperity and sustainable development. In light of the preceding survey of issues and literature, the following recommendations are offered as guides for meeting the diplomatic and operational challenges of hosting a successful Commonwealth Games.

- All stakeholders need to focus on maintaining good diplomatic representation, communication and, when required, negotiation throughout all four phases of a Games. A key issue is how best to achieve the Commonwealth's objectives in bringing the Games to more developing country members and what specialised diplomacy is required to ensure successful bids lead to successful Games. The CGF is taking cognisance of this, with Samoa hosting the 2015 Commonwealth Youth Games. In addition, the new CGF Partnerships special vehicle between the CGF and Lagardère Sports (private sector) is an excellent example of the sort of specialised diplomacy needed to improve support for host nations and cities to enhance the overall value of hosting the Games.
- Municipalities considering a Commonwealth Games bid should decide in advance the mix of types of objectives their bid will seek to achieve, and should choose appropriate metrics of success, with attendant accounting conventions, for each.
- The bid process needs to be as transparent and participatory as possible, both in terms of ensuring maximum community support for a bid and in order to prevent over-bidding, which can result in a municipality suffering the winner's curse of being burdened with expenses it cannot meet.<sup>19</sup>
- A successful bid needs to distribute social benefits throughout the region and its population in which the bid city is located, rather than concentrating benefits in a single location and among a narrow group of beneficiary businesses and social groups.<sup>20</sup> In the broader Commonwealth context, consideration could be given to supporting some legacy beyond the host country through various funding initiatives. The International Inspiration initiative of the 2012 London Olympic Games is a good example, where £40 million was raised for projects in 20 countries outside of the UK.
- The LOC, sporting federations, local, regional and national governments, sponsor firms and other relevant stakeholders should adopt an active strategy for working together throughout the bid implementation, hosting and legacy phases of a Games to shape media narratives in a positive direction, with particular sensitivity to issues facing developing countries when they host future Games.<sup>21</sup> Doing so will help ensure that the host city and region accrue maximum place branding benefits from a successful Games, and that the Commonwealth brand too is advanced as much as possible.

19 Black (2008); Smith and Fox (2008).

20 Black (2008); Smith and Fox (2008).

21 Mishra (2013).

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