THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMAN RIGHTS AND MEGA SPORTING EVENTS: A CASE STUDY OF THE VANCOUVER WINTER OLYMPICS AND THE SPECTRE OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

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ABSTRACT

There has been an increasing emphasis upon a human rights agenda within tourism development. Commentators have examined the ethics of tourism products associated with destinations with known human rights issues (Lovelock 2008; Henderson 2003) and tourism and travel as a human right (Higgins-Desbiolles 2006). Sex tourism has garnered significant attention and there have been varying accounts of its relationship to exploitation or empowerment (Hall & Ryan 2001; Herold, Garcia and DeMoya 2001; Opperman 1999; Ryan & Kinder 1996). This paper focuses upon the human rights agenda associated with the Olympic Games. Key themes within this arena concentrate on the Olympic Games contribution to human rights improvements (Black & Bezanson 2004) and abuses (Lenskyj 2008; Rutheiser 1996). With regard to human rights abuses, much of this work has centred on the housing rights of vulnerable groups and the forcible relocation of communities for Olympic development (COHRE 2007; Olds 1998).

Recently, commentators have suggested that human rights abuses associated with major and mega sporting events have extended to the realms of human trafficking (Hennig et al. 2007; The Future Group 2007). It has been suggested that major sporting events and the concomitant increase in visitors to host communities, both prior to and during the event, has contributed to human traffickers targeting such destinations. The extent to which this occurs in host communities is directly linked to the prevention mechanisms in place. However, there is limited evidence to substantiate these claims and it has been argued that linkages between sex work, human trafficking and mega sporting events are problematic (Frontline Consulting 2009). There has been a concerted effort to chart the push-pull factors which lead to human trafficking. Such factors encompass poverty within source nations (Laczko & Gozdziak 2005), gendered migration practices (Augustin 2003), the globalisation of economic practices (Mamelli 2002), changes in border controls and political changes (Hughes 2000; Klingman & Limoncelli 2005), the role of organised crime (Monzini 2005), and regulation within the sex industry labour market (Anderson & O’Connell; Davidson 2003). This paper will examine the phenomenon of human trafficking for sexual purposes as it relates to the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics Games. The rationale for focusing upon the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics arose as a consequence of concerns raised by various groups that the existing human trafficking situation in Vancouver could be exacerbated as result of hosting the Winter Olympics (Future Group 2007). The objectives of this paper are to: first, examine the perceived link between human trafficking for sexual purposes and the 2010 Games; second, evaluate the preventative measures in place for the 2010 Games; and, third, evaluate the implications of these measures. Within the specific area of human trafficking and events there is a substantive gap in research. Work within this area has largely evolved from human rights and sex industry safety organisations (Frontline Consulting 2009; Future Group 2007; Hennig et al 2007). Data collection took
place prior to the 2010 Olympics. A series of twenty-two semi-structured interviews were undertaken with public, private and third sector stakeholders. This ranged from, for example, police officials, city officials, legal NGO’s, sex worker groups, support organisations and women’s groups. Data analysis was facilitated with the use of the Nvivo package.

It is suggested that there is a mixed evidence base for the perceived link between human trafficking for sexual purposes and this mega sporting event. This is compounded by public policy challenges and moral agendas. Findings centre upon an examination of the preventative measures in place in relation to the 2010 games and human trafficking. Key preventative measures are identified, primarily related to education and awareness based campaigns by the third sector. It is argued that the origins of the preventative measures have an important part to play in the human trafficking strategies. Further, it is suggested that such campaigns bring to the fore issues regarding city imaging and event impacts, moral agendas, and collaboration between stakeholders. Finally, it is argued that the Olympic Games acted as a catalyst for debates regarding prostitution/sex work.

In conclusion, this paper focuses upon an under-researched area which is at the nexus of tourism, events and human rights. It raises a set of critical challenges in relation to public policy and, in particular, the need for an integrated strategic framework which encompasses a holistic and inclusive set of stakeholders.

KEYWORDS

Human Trafficking, Olympic Games.

REFERENCES


