Leisure Studies ›

Volume 31, 2012 - Issue 3: Leisure, Culture and the Olympic Games

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The sociocultural legacy of the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games

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Pages 271-289 | Received 01 Jun 2011, Accepted 25 Oct 2011, Published online: 18 Nov 2011

Cite this article https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2011.636178

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Abstract

The belief that elite sport and its mega events act like behemoths trampling over all before them is widely held, not least in the culture industries. But how accurate is this view and what contradictory evidence, if any, can be cited? In order to answer these related questions, this article examines the legacy of the 1998 Summer Olympics, held in Seoul, South Korea. This study is based not only on a review of existing relevant literature but also on a series of interviews conducted with prominent figures from the worlds of South Korean politics and sport whose reflections on the immediate impact of the Games and also their consequences, although impressionistic and ultimately highly subjective, nevertheless add flesh to the bones of developments that are difficult, if not impossible, to quantify. We find evidence in the legacy of the Seoul Olympics that global events can help to promote indigenous cultures and even reverse the direction of dominant globalising trends. If nothing else, the example of Seoul 1988 suggests

that the culture industries should see sports mega events as potential opportunities rather than self-evident threats.

Keywords:

culture | mega events | globalisation | tourism | sport | South Korea

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