

# STATE OF THE DESTINATION

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## Race for the prize

The race to host major events can help cities and regions to transform their image and boost their economies. Regular, well-managed events deliver more or less predictable injections of cash on an annual basis. Edinburgh's Festival and its Fringe, for example, bring in around £90 million to the city every year. One-off events, meanwhile, help cities to put themselves on the map, or improve their existing brand profile.

Global sporting events are arguably the biggest destination prizes on offer. It might have failed to bring the Olympic Games to Britain (for the first time since 1948), but Manchester's bidding team did succeed in capturing the Commonwealth Games, staged recently to universal acclaim and the considerable economic benefit of the city and its surrounding region. Manchester City Council and its partners deserve much praise for their strategic decision to integrate the Games into a wider regeneration process. Their approach to the Games was developed over the course of the decade preceding the event. Throughout, they have focused not just on generating jobs alone, but on what the event could do for the broader and longer-term process of economic renewal. The Games provided an unprecedented opportunity to engage with people, businesses and regeneration initiatives, to unite a coalition of interests including the private sector and national government, and to induce investment in infrastructure and facilities of regional and national importance. It was an opportunity that Manchester grabbed with both hands.

And the results speak for themselves. Previous estimates of the impact of the Commonwealth Games had suggested that Manchester would benefit from almost 4,500 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs, of which 1,000 would be additional to the local economy. But it is now estimated that 6,100 FTE jobs are attributable to the Games, of which 2,400 are additional direct and indirect jobs to Manchester. It has also been estimated that the Games will bring £22 million additional expenditure into Manchester, and will encourage just under 300,000 additional visitors to Manchester per annum, spending in the region of £12 million. These impacts place the event on a par with the rate of return for economic benefits achieved by the host cities of the last four Olympic Games, in Seoul, Barcelona, Atlanta and Sydney.

Beyond these headline figures, which are still estimates, Manchester is certain to benefit from the major investments already made in new sporting, transport and other new facilities. Some £277 million was invested in construction and operations of Games venues. Many of the venues for the different Games events have a viable after use, from the City of Manchester Stadium itself, which is to be the new home for Manchester City Football Club, to the Aquatics Centre, which has already sold half a million swimming sessions in its first year of operation. On top of this, long-term transport projects costing £796 million, including links to the Airport and the North Manchester Business Park, have been brought forward

as a result of the Games, and given a greater sense of coherence to future planning. And a further £200 million has been spent on regeneration activity associated with the Games.

The media coverage of the Games has undoubtedly improved Manchester's image worldwide. The city has demonstrated its capability to host future events from sporting competitions to conferences. Its appeal to business visitors and tourists alike has been heightened.

It is vital that the UK's city managers and bidding teams learn from Manchester's positive experience. The early signs, however, have not been encouraging. England's application to stage the 2006 Football World Cup ended in humiliation, gaining just three votes from FIFA's judging panel.

Fortunately for the UK, it cannot fail to capture the next major international event on its horizon: the European Capital of Culture. This title is bestowed upon one European city every year, giving it the opportunity to stage a year-long programme of cultural events and, although markedly different in nature to sporting events such as the Commonwealth Games, offering a similar chance to build a brighter economic future for its residents and investors. In 2008, the title will be awarded to one of 12 British cities currently competing for this prize. All should already be glancing towards Manchester. Not only will

they learn how best to exploit the run-up to the shortlisting and eventual judgment, and how to use the event to its maximum advantage during and after their year in the headlines, in the event of winning. The 11 who are not lucky enough to make it through will also learn how best to cope with finishing in second place.

As Manchester did, having twice experienced the pain of Olympic failure, they must pick themselves up and convert their positive campaigning experiences into other forms of destination success. This is a race that brighter competitors cannot lose.