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## *World Conference on Sports and Tourism (22-23 February 2001) Barcelona*

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### **Tourism promotions in Australia on occasion of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games**

#### **Contrast between the promotion of sporting and artistic activities to express the cultural identity of the host country**

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#### *Research Summary*

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### **Introduction**

On occasion of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, Australia has been strongly dedicated to strengthen its tourism appeal to fight the limited awareness and understanding about the country that has been traditional in many areas of the world. A key objective of the tourism initiatives has been the promotion of a sophisticated image of Sydney and Australia, which is able to go beyond classical stereotypes<sup>1</sup>. This aim has led to an emphasising of Australia's love for sport and the quality of the sporting facilities designed for the Games<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, the aim has led to an emphasis on promoting the country's growth and further potential of trade and business markets<sup>3</sup>. Contrastingly, it can be argued that the country's artistic experiences and activities have been relegated to a second position both in the approach to and during the Olympic period. This has been so despite the existence of an Olympic cultural program fully dedicated to the arts<sup>4</sup> and, arguably, has resulted in a very scarce presence of references to this program within the tourism image that Australia has built up internationally<sup>5</sup>.

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### **Findings and debate**

The research undertaken discusses the difficulties to promote artistic and sporting activities in a complementary basis within the Olympic Games current framework. It analyses the specific characteristics of the cultural program of the Sydney 2000 Games to explain the lack of interaction between arts and sport and the scarce presence of a wider cultural discourse throughout the designed Olympic communication strategies dedicated to tourists<sup>6</sup>. With this aim, the research offers a review of the promotional activities developed by a range of Australian institutions in their approach to potential tourists from 1997 until the time of the Games. These activities are contrasted with those designed to promote artistic expressions within the same time period<sup>7</sup>.

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### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the research argues that Australian tourism institutions and analogue bodies have not seen much potential in promoting artistic experiences as a significant part of the appeal of the 2000 Olympic Games and the host city. This perspective is reinforced by evidence indicating a long standing lack of identification of the Olympic cultural program with the Games experience as a whole and pointing out the traditional division between sporting and artistic promotions. As recommendations, the research encourages tourism promoters to blend sporting and artistic options within the concept of cultural tourism and suggests that the cultural program of the Olympic Games offers such an opportunity.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Comments by Maggie White, Manager Olympic Games Liaison at the Australian Tourism Commission (ATC) (personal communication, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Evidence of the argument is found throughout the tourism campaigns developed by the ATC from 1995 on, with the slogan “Brand Australia” and “Brand the Olympic Games”. In the words of Janet Cahill, Olympic Project Manager at the University of Technology of Sydney, a significant section of these campaigns was dedicated to the promotion of the concept of “a young Australia with great sporting expertise”. A fundamental aim was to encourage the arrival of athletes to undertake their pre-Olympic training in the country, and, after the end of the Games, to make Australia become a key point of reference to train professional sportsmen (Cahill, personal communication, February 2000). In addition, these campaigns were also aimed to reinforce the concept of Australia as a country providing great chances for “sports tourism” in the sense argued by Laurence Chalip (2001) “Sport and Tourism. Capitalising on the linkage” in: *Perspectives* (vol 3. The Business of Sport).

<sup>3</sup> The ATC campaigns mentioned in note 2 were complemented by an interest to establish a strong image within the business sector, in special, through the promotion of Sydney and Australia as ideal destinations for staging trade congresses and commercial fairs. In the lead up and during the Olympic Games, institutions promoting business and trade ranged from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade at Federal level, to the Department for State and Regional Development of New South Wales. In the Olympic year, several of those institutions worked on a joint partnership with tourism institutions for the creation of a Sydney Media Centre (SMC), a centre dedicated to provide information on Australia to those journalists lacking an official Olympic accreditation.

<sup>4</sup> The Australian Olympic cultural program, following a tradition started with the Barcelona Games in 1992, expanded throughout four years (an “Olympiad”) from 1997 to 2000. The program was called “Olympic Arts Festivals”, however, the research undertaken offers consistent evidence about the program’s lack of association with the Olympic project. (See García, B. (2000) “Comparative Analysis of the Olympic Cultural Programs and Management of Barcelona’92 and Sydney’00” in: Wamsley; Martyn; MacDonald & Barney (Eds) *Bridging Three Centuries: Intellectual Crossroads and the Modern Olympic Movement*, 5<sup>th</sup> International Symposium for Olympic Research, International Centre for Olympic Studies at University of Western Ontario (Sydney, September 2000) )

<sup>5</sup> During the Symposium quoted in note 4, Prof. Manfred Messing and Prof. Norbert Müller from Mainz University stated the remarkable lack of accessible information about the Australian Olympic cultural program in countries such as Germany. Interviews with managers at ATC and the Communications Department of the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (SOCOG) have reinforced the idea that, at an international level, the promotion of the Olympic Arts Festivals (OAF) was reduced to some agreements with Australian embassies and ATC agencies abroad. Those agreements were mostly done in a low budget basis, ranging from brochure placements to brief mentions within informative publications dedicated to the Australian Games. In the words of OAF marketing director, Stephanie Sulway (personal communication, 14<sup>th</sup> August 2000), the World Wide Web was seen as one of the most appropriate tools to publicize the festivals at an international level without implying much cost. Nevertheless, the content analysis of a sample of some of the most used websites in the Olympic context, from SOCOG’s and other Olympic institutions to the ATC and Tourism New South Wales, has proved the very scarce presence of references to the festivals, remarkably, within their respective home pages.

<sup>6</sup> A significant example of the referred evidence was the nature of the OAF program, composed fundamentally of arts expressions in a classic sense (painting, sculpting, music, theatre and so on) without relevant intentions to promote their association either with Olympic sporting activities or the Olympic Movement in itself. In addition, during the Olympic period, the arts festival took place within Sydney’s Opera House and most key art galleries and museums within the city centre, an area that was far from the Olympic Park (Homebush), the place where most sporting competitions were taking place. Moreover, excepting visual arts exhibitions, most festival events required the payment of very high rates. In that context, the free activities (“Live sites!”) set up by Sydney City Council and the Olympic Coordination Authority (OCA) in parallel to the Games, became the most popular and acknowledged “non sporting” event in the city, arguably to the extent of being thought as the official Olympic cultural program.

<sup>7</sup> The mentioned “Brand Australia” and “Brand the Olympic Games” campaigns (see note 2) were not accompanied by other dedicated to the Australian arts scene until year 2000, the time for *ausarts 2000*, a cultural promotion plan aimed at the international press organised by the Australia Council, Federal funding body for the arts. The festival of 1997 (dedicated to celebrate Aboriginal culture) was the only one to receive significant support prior to the Games time, but the promotional focus was fundamentally domestic. As a whole, it can be argued that the international impact of the OAF or, alternatively, the acknowledgement to the Australian arts world was very poor within the Olympic context. Initiatives such as *ausarts 2000* are arguably only to achieve the desired effect on international audiences in the post-Olympic period.