

All at sea: developing sailing sports tourism



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Winston Churchill Fellowship Report



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1.0 Introduction: When the Navy left HMS Osprey, there was pessimism about the future of Portland. The announcement that London had won the bid for the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2012 meant that Portland and Weymouth Bay would be the host venue for the sailing events. This has resulted in marine leisure and tourism becoming the cornerstone of the area's regeneration. Sailing as an Olympic sport has a strong history and tradition, however, as outlined in the International Sailing Federation Olympic Commission Report (2010), there are concerns about the level of public and media interest in the sport globally.

Sports events have established a strong role for tourism, generating diverse flows of attendees. Sports tourism strategies have been an essential ingredient in the success of the Australian experience of hosting mega sailing events such as the America's Cup defence, the annual International Sailing Federation World Cup event, Sail Melbourne and the Perth International Regatta (test event for the Perth 2011 International Sailing Federation (ISAF) World Championships). This Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship focuses on the possible sports tourism strategies and legacies that can result from Weymouth and Portland hosting international sailing events.

1.1 Fellowship approach: The first element of the Fellowship was to identify and evaluate the sports tourism strategies that are being used in Australia. In order to achieve this, visits and interviews occurred with relevant event managers and stakeholders who have been vital to the development of these strategies for international sailing events and also further interviews with organisations providing associated sailing participation opportunities and volunteering.

The second element was attending the Perth 2011 International Sailing Federation World Championships, the biggest international sailing event to be held in Perth since the 1987 America's Cup defence. The 2011 ISAF Sailing World Championships were a key qualification event for the London 2012 Olympic Games. More than 5,000 officials, including 1,200 sailors and tens of thousands of spectators were expected to visit Western Australia for the two-week regatta, where world champions in each of the ten Olympic sailing events would be determined. This also included attending the observers programme to help facilitate a dedicated transfer of knowledge about the organisation of the regatta, to develop an understanding of the management of the event experience for spectators and access to interview some attendees at the regatta to develop a deeper understanding of the sailing sports tourist.

1.2 Fellowship aim and objectives: The aim of the Fellowship was achieved through the completion of four objectives, which are outlined below:

- Objective 1: to identify sailing sports tourism strategies that could be applied to Weymouth and Portland to develop sailing sports tourism and tactics that inspire attendees to further engage with sailing.
- Objective 2: to discover why people attend international sailing events (e.g. atmosphere, physical environment, athlete ability, competition, periphery activities), changes in attitude about the sport and areas that would increase engagement (e.g. taster sessions, talking to experts, volunteering).
- Objective 3: to evaluate these strategies, tactics, and aspects of the event experience to encourage sports tourism at sailing events in Weymouth and Portland.
- Objective 4: to explore the potential that exists in Weymouth and Portland hosting the sailing competitions this summer and investigate how sailing sports development (e.g. participation, volunteering) can be used to engage local residents as a legacy.

Upon returning to the United Kingdom in late December 2011, the author drafted a press release for the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust to be published in January 2012 detailing the headlines of the project. The Fellowship concluded with the writing and submission of a final report to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, and the dissemination of the information to the wider stakeholders, for example, via existing governance (Dorset Steering Group; Dorset Operations Group), Local Authorities work stream leads (Weymouth & Portland Borough Council, West Dorset District Council and Dorset County Council), Active Dorset, London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, and the Royal Yachting Association. The project aspired to be 'action research' rather than anecdotal or retrospective. As such, the project will have a greater impact in helping support or change strategies to further support sailing sports tourism in Weymouth and Portland.

2.0 Sports tourism strategies: What was evident from the moment the author arrived and started speaking to people in Fremantle was the irrefutable impact that winning the America's Cup 1983 and the subsequent defence in 1987 has had. When comparing this against events management literature, six event structures were identified as key to a legacy such as this, infrastructure, knowledge, image, emotions, networks, and culture. It was clear to the author that these were pivotal in the sports tourism strategies being utilised.

2.1 Role of history: As a result of winning the Americas Cup in 1983, the Western Australian Government set up Eventscorp. Eventscorp was the first state-owned events agency in Australia. Eventscorp's role was to maximise the tourism benefits of the America's Cup defence. Today, Eventscorp achieves its goals by implementing a number of strategies which include: identifying and attracting a diverse range of world class events to Western

Australia; providing funding for both major events as well as regional events through the regional events scheme; supporting and developing events from concept to successful implementation; managing and growing events, where appropriate, particularly in regional areas; and leveraging tourism, business and media opportunities through events. Eventscorp is crucial to a sustainable event portfolio for Western Australia and for each of the events hosted, a rigorous economic impact evaluation is undertaken to measure the impact to the area such as the one delivered and executed during Perth 2011 ISAF World Championships. From discussions with the Perth 2011 team and publically acknowledged in the opening briefing of the event, had it not been for the energy of a key group of people, the support of Eventscorp and the local network, the bid would never have got off the ground and the dream realised.



2.2 Bid award: When reviewing the aspects that were crucial in ISAF deciding to award the event to the Perth 2011 team, key drivers were the existing infrastructure, good sailing conditions and venue facilities which placed the destination ahead of other bidding cities. It is also worth noting that the social capital derived from the America's Cup win and defence is visible with many of the key personnel embedded within the board or management of Perth 2011. When considering this against events management literature, it is clear that six event structures (infrastructure; knowledge; image; emotions; networks; and culture), with further classification to hard (tangible) and soft (intangible), have been preserved and utilised within Perth 2011. It was evident via the Fellowship interviews that place attachment, identity and networks were key drivers. Some would argue success has bred success and tactics to diversify the events portfolio have been used to enable other assets within Western Australia to be utilised.



3.0 Event specific sports tourism strategies: Pragmatically speaking, without an event and the groups that attend, many would question whether a sport could continue to exist, the exhibition of sport is the core product. Each of the attendee groups (competitors, coaches, volunteers, media, fans and spectators) at an event is equally reliant on each other and has differing needs that have to be met. Allied with this is mobility and raised awareness of the new geography of tourism associated with a sport. The sportification of society via new multimedia technologies has inevitably increased the reach of a sport without having to leave home. The sporting spectacle has many sports tourism groups to satisfy and associated strategies to execute. Perth 2011 Sailing World Championships was no exception with many of the tourism strategies being engrained within the bid and activated well before the actual event.

3.1 New competitors: Attracting new competitors was critical to the Perth 2011 bid and



event outcomes, this was via the Emerging Nations Programme (ENP). The ENP assisted developing sailing nations to participate in international sailing competitions, subsequently increasing the number of competitors at the Perth 2011 ISAF Sailing World

Championships. Over the course of the programme, forty athletes from thirty nations who were not represented in any sailing discipline at the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games were then invited to Perth to receive training and coaching to act as a catalyst for qualification to Perth 2011. Two recipients of the ENP programme spoke to the author at Perth 2011. It was clear that the programme had fundamentally changed the course of the individuals' sailing career. It also altered the way in which their respective countries supported sailing as an Olympic sport and the training, in the years building up to 2011, the training had been invaluable.

3.2 Volunteers: Volunteers are critical to the successful execution of sporting events. For event organisers like the team of Perth 2011, volunteers represented a committed and skilled resource in the hosting of the event. For the volunteers themselves, the benefits bestowed on them took the form of a sense



of belonging and ownership of the event, in addition to giving something back to society. The Perth 2011 team had utilised the local resource base around them by asking each of the local sailing clubs to supply an onshore and afloat team to apply to a specific sailing course/event. The organisers had leveraged in the engagement and involvement of the universities and colleges within the catchment to support the event. Volunteer tourism was also apparent with both domestic volunteer tourists from the east coast but also from international destinations. Interviews were conducted with a lead from each of the sailing clubs involved and a volunteer tourist



representative from domestic and international destinations. The findings from the sailing clubs' interviews, found that the generation inspired and touched by the America's Cup defence, was the cornerstone which was further consolidated by friends and family of local athletes competing at the event. The younger generation

involved with the event had heightened levels of interest in the sport and viewed the experience as critical to securing future employment within the sector. For the volunteer tourist, the passion to travel and experience the event to take home new skills and lessons was paramount.

3.3 The sporting spectacle: Working with ISAF, the Perth 2011 team designed the delivery of the sporting spectacle and the medal races, around the weekends thus naturally widening access to engage and maximise flow of people to Fremantle to further the reach of the event

and sport. This also included using the stage within the Worlds Village after racing for interviews with the athletes and the medal ceremonies. The event organisers used and promoted open spaces to highlight the opportunities to



watch the event and built a temporary grandstand on the Challenger Harbour breakwater, holding up to two hundred and fifty people. A smaller grandstand was also built at Fremantle Harbour for the woman's match racing event. Using natural vantage points and promoting them at Bathers Bay, Leighton and Port Beaches it allowed further viewing opportunities. Speakers were provided at these locations to enable the radio coverage to support the experience. Additional opportunities for race viewing via the corporate hospitality offer or via the spectator boat and Endeavour day sail programme were available as well as tailored sports tourism packages to Perth offered by the event sponsor Qantas via Qantas Holidays. What was noticeable was the organised offer and central points where visitors to Western Australia could find out about amenities, staying in Fremantle and the options available to them pre and during the event.

3.4 Multimedia: Reaching out to non travelling sports tourists through multimedia was also



fundamental to the event, with live radio streaming (88.8FM), sixty one nations showing the footage recorded at the event (Network Ten Sport) and the Free zone channel on the Perth 2011 website. The live tracking and event blog enhanced the experience. Headlines from the blog, showed 40,926 readers, with an average duration online being 1 hour 36 minutes, 878 comments to the blogging team with 190 replays of the event blog in the twenty four hours after the event finished.

3.5 Broadening the event offer: Provision of an event programme that appealed to a broader audience other than sports tourists was something implemented at Perth 2011. Prior to the delivery of the event there was a schools programme delivered to help educate the local youths on sailing, the event and the teams coming to Fremantle and during the event the schools were invited to the Worlds Festival. The event organisers started the Worlds Festival in the Worlds Village with INXS headlining, focus on weekends and the provision of activities for children (build a boat in a day), cultural displays (wired and free), cuisine and sundowner performances from 1700 to 1900 nightly. The calendar of events for the duration of the event composed of six key themes lifestyle, kids, theatre, music, sport and



demonstrations and visual art. In addition, specific events were also put on for attendees (e.g. Worlds Party and Worlds Beach Party).

4.0 Spectator experience and evaluation: Spectator experience at events needs to be as an experience, one that is both a service offering and a product which has poignant, symbolic and transformational meaning for a spectator. The elements of the attendee



experience have been further broken down to three components, which are: the self-gratifying enjoyment and achievement; social interactions; meanings and values. By enriching personal and emotional essentials of the experience as part of the relationship with a unique sporting occasion, and it taking place in at a defined

area, these elements are central to the occasion in association with social interactions, therefore render the sport event experience unique. For the Perth 2011 team, understanding the event experience they could offer, was crucial to developing the experience space using the open areas around Fremantle. The team recognised the interactions with attendees and the relationship with future experience management and marketing.

From an experience marketing perspective, it was essential that there was a strong brand for the event. This was activated very early on in the event planning as it enabled brand awareness as the first component of developing brand knowledge; image and loyalty. Brand attachment uses both rational and emotional evaluations, which stem from functional and emotional brand associations that need brand awareness. For Perth 2011, understanding brand awareness meant the relationship between themselves, corporations and the consumer was enabled. Establishing brand awareness in the memory of the potential consumer is critical in decision-making as to whether or not they will attend. This can be measured via the initial medium of awareness and the planning behaviour of attendance (e.g. six months, past month, the last week or on that specific day). In the context of the spectators the author interviewed at the grandstands, they were at the two ends of the spectrum, those who had planned to attend over six months ago (international) and those who had opportunistically turned up on the day. For sponsors, of which Perth 2011 had a significant number, it provided a means of pursuing brand awareness, with corporations focusing on the strategic effect event sponsorship, as a means of driving awareness longer term with consumers.

Due to Eventcorp's support, the natural focus on customer satisfaction was considered within key aspects of event planning and management. The level of satisfaction a person has derived from an event is based very simply on the comparison of their predictive expectations of the experience and their perceptions of what actually occurs. The need to

understand spectator satisfaction is simple as it affects behaviour with respect to repeat visitation and the factors that affect motivation. What was noticeable within the data collected to evaluate the impact of the event was that the focus was predominately on economic impact and levels of satisfaction with no drawing down on the social and sporting impacts or the event attributes and the experience management.

4.1 Open space review: The author spent time chatting to spectators at a variety of locations in and around the event to understand what the pull or attraction was to come along and see the event. Without question those down on the breakwater grandstand were there to watch the pure spectacle of the sport, the skill of the athletes' quality in competition and generally they had an allegiance to a particular team or athlete. The concept of stadium style racing is something that has seen a growth in the past eighteen months. Key to this, is ensuring that there is an MC or live commentary, as the reliance on the radio could mean on occasions what was happening on the water was not in sequence with what they were hearing. In addition to this the breakwater grandstand had no shading which was an issue during the heat of the day The addition of a screen to show the tracking would also have allowed these spectators to carry on the journey of the race when it was out of view. Saying that, the respondents were very complementary about the facility available to them and the experience derived from it. The Harbour grandstand again provided a very different experience, an alternative type of racing (match racing rather than fleet racing), and this had live commentary. Whilst the draw to attend was slightly less in volume, it provided a unique insight into match racing, with a core following turning up on a daily basis. These were mainly friends, family and team members supporting the women as well as the local match racing fans. Perth and Fremantle have a strong match racing history and youth programme, hosting the Warren Jones (Youth) and Australia Cup. At Bathers Beach, the audience was a mixture of local residents, and the inquisitive tourists who by chance saw something going on and had a look. The radio commentary provided them with a useful medium to hear and learn about the racing. This needed to be further supported with basic information and the availability of the programmes explaining the sports competition. The availability of taster sessions would also have enabled further engagement.



The Perth 2011 'Centre of the Worlds' provided a focus point for the spectators enjoying the viewing of the competition and provided opportunity for strong sales of the event merchandise. This links to the identity of the sporting sub culture. What was noticeable was a surprising demand for the Worlds Village during parts of the event and whilst popular

during the sundowners, ceremonies and concerts it was not sustained during the day when the attraction of the sporting spectacle was greater.

5.0 Transferability: When considering transferability, it is essential to refer back to events management literature and the six event structures (infrastructure; knowledge; image; emotions; networks; and culture) previously outlined and need to be examined pre, during and post this summer. It is evident that the forthcoming events this summer have acted as a catalyst for infrastructure development in Weymouth and Portland. For example, this has included the regeneration of Osprey Quay Portland and the Weymouth Transport Package. This outcome was also seen in Fremantle to facilitate the delivery of the America's Cup defence. The role and value of infrastructure investment needs to be measured and promoted.

The knowledge, partnership and working of organisations co-ordinating the planning of the events this summer have brought together a range of organisations that now understand in a very new way, high levels of co-operation and enabled knowledge transfer. In order to maximise legacy, there is a need for the governance to be maintained for the long term, for example via the Dorset Steering Group. The strategy beyond this summer needs to be considered through the common values in future decision making processes, further collaboration, dissemination of outcomes and the degree of reflection that these stakeholders undertake. One of the ways this could be further embedded within the governance and future strategy is through the evaluation of this summer, as the benefits will be beyond the economic impact and include social (image, place, participation, skills, volunteering, youth engagement), environmental (sustainability development) and media impacts. In addition to this, the lessons learnt, can be embedded into future bids and hosting of international events.

The opportunity presents itself to Weymouth and Portland to reposition itself as a destination as the image is there to be leveraged. The evidence from Fremantle is that this can be realised. The eyes of the world will be watching the sporting spectacle with the back drop of the Isle of Portland, Jurassic Coast and Weymouth this summer. It is an opportunity to showcase the destination and its unique selling points, the history and culture that has seen it evolve over time. This will naturally change and enhance tourism flows to the Borough as part of the legacy. As such it is essential that there is a robust understanding and selection of target markets, market analysis, and marketing strategy, using the tool kit of integrated marketing communications to enable the longer term tourism to the Borough. The development of longer term strategies and offers for sports tourism flows into the Borough is

critical. Ensuring that there is an understanding of the differing markets that can be catered for and the desired levels of service will inevitably increase the reach of future events and also add value within the bidding process. Arguably innovative approach to Perth 2011's bid added value to the overall proposition.

Pre the bid decision, Portland was already home to the National Sailing Academy. As such, it is essential that a sustainable flow of events tourism to the site is achieved via the Weymouth and Portland National Sailing Academy (WPNSA) and the Royal Yachting Associations events programme, which should look to further maximise use of the facility. In addition to this, the facility lends itself to multi sports usage and this has been exploited to enhance the events portfolio as well as being a conferencing and weddings venue. Weymouth and Portland need to keep a close watch on developments in the sailing arena and be pro-active in turning sports events into business opportunities – into conferences, product launches, exhibitions and networking. The respective agencies involved with events in the Borough need to look at a multi agency task force with similar objectives to those of Eventscorp to keep the bidding for international events to a high with further investigation on funding to pump prime bidding for future events in the Borough. Key to this would be the promotion of the six event structures that will be assured as a result of this summer's events (infrastructure; knowledge; image; emotions; networks; and culture). These are critical in supporting the foundation of future bids.

The Perth 2011 ISAF World Championships required a considerable volunteer base as does the boroughs requirements, to deliver operations this summer. The agencies involved have recruited and selected these volunteers, creating a volunteer infrastructure and social capital that will enrich the local community and network. Critical to the future is managing expectations and keeping these volunteers engaged by enabling further opportunities via existing volunteer networks (e.g. Volunteer centre Dorset, the RYA, WPNSA etc) and maintaining communication with the volunteers about annual opportunities (e.g. Weymouth Carnival and Spirit of the Sea).

The opportunities this summer to change the perception of sailing and the spectator experience via the management of open spaces and broadening the event offer, naturally means more people will be able to engage. It is important that the offer meets the needs of the audience and there are suitable resources to develop the understanding required to enjoy the experience. There is potential for those are intrigued or inspired to have a go and to take the next steps to find out how they can learn to sail or join a club. Key to this is developing an understanding that sailing does not have to be an expensive sport to be able to participate in. This has been activated locally for youths in the Borough via the 'Sail for a

fiver' scheme. There is a need to further activate this, via the specific opportunities that each club has, the broader RYA opportunities and via initial opportunities to access the experience. The annual Spirit of the Sea festival provides a vehicle to facilitate this. This summer, inevitably sporting heroes and legends will be made. Naturally some of them could be from the host nation or reside within the Borough. The power these individuals have, to inspire youth, endorse projects and promote both the sport and destination, is invaluable. The crew of Australia II has successfully used this, thus demonstrating that the power can be further utilised to maintain awareness and motivate the community.

6.0 Fellowship conclusion: Without question, the Winston Churchill Fellowship has provided the author with an opportunity to look at how Weymouth and Portland can use the knowledge from Fremantle and Perth's experience in hosting international events. Returning to the principle of activity, people and place, Weymouth and Portland have the opportunity to use this summer as a stepping stone for the future. For the author it was an honour and a privilege to be awarded the Winston Churchill Fellowship to Australia. It was a unique opportunity to meet the legends of Australia II, to understand the legacy that a moment in sporting history has inspired the community, changed Western Australia and how this has been advantageously leveraged ever since.

