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Sex, Lies and Olympic Games: Case Study of the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics

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Many thanks to School of Business, Enterprise and Management at Queen Margaret University, International Centre for the Study of Planned Events, and Carnegie Trust for making this research possible through generous funding and support.
Rationale:
Commercialised Sex & Global Events

- Developed literature on sex tourism (Hall & Ryan 2001; Opperman 1999; Ryan & Kinder 1996)
- Urban geography (Hubbard 2008; Bell and Valentine 1995; Pitcher et al 2006)
- Developing interest in global events and commercial sex
  - Global events and demand (Future Group 2007; Henning, Craggs, Laczko, & Larsson 2007)
  - Located within human trafficking context (Hughes 2004; Kempadoo 2005; Jeffreys 2002)
- Substantive research gap in the area
Interdisciplinary Literature: Gender & Sexualities Studies

- “Sex work”

- “Prostitution”
  - Abolitionist: Criminalise & eradicate demand (Jeffreys 2002; Davidson O'Connell 2006)
Interdisciplinary Literature: Human Rights Approaches

- Human Rights & Sporting Events
  - Improvements (Black & Bezanson 2004)
  - Housing displacement for Olympic development (COHRE 2007; Olds 1998)
  - World Cup (Tavella 2007; Ohmann 2006)
Research Plan

- Case study of 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games
- Impacts on and issues related to vulnerable populations before Games
- Specific attention to landscape, policies, and responses
Why Vancouver?

- Timing (new research)
- Brothel in Olympic Village news
- Dual city reputation (DTES)
- Developed nation....
Research Approach: Qualitative

- In-depth, semi-structured interviews with experts in the subject of enquiry (22)
- Private, public and third sector stakeholders
  - Police (VPD, RCMP)
  - Government (OCTIP, City)
  - National chapters of international agencies (GAATW)
  - Academics (UBC, SFU)
  - Frontline support agencies
  - Ethnic minority support agencies
  - Legal NGO's
  - Former sex workers/current activists
- Vice Squad; Border Security Agency
Methodological Challenges

- Conducting research in a sensitive subject
- Research design and ethical issues
  - Informed consent, no harm to participants, sensitivity of material and protection of participants (Saunders 2006; Shavers 2005; Lee & Renzetti 1993; Sieber 1993)
- ‘Emotional labour’ and the researcher (Melrose 2002)
Vancouver Landscape

- Prostitution laws: legal to have sex and get paid
  - Illegal to solicit or communicate commercial sex
  - Brothels and public sex is illegal
  - Pimping is illegal
  - Massage parlours are licensed
  - 'John Schools': VPD deal with provider
- 10-15% street prostitution: most focus
- Type of sex work 'segregated' by ethnicity
- Missing women – 75% First Nations
  - 'Highway of Tears': 520/3,000
- Nationally well regarded frontline support agencies
Event Geographies & Commercialised Sex

- Increase in demand for sexual services before Games (construction)
- Overlap of street sex spaces and Olympics spaces (centralising the marginal)
- Displacement/eradication issues = safety issues
- Image/Cost implications ('sanitisation' of city)
- Politicisation of space / Politicisation of bodies
- Media attention brings issues to forefront
Where the women went missing, little has changed
DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE: Degradation, debauchery may even be worse today

On any night, dozens of oddly looking pedestrians are strolling the Downtown Eastside.

"It's no different than it was a decade ago, and it's worse," said Susan Dale, who has been a prominent voice in the Downtown Eastside.

The women are living the same miserable existence in the Tenderloin, Main, Cambie, Strathcona and Portage streets. Dale, who has been a vocal advocate for women's rights and has been involved in the Downtown Eastside since 1992, said women are often left to fend for themselves.

"The women here are living in their cars, in the garbage and in the alleys," she said. "They're not getting the support they need."}

Support for prostitutes

Three groups provide support for prostitutes in the Downtown Eastside:

Women's Information and Safety House (WISH)

Founded in 1995, WISH provides direct support, finding shelter and referrals for drug users.

Prostitution Education Resource Education Society (PERES)

Open in 1995, PERES offers programs to help prostitutes find new work.

Not enough

"There are not enough services available to the Downtown Eastside," Dale said. "It's so hard to get help for these women."
Issues Emerging

- Very divisive two-camp approach to issues pertaining to commercial sex, which have repercussions on approaches to support, agency influence and policies

- Olympic Games are catalyst for debate. Aggravate current situation and bring issues close to surface above the surface through increased media attention and forums for debate, especially concerning resource allocation
Other factors

- Lack of co-operation between support and activist groups
  - Victim / Entrepreneur
- Financial cuts to services
- Resource focus
- Police (mis)trust
- City as theme park? (Sorkin 1995; Zukin 1991)
  - Further marginalisation
  - Underground activities
  - Dual/Unequal City
    (Hamnett 2003; Mollenkopf & Castells 1992)
Summary/Conclusions

- Olympics shine media spotlight on city/region/country
- Brings debates regarding approaches to commercialised sex to surface and highlights divisions
- Mapping commercialised sex and Olympics spaces – shift of focus for city
- Potential to contribute meaningful discourse and legislation with regard to commercialised sex in the city
Questions?