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Study finds 'slight' impact of Games on Vancouver

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VANCOUVER, British Columbia (AP) — Preparations for the 2010 Winter Olympics have had a "slight positive" impact on Vancouver, according to a study released Friday.

The study, conducted by the University of British Columbia, measured economic, social and environmental changes in the metro Vancouver area between 2002 and 2006.

The report is the second of four studies required by the International Olympic Committee to analyze the overall impact of the games in the host city over a 12-year span.

The study is designed to assist bidding cities and future organizing committees to "maximize the benefits of the games" and create a benchmark for all future Olympics.

The results were largely inconclusive, particularly on issues such as housing and environment, and offered no dramatic positive or negative findings.

"The overall conclusion is there was a very slight positive impact up to 2006," Prof. Rob Van Wynsberghe, who led the study, said in a conference call.

The next report, which will focus on the impact of the Feb. 12-28 games, will be released in June 2010. The final report will be issued in 2013.

The most tangible result of the new study was the boost in medals won by Canadian athletes at the Olympics, world championships and other elite events. This was attributed in part to the "Own the Podium" programs for assisting Canadian athletes and coaches.

The number of Canadian medals increased by 41 percent, from 17 in Salt Lake City in 2002 to 24 at the 2006 Turin Games. The report said the overall rise was because of improved performances by female athletes.

Vancouver's selection as 2010 host likely contributed to the increase in businesses in the city (17 percent) and the Squamish-Lillooet region (36 percent), the report said. It added that it is "plausible" that British Columbia's unemployment rate has improved as a result of the games.

The report said the Olympics may have had "an indirect negative" and "possibly temporary" impact on air quality in Whistler and nearby Squamish, likely because of venue construction and other preparations. However, it stated overall air quality in metro Vancouver improved between 2002 and 2006.

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