

(SP) SPORT SPECTATORS AND TRAVEL: INSIGHTS FROM A META-INTERPRETATION OF SPORT SPECTATOR BEHAVIOURS

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Introduction

Sport Spectator behaviour has attracted a fair amount of attention in the literature. However, most research has tended to focus on dysfunctional behaviour (i.e. violence and disorder by spectators) and on the sport of association football (e.g. Dunning, 2001). Such research has sought to explain such dysfunctional behaviour and in some cases contribute to policy discussions regarding initiatives to combat such behaviour (e.g. Carnibella et al, 1996). Other research has examined spectator behaviour through assessing spending patterns. However, behavioural elements have rarely been extrapolated from such studies as their prime purpose has been to assess the overall economic impact of a particular sporting fixture, franchise or event (e.g. Hudson, 2001). Some more recent studies, conducted within the field of sports tourism, have attempted to utilise concepts and theories from the tourism literature to examine the impacts of travel and away from the home environment on the behaviours of sports spectators (e.g. Weed, 2002). It is the impact of this travel element that this paper will seek to examine further.

This paper will discuss insights from a broader meta-interpretation of sport spectator behaviours, and examine the extent to which the nature of the travel experience associated with some forms of sports spectating can impact upon the behaviours of such spectators. As is consistent with the meta-interpretation approach, the synthesis commences with a research area rather than a research question, with the focus of the synthesis developing as the process progresses.

Method

This paper draws on insights from an ongoing meta-interpretation of sport spectator behaviours. Unlike the more widely used meta-analysis approach, meta-interpretation is an interpretive synthesis approach that allows qualitative research to be synthesised using a synthesis method underpinned by the same interpretive epistemology as the research itself (Weed, 2005). Space precludes providing a full listing of the 24 articles included in the meta-interpretation here, but the synthesis includes research focussing on a range of different sports (eg football, cricket, ice-hockey, american football and baseball) and from a range of disciplinary perspectives (eg economics, management, psychology, sociology and marketing). Meta-interpretation involves interpretive synthesis through a number of iterations until original or additional insights are no longer emerging. As such, its intellectual heritage lies in the revisionist grounded theory approach discussed by, *inter alia*, Charmaz (2000) and Layder (1993).

Results

The insights from the meta-interpretation show that in many spectator groups there exists a 'one view' approach to the world and the spectator group's place in it. Such groups often define themselves in opposition to some form of 'other', and in many cases

uncritically adopt broader political discourses. Among more committed or highly identified members of supporter groups, there is a group-reinforced requirement to 'perform' the identity of the sport spectator group, which in some cases could lead to dysfunctional or socially undesirable behaviours.

Discussion

In exploring the relationship between the insights highlighted in the results and the influence of travel, the paper will discuss the extent to which sports spectators travelling away from their home environment experience 'ritual inversion' (Graburn, 1982), which may magnify some behaviours. It will highlight the potential of travel to create a strong, but temporary, feeling of 'communitas' or togetherness among spectator groups, and the feeling that the behaviours that they perform are taking place inside a 'liminoid' space (Turner, 1992) in which the, often restrictive, norms of everyday life may be weakened, thus allowing such groups to behave in ways untypical of their everyday behaviour. Consequently, when sport spectating takes place as a sports tourism experience, a psychological place is created in which people experience strong feelings of 'communitas' in sharing the spectating activity and its associated behaviours. This adds a further dimension to Weed & Bull's (2004) view of the essence of sports tourism as arising from the unique interaction of activity, people and place, as in this case the place element would refer to a psychological place. Of course, the concern for policy makers and providers is that the 'liminoid' nature of such a psychological place may lead 'ritually inverted' participants to feel that behaviours that are usually seen as socially undesirable are felt to be more acceptable.

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