

Small-scale event sport tourism: A case study of six events

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Aim of paper and research questions

Higham (1999) proposed that communities should focus on regular season sports or smaller scale sports events instead of hallmark or mega events. This study examined six small sport events hosted by a local sports commission in a small US college town over a two year period. To understand the cross-event impacts the following questions were asked:

1. What is the profile of the average participant at each of the events?
- 2a. On average, how many days/nights did the event participants stay?
- 2b. How many hotel room nights did each event generate?
- 3a. What were the expenditure patterns for the day/overnight participants for each event?
- 3b. What was the overall direct spending impact for each event?
4. What other activities did the event participants take part in?
5. What were the primary motivations for attending the event?
6. What were some of the event related characteristics?

Literature review

The benefits of hosting large scale events continue to be debated (Kim & Gursoy, 2006; Solberg & Preuss, 2007). As citizens question the financial and social costs of hosting such events (Hall & Hodges, 1996), smaller communities have begun to realise the benefits that accrue from hosting regular season (Gibson et al., 2003; Higham & Hinch, 2002), or smaller scale sports events (Horne, 2000). Much of the research on these smaller events focuses on economic benefits as this is still a powerful indicator of worth in a community (e.g., Daniels & Norman, 2003). However, social benefits such as developing a skilled volunteer group (Horne, 2000) or community pride and spirit (Williams et al., 1995) may also accrue.

Research design and data analysis

The participants (over age 18) or spectators and coaches (for youth events) of six sports events held in a small US college town between January 2007 and December 2008 were surveyed. Intercept surveys at the event was the primary method; online surveys and mail surveys were used for two events and the coach surveys. The events were: a marathon (n=199), senior games (n=165), archery (n=299), youth soccer (n=515), youth softball (n=227) and youth swimming (n=252). Information collected by the local sports commission about each event was used as supplementary data. Data were analysed using frequencies.

Results

RQ1: the majority of the participants were white and for the youth events were female and non-youth events male. The average age was similar (about 42 years) for all events except for the Senior Games (M = 69 years).

RQ 2a and 2b: Days and nights ranged from 1-5 with the higher average of days/nights for the youth events. The total hotel room nights generated across the 6 events was 14,980.

RQ 3a: daily expenditure across events ranged from \$95 to \$228 for day trippers and \$158 to \$216 for overnights. Average travel party size ranged from 2 to 4 people.

RQ 3b: the overall direct spending impact ranged from \$28,040 to \$1,115,048, with a total of \$6,105,210 for all 6 events.

RQ 4: dining was the most frequently cited additional activity followed by shopping.

RQ 5: the primary motivation was the competition except for archery where spectators cited enjoyment.

RQ 6: all events were rated high for organisation (M = 5.21 – 5.94), overall satisfaction (M 5.07-6.14) and quality of the facilities (M = 5.06-6.36). All events used volunteers ranging from 20 to 100 per event with a total of 220 volunteers across all events.

Discussion and conclusion

These events generate economic benefit for the community in direct spending and in tourism (hotel stays, restaurant patronage and shopping) (Solberg & Preuss, 2007). The events are scheduled so that they do not conflict with other major events in the community and provide business when there may be little (Higham & Hinch, 2002). The supplemental data shows evidence of social benefits primarily in the form of volunteer opportunities for residents (Horne, 2000). Volunteering and attending the events also generates a sense of community. In particular, the marathon has evolved into an event for locals and visitors of all ages. While infrastructural costs were not directly measured, we can argue that they were low. Also the environmental, economic and social costs associated with building new facilities were minimal to none (Chernushenko, 1996). Support for adopting sustainable development principles and the triple bottom line (economics, social, and environment) in tourism is widespread (UNWTO, 2007). We contend the philosophy of small-scale event sport tourism is compatible with the call for a sustainable approach to sport tourism (Jago, 2008). Our findings support the contention that small-scale events provide more direct benefits (Higham, 1998) and as such contribute to a community's sustainable development.

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