

Session: **Project management of big sport events I.**

Abstract nr: **EASM-0213**

Central factors in the branding process of recurring sporting events: An organizers perspective

*L. Eskerud*¹

¹*Norwegian School of Sport Sciences, Departement for culture and society, Oslo, Norway*

line.eskerud@nih.no

Background

With the XXI Olympic Winter Games completed, attracting over 3 billion television viewers, it is evident that sporting events can be viewed as ‘big business’. Researchers have steadily pointed out benefits attained when offering brands within sport (e.g., Couvelaere & Richelieu, 2005; Gladden, Milne, & Sutton, 1998; Ross, 2006), but for event organizers to be able to effectively build a brand, they need to be aware of the factors that are likely to have an impact on this process. Parent and Séguin (2008) have drawn on general brand research and an extracted organizational identity construction model for sporting events (Parent & Foreman, 2007) and proposed a model for event brand creation for large-scale one-off events. Various brand affecting factors were linked to three main components: 1) the leadership group with its political/networking, business/management, and sport/event skills, 2) the context of the event, and 3) the nature of the event. The model was used as a framework for this study to help expand our knowledge on recurring sporting events, which are more predominant and frequently held than large one-off events, such as the Olympics.

Objective

There has been insufficient attention devoted to the brand builders in general and to organizers of sporting events in particular. Thus, the main objective for this study was to understand the brand creation and development process for international recurring sporting events, and thereby enlighten event organizers with central factors to be assessed in order to manoeuvre this process successfully.

Methods

A comparative case study of cross-country skiing World Cup in Alberta (CAN) and Drammen (NOR) was conducted through analysis of archival material and fifteen interviews with organizing committee members and stakeholders. The two events were selected according to my observation skills and their ability to provide relevant information (Miles & Huberman, 1994), based on a different contextual grounding (position of the sport and geographical location: Rocky Mountains vs. an urban city scene). Social constructionism was used as a lens and transcripts were analysed in MAXQDA 2007 through pattern coding and cross-case analysis. Tables were used to compare the cases on important aspects. Using multiple sources of evidence, through triangulation, and maintaining a chain of evidence (Yin, 2009) helped increasing the trustworthiness of the study.

Results

Findings supported Parent and Séguin's (2008) three referents as components of the branding process. Within the leadership group, role clarification and empowerment proved to be critical for the two entirely voluntary led events. Additional components were also found to have an affect: institutional affiliation with the national sport organization, experienced induced elements from event execution, and core values embedded in the organizers' actions. As strong congruency between the organizers and stakeholders' brand identity perception, linked to the core values, appeared to have a stronger affect on the shaping of a brand reputation than time aspect, which have been emphasized in early brand literature. Finally, although assessing central factors, the national recognition of the sport appeared to significantly affect the ease or difficulty of the branding process.

Conclusion

Based on the catalyzing, constraining and moderating factors that were found, an expanded conceptual brand creation model more applicable to sporting events of a recurring dimension is proposed. Together, it provides an understanding of why Alberta World Cup is still a local brand in creation, while World Cup Drammen is a national brand in development. This study contributes to the event literature and those engaged in hosting recurring sporting events by highlighting aspects to be aware of and manage when being in a branding process, either at the creation or development level.

References

- Couvelaere, V., & Richelieu, A. (2005). Brand strategy in professional sports: The case of French soccer teams. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 5, 23-46.
- Gladden, J. M., Milne, G. R., & Sutton, W. A. (1998). Conceptual framework for assessing brand equity in division 1 college athletics. *Journal of Sport Management*, 12, 1-19.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, M.A. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis (2nd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Parent, M., & Foreman, P.O. (2007). Organizational image and identity management in large scale sporting events. *Journal of Sport Management*, 21, 15-40.
- Parent, M., & Séguin, B. (2008). Toward a model of brand creation for international large-scale events: The impact of leadership, context, and nature of the event. *Journal of Sport Management*, 22, 526-549
- Ross, S. D. (2006). A conceptual framework for understanding spectator-based brand equity. *Journal of Sport Management*, 20, 22-38
- Yin, R. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods (4th ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE

