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Marketing (through) the 'Different' ? The Example of Homo Sports Events

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The aim of this presentation is to outline the contextual frame of a research field on the move forward: homo sports events and their connection to city marketing.

The intense competition between places means that new and more differentiated marketing strategies are becoming increasingly important in order to attract visitors and other target groups. In order to be seen, gain positive media attention and put the place on the map many cities try to develop marketing concepts based on experiences, among other things. One such strategy used by many places is to focus on sports, including big events and arenas as well as different kinds of sports activities (see for instance Book & Carlsson, 2008; Gratton & Henry, 2001; Highman, 2005; Weed, 2006). Here we can see a great deal of homogenization and standardization based on international ideals. However, another present-day strategy is to highlight and commercialize 'the different?', for instance homosexuals (which has been fueled by Richard Florida's introduction of the Gay Index of cities, see also for instance Hughes, 2003). An interesting phenomenon in this context is the merging of sports and homosexuals and the use of this as an economic development strategy.

In my presentation I will analyze the homo sports event World Outgames as an outcome in the intersection between city marketing, the commercialization of sports and the commercialization of homo culture, and present a model based in this (first presented in Book & Eskilsson, 2010). World Outgames, one of the largest international homo ? or LGBT to be more specific ? sports events (similar to the Gay Games), took place in Copenhagen in summer 2009. It engaged a lot of actors at different levels and created huge expectations when it comes to city marketing, enhancing tourism and highlighting tolerance and human rights.

The merging of sports and homosexuals into special events is quite a new phenomenon as a marketing strategy. As such it is an example of a specialized event, a type of event that is becoming increasingly common. With this in mind several questions arise: What are the driving forces? Why sports? How can the trend towards special events be understood and analyzed in a bigger context; for instance in the context of a growing experience economy and increased commercialization in most sectors of society?

I will during my presentation on the one hand outline a theoretical framework based on literature mainly from the field of city and event marketing with the above questions in focus. Furthermore, I will present World Outgames in Copenhagen as a case within this topic. Before, during and after the games I and Lena Eskilsson carried out interviews with

organizers representing the LGBT society and the hosting organization Wonderful Copenhagen (which is the official convention and marketing organization of Copenhagen). While the aims of the organizers from the LGBT society were focused on social and human right issues, the aims of Wonderful Copenhagen was clear: the Outgames was considered to be an event that would put Copenhagen on the map as a cosmopolitan and open city and furthermore attract an attractive segment (?pink tourists?). Wonderful Copenhagen also mentioned that the Outgames was a test for larger events, like the Olympic Games. After the Outgames both sides were very satisfied with the results; that is both the social and right issues of the LGBT society and the economic and marketing issues. Other actors in the World Outgames were the sponsors considering the games to be interesting because of the special segment of the pink economy. The sponsors saw a great opportunity to tie this segment closer to them.

The study of World Outgames by Book and Eskilsson is to be considered as a limited pre-study with the aim to end up in a larger project where Outgames is used as one example of specialized events where ?the different? is in focus, complemented by other cases, like the Gay Games, World Cup for homeless and Masters Games as sports event examples.

My presentation will focus on the marketing aspects, mainly from an urban perspective, of specialized events and not at all on whether separate events for, in this case, LGBT-persons are socially desirable. That is another, though relevant, question.

References:

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