
SMALL-SCALE SPORT EVENTS IN ISLAND COMMUNITIES: A SUSTAINABLE FIT?

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Abstract

The case of Cyprus embodies an island destination with an embryonic event industry, which raises the question whether the emergence of new events can contribute to the sustainable tourism development of the island. The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of participants about the characteristics and attributes of two nascent small-scale sport events, the Limassol Marathon and the Tour o Cyprus Cycling Challenge, with a focus on their prospects for creating outcomes that can contribute to the rejuvenation of Cyprus as a tourism destination and its sustainability.

BACKGROUND

Islands are more vulnerable to unsustainable development mainly because of resource scarcity. Thus, often they are found to be over-dependent on the tourism industry, catering for the lower quality end of the mass tourism market, exhausting natural resources, and causing environmental degradation, hence constraining their sustainable development (Bull & Weed, 1999). Moreover, island tourism development faces a number of challenges such as dependency on external forces, reduction of traditional economic activities, vulnerability in various crises and isolation (Carlsen & Butler, 2011). Therefore, if not appropriate strategies are implemented, tourism development in islands threatens sustainable stewardship of their limited resources and socio-cultural character. How then can the introduction of small-scale sport events to the tourism product of islands become a sustainable strategy?

The staging of small-scale sport events constitutes a viable option for enhancing a host community's quality of life and fostering sustainable tourism development within the confines of its resource capacity

(Higham, 1999; O'Brien, 2007). Although there is a range of sport activities that can be staged by islands to attract tourist visitation and achieve community benefits, running marathons and cycling tours are common, perhaps because these sports enable to 'tour' participants around core island attractions, hence promoting the identity and image of the island as a tourism destination. Additionally, these sport events operate within the existing natural infrastructure and convey social messages that can be easily tied to community-building or charitable purposes. Yet, little is known on whether the perceptions of participants confirm the events' sustainable fit with the host island. In so doing, it is essential to examine event outcomes based on participants' experiences in relation to attributes of small-scale sport events that enhance their social character and the tourism product of the host island.

METHODOLOGY

A survey was conducted of event participants in order to examine their perceived experiences in the events. A self-completed questionnaire was distributed to participants after the end of the two aforementioned events. The questionnaire comprised of respondents' rates for a series of event attributes and experiential elements from their participation in the event. A convenience sample was used including people who participated in the two events (n=108 for Limassol Marathon and n=58 for the Tour of Cyprus). Non-parametric tests were used in the form of Chi-square tests for finding out significant differences between the observed and expected values.

RESULTS/DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The perceptions of participants as shown in the survey generally indicate positive views about the Limassol Marathon but moderate about the Tour of Cyprus. For this reason, the Limassol Marathon has higher intention for repeat visitation/recommendation, while it also appears to have improved the image of Limassol for participants. Nonetheless, participants for both events indicate the appeal of only some attributes related to the host destination. These are the natural scenery, the weather, and the connection with natural environment. Likewise, participants indicate the environmental friendly and active character of the marathon running and cycling events. On the other hand, participants show few opportunities to learn about the Cypriot culture, purchase local products, and participate in other tourist activities. Similarly, the participants' perceptions do not show that the events provide enough opportunities for social interaction, camaraderie, and relationship-building. Another troubling issue in the views of participants is that their experience in both events was neither perceived considerably affective nor thought-provoking, since they did not acquire new knowledge or felt

inspired with new ideas.

It appears that the contribution of these events to the sustainable tourism development of Cyprus is currently limited. The reported lack of opportunities by participants to purchase local products or take part in other tourist activities, limit the economic and tourism benefits of both events, while the participants' perceived lack of acquiring new knowledge and ideas or experiencing a heightened sense of community, constrain the social impact of the events. The coordinated organization of ancillary events and activities could provide opportunities for the economic and social leverage of both events (O'Brien & Chalip, 2008). In conclusion, this research suggests that island communities can employ small-scale sport events to diversify their tourism product and enhance their quality of life. However, to enable the contribution of emerging events to an island's sustainable tourism development, a strategic approach is needed for implementing coordinated joint tactics that leverage events in synergy with an island's assets.

References

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