
FOOTBALL BRANDING PLACES

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Type: Scientific

Category: 14: Other sport management related issues

Abstract

AIM OF ABSTRACT – RESEARCH QUESTION

The role of sport in society has become more prominent and sport organizations have become increasingly influential members of the community (European Commission, 2008). Historically, there have been strong ties between football teams and their local community, but questions have been raised if the modern restructuring of the game has eroded local ties. In the past, football players were "local boys", sponsors were local, and the football grounds were inextricably linked to the place (Edensor and Millington, 2008). Have all this gone lost, or have clubs been able to intensify their local anchoring through recasting the social, economic and cultural relations with the place, as is suggested by Jakobsen et al (2009)?

It is frequently assumed that one way in which sport clubs can impact the community is by promoting or branding the place which hosts it (e.g. Douvis, 2008). In this paper we ask if this is the case and if it can be measured. The paper reports a study which set out to measure how and the extent to which the Norwegian premier league club Molde Fotballklubb (MFK) is branding the city of Molde.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Prior research studying the impact of sport on communities hosting a professional sport teams has argued (Nunn and Rosentraub, 1997; Douvis, 2008) that there is little economic gain for communities as the supposed benefits of hosting a sport team is nearly non-existent. Still, research is supportive to the notion that a professional sport club contributes to the community, especially through intangible non-economic impacts such as increasing community identity, community solidarity, civic pride, promotion of the city/community, and attracting new businesses (Douvis, 2008, Jakobsen et al. 2009).

METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

An investigation of media coverage of Molde city and MFK was undertaken in national and regional newspapers, excluding local

newspapers. The investigation relied on the full text database Atekst provided by Retriver, and hits on "Molde" were compared to other Norwegian cities of similar size in terms of total media coverage and coverage derived from football specifically for the time period 01.04.2008 to 31.03.2013. This procedure allowed us to compare across cities and the impact of football on city coverage. To more exactly measure the proportion of coverage derived from football as compared to other sources all articles that had hits for "Molde" for two months, January (low season) and August 2012 (high season) were scrutinized qualitatively.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

It was found that Molde as a hosting city largely outperformed other cities of a similar size that do not host a top team. In fact the media coverage of Molde also outperforms some other cities that host top teams but have double the population of Molde. It is believed that these results are attributable to the long standing success of MFK compared to teams from bigger cities but with less success. The investigation also indicates that in the low season about half (52 percent) of the media coverage of the city is football related whereas in the high season this proportion is 74 percent. These measures support the notion that professional football clubs are powerful agents when it comes to branding places.

References

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