

Small-Scale Sport Events: A Critical Review of the Literature and Future Directions

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Synopsis:

Review of literature associated with small-scale sport events since the 1980s. An assessment of the trends in the research is made. Future directions discussed in the light of some growing negative impacts of hosting such events.

Abstract:

Background

Small-scale sport events, or what Wilson (2006) calls Type E events have been the focus of academic discourse and practice since the mid-1990s. Type E refers to minor events, where participants outnumber spectators, with limited media coverage, and are generally hosted by small to medium sized communities (Wilson, 2006). The general consensus about this type of events is that the benefits outweigh the costs and therefore, communities often incorporate these small-scale events into their annual calendar. The purpose of this paper is to provide a comprehensive review of the literature on small-scale sport events, to highlight recent developments in the literature, and to suggest future directions for research in light of some emerging negative impacts of hosting these events. Journal articles that examined Type E events were the criteria for selection. An extensive search for these papers was conducted encompassing, but not limited to, journals in leisure studies, tourism and events and sport management.

Early Days

Literature on small-scale sport events dates back to the 1980s. Predominantly, the early focus was on economic benefit. Marsh (1984) examined a boy's hockey tournament and found that hosting the event had a positive impact on the host city in the form of tourist expenditures and hotel nights. In the mid-1990s as communities increasingly viewed events as a form of economic (tourism) development, a series of studies confirmed Marsh's findings that hosting tended to outweigh any costs to the community and that most economic benefit accrued in the form of accommodation and food

expenditures; thus a major recommendation was to organize events to necessitate an overnight stay. In the mid-1990s some concerns were raised about the uneven spread of economic benefits in a community; measurement accuracy about visitor recall lending support for expenditure diaries as the recommended method; and the assessment of economic impact. However, as we entered the new century, the overwhelming consensus was that hosting small-scale sport events was integrally linked to economic benefit through tourism and ideas related to what is now called an event portfolio (Horne, 2000; Ziakas, 2010). There was also a growing recognition that without hosting these events, communities would not have attracted these tourists, particularly during low season, or not at all, as researchers revealed that visitors would not have considered visiting if it had not been for an event.

Studies from the 1990s also identified a number of positive social impacts from hosting these events. Community pride, enhanced quality of life, and civic engagement through volunteering were cited. Horne (2000) was one of the first to warn about potential negative impacts of hosting too many events from volunteer burnout, overcrowding and traffic concerns for residents, and an economic “boom and bust cycle.” But even Horne emphasized the positives and suggested that an enhanced community image might attract further tourists not associated with an event, which lead to scholars invoking concepts such as destination branding and event image. Fredline (2005) was another early scholar to discuss the potential negative event impacts which included pollution, litter, traffic and congestion. Nevertheless, the consistent message in the 2000s was the positives outweighed the costs.

Recent Developments

While some focus on economic impact survives, as more researchers have become involved in this area, a predominant focus since the mid-2000s has been on the participants. Drawing on the Leisure Studies literature, over the past eight years, more sport scholars have adopted concepts such as enduring involvement, motivation, serious leisure, travel career, and attachment to examine participants of marathons, triathlons and cycling. Also, with the growth in charity sport events, scholars have focused on motives, experiences, and the role of philanthropy and attachment to a charity in encouraging (repeat) participation (e.g., Filo et al, 2009). Another theme has been the connection between event participation and individual benefits such as health and continued sport participation and community benefits such as social capital, quality of life, and civic engagement in the form of event volunteering.

Future Directions

The events industry has exploded over the past decade, and while we suggest that small-scale events impacts are generally positive, potential negative impacts hinted at previously (e.g., Horne, 2000; Fredline, 2005) are starting to occur. Residents of host communities who are inconvenienced by road closures, crowding and congestion are voicing concerns. There have been some incidents of residents protesting and even sabotaging events. There is also growing competition among communities to host these events, often building new facilities with public monies, only to be outbid by another community for an event. Thus, we should not ignore the potential community tension growing in the small-scale events realm. Tourism scholars have long

studied the negative perceptions of residents and many lessons and concepts can be applied from this literature to help us understand and mediate the growing negative impacts (Fredline, 2005). There is also a movement within the sport event scholar community to examine the methods used to measure the impacts associated with these events and should be considered as we address the potentially negative outcomes for host communities.

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