
LEVERAGING THE FIFA 2022 WORD CUP QATAR FOR THE PROMOTION OF ACTIVE AND GREEN LIVING

Abstract ID: EASM-2015-215 - (539)

All authors:

Eleni Theodoraki (corresp), Dan Musinguzi, Maktoba Omar, Jane Ali-Knight, Misba Bhatti

Date submitted: 2015-03-16

Date accepted: 2015-04-29

Type: Scientific

Keywords: FIFA 2002 World Cup Qatar, leveraging, active living, green living, lifestyle change.

Category: E: The Business and Management of Sport in the MENA Region

Synopsis:

Abstract:

The paper aims to identify initiatives for the promotion of active and green living in Qatar, locally held perceptions of the issues surrounding population lifestyle changes and expectations of leveraging of the FIFA 2022 Word Cup Qatar to promote such changes.

Societal challenges in the developed and developing world include physical inactivity (which also leads to proliferation of lifestyle related diseases) and environmental degradation. It is now widely accepted, that action is needed to address these problems and the promotion of lifestyles that encourage physical activity and respect the environment are such desired actions. Qatar, as an oil rich economy with a high per capita carbon/water footprint and widespread sedentary lifestyles, is particularly vulnerable to such challenges and this study is part of a two-year project supported by the Qatar Foundation's' National Priorities Research Programme that funds research that is responsive to national challenges.

Governments have started presenting mega events as a tool to inspire social change (DEFRA, 2011) and likewise, Qatar's sports strategy (Qatar Olympic Committee, 2011) involves utilizing the hosting of regional/international sporting events to increase sports participation and healthy/active lifestyle practices among its population to improve health outcomes.

Leveraging is generally taken to mean those activities which seek to maximize the long-term benefits from events and often take the form of a series of interventions with this aim in mind (Chalip, 2004). Furthermore, a wide variety of literature illustrates that mega events are increasingly used by host cities to leverage desired aims (VanWynsberghe, 2012) even though the actual evidence of impact is elusive and often quite weak (McCartney et al. 2010).

The research design included the conduct of six semi structured focus group interviews, two with professionals related to green and active living promotion, and four with higher education students on sport science/sport tourism related degree courses. The interviews lasted 60-90 minutes, were recorded, transcribed and then findings were coded thematically (using NVivo 10) as these emerged from the discussions held.

The qualitative data analysis revealed eight overarching themes across the six focus groups. These themes are grouped into three main broader themes: issue awareness (meaning and problem), perceptions of leverageable resources (initiatives, support, barriers) and anticipated FIFA 2022 World Cup Qatar leveraging (opportunities, expectations and aspirations).

Despite there being many initiatives and programmes launched by government to promote green and active living, the general perceived level of acceptance of such lifestyles in the country was perceived to be low. Professionals felt that the lack of awareness and education regarding these issues was a barrier to people changing their behavior patterns and saw the need for improved infrastructure and programmes better aligned with the cultural sensitivity of the country as significant factors in implementation. Focus group participant discussions also highlighted the perceptions of Qatari students and their expectations and aspirations for the event, which is seen as an opportunity to bring about the desired lifestyle change but needs careful planning and use of resources to achieve desired goals.

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