

Spectator attitudes towards sport events with a social message – Melbourne 2008 Homeless World Cup

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Aim of paper and research questions

The aim of this study was to investigate spectator attitudes towards sport events with a social message; the Melbourne 2008 Homeless World Cup (HWC). The research questions were:

1. Are there differences in attitudes toward the event benefit and homelessness based on demographic characteristics?
2. Are there differences in the attitudes towards the event benefits and homelessness based on patterns of attendance?
3. Has the HWC changed attitudes towards the key social issue (homelessness)?
4. What are the characteristics of those who have changed attitudes as a result of attendance at the HWC?

Literature review

The HWC is an annual international sport event that draws together people experiencing homelessness for a street soccer tournament. A key goal of the HWC is to use sport to raise community awareness of homelessness, and to create positive attitudinal change in the community.

Drawing on previous studies (Delamere, Wankel & Hinch, 2001; Fredline, Jago & Deery, 2003), it is argued that events such as the HWC provide social impacts, including social benefits, for their host communities. Fredline et al. (2003) posit that events that build a sense of community and common purpose can facilitate the building of social capital. Sport development activities, such as the HWC, can provide marginalised groups with a platform and environment to demonstrate their abilities, and to challenge negative perceptions and stereotypes (Blackshaw & Long, 2005). This, in turn, may increase understanding between different groups within the community, and subsequently develop stronger social capital.

Research design and data analysis

Data were collected from 366 spectators across the seven days of the HWC competition. The questionnaire was organised in five sections. The first two sections asked about demographic information and individual's attendance at the event. The third and fourth sections contained items concerning attitudes towards the benefits of the event and the individual's attitude towards the social issue of homelessness. The event benefits items were adapted from previous studies (Delamere et al., 2001; Fredline et al., 2003). Given little research existed to guide the measurement of homelessness as a social issue, these items were developed by the researcher from earlier qualitative studies in this field. The final section asked specifically about attitudes towards homelessness; if attitudes had changed as a result of attending the HWC and also included an open ended response question concerning how attitudes had changed.

Data analysis was undertaken using SPSS. Twenty-three items were subjected to Exploratory Factor Analysis (in line with principles of Fabrigar, Wegener, MacCallum & Strahan, 1999) to develop composite scales by which attitudes to event benefits and homelessness could be assessed across different groups. Two factors emerged relating to each of Event Benefits and Attitudes to Homelessness. AVE ranged from between 0.57 and 0.69 with Alpha scores between 0.76 and 0.90 (Cronbach, 1951) suggesting the measures were reliable representations of the intended constructs. Four composite measures were then generated by summing the relevant items to provide four measures relating to perceived event benefits and attitudes to homelessness. These four composite measures were then assessed for differences across groups using T-tests and ANOVA.

Results

Findings were generated in two sections. Firstly, differences in attitudes to the Event Benefits and Homelessness were compared across various demographic and attendance variables. T-test and ANOVA revealed significant differences in attitudes based on gender, the home location of participants, reasons for attendance, who they attended with and for how long they spent at the event.

The second stage looked at exploring characteristics of people who had undergone attitudinal change towards the issue of homelessness as a result of event attendance. Overall 52% of people indicated the event had changed their attitudes towards homelessness. Qualitative coding of open responses categorised these changes in three areas; awareness, positive responses and empathy. Cross tabulation and significance testing again revealed the propensity of those undergoing attitudinal change differed across gender and location. This change was also seen to be influenced by participants' motivation for attendance, who they attended with and the length of time spent at the event.

Discussion and conclusion

Sport events are increasingly being linked to social outcomes, or to support a particular social issue. This research found that sport events such as the HWC have the ability to facilitate attitudinal change in spectators, and that these changes are influenced by both attendance patterns and personal characteristics. By understanding these influences on attitudinal change, sport event organisers will be better placed to effectively facilitate positive social change, and enhance the social outcomes and impacts of their events.

References

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