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Major Australian sport events: Security and safety explored

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Background

In Australia, large public gatherings that are associated with major sport events, such as the Olympic or Commonwealth Games, and even football or cricket matches, presently are framed as posing significant problems for public safety and security. Drawing on Douglas' Theory of Cultural Complexity and Coaffee and Rogers' (2008) terrorism and resiliency work, we examined how the relationships between the current technologically driven security strategies and processes in stadia and surrounding precincts, influenced by the fear of terror, especially since 9/11, can create sanitized sport spaces and practices that alienate spectators from sport event engagement.

Objectives

There is a growing body of literature on the causes and effects of the increasingly complex security issues at sport events (Giulianotti and Klauser, 2010; Yu et al., 2009). However, as Yu et al. (2009) suggest, the analysis of sport event security issues, as related to their urban development or post-event social legacies, is limited and such work in this area fails to draw on the "increasingly sophisticated body of theoretical and empirical research about the shifting modes of global security governanceand about the question of how contemporary security practices in the war on terror impact upon everyday (urban) life" (p. 392). In this examination of sport events in Australia, the objective is to give critical consideration to the social and cultural aspects of security efforts surrounding major sport events and explicitly focus on sport managers' viewpoints on risk perception, safety and security, and the dilemma of balancing these constraints with spectator enjoyment.

METHOD

Interviews with sport mega-event stakeholders and decision-makers were undertaken to contextualise recent management responses to security, and to locate contemporary safety requirements within an applied methodological approach. An analysis of Australian media reporting on sport event safety and security over the last five years provided complementary data. The study encompassed 10 interviews with sport stadium managers, sport event organisers and sport organisation representatives that were responsible for sport event management. A media analysis of articles and press releases associated with major sport events in Australia was also undertaken. The media review was used to complement the other research methods and add depth to the data analysis.

RESULTS

The interviews provided the core data used in the analysis. The newspaper media search revealed over 800 articles related to sport event safety and security over the past 5 years. In summary the results showed:

- *Risk perception* –views of risk were largely influenced by individual context and event organiser perceptions often varied from media representations.
- *Language of safety/ risk* – emotive aspects of dealing with risk/safety were more prevalent in the media narratives than in sport event organiser discourse.
- *Language of uncertainty* – language reflecting on (un)certainly and risk/safety of sport stadium managers was mainly technical.
- *Culture and conflict* – there was little evidence of conflicting and contradictory approaches between event organizers and attendees and/or sport teams when discussing risk and decisions.
- *Diversity* –there was a difference in approaches to dealing with and talking about risk/safety between different groups eg by dimensions of culture, gender, sport type.

Conclusion/Application to practice

In Australia's multicultural society the dominant, hi-tech paradigm to securing sporting venues has been shaped by a growing fear of terror; an approach that fails to consider the range of cultural dimensions of risk perception, does little to enhance community resiliency, targets

disadvantaged groups and creates sanitized sport spaces. The meaning and practice of event safety and security, is highly contextual in nature, as well as being driven by the sport event's relationship to economic and commercial imperatives. While traditionally, localised stadium or sport security played a central role in shaping policies and approaches to event security the heightened awareness of global terrorism threats, local tensions and the application of industry standards have led to significant outsourcing to security firms, event safety specialists and the use of dedicated security expertise.

Safety and security practice in Australia is shaped by the result is the much of the accompanying fortification and suggest that consideration should be given to a more cultural and social focus to resilience planning and a shift away from a highly technical focus. The question for 21st century major sport event organisers is: Can a modern conception of security capture concerns for individual emancipation or quality of life; achieve security outcomes with rather than against the other; and encapsulate non-violent means of achieving security?

References (available on request)