

SMALL VERSUS MEDIUM-SIZED MASS PARTICIPATION EVENTS: WHAT CAN

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Aim of abstract/paper

Most of the sport event research has focused on economic and tourism impacts of mega-events. Bidbooks of mega-events often promise major benefits for host cities and the wellbeing of inhabitants, such as community-building or increased sports participation. In the literature, both positive and negative effects have been found, but the key issue remains that those objectives are not the core concern of those event organizers. This raises the question whether small and medium sized events are perhaps more suited to address these broader range of objectives. Our research wants to contribute to this search for answers by looking at different effects of two small sport events (SSE) and one medium-sized sport event (MSE) in two large Belgian cities. This paper describes effects on tourism, the participants' social life and sports participation.

Theoretical background or literature review

Although current literature on small and medium-sized events is limited, some interesting conclusions have been drawn. Compared to the mega-events, smaller events require less investments, cause less practical inconvenience and show larger social advantages. For example, the use of local volunteers maximized the community spirit and pride (Gibson et al., 2012). Next to the influence on community life, sport events often have the ambition to contribute to the marketing of the host city, but findings are not equivocal. Finally, participation or attendance of a sport event is expected to influence enduring sport participation. Murphy and Bauman (2007) suggest that mass participation events have potential for mass community reach in order to rise sports participation of residents. This assumes that differences will be found between spectator sport event and mass participation events. In this research, we will only focus on mass participation events.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

The lack of a general accepted typology of events, makes it difficult to distinguish between medium-sized and small events. We decided to use the typology of Gratton, Dobson and Shibi (2000) and Wilson (2006). Their model contains five types, but the first three categories are assigned to large events, such as the Olympics or World championships. Therefore, only the last two types will be used in this research. The medium-sized events are competition-driven events who are part of the annual cycle of sports events. Small type events are annual events, where competitors outnumber spectators with little national media interest and limited economic activity compared with the major events. Mass participation events, such as marathons and mass cycle rides, have become increasingly popular, but running events still stay at the heart of mass participation events. Consequently, we have chosen three running events to study. For the first event, the Antwerp 10 Miles & Marathon, data (n=382) was collected during the 2012 edition with 26,075 participants in Antwerp (502,604 inhabitants). We consider this event a medium-sized event. The Ekiden run and Midzomernacht run both take place in Ghent (248,242 inhabitants). The data (n=468) on these events (total participants=4,244) was combined into one data-set of the small events. All data was collected through surveys which included demographic information, questions about the respondent's sports participation, consumer behaviour during the event and motivational elements for participation. Descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, Anova's and Pearson's correlations were performed to examine variables relationships using SPSS software (version 20).

Results, discussion and implications/conclusions

Thus far, smaller events were not appealing to research because their economic impact is relatively small. However, our research pointed out that mass participation events may have other important values. Results showed that participants of the MSE started to train (more) compared to those of the SSEs. This difference was not influenced by age, gender, address, nor by previous participations. A significant difference was found between the main motives; MSE participants want to compete, become healthier or be part of the experience, while the SSE participants were at the event for leisure and social reasons. Social aspects, such as peripheral activities, the presence of family and friends, and food and beverages, are of most importance for the SSEs. The key elements of the MSE are all part of the unique experience that participants search for, such as a smooth organization and the event's reputation. Both SSEs and MSE have potential for tourism objectives; SSEs' participants attached more importance to the location and spend more on foods and beverages than participants while MSE participants indicated that the event gave them a better image of the city. In general, we can conclude that both event types have the potential to create added value for the city, surrounding communities and participants.

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