

Event concept innovations

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Aim of paper

The sport events sector is constantly growing and evokes high interest from a wide range of stakeholders. Mega-events such as the Olympic Games or the FIFA World Cup have outstanding value as instruments of public policy. However, their broad appeal has led to those mega events becoming gigantic in size, demanding enormous costs, including public resources to stage them and involving immense risk. The high cost and a lack of public support most recently resulted in both Hamburg (Germany) and Oslo (Norway) withdrawing their bids for the Olympics.

The growing concern about the developments of sport mega events has, among other factors, been a driver for a trend towards new event concepts, including joint bids of cities or even host countries for sport mega-events. Such novel event concepts lead to new opportunities, but also to challenges for the various stakeholders involved.

Despite their importance for the sport event sector, event concept innovations and associated issues have not yet received much attention in academic research. Therefore, our research aims to identify the nature and characteristics of sport event concept innovations and provide a ground for the development of a research agenda for this novel field of research.

Background

The enormous cost involved in bidding for and hosting mega-events, the risks associated with them, and their potential social and environmental impacts have created almost insurmountable barriers to their staging. A decreasing reputation of International Sports Governing Bodies due to several non-transparent decisions in awarding major events in the past (e.g., FIFA: Russia 2018, Qatar 2022) as well as a number of corruption scandals are other areas of concern.

In the Olympic Agenda 2020, the IOC has made many decisions aimed at a more flexible management of the Games, more attention to sustainable development of the host city, and a liberalization of the bid process to potentially include joint bids by cities or even countries. Another innovation has been made by UEFA with the announcement of the format for the 2020 UEFA European Football Championship, which will be staged as a pan-European event in 13 cities across Europe. Other examples of emergent event concept innovations include the Youth Olympic Games or the new European Championships which will unify existing individual European Championships into one coordinated multi-sport concept.

Literature review

Along with the growth of the sport event industry, academic research on events has been growing concurrently. As several literature reviews (Getz, 2012; Kim, Boo, & Kim, 2013; Mair & Whitford, 2013) document, event studies draw upon an array of disciplines in order to understand “the roles, meaning,

importance, and impacts of planned events in society and culture” (Getz, 2012, p. 173).

Mair and Whitford (2013) identified current topics under investigation and themes with an expected increase in importance. Their results show that event impacts and outcomes remain of interest for research, but with an expected shift in focus from the economic contributions of events towards a broader perspective including the socio-cultural, political and environmental impacts.

Surprisingly, the area of event concept innovations and associated issues has not yet studied to a great extent, despite its growing importance for the event industry (Carlsen, Andersson, Ali-Knight, Jaeger, & Taylor, 2010). In fact, little is known about innovations relating to events, with the exception of some scattered research on program innovations (Paleo & Wijnberg, 2008), knowledge and creativity as prerequisites for innovation (Roper, Du, & Love, 2008), and innovations related to operations (Carlsen et al., 2010).

Discussion

With new event concepts emerging, it is important to provide a better understanding of their potentials and challenges to the various stakeholders involved, for example the changing spectator experiences, sponsorship opportunities, media coverage, and volunteer involvement. Furthermore, the driving forces behind such innovations, their economic, social, and environmental impact, and the consequences for event legacies, policies or governance issues are themes that require further investigation. Of particular practical and policy-related interest is further the identification of opportunities for the (re-)involvement of smaller nations in staging large-scale and mega-events through event concept innovations.

Several innovations have only recently been implemented (e.g. Youth Olympic Games staged first in 2010) or will be implemented in the near future (European Championships 2018; UEFA EURO 2020) providing ideal ground for research arising in the various phases of event innovation before, during and after the event.

To foster the exploration of this new field of research, we will identify the nature of sport event concept innovations, discover themes of high importance for future research and develop a research agenda.

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