

Entrepreneurial Approaches To Delivery Of Community Sporting Events: A New Zealand Case Study

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Aim

This paper presents the first of a series of case studies investigating the emergence of the commercial sport event delivery model in New Zealand. The study explores the growing diversification in the way sport is offered and consumed; the emergence of sport entrepreneurship; the motivations of event owners, sponsors, volunteers and participants; and the characteristics of the events that have contributed to their success. This paper sets the context for the overall study and presents the findings from the first case study within the series.

Background and literature

New Zealand has a longstanding tradition of sports clubs and schools being the primary providers of sports events, experiences and opportunities for the community. Driven by a number of broader societal trends, many sports clubs have experienced a decline in memberships and, as a consequence, struggle to remain viable (Sport NZ, 2015).

Within this context the provision of sport participation opportunities through private events companies has emerged. Such approaches typically have their genesis in an entrepreneur who develops and promotes an event or series of events whereby participants purchase, through entry fees, the right to take part. These individuals, through small businesses, use a commercial model of marketing and promotion and often partner with other private sector companies as sponsors who utilise the event to promote their products and services to participants and spectators.

Ratten (2011, 2012, 2013, 2014) has done some work in merging the literature related to entrepreneurship, social innovation and sport management. She describes sports entrepreneurship as consisting of "... individual entrepreneurs who leverage opportunities that arise from their networks..." and views sport entrepreneurship as "...identifying the conditions and procedures in which emergent business ventures with a social orientation are formed (Ratten, 2014). This paper provides insights into this emerging alternative approach to the provision of sporting events for the community.

Methodology, design and analysis

Through a series of exploratory case studies, the researchers investigate information-rich cases from various perspectives as examples of the emergence of sport entrepreneurship and the growing diversification of the way sport is offered to the public.

The initial case study explores the origin, subsequent development and eventual sale of one such event, the 'Beach Series', and identifies characteristics of the event which have contributed to its success. The researchers used purposive sampling, firstly to target this event as the first in the series, and then to conduct semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders including the event founder, the current owner, sponsors, volunteers and participants. A thematic analysis involving transcription, familiarisation, coding and theme development (Clarke & Braun, 2006, 2013) is undertaken. Publically available secondary data on participant numbers and demographics is analysed for trends. A cross-case comparative analysis will follow, involving additional community based, commercially delivered sports events.

Results, discussion and conclusion

The 'Beach Series' is a weekly event held on Tuesday evenings in Takapuna, a popular urban beach on the North Shore of the city of Auckland, New Zealand. The event offers participants options of competing in races of varying distances in running, swimming and stand-up paddle boarding. The event was launched in 2005 by an entrepreneurial sportsman who realised an opportunity to establish a business promoting and delivering events for the non-elite sporting enthusiast. The Beach Series operates over an 18 week summer season and has grown every year, attracting hundreds of participants each week of all ages and abilities.

The findings identify key success factors for the Beach Series as: an ideal location, a professionally run event, the creation of a community and family environment, flexibility of various event options, and an excellent link to other events. Sponsors reveal key factors motivating them to be involved as: a personal connection with the event owner, the professionalism of the event management, a good price point for

various levels of sponsorship, a good target market fit, and the ability for the sponsor to profile their role in the community by partnering with this event.

This first case study of the series concluded that the event founder/owners, as sport entrepreneurs, made extensive use of social and professional networks as discussed by Ratten (2014). The implications for sports clubs, governing bodies and sport managers relate to the need to understand the key success factors, including the motivations for entrepreneurs, volunteers, sponsors and participants to be involved in this emerging model of delivery.

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