

Place Attachment in Sporting Event Participants — In Case of Local Walking Event in Japan

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Aim

In recent years, communications between people have become increasingly tenuous, and in some areas, neighbors do not greet each other and people often do not even really know who lives next door to them.

Sport has a role in promoting interactions between people and between regions and in fostering regional solidarity and vitality. It makes a major contribution to the revitalization of local communities in the face of problems such as the dilution of interpersonal relationships. The promotion of sport is expected to have a range of impacts that go beyond just improving competitiveness and winning more medals. Holding sporting events can be expected to enhance the attachment that residents feel toward their region.

Literature Review

“Place attachment” is generally defined as “emotional ties and connections between people and particular places,” (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001). Hikichi et. al. (2009) reported that the higher value residents place on the physical and social environments of a place, the stronger their attachment to that place. It has also been shown that the stronger the place attachment held by a resident, the more willing that resident is to continue living in that place and participate actively in local activities and the more enthusiastic that resident is toward such things as neighborhood and community-building activities (Ishimori, 2004). It has also been suggested that, when attachment to place is increased, cooperative actions toward the city and involvement in community building are enhanced (Suzuki & Fujii, 2008).

Studies that have shed light on place attachment in the sports domain include a study that shows that the impact of attachment to place on team identity toward the local J. League soccer club is not direct, but is imparted through the team’s reputation (Tomiyama, 2014), and a study that suggests that commitment toward a local sporting club, while not directly linked to place attachment, increases place attachment through social capital (Tomiyama, 2016). These kinds of studies have reported that residents’ attachment to place is enhanced through sport. Further empirical studies into the relationship between sports and local community are needed. The objective of this study is to classify the reasons for participation in walking events and reveal how those reasons are associated with place attachment.

Research Design and Results

The sample for this study comes from a written questionnaire completed by participants in four walking events held around Japan in 2017 after the conclusion of the event. 176 valid responses were received, with a valid response rate of 100%. The event participants were classified using a reason for participation scale, the result of which the participants were divided into four clusters. After testing of the significant differences between these reasons for participation, significant differences were recognized for all reasons. The 1st cluster was those participants who had no particular commitment to the event and was given the name “invited to participate” group (21.6%). The 2nd cluster was called the “repeater” group (37.5%) due to the fact that the “I enjoyed it when I participated previously” reason received

the most responses. The 3rd cluster had the lowest response rate for “invited to participate” and “enjoyed when participated previously,” so was dubbed the “first-time participant” group (15.9%). The 4th cluster had the highest value for the nine reasons, excluding “enjoyed it when participated previously,” and was described as the “actively want to exercise as family” group (25.0%).

In a comparison of attachment to place for each of the classified clusters, it was found that the 4th cluster had the highest scores in all measures of place attachment. Consequently, it was revealed that sporting event participants can be divided into multiple segments according to the reason for participation, and that attachment to place differs among those segments. The objective of the walking events that were the subject of this study was for families to enjoy walking together. The fact that place attachment was highest in the segment in which participants empathized with this intent and proactively joined in with the aim of enjoying the event as a family may suggest that proactive participation in local sporting events is associated with attachment to place.

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