

The social impact of sport events on a city: Leveraging small-scale sport events to enhance a community's image

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Abstract 143**

The purpose of this study is to begin to address the following questions: Can a sport event have an impact on the image of the city in which it takes place? Or can a sport event help to enhance people's perception of a city, particularly a city that has a negative image? The sport management literature has addressed the value of professional sport teams and sport facilities to the image of a city. But it has not given the same attention to the impact of sport events on a city's image. When the impact on city image is discussed, it is typically done so in the context of large-scale hallmark events like the FIFA World Cup, the Olympic Games, or the Super Bowl. However, Hingham (1999) has argued that small-scale events have the potential to provide the community with more benefits than one-time hallmark events because they require fewer public resources and may be less prone to crowding and congestion.

This paper attempts to fill the gap in the literature. First, it reviews the literature on city image as well as the literature on the influence of sport facilities and sport organizations on this image. Then the paper applies these theories and concepts to the impact of sport events on city image. Finally, it examines a case study of the image of Cincinnati, Ohio, following riots in 2001 and the influence of the Flying Pig Marathon on people's perception of the city.

This paper is significant for two reasons. First, it builds upon concepts and theories emerging in the sport management literature. Specifically, it extends the thesis that professional sport teams and sport facilities are "assets" that can result not only in economic benefits for a community but also in social benefits. According to Sparvero and Chalip (2007), the social benefits of professional sport teams include enhancing the perception of a city by residents and by tourists and other non-residents. According to Eckstein and Delaney (2002), a sport stadium can improve "community self-esteem," which involves an internal component (i.e., residents' own positive perception of their community) and an external component (i.e., residents' belief that outsiders have a positive perception of their community). Based on this literature, the paper at hand asserts that sport events can also be seen as assets that can produce social benefits, such as enhanced image and community self esteem.

Secondly, this paper is significant because it represents a critical nexus between the fields of sport management and public administration. Organizers of sport events often have to work with government agencies and officials in regards to planning, permitting, safety, marketing and promotion, etc. In some cases, organizers request financial support from government agencies - either in the form of grants or donations or in the form of in-kind donations of public services, such as police, fire and transportation. In return, government officials often expect that their support will have some positive impact on the city - economic, social or otherwise. Therefore, the authors approach this research in a way that considers these two unique perspectives and integrates literature from both fields.

There has been no shortage of studies that have examined the economic benefits and costs that accrue to cities that host sport events, from large-scale hallmark events like the 2002 FIFA World Cup (Lee & Taylor, 2005) to small-scale sport events and tournaments (Crompton, 1999, 2000; Cobb & Olberding, 2007). Interestingly, the literature on economic development policy has recognized a connection between image and economic development. Scholars have identified city image as one factor that contributes to the degree to which individuals and business are attracted to that city (e.g., Bradley, Hall & Harrison, 2002). Other factors are related to economic development in a more tangible way, such as the quality of the labor force, access to inputs of production and access to customers. Although image is less tangible, it has received increasing attention from practitioners, scholars and other observers in recent years. "At the dawn of the Global Century, business leaders say, the international image of a city and its region has never been more crucial for recruiting new business talent and opportunity" (Paint It Milwaukee, 2005).

Cities and regions have initiated a number of different strategies in order to enhance their image directly or indirectly. These strategies include: conducting regional, national and international image campaigns; investing in a city's physical assets (e.g., stadiums, convention centers); enhancing organizations which are perceived to be tied to a city's image (e.g., "high culture" organizations like the symphony or "popular culture" organizations like local sports commissions); and developing and expanding special events including both high culture events such as art festivals and popular culture events such as sport events.

This paper begins to address the research question: Can a sport event have a social impact on the city in which it takes place? It

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does so by looking at a case study of the Flying Pig Marathon in Cincinnati, Ohio. In April 2001, a white police officer shot and killed a 19-year-old black man; he was the 15th black man to die in police custody in as many years. In response, riots broke out in downtown Cincinnati, concentrated in a lower-income neighborhood called Over-the-Rhine. The local and national media provided stories and images of burning and looting in Cincinnati. The immediate damage from the two days of riots was estimated at \$3.6 million. Also in response to the fatal shooting, a coalition of organizations called for a boycott of all businesses in downtown Cincinnati. A number of celebrities cancelled speaking engagements and concerts, including Bill Cosby, Whoopi Goldberg and Wynton Marsalis. In the first year of the boycott, the loss in convention and entertainment revenue was estimated at more than \$10 million.

The 2001 Flying Pig marathon took place in Cincinnati one month after the riots. As in previous years, the marathon course went around downtown Cincinnati. But in 2002, Flying Pig organizers made a conscious decision to re-route the course so that it went through Over-the-Rhine and other neighborhoods in and around downtown Cincinnati.

In order to test whether the Flying Pig Marathon influenced people's perceptions of downtown Cincinnati, the authors use data from a survey of participants in the 2002 event. In particular, one question asked local participants the following: "Did your participation in the marathon change your perceptions about downtown Cincinnati?" The survey instrument gave respondents the opportunity to mark "yes" or "no" and also to write a narrative response. In addition to data from 2002, the authors will use data from similar questions on the participant surveys for the 2008 marathon. The authors will use SPSS statistical software to analyze quantitative results and NVivo to classify the qualitative responses.