Differences in the Perception of Sport Event Images by Active and Passive Sports Tourists

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Abstract 2010-005

Sports tourism encompasses on the one hand active sports tourism and on the other hand passive sports tourism: There are people who travel to participate in sporting activities and competitions and people who travel to watch sport events (Gibson, Atte, & Yiannakis, 1998). Weed and Bull (2004, 37) define sports tourism as “a social economic, and cultural phenomenon arising from the unique interaction of activity, people and place.” The activity is often bound to the travel motive (watching or participating) and it is assumed that there are different underlying intrinsic motivations. Therefore the purpose of this paper is to analyze whether there are differences in the perception of sport event images.

In marketing, image is determined by affective (emotional) and cognitive (factual knowledge) components which result in the conative component, respectively in intention (Kotler, 1997). The peculiarities of sport events such as a competition between teams or individuals, significant public interest, significance to the sport concerned and that it is featured on the international calendar of the sport (Allen, O'Toole, McDonnell, & Harris, 2002), high degree of emotions, authenticity, and uniqueness (Schmid, 2006) need to be taken into consideration for determining the sport event image as well. Nonetheless, these can be attributed to the cognitive and affective components as well. The image is created in a person’s mind and therefore very subjective.

Regarding the sport science perspective on sport event image it can be noted that there is only a very small body of literature, referring to sponsoring (e.g. Ferrand & Pages, 1996) or to the hosting destination (e.g. Kaplanidou, 2007). Using different items, sport event image was tested on its influence on variables such as age or future visits. Sport event images of active sport tourists have been studied from a qualitative perspective by Kaplanidou, Funk, Buta and Goutzioupas (2009) indicating that themes referring to emotion, history, organization, sport, environment and social aspects are of high importance.

A quantitative research paradigm was chosen. A survey, using a standardized self-administered questionnaire was undertaken. The sample consists of sport event tourists at 24 sport events which took place in 2008 and 2009 in Germany. The total sample comprised n = 7,331 sport tourists (active: n = 2,117; passive: n = 5,214). Image items were selected based on a literature review (Ferrand & Pages, 1996; Kaplanidou, 2007) that could be attributed either to the affective or the cognitive component. In total, twelve items were selected. The rating scales ranged from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). Confirmatory factor analyses using the asymptotic distribution free estimator were carried out using AMOS 17 in order to evaluate the sport event image as perceived by active and passive sports tourists. Moreover, the questionnaire contained open-ended questions for sport event image to capture qualitative image aspects as well.

The most common associations of active sports tourists were destination (42.6%) and sport attributes (39.2%) and suggestions for improvement (41.2%) concerning mainly the competition (e.g. course (17.8%) or expo(10.2%)). Passive sports tourists named most often aspects such as sport attributes (61.7%) and atmosphere (40.9%) and suggestions for improvement (44.3%) were concerned about side events (12.3%) and the expo (10.8%). Although Cronbach's Alpha showed support for using twelve items for sport event image (0.815 for active sports tourists and 0.852 for passive sports tourists) the model fit of the confirmatory factor analyses was insufficient for both models. Consequently the two models were re-specified eliminating indicators. The χ² test statistic for the active sports tourist model reveals for the exact model fit the value $67.403 (12 \text{ df}; p = 0.000)$ which is still not satisfactory. Further fit indices indicate a good model fit like the RMSEA = 0.047 (LCL = 0.036; UCL = 0.058; pclose = 0.670) as well as the CFI = 0.930 and SRMR = 0.026. The refined model includes seven indicators. The final model for passive sports tourists encompasses the same seven indicators for sport event image. The exact model fit has a value of $102.886 (11 \text{ df}; p = 0.000)$ for χ² which is not sufficient, but the sample size might be a reason for this result. The other fit indices show support for the model (RMSEA = 0.040; LCL = 0.033; UCL = 0.047; pclose = 0.989; CFI = 0.956 and SRMR = 0.022).

Tampa, Florida
June 1 – 5, 2010
Page 462
Interestingly, there are no differences in the perceptions of the quantitative aspects of sport event image between active and passive sport tourists. However there are some differences with regards to qualitative aspects. These show that active sport tourists focus on different aspects of the sport event than passive sport tourists. Active sport tourists are concerned about the competition whilst passive sport tourists focus on side-events and enjoying the atmosphere.

References

Allen, J., O'Toole, W., McDonnell, I., & Harris, R. (2002). Festival and special event management. Milton: John Wiley & Sons Australia, Ltd.


