Comparing Sport Fan and Non-Sport Fans’ Perceptions of a Sporting Event in a Mountain Park Destination

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(Visions)

When sport events are integrated into a destination’s suite of offerings they can be effective avenues for marketing the destination (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2010; Chalip & McGuirty, 2004) and enhancing the experience of sport enthusiasts (Hinch & Higham, 2004; Smith & Stewart, 2007). This presentation examines residents’ and visitors’ perceptions of a sport event held in Banff National Park (BNP). To enhance our understanding of sport tourists and perceived impacts of sporting events in destinations, three categories, avid, casual, and non-sport fans were used to frame the analysis. Jones (2008) suggests “that the state of knowledge [on sport fans] lacks clear linkages, especially in terms of the fan as a sport tourist…” (p.161). There is a need for descriptive understanding of the sport fan as a sport tourist (Jones, 2008).

Data were collected as part of a larger study that explored the hosting of special events within Banff National Park, Canada. Parks Canada, the parks’ management agency funded the study. The sporting event, Banff Bike Fest included five events: family and children’s races, time trials, a criterium, and an invitational road race. The event offered various opportunities for spectating and participating in a variety of locations within BNP during the two day event. The study was explained to potential participants who were asked to return the completed survey questionnaire in a postage paid envelop once they arrived home. Surveys were distributed to every fifth individual encountered at key sites in BNP (i.e., the Town Site, scenic lookouts, along the Bike Fest race routes). The survey was designed to examine experiences and motivations about visiting Banff National Park, interest in bicycling and sport tourism, and sport fan and travel behaviors. Approximately 1149 surveys were distributed between June 20 and 22, 2008 from 9 am to 7 pm; 51 residents and 213 visitors returned their surveys for a response rate of 23%. None of the respondents in this sample were participants in Bike Fest. Respondents self-selected their personal sport fan rating of avid (n=21), frequent (n=72) (these two categories were later combined and labelled as avid (n=93) to simplify analysis), casual (n=110), or not a sport fan (n=53) (8 participants failed to identify their sport fan type). Data presented were analyzed using SPSS 18.0; descriptive statistics and one-way between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to examine differences between (a) avid sport fans, (b) casual sport fans, and (c) non-sport fans. Qualitative open-ended comments were used to enhance analysis of the quantitative data. Forty-four men and 44 women were grouped into the avid sport fan category with an average age of 41 years old. Forty seven casual sport fans were male and 50 were female; their average age was 43 years old. Twelve males and 37 females identified themselves as not being sport fans and had an average age of 45 years. Household income levels of avid sport fans were slightly higher than the other two categories, however education levels were similar.

Two items measured appropriateness of the setting with a 5-point scale; similar results were observed in response to these items: “The social and cultural atmosphere of BNP makes it an appropriate location for Bike Fest” was more agreeable to avid sport fans (M=3.62) than casual (M=3.37) and non-sport fans (M=3.00). Avid sport (M=4.10) fans agreed more strongly to the statement “The physical landscape of BNP makes it an appropriate site for Bike Fest” than casual (M=3.72) and non-sport fans (M=3.27). An one-way ANOVA test revealed a significant difference between the avid sport fans and non-sport fans for all statements at the p<.05 level: F(2, 215)=3.9, p=.02, and F (2, 214)=9.0, p=0.00 respectively.

Significant differences between groups were observed for half of the items used to measure the impact of the event on park residents and visitors. These included: “Bike Fest reduced my access to a favorite place in Banff N.P.”; avid sport fans (M=1.81), casual (M=1.95), and non-sport fans (M=2.37), and “Bike Fest increased my enjoyment of the Banff N.P.”; avid sport fans (M=3.43), casual (M=2.74), and non-sport fans (M=2.43). For residents of Banff “I wanted to remain in Banff N.P. this weekend so I would enjoy Bike Fest” revealed differences between avid sport fans (M=3.48) and non-sport fans (M=1.90) but not casual sport fans (M=2.60) (p<0.5). For visitors: “I wanted to visit Banff N.P. this weekend so I could enjoy Bike Fest” revealed differences between avid sport fans (M=2.53) and both non-sport fans (M=1.87) and casual fans (M=1.81) (p<.05). No differences between groups were observed for items...
that addressed opportunities to “accomplish planned weekend tasks in BNP,” “engage in a favorite activity in BNP” or “affect where visitors stayed in BNP.” A final impact measurement item which used a 10 point scale, “Bike Fest enhanced [value = 10] or detracted [value = 0] from your experience in the park that weekend,” revealed that avid sport fans had an enhanced experience (M=6.30) because of Bike Fest; this differed significantly from casual sport fans (M=5.24) and non-sport fans (M=4.19) who had a more neutral to slightly overall negative experience (p<0.01).

One significant difference was observed within the four items used to measure crowding in BNP during the event. For the item “The other people in BNP [0 = detracted from my experience; 10 = added to my experience],” significant differences were observed between avid sport fans (M=5.59) and non-sport fans (M=4.73) (p<.05), however casual sport fans (M=5.09) responses were not significantly different from the other two groups. No significant differences were observed between sport fan groups for the other crowding measures. These included: “BNP would have been enjoyable with far fewer people vs. far more people;” “The availability of parking, accommodations and other tourism services were intolerable vs. tolerable;” and, “The time spent waiting for access to scenic sites, parking, and tourism services was intolerable vs. tolerable.”

Intentional behavior items also did not reveal differences between the sport fan groups. These included: “I plan to return to BNP in the near future” [avid sport fan (M=4.15), non-sport fan (M=4.20), casual (M=4.06)] and “I would recommend BNP as a travel destination to my friends and family” [avid sport fans (M=4.66), non-sport fans (M=4.64), casual (M=4.59)]. Additional intention items aimed only at tourists responding to the survey also revealed no significant differences in response to “Plans to return to BNP in the near future” [non-sport fans (M=4.15), avid sport fans (M=4.10), casual sport fans (4.05)] and “Overall visitor experience” [non-sport fan (M=4.72), avid sport fan (M=4.67), casual (M=4.61)].

Using a continuum of avid sport fan to non-sport fan categories, this presentation outlines residents' and visitors' attitudes towards a small-scale sport event and its perceived impacts on their experiences in Banff National Park, an iconic park tourism destination. Positive impacts included Bike Fest’s enhancement of the experiences of a large portion of surveyed residents and visitors (both casual and avid-frequent sport fan). Many of the indicators (almost all the perceived crowding and half of the “impact” items) found no significant differences between the sport fan groups. However, some aspects of the sport event decreased the experiences of the non-sport fans, e.g., access to sites that residents and visitors wanted entrance to appeared to be constrained, this needs further investigation if negative social impacts of sporting events in BNP are to be reduced. Additionally non-sport tourists differed significantly from avid sport fans in their views about the appropriateness of BNP as a setting for Bike Fest. This data reveals that destinations managers and marketers as well as event organizers need to consider how small-scale sport events influence the experiences of participants and spectators. The three different categorizations (avid, casual, and non-sport fans) confirm that sport is observed, evaluated, and perceived differently.