

Resident Perceptions of Successfully Hosting a Small Scale Sport Event

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**Sport tourism
Abstract 2013-212**

**Saturday, June 1, 2013
9:20 AM**

**Poster
(Ballroom)**

Sport tourism is one of the fastest growing market segments in the tourism industry and has received increased attention for its social, environmental, and economic impacts upon destinations (Hritz & Ross, 2010). But research on small-scale sports events is scarce (Higham & Hinch, 2002) because they are seen as having a small economic impact (Daniels & Norman, 2003). As noted in Walo, Bull, and Breen (1996) smaller events deserve more research attention because they operate within the existing resource capacity of a local economy featuring low opportunity costs and high community benefit (i.e., community development). This study aimed to understand and describe residents' perceptions regarding success factors of hosting a small scale sport event; the types of impacts related to hosting a small scale sport event; and examine what factors are dominant in the minds of residents in relation to hosting a small scale sport event. The research questions were: (i) what factors contribute to the success of hosting a small scale sport event; (ii) what are the impacts from hosting a small scale sport event; and, (iii) what are the dominant themes that residents think about related to hosting a small scale sport event in their community?

It is important to consider the size of each event because of its impacts on the community (Chalip & Costa, 2005). Higham, suggested that there is more tourism development potential in small-scale events such as "regular season sporting competition, international sporting fixtures, domestic competitions, and Masters Games or disabled sports" (1999, p. 87). Higham (1999) further suggested that some of these small-scale events draw spectators, while others such as marathons, due to their features (i.e., competition) may attract participants. Higham (1999) also suggested that small-scale sports events can have more positive impacts for residents. The benefits of hosting a small-scale event is that they function within existing infrastructures, need little investment of public finances, and are more manageable with regard to crowding and congestion (Gibson, Kaplanidou & Kang, 2011; Higham, 1999). When examining the impacts of hosting an event in a community, Chen (2001) suggested that impacts should be broken down to represent the different types such as economic, social and environmental. Such breakdown provides researchers and organizers with a comprehensive representation of what impacts predict/influence resident support towards sport tourism. An appropriate theoretical framework utilized to evaluate tourism related impacts on a community and to determine resident support for tourism developments has been social exchange theory (Ap, 1992; Chen, 2001; Deccio & Baloglu, 2002; Gursoy et al., 2002; Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Perdue, Long, & Kang, 1999; Wang & Pfister, 2008). The basic assumption derived from these studies is that resident support occurs when positive impacts such as economic benefits, outweigh the negative impacts such as social and cultural costs, and the sharing of environmental and social resources with tourists (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004). To date, there is little research that examines the role of small-scale sport events in community development (Higham, 1999). Therefore, this research attempts to address this gap in the literature by examining a) the factors that contribute to successfully hosting a small scale sport event, b) the different types of impacts that occur as a result of hosting a small scale sport event, and c) the nature of the dominant themes related to the meaning of small scale sport events that residents think about as a result of hosting a small scale sport event in their community.

In order to examine the research questions above 412 intercept surveys were collected at two Florida Youth Soccer Association events. Participants were given a questionnaire in which they were asked: What factors do you think make a small scale sport event a success for YOU and YOUR HOME community; Do you have any other comments you would like to add about how these small scale sport events impact YOU and YOUR HOME community; and, What are the 3 words that come to mind when you think of this event you are attending today? Echtner and Ritchie's (1993) measurement paradigm was adapted to measure the event aspects, asking respondents to indicate three words that came to mind when they thought of the event they were attending. SPSS 19.0 was used to analyze responses and frequency counts for the success factors, additional impacts and the three words associated with the event. The success factors generated for the event were classified into seventeen themes (outlined in the results); the additional impacts mentioned were classified into twelve themes (outlined in the results); and, the three words that came to respondents' minds were classified into eleven themes (outlined in the results). All themes were generated by the respondents and classified into their respective themes by two faculty members with expertise in sport tourism and management for face and content validity.

2013 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2013)

The seventeen themes that emerged from the question regarding the success factors of the event were: socio-cultural, psychological, infrastructure, involvement, attendance, tourism, sport, proximity, economic, health, knowledge development, organization, environmental, communication, political, demographics and satisfaction. Frequency analysis of the success factors revealed socio-cultural (21.6 %), infrastructure (17 %) and organization (15.2 %) factors were cited the most as contributing to the success of the event. The twelve themes that emerged from the additional impacts of the event were: socio-cultural, psychological, infrastructure, tourism, sport, economic, health, knowledge development, organization, environmental, political and quality of life. Frequency analysis of the additional impacts revealed that socio-cultural (35.6 %), psychological (23 %) and health (8 %) impacts were cited most often. The eleven themes related to the meaning of small scale sport events generated from the three words that came to respondents' minds were: sport, psychological, socio-cultural, knowledge development, political, organization, environmental, infrastructure, health, proximity and economic. Frequency analysis revealed that psychological (34.5 %), socio-cultural (23.1 %) and sport (13.9 %) were the most dominant themes in respondents' minds.

Literature discussing the role of small-scale sport events in community development is scant, (Higham, 1999), a gap this study aimed to address. As the results of the current study indicate, small-scale sport events provide host communities with additional benefits beyond just economic benefits including: psychological, social and environmental benefits, knowledge development, health, infrastructure and political impacts. These results suggest that event managers concerned with planning for community development through the use of small scale events should focus on maximizing the socio-cultural, infrastructure and psychological aspects by collaborating with different community groups, local tourism and local government agencies in order to create a festive atmosphere and build on the community unity these events tend to generate. Furthermore, creating volunteer opportunities and spectator participation opportunities will help engage the residents that can increase the positive experiences and provide these individuals with a feeling of inclusion and involvement.