

An Insider's Perspective on the Creation of Community through a Charity Sporting Event

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Researchers have focused mainly on large-scale sporting events with regards to building communities (Misener & Mason, 2006). However, Schulenkorf and Edwards (2012) have argued that small-scale sporting events have a greater potential to create connections among the community members. What is not exactly clear is how sport is being used as an 'engine' of development (Levermore, 2009), particularly when the focus is on charity rather than on broader social or political targets. An increasing number of charity organizations are holding sporting events to fund-raise where links are beginning to be explored to participation retention, camaraderie (Filo, Funk, & O'Brien, 2009) and worthwhile and enjoyable events, memorable for their competitive spirit (Woolf et. al. 2012) that increase social capital and an atmosphere of solidarity (Pelozo & Hassay, 2007). Yet we still know very little about the value of these events in the creation of social capital and community. My research focuses on that gap in literature, specifically: the creation of social capital, social inclusion, and sense of community through recreational participatory events done for charity. I utilise a case study of the semi-annual charity open co-ed beach volleyball tournament held on Jeju Island, South Korea, that raises money for local families in need, in order to learn the role that the event has played in building connections within the ex-patriot community on and off Jeju Island as well as between the ex-patriot and local communities.

Good societies are societies where it is easier to do good (Day & Maurin, 1955), but as Robert Putnam argued in *Bowling Alone* (Putnam, 1995), good societies, or communities, that is to say, communities that are contented, secure, in good physical and mental shape, are in decline due in large part to a loss in 'bridging social capital' and 'bonding social capital'. Putnam used the terms bridging and bonding social capital to identify the interconnections among various communities and their members including those of trust, norms, and reciprocity – namely, the act of helping someone else without the requirement of a reward. Putnam went on to argue that where there is a decline in social capital there is also a downward trend in volunteerism, in joining and contributing to group events, and even in unorganized social interaction, such as informal visits. Sporting events seem to provide an antidote to this decline in social health as researchers have argued that sporting events can potentially increase social capital, through the expansion of networking, the reinforcement of existing customs and traditions and fostering social and economic justice (Nicholson & Hoye, 2008; Skinner, Zakus & Cowell, 2008), as well as camaraderie (Filo, Funk, & O'Brien, 2009), and social inclusion (Jarvie, 2003).

Sporting events, particularly events done for charity, and perhaps especially recreational participatory events such as beach volleyball tournaments, are able to continually bring people together towards a common objective all the while achieving other valuable goals. This is similar to what Randy Pausch referred to as 'head fakes' or indirect learning in his 'Last Lecture' (Pausch, 2007), where it is often more effective to focus on simple concrete goals in order to achieve complex abstract goals. In his lecture, Pausch was referring to learning computer programming through a storytelling activity.

This case study explores the Jeju Furey Beach Volleyball Tournament, held on Jeju Island, South Korea - a 'head fake', although altogether unintended. This sporting event was held to raise money for a specific limited goal. In an effort to raise as much money as possible, the tournament needed to be open to all members of the community, boys and girls, men and women, of any age, with varying degrees of ability and skill and was advertised to both the ex-patriot and local communities from both the island and mainland Korea. People were encouraged to form their own teams but could also register individually or with incomplete teams. Those not interested in playing were encouraged to volunteer and participate in other ways, and all members of the community were encouraged to be spectators of the games and festivities. Participants in particular were encouraged to take part and volunteer their time in the organization and the setup of the event providing the opportunity for as many as possible to have a stake in the event's success. All the aspects of the event listed above represent building blocks for forming a tight-knit community.

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This research employs a case study methodology (Yin, 2009) where four of the six sources of evidence suggested by Yin are used; participant observation, interviews, documentation, and physical artifacts. Coding and analysis focus on Putnam's elements of social capital and the broad understanding of community development. We will be presenting preliminary findings about how this event is uniquely fostering a sense of community through enduring connections between local community members and ex-patriots. In particular, the interconnections among the diasporic (ex-patriot) communities alongside the local population present a unique way of addressing social inclusion and building bridging social capital. This case offers an insider's perspective, as this author was also the organizer of the events, as well as a distinctive example of a community created unintentionally through - in most part - a charity sporting event, and illustrating one of the roles sports can play in society in general and in small communities in particular; namely, by making it easier for people to do good and be good, because the whole point of Pausch's head fakes is not really to learn the fine technical points of a football play or an intricate soccer move, but to develop enduring social an individual character traits, such as cooperation, teamwork, and determination.

References

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