Canadian Cyclocross Championships: Racing in the Temporary Cycling Place

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Cities desire to host mega-events for positive economic and social development (Misner & Mason, 2006) and destination marketing (Jutbring, 2014). However, small-scale sport events (e.g., local and regional competitions) provide an event hosting alternative. These local and national events occur with minimal negative impacts (e.g., crowding) on the host destination’s infrastructure and attract local audiences (Higham, 1999). Small-scale sport events permit the use of the repurposed or temporary sportscape (Kural, 2010) where for example, the bicycle race’s features are removed after the event. Furthermore, events such as bicycle races have been celebrated for their ability to showcase the host destination (Hinch & Higham, 2004; Weed, 2009). The 2014 Canadian Cyclocross Championships were held in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada between October 24 and 26, 2014 (Canadian Cycling Magazine, 2014a).

Cyclocross is a winter cycling sport (Dixon & Hegedus, 2014), which takes place on a race course consisting of hills, forested trails, open fields, and obstacles (e.g., stairs, sandpits) (Canadian Cycling, 2012). Cyclocross is a sport with a unique set of rules and athletic abilities that distinguishes it from road and mountain bicycling (Canadian Cycling, 2012). Competitors race the 2.5 to 3 kilometer course in approximately one hour (Canadian Cycling, 2012). The racers exemplify the interaction between the athlete and the place.

Journalists document events and issues (Van Gorp, 2003) by providing specific information to the audience through directed communication; the media frame (Entman, 1993). Frames consist of the packaging of information through the use of "keywords, metaphors, concepts, symbols, and visual images" (Entman, 1991, p. 7). The media frame makes specific information stand-out to the reader (Entman, 1993; Lewis & Weaver, 2013). Research on frames is relevant because frames are shared (Naraine & Dixon, 2014; Reese, 2007) and exemplify culture (Van Gorp, 2007). Researchers have demonstrated the relevance of media frame research within sport management with mega-event (Sant & Mason, 2015) and stadium development (Buist & Mason, 2010) research. Currently there is a gap in the literature regarding how place meanings of an event host destination are framed within the media.

This research focuses on place meaning theory where place meaning includes the "thoughts, feelings, and emotions individuals and collectives express toward place" (Kyle & Johnson, 2008, p. 111). Meanings are established through social and physical experiences, knowledge, and sharing (Kruger, 2006). Understanding place meanings highlights the importance of place for site managers who can consider how their management choices influence and are influenced by those meanings (Smale, 2006). Media frames can influence the reader’s perceptions and interpretations of issues (Lewis & Weaver, 2013) and place meanings influence an individual’s behaviors (Kruger, 2006). Therefore, the place meanings presented as media frames about a bicycle race will inform participants and sport fans about the host destination. The purpose of this research was to answer, “What place meaning frames were contained within the media’s coverage of the 2014 Canadian Cyclocross Championships?”

Method

Data for this study included articles published by two online Canadian sources (Canadian Cycling Magazine and Winnipeg Free Press) and one international online publication (VeloNews.com). Identical article search procedures were used for each media source. News articles were located through a systematic search using keywords (e.g., Canadian Cyclocross Championship and Shimano Cyclocross Championships) and associated article titles and links focusing on the 2014 event. A total of 30 articles were obtained from Canadian Cycling Magazine, six from the Winnipeg Free Press (the host destination’s newspaper) and seven articles from VeloNews.com. Prior to analysis articles were organized by date and subjected to analysis consistent with media framing research (e.g., Sant & Mason, 2014). Specifically, analysis through line-by-line coding identified the emergent place based themes (Patton, 2002). For example, “Winnipeg” and descriptions of downtown comprised the setting theme. The themes were condensed and categorized into frames containing specific themes. Analysis resulted in three place frames.

Results
The findings presented here highlight the three place meaning frames of community, eventscape, and sportscape. The community frame (development, celebrity, cycling kit themes) captures the sense of community associated with the event, staff, athletes, and spectators. Journalists highlighted the community development focus of the event. For example, Prest (2014) explained the course as “spectator-friendly” where, “Amid the clanging of cowbells and cheering of the crowd, the bicycle-racing sport of cyclocross captured a new community of enthusiastic fans.” The geographic connections of the notable athletes (e.g., Catherine Pendrel (Campbell, 2014)) created a link between them, their home, and the event (i.e., celebrity theme). Cycling kit theme signifies the connection of the Maple Leaf to the Canadian culture and Winnipeg where the jersey was won. For example, “Boersma’s next challenge is defending his maple-leaf jersey . . . in Winnipeg” (Pioro, 2014).

The eventscape frame contains the broad festival grounds that characterized Winnipeg within two prominent themes: setting and beer. The setting for the event was “The Forks [park], in the city’s downtown” (Canadian Cycling Magazine, 2014c) “where the Assiniboine [R]iver runs into the Red” (Sturney, 2014) and where the “Cyclists got quite the view of our new Canadian Museum for Human Rights” (Hagan, 2014). Beer was highlighted as the beverage of choice for the sport. It was named Dead Ringer (Canadian Cycling Magazine, 2014b) and connected to the sport to Winnipeg where “In true cyclocross spirit, there will even be a beer garden with a special brew for the event” (Canadian Cycling Magazine, 2014c).

The unique nuances of the race course were combined to establish the sportscape frame with three themes: Belgian Prairies, obstacles, and competition. The Belgian Prairies theme highlights how the Winnipeg course was distinctive but held true to the sport’s history. VeloNews.com (2014b) explained, "Riders will experience a circuit with an in-town feel similar to venues in the Belgian motherland." The second theme, obstacles, focused on the physical challenges included in the race course. Specifically, "The Elite and Junior women raced the 3.3-km course of sandpits, run-ups, barriers and a Knoll of Pain" (Sturney, 2014). Finally, competitors (theme) made the event interesting for spectators and athletes (e.g., VeloNews.com, 2014a) and were detailed in race highlights (e.g., VeloNews.com, 2014c).

Conclusion

The results from this study isolate the place meaning frames as they relate to the 2014 Canadian Cyclocross Championship. The place related frames are consistent with previous place meaning research which explains that place meanings are influenced by social interactions, activity, and physical characteristics (e.g., Kruger, 2006; Spartz & Shaw, 2011). Specifically the community frame contained social interactions where Winnipeg was the place to grow a local and national cyclocross audience. Furthermore, the eventscape frame was inclusive of the Canadian festival with an American flair (VeloNews.com, 2014b). Finally, the sportscape was connected to the historic cyclocross place (i.e., Belgium) demonstrating a connection between the sport place, characteristics, and nostalgia (Cho, Ramshaw, & Norman, 2015). Considering that frames influence the reader (Buist & Mason, 2007), possibly an athlete or spectator, these media frames are relevant to event organizers as indicators of the sport journalists’ focus. For example, organizers can highlight the nuances of their course by supplying pertinent information to the journalist (e.g., connecting the river setting to Belgian cyclocross history). Future research could compare place meaning frames between national championship events to find the consistencies in race course designs and event frames.