Defining the Community-Driven Approach to Sport Venue and Event Security

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Venue security is a key planning component of sporting event management, often relying on approaches informed by principles of risk management. The focus of sport safety and security on limiting liability and property-related risk tends to be reactive in nature. Research detailing sport security suggests that the current approach can repress spectators’ and citizens’ civil liberties (Boykoff & Fussey, 2014) encourage heavy handed police tactics (Hogget & Stott, 2010), and in turn, can act as a catalyst for strengthening the police state approach to safety and security (Toohey & Taylor, 2012) thus undermining the fan experience and sense of communitas and liminality (Chalip, 2006) that sporting events are meant to generate. This study reviews the current paradigm of venue risk/security management in the sport industry and suggests a new community-centered approach informed by theories of environmental criminology.

The property-centered approach to sport security is concerned with prioritizing risks to the property associated with the sporting event, and the potential injury to patrons causing reputational harm and fiscal liability. Risk management and the theory of negligence, rather than patron experience, are the current foundation for event security. In contrast, the community-driven approach grounded in environmental criminological approaches seeks to preserve enjoyment and dignity for both fans attending the game and the surrounding community, while simultaneously maximizing safety and security.

The routine activity approach (Cohen & Felson, 1979) identifies what conditions are necessary for a crime to occur; a crime occurs during the course of normal activities when a “likely offender” (a young fan) without an “intimate handler” (capable of exerting leverage on the likely offender) encounters a “suitable target” (opposing fan) in the absence of a “capable guardian” (a police officer who is able to protect the target) or “place manager” (e.g., a parking lot attendant) (Madensen & Eck, 2011). Crime pattern theory adds further describes how these conditions emerge in time and space. Sport stadiums are considered crime generators (Kurland, Johnson, Tilley, 2014). Brantingham and Brantingham (1995) define crime generators as places, such as a sport venue, where large numbers of people gather, generating opportunities for motivated offenders to commit illicit activities. Research on the criminogenic impact of soccer matches has consistently uncovered differences in the spatial (and temporal) distribution of various types of crime and disorder events around stadia (Kurland, Tilley, & Johnson, 2010; Breetzke & Cohn, 2013). The rational choice perspective (Cornish & Clarke, 1986) argues that offenders perform actions that are not only purposive and intelligible, but rational by weighing the means and ends available to them and making decisions best suited to their motives and goals. Situational crime prevention seeks to implement opportunity-reducing measures directed at specific crime types by manipulating the immediate environment so as to make crime more difficult, risky, and less rewarding (Clarke, 1997).

These perspectives set the framework for integrating stakeholder input with environmental criminological theory that informs the community-centered security approach, leading to a better balance of sport safety and security interventions with preservation of the positive spectator experience.