A Conceptual Ex Ante Framework for the Strategic Study of Social Utility of Sport Events

Nico Schulenkorf

Abstract

The area of sport event tourism has been growing over the last years, which led to an increasing amount of research that has analysed both the economic and social impacts of sport events. Whereas a substantial amount of ex post assessment frameworks for quantitative event evaluation is available, there is growing demand for process orientated ex ante frameworks that guide the strategic study of social utility of events. To address this issue this paper presents a process framework suitable for theoretical and practical research in the area of inter-community sport events. It combines the areas of community participation, intergroup relations, social identity and event impacts in a process towards generating social capital within and among communities. The ex ante process framework is designed to support the strategic investigation of inter-community sport events and their contribution to social cohesion, socio-cultural development, and the enhancement of communities' quality of life.

Introduction

The concept of "quality of life" is emerging within many different disciplines, including the social sciences, economics, education or medicine, which all have a particular wisdom as to how to define the term in relation to their area of interest. However, according to the Australian Centre on Quality of Life (ACQOL) (2008), there are two common interdisciplinary elements which are valid for all quality-of-life studies. First, quality of life directs attention to positive aspects of people's lives, and second, it can be measured both objectively and subjectively. The area of tourism has also been linked to the quality-of-life phenomenon, as people travel in order to satisfy certain wants or needs, which can add to their level of comfort and happiness. For example, tourists and visitors like to enjoy the natural environment, visit friends and relatives, see historically significant places, visit authentic cultural settings, experience feelings of spirituality, or participate in different and exciting activities (Andereck, Bricker, Kerstetter and Polovitz Nickerson 2006; Loker and Perdue 1992). Whatever the motivation: travel and tourism is considered a pleasurable activity.

Being recognised as a powerful vehicle to enhance the quality of life of visitors and host communities, tourism has been able to contribute to economic, social and cultural development

around the globe (Hinch and Higham 2004; Kelly and Nankervis 1998). Particularly in the developing world, tourism secures a large amount of jobs and revenue for local communities on the one hand, and extraordinary socio-cultural experiences for visitors on the other. One reason for travelling is people's desire to take part in sport events, either as a participant or a spectator. Sport event tourism has been growing over the years and several studies have analysed the economic (including tourism) impacts of events (Gratton 2006; Preuss 2006, 2003; Burgan and Mules 2001, 2000). Recently, the social impacts of events have received increased research attention (Misener and Mason 2006; Ohmann, Jones and Wilkes 2006; Derrett 2003, 2000), with some studies investigating the community development side of sport events. However, there is less research which focuses on sport events that are specifically directed towards the building of social capital, the fostering of social values, and the enhancement of participants' and host communities' quality of life. The few studies that have been conducted however predict that a sense of *communitas* can be created as a result of sporting events, and that different social and cultural impacts can arise which are a core source of potential event value or problems (Misener and Mason 2006; Ingham and McDonald 2003).

The focus of this paper is on inter-community sport events in divided societies, which are used for the purpose of creating social development in terms of bonding and bridging social capital. In particular, a conceptual framework will be proposed which links sport event impacts to community participation, social identity and intergroup relations. Against the background of social development, inter-community sport events are described by the author as the cooperative efforts of different communities, in organising and implementing sport events with a socio-cultural focus. Previous studies in ethnically or religiously divided societies have indicated that sporting events can bring together groups that might otherwise never confer (Misener and Mason 2006; Arai and Pedlar 1997). Furthermore, inter-community sport projects have shown to reduce intergroup conflict and augment the relationships between diverse communities, and they may create a common social identity and establish social capital within and among groups (Sugden 2006; Verweel and Anthonissen 2006; Ingham and McDonald 2003). Such positive event impacts add to the improvement of general living conditions in communities and to an increase in people's quality of life.

While event organisers and host communities have been calling for attention to be paid to these social values of events, Chalip (2006) argues that a suitable strategic framework guiding the study of social utility of events is currently not available. Such a framework is however needed to foster practical research in the area of event impacts that can inform event planning and management. In an attempt to fill this gap, this paper presents and discusses the Social Inter-Community Event (SICE) framework. This ex ante framework is used to guide the strategic investigation of inter-

community sport events and their contribution to social capital building, socio-cultural development, and the enhancement of communities' quality of life. The SICE framework is part of the author's PhD thesis which examines the role of inter-community sport events in contributing to social development among the rival ethnic groups in war-torn Sri Lanka.