

# SPORT EVENTS AND TOURISM

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## Session Chair: Dimitra Papadimitriou

### Identifying Assets To Leverage Sport Teams For Tourism Benefits

**Sobral, Vitor; Fairley, Sheranne**

University of Queensland, Australia; v.sobral@uq.edu.au

#### **Aim**

This research seeks to understand how sport teams, and their regular season events, can be effectively leveraged for tourism gain. Compared to major and mega events, regular season events incur less societal disruption and financial cost to the host city (Higham & Hinch, 2002; Sparvero & Chalip, 2007). However, little research has examined how regular season events can be leveraged. This research aims to identify the assets that host cities can use to maximise tourism outcomes from regular season events.

#### **Literature Review**

Host destinations can gain tourism benefits through strategies that increase visitation, extend visitor stay, and encourage visitor spending (Chalip, 2004). Host cities can enhance their destination image through strategies that capitalise on the increased media exposure and attention that the destination receives in the lead up to and during the event (Jago et al., 2003). This process is known as event leveraging (Chalip, 2004). The majority of research on event leveraging for tourism gain focuses on mega-events such as the Olympic Games (Kelly & Fairley, 2018). Regular season events can be more beneficial to the host city given they take place within the host's existing infrastructure and cause minimal disruption to the host community (Higham & Hinch, 2002). A central component in regular season sport events are the teams competing (Sparvero & Chalip, 2007). While previous research has suggested that there is no economic benefits from hosting a professional sport team (Baade et al., 2013), this research focuses on the concept of leveraging, and therefore creates and tests strategic planning for benefits. This study therefore extends the current literature by focusing on strategic planning, rather than assuming outcomes from hosting sport teams will occur naturally.

While research on event leveraging has specifically examined how the event itself can be used as "seed capital" to leverage benefits for the host destination, the central component in regular season sport events is the teams that are competing (Higham & Hinch, 2002). In other words, the sport team is the leverageable resource central to regular season sport events that attracts outside visitors and media attention (Sparvero & Chalip, 2007). Identification with a sport team may be motivation for consuming team-related media and events, including traveling to watch the team play (Heere, 2016).

To understand how to leverage a sport team, we need to first identify the leverageable assets. This study therefore seeks to identify the assets that can be used to leverage sport teams for tourism gain. Identifying relevant assets will help a host city's sport and tourism stakeholders develop leveraging strategies to achieve the destination's desired

tourism objectives and begin to fill the gap in knowledge of how to leverage sport teams to benefit their host cities.

## **Methodology**

The study used 20 semi-structured interviews with sport and tourism stakeholders in a regional city that hosts professional men's league teams in two different sports. Key stakeholders were identified through analysis of government and industry documents and publications, snowballing, and through initial discussions with the city's sport and tourism representatives. The semi-structured interviews ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. The data were coded using an inductive process of open, axial, and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

## **Findings, Discussion**

The regional city in which this research was conducted had limited resources for tourism promotion. The team, being a central unifier of the region, was viewed as a potential opportunity on which various stakeholders could collaborate. Further, unlike singular one-off events where leveraging opportunities are limited based on the temporal nature of the event, the regularity of sport team events provides a prolonged opportunity for host cities to provide consistent messages to fans of both the home and visiting team. The regularity of sport team events also provides opportunities for ongoing stakeholder collaboration, which can help build relationships and leveraging knowledge.

Fan identification with the team and the sport is a key resource that can be used to leverage the team for tourism gain. Specifically, identification with the team is believed to increase consumption of the team's media. Team and league media include social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), and the membership and ticket sales database through email direct marketing. Tourism product and images of the host destination can be integrated into the team's media channels, providing opportunities for cross-promotion. While event broadcasts and news media have a wider reach, they cannot be fully controlled by the sport team. However, through collaborations and cross-promotions with tourism stakeholders, these channels provide potential opportunities to showcase the destination.

In addition to the team media, each of the sport team players' media is another asset that can be leveraged for tourism gain. Those identifying with the players may engage with the player's media, giving them the opportunity to act as influencers and promote the destination. In other words, the players may also act as ambassadors for the host destination's communications.

## **References**

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