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Site Selection Factors for Youth Sport Tournaments

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PURPOSE OF STUDY

Youth sports tournaments can generate a large economic impact on cities of all sizes, and destinations are seeking more business from youth sport tournaments. Itinerant sporting events generated over \$6.65 billion in direct spending in 2010 (O'Connor, 2011). While exact numbers are not available for youth sport tournaments, they constitute a significant economic impact (NASC, 2010), as children participate in local, regional, state, and national tournaments, many of which require family travel.

Yet, study of site selection for these tournaments has not been explored fully. This study will investigate the factors which are important to sporting event planners when selecting a site for a youth sport tournament and will integrate site selection research from convention and event management into sports tourism applications. It seeks to uncover the relative importance of site selection factors, which will be useful to destination marketing organizations, which need better information about sports event site selection to attract youth sport tournaments and benefit from the economic impact.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Events are of particular importance to marketers because they have the largest economic impact of all sports tourism activities (Kurtzman, 2005). Gratton & Taylor (2000) divide event sport tourism into participant-driven and spectator-driven sectors. Youth sport tournaments are usually participant-driven, meaning that officials, competitors, and the media comprise a majority of the visitors. A major advantage of participant-driven events is that it is much easier to forecast economic impact, because destinations do not need to rely on attracting a substantial attendance of spectators, which can be difficult to predict (Gratton & Taylor, 2000). As the size

and scope of sports tournaments has grown, more cities have sought to host these events, leading to increased competition for this coveted business (“Q & A Interview,” 2007; Kurtzman, 2005).

Yet, despite the destination marketing industry’s focus on attracting youth sport events, research into site selection and decision-making processes for sport tournaments is scarce in both the event management and sport management literature (Shonk, 2010). Many studies of itinerant sporting events have concerned mega-events or hallmark events (Gibson, Willming & Holdnak, 2003) instead of small-scale events, which can also offer benefits to a region (Cela, Kowalski, & Lankford, 2006). When contrasted with many mega events, smaller sporting events do not typically require additional infrastructure investment, the local community (instead of out-of-town businesses) receive a larger share of the economic benefits, there is less displacement of other visitors, crowding is less likely, and there is less burden on the host city’s residents. Higham’s (1999) comparison of mega events with “regular” events revealed that there are great positive impacts from hosting smaller sporting events that fit within the host city’s infrastructure and facilities. For many of these reasons, Gibson et al (2003) state that small-scale sport events show great tourism potential to communities.

Recent studies have begun to quantify the economic benefits of youth sports events, demonstrating that positive economic impact can be realized from events of all sizes (Daniels and Norman, 2003; Crompton, 2010) In addition to the great range in event size, a great range of cities large and small benefit from youth sports events, as money is spent by players, spectators, and sponsors (Mitchell, 2010). Aside from the economic benefits, there are many other benefits to hosting sporting events: sporting events impact the positive image of a destination (Page & Hall, 2003), attract first-time visitors to a city (Daniels & Norman, 2003; Williams & Riley, 2003; Cela et al, 2006), attract visitors who would not have visited in the absence of the sporting event (Cela et al, 2006), increase visitation during off-peak seasons (Williams & Riley, 2003), and lead to repeat visitation (Kurtzman, 2005).

The primary study of sport tournament site selection was conducted by the National Association of Sports Commissions (NASC) (2010), which asked rights holders to sporting events to rate site selection criteria. Respondents, which included youth sports tournament planners in addition to high school, collegiate, and professional planners, rated 28 site selection factors on a 7-point Likert-type scale. NASC (2010) also determined which site selection factors predicted satisfaction and return intent (Table 1). However, it did not identify the *relative* importance of the 28 selection factors. In addition, Shonk (2010) acknowledges that the response rate to this study (12.3%) was less than desired.

Insight into convention site selection may be best to advise the youth sports event site selection decision, as there are many similarities between the convention and event sectors.

Site Selection Factors for Sporting Events (NASC, 2010)	Site Selection Factors (Crouch & Ritchie, 1998)
Cost of airfare to the destination is affordable Transportation at the destination site is easily accessible Numerous airlines fly to the destination site	Accessibility
Host organizations are supportive Host organizations provide prompt assistance Host organizations offer to defray costs through rebates/subsidies/bid fees Support is offered by the CVB or Sports Commission	Local Support
There are a number of suitable restaurants in the area The site offers a number of recreation and social activities There are opportunities for sightseeing There are numerous opportunities for shopping in the area	Extra-Conference (<i>or Event</i>) Opportunities
Suitable accommodation is affordable Hotel rooms are readily available Hotel properties are free from security risk ^ Hotels are in close proximity to event venues	Accommodation Facilities
Event facilities are available when required *^ The destination is able to provide suitable competition facilities Event facilities are affordable The layout of event facilities are suitable *^ Participants feel secure while attending events	Meeting Facilities / <i>Sporting Facilities/Venues</i>
The destination has performed satisfactorily in the past *^ The local community excels in welcoming guests The reputation of the destination is positive among other event planners	Information
The destination's surroundings are attractive The destination's climate is desirable	Site Environment
Guests perceive the destination to be a safe place ^ The destination is likely to produce a profit for the event The destination is a novel location	Other Criteria
* Factors which predict satisfaction with a destination ^ Factors which predict return intent <i>Italics added by authors for adaptation to a sporting event model</i>	

Table 1: Site Selection Factors for Sporting Events Placed within Crouch & Ritchie's (2008) General Conceptual Model of the Site Selection Process

The site selection process for conventions has been explored in great detail. Crouch & Ritchie (1998) reviewed 64 studies to develop a general conceptual model of the site selection process. This model provides a starting point for researching and determining site selection attributes. Seven categories of site selection factors were identified: accessibility; local support; extra-conference opportunities; accommodations facilities; meeting facilities, information, site environment, and other criteria (Crouch & Ritchie, 1998). It is hypothesized that all site selection factors fit into these categories. Table 1 shows site selection factors for sporting events identified by NASC (2010) placed within categories defined by Crouch & Ritchie (1998).

DESIGN OF STUDY

Site selection factors for meetings and conventions have been studied for years, but the study of site selection factors for itinerant sporting events is still in its infancy. One weakness of most convention site selection research is that it asks respondents to rate certain site selection factors, but it does not establish the relative significance of key variables in site selection (Crouch & Louviere, 2004). The drawback to this research method is that in reality an event planner must make trade-offs. For example, site selection decisions may need to be made weighing the convenience to the attendee and cost to the event planner. Site selection factors are not likely to be equally important in scenarios in which a trade-off is required.

This research will build upon the sport and event management literature in understanding decision criteria for sports events. It also seeks to delineate factors unique, or of greater importance to, youth sport. It is believed that destination marketing organizations will be able to use this information to set strategies to attract more youth sport tournaments. It is further believed that this study will build upon the research into event site selection and help to integrate sport event research with convention research.

METHODS

The study will survey planners of youth sporting events who have planned at least one tournament in 2011 or 2012. They will be contacted by email with a follow-up mechanism in place. After background questions are answered, the respondents will be asked to rate twenty-eight site selection factors on a 10-point Likert-type scale, anchored by 1 “not important” to 10 “extremely important” as well as ranking in order the ten most important site selection factors. The factors chosen were modified from NASC’s (2010) list of site selection factors, subtracting factors that were less relevant to youth sports and adding factors of particular importance to youth sports determined by a panel of experts.

The ranked criteria will be evaluated individually determine which factors are deemed most important. In addition, the rankings will be evaluated based on Crouch & Ritchie’s (1998) categories. This will help in determining which categories are most important as well as which individual factors are most important regarding site selection. The ranked data will be compared to NASC’s (2010) rated data. While the sample will not be identical for the two studies, it is sampled from the population of sports event planners. To summarize, this study seeks to identify:

- Which site selection factors are most important to youth sports event planners?
- If there are any categories of site selection factors which are more important to youth sports event planners? Or do the factors need to be evaluated separately?
- If there are there significant differences in site selection factors among event planners in different sports?

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