

Chapter 31

Sociocultural Impacts of Sport Event Tourism in Mexico: Research Needs and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

Sport event tourism has been acknowledged as a potential agent of economic and sociocultural change in host destinations. The existing literature provides evidence that the impacts of sport events are extensively shaped by not only the type and magnitude of the events but also by the conditions of the destinations in question. By recognising that most of the empirical evidence on the sociocultural impacts of sport event tourism has been drawn from case studies in Western, developed countries, this paper suggests that the experiences of developing countries need to be incorporated into the general body of knowledge on this area. The paper then explores potential research needs and opportunities for the study of sociocultural impacts of sport event tourism in Mexico that could contribute to the general advancement of the theoretical and conceptual underpinning of sport event tourism's impacts.

INTRODUCTION

From a Western, developed perspective, sport tourism has been described as a subfield of scholarly study now approaching a phase of maturity in which it is no longer struggling to establish itself (Weed, 2008a, p. 569). While the number of specialised scholars, publications, postgraduate programmes and theoretical and conceptual foundations within the field of sport tourism has lately increased significantly, this assertion needs to be treated with caution. Some areas of sport tourism have perhaps been extensively studied – including sport event tourism (Weed, 2006) – but there are specific areas of this subfield that remain insufficiently explored, particularly within international contexts.

This lack of exploration is not only about theoretical, conceptual and methodological underpinnings but also – and perhaps more importantly – a question of the contexts from which empirical evidence has been obtained. Most of the conceptual and theoretical assertions have thus far been based on evidence

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from quite specific cases in Western, developed countries. The experiences of, and perspectives on, sport tourism and related issues in developing countries have been significantly neglected in the international literature and, therefore, not incorporated in this alleged advancement of the subfield. If sport tourism is indeed a global industry (Ritchie & Adair, 2004, p. 2), any understanding of this field – and thus conceptual and theoretical development – needs to be based on analyses of this phenomena at a global level.

Sport event tourism's sociocultural impacts is a specific area of sport tourism that has been unexplored through case studies of different destinations in developing nations and that could contribute to obtaining global empirical evidence. There is no reason to believe that the relationships between sports and tourism so far described are exclusive to only a few, specific societies, be they developed or developing. Although the magnitude of these relationships may be stronger in some destinations, sport event tourism appears to be a phenomenon that can have relevant economic, sociocultural, environmental and political implications for those who host these events, regardless of the host communities' level of development.

Since sport event tourism has been adopted as an economic strategy by some destinations, the economic impact of these events, whether benefits or costs, have consequently been widely studied in developed countries. In particular, the existing literature suggests that sport events can have a direct impact on government and private investment, employment generation, trade opportunities and multiplier effects in host communities. In addition, the English-language literature provides evidence that identifies sport events as relevant agents of sociocultural impacts. Some of these impacts can immediately modify – positively and/or negatively – the social aspects of localities. Modifications can be made, for instance, in infrastructure, constructions, landscape, traffic congestion, overcrowding, land use and leisure opportunities. Other times, however, these changes take place in the long run and in non-material aspects. Communities' sense of pride in hosting the events, implications for fitness levels and health and demonstration effects through competitors and spectators' intercultural interactions can also be produced as a consequence of sport event tourism.

The above and other social indicators – extensively drawn from case studies in developed nations – may be similar to those of destinations in developing countries. However, empirical evidence is needed to assess the theoretical validity of these impacts in these other contexts. For this purpose, it is first necessary to identify specific areas of research opportunities whose findings can eventually concur with, or differ from, findings in developed contexts.

In this vein, this chapter seeks to explore research needs and opportunities within the study of sociocultural impacts of sport event tourism in Mexico. As discussed below, Mexico annually hosts large and small-scale sport events that have economic, social and cultural implications of relevance to the planning and management of these events. The sociocultural implications of sport event tourism in Mexico, however, have been almost completely neglected by researchers from both developed and developing countries. By exploring these research needs and opportunities, the author's goal is to demonstrate the need for scientific research that can assist government and decision-makers in the planning and management processes of sport events in Mexico. In addition, it is also expected that this research will contribute to the general theoretical development of the sociocultural impacts of sport event tourism that has already been achieved by other academic communities.

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