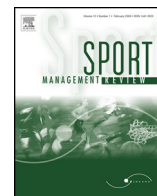




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Perception of the new competition formats in the Innsbruck 2012 Youth Olympic Games sports programme—A spectators' perspective



Martin Schnitzer*, Sabrina Scheiber, Madeleine Lang, Elisabeth Brandstetter, Martin Kopp

Department of Sport Science, University of Innsbruck, Fürstnweg 185, 6020 Innsbruck, Austria

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ABSTRACT

The Youth Olympic Games (YOG) was initiated by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 2007 aiming to reach out to a younger target group. Besides the introduction of a Culture and Education Programme the creation of new competition formats was an important initiative. The objective of this study was to assess the spectators' perception of the new sports competitions at the first Winter YOG 2012 in Innsbruck, Austria. The aim was to understand how the Games were perceived by on-site spectators attending the event. For this purpose a quantitative research approach was chosen. Based on an extensive literature review a paper questionnaire was developed and distributed among the spectators during the YOG in Innsbruck. The results revealed that the Level of Performance was perceived very positively across all competitions. Regarding the Entertainment Value, Future Development, Eustress and Rules the spectators' perception differed between the various competitions. The findings from the study in hand provide important insights for future organisers of sports events and other related stakeholders (federations and sports clubs) with respect to the implementation of new sports competitions.

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1. Introduction

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) decided to introduce the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) in 2007. The YOG targets talented young athletes aged 14–18 and is designed to provide an insight into the fields of sport, education and culture (Krieger, 2012; Kristiansen, 2013; Wong, 2012). Some opinions around and within the IOC point to the fact that the IOC is struggling to attract younger spectators, as viewing audiences of the Olympic Games become steadily older (Sports Business, 2008). The YOG was seen as a marketing tool for the IOC and a means of recapturing the youth, while the IOC set itself mainly idealistic goals for the YOG (IOC, 2011b). One such goal is that the YOG should act as a platform for initiatives within the Olympic Movement. The main innovation of the YOG was without doubt the introduction of the Culture and Education Programme (CEP). Furthermore, the creation of new competition formats aiming to reach out to a younger target group and thus rejuvenate the Olympic Movement (Judge, Petersen, & Lydum, 2009) can be seen as another important initiative.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +43 512 507 45865.

E-mail address: martin.schnitzer@uibk.ac.at (M. Schnitzer).

Hence, the aim of this paper is to understand how the new competition formats have been perceived by on-site spectators attending the event, using the first Winter YOG 2012 in Innsbruck, Austria as an example. In this context, the article discusses various attributes used to describe the perception of a competition and delivers valuable findings with respect to the initiation, operation and presentation of new competitions at sports events. Finally, recommendations will be given for future actions of event organisers and sports associations.

1.1. Spectators' perception of sports events

The term sports spectator can be described with reference to the definitions by Heckhausen (1980) and Strauß and Jürgensen (1998). They define a sports spectator as a person who observes the sporting activity without actively taking part and who thus primarily satisfies personal motives and has to expend corresponding resources to do so.

Scholarly literature widely discusses what drives people to attend sports events and factors influencing attendance (Dale, van Iwaarden, van der Wiele, & Williams, 2005; Laverie & Arnett, 2000; Pan, Zhu, Gabert, & Brown, 1999) as well as spectators' behaviours and attitudes (Bristow & Sebastian, 2001). Research on spectators often focuses on measuring the perception of aspects related to services provided, which can be based on Dale et al. (2005) with differentiations made in terms of functional quality dimensions ("how" are services provided), technical quality dimensions ("what" services are provided) and image quality dimensions. Also Theodorakis, Kambitsis, Laios, and Koustelios (2001) and Theodorakis, Koustelios, Robinson, and Barbos (2009) have assessed the perception of service quality among sports spectators and introduced five dimensions (tangible dimension, responsiveness, access, security and reliability), while Kelley and Turley (2001) have developed nine factors for measuring service quality at spectator sports (employees, facility access, concessions, comfort, games experience, show-time, convenience, price and smoking). Finally, a Model of Event Quality for Spectator Sport (MEQSS) introduced by Ko, Zhang, Cattani, and Pastore (2011) discusses key factors that determine service and event quality at spectator sports, such as (1) game quality, (2) augmented service quality, (3) interaction quality, (4) outcome quality and (5) physical environment quality.

In order to classify the spectators' perceptions of sports events more easily it is important to understand their motives for attending sports events. These may range from socio-emotive dimensions to on-site entertainment, depending, among others, on the different fan types. Preuss, Seguin, and O'Reilly (2007) discuss sports event visitors in terms of consumer patterns. Robertson and Pope (1999) as well as Zhang, Smith, Pease, and Jambor (1997) highlight the fact that other forms of entertainment (e.g. leisure activities, television) influence spectator attendance at sports events. Furthermore, sports events provide an opportunity for people to socialise with friends and family (Kahle & Riley, 2004; Wann, Waddill, & Dunham, 2004). Gladden and Milne (1999) discuss the inclusion of entertainment before and after the event as a means of engaging and maintaining spectator interest. Finally, issues such as size, seating comfort, access as well as the stadium's aesthetic qualities (Buttle, Morres, & Tomlinson, 1995; Shank, 2001) influence attendance at sports events.

1.2. The role of the competition for spectators at sports events

The competition as such is only one part of the spectators' experience at a sports event. Kelley and Turley (2001) see the *games experience* as one of nine service quality factors and Ko et al. (2011) discuss *game quality* as one of five event quality factors for spectators. Hall, O'Mhony, and Viecele (2010) criticise that academic research on attendance at sports events does not identify the factors that influence emotions during the sports event. Kim and Chalip (2004) discuss push and pull factors for sports event tourists attending mega events and stress the fact that "although different research has used different instruments, research consistently finds that fan motives are multidimensional, and attendance, frequency, likelihood, or interest are significantly predicted by fans' motives" (Kim & Chalip, 2004, p. 696). The authors refer also to Wann, Melnick, Russell, and Pease's (2001) insights on fan interest as well as to Funk, Mahony, Nakazawa, and Hiraakawa's (2001) dimension for predicting attendance at sports events. Kim and Chalip (2004) identified *event interest* (also motives related to the competition as such and the experience of attending the event) as an important motive for attending mega events, but they see constraints (e.g. financial, time) as a third important factor besides push and pull factors.

In the sports management literature, it is commonly known that spectator sport boasts special characteristics that may increase demand for a sports competition. Whereas in the case of normal products and services consumers look for identical quality and certainty, Heinemann (1995) indicates that in the world of sport it is primarily the factor of uncertainty that makes a sporting event particularly attractive for the spectator. The uncertainty of outcome of a sports competition and the often dramatic course facilitates a kind of positive physiological arousal that spectators seek. Referred to as eustress in the literature this phenomenon is considered as an important motive in the Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS) (Wann, 1995; Wann & Waddill, 2003). Woratschek and Schafmeister (2004) also identify a delight in sensation as a characteristic of spectator sports, which includes, for example, the hope for fierce competition. Woratschek and Schafmeister also mention relevance as an element affecting the demand for a spectator sport. Accordingly, the relevance of a World Cup Final is considerably higher than that of a friendly match. Relevance thus can be interpreted as one facet of the so-called game attractiveness factor introduced by Schofield (1983). The attractiveness factor however contains several types of variables that are influencing fan attendance such as the record (won-loss) of a team, rivalry between opponent teams, number of star athletes involved or the closeness of competition (Hansen & Gauthier, 1989; Schofield, 1983). Related to this context Woratschek and Schafmeister pointed out that spectators can only fully exploit the entertainment value of a sport (as being

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