

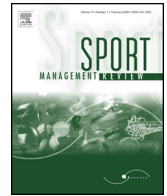


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Full Length Article

Accumulating subcultural capital through sport event participation: The AFL International Cup

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the authors use participant interviews to examine how participating in an international event enabled the accumulation of subcultural capital. The authors conducted interviews with players ($N=9$) in the Australian Football League (AFL) International Cup from Canada, USA, New Zealand, and Ireland. The AFL International Cup created a liminal state offering individuals with opportunities for: (a) national representation; (b) international competition and comparison; (c) cross-cultural learning and interaction; (d) sport subcultural engagement; and, (d) authentic game experiences. The resulting experience enabled participants a deeper connection with the sport subculture, which created the potential for sport advocacy in their home countries. Results will assist international sport event hosts in creating meaningful participant experiences that facilitate deeper personal attachments to the sporting subculture.

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1. Introduction

Given the potential benefits that events can bring to host regions, cities, and nations, prospective hosts are increasingly embedding sport events into their destination marketing strategies. Benefits include economic impact through increased tourism (Daniels, Norman, & Henry, 2004; Gelan, 2003), destination image building (Kim & Morrison, 2005; Smith, 2005), and counteracting seasonality (Higham & Hinch, 2002). Events can also bring significant social benefits to the host community by creating excitement, euphoria, and community pride (Andersson, Rustad, & Solberg, 2004; Kim & Morrison, 2005); increasing social capital within the host community (Misener & Mason, 2006); leveraging for business facilitation within the host city and country (O'Brien, 2006, 2007; Brien, 2006, 2007); increasing levels of sport participation (Taks, Green, Misener, & Chalip, 2014); and increasing volunteerism (Fairley, Gardiner, & Filo, 2016; Ralston, Lumson, & Downward, 2005). Thus, sport events have been shown to have considerable utility. The primary focus, however, has been sport in tourism development, rather than tourism's role in the development of the sport subculture beyond the host destination.

Events can be leveraged for various gains; however, researchers have yet to examine how active sport tourism experiences facilitated by competition in an international sport event can foster subcultural capital for participants. Therefore, we address the research question: what are the components of an event active sport tourism experience that facilitate the accumulation of subcultural capital? The research context is the Australian Football League's (AFL) International

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Cup, held in Melbourne, Australia. Australian rules football is a sport that is native to Australia, and the AFL is the peak professional body of the sport in Australia. The International Cup is an initiative of the AFL to aid in the globalization of Australian rules football by bringing 16 nations together every 3 years to compete at an international level. We examine how an event and the sport tourism experience it engenders contribute to subcultural capital accumulation among participants.

2. Literature review

2.1. Event active sport tourism

Many sports and leagues have international competitions that require athletes to travel long distances in order to compete (Higham & Hinch, 2012). From a destination standpoint, Gratton, Shibli, and Coleman (2005) suggest that world or international championships of lesser known sports may be less likely to attract spectator interest, and therefore, less likely to provide economic benefits to the host destination. From the standpoint of the athletes, there are considerable logistical challenges that travel presents, including stress, long periods of time away from home, adjusting to a temporary living environment (Higham & Hinch, 2012), and physically acclimatizing to maximize competitive performance (Manfredini, Manfredini, & Conconi, 2000).

Gibson (1998) identified three forms of sport tourism: travel to participate in sport, travel to watch sport events, and travel to visit sport halls of fame or museums. Subsequently, Fairley et al. (2007) noted that individuals may also travel to volunteer at sport events. Kaplanidou and Gibson (2010) have termed those who travel to compete in a sport event as event active sport tourists. Researchers focusing on event active sport tourists have predominantly focused on individual sports, such as cycling (Downward, Lumsdon, & Weston, 2009; Gibson & Chang, 2012; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; Lamont, 2014), mountain biking (Getz & McConnell, 2011), marathons (Chalip & McGuirty, 2004; Getz & Anderson, 2010), triathlons (Lamont & Kennelly, 2011), and skiing (Richards, 1996), while less attention directed toward team sports (Green & Chalip, 1998).

Researchers focusing on participatory sport tourism have adopted a number of perspectives and used various lenses. Typically, researchers have sought to understand the involvement of participants and the meaning they attribute to the activity (Gibson & Chang, 2012; Green & Chalip, 1998; Lamont, 2014). This involvement and meaning includes research on sport tourism participation over the lifespan (Gibson & Chang, 2012) and underlying motivations for participation (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013; Ogles & Masters, 2003). Others scholars have explored the relationship between destination image and participatory sport tourist behavior (Dolnicar & Fluker, 2003; Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007), impacts on host communities (O'Brien & Ponting, 2013, 2017; Ponting & O'Brien, 2014, 2015; Towner, 2015, 2016), constraints and competing priorities (Lamont & Kennelly, 2011; Lamont, Kennelly, & Wilson, 2012), and the determinants of active sport tourists' expenditure patterns (Downward et al., 2009).

Higham and Hinch (2009) suggest that individuals may travel to participate in sport to further develop their abilities, to seek competition, to experience unique and/or famous places, and develop identity or standing within a subculture. Similarly, Robinson and Gammon (2004) suggest the need to compete, desire to win, and opportunity to improve one's skills are key motives for active sport tourists. Ogles and Masters' (2003), in their study of marathon runners, found that personal and self-esteem motivations were prioritized over social and competitive motives.

Higher involvement in sporting pursuits results in similarly higher levels of participation in competitive events and the greater likelihood of travel to those events (McGehee, Yoon, & Cardenas, 2003). Getz (2008) posited that as individuals become more involved in their sport, they may develop a travel trajectory. Getz and McConnell (2011) use Stebbins' (1982) concept of serious leisure and ego involvement theory to analyze the participants in a mountain bike challenge. Drawing on Pearce (1988) travel career ladder, they further suggest that an individual can build an event travel career (ETC) based on competitive events. Using the idea of the ETC, Lamont et al. (2012) found that progression through an ETC is affected by the number of available events compared to wanting to travel to the more challenging or more iconic events.

Getz and McConnell (2011) hypothesized that there is a progression from local, to national, to international travel suggesting that the higher the involvement, the greater the desire to travel to the bigger, more significant events. Likewise, Higham and Hinch (2012) suggested a competitive hierarchy exists from local, regional, national, and international sport events, noting that few people reach the international level of sport competition, and thus, opportunities to represent one's nation in sport are relatively few, but highly prized.

Numerous scholars have found that, for many active sport tourists, the destination is often not a primary consideration (Bull, 2006; Chalip and McGuirty, 2004; Getz & McConnell, 2011; Richards, 1996). Instead, elements such as the challenge (Getz & McConnell, 2011), the quality of the focal activity and the environment (Bull, 2006), the terrain and conditions (Richards, 1996), or the event itself (Chalip & McGuirty, 2004) are more important than the actual destination. Chalip and McGuirty note that this is particularly true when individuals are traveling to an event alone. Green and Chalip (1998) observed as much for individuals traveling to a team football tournament.

In their study on participants in a flag football tournament in Key West, Florida, Green and Chalip (1998) highlight that individuals may utilize sport tourism as a celebration of a shared subcultural identity. They suggested that individuals may in fact prioritize the celebration of subculture over the competition itself and, therefore, highlight the importance of the sport subculture in the sport tourism experience. Similarly, events represent sites conducive to the creation of liminality (Chalip,

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