

Taming the Lions: An Exploratory Study into the Actions Taken by the RTOs Ahead of, and for the Duration of, the 2005 Lions Tour.

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Abstract

People have been attending sports events for centuries and travel, whether domestic or international, has long been an integral component of the global sports industry. The continual globalisation and the progressive advancement of transport and communications (i.e. media) technology have made accessibility to sport significantly easier, regardless of the location or the time of year. As a result, sports event tourism has become a growing niche market, emerging through the amalgamation of two increasingly fashionable, socially constructed, spheres of tourism.

Over the past two decades, numerous studies have been compiled on the impact of sports events, especially with regards to the economic development and social implications on the host nation/destination. As a result of the increase in attention, more and more national governments have begun to acknowledge the benefits that can emerge from staging events. However, the preparation and planning required when bidding for, not to mention hosting, major sports events can be a complex process. Inevitably, it will involve a vast number of stakeholders, from various different members of society. Despite the growth in sport and event tourism literature, little information has been gathered on the role played by tourism organisations during the planning stages of high profile sports events. Furthermore, there has been a considerable shortage of qualitative-based research projects, focusing on sport event tourism at local or regional industry level.

Through the use of semi-structured interviews, this exploratory study investigates the actions taken by eleven Regional Tourism Organisations (RTOs) during the build up to the 2005 Lions Tour of New Zealand. It focuses on identifying the relationships formed with national, inter-regional and intra-regional stakeholders, as well as examining how the promotional policies adopted affected the local area during the tour. The Sports Event Tourism (SET) Regional Planning Cycle is developed, identifying six stages that span the entire planning process; from initial proposal, through preparation, participation, promotion, and publicity, to the potential for future development.

The findings highlight a high degree of concern and uncertainty amongst the RTOs and their regions, especially during the early planning stages. In general, the situation was blamed on the unique nature of the event and a lack of previous experience or existing event strategies capable of coping with such an occasion. The majority of respondents acknowledge poor communication and insufficient cooperation between both regional and national stakeholders. The socio-economic impact associated with hosting such a large event and the crucial role played by the local community is also discussed. The discussion generated from the findings highlights the close relationship that exists between the preparation and participation stages of the SET regional planning cycle. It also identifies the importance of external publicity, which, in the case examined, certainly took on greater significance than the regional promotions being developed. The conclusion and subsequent

recommendations focus on the need for continued explorative research in the under-developed area of study.