

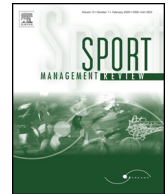


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Sport Management Review

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/smr



Full Length Article

Building social capital from sport event participation: An exploration of the social impacts of participatory sport events on the community

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 25 April 2017
Received in revised form 14 November 2017
Accepted 14 November 2017
Available online xxx

Keywords:

Social capital
Running events
Social capital outcomes
Participants
Community

ABSTRACT

Participatory sport events have the potential to generate substantial social value in the local community. One important social benefit of such sport events is the development of social capital. However, little is known about the development and outcomes of social capital in the context of participatory sport events, such as running events. Taking a qualitative approach, the authors explored the social capital building among active participants in running events. The findings revealed that bonding capital is developed by all participants in the study while the bridging and linking capital varies by event type and involvement level. Moreover, four positive outcomes of social capital were identified: supportive attitude and behaviors, positive influence on others, prosocial behaviors, and increased everyday socializations. By generating these positive outcomes among the participants of this study, social capital has the potential to contribute to the community development and well-being. This study provides insights as to how social capital that stems from sport event participation can lead to the development of community in the long term. Suggestions are made for future research to test the relationships between social capital, its outcomes, and community development and well-being.

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1. Introduction

Scholars widely recognize the social value of mass participation sport events (Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2003; Gibson, Kaplanidou, & Kang, 2012). It is believed that such sport events can bring rich social benefits to a community, such as civic pride, social cohesion and community attachment (Inoue & Havard, 2014). One important social impact of sport events is the development of social capital, which can be built and enhanced through the social interactions among various event actors (e.g., participants, spectators, volunteers, organizing staff; Sherry, 2010; Sherry, Karg, & O'May, 2011). As a result of participating in the events, there can be an enhanced sense of belongingness, solidarity, and camaraderie among the local people (Schulenkorf, Thomson, & Schlenker, 2011). Not only do people develop bonding capital with their families and friends, they also form bridging capital across class, religious, and ethnic boundaries (Harris, 1998; Tonts, 2005). In addition, the linking capital between individuals and community institutions (e.g., event organizers, sponsors, local sport associations,

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2017.11.001>

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and charitable organizations etc.) are strengthened from their interactions in the events (Sherry, 2010). These different types of social capital are mostly found in studies that focus on either mega sport events (Gibson et al., 2014) or sport-for-development events (Schulenkorf et al., 2011; Sherry, 2010; Welty Peachey, Cohen, Borland, & Lyras, 2013). However, scholars have not fully examined the social capital stemming from participating in community-based mass participant sport events, such as running events.

Social capital reflects the psychic connections between people and can lead to a series of behavioral outcomes, such as civic engagement and social participation, that are beneficial to a community (Misener & Mason, 2006; Putnam, 1995). Community is marked by meaningful social ties and interactions among its members and, thus, is widely used as the context for studying social capital (Arai & Pedlar, 2003; Skinner, Zakus, & Cowell, 2008). Prior researchers have noted that social capital was critical in community building because it facilitates collective actions among community members who, therefore, take active part in political and social community activities – for example, voting, signing petitions, running campaigns or becoming memberships of social organizations (Stone, 2001). In the sport field, however, exploration of the positive outcomes of social capital within the community is limited. Although scholars have identified that sport events are able to bond, bridge, and create the relationships among individuals, groups and organizations (Schulenkorf et al., 2011; Sherry, 2010; Welty Peachey et al., 2013), they have largely eschewed discussion on the process of achieving long-term outcomes of these social relationships. In other words, there is a missing link between social capital development and community benefits that answer the question: what are the processes through which social capital can benefit the community long term? Answering the question allows for understanding of the role of sport events in the long-term development of the community.

2. Literature review

2.1. Conceptualization of social capital

While several scholars have made attempts to define social capital, we drew from Putnam (1995), as he interpreted social capital in a collective sense and characterized the ways in which community members interacted. According to Putnam (1995), social capital is “the features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that can facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (p. 66). It consists of three core elements: trust, network, and reciprocity (Putnam, 1995). Trust and reciprocity serve as the cognitive elements of social capital because of their subjective and intangible nature, while network serves as the structural element of social capital because it reflects the structural forms of the social groups (Grootaert, Narayan, Jones, & Woolcock, 2004). Among the three elements, trust is the foundation of social capital, facilitating communication and mutual understanding. Once the trust was built, social networks can be created. Within these social networks, a process of exchange and reciprocity occurred, further strengthening the trust and networks (Schulenkorf et al., 2011).

Based on the three elements of social capital, scholars suggest that social capital is a multi-dimensional construct that also encompasses three types of networks: bonding, bridging, and linking social capital (Foxton & Jones, 2011; Stone, 2001; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Bonding social capital reflects the networks within homogenous groups where people shared similar identities and strong familiarity. It represents everyday sociability, which includes social connections with families, friends, neighbors, colleagues, and other acquaintances (Foxton & Jones, 2011; Narayan & Cassidy, 2001). Bridging social capital, on the other hand, is fostered between heterogeneous groups, where broader social networks can be built among individuals who are not like one another. As such, the bridging capital is an important indicator of community inclusiveness and tolerance of diversity (Onyx & Bullen, 2000; Skinner et al., 2008). While bonding and bridging capital represent horizontal networks, linking social capital represents the vertical connection within a social hierarchy, referring to the ties with people in positions of authority. Linking social capital involves greater heterogeneity among people with different levels of power and is often found in individual's relationships with institutions. As such, linking capital underlines individual's perceived influence on the authorities and represents a measure of empowerment, personal efficacy, self-value, and community-ownership (Foxton & Jones, 2011; Grootaert et al., 2004; Kay, 2006).

2.2. The positive outcomes of social capital in the running and broader community

As a reflection of the communitarian view, Putnam's social capital framework looked at social capital in the context of the community and emphasized the collective values of trust, mutuality, and community solidarity (Arai & Pedlar, 2003). Community is a broad concept emerging from complicated social relationships. The constructs is commonly characterized in two ways: the actual and symbolic or imagined (Arai & Pedlar, 2003; Jarvie, 2003). The actual community is based on geographic space, in which people actually live. It involves a group of individuals who share a common environment and are interconnected through units of social relations such as family, kin, neighborhood, and workplace (Blackshaw & Long, 2005). In this present study, the actual geographic community is termed broader community. The symbolic community extends beyond the geographic boundaries and carries a symbolic meaning. It consists of individuals with shared social identities, common interests, and a sense of belonging (Arai & Pedlar, 2003; Skinner et al., 2008). In this study, we term symbolic community as running community. As such, we look at both broader community and running community, and their development as a result of social capital building.

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