



Sport events tourism as a catalyst for image makers for tourist destinations: A case study of Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality in relation to the Legends Marathon Event

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Abstract

Events tourism is recognised as a significant and essential part of economic development strategies in developing countries as this industry affects the economy and the development of tourist destinations. Globally, many destinations are exploiting sport events as a strategic tool for energizing and themselves. In recent years, it has been widely accepted by tourism destination managers that sport events tourism make huge contributions to the tourism industry and the economy through foreign capital inflows. Various studies demonstrate that there is growing interest or even hunger to host sport events tourism as promoting development is evident in both developing and developed countries. For example, economic growth and prosperity is evident in tourist destinations such as Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg to mention but a few. Therefore, the aim of the study was to ascertain the perceived potential of sport events tourism as a catalyst for image makers for developing tourist destinations like Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality (BCMM) in the Eastern Cape province. A purposive sampling technique incorporating both qualitative and quantitative research approaches was adopted. The purposive sampling technique was used with self-administered questionnaire being used to target Legends Marathon stakeholders. The results revealed that the respondents had solid knowledge about sport events tourism in particular the Legends Marathon. The findings further show that despite the benefits that sport events tourism present, the study identified a lack of marketing of the event and lack of stakeholder coordination as problems, and there is a need for more exposure of sport events hosted within the BCMM region and East London as a tourist destination.

Keywords: Tourism, Events, Marathons, Legends Marathon, Image Maker, Sport Events

Introduction and background

In recent years' sport events have been looked upon as niche markets and have received a significant amount of attention (Gammon & Ramshaw, 2016). For example, events tourism growth in Australia over the past decade has been an average of 10% of tourist arrival annually. Sporting events have played a significant role in this context. Conversely, it is noticed that destinations such as South Africa where a number of events have been hosted have demonstrated growth and development as events tourism destinations. Some major events have been held such as the Commonwealth Games in 1982 which attracted 600,000 foreign visitors on a yearly basis. Similarly, America's Cup Defence in 1986-1987 attracted 700,000 visitors; the recent 2018 FIFA Soccer World Cup that was held in Russia positioned that destination on a global pedestal. Saayman (2012) highlights that South Africa has followed suit by hosting a large number of major events. Consequently, the country has become an events destination hosting a number of mega events such as the Cricket World Cup held in 2002 spilling over to 2003 and the Federation International de Football



Association (FIFA) Soccer World Cup in 2010. Various countries inter alia, Switzerland, England and Canada utilise sport events as a tool to grow visitor numbers. The participants in these events also increase tourism numbers through audiences, medical personnel, partakers, family and friends, media personnel and representatives. Hence, the image of the destination is appraised in an affirmative manner and the tourist destination enjoys a positive reputation.

The benefits accruing from successful sport tourism are vast since it invigorates economic development through increased numbers of tourists, and leads to a socio-cultural and environmental renaissance and ultimately often needed urban renewal (Chalip, 2006; Preuss, 2007). Consequently, the growth and development of sport events tourism has led to a number of destinations in the world becoming destinations of choice, for example Sydney for hosting the Olympics, Australia for the Wimbledon Tennis Tournaments, South Africa for the FIFA Soccer World Cup and East London for the Africa Open Golf Challenge. Destinations often host events that are synonymous with their names and these events are identified as playing a meaningful role in creating a favourable image for the destination. Thus, hosting of sport tourism events is increasingly becoming a strategic imperative to enable tourism development in both developed and developing destinations. Events play a meaningful role in building the image of the destination for potential tourists. Consequently, destinations are gradually and strategically positioning themselves as destinations of choice; they thus host events such as world fairs, expos and sporting events (Mxunyelwa, 2017).

The Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency (ECPTA) (2015), has identified the hosting of events as a key part of its strategy. The Eastern Cape Province has hosted a number of events as way of spreading tourism demand. The hosting of events is viewed as a tool that facilitates the development of domestic tourism products and placing the province on the global map as a tourist destination which in return increases tourist numbers within the Eastern Cape Province.

The Eastern Cape hosts a number of events such as the following in order to gain a more positive image:

- Ironman South Africa
- Africa Open Golf Challenge
- National Arts Festival
- Billabong Surfing Pro
- Buyel'Ekhaya
- EC Horse Racing

In the context of hosting these above mentioned events, the host destination can potentially attract events tourists from around the world. In such events spectators interact with both local and international tourists. Therefore, this promotes the social cohesion within a host destination. Furthermore, events enable job creation for sustainable growth of the local economy. Sport tourism, is also a sociological phenomenon of note (Peric, 2010). In addition sport tourism events impact positively on the socio-cultural, monetary and environmental aspects of their host destination and especially within the local community (Swart & Smith-Christensen, 2005).

Events create socio-economic opportunities for local entrepreneurs in sectors such as the hospitality, tourism, food and beverage, and technical services sectors and this promotes entrepreneurship. In addition, events tend to create a positive image of the destination and



this in return positions the destination in a strategic light (Eastern Cape Tourism Master Plan, 2010).

A successful sports event is crucial from a sporting perspective and also from a security management outlook, and can play an significant role in stimulating the image of a host city and country in the international market place. It also provides added value which goes way beyond the actual event and ultimately influences the appeal of a country as a tourist destination and also promotes its products and services (Zagnoli and Radicchi, 2008). The government should thus actively promote participation in local sport events and obtain the buy-in and support of the private sector.

Through hosting events, the ECPTA seeks to create employment opportunities and foster a positive image while creating a conducive environment in order to stimulate local economic development. Endeavours of this nature could improve economic growth in the province, whilst also creating awareness about the Eastern Cape as a preferred tourist destination. The residents of the local community must of course be invited to play a very active hands-on role in the planning process in order to guarantee their support (Brida et al., 2011).

The developmental plan of Eastern Cape which is the Tourism Master Plan (2010) highlights the hosting of large scale international events as one of the means of attracting and improving tourist destinations. The associated tourism benefits can create a positive image for destinations. These benefits include transport and infrastructure since when tourists are attending these events the state upgrades transport and infrastructure which is a long term investment that will also benefit the host community. The local community is also given an opportunity to use their culture, heritage and other products or skills that might attract tourists and create employment opportunities and mitigate dire poverty. Entrepreneurial opportunities are created as a direct or indirect impact of hosting these events.

Problem statement

Sport events tourism has received attention around the global spectrum as an image maker. For example, the Wimbledon Tennis Tournament in England, has been around for a number of decades on the global tennis space and it has developed into a renowned and prominent sporting event that attracts many millions either on television or at the actual tournament. The same could be argued about the Olympic Games and other global sports events. In the context of South Africa, the 2002/2003 Cricket World Cup and 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup branded South Africa and provided a great impetus to its tourism offerings. South Africa as a destination, has to an extent demonstrated its capacity and capability to host sport events and attract tourists. Furthermore, destinations such as Durban have developed a positive image through hosting events such as the Vodacom Durban July horse race, while, in Johannesburg the Sansui Summer Cup is held on an annual basis in an endeavor to promote the destination. In Cape Town, the Cape Town Met is also held to boost events tourism demand and the Comrades Marathon has long been associated with Durban. The growth of such sporting events attracts media attention, results in influxes of tourists, growth of revenue and repeats of visitor numbers and creates a positive image for destinations. Furthermore, the literature suggests that there is a paucity of research in South Africa that focuses on utilising sport events to promote local destinations.

Purpose of the study

There is dearth of research that addresses the impacts of sport events tourism in East London as a developing destination. The Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality is a host destination to an internationally accredited marathon, but there is no evidence of the number of tourists and benefits accruing from hosting this famous event. The purpose of this study is to understand how the Legends Marathons creates a positive image for a developing



destination such as East London. Therefore, this study seeks to ascertain how sporting events can be used as catalysts to promote the image of destinations.

Literature review

Events tourism has demonstrated a significant growth over the years in both developing and developed countries. Nowadays, events are utilised as catalysts to develop and market host destinations. Therefore, the image of the host destination can improve and this can potentially lead to an influx of tourists to the host destination. Sporting events benefit destinations in various ways such as the infrastructural developments, foreign investment and foreign exchange, which leads to entrepreneurial opportunities.

Events tourism feature prominently in the development and marketing plans of the tourism agencies in different destinations. Events are well documented for their role in creating attractiveness to attract visitor spending. Leiper (2014) outlines the importance of events tourism in promoting regions using a three geographical elements model: wherein the tourist will travel to the generating region, tourist destination region and transit route region. This model forms a bed-rock in which destinations approach their strategies to promote their tourist offerings. Consequently, events tourism acts as a pull factor to attract visitors to destinations.

Connell, Page and Meyer (2015) juxtapose the similarities that can be found regarding the event and a tourist's expectations. Through hosting an event destinations are able address issues of seasonality and low demand of tourism offerings. Therefore, events are planned in such a way that they address the needs of a destination as well as the local communities and tourists. Moreover, taking into consideration the triple bottom line: social, to cultural, economic, environmental or political is important The benefits of these positive connections form motivation for the popularity and support of events (Mxunyelwa, 2014).

The FIFA Soccer World Cup is one example that illustrates the benefits such as infrastructure development, which are created by sport events. The event was held in South Africa in 2010 and much effort was put into developing the infrastructure which created some positive benefits for the country. These impacts varied from region to region, as the event was staged in different provinces of the county (Brand South Africa, 2010).

Sport tourism is an inclusive phenomenon that has existed for decades. Valek, Shaw and Bednarik (2014) point out that sport has always been an important part of society which has globally emerge and is become an essential part of the economy. Furthermore, through the recognition of tourism it has become a vast international business attracting media coverage, investment, political interest, traveling participants and audiences.

Keyser (2002) asserts that sport tourism is an important growth area for South Africa, and many key requirements are in existence for sport tourism. Gibson (1998) suggests that competition among destinations has helped to put a focus on sport tourism. Furthermore, there is another much published benefit of hosting sports tourism events in that they may promote tourism beyond the event itself. For instance, participants of the event may return for a vacation, and the people who have accompanied the participant will use other amenities in the destination (shops, accommodation and transport) or may decide to visit the destination later, and economic benefits generated by the host destination can never be underrated.

By comparison to other provinces in the country, such as for example the Western Cape, Gauteng, and KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape Province currently receives few international tourists. The Eastern Cape (2010) outlines in its Eastern Cape Tourism Master Plan of 2009-2013 that in order to change such statistics the development and use of niche tourism products such as sport events tourism is vital for any tourism growing venture to succeed.



Established in commemoration of the Bisho Massacre, and as a tribute to struggle heroes of the Eastern Cape, the Legends Marathon is one of South Africa's most renowned ultra-marathons that takes place yearly in different parts of the BCMM; attracts athletes from around the world, and boasts a participation of more than 14, 000 runners. The Marathon is named appropriately to celebrate the legendary spirit of the people of the Eastern Cape and its legends. It thus celebrates the Eastern Cape, its people, physical spaces and spiritual beacons, identified by the people themselves; amongst them the world's foremost recent legend, Nelson Mandela, and many others. The Eastern Cape government has undertaken a very important step of repositioning the province in its branding, as the "Home of Legends".

The inaugural Legends Marathon route extends from Bisho Stadium to East London, covering a distance of 68 km. The marathon is staggered into three categories ensuring broad participation and multiple exit points exist for different abilities of runners: 68 km; 21,1 km, 10 km and 5 km.

Methodology

To examine the phenomenon of sport events tourism in the Eastern Cape adequately a mixed methodological approach was used in which both qualitative and quantitative research was deemed appropriate for this study. Purposive sampling was carried out in East London. Multiple-choice, close-ended and open-ended questions were all used as part of a questionnaire. The instrument was piloted for internal validity and reliability. To ensure the validity of data acquired in the study, a pilot study was conducted. Similarly, reliability was achieved by having the questionnaire critically reviewed and pre-tested. There was additionally training and supervising of the fieldworkers.

Results and discussion

The findings of the study have indicated the lack of coordination between local and government marketing and the stakeholders of the Legends as it is a privately owned event partly using local/provincially owned resources. This creates a lack of infrastructure development (at the Jan Smuts stadium), which is the end point of the race. Lastly, advertising for the event is poor. The researcher thus recommends that ECPTA put more effort in advertising the Marathon as it is an internationally accredited event through the use of billboards, flyers and sporting outlets. As Baade and Matheson (2004) point out, sport tourism as one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism sector. In addition, the findings also indicated the growth of road running in East London and the coordination by, and participation of some of the stakeholders in such sporting events.

Educational qualification of the respondents

Table 1. Respondents highest educational qualification obtained.

Respondents highest educational qualification obtained (n=22)	
Highest educational qualification	Total (in %)
Grade 10 or lower	5
Grade 12 or Matriculation	5
National Diploma (3 year qualification)	41
Degree (3 or 4 year qualification)	23
Post-graduate	18
Other educational qualification	9

Table 1 depicts that 41% of the respondents had obtained a National Diploma, followed by a 23% with a degree, and 18% with a post-graduate qualification. A further 9% of the

respondents obtained other educational qualifications and the smallest percentage had obtained Grade 10 or lower, and 5% Grade 12. Generally, respondents were educated. Therefore, the results demonstrate that education can potentially influence the population's perception regarding sport event tourism in the context of Eastern Cape.

Figure 1. Level of understanding of sport tourism events

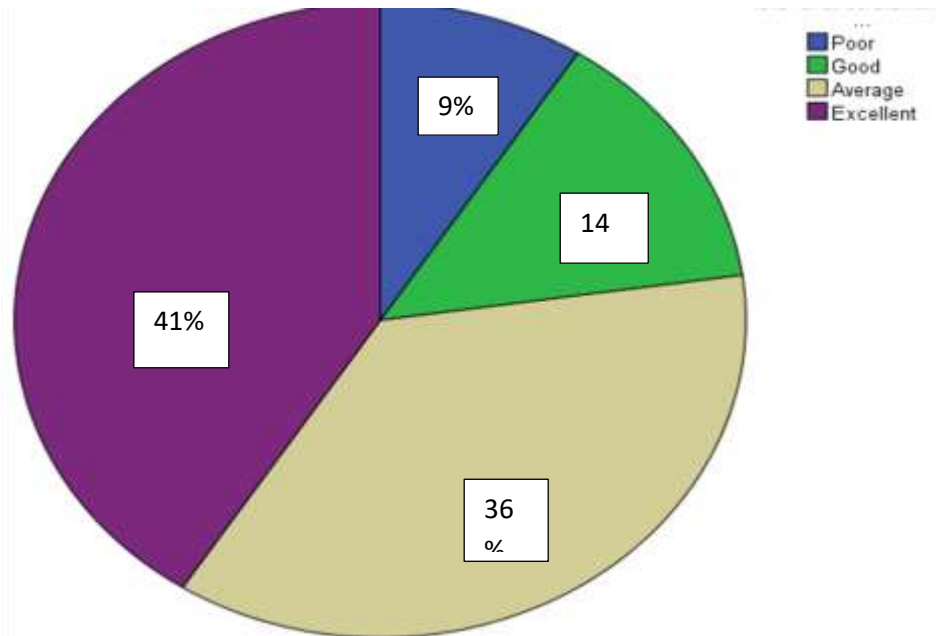


Figure 1 depicts that the respondents level of understanding of sport tourism events with 41% of the respondents have an excellent understanding of sport tourism events. However, 36% demonstrated that their understanding was average, on the other hand 14% had good understanding and 9% showed poor understanding. This can be attributed to the fact that the majority of the respondents were from the sport and meetings, incentives, conferences and events (MICE) sector and were sport fanatics, thereby making it easier for them to comprehend sport event phenomena. Furthermore, the study shows that respondents enjoy sport events tourism product offering.

Figure 2. Legends Marathon creating opportunity for the host destination

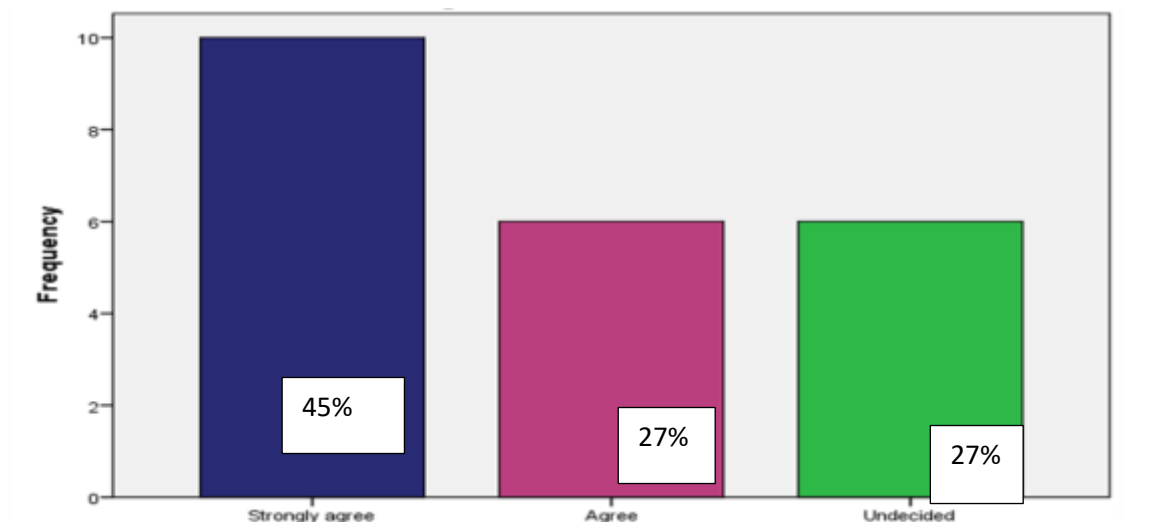




Figure 2 underscores that the 45% respondents strongly agree that the Legends Marathon is creating opportunities for East London as a destination. There was 27% cohort of respondents who agreed and another 27% who were undecided. This can be attributed to the fact that East London is reaping benefits from hosting the Legends Marathon through employment. Equally the development of BCMM and surrounding communities can be realized through events tourism.

Table 2. Respondents' role in sport events tourism hosted in East London

Role in sport tourism events that are hosted in East London	
Involvement in sport tourism events	Total (n=21, in %)
Organiser	33
Participant/Spectator	14
Volunteer	
Sponsor	9
Employee	9
Not involved	29

The respondents' role in sport tourism events that are hosted in East London is shown in table 2. The results indicate that 33% of the respondents are organisers, followed by 29% who are not involved, and 14% of respondents who are as participants/spectators. Furthermore, a 9% of respondents are sponsors and another 9% employees, whilst 5% of respondents were classified as 'other'. This denotes the growth of sport events in East London.

Recommendations

The researcher recommends that the stakeholders involved in the Legends Marathon should not only be involved in the planning or management. It is envisaged that through attending such events the planners will comprehend tourism value and investment opportunities that can occur at a host destination. This will ensure monitoring the improvements and changes that are required to be implemented. Secondly Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality (BCMM) should be on board as part of the stakeholders which will enhance the promotion of the Legends Marathon and assist in providing facilities for the event as the local government. As such, the planning and promotion of these events must form an integral part of the Municipality's Integrated Development Plan (IDP) in order to address the Local Economic Development priorities within Buffalo City. In this context, the event planning companies with various government spheres must prioritise the needs of the tourists and the community respectively. Gursoy, (2006) avers, that event planners ought to ensure that the host destination delivers an event that reflects an authentic ambience.

This paper recommends that an integrated approach is required between relevant stakeholders in order to achieve the strategic objectives and goals of events tourism. These objectives relate to the aspects of the triple bottom line. For example, fostering business relationships, investment and employment opportunities are important for destination development. This will ensure that the benefits accrued through hosting of events will impact positively on all relevant stakeholders. The researcher recommends that the event planners must ensure that the authenticity within the African context is maintained through these events. This will ensure an ongoing strategy of creating a competitive edge for the host destinations. The researcher further postulates that events must be utilised as a strategy to



combat the triple threat challenge that engulfs the Eastern Cape Province, where unemployment, poverty and inequality still persistent for the local people.

Furthermore, the findings of the study have indicated that there is a lack of coordination between local and government marketing and the stakeholders of the Legends as it is a privately owned event partly using local/provincially owned resources. As Baade and Matheson (2004) point out, sport tourism is one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry and thus requires nurturing. In addition, the findings also indicated the growth of road running in East London and the coordination with and participation by, some of the stakeholders in such sporting events

Conclusion

The results indicate that sport events tourism plays a vital role in creating a positive image for a destination and that the Legends Marathon shapes the image of East London, with respondents who strongly agree that sport events tourism can be used as a catalyst to promote a destination. The findings also show that respondents strongly agree that the Legends Marathon is creating opportunities for East London to be recognised as a destination, and that the Legends Marathon attracts more tourists in East London, resulting in an increase in tourist expenditure. The results show that the Legends Marathon is in a position to create a favourable image for East London as a desired destination. Against this background, developing destinations must enhance their marketing strategies in order to attract wider markets to attend their events in order to unlock economic opportunities. Events are thus well poised to be catalysts to create positive images for host destinations. Thus developing destinations such as Buffalo City is critical and the city can ill-afford to miss such opportunities as they play a significant role in placing the destination on the global tourism map. The organisers of the event should strive to get greater the buy-in from the local community so as to ensure a more successful hosting of the event. Thus community consultation and participation is essential for success.

If the impacts of the event are not understood and viewed as detrimental rather than productive for the local community, support will diminish. Thus the marathon organisers should analyse the impacts of the event on the adjacent communities (Fredline et al., 2006). East London as a potentially good tourist destination lacks international exposure of its tourism offerings and the lack of stakeholder collaboration and participation. Therefore, the events tourism planners in East London need to take advantage of their geographical location and use it as an opportunity for improving tourism and diversifying it as well as tourism product packages. This could be achieved by adding the aspects that reflect cultural and heritage elements at the said event. Finally, the findings of this study resonate with the priorities of South Africa's aspirations of hosting events to promote the country as an investment destination of choice.

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