

Indianapolis Event Tourism: Culture and sport perspectives

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Abstract

Cities rely on urban tourism for economic regeneration and strategic development (Ioannides & Peterson, 2003; Law, 2002; Rogerson, 2004). Depending on how it is calculated, tourism is Indianapolis's third- or fourth-largest industry, with an estimated economic impact of about \$3.56 billion a year. Cultural and sports activities that are attractive to special event attendees include: sports events, festivals or fairs, group tours, trade shows, and cultural attractions, such as museums, plays, concerts, etc. The purpose of the study was to investigate Indianapolis residents' perceptions of the importance of event tourism, via culture and sports, and their willingness to sustain each segment using public financing. A total of 16 urban cultural tourism development attributes and 16 sports tourism development attributes were adapted from a study by Wang, Fu, Cecil, and Hji-Avgoustis (2008). The 16 items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Data was collected in September 2010 via convenience sampling in eight pre-selected locations in Indianapolis. Several sports and cultural events such as the Irish festival and a canoe regatta had been held in those locations. A total of 380 surveys were used for analysis. This is a case study and the generalizability of the findings is limited.

Based on the paired sample t-tests, residents' perceptions about sports tourism vs cultural tourism were significantly different on 13 of the 16 items. The biggest discrepancies of mean ratings were found in pair 1 (accomplishment awareness), pair 10 (related offerings awareness), pair 2 (city plans awareness) and pair 3 (potential to succeed). For these four pairs, sport items were more positively perceived than cultural items. There was moderate correlation between 'accomplishment awareness' and 'potential to succeed', 'accomplishment awareness' and 'positive image creation', and 'accomplishment awareness' and 'good for economy' in terms of both cultural tourism and sport tourism. The results indicate that more accomplishments achieved by the city, either in cultural tourism or sport tourism, may more likely make residents feel and acknowledge the importance and benefit of cultural tourism and sport tourism development and thus become more positive in supporting tourism or sport-related initiatives. As for city event tourism planners, one important task may be to make known to the public every achievement made in the areas of cultural and sports tourism. Coccossis (2009) described a qualitative shift in tourist demand where education, culture and activities which engage the visitor in local events and lifestyle are gaining importance. Hence in planning for the future, Indianapolis could pre-emptively provide a relatively richer diversity of cultural offerings in comparison to sports offerings, to carve a competitive edge to meet the evolving demands of visitor experiences.

Keywords: tourism, sport, culture, events, development

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