Presentation

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Analysing Environmentally Sustainable Management in the Flemish Sports Events Sector.

INFORMATION

Aim and research interest

Limited research is available on the environmental management of grassroots sports events if compared to mega sports events (Jiménez-García, 2020). To fill a part of this current gap in literature, the aim of this study is to scrutinize the managerial approach of sports event organisers in Flanders (Belgium) towards environmental sustainability. As it is assumed that sports organisers do not consciously implement environmental initiatives in their event management. Therefore, the research objectives are to analyse the integration of environmental sustainability in the operational procedures and to create benchmarks regarding the implementation of environmental initiatives in the sports events sector in Flanders.

Theoretical background and literature review

The popularity of sports events, especially running events, has been increasing throughout the years (Scheerder et al., 2015). The same is true for the social importance of environmental sustainability, as can be seen by the more than 100 youth climate strikes that were held worldwide in 2019 alone (Ramzy, 2019). The United Nations was one of the organisations that established a connection between the two subjects when they introduced the Sustainable Development Goals. The official report clearly mentions the importance of sports as an enabler to achieve a more sustainable and environmentally friendly future (UN, 2015). However, sports events often have an underestimated negative impact on the environment. The European Commission addressed this matter and declared that sports event organisers should promote environmentally sound management and adopt objectives in order to make events more sustainable (EC, 2007). Nevertheless, Sotiriadou and Hill (2015) conclude in their review that advances in the field remains slow and more comprehensive research is needed to encourage changes in behaviour of sports event managers and consumers. Therefore, empirical research that quantifies, reports and promotes the sustainability of sports events would be of great academic value (Jiménez-García, 2020).

Research design, methodology and data analysis

In the present study we concentrate on empirically analysing six grassroots sports events in Flanders. More precisely, we look at the three most popular Flemish sports, i.e. running, walking and cycling, completed with a team sport, a duo sport and a single practice sport, i.e. football, tennis and triathlon. The specific events have been selected based on a definition, in which “accessible for all” was one of the main requirements. Special attention is paid to an even distribution in geographical location and type of organisation, i.e. market-oriented organisation, civil society organisation and government organisation, when selecting the events. In the study, a mixed-method approach is used to diminish possible methodological pitfalls. Thereby, data is collected by means of a self-evaluation and a content analysis. The self-evaluation consists of items related to environmental sustainability that are a part of the Flemish Panel of Sporting Events survey (FPSE). The FPSE survey is addressed to 832 event organisers that will continuously be contacted in the following years with subsequent surveys. The second part of the data collection is an extensive content analysis of the respective events’ websites. The sustainable development goals form the foundation for both parts of the research, since the goals were mirrored from “The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” and adapted to the sports events sector (UN, 2015). Extra questions were added in the self-evaluation part, with a particular focus on environmental sustainability. The survey has been sent out 26 May 2020 and is available online for the following four weeks, a reminder will be sent after two and three