

BEYOND ANECDOTES: THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL THROUGH INTER-COMMUNITY SPORT EVENTS

*Nico Schulenkorf, Alana Thomson and Katie Schlenker
University of Technology, Sydney*

Abstract

Sport events are believed to promote dialogue, integration and peaceful understanding among groups, even when other forms of negotiation have not been successful (Croft, 2005; Sugden, 2006). At the same time, sport events are thought to play a role in the construction, reproduction or consolidation of social identities in politically, socially or ethnically divided societies. Better publicised events, such as the Olympics, may demonstrate this social utility of sport, where diverse communities stand and feel together *as one*. However, the social outcomes from sport events are largely anecdotal. This paper argues that for disparate communities to experience lasting benefits from sport events there is the need to move beyond symbolism and anecdotes. There is a need to examine the active engagement of groups with ‘others’ in participatory sport event projects where they experience first hand the impacts of cooperation and diversity (Auld & Case, 1997; Chalip, 2006b).

This paper discusses the potential of an inter-community sport event in contributing to intergroup development and the building of social capital in the ethnically divided Sri Lanka. It follows an interpretivist mode of inquiry, and findings are derived from the analysis of two focus groups and 35 in-depth interviews with Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim and international event stakeholders. The paper provides empirical evidence of impacts that influence the stock of social capital available to communities, and it discusses the perceived change in intergroup relations resulting from people’s involvement in the event. In the future communities and event organisers need to identify strategies for sustaining and leveraging positive event impacts, to achieve lasting social outcomes for participants and the wider community.

Keywords:

Sport Events, Community Participation, Intergroup Relations, Social Capital, Strategic Management

INTRODUCTION

People from all over the world love to play, attend, watch, listen to, talk about, experience and even *feel* sport at any level of performance. Local community sport events are attended by friends and family week after week and national and international sporting competitions such as World Cups allow fans to follow sport teams all around the globe to loyally support ‘their’ squad. At the 2006 Football World Cup, for example, tens of thousands of Australian and Japanese supporters travelled for up to 30 hours to cheer on their teams in Germany. Apart from the usual rivalries, it was reported that fans of different nations celebrated together; before, during and after the matches (Ohmann, Jones, & Wilkes, 2006; Smith-Spark, 2006). For such reasons, sport has been described as a language which all people in the world

speak and understand and in turn, has the ability to emotionally combine and unite groups (Dyreson, 2003).

Better publicised sport events, such as World Cups or the Olympic Games, have demonstrated this social power of sport. For example, North and South Korea marching under one flag at the 2000 Sydney Olympics; or Cathy Freeman's symbolic lighting of the Olympic torch, represent diverse communities standing and feeling together *as one*. However, the social outcomes from such symbolic demonstrations are largely anecdotal. It is argued that for disparate communities to experience lasting benefits from sport events there is the need to move beyond symbolism and anecdotes. Active participation with 'others' is needed to experience first hand the power of sport and sport events to contribute to social development (Coalter, 2007; Schulenkorf, 2008; Sugden, 2006). This paper provides an empirical investigation of an inter-community sport event as a strategic tool for reducing social barriers and creating social capital. The findings of this research will assist governments, policymakers and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in advancing policies and practical measures that build on sport events as vehicles for reconciliation and community development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents a review of the relevant literature underpinning this study. First, the potential of sport to unite and act as a positive force for inter-community development is presented. Second, an alternative perspective is offered, which highlights potential negative outcomes that sports can have for communities. Third, the link between sports, active participation and social capital building is presented.

Positive outcomes of sport

In 1896, Baron Pierre de Coubertin established the Modern Olympics with the belief that sport events brought people together, and in doing so contributed to a better understanding between peoples and nations (Bannister, 1981; Müller & Gerling, 2006). The universal appeal of sports has also been thought to play a role in the construction, reproduction and/or consolidation of social identities in politically, socially or ethnically divided societies, even when other forms of negotiation have not been successful (Croft, 2005; Sugden, 2006). For this reason, governments all over the world have used sport events to capitalise on the pride and unity often generated, to create or advance a shared sense of national purpose, pride and identity (Chalip, 2006a; John Hargreaves, 2000; Jarvie, 2003; Nauright, 1997; Vinoker, 1988).

Anecdotal discussions highlight the interconnection between politics and sport events in regards to: the building of nationalism and national consciousness; the creation of national identity and patriotism; and the process of reconciliation (Jarvie, 2003; Maguire, 2002). The building of nationalism, for example, is illustrated by the 1936 Nazi-Olympics in Berlin, which the Hitler regime intended to use as a medium to showcase the Arian race and the Germanic nations as the dominant power. The use of sport events in creating national identity and patriotism is reflected in the 1980s policy of the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, which was "One Can

Not Play Normal Sport in an Abnormal Society”. When the apartheid regime had finally come to an end, President Mandela argued that sport had become part of the new glue that held the nation together (Jarvie, 2003; Jarvie & Reid, 1999). Later, in 1995, Mandela wore a Springbok cap and shirt following the country’s victory in the Rugby World Cup, and symbolically demonstrated the need for the new ‘Rainbow Nation’ to work together and respect each other (Maguire, 2002).

There are further examples that illustrate the potential for sport to assist in overcoming political antagonisms. For example, the so-called ‘ping-pong-diplomacy’ used by US President Nixon to establish positive contact with the political rival China; and later the jointly hosted 2002 Football World Cup that symbolically combined Japan and its former enemy Korea. Finally, anecdotal evidence from Spain suggests that the success of the national football team at the 2008 European Championships united the divided country more than any other sport events since the end of the Franco era in 1975 (Klinger, 2008). Catalans, Basques, Galicians and Spaniards were able to celebrate together and finally found a new ‘Us-Feeling’ that bridged group differences across the boundaries of ethnic, religious, cultural and socio-economic status.

These anecdotes suggest that sport events are able to promote dialogue, integration and peaceful understanding amongst groups. However, empirical evidence that does exist stems from research on sport programs in the developing world. Sport programs are considered as regularly scheduled activities over a certain length of time, differentiated to sport events which are less regular, short-term intensive activities lasting only a few days (Skinner, Zakus, & Cowell, 2008). In terms of sport programming, different ‘melting pot development’ programs have proven to be successful in also promoting longer term cross-cultural understanding and ‘normalising’ in deeply divided societies such as: Israel (Stidder & Haasner, 2007; Sugden, 2006); Bosnia / Herzegovina (Gasser & Levinsen, 2004, 2006); Sierra Leone (Lea-Howarth, 2006); Liberia (Armstrong, 2004); South Africa (Guelke & Sugden, 2000; Höglund & Sundberg, 2008); and Northern Ireland (Bairner & Darby, 2000; Sugden, 1991). In these examples it has been shown that regularly scheduled sport activities can contribute to people regaining step by step a sense of security and confidence when approaching new people, groups, and even politically opposed communities. Active involvement and participation in sports can further lead to skill development, cultural learning and overall community empowerment (Lawson, 2005; Skinner *et al.*, 2008). Yet, there is currently little empirical evidence to support the claim that sport events can be used as vehicles to facilitate the advancement of intergroup relations and the creation of social capital (Chalip, 2006b; Kellett, Hede, & Chalip, 2008).

Negative outcomes of sport

While both anecdotal and empirical evidence suggests that the involvement and participation in sport based activities can lead to positive social, cultural and psychological development, there is also a body of literature that highlights the potential negative outcomes of sport (Armstrong & Giulianotti, 2001; Dimeo, 2001; Hall, Selwood, & McKewon, 1995; Higham, 1999; Kelly, 1993; Sack & Suster, 2000;

Xiao & Smith, 2004). Negative outcomes arise as a result of several inherent characteristics of sport that reflect the dynamics of broader society, which need to be considered by organisers and communities during the planning and management of inter-community sport events (Jennifer Hargreaves, 2000).

First, it is suggested that the competitive nature and rivalry at sport events, with an emphasis on winners and losers (Jennifer Hargreaves, 2000; Torkildsen, 2000), may lead to negative social impacts such as hooliganism, vandalism or stampedes (Bishop & Jaworski, 2003; Griggs, 2004; Sack & Suster, 2000; Soutar & McLeod, 1993). Second, several authors have identified an increase in anti-social behaviour, criminal activity, violence and arrests during the period of sport events (Armstrong & Giulianotti, 2001; Hall *et al.*, 1995; Higham, 1999; Kelly, 1993; Sack & Suster, 2000; Xiao & Smith, 2004). Anti-social behaviour may lead to a reiteration or re-emergence of historical and prejudicial stereotypes (Dimeo & Kay, 2004), which are capable of worsening intergroup relations (Dimeo, 2001; Hay, 2001). Thomas and Dyal (1999) argue that sport performances are often interpreted by those who watch or participate in them, in ways that dramatise ongoing cultural and political issues.

For these reasons, professional spectator sport events are considered an ineffective means for establishing or re-building any lasting sense of community. The potential for negative outcomes may unintentionally serve as a platform for worsening intergroup relations and contribute to a divide between sportspeople, residents and interest groups (Jennifer Hargreaves, 2000; Ingham & McDonald, 2003; Smith & Ingham, 2003; Thomson, 2007; Torkildsen, 2000).

Active Participation and Social Capital

In order to utilise sport events as vehicles for reconciliation and intercultural togetherness, they should build on active community participation (Atkinson, 1991; Brown, Brown, Jackson, Sellers, & Manuel, 2003; Schulenkorf, 2008; United Nations, 2006). The United Nations define community participation as “the creation of opportunities to enable all members of a community and the larger society to actively contribute to and influence the development process and to share equitably in the fruits of development” (cited in Midgley, 1986, p. 24). Fundamental to the ideal of community participation is an emphasis on development which is initiated within communities, taking a bottom-up approach and therefore incorporating a relevance to communities (Cameron & MacDougall, 2000; Getz & Frisby, 1988; Kelly, 2002; Quinn, 1999; Reid, 2006). This approach has a greater likelihood of providing an innate sense of cultural relevance, self-determination, sense of belonging for the participants and better achievement of outcomes (Atkinson, 1991; Thomson, 2007).

Recently, research has suggested that sport events and sport development projects can have an impact on the stock of social capital available to communities (Misener & Mason, 2006; Nicholson & Hoyer, 2008; Skinner *et al.*, 2008). Social capital is defined by Baum and his colleagues (cited in Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002, p. 3) as “the building of healthy communities through collective, mutually beneficial interactions and accomplishments, particularly those demonstrated through social and civic participation.” The central elements for social capital are trust, networks and

reciprocity (Putnam, 1993, 2000, 2003), which are considered as “the oil that lubricates social processes” towards social development (Kilpatrick (1999, p. 123).

Trust is described as “the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest and cooperative behaviour, based on commonly shared norms, on the part of other members of that community” (Fukuyama, 1995, p. 26). In intergroup settings, particularly when cultural elements and differing norms and values are involved, trust serves as the foundation for meaningful communications and understanding. According to Putnam (1993; 2000; 2003), three types of trust are important for the creation of social capital: personalised trust, generalised trust and institutionalised trust. Personalised trust describes experiences on an individual level; this is referred to as ‘bonding’ with well-known people. Generalised trust expands to other groups at an event and is referred to as the ‘bridging’ element of social capital. Institutionalised trust links to the confidence in external parties involved in the organising of sport events, which is referred to as ‘linking’ social capital (Woolcock, 2001).

Once trust is built, social networks can be created. Networks are the voluntary interlocking of relationships between individuals and groups, and include newly established or fostered contacts, ties, group attachment, or friendship circles. According to Stone (2001), networks are the ‘structural’ elements of social capital. Through participation at sport events, people have the opportunity to build networks on both the personal and professional levels. From within these networks a process of exchange occurs, and those interactions are referred to as reciprocity (Stone, 2001). Putnam (2000, p. 20) explains the concept as “I’ll do this for you now, in the expectations that you (or perhaps someone else) will return the favour”. Reciprocal acts facilitate access to resources at an individual and collective level, and within a social network. For instance, at a sport event people can gain access to physical resources by borrowing from each other or receiving equipment from friends or colleagues.

While participation in sports has long been considered to build character, teach values, encourage healthy competition and promote intergroup friendship, there is little empirical evidence of inter-community sport events and their wider social role (Chalip, 2006b). Therefore, this study answers a call for evidence on the effectiveness of sport events in facilitating social capital. The study empirically examines participation at an inter-community sport event and whether this can contribute to breaking down social barriers and creating social capital between disparate groups. Using Sri Lanka as a case study, people’s social and cultural experiences from partaking in the ‘1st International Run for Peace’ are analysed and discussed.

METHOD

Context and Setting

Intergroup relations within multi-ethnic Sri Lanka have been fraught with difficulties for several decades. The country’s Tamil minority has been anxious with the country’s unitary form of government, believing that the Sinhalese majority would abuse Tamil rights (Dunung, 1995). In the 1970s the Tamils began to rebel for their

religious and cultural identity and started to seek an independent state *Tamil Eelam* by force. Under the leadership of Velupillai Prabhakaran the *Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam* (LTTE or Tamil Tigers) were formed to fight for self sovereignty in the northeastern regions of Sri Lanka, which are considered the areas of traditional Tamil settlement. Seeing themselves as the acting representative of the Tamil people, the LTTE's violent demands culminated in a civil war that lasted from 1983 – 2002 and resulted in over 70,000 deaths (Bilger, 2006). In northeastern Sri Lanka, the Tigers managed to establish a de facto state with its own military, police, schools, laws and courts. In 2002, the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE finally agreed to commit to a peace process. While the LTTE withdrew from active peace talks after six rounds in April 2003, a cease-fire agreement remained in place until January 2008, when Sri Lanka returned to open civil war.

Against the background of a deeply divided society, research for this study was conducted in western Sri Lanka from January until April 2007. At that point in time, the LTTE controlled 15% of the island and claimed another 20% as their traditional homeland. Intergroup relations among Sri Lanka's ethnic groups were deeply shattered and opportunities for positive intergroup contact were scarce.

The event

In an attempt to contribute to positive contact, appeasement and reconciliation between ethnic groups on a community level, the NGO *Asian German Sports Exchange Programme* (A.G.S.E.P.) has been organising inter-community sport events under a 'Games for Peace' theme since 2002. These sport events bring Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim and international sportspeople together in a leisure environment free of socio-political constraints, and therefore conducive to building social capital. With the help of the communities and international volunteers, A.G.S.E.P.'s vision is "to contribute to the re-establishment of peace in Sri Lanka", with a mission to "popularise social values such as respect, courage and commitment through sport events" (A.G.S.E.P. Website, 2008).

This study focuses on the social and cultural event experiences resulting from people's involvement at the 1st International Run for Peace (IR4P), held on the 1st October 2006 in Sri Lanka's capital Colombo. The IR4P followed an earlier A.G.S.E.P. initiative, the National Run for Peace (NR4P) staged in 2004. The NR4P focused at a domestic level, bringing together the different ethnic communities from 12 Sri Lankan districts to run from their home towns to reach the Bogambara stadium in the centrally located city of Kandy. The IR4P took an international focus. The communities were in charge of the design and the marketing of the event to their respective groups, while A.G.S.E.P. arranged official approval and support from the Government and Sport Councils, provided the transport for participants from rural areas, and organised event experts and social workers for conducting and supervising the event. Security personnel and medical staff from the local community hospital were also volunteering and present on site.

The IR4P provided a day of celebration, spectacle and colour for 800 national and international participants and several thousand spectators. The IR4P featured three

categories. First, a competitive 21 kilometre half-marathon was staged for both male and female athletes. Second, a 'mini marathon' of ten kilometres was offered to participants and sports groups who wanted to get some physical activity. Third, a symbolic 'peace move' of five kilometres was also offered to encourage participation by people of different fitness levels and age groups, who wanted to support the event theme of peace.

One of the unique features of this sport event was the participation and spectating across age, gender, social class and ethnic/national background. The run started at Colombo's Independence Square and passed through three city districts of very different socio-economic status: the upper-class Colombo 7 quarter; the slums of Maradana; and the middle class Kolpitiya district. The run finished at the Colombo Race Course Grounds, where a multicultural music festival was conducted as part of the after-event celebrations. In an awards ceremony, groups were awarded for their valued participation, performance, social contribution and personal commitment, rather than identifying winners and losers. This was in line with A.G.S.E.P's 'no-one loses' philosophy, which put a focus on the social and integrative character of the sport event with its supporting cultural performances, rather than on the actual result of the sport events.

Research Design

This research is of a qualitative nature, underpinned by an interpretive mode of inquiry. The interpretive approach acknowledges the social construction of reality (Crotty, 1998; Glesne, 1999; Neuman, 2003), and the inductive analysis of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). According to Myers (1997), interpretive studies aim to understand the context of a phenomenon through the meanings that people assign to it. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to find out in detail, about people's sport event experiences. This method was chosen because according to Hoepfl (1997), in-depth interviews are the most promising method to find out the 'real' about contemporary cases and phenomena. In line with the in-depth approach to research, *purposeful sampling* was applied, as it allows the researchers to specifically choose participants who suit their research subject best (Burnett & Uys, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1995; Neuman, 2003). The integration of voices from *all* groups that were impacted by the sport events can thus be ensured, which contributes to a holistic and realistic picture of the case.

Key individuals from the main sport event stakeholders and from the participating communities were identified for the initial round of interviews. These included community members, event organisers, participants, spectators, sponsors, media and government representatives. Further interview respondents were accessed through the use of snowball sampling. The combination of community representatives previously known by A.G.S.E.P. and the snowballing method resulted in the researchers getting access to a wide spectrum of interviewees, ranging from local fishermen to high profile Members of Parliament. In total, 35 semi-structured interviews (see Table 1) were conducted between January and April 2007. They ran for between 35 - 120 minutes each and included questions on the socio-cultural impacts experienced and/or witnessed at the IR4P event; on how the event impacted on people's social identities

and sense of belonging; and on how to sustain and grow positive event impacts for wider community benefit. In cases where the participants' English proficiency did not allow adequate responses, they were assisted by a local Sinhala and Tamil speaking interpreter. To guarantee a confidential yet personal presentation of findings, research participants were given pseudonyms.

Table 1: Overview of interview respondents

Event Stakeholder Type	Number	Ethnic Background
Event Organisers	5	3 European, 1 Sinh., 1 Tamil
Volunteers	4	3 European, 1 Muslim
Event Participants	4	3 Sinhalese, 1 European
Event Spectators	4	2 European, 1 Sinh., 1 Tamil
Sinhalese Community	5	5 Sinhalese
Tamil Community	2	2 Tamil
Muslim Community	2	2 Muslim
Government Ministries	2	2 Sinhalese
LTTE Official	1	1 Tamil
Sport Associations	2	2 Sinhalese
Aid Organisation	1	1 Sinhalese
Media	2	1 Sinhalese, 1 Muslim
Sponsor	1	1 Sinhalese
Total	35	17 Sinhalese, 5 Tamil, 4 Muslim, 9 European

The computer software used to support the analysis of findings was NVivo 7, which assisted the researchers in integrating, indexing and coding the large amount of qualitative data. During the data analysis process both free nodes and tree nodes were used. This resulted in a better understanding of relationships of the data and structures of emerging arguments, and allowed for the coding and reconceptualising of data into seven themes of experience.

FINDINGS

The socio-cultural experiences of participants in the IR4P were analysed using an inductive approach, from which emerged seven themes of experience. Of these, experiences under five themes contributed to positive social development and a reduction of ethnic barriers, while two were found to limit social development and impact negatively on intergroup relations (see Table 2 below).

Table 2: Socio-Cultural Experiences resulting from the IR4P sport event

Positive Socio-Cultural Experiences	Negative Socio-Cultural Experiences
Socialising	Inappropriate Behaviour
Trust	Managerial Issues
Reciprocity and Solidarity	
Contact and Networks	
Learning and Development	

The seven identified themes will be presented next, drawing on representative comments from interview respondents.

Positive Socio-Cultural Experiences

Socialising

The category of Socialising includes elements of fun and entertainment; inclusive interaction and shared experiences; and the pride of having actively and creatively contributed to development efforts.

Participation in the inter-community sport events resulted in fun and entertainment for sportspeople, spectators, event organisers and the local communities. Chulo, a local aid worker, reports that during the IR4P people along the course were “supporting, cheering, celebrating all the time”. The open and welcoming character of the sport event led to socialising opportunities around the sport event, for spectators and participants alike. An example of the relaxed social atmosphere among spectators and athletes was the spontaneous celebration of ‘The Mexican Wave’ at the end of the event. Kevin, a former staff member of the Ministry of Sports, praises this symbolic gesture, stating that “when they finished the race and started the wave, it was a good ceremony for the people”.

Shawn, a participant in the IR4P, describes the integrative cooperation and joint participation at the inter-community sport events as a valuable socio-cultural impact which led to positive long-term memories. He says: “You see even now – half a year after the event – people still wear their shirts with ‘Run for Peace’. So it is really something that they kept in their hearts and minds for a long time, because they still like to wear it and remember the day.” Shawn’s example shows that even months after the IR4P people were proud of their active contribution to the inter-community sport event and enjoyed remembering the peace run as a joint celebration of all Sri Lankan communities.

Trust

The category of Trust includes the elements of inter-community trust and confidence; increase in perceived safety; and increase in (intergroup) comfort levels. Comments made by respondents revealed that for the creation of trust, three elements are of central importance. First, the good reputation of the island-wide known event organiser A.G.S.E.P.; second, symbolic factors such as themes and logos; and third, the supportive nature of key stakeholders.

The acceptance and awareness of A.G.S.E.P. has been improving over the years, and its good reputation as an international yet locally grounded NGO in Sri Lanka has grown. Respondents agree that A.G.S.E.P. is perceived by communities as an event organiser that can be trusted. Kappa for example states that “with A.G.S.E.P. as a supporter or expert, people expect a better organised and better managed event of great quality. Simply because that name is on the board.” Another reason for

A.G.S.E.P.'s acceptance by all communities is their inclusive sport event campaign 'Games for Peace' and their politically neutral logo. Ranil states that A.G.S.E.P. decided to purposely use impartial slogans that focus solely on the impartial sport factor in intergroup relations:

Our logo says 'Connecting Sportspeople', which is a very neutral statement. It does not give any ideas or links towards any political affiliation or philosophical direction, we are just connecting sportspeople. There are a boy and a girl, another boy and a girl, and we try to put a ball in between them and try to make people interact through the medium of sport. And that's it.

A trustful organiser increases feelings of safety and comfort. According to media representative Andy, the supporting stakeholders also play a key role in creating feelings of confidence and safety among participants:

It was a very safe event! We took the security's advice and didn't have any problem. You get the fullest support from all the authorities, security, police, army and everything. And because of the fullest support it was a 100 percent secure event.

However, a safe and secure inter-community sport event does not automatically generate full trust among ethnic groups that have been engaged in civil war for over 25 years. Government representative Jayo explains that "there was some kind of a trust. I don't say it's 100%. ... That's why I said it's more or less a confidence building or trust building exercise."

Reciprocity and Solidarity

The category of Reciprocity and Solidarity includes elements of helpful intergroup cooperation, and physical as well as emotional support at the sport events. Feelings of intergroup camaraderie existed around the sport event, which became obvious through the many small gestures and signs of goodwill. Organiser Didi highlights:

The participants who came and took part in the IR4P, they came from drastically different ethnic backgrounds... We noticed that the support for example towards the poorer participants was shown by the more affluent, richer participants in the sense that they have also supported them with materials, with T-shirts, sometimes also with shoes. Because we had runners that didn't even have shoes!

While the generous sharing of sport equipment is an example of reciprocal support on the physical level, people also witnessed support on the emotional level. Participant Anu recalls that encouragement was given to the athletes by other participants or spectators throughout the race, as "people came out of their houses and shouted: 'Ah, run, you can do it!' And at working places they stopped their work and shouted, cheering up, running behind us with water ... so they were very helpful."

Other respondents highlight positive intergroup interaction and active support after the race, when the sportspeople came together, celebrated and relaxed at the finish line. Matt, a local attendee from Colombo, states that “irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds, people were given massages and physical treatment at the finish line”. Andy sums up that it was great to experience that “we [the Sinhalese] can get something from them, and they [the Tamils] can get something from us also!”

Contact and Networks

The category of Contacts and Networks includes elements of establishing and advancing individual contacts and friendships; increased intergroup contacts and bridging; and the establishment of business relationships.

The IR4P contributed to establishing individual contacts and friendships among participants, spectators and organisers. The interview respondents describe the sport event as an opportunity to get in touch with other people from their own ethnic group and with individuals from other ethnic backgrounds. Shanto, a member of the Sinhalese Nattandiya community reports that “after the Run for Peace I also met up with some new friends from MTV and Red Bull, from Lotteries Board and I am still friends with them. They are coming to our parties and they are good friends for always.” The sport event further offered “the chance to interact with foreigners from the US, Europe, Australia and other parts of Asia”, which represents an opportunity of extending contacts to the international level. On the other hand, international volunteer Mark reports that organising the sport event contributed to “forming new social relationships. I won a lot of contacts in Sri Lanka while working at this event. Actually, I won a lot of friends.”

In addition to the newly established intragroup and intergroup contacts, the IR4P allowed for professional contacts to be developed. Mark says that for individuals, particularly those from the organising committee, it was the chance to “make important business contacts with ... the Sri Lankan organisers, the Sri Lankan sponsors, the Sri Lankan people from the Ministries, [who] were all involved in the organising of the event”. Overall, contacts, friendships and networks were valued as a vital part in the intra- and inter-community development process: on the interpersonal, intragroup and intergroup level.

Learning and Development

The category of Learning and Development includes the development of specific sport and management skills; intercultural learning and the expansion of cultural perspectives. The IR4P allowed people to gain a better understanding of each other and to learn that togetherness is possible and indeed beneficial within the right social environment. Kevin from the Ministry of Sports believes that members of the local communities learnt valuable social skills, and gained professional knowledge from partaking in the planning, management and implementation phases. As he explains:

Learning means sometimes the organisation of the race. So different parts of the day: that the transport things are there, the food is there,

accommodation is there, the media part is there. So when someone organises this type of event, these things are to be considered. So actually we got a lot of outcome from this one event, regarding the things we must think of all the time. That's right. So myself and my officers also, they got a lot of experience from this race. So next time we are doing this, we have the knowledge.

Kevin's comment suggests that the local communities will benefit from the increase in knowledge when organising future activities and sport events.

Negative socio-cultural experiences

Inappropriate Behaviour

Respondents comments highlighted two examples of inappropriate social behaviour that were witnessed around the inter-community sport events. First, onlookers from the local community, who were not directly involved in the sport event, disturbed participants and were described as having 'wrong intentions'. Sinhalese IR4P participant Anu observed:

“I could see from their behaviour and the way that they were talking that they were not really for the program. Some were coming to see girls; some were coming just to laugh at the [participants].” (P2: 82-84)

Anu goes on to describe these spectators as “disturbing intruders”, who intimidated participants. This comment shows that open inter-community sport events contain risks of socially debatable or even inappropriate behaviour.

The second instance of socially inappropriate behaviour at the IR4P related to the welcome speeches given to the participants, spectators and organisers at the opening of the sport event. Sudu, a Sinhalese community member from Marawila, was not impressed with the style of the speech given by the Sinhalese chief guest, saying that “some words that he used to introduce these Muslim people were words that were really not matching. It wasn't only negative... I also felt that he was also not civilised, so not very polite.” Sudu's comment shows that she did not feel her community was being represented appropriately by the chief guest.

Managerial Issues

This category includes communication problems and management issues resulting in smaller than expected number of participants at the sport event and the after party.

Mark, a member of the IR4P organising team, argues that communication issues were prevailing in the lead-up phase of the sport event. The organising group became frustrated with certain stakeholders, who did not provide sufficient input and did not communicate properly and inclusively:

I wished that [the Ministry of Sports] would have told us more about their decisions and what they were thinking. When we had meetings with the Ministry we were basically always telling what we were thinking and how we would like to do that and they approved it or not. But they never really told us what they wanted to do with this event, what it meant to them. So that was in my eyes clearly a problem.

While Mark wished for more input and communiqué from the Sports Ministry, he also acknowledges that communication issues may have originated from uncertainty or a lack of understanding in the values and goals of the sport event. He goes on to say:

We thought they knew what we wanted to do with this event. But we didn't explain well enough what our goals and objectives were. [Probably] they saw it as just another sport event and did not put as much heart into it as we did.

Poor communication and cooperation between organisers and stakeholders in the lead-up phases of the sport event led to a decrease in overall registration numbers. Many people who had been involved in the 2004 National Run for Peace in Kandy “noticed that this year participation was low, which was a bit disappointing” and that valuable opportunities for maximising sport event benefits were lost. Marco on the other hand, believes that “transportation and logistical problems” explain the lower than expected participant numbers. He suggests that traveling to Colombo was a hindering factor particularly for the Tamil and Muslim communities from the northeastern parts of the island. Arguably, the 2004 in Kandy attracted more participants, as access for the Muslim and Tamil communities was easier and more comfortable, due to smaller travel distances and less Governmental restrictions.

Another managerial issue was mentioned by Shanto, who observed that fewer than expected local participants and spectators attended the sport event after party:

“There were a lot of people participating in the marathon, but after they were running, after they got their certificates and got their prizes, they vanished. Now this is not a complaint but a thing missing: only the A.G.S.E.P. staff and the Peace Village staff were at the music show. [We need better] organisation and planning to include ALL people. We must inform [everyone], and if they support the marathon, they should be at the party also, because it was for them!” (SC5: 107-113)

Shanto's comments do not explain the reasons as to why he believes local participation was low, but differences in socio-cultural values may have contributed to the disappointing attendance of locals at the after party. The organisers explained that modern western style attire, music and dancing was dominant, and that alcohol was readily available. These elements may have affected people's decision to attend the party.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this research was to empirically test whether an inter-community sport event in Sri Lanka could provide positive socio-cultural experiences on a practical level, while enhancing stocks of social capital between the Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim communities. Seven broad themes emerged from the study of the IR4P, representing both positive and negative socio-cultural experiences. The following discussion will outline first, how the IR4P made positive contributions to social capital stocks and the breakdown of social barriers between participating groups; and second, how negative outcomes decreased the stock of social capital and had negative impacts on intergroup relations.

The first five themes were seen to contribute to an increase in the stock of social capital and a reduction of social barriers, which plays a role in enhancing intergroup relations. First, the IR4P provided participants and their communities with important opportunities for **socialising**, as opposed to a passive spectator experience of elite performance and symbolic representations of social interaction. Socialising within and between groups was enabled through the active participation encouraged by A.G.S.E.P. through the sport event (Atkinson, 1991; Schulenkorf, 2008; United Nations, 2006). These active participatory opportunities reduced the distance between people and groups; further, they allowed people to share the experience of a sport event with others, contribute to the innovative idea of peace-building through sport events, and celebrate with newly made friends at the after-party.

Second, also contributing to a supportive environment to build social capital is the notion that the IR4P was identified as a neutral space for participation. The sport event was identified as a promising 'starting point' for the creation of trust and had an 'intrinsic power' for removing barriers between people, groups and institutions (see Brown *et al.*, 2003). Respondents argued that inter-personal, intergroup and organisational **trust** developed among people and groups at the sport event. The impartiality of A.G.S.E.P., the official support from all communities, police presence and the social peace theme contributed to feelings of safety, comfort and trust among participating groups. The neutrality component for sport events was outlined in the literature as an important opportunity to place diverse groups on a 'level playing field' where trust can develop. This study confirms this argument and findings link to the three types of trust Putnam (1993; 2000; 2003) claims are a central part of social capital: personalised trust, generalised trust and institutional trust. This suggests that inter-community sport events can contribute to both bonding and bridging social capital even among disparate communities.

A third element of social capital is **reciprocity** (Putnam, 1993, 2000; Stone, 2001), which was demonstrated in this study through the active engagement for physical and emotional support for others. The sport event encouraged people to help others in need, which shows that in a social environment encouraged by sport events, reciprocal exchanges and solidarity are possible even among members of disparate communities. On a physical level, some well-off people provided the poorer ones with sport equipment such as running shoes and clothing, while on an emotional level, participants were continuously encouraged and cheered by local residents during the

race in Colombo. These findings add to Yuen's (2005) results from her study on an international sport camp which showed that leisure activities can foster reciprocal support in social learning and skill development.

Fourth, the sport event facilitated **contact** within groups and opportunities to establish **networks** between groups. While the IR4P was not a major business or formal networking event members of the organising team benefited from improved business contacts and the creation of professional networks. New relationships were therefore formed on the intragroup, intergroup and institutional levels. This indicates that the sport event contributed to the bonding, bridging and linking elements indicative of social capital building (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock, 2001). It is argued that the active engagement of participants and organisers at the community level is what contributed to such an effective development of relationships and networks for social capital within an intensely short sport event life cycle. While previous studies have shown that events can establish contacts and networks within communities (Reid, 2006; Small, 2007), this study found that a leisure environment allows for networking even among members of groups that are engaged in a quasi civil war.

Fifth, **learning and development** plays a critical role in the inter-community sport event context and is considered to operate at two levels. First, cooperation between the communities and A.G.S.E.P. provided locals with opportunities to participate with and learn from others in a culturally diverse environment. Community members who were involved in the organisation and design of the sport events had the chance to expand their horizons, as they were able to learn management skills through working alongside A.G.S.E.P. Further, it was found that they had the opportunity to shape and develop the sport event program as a culturally diverse *team*, a learning process that built bridges between people and groups (see Auld & Case, 1997; Brown *et al.*, 2003). Respondents revealed that intercultural learning contributed to intergroup approximation, understanding and respect.

Whilst the five themes previously discussed have been shown to make positive contributions to social capital stocks and the break down of social barriers, it must also be recognised that inter-community sport events such as the IR4P have the potential to create negative outcomes for participating groups. The following section will discuss the two themes identified by participants that decreased the stock of social capital and had a negative impact on intergroup relations.

First, examples of **inappropriate behaviour** may arise inside and outside the sport event environments, for example by inapt manners shown by community members towards 'others' at the sport events. Respondents revealed that some people who were not directly involved in the sport event, made negative comments about the event organisers and active participants. This suggests that parts of the community did not accept the idea of inter-community celebration, or perhaps rejected the idea of a Western change agent organising sport events in Sri Lanka. In some cases, locals intimidated participants and spectators with words and gestures, which highlights the potential of a sport event to reduce the stock of social capital through eroding the

sense of safety, comfort and trust, which was considered so important to facilitating social capital building (Putnam, 1993, 2000).

Second, communication problems and cultural differences were identified as the main **managerial issues**. Respondents revealed that when interacting with people from ethnically different groups, a different interpretation of values occurred. In some instances, differences in showing respect towards 'others' and differences in enthusiasm for the peace theme of the IR4P led to disagreement and tension between groups. For example, the dedicated peace-activists were left frustrated with participants and stakeholders who focused predominantly on the physical sport aspect of the sport events. Furthermore, respondents observed that the after-party was dominated by international participants, volunteers and tourists, which left both the organisers and attendees disappointed. It was found that the timing and location of the sport event and after-party sites presented great challenges for the participating communities. As a consequence, many locals were unable or unwilling to participate in the sport event, which reduced opportunities to advance bonding and bridging social capital. This example highlights the importance of including the communities' voices in the strategic event management process to cater for local demands (see Getz & Frisby, 1988; Kelly, 2002).

CONCLUSION

Sport and sport events have been criticised for their lack of rigorous empirical evaluation and a reliance on subjective experiences and anecdotes suggesting that they can contribute to intergroup development and social cohesion (Chalip, 2006b; Lea-Howarth, 2006). Therefore, this paper presented an in-depth investigation of the '1st International Run for Peace' and its contribution to constructing dialogue and creating social capital between disparate communities in the ethnically divided Sri Lanka. It was found that the inter-community sport events provided a day of spectacle and colour for participants and attendees, which resulted in opportunities for socialising and intergroup celebration; an increase in trust; positive experiences of reciprocity and solidarity; opportunities to advance contacts and networks; and intercultural learning and development. These positive experiences contributed to an increase in the stock of social capital available to participating communities. However, sport event managers and communities need to be aware of instances of inappropriate behaviour and managerial challenges, which can have a negative impact on the stock of social capital.

Overall, this study shows that as an active and participatory form of social development, inter-community sport events offer potential to go beyond the symbolic value of spectator sport events and encourage people to experience first hand the social power of intergroup celebration. If carefully planned and managed in accordance with local demands, these sport events can contribute to social capital building and the reduction of socio-cultural barriers between participating communities. Consequently, inter-community sport events should be encouraged and supported by communities, event organisers and governments as an innovative platform for reconciliation and social development. Future research in this area should

focus on developing strategies to sustain social capital beyond the sport event, and to leverage positive experiences to the wider community.

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THE INTERNATIONAL EVENT MANAGEMENT SUMMIT CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS



INCORPORATING:

**FIFTH INTERNATIONAL EVENT MANAGEMENT RESEARCH CONFERENCE
6TH – 7TH JULY 2009**

&

**THIRD EVENT EDUCATION AND RESEARCH NETWORK AUSTRALASIA SYMPOSIUM
8TH JULY 2009**

CONFERENCE THEME

Meeting the Challenge of Sustainable Development: How do public and corporate events engage with the global agenda?

VENUE:

Holiday Inn, Surfers Paradise, Australia

PRESENTED BY:

Australian Centre for Event Management, University of Technology, Sydney

ENDORSED BY:

The International Special Events Society (ISES) – Australasian Affiliate

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The organisers reserve the right to amend the programme as required in the light of changed circumstances. The material contained in this publication was accurate to the knowledge of the organisers at the time of publication.



EDITORS' PREFACE

The theme chosen for the Conference is Meeting the Challenge of Sustainable Development: How do public and corporate events engage with the global agenda? This theme was selected in recognition of the greatly expanded focus on the linkage between events and the broad area of sustainable development in recent years. Events also have the potential to act as agents for creating environmental awareness and knowledge, as well as attitude and behaviour change. This is reflected in the myriad of environment based festivals and other events that now take place within Australia and internationally.

The Conference format will involve keynote presentations by local and international presenters based around this theme, as well as workshops, seminars and case studies. It will also include a number of more general topics associated with event management.

The Conference provides an excellent opportunity to discuss and exchange ideas with leaders in the Australian and international event industry, and with established researchers in the field.

Following on from the Conference, a one-day Symposium will be conducted exploring issues associated with education and training in the events field. The Symposium will feature international and local perspectives, as well as the latest developments in event related teaching and learning resources.

These Proceedings contain refereed papers that have been subjected to a double blind refereeing process conducted by academic peers with specific expertise in the key themes and research orientation of the papers. They also contain working papers that have been reviewed by the conference committee.

Australian spelling has been applied throughout the editing process, and grammar and expression have been standardised whilst making every effort to respect the content and integrity of the papers.

The Conference committee hopes that these Proceedings will serve to strengthen the foundations of the rapidly emerging field of event studies, and takes great pleasure in recommending the Proceedings of the Conference and Symposium to you.

John Allen AM
Foundation Director
Australian Centre for Event Management
University of Technology, Sydney



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