

CULTURAL TOURISM VERSUS SPORT TOURISM VERSUS EVENT TOURISM

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I have been asked to initiate a discussion on cultural tourism versus sport tourism versus event tourism by providing some scattered thoughts on the topic.

In a reasonable world, we would not be talking about these as separate or competing ideas. One of the best lessons coming out of the Sydney Olympics and the Manchester Commonwealth Games is the value of seeing event, sport and cultural tourism as really one thing. Done well, large events can kick start long term cultural, sport and recreational development.

We do not always live in a reasonable world. We find ourselves competing for tourism development dollars with our colleagues in the recreation and special event departments across the hall. In Hamilton, a recent consultant study was actually tasked with commenting on whether the city should pursue cultural or sport tourism. As if one or the other was preferable. The consultants spoke up strongly for cultural tourism, discerning folk that they were. This insight did not stop anyone from pursuing the city's recent (and unsuccessful) bid for the Commonwealth Games.

It seems to be the case that large scale sport or event tourism projects (such as Hamilton's recent hosting of the World Cycling Championships) are easier to promote than more low key cultural tourism proposals. The short term high impact of sport tourism is just more visible than the slow steady flow of tourists to the art gallery. It also seems to be true that for all the griping about the disruption caused by a large sporting event, citizens are pretty pleased to see their city on national TV. That kind of good feeling can make a very positive contribution to building the kind of city we all want to live in.

However, the positive impacts of sport tourism development can be matched with costs (see the Tim Chapin article cited below). Chapin is very clear on the non-economic benefits and costs of sport tourism. One cost can be the significant loss of social capital generated by a controversial project. As I have noted elsewhere, whatever else you might say about culture, not many people lie down in front of bulldozers to prevent the construction of a museum. Perhaps more people should.

Sport tourism is often accused of overbuilding: that is, of creating facilities that remain idle much of the time. We can all think of examples. In our more honest moments however, we have to acknowledge that this is a critique that can be levelled at cultural tourism as well.

Sport tourism, at its best and built around existing bricks and mortar, can work. It needs to be remembered that sport tourism is not just about big events. It is also tourists playing a round on the local golf course. It can generate revenue, inspire

community involvement, enthusiasm and a long term commitment to a healthy life. In that regard, it is not much different from the best of cultural tourism.

The key may be to stay focused on tourism (whether sport, cultural or event) as a means to an end—community development. If we lose sight of that, if we let cultural tourism be a justification for our existence rather than an aid to our viability, we may be lost. Tourism is a good servant but a bad master.

Some readings:

Razaq Raj “Impact of Festivals on Cultural Tourism” The 2nd DeHaan Tourism Management Conference 2003

<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/ttri/pdf/conference/raj%20razaq.pdf>

Tim Chapin “Identifying the Real Costs and Benefits of Sports Facilities” Lincoln Institute of Land Policy 2002

http://www.lincolninst.edu/pubs/dl/671_chapin-web.pdf