

Crime in the Tropics: Is sport part of the solution, or part of the problem?

Terry Engelberg

Sport and Exercise Science/Department of Psychology, James Cook University, Cairns, AUSTRALIA

Correspondence: terry.engelbergmoston@jcu.edu.au

Introduction

Sport is recognised as having an important positive social function with positive social returns on investment. For example, UK data show that for every £1 spent on sport, £1.91 worth of benefits are generated¹. This includes improvements in good health and reduced risks of coronary heart disease, breast cancer, Type 2 diabetes, etc. There are also social benefits, such as reductions in crime, improved educational performance, and enhanced social capital (volunteering)². However, the status of sport as a positive social force is under threat³. While the use of banned performance and image enhancing drugs (doping) is currently the most visible threat to the integrity of sport, other concerns such as match-fixing, violence (on and off the field), sexual assault and multiple forms of discrimination, are also emerging as potential threats⁴.

Methods

The study will involve surveying the attitudes and opinions of a broadly representative sample of North Queensland athletes (n=600) and support personnel (coaches, doctors etc., n=100) about the positive and negative impact of sport on a range of social and health related issues. Questions will be structured to assess both awareness and perceptions at local (Tropical NQ), state (QLD) and national (Australian) levels.

Results

Data collection is ongoing at the time of writing. Preliminary results will be available at the time of the conference.

Conclusion

Concerns over the positive and negative impact of sport are of considerable significance to many tropical communities, where sport has increasingly become one of the primary social engineering tools, used to build communities and to prevent social problems such as drug use and criminality. There is a growing body of evidence that prompts the following question: is the intended cure actually a cause of some of the problems currently experienced in North Queensland communities?

References

- ¹ Davies, L., Taylor, P., Ramchandani, G., & Christy, E. (2016). *Social Return on Investment in Sport: A participation-wide model for England. Summary Report*. Retrieved from Sheffield, UK: <http://www.shu.ac.uk/assets/pdf/research/sirc/Final-SIRC-SROI-England-Web-report.pdf>
- ² Engelberg, T., Skinner, J., & Zakus, D. (2014). What does commitment mean to volunteers in youth sport organizations? *Sport in Society*, 17(1), 52-67. doi:10.1080/17430437.2013.828900
- ³ Moston, S., & Engelberg, T. (2014, October). The Doping Age. *Australasian Science*, 35, 17-19.
- ⁴ Engelberg, T., & Moston, S. (2016). Hiding in plain sight: sexual harassment in sport. In M. Barry, J. Skinner, & T. Engelberg (Eds.), *Research handbook of employment relations in sport* (pp. 295-309). Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Press.