

**Parkrun or Running in the Park? Media Framing of Place Meaning in Small-Scale Sporting Events**

*Cory Kulczycki, University of Regina*  
*Mathew Dowling, Anglia Ruskin University*

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Introduction

Small-scale sporting events often make use of existing urban public spaces and facilities while facilitating a multitude of sporting and recreational activities for individuals and groups (Higham, 1999; Kural, 2010). It is in these contested public spaces, such as urban parks, whereby people attempt to undertake multiple activities simultaneously resulting in user conflict (Santos, Mendes, & Vasco, 2016). Exasperating these issues are users' impact on and interaction with the park's features and other users. Parkrun is a small-scale participant focused event that exemplifies how such public places are currently being contested in the United Kingdom (UK). Parkrun is a series of timed five kilometer running events that take place weekly in public spaces (parkrun.org). These volunteer-run informal 'fun runs' are free and open to all ages and abilities. Parkrun began at Bushy Park, London in 2004 as a single time trial event for 13 running enthusiasts and has since expanded into a global phenomenon. Now tens of thousands of people take part in Parkrun events, across 961 locations, spanning 14 countries including the United States and Canada (Bourne, 2014).

Objectives

The purpose of this study is to explore the media framing of place meaning in urban parks and public spaces as the hosting locations of small-scale sports events through the case of Parkrun UK. More specifically, the investigation sought to answer the following research questions: (i) How is Parkrun UK portrayed within the local and national media?; and (ii) what place meanings of Parkrun UK are evident within the local and national media?

Theoretical Background

The study is theoretically informed by place meaning and media framing theory. Place meaning theory is used to comprehend how knowledge, social interactions, and activity experiences connect people to specific places (Kruger, 2006). Place meanings are the "thoughts, feelings, and emotions individuals and collectives express toward place" (Kyle & Johnson, 2008, p. 111). Place meanings demonstrate to event and facility managers why a place is important and why people perceive certain actions as place appropriate (Smale, 2006; Spartz & Shaw, 2011).

Place meaning can be understood through the medium of media framing. Media explain and record events (Van Gorp, 2003) and through the process of media framing journalists focus the readers' attention on particular information (Entman, 1993). It is through the frames (i.e., the descriptors, terminology, and pictures) in a news story that journalists present perspectives (Entman, 1991). Frames warrant consideration since they are exchanged and contribute to public knowledge (Reese, 2007) in such ways as to explain a cultural perspective (Van Gorp, 2007). Within this study, culture includes the general community and specific sporting and running communities. While sport management research has applied media framing research to crisis management (Carey & Mason, 2016) and mega-events (Sant & Mason, 2015), the literature has yet to thoroughly explain how sport places are captured and discussed in mainstream media.

Methodology

Data for this research contains 45 newspaper articles from nine national (e.g., Guardian and Daily Express) and six local newspapers (e.g., Bristol Post, Gloucester Mercury). Newspaper articles were sourced through Google News and were selected using the following criteria: (i) any article local or national newspaper article published within the UK; (ii) between 2010 and 2016; and (iii) which primarily focused on Parkrun as the main element of discussion. All articles were compiled into an 87 page Word document for analysis. Consistent with previous sport-management media framing research (e.g., Sant & Mason, 2014), the analysis followed a line-by-line inductive coding approach

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(Patton, 2002). Both authors conducted the initial open-coding analysis independently and place-based codes were compared and consolidated to establish frames and sub-themes. For example, discussions about inclusion and running communities within parks and events were captured in the Social frame.

### Results

The media surrounding Parkrun UK events provided insight into the significance of place associated with the public spaces which hosts these small-scale sport events. Analysis identified four salient frames: Access, Activity, Features, and Social. The Access frame (themes: opportunity and constraint) highlighted that Parkrun UK events provided opportunity for participants while the events themselves were under organizational constraints. In the Activity frame (themes: health and structure), first, the media highlighted both the physical and mental benefits of participating in Parkrun UK events. Second, the event activity itself was portrayed as being an unstructured small group/independent running event that was viewed as an acceptable free park-based activity compared to structured activities that were required to pay for park usage. The Features frame (themes: characteristics, impact, and transferability) captures the specific aspects of the park that drew the Parkrun UK organizers and event participants to the specific places and the perceived impacts this has caused. The people involved with and supporting Parkrun UK events combined to form the Social frame (themes: inclusion, Parkrun tourism, and credibility) which included inclusivity of events, tourism whereby runners would visit different Parkrun events, and the utilization of statistics and sporting/political celebrities to build event credibility.

### Discussion and Conclusion

These place meanings, consistent with previous research (e.g., Spartz & Shaw, 2011), explain why people want to have and participate in Parkrun UK events in specific parks/places. Place meaning is therefore useful in explaining the continued growth of Parkrun as a small-scale local sporting event that has now expanded internationally. This is particularly relevant for future research considering sport event loyalty (Okayasu, Nogawa, Casper, & Morais, 2016), serious leisure and destinations (Moularde & Weaver, 2016), and active sport event travel careers (Buning & Gibson, 2016). More broadly, the case of Parkrun UK offers a valuable insight into the underlying issues and tensions faced by small-scale event organizers and facility managers, especially issues surrounding contested space usage and the distinctions between structured and unstructured small-scale sporting events.