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Mishap in Macao

Unexpected accidents at motorsport events

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Introduction

Motorsport races are some of the most vibrant and exciting events on the event calendar. These events bring enormous economic benefits and are lucrative tourist spectacles in the host community, although they are also associated with a myriad of problems to local residents (Fredline & Faulkner, 2001). Celebrating its 68th edition in 2021, the Macau Grand Prix is one of the most challenging motorsport city circuit racetracks in the world and is world-renowned for its numerous sharp and narrow bends, along 6.12km of narrow city roads. It is the only racetrack in the world that hosts Formula 3, motorcycle and touring car races. Many top Formula 1 drivers have raced in the Macau Grand Prix, including Riccardo Patrese, Ayrton Senna, the Schumacher brothers, Edoardo Mortara, and Lewis Hamilton.

Because motorsport races held at city circuits create greater impacts compared to dedicated racetracks (Tranter & Lowes, 2005), the majority of research on Macau Grand Prix has been related to impacts (Zhou, 2010). Earlier research focused more on practical issues, such as traffic and congestion (Chiang *et al.*, 2019; Han *et al.*, 2018; Wong & Yu, 2011). Other research seems to address a wider range of issues. McCartney (2005) suggests major events such as the Macau Grand Prix partly shape Macao's destination image. In recent years, researchers have drawn on more theoretical perspectives by using the Macau Grand Prix as a case study. For example, Couto *et al.* (2017) extend sportscape in motorsports by introducing enjoyable factors for attendees at such events, namely, event amenities, event aesthetics, event ambience and event tickets. Tang and Wang (2020) and Wu *et al.* (2020) contribute to the well-being literature by examining leisure engagement and perceived benefits associated to Macau Grand Prix. Taking a management perspective, Zhou (2016) attempts to relate the success of major events to project management and marketing principles, using the Macau Grand Prix as an example.

Successfully staging complex spectacles such as major motorsport races does indeed require meticulous planning and precision logistics. This should be unsurprising given the astronomical sums of money involved, and the ever-present danger to both participants, organisers and spectators. (Fredline & Faulkner, 2001; Getz, 2012). Event planners do everything they can to minimize risks in events, yet it can be physical risks that make events unique and exciting (Getz, 2012). This is especially so in motorsport events. The thrills and excitement may come from the speed of the vehicles, skills of the racers and demands of the race circuit (Fredline & Faulkner, 2001), yet these are inherently dangerous. For that reason, motorsport events are among the most strictly regulated of sports. Nonetheless, these events still see some freak but devastating accidents, often as a result of complex factors.

This chapter highlights the pivotal role that risk management plays in mitigating potential failures in motorsport events. The remainder of the chapter examines a selection of event planning tools, drawing examples from Macau Grand Prix and motorsport governing bodies, and concludes with a reflection on the lessons learnt, in particular, how aspects of risk management may help in reducing motorsport event failures and related consequences.

Risk management

It is widely acknowledged that measures with regards to risk management must be embodied and embedded in all stages of event planning, operations and management (Allen *et al.*, 2011; Getz, 2012; Piekarz, 2015; Silvers, 2008; Tarlow, 2002). Event planners typically focus on risk management associated with event attendees. However, some argue that this focus should encompass all event participants, including organisers, support staff, and performers or competitors (Fredline & Faulkner, 2001; Tranter & Lowes, 2005). Research on health and safety in motorsports is relatively scarcer compared to other sports. In part, this is due to the commercial secrecy that revolves around motorsports performance, associated with enormous financial implications and lucrative business, as well as profits associated with its technological value (Henry *et al.*, 2007).

Research in motorsport safety, particularly in regard to professional racers, is extremely important. Potkanowicz and Mendel (2013) recommend studies to focus on driver demographics, real time performance and training programmes. Previous research shows that professional motorsport racers possess superior visual acuity, which is not only linked to performance, but also reduced accident risks (Schneiders *et al.*, 2010). Recently, Decker *et al.* (2020) urge that there is still ample scope for improving safety features, such as using innovative technology to simulate crashes and accidents, although motorsport drivers have a variety of safety features to protect them in races. While improvements to driver safety are an ongoing feature of motorsports, what is being done to improve other aspects of safety and risk management in the sport? How about in terms of planning for motorsport events? What can we do to improve safety of motorsport events and play our part to minimise injuries?