

Leisure Cards in England: An Unusual Combination of Commercial and Social Marketing?

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Abstract

The article examines how the mechanism of local Leisure Cards (LCs) operated by local authorities in England and Wales interestingly combine both commercial and social marketing functions. However, they could be much more potent in promoting sport in a sedentary and obesogenic society. Methods include national survey, case studies, and policy analysis. The article describes the quasicommercial marketing of the residents' tier of LCs, using loyalty devices, and the social marketing tier to attract deprived groups. It shows how tokenistic most card operations are, with few dedicated resources, and how the most effective cards carefully segment and target their markets; they offer a choice of sport, arts, and commercial activities, thereby attracting female and older users. The article argues that improved resources and clearer strategies could help usage of facilities and make a better contribution to very challenging government targets for increasing participation. It ponders the conundrum as to why social marketing has not been seen as useful in a field well used to commercial marketing. The article suggests that, unusually, LCs can combine commercial benefits to public leisure providers, and wider social benefits to frequently excluded groups. Although many cities offer tourists packages of discounts, and some social promotion program, there seems little or no research on their impact or efficacy in what is the most free-choice area of social life.

