

SUSTAINABILITY AND SPORT EVENTS: EXPLORING SYNERGIES BETWEEN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL LEVERAGE

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INTRODUCTION

Numerous researchers have explored the impacts of sport events, and it is well-established that sport events can generate both positive and negative economic and social outcomes for host communities (cf. Crompton 1995; Dwyer, Mellor, Mistillis, & Mules 2000; Mules & Faulkner 1996). This traditional *ex post*, impact-oriented approach focuses on measuring short-term, visitation-related outcomes for host communities. The current study recognizes that a paradigm shift is underway in parts of the international events community where some stakeholders have begun to look beyond “impact” to strategizing for longer-term, sustainable outcomes. It is now common for major sport events to be accompanied by strategic leveraging programs. For example, the 2002, 2006 and 2010 Commonwealth Games in Manchester, Melbourne and New Delhi respectively, the 2003 Brisbane Rugby World Cup, and at every Olympic Games since Sydney 2000, leveraging programs to enhance the host destination brand, and to foster tourism and business development have accompanied, or are planned for, each event. This shift towards an *ex ante*, strategic approach to generating event benefits refers to the phenomenon of event leverage, and has stimulated a burgeoning avenue of study (Chalip 2004, 2005, 2006; Chalip & Costa 2005; Chalip & Leyns 2002; O'Brien 2006, 2007; O'Brien & Gardiner 2006). The current research argues that if sport events are to be sustainable and are to retain the public and private support upon which they so heavily rely, then promised benefits must be cultivated through strategic leverage. Building on the extant work on economic leverage, the authors explore potential synergies with social leverage.

METHODS

Based upon in-depth analyses of the extant literature on sport event impacts and sport event leverage, this paper proposes a theoretical framework for the social leverage of sport events.

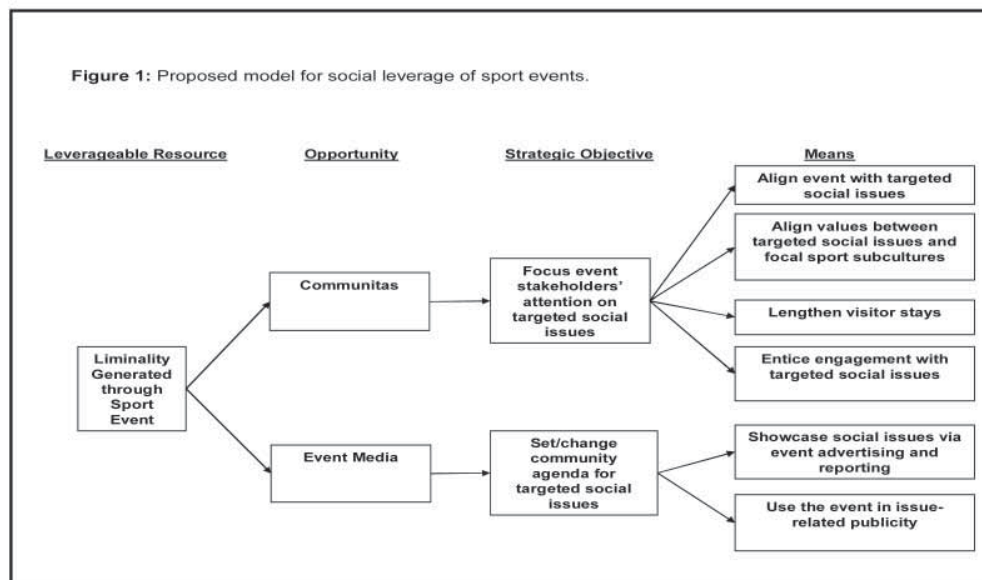
RESULTS

This work proposes a future direction for the implementation and study of sport event leverage. A review of the extant knowledge on economic leverage reveals potential synergies for the achievement of social leverage. It is argued that the liminality commonly generated at sport events can be treated as a leverageable resource for stimulating social change in host communities (Chalip, 2006). Thus, the opportunities, strategic objectives, and means for stimulating change in the regional social agendas of host communities are identified in the proposed model for the social leverage of sport events (see Fig. 1).

DISCUSSION

Although economic impact remains the dominant focus of event-related research and policy, literature on the social impacts of sport events is well-established (e.g., Andersson, Rustad, & Solberg, 2004; Fredline & Faulkner, 2001; Waitt, 2003). However, as with the economic effects of events, the focus on social impact remains *ex post* rather than *ex ante*. While some authors call for strategic planning for event legacies (Bramwell, 1997; Ritchie, 2000), the primary focus is still towards impact assessment rather than on the strategies through which outcomes are obtained or enhanced. And while the potential for economic (Chalip,

2004; O'Brien, 2006; 2007) and social (Chalip, 2006) leverage of sport events has been well articulated, the limited empirical work on leverage has focused on economic development, particularly through tourism and destination branding. What remains less understood is how sport events might also be leveraged for ongoing social benefits to host communities. The current study explores the potential synergies between economic and social leverage, and concludes with both challenges and notes of caution for the international sport events community regarding the issue of event leverage.



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