

STRATEGIC LEVERAGING OF A NAUTICAL SPORTS EVENTS PORTFOLIO: MULTI-DIMENSIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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Aim of the abstract

This study aims to examine the strategic goals and actions carried out in order to leverage a nautical sports events portfolio (Kite Masters Portimão World Tour, Formula Windsurfing World Championship, Sailing Audi Medcup, P1 World Championship, Portimão Global Ocean Race, F1H2o World Championship) hosted in the tourist community of Algarve. Based on Chalip's models (2004, 2006) we want to identify other goals related to the maximization of the events' benefits. The evolutionary case study (Dawson, 2008) was selected because this particular type of study allowed the introduction of the emergent findings in the successive cycles in the course of the research data collection process.

Theoretical background

Sports events have been used as a way to promote host communities in the global marketplace on the lookout for focusing and retaining mobile capital in the time beyond the actual event. Chalip (2004) started a new line of research in this area, focusing on a pre-event strategic approach, for which he created leverage models to explain this type of approach (Chalip, 2004, 2006). The model for economic leverage (Chalip, 2004) targets two strategic objectives: "to optimize total trade and revenue" in order to maximize short-term leverage, and "to enhance host destination's image" seeking to achieve longer-term leverage. Chalip (2006) also focus his attention to the social leverage of sport events and suggested a framework to enable and amplify liminality and communitas, with two objectives: "to foster social interaction" and "to prompt a feeling of celebration". However, few studies were developed applying these models to a real portfolio of events and the author alerted to the necessity of further empirical evidence.

Methodology (research design and data analysis)

An evolutionary case study (Dawson, 2008) was used in the research because we considered it adjusted with the time sequence of the events' portfolio and is designed "to explicitly explore emerging concepts in an evolving theoretical model based on reinforcement, revelation, reflection and re-examination" (Dawson, 2008, p. 29), and allowed us to integrate emergent goals in the instruments, in the procedure of data collection and selection of the respondents, from one event to the following one during the investigation cycle.

Fieldwork conducted from June of 2008 until December of 2009 was based on qualitative interviewing, observation and documental research to allow the triangulation process one of the quality criteria of this qualitative research. During the research process, over 100 interviews were carried in person lasting one hour in average, pre and during the events. The interviewees were chosen among decision makers, senior executives and operational staff of several organizations: external event organization committee, local public event organization committee, local and regional policymakers, local agents of the private sector, local sport-related organizations, event media partners, and sponsors. The on-site observation was a relevant part of this research, allowing us to understand the real practices. We observed all the events, which lasted an average of 6 days each, using an observation protocol based on the sensitizing devices mentioned above and focused on the implementation of actions related to the strategic goals announced and on the emergent actions related to strategic leveraging. We also used collected events' documents and organizational documents during the process. Data was deductively analyzed based on qualitative contents analysis approach (Mayring, 2000) and inductively analyzed based on the general principles of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The emergent references related to new strategic objectives and their implementation were coded in open concepts and constant comparison led to define the key emergent dimensions. We systematically and progressively coded data through qualitative data analysis software, NVivo 9 by QSR International. This software was an essential tool to manage data since it allowed us the organization of a large amount of data from various sources of information and its filter.

Results, discussion & conclusions

The results verify the application of the strategic goals of Chalip's models (Chalip, 2004, 2006) and that six strategic goals emerged from the empirical study, namely: i) "innovate sports tourism products"; ii) "develop sports dynamics" iii) "integrate and retain sponsors/partners" iv) "boost political advantage" v) "encourage environmental commitment" and; vi) "increase social capital and networks of cooperation". We concluded that the leverage of sports events portfolio could be developed in a multi-dimensional perspective according to the interaction of the different groups inside the community and external to the host community (e.g., the external event organization committee). Overall, we also realized that the leveraging process of the nautical events portfolio involved both intentional and unintentional leverage.

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