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Leveraging nautical sports events portfolio

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Background: The sports events have been used as a strategy to attract tourists, playing an important role in the strategic plans of cities, regions and countries. Recent literature indicates a new focus on research with an emphasis on the leveraging benefits of an event. Sport events leverage aims to maximize the benefits of the events to the host community. The leverage concept was first used by Chalip (2000) in an article about the strategies Australia developed to leverage the Olympics for tourism. This line of research analyses the pre-event strategic approach and argues that the impacts of the event depend on how it is leveraged through strategic planning (Chalip, 2000, 2004; Green *et al.*, 2003; O'Brien, 2006, 2007). Chalip (2004:229) presents a model for event leverage centred on the portfolio of events as the leverage resource. This model has two strategic objectives: "to optimize total trade and revenue" and "to enhance host destination's image". O'Brien & Chalip (2007:265) proposed a new direction, whose focus is on the social leverage. In this proposal the strategic objectives are "to focus events stakeholders' attention on targeted social issues" and "to set/change community agenda for targeted social issues". Some studies show that outcomes from such events hinge on the ways they are used (Pennington-Gray & Holdnak, 2002). O'Brien (2007) further underscores the importance of developing empirical studies about smaller events. Chalip (2004) highlights the need to do work on the matters that facilitate or hinder networking and alliance formation for and through events.

Objectives: This study aims to examine the leverage process of a nautical sports event 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, by identifying the planned and emergent actions of economic and social leverage, by analyzing the implementation process and by identifying the implemented actions of success and failure and their possible causes.

Methods: The case study was the research approach that we selected for the analysis of the strategies, tactics and actions of economic and social leverage (Chalip, 2004; O'Brien & Chalip, 2007). We used the literature to define the theoretical proposition, but after the initial deductive stage, the research becomes a series of iterations and reflections between deduction and induction. Fieldwork ran from June of 2008 until December of 2009, based on qualitative interview, direct observation and documental research. Around 100 interviews were done during the research process. The first cycle of interviews adopted a semi-structured format and the explored themes were centered on event planning. Interviewees were mostly in senior or relevant positions, and included external event organizers, local public event organizers, local and regional policymakers, local agents of the private sector (tourism and business), local sport-related organizations, event media partners, and sponsors. The observation *in situ* took place while the events were running, normally for 5 days.

The goal was to analyze the implementation process, namely planned and emergent actions. After the events, we did the second cycle of interviews with the purpose of identifying the implemented actions of success and failure and their possible causes. This set of interviews allowed us to clarify less explicit information from the observation process. In the course of the research process we did documental analysis (minutes of meetings, contracts, promotional material, both electronic and printed articles from magazines and regional newspapers, media releases and others). In data analyses we used the method of qualitative contents analysis, ground theory and hermeneutics. The hermeneutic analysis is suitable when you want to deepen social and organizational situations, as it focuses on the meaning of the data collected, and is particularly useful when the data refer to conflicting interpretations of the same phenomenon (Myers, 2009). However, the ongoing investigation was characterized by a global deductive strategy, where the body of data justifies chosen inductive encodings. We resorted to the use of grounded theory to develop theories of inductive method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Empirical evidence: A strategic use of the nautical sports events to rebrand the host destination image is an obvious item of leverage at different levels: hiring advice services for specialized press or organizing tours with journalists from national and international press are two cases in point. As Chalip (2004) already proposed, the destination image and brand can be enhanced by showcasing the destination in event advertising and promotional campaigns. In the interviews with promoters of events, travel agents and the hotel managers we noticed the nonexistence of actions to optimize revenues, as for example the creation of special events packages or attractions to lengthen visitor's stay. This kind of actions has not been the object of concerted planning between different actors. They state that the announcement of the event's dates is not done in the time required to launch event packages. Randersen (2002) noted that in the creation of an event strategy the difficulties among the actors for the allocations of responsibilities and resources are exacerbated in the initial phase. According to Mintzberg (1994), the conception of strategy as behavioral model was privileged, the actors having demonstrated the adoption of intentional and emerging actions, visible through the participants' observation. Jones (2005:190) acknowledges that sometimes the "organizational benefits were levered from the event without necessarily any formal link to events organizers". The host promoters of the event also use the term dynamic management to deal with the need for emergent actions to take advantage of the opportunities. We identified new items that were not part of the theoretical base model for sports events leverage. Key-words: Strategy, Leverage, Sports Events

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