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Title: Perspectives of event leveraging by restaurants and city officials

Abstract

Purpose

Hosting events can attract visitors to an area and provide an opportunity for local businesses in the host community to benefit economically. Restaurants, in particular, have an opportunity to benefit as food is a necessary expenditure. However, previous research suggests that the intentional attraction of event visitors by local businesses has been minimal. The purpose of this study was to explore perspectives of event leveraging held by restaurant owners/managers and a destination marketing organization.

Design/methodology/approach

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with owners/managers of 16 local restaurants and from three destination marketing organization (DMO) executives in one medium sized city in Ontario, Canada. Data were analyzed using initial and axial coding.

Findings

Findings indicate that restaurants did not engage in event leveraging. Three common reasons emerged to explain their lack of engagement in leveraging, including: (a) a lack of a belief in benefits from leveraging; (b) inconvenient proximity to event venue; and (c) not being prepared for event leveraging opportunities. The DMO had a desire to assist local business in leveraging, but their ability to do so was negatively impacted by a lack of awareness of events being hosted, disengagement by local businesses, and limited resources.

Originality/value

Findings suggest there is a need for DMO's and local businesses to create stronger and more supportive working relationships that address financial and human resources constraints preventing the adoption and success of event leveraging. As part of this approach there is a need for cities to make stronger financial investments in supportive agencies such as a DMO.

Keywords: Leveraging, small scale events, sport tourism

EVENT LEVERAGING

Introduction

Hosting sport events have the potential to provide local businesses with tourism-related benefits through visitor spending if the event is strategically leveraged (Misener *et al.*, 2015; O'Brien and Chalip, 2008). Event leveraging refers to strategic and intentional tactics that seek to derive benefits from the hosting of sport events. Yet, few local businesses engage in leveraging tactics to maximize the impact they receive (Chalip and Leyns, 2002; Smith, 2010; Mackellar, 2015). Research has identified some potential impacts that would positively benefit local businesses related to the hosting of major cultural events. Specifically, in a review of existing research Pappalepore and Duignan (2016) examined the impacts, both long and short term, of hosting major events on creative organizations. This research identified both positive and negative impacts that events can have on smaller businesses. Examples of positive longer-term benefits include: enhanced business contacts and increased business confidence (Dwyer, Mellor, Mistilis and Mules, 2000), increased cohesion (Paiola, 2008), collaborations and partnerships (Bergsgard, Josendal and Garcia, 2010; Bergsgard and Vassenden, 2011), and the strengthening of ties and interactions between organizations (Schussler and Sydow, 2013). Examples of potential negative impacts include, a displacement of local businesses (Raco and Tunney, 2010) and increased rental costs (McKay and Plumb, 2001; Kavetsos, 2012). In terms of short-term impacts, small local businesses could benefit from increased visitors (Garcia, 2008), the development of new ideas (Bergsgard *et al.*, 2010), encouragement of first time relationships between grassroots groups and mainstream organizations (Garcia, 2004), increased visibility, international exposure (Paiola, 2008; Low and Hall, 2011), development of innovative connections with local audiences (Low and Hall, 2011), and business development (Dwyer *et al.*, 2000). Potential negative impacts for these organizations could include decreased foot traffic in the business (French and Disher, 1997),

EVENT LEVERAGING

local residents avoiding the event area and thus the local business (Spilling, 1996), and a diversion of funding from the arts to event infrastructure (Kenyon and Palmer, 2009).

In comparison to larger mega events, smaller, non-mega sport events represent a significant opportunity for leveraging efforts because many communities already hold such events annually and disruptions to host communities and use of tax dollars are minimal (Smith, 2010; Taks, 2013). However, research on the leveraging potential of small scale, non-mega sport events remains underexplored (O'Brien, 2007; Smith, 2010; Taks, 2013). Central to the strategic planning process involved in leveraging is an understanding of why local businesses choose to engage (or not) in leveraging (Mackellar, 2015). Restaurants are a particularly relevant stakeholder group because food is a required purchase for travelers and event attendees typically have the freedom to select where they dine (Taks *et al.*, 2013). Practically, an understanding of restaurants' perspectives may assist in the development of strategies by city officials to educate, support, or encourage leveraging. Thus, this study develops an understanding of perspectives about event leveraging held by restaurant owners/managers and executives at a destination marketing organization in order to capitalize on opportunities from hosting smaller scale events. The present study addresses a growing need for research into factors and conditions necessary for sport events to have beneficial outcomes in host communities (Coalter, 2007).

Literature review

Recognizing that sport events do not always produce significant benefits for the host community (Coalter, 2004; Gaffney, 2010, 2013), a line of research termed event leveraging emerged that takes a prospective approach by suggesting that benefits can be achieved if sport events are leveraged effectively through a number of tactics and strategies (Beesley and Chalip, 2011; Chalip and Leyns, 2002; Chalip, 2006, 2014; O'Brien, 2007; Taks *et al.*, 2009). On an

EVENT LEVERAGING

immediate basis, host communities can seek to benefit economically through leveraging by enticing visitor spending, lengthening visitor stays, retaining event expenditures, and enhancing business relationships (Chalip, 2004). Local restaurants hope that event visitors are enticed to stay in the host community to dine and come to their establishment in particular.

There are various tactics that can be employed to leverage events to achieve economic benefits. Recent work has identified that visitors will stay longer in a particular location prior to and following an event if they are made aware of desired attractions in the host destination (Taks *et al.*, 2009). As a result, bundling sport events with other host destination attractions is one approach that can be utilized to effectively leverage the event. Bundling involves combining services and/or products into a single package for a reduced price. Bundling can result in increased awareness, a simplification of the information search and purchase decisions, perceived discounts on prices and the increased appeal of the host destination (Naylor and Frank, 2001). For example, in order to realize this potential benefit, destinations can bundle sport events into a package with sightseeing tours, visits to shopping areas and restaurant districts, and entrances to attractions in the area. As visitors at an event may have different motivations for attendance, it has been suggested that ancillary activities that match their consumer profiles should be promoted (Snelgrove and Wood, 2010). For example, some sport event attendees can be presented with an opportunity to celebrate their event identities with similar others, and for those who are not attached or connected to the sport, the addition of music, dance, theatre, and/or art exhibitions might appeal to this segment of attendees (Chalip and McGuirly, 2004). These ancillary activities may entice visitors to spend money, lengthen their stays, enhance their event experience and even promote positive word of mouth about the destination (Taks *et al.*, 2009; Xing *et al.*, 2014).

EVENT LEVERAGING

Another means of leveraging can be through the use of subcultural aspects of the sports at hand in an effort to encourage visitors to spend money within the community. This requires host communities and event organizers to identify the subcultures that may exist within the sport and then local businesses can use this information in the design of related ancillary activities (Chalip and McGuirty, 2004; Green, 2001; O'Brien, 2007; Xing *et al.*, 2014). In the case of the Gold Coast Indy, work identified that few local businesses actually viewed the event as a potential leveraging opportunity. The businesses that did leverage the event, however, by creating themed activities found the tactic to be effective. Thus local businesses can be successful if they partner with other businesses to create themed areas that enable visitors to celebrate their shared event identity, develop an understanding of the consumers' preferences, and create targeted promotional campaigns that appeal to visitors (Chalip & Leyns, 2002). Similarly, Xing *et al* (2014) demonstrated that the development of a sense of community among sport event tourists was predictive of spending at local restaurants and shops. Their work demonstrated that sense of community serves as a mechanism through which spending at local businesses occurs and can be increased (Xing *et al.*, 2014). Thus, this work acknowledges that businesses could potentially benefit from events that foster sense of community among attendees, which can be achieved through appeals to social motivation and subcultural identity (Xing *et al.*, 2014). With respect to retaining event expenditures, striving to utilize local personnel and concessionaries can assist in ensuring that earnings from the event will remain within the local community (Chalip, 2004). For event organizers this can be achieved by sourcing local businesses to provide the necessary event related items.

Another tactic shown to stimulate visitor spending is the use of promotions (Chalip & Leyns, 2002). Promotions by local businesses to event visitors can occur in a coordinated manner,

EVENT LEVERAGING

through for example a destination marketing agency, the event organizer for sponsors of the event, or through the individual efforts of businesses (Mackellar, 2015). Chalip and Leyns (2002) found that local businesses who leveraged the event by promoting their businesses to event goers through coupons and contests were more successful in generating visitor spending than those businesses that did not target event visitors. It is also possible to tie promotions and theming together to maximize the attraction of event visitors (Chalip, 2004). However, the usage of such promotion tactics is contingent upon either a coordinated effort to support businesses and provide an outlet for them to reach visitors, or in the case of individual efforts, a necessary level of marketing expertise by the owners/managers (Mackellar, 2015).

Last, events can be leveraged through the development and enhancement of business relationships for future economic growth within the host destination (Potwarka and Snelgrove, 2014). By way of example, O'Brien (2006) examined this leveraging opportunity with respect to the 2000 Olympic Games hosted in Australia. O'Brien found that government officials from Australia's Trade Commission gained insight from the 1996 Atlanta Games and the potential of the Games to connect business executives in attendance when hosted in Australia in order to create future economic benefits for Australian companies. As a result, Australia created Business Club Australia with a mandate to leverage the global nature of the Olympics in order to increase international trade.

Despite the potential of increased revenues that can be achieved, few local businesses are leveraging events (Chalip, 2014; Chalip and Leyns, 2002; Mackellar, 2015). Indeed, minimal empirical attention has been given to understanding the reasons for limited engagement in strategic leveraging. Thus, there is a need to identify reasons why efforts are not undertaken by local businesses to entice visitor spending. Clearly, different stakeholders in a community can play a

EVENT LEVERAGING

role in enacting leveraging tactics (e.g., event organizers, city officials, local organizations; Chalip and Leyns, 2002; Mackellar, 2015; Taks *et al.*, 2014). However, one of the main beneficiaries of economic benefits, and thus of leveraging are local businesses in the host community where visitors will spend money (Chalip and Leyns, 2002). Hence, local businesses have a potential interest in employing leveraging tactics for direct benefit.

However, the willingness to undertake leveraging practices may rely upon a number of factors. One of the few studies that has examined the reasons behind engagement or lack of engagement in leveraging by local businesses and destinations highlighted six domains affecting involvement in leveraging (i.e., Mackellar, 2015). The six domains identified by Mackellar were (1) event cooperation (e.g., coordinated engagement of all stakeholders in a community involved in creating an event and tourist experience), (2) tourism dependency (e.g., the percentage of sales directed toward visitors and perceived impact on regular customers), (3) business type (e.g., perceived appeal to event visitors), (4) promotional strategy (e.g., perceived fit with overall marketing strategy of business or parent company), (5) strategic direction (e.g., viewed as a contribution to the community), and (6) skills, knowledge and inertia (e.g., knowledge to execute and responsibility for coordinated efforts). Mackellar (2015) found variation within each of these domains, thereby highlighting both success factors and constraints to leveraging engagement.

Additionally, research examining the leveraging efforts of local businesses (e.g., accommodation, retail and restaurants) found that only 8 of the 22 businesses identified engaging in leveraging, and for most the tactics employed were very minimal (Chalip and Leyns, 2002). The reasons cited for not engaging in leveraging included location (i.e., those within the event location believed there would be high demand anyways and those outside the event precinct thought their efforts would be futile), not viewing event patrons as a viable market (i.e., businesses felt the event

EVENT LEVERAGING

patrons would not be interested in shopping) and that the event pulled local residents away from their businesses through increased traffic and congestion (Chalip and Leyns, 2002). One example of event leveraging that was found was a restaurant engaged in a coordinated theming strategy that was implemented together with the other local businesses in the neighborhood (i.e., they developed an auto racing theme for the entire area). Overall, this work found a minimal use of leveraging strategies and most of the tactics employed were haphazard and limited to businesses that were in close proximity to the event precinct.

In a study of leveraging the International Children's Games for sport development purposes, Taks *et al.* (2014) identified the reasons for failed implementation of leveraging tactics as a lack of human resource capacity and minimal collaborative action within the community. Similarly, a model on leveraging events for sport participation, developed by Chalip *et al.* (2016), illustrated the necessity of adequate levels of human, financial and physical resources. Other studies identified that benefits derived from hosting sport events may vary based on stakeholder group and geographic proximity to the event, which suggests that some local businesses may stand to benefit from hosting events more than others (Potwarka and Leatherdale, 2016; Taks *et al.*, 2006).

Smith (2010) identified a number of factors critical to the successful implementation of event leveraging tactics. Notably, Smith advocated for the use of local champions to coordinate activities among key stakeholders and push for the creation of themed areas, the necessary engagement of local businesses to be a part of creating themed areas, the development of relationships among key stakeholders, and the commitment of resources by city officials to supporting leveraging efforts. Having advanced knowledge and being informed about upcoming events, specifically by the event organizers, has been recognized by businesses as being important to leveraging success and without such communication can serve as a barrier to event engagement

EVENT LEVERAGING

(Mackellar, 2015). Moreover, another means of successful leveraging could involve businesses hosting auxiliary events in collaboration with other businesses (O'Brien, 2006; Harrison-Hill and Chalip, 2005). This tactic would require the businesses to work collaboratively with one another, which may seem to be anticompetitive. However, doing so would benefit all groups involved in the end. Important to acknowledge is that not all businesses will likely benefit equally. That is, while businesses may engage in leveraging and in some instances a coordinated strategy with other businesses, their participation will not ensure that they receive economic benefits. In fact, related to event spending, work has identified that the distribution of benefits from hosting the event can vary greatly based on proximity to event area, with some benefiting greatly and others experiencing a negative effect (Putsis, 1998). Additionally, other work has found that in the case of small and medium sized events, visitors may not spend much outside of the necessary event expenditures (Nogawa, Yamaguchi and Hagi, 1996). Thus, to encourage spending from event attendees businesses would benefit from creating and fostering a sense of celebration (Chalip and Leyns, 2002; Green and Chalip, 1998).

Additional work has identified that businesses require assistance in the creation and execution of leveraging strategies and this needs to be accomplished through the development of business alliances (Chalip and Leyns, 2002). In fact, it has been suggested that a central coordinating body should be created to assist in the process of developing and implementing programs and structured initiatives that will aid local businesses in leveraging and gaining access to event attendees (Chalip and Leyns, 2002; Weed, 2003). Overall, the literature to date has identified the need and opportunity for DMO's and local businesses to work together to create positive working relationships in order to mutually benefit from the hosting of events (Kaplanidou and Gibson, 2010; Ziakas and Costa, 2010; Weed, 2003).

EVENT LEVERAGING

Notwithstanding the contributions previously identified, there remains a limited understanding of local businesses' perspectives related to event leveraging. Specifically, little research has identified the perspectives held by local restaurants and DMOs, or perspectives held in the context of non-mega events. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore the perspectives of local restaurants and a supporting DMO about leveraging non-mega events in one community in Ontario, Canada.

Method

Research setting

The context for this study was three medium sized multi-sport events that were hosted in one medium sized community in Ontario, Canada. These events took place over two summers and included the following: the 2013 International Children's Games (ICG), the 2014 Ontario Summer Games (OSG) and the 2014 55+ Ontario Summer Games (55+). Specifically, the ICG is an Olympic Committee sanctioned event that is hosted annually for athletes 12 to 15 years of age. Hosting communities are responsible for determining the sports that will be contested at each event. The 2013 event involved 8 sports (4 individual and 4 team) at 12 venues throughout the community. The event hosted 1,600 participants representing 80 cities and 31 countries (Guthrie, 2013).

The OSG is a multi-sport event that until recently was hosted by Sport Alliance Ontario (SAO). The event is contested on even years and is a provincially based competition. The 2014 OSG involved 19 sports (e.g., baseball, basketball, box lacrosse, soccer, skeet shooting) at 16 venues throughout the community. The 2014 event hosted 2,100 athletes ranging in age from 13 to 20 years (Waddell, 2014).

EVENT LEVERAGING

Last, the 55+ is a provincial event that is held bi-annually (with the winter games taking place in alternate years). The 55+ is a multi-sport event that is hosted by the Ontario Senior Games Association. The purpose of the organization and the event is to promote active lifestyles for adults 55+ who are not engaging in sport at a more advanced or masters level (www.ontarioseniorgames.ca). The 2014 event involved 18 sports (e.g., lawn bowling, cycling, swimming, pickleball) at 10 venues around the community. The event hosted 1,400 athletes aged 55+ for two days of competitions. For all three events described, communities actively engage in a coordinated bidding process to earn the right to be a host.

All three of the sport events were held in one community and surrounding county over the course of two summers. Specifically, there is one medium sized city that is surrounded by a county made up of seven municipalities. Together these areas hosted the three sporting events. The majority of the events were held in the medium sized city, however, the surrounding county was responsible for a number of the events. The municipalities surround the city on all sides and are at maximum a 30-minute drive to the main city. The city and one municipality hosted the 55+ Games while the other two events spanned the city and seven municipalities. The medium sized city is mainly a blue-collar city, with a current unemployment rate of 4.9% and a stagnant population growth (Statistics Canada, 2016). The downtown core has a number of hotels that were utilized for spectators and athletes to stay during the events. There is a university and college in the city and both were used for athletes during the 2013 ICG. The downtown core has a plethora of restaurants and businesses that would be of interest to spectators during the events and which are in close proximity to the event venues that were utilized. There are also restaurants that are in close proximity to the event venues in the surrounding county that could have engaged in leveraging of the event and who were included in the study sample.

EVENT LEVERAGING

Data collection

Data were collected in a three-step process. First, in 2013 three interviews were conducted with senior officials (i.e., CEO and two vice-presidents) at the region's destination marketing organization (DMO). Second in 2013, a total of 8 local restaurant owners or managers were interviewed around the time of the ICGs. Third, an additional 8 owners or managers at different restaurants were interviewed in 2014 around the time of the OSG and 55+ to further test and refine the emergent themes developed after the first year of data collection (Charmaz, 2006). The data collection in year two was also beneficial because the two events had very different target markets (as described previously) allowing the researchers to increase the generalizability of the findings. Restaurant types included fast food locations, sit down family style, casual dining, pubs, and more upscale experiences. Seven of the restaurants were located in the downtown core of the city, seven were located close to the event facilities, and two were located by the main shopping mall in the community. In all cases, the restaurant managers and owners had several or more years of experience in their roles, with experience ranging from 5 to 30 years. Additionally, each of the interviewees were responsible for marketing their restaurant. In total, 19 semi-structured interviews were conducted.

Interviews focused on perspectives about leveraging in the context of the identified sport events. Examples of questions asked of local businesses include, "What do you do to promote your business, what strategies are utilized, and how are these decisions made?", "Were you aware of sport event X that took place in the community this year? Did you plan any promotions for the event, why or why not?", "What were your objectives with the strategies you utilized and were they met?", "Have you tried promotional tactics with previous events in the community? Did you find them to be successful, why or why not?", "Have you collaborated with other businesses when

EVENT LEVERAGING

events take place in the community, why or why not?”, “Do you have a relationship with the city, and do you believe they support your efforts to benefit from tourism and events?” Examples of questions asked of the DMO include, “How do you promote events when they are in the city?”, “How do you connect with the local businesses surrounding the hosting of events?”, “What relationship do you have with event organizers and is the relationship important for the success of the event from the city’s perspective?”, “Do you ever face resistance when trying to promote events in the region? In what way, and what impact does this have on your efforts?”

The DMO was selected because it was, at the time of the study, the only coordinating organization with dedicated staff attempting to engage in leveraging and interact with local businesses. There was no sports council in operation, nor was there a paid employee in charge of coordinating sport events or leveraging. Restaurants were selected based on proximity to the venues (both nearby and farther away), and a reasonable possibility of leveraging the event (i.e., commonly frequented location for visitors, not a specialty business). Interviews were conducted at a time of the participants’ choice and ranged in length from approximately 30 to 80 minutes. All interviews were transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed in a staged process. The first stage of the analysis involved thematic line-by-line coding of the transcribed interviews conducted in year 1. Two researchers undertook this coding process independently. The two researchers then met to discuss and resolve discrepancies and create final initial codes. The second stage involved using axial coding by these two researchers working together to develop broader themes from these initial codes. Third, data collected in year two were analyzed to test and refine the emergent themes (Charmaz, 2006). Consensus was reached among the researchers that initial emergent themes were represented well

EVENT LEVERAGING

in the additional data, and theoretical saturation had been reached (Charmaz, 2006). Following the development of major themes, representative quotes were selected.

Trustworthiness of the data was established by sending participants the interview transcripts to confirm the accuracy of the data collected, having two researchers code the data independently, by providing extensive quotations throughout the findings section so the reader can assess the conclusions drawn, and collecting data in multiple years in the context of three different events (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, 1986).

Restaurants' perspectives

Despite opportunities to do so, the majority of the restaurants interviewed in this study decided not to leverage the events. Their decision not to leverage was somewhat surprising for most restaurants who typically undertook promotion efforts that could have been adapted to attract event visitors. Specifically, the majority described promotion efforts such as radio advertising, print advertising, couponing, sponsorship, and posts on social media. For example, Liz said “We do a lot of posters, flyering, flyer drop offs. We also do a ton of radio advertising.” Similarly, Steve said “We use a lot of social media. We use our Facebook quite a bit, quite extensively to drive traffic not just here but to our website.” Conversely, a small number of restaurants indicated no use of promotions at all, relying on word-of-mouth advertising and repeat business exclusively. Mike explained his approach by saying, “Usually 99% of the time nothing, [just] word of mouth. Word of mouth is the only thing that we really focus on. It’s all we’ve ever done from the beginning.” Similarly, John explained “I believe our brand and what we have already speaks for itself so. I hate to say it like that but people come to our place just because of who we are already.” Thus, for this latter group it is perhaps not surprising that they did not engage in leveraging.

EVENT LEVERAGING

Three reasons why the restaurateurs did not engage in event leveraging were common, including (a) a lack of a belief in benefits from leveraging, (b) inconvenient proximity to event, and (c) not being prepared for event leveraging opportunities. Further detail, representative quotes, and pseudonyms are presented in the following section.

A lack of a belief in benefits from event leveraging

Restaurants had to believe that benefits were possible before considering event leveraging (n=12 restaurants who mentioned belief in benefits), which in this case was largely shaped by their level of trust in claims made by city officials. In this regard, past claims and results from hosting events in the community were influential. More specifically, these study participants felt the city promised more benefits would accrue than were actually obtained. For example, Mike said, “We did see a slight increase of business but nothing like what we were supposedly promised.” Similarly, thinking forward to the upcoming Ontario Summer Games, Mike reflected on his perceptions of the impact the International Children’s Games had on his business and the city: “We were informed about what a great success they’d be for the city of Windsor and how they would be so beneficial to the businesses and blah blah blah. Because at the end of the day, it really sort of turned out to be blah... It wasn’t really that big of a deal.” The problems created by this lack of trust persists as more and more events are being hosted, as it becomes challenging for businesses to determine which events are worth the investment in light of the claims of benefits and attendance figures made by city officials. As George explained,

“it’s hard to tell who knows what they’re doing and who doesn’t. I don’t know for me if there was something where... either...say the Children’s Games came again, I would say oh, I remember the Children’s Games, that was great or I know what happens when there’s a sporting event taking place in the downtown, we’ve done that before, we’ve seen it. So

EVENT LEVERAGING

that if part of people's marketing to me was saying we're the people who did this in the past and that turned out, to help me realize that it's credible is one of the most important things.... So, discerning which ones are legitimate or at least semi-accurate in their estimates is tricky" (George)

Thus, findings suggest that many business owners and managers held skeptical perspectives about politicians' claims of benefits from hosting events.

A lack of a belief in benefits were also related to some (n=3) restaurants' feelings that they were expecting to be busy regardless. John explained his thinking by stating, "when it's more of a summer event ...we're a very busy restaurant in the summer ... it's our busy season, so when it comes to summertime, we don't really like to throw too many things at it. ... for the Children's Games we just basically were open." Thus, for these restaurants the perceived benefits were minimal.

Inconvenient proximity to event

Restaurants also mentioned proximity to the event or host hotel as a factor impacting leveraging success (n=11 restaurants who mentioned proximity). The location of the event mattered a great deal to restaurants, as exemplified by Graham's comment that "the location of the event absolutely does matter." Additionally, John said, "you know the Ontario Summer Games, I think one of their major problems was that the events were not hosted downtown. I think the events if I recall they were hosted all over town... I believe they were all on the outskirts. I don't believe they came downtown." Steve also described the importance of location when determining whether to engage in leveraging when they stated, "We just weigh the different factors...if it's close by we're definitely interested in advertising or promoting or donating you know dinners, raffles,

EVENT LEVERAGING

whatever that kind of thing.” However, Steve suggested that his restaurant did not benefit from visitors at the events because they were not held in close proximity to his establishment.

Conversely, some, perhaps more savvy, restaurants located away from the event venue still believed they could benefit from leveraging. For example, a few restaurants downtown pointed out that it did not matter if the event was hosted outside of the downtown area, as long as participants and/or spectators were staying at downtown hotels because they would need to eat and shop when they were back at their hotel. Similarly, one participant described how being outside of the event area did benefit their restaurant in terms of a trickle down effect, as they were able to capitalize on those individuals who were interested in escaping the busyness of the event area. Dave said, “we definitely do still see some trickle down. Sometimes it’s almost because of the fact that we don’t have all of that hoopla going on. Some families will choose to leave the enclosed chaos area and go somewhere that they hope will be a little quieter and not so rowdy. So we definitely do see some trickledown effect from that.”

Being prepared for event leveraging opportunities

Last, restaurants indicated their willingness to engage in leveraging was contingent on an ability to adequately plan for such an undertaking (n=11 restaurants who mentioned being prepared). Restaurants primarily expressed a lack of awareness of sport events that had been recently held or were about to be held as a major reason why they did not engage in leveraging.

“I don’t know who did any of the marketing or planning. ... I think most of the city was kind of caught off guard that a lot of them were coming because a lot of the local businesses didn’t even know that they would be staying at the university or around the area or where the games were being held.” (Steve)

EVENT LEVERAGING

Similarly, Patricia said “we’re not really doing a promotion because we didn’t budget for it. We found out a little bit too late about it. If we would have known about it a little bit earlier we would have budgeted for it.” These businesses said advanced awareness is important because it allows them to adequately budget for marketing tactics and operationally handle increased traffic. Steve also expressed this sentiment when he stated,

I think most of the city was kind of caught off guard that a lot of them were coming because a lot of the local businesses didn’t even know that [the athletes] would be staying at the university or around the area or where the games were being held.

In most cases, businesses expressed a desire for the city to initiate communication about upcoming events. For example, John said, “I think they [the city] could do a better job informing people for sure.... I think they could do a little bit of a better job informing people about all of the events that happen in the city.” Steve further expressed this notion when he said, “there really was a lack of knowledge sharing ... just knowing in advance us huge. I guess you can watch the events calendar on the news but I just find, I don’t know, there isn’t really, I don’t see a lot of things for you know something big is coming.” Further as Rebecca explained, having someone share the information regarding the events taking place in the community is extremely important: “if they didn’t come to us we probably like...it would probably be hard for us to find out. Like we don’t...we wouldn’t find out if they didn’t. We wouldn’t be able to plan for the event ahead of time anyway.”

If they were able to have advanced notice of an event, participants described how they could make proper use of this information to engage in what would hopefully prove to be successful leveraging opportunities. As Steve explained,

EVENT LEVERAGING

Basically, I would have to find out number one where the venue is, where are they staying, types of events, the demographic, are children involved, and I would have to build a strategy to kind of cater not only towards the athletes but parents as well and do things like that. There will definitely be daytime promotions to promote food and things like that and then there will also be night time promotions where more nightlife, whether it be drinking, entertainment, things like that.

As Steve explained, having advanced knowledge of an event would enable the businesses to create a proper strategy in terms of leveraging

DMO's perspectives

Interviews with senior officials at the DMO revealed their perspectives related to their efforts to date in facilitating event leveraging by local businesses, as well as some of the challenges they face in supporting such practices. This section describes (a) attempts at supporting leveraging, (b) lack of awareness as a constraint, (c) the importance of engagement by local businesses, and (d) the impact of limited DMO resources.

Attempts at supporting leveraging

DMO officials clearly articulated a desire to help local businesses successfully leverage the hosting of sport events. As Mark noted, they try to provide as much information as possible for visitors.

[Our goal is] to provide the most up to date information. So depending on how big the event is, sometime we'll promote by staff. For instance, we've done it twice now at the Aquatic Centre for big events where certain hours, if it's peak hours we'll provide a table there and we'll have visitor information specialists on site to have our visitor guides there, to have downtown maps there, if there's a question like hey where's [restaurant X] well

EVENT LEVERAGING

here it is on the map, go for it. Let them know what's going on around the area, just have information available to people while they're here.

Furthermore, for some events they have created initiatives that directly benefit select restaurants. For example, Sarah described one such initiative for the 55+ Games.

We have a middle night and we thought how are we going to feed them? We've got a budget of \$15 from the registration fees to feed each athlete ... and we thought why don't we try to create some economic impact for some of the downtown restaurants. So we created what's called a dine around program. We made these cards up that give \$15 value and we worked with the downtown BIA to get some of their members on board. They solicited all the restaurants who want to be involved and we have a list of I think 15 restaurants that want to be involved and they're willing to take these cards. They're worth \$15 and if they get turned in or redeemed they'll get the money back from the games. ... It creates a little bit more activity for the restaurants if they're willing to participate and take these cards. There's a huge pile that won't spend any more above that, maybe they'll order a beverage, you know but still it's putting that money into the restaurant's pockets.

Another approach to encouraging leveraging was through communication with local restaurants. The DMO clearly recognized the importance of *communicating* with local businesses about upcoming events and described a number of methods employed to create awareness when they knew about events (e.g., email blasts, stories in media). Roger explained that in the past, "we gave [local businesses] a little workshop, we said okay, do this and this, we had speakers, we provided them with information to have and then we gave them a birder friendly sticker that they can put on their restaurant, their hotel." Mark reinforced this idea when he stated, "So, we're

EVENT LEVERAGING

communicating with [the businesses] to let them know they're coming, embrace them, these are the events, where they're going to be, all of that information.”

When discussing the Ontario Summer Games specifically, Roger's team sent an “e-blast” that said,

be prepared, what are you doing for Ontario Summer Games? Let us know and we'll help put it on the website. So in other words, are you going to offer a special or whatever else so that's kind of a little bit of prep work to... and again get that connection and buy in in the community. Let everyone know they're coming.

However, there are very few additional examples of leveraging initiatives that have occurred in this community. The DMO's ability to assist with leveraging was impacted by a number of factors, including a lack of awareness, engagement by local businesses, and limited resources.

Lack of awareness

First, an *awareness* of events being hosted in the region was a necessary initial step for the DMO. As Mark suggested, “Certainly when we're *aware* of an organizer coming here what we do is we contact them to see, can we put together a weekend guide to what's happening in [the region] at that time.” In reference to working with local businesses, Roger said,

We're trying to encourage local groups to work with our office because we could help from that perspective and then we can also help from a visitor services perspective. It's education. We're only as good as the information we know, if I don't know then I can't help you. Then don't complain about it.

Ultimately, though the first step in assisting local restaurants is the awareness that the event is taking place in the community. As Mark stated, “We're only as good as the information that comes to us.”

EVENT LEVERAGING

Engagement by local businesses

However, from Roger's perspective, even if communication was improved and awareness of events was high, engagement in leveraging may not follow. He suggested, "As much as we can communicate with them, sometimes you're stuck with ... you're at their mercy, basically." Mark reinforced this idea when he said, "Really it's up to [the restaurants] to do what they want, we can give them ideas but at the end of the day we can't fund all this we can only...if you're the owner of a business we'll let you know what's coming and it's up to you to do whatever you want with it."

Unfortunately, as Sarah noted, not all restaurants view sport events as an opportunity to increase business and revenue and ultimately do nothing to attract the visitors that are in the community for the event. "We don't get a lot because it's hard when restaurant owners, it's such a small margin so there's not much going on with local restaurants for the Summer Games. Again, we didn't have much control or ability to do things." As a result, as Roger noted, all they can really do is inform the businesses and encourage them to engage in leveraging.

So while they're here we encourage the businesses to have welcome signs up, just to have a little logo of that event. That participant and/or parent knows that okay, I can go here, and they're embracing us. When they go in, maybe there's a specific menu. We're trying to encourage our local businesses to embrace these groups that are coming in to make them feel welcome and so there's a consistent message.

Limited resources

The ability of the DMO to implement leveraging tactics was also constrained by their budgets allocated to each event and the number of paid staff and volunteers and respective abilities. A number of times during the interviews, Sarah and Roger described leveraging tactics they could

EVENT LEVERAGING

theoretically employ but were not able to because of limited funds or a lack of staff or capable volunteers. For example, Roger referenced the success of the past leveraging workshops they had done for a birder festival held in the past, but indicated that it would not be possible to do very often because of financial and staff limitations. Sarah described a number of efforts that were less than ideal because “we didn’t really have much of a budget” which was viewed as a “challenge.” Last, Mark described event theming initiatives that used to occur in the downtown area through the business improvement agency whereby welcoming event banners were posted and signs placed in the windows of retail locations and restaurants. Eventually, though, this effort ceased because they had a problem getting volunteers to continue doing it. “It’s work to sell it, but at the end of the day it certainly pays for itself. ... it would be nice if they were to do something more like that and then over time [it happened less often] to now nothing.”

Discussion and implications

Findings from this study provide an understanding of restaurants’ and DMO executives’ perspectives related to leveraging. Specifically, restaurants were primarily concerned with whether event leveraging would lead to business success (e.g., increased revenues) and the majority did not engage in leveraging because they did not believe they would be successful for at least one of three reasons. Specifically, they did not engage in leveraging because of a lack of belief in benefits from leveraging, inconvenient proximity to the event, and not being prepared for event leveraging opportunities. This lack of leveraging existed despite most restaurants’ typical promotion efforts that could have been adapted to attract event visitors. These findings contribute to the extant literature on event leveraging by providing further understandings as to why engagement in event leveraging may be minimal by local restaurants.

EVENT LEVERAGING

It is reasonable to expect that restaurants not close to the event venue would not view leveraging as being beneficial (c.f., Putsis, 1998). However, all of the restaurants interviewed in this study were in close proximity to either the event venues or host hotels. Thus, poor proximity does not appear to be a reasonable justification for not engaging in leveraging despite them presenting it as an explanation. For some restaurants, proximity as an explanation was offered because they failed to recognize that many visitors would be staying in hotels near their establishments. For other restaurants close to the event venue, proximity was offered as an explanation for their lack of leveraging despite the fact that distance should not have been a constraint. One of the ways that businesses inside or outside of the event area can attract event visitors is by working together to create a coordinated theming strategy that parallels the event (Chalip and Leyns, 2002; O'Brien, 2007; Smith, 2010). In such cases, attendees are able to celebrate their shared subculture beyond the event experience (Xing *et al.*, 2014). Unfortunately, in the present study no coordinated strategies were undertaken by businesses within or outside of the event or host hotel area and restaurants did not indicate an interest in working with other restaurants.

Restaurants also suggested that a lack of engagement in event leveraging was the result of a belief that benefits would not accrue from doing so. Such a perspective is to be expected from the restaurants in the study who rely solely on word-of-mouth advertising and repeat business. That is, they typically see no value in promotions to local residents, so there should not be an expectation that they will see a benefit in promoting their restaurant to visitors. However, for those restaurants who typically promote their business in various ways, it does seem like an approach that would be consistent with their strategy. In a study of a repeat event in one community, Chalip and Leyns (2002) found that some businesses eventually engaged in leveraging when they witnessed the

EVENT LEVERAGING

benefits accrued to other businesses and they did not want to miss out on the opportunity provided by the event in subsequent years. Thus, efforts should be made to reduce uncertainty of outcomes from leveraging for local businesses. Practically, event organizers are encouraged to develop and document an understanding of successful leveraging approaches undertaken in one community and share that information with future host cities so that local businesses unfamiliar with the event can make an informed decision rather than relying on the rhetoric exposed by local politicians or DMOs. This suggestion is particularly important as perspectives that challenge politicians' claims of positive economic impact and to whom the benefits accrue are increasingly common in the academic literature (e.g., Crompton and Howard, 2013; Whitson and Horne, 2006) and were articulated by study participants. The important role of educating local businesses on event leveraging was not lost on DMO officials in this study who highlighted past leveraging workshops they held in the region but were clearly constrained in executing based on available financial and human resources. Findings from the present study also suggest another strategy that may increase the confidence that claims being made are real, namely the establishment of continuity within organizing committees as local restaurants may be familiar with local figures and trust their ability to execute an event that provides the host community with economic benefits. The inability to plan for the opportunity to leverage was also expressed by some of the businesses as a reason why they did not engage in leveraging. In some cases, participants were simply not aware the events were taking place, whereas in other cases participants found out too late. Participants identified that having this advanced awareness was important in order to budget for marketing materials and create an operational plan to deal with the increased traffic. This lack of awareness was echoed by DMO officials who expressed an ability to help only when they knew a sport event was being hosted. The finding that some businesses and even the DMO were not aware the events

EVENT LEVERAGING

were taking place is troublesome and begs the question of whose responsibility it is to collect and provide the information (e.g., event organizers, other city officials, or the organizations themselves; Gretzel *et al.*, 2006). Local businesses indicated a desire to hear from the city about upcoming events, whereas previous work has identified the event organizers as being the ones who should be responsible for this task (MacKellar, 2015).

Research has identified that cooperative activities are often coordinated and facilitated by sports councils, tourism agencies or destination marketing organizations (Stokes, 2006; Wasche and Woll, 2010). In order to assist in creating the event experience these organizations are fundamental in their roles of encouraging and facilitating cooperation between event organizers and businesses (Mackellar, 2015). In previous work, businesses have also identified the lack of communication and assistance from event organizers and suggested that this served as a barrier to event engagement (Mackellar, 2015). The businesses could also host auxiliary events in collaboration with other businesses as an effective means of leveraging (O'Brien, 2006; Harrison-Hill and Chalip, 2005), yet this opportunity was also not enacted upon in the current study and no benefits were realized for the restaurants.

Coordinating agencies (e.g., DMO's, liaison officers between sport and tourism) play an important role in the development and implementation of programs that enable and assist businesses in accessing event sport tourists through structured initiatives (Weed, 2003). These initiatives serve to remove some of the barriers that businesses experience when attempting to benefit from the increased number of visitors in the community. Some of the restaurants in the current study identified a lack of awareness that sport events were taking place and thus, this would imply that the coordinating agencies in the community did not provide assistance with respect to programs and ideas for the restaurants to engage in leveraging of any kind. Whether it is the

EVENT LEVERAGING

responsibility of the business, who may have lacked the necessary skills, or that of a coordinating agency, who may have lacked the necessary human resource capacity, an opportunity was missed. Thus, there is a need for DMO's and local businesses to create stronger and more supportive working relationships in order to achieve success (Kaplanidou and Gibson, 2010; Ziakas and Costa, 2010; Weed, 2003).

Previous research has identified that organizations, such as local businesses (Mackellar, 2015) and sport organizations (Taks *et al.*, 2014) are constrained by financial and human resources capacity when it comes to leveraging events. This study highlights similar challenges exist for DMOs (Gretzel *et al.*, 2006; Karadakis *et al.*, 2010). Thus, despite the DMO's best intentions to support restaurants' event leveraging efforts, they were constrained in their capacity to do so. Similarly, it is unclear whether one of the main explanations for a lack of engagement in event leveraging was really because restaurants did not know how to leverage the event (i.e., lacked human resource capacity, specifically knowledge). This explanation is plausible when one considers that many of the restaurants interviewed did not consider promotions or theming to target visitors.

Conclusion

This study builds upon the existing event leveraging literature by identifying the conditions under which restaurant owners/managers are willing to engage in leveraging and the concurrent challenges faced by destination marketing organizations. From a local restaurant perspective, a lack of engagement in leveraging was explained by a lack of a belief in benefits from leveraging, inconvenient proximity to event, and not being prepared for event leveraging opportunities. These factors provide further understanding of the reasons for a lack of leveraging by local businesses despite potential benefits. From the local DMO's perspective, their desire to help local businesses

EVENT LEVERAGING

benefit from the hosting of events was apparent but constrained by a number of factors including awareness of events being held, engagement by local businesses, and limited resources. If creating benefits for local business through events is seen as an important positive outcome of events, then cooperation among a supportive agency (e.g., DMO) and local businesses will need prioritized attention. Doing so will enhance leveraging engagement through shared financial and human resources and information.

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