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Title: Sport participation from sport events: Why it doesn't happen?

Abstract

Purpose: This study presents and uses an Event Leveraging Framework (ELF) to examine processes and challenges when seeking to leverage a sport event to build sport participation.

Method: The study used an action research approach for which the researchers served as consultants and facilitators for local sports in the context of the International Children's Games. Initially three sports were selected, and two sports were guided through the full leveraging process. Prior to the event, actions were planned and refined, while researchers kept field notes. Challenges and barriers to implementation were examined through observation immediately prior to and during the event, and through a workshop with stakeholders six weeks after the event and interviews a year later.

Findings: With the exception of a flyer posted on a few cars during the track and field competition, none of the planned action steps was implemented. Barriers included competition and distrust among local sport clubs, exigencies associated with organizing event competitions, the event organizers' focus on promoting the city rather than its sports, and each club's insufficient human and physical resources for the task. These barriers were not addressed by local clubs because they expected the event to inspire participation despite their lack of marketing leverage. The lack of action resulted in no discernable impact of the event on sport participation.

Implications: Results demonstrate that there are multiple barriers to undertaking the necessary steps to capitalize on an event to build sport participation, even when a well-developed framework is used. Specific steps to overcome the barriers need to be implemented, particularly through partnerships and building capacity for leverage among local sport organizations.

Originality/value: This study presents the Event Leveraging Framework (ELF) and identifies reasons why sport events fail to live up to their promise to build sport participation. Necessary steps are suggested to redress that failing.

Keywords: Evaluation; Event leverage; Organizational capacity; Outcomes; Sport clubs; Sport organizations

Introduction

Although bids for sport events typically claim that the event will have a positive effect on sport participation, research finds that sport events do not increase the number of new participants (Weed et al., 2015). The problem seems to be that sport organizations take little, if any, advantage of sport events to build participation (Taks, Misener, Chalip, & Green, 2013). To address this problem, we examine how local sport organizations (LSOs) can incorporate an event into their marketing strategy to increase participation. In order to do so, we examine the strategies and challenges associated with each phase of the Event Leveraging Framework (ELF): planning, implementation, and evaluation of outcomes.

Previous work has demonstrated that after their event has passed, sport administrators and organizers of championship events recognize that they have missed an opportunity to capitalize on the event to build participation, and they wonder what could have been done (Taks et al., 2014; Misener et al., 2015). The suggestion, then, is that the event should be built into the overall marketing of sport organizations – a form of event leverage (Chalip, 2014). This paper reports an action research project that sought to assist local sport organizations (LSOs) to build participation in their sports by leveraging an international youth sport event, the International Children’s Games (ICG).

Event Leveraging Framework (ELF)

Leveraging treats an event as an addition to the product and service mix at the host destination. What an event enables, is therefore a consequence of the ways that it is incorporated into that mix and then used strategically to reach whatever strategic objectives have been set. The benefits the host community obtains depend on what it seeks from the event, and the consequent

strategies and tactics the community employs to achieve the desired ends. Thus, the focus is on strategy formulation and implementation throughout event planning and implementation.

Early work on event leverage focused on economic leveraging (Chalip, 2004). Multiple strategic objectives were shown to be feasible, and the requisite planning foci were elaborated. Subsequent work extended the model to enable leveraging to obtain social benefits (Chalip, 2006). Economic and social leverage could be made symbiotic, thereby enabling integration of the two and extension into the leverage of events to foster positive environmental attitudes and behaviors (O'Brien & Chalip, 2007). Several studies demonstrate event leveraging to be effective if-and-when it is applied (e.g., Chalip & Leyns, 2002; Kellett, Hede, & Chalip, 2008; O'Brien, 2007; Pereira, Mascarenhas, Flores, & Pires, 2015).

Extensions and integrations of event leveraging frameworks suggest that the model can be generalized and applied to specific objectives. Fundamentally, event leveraging requires strategic vision for the use of an event pursuant to particular strategic ends. A generic Event Leveraging Framework (ELF) is illustrated in Figure 1. In this study, we apply the ELF to investigate the challenges of leveraging an event for the purpose of stimulating participation.

The International Children's Games

The International Children's Games (ICG) is hosted annually across the world in a different city each year. They are sanctioned by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) (International Children's Games [ICG], 2016). Cities, rather than countries, host these events, and invite teams from other cities to participate. Unlike most international events, athletes (ages 12-15) do not necessarily need to qualify to be able to participate; they need to make the team that a city selects to send. Each city and each sport can have its own selection criteria.

This means, that while competitive, the level is not necessarily high performance, so children who are not high performance athletes can nonetheless compete internationally. The gap between elite athletes and youth non-participants can hinder the ability of the athletic performance to inspire sport participation (Hindson, Gidlow, & Peebles, 1994). However, the ICG showcases youth athletes from around the world; youth athletes that are competitive, but not so elite that other youth can't see themselves accomplishing similar feats. This attainability offers a potentially unique tool to target children and youth to participate in sport. Moreover, each sport was represented by a local team from the host city. The host city's teams were comprised of athletes from several local clubs, thereby potentially enhancing interest in the ICG among people in the community (e.g., other club members, parents, and friends). The fact that these local teams competed with international teams, made it especially attractive for the athletes, and could generate interest from the host community to come and watch the events. Local clubs hoped that the level of performances and the age of performers could generate interest in their sport among children, pre-adolescents, and adolescents.

In 2013, the event was hosted from August 14 to 19 by the city of Windsor in partnership with Essex County, Ontario, Canada. The host city and county have a population of approximately 350,000 inhabitants. The event featured eight sports: baseball, basketball, gymnastics, soccer, swimming, tennis, track and field, and volleyball. The event attracted 1,640 athletes (age 12 to 15) and coaches from 84 cities across 23 nations. The event required 1,200 volunteers and 250 local team ambassadors who spoke 25 different languages, and was said to attract approximately 4,000 tourists into Windsor-Essex County (Windsor Star, 2013a). This was the first event of its kind hosted by the community. The ICG had acted as a springboard to build a \$78 million downtown aquatic complex with the intention to pursue more large watersport events in the future (e.g.,

swimming and diving) as a part of an economic development strategy (City of Windsor, 2011, June 13). The sport competitions were free for spectators to attend, and generated substantial local media attention before, during, and after the event (Anderson & Taks, forthcoming).

Method

After an alignment phase, in which we explored potential partners for the project, we engaged in planning and implementation of leverage, and explored outcomes subsequent to the event. In order to generate a dialectical interaction among data, theory, and method, we opted for an action research approach (Chalip, 2015). Thus, we engendered and maintained a symbiotic relationship between researchers and sport clubs throughout the process, allowing for the fluid and iterative nature of the action research approach.

Selection of the Participating Sports (Alignment Phase)

The technical coordinators in all eight sports were interviewed to determine the extent to which they would be interested in attracting new participants to their sports through the ICG. All eight interviewees were representatives from local sport organizations. The interview started with some icebreaker questions about the interviewees' position(s) and responsibilities within their local club (one of the eight sports), as well as their involvement with the 2013 ICG. The core questions probed for elements of the ELF: "Are you aware of any intentions, initiatives, or strategies being taken to promote sport participation due to the International Children's Games coming to Windsor?" (i.e., ELF phases 1 & 2 – planning, goal setting, and implementation); "To your knowledge, are there any goals or objectives being formulated with regards to increasing sport participation or development?" (i.e., ELF phase 3 – identification of outcomes) ; "What are your expectations regarding the potential effects the event may have on sport development and participation for you sport?" (personal perspective on leveraging ICG for sport participation). All

interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and coded via phases of the ELF, using NVivo.

Based on the interviews, team sports were eliminated, as the technical coordinators expressed concern for development of coaches and officials (i.e., the supply side), rather than attracting new participants (i.e., the demand side). Tennis was also eliminated, as the technical coordinator for that sport deemed it to be operating at full capacity, with no spare coaching or court time through which to accommodate new participants. This left three individual sports: gymnastics, track and field, and swimming. The track and field technical coordinator expressed interest and noted that the sport had room for growth. The technical coordinator for swimming expected significant opportunities for growth due to the new aquatic facility being built for the event. The technical coordinator for gymnastics expressed interest in coordinating local clubs to promote the sport locally through the ICG, including educating locals about gymnastics. So, gymnastics, swimming, and track and field were selected into the planning phase as candidate partners for leverage.

The Planning Phase

All local clubs in the three sports (one track and field club, four gymnastics clubs and two swimming clubs) were sent a recruitment e-mail inviting them to have a conversation about the club's potential goals for leveraging their sport during the 2013 ICG, and how the research team could share their resources to assist the club to achieve these goals. If clubs expressed interest, they were invited to participate in our meetings and workshops. They were asked to identify stakeholders relevant to their sport and club (e.g., parents, coaches, executives, funders, referees), and to invite them to take part in the planning workshops. The planning phase consisted of multiple meetings and workshops with administrators and representatives from clubs in each sport (n=14;

Table 1) to consider ways to build the event into their marketing, and to determine whether the clubs were interested in leveraging. During three initial meetings (i.e., one in each sport), we sought to determine the need to leverage for growth, the desire to pursue leveraging opportunities, and the degree to which each club felt capable to undertake leverage. Participants in the gymnastics and swimming sessions came from different clubs, and talked about their sport in the local area in general. We started with *scoping*, which included a discussion around the following questions: “What do we all know and what are we all doing?”; “How much capacity does [sport] have?”; “Is the gender balance good?”; “Up to what age are athletes still sampling [your sport]?”; “How is member retention?”; “Where do new members come from?”; “What is your organizational structure?”; “How are your media relations?”; “Are there any ICG Issues?”; “Ideas for the future?”; “How can the research team help [your sport]?”. Next, individual *brainstorming sessions* were held for track and field (two sessions), and for gymnastics (one session); the two sports were deemed ready to begin the leveraging process based on the ELF (see result section below). During these sessions, strategies for leveraging, before, during and after the event were identified. Based on this, an *action plan* was developed, including points of action, as well as the timing, purpose, available resources, and necessary resources for each action point. Throughout this process, the researchers served as facilitators and consultants, recording ideas on whiteboards, and revising them as the ideas developed. A research assistant served as a note taker. Pictures were taken of the whiteboards as ideas were generated and refined.

The Implementation Phase

As planning for leverage crystallized, clubs were advised to establish “leveraging committees” to enable implementation. In the lead-up to the event, the research team worked with club administrators to further develop, refine, and implement leveraging strategies and tactics,

while also trying to reduce barriers and troubleshoot problems as they arose. Methods used included skype or phone meetings, as well as personal meetings in which research team and club members collectively worked on elements of the plan (e.g., developing a flyer for gymnastics). Notes were kept throughout the process. The research team phased out its active role as the event began, in order to evaluate each club's leveraging efforts. Thus, during the event, the research team monitored implementation as observers. The team looked specifically for evidence of the action points from the previously developed plans (whether they were undertaken, and if so, how they were implemented); while also observing how the events in the different sports unfolded to identify any missed opportunities for leverage. The team kept field notes and took photographs of their observations.

Outcome Evaluation

In addition to observation during the event, a post-event workshop was organized six weeks after the event. During that workshop, club leaders from each sport came together to compare and discuss what was done and what outcomes were still anticipated. Their insights and ideas were then used to as a basis for individual interviews with club leaders a year after the ICG in order to obtain a more detailed sense of what had transpired during and after the event.

Post event workshop (six weeks post ICG). Participants in the one-day workshop included seven representatives across the three sports (see also Table 1): track and field (n=2; two board members), gymnastics (n=2; a head coach, and a representative from another local gym club), and swimming (n=3; a head coach/technical director, and two club coaches). Swimming was included again because the swimming clubs had also considered using the event to build participation, although they elected to proceed without support from the researchers (see below). The participants were asked three questions to consider the ways in which the ICG did and did not

affect their club and their sport, and to list as many ideas as possible: (1) What were the beneficial outcomes of the ICG for your Sport/Club?; (2) What resulted from the ICG that was not so good (or downright bad) for your Sport/Club?; and, (3) What might have made the ICG more beneficial for your Sport/club? Throughout this process, the researchers served as facilitators to stimulate thoughts and ideas, and recorded ideas on whiteboards. A research assistant served as a note taker transcribing the discussions that took place. Photographs were taken of the whiteboards as the discussion progressed.

Follow-up interviews (1 year post ICG). A year later, follow-up interviews were conducted with nine participants, who each had a different type of involvement with the ICG (see also Table 1). Track and field was represented by a head coach of a relatively new track and field club (TF 1) and a board member from the established local track and field club who was also an assistant to ICG athlete selection (TF 2) and had been involved in the whole ELF process. Swimming was represented by an assistant competition organizer (SWIM 1), a meet manager (SWIM 2), and the head technical director (SWIM 3). Gymnastics was represented by two head coaches from two different local clubs (GYM 1 and GYM 4), a competition organizer (GYM 2), and a volunteer club official (GYM 3).

The semi-structured interview guide was adapted from Taks et al. (2014) and Misener et al. (2015). Questions included: “What were the outcomes for your sport from the ICG?”; “How did those outcomes compare to expectations, desired outcomes, and actions?”; “What leveraging actions were done/not done, and why?”. Probing questions were used to gain deeper insights. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, except for one, which was completed by phone. The interviews lasted between fifteen to forty-eight minutes, and were recorded. Each was transcribed,

and NVivo was used to assist with thematic coding. Findings were subsequently compared to data from initial stages.

Table 1 provides an overview of all participants in the meetings and workshops of the planning phase and outcome evaluation phases. In total, there were 19 unique individuals; three participated in all three phases; five participated in two out of the three phases, and 11 participated in one part only. As indicated earlier, representatives from clubs in each sport were selected and invited to participate at every stage; participation was voluntary, and everyone who accepted our invitation was welcome to participate.

Results

Planning Phase

Individual planning meetings were held four months prior to the ICG. The meetings were customized to the needs, objectives, and structure of each sport. There was only one track and field club in the community, but there were two swim clubs, and multiple gymnastics clubs. Although in each case, the purpose was explicitly to grow the sport, the planning process was affected by the structure of the club systems in the community.

Track and Field. Track and Field had the simplest planning process as it was, essentially, a strategic planning exercise for a single club. All three participants worked for the local club in some capacity; all had in-depth knowledge of the traditional recruitment activities of the club; all had a history of working together. As a result, this group made significant progress in developing an action plan to leverage the ICG, and exhibited excitement about the potential of the event to grow the club. However, these participants also represented the most active members of the club's board, so they were deeply invested in the current ways of doing things. Although there was shared interest in expanding the club's recruitment efforts, there was concern regarding the capacity of

club and board members to implement a full range of tactics. Nevertheless, this was the only group to formulate a full action plan during the initial workshop. Their abbreviated action plan is shown in Table 2.

Swimming. Three representatives from each of two competing clubs (six persons in total) represented swimming at the planning workshop. The two clubs were somewhat different in their focus, philosophy, and structure. One was a not-for-profit club with a strong emphasis on development of competitive swimmers from beginner to elite. The other was a for-profit club owned by a coach whose primary focus was elite competition, and with a particular concern for recruitment and retention of a corps of highly skilled competitors.

The tension between the clubs was evident from the start. Participants spent much of their time discussing the challenges and needs facing the sport, and sometimes contrasting their club with the other club. Since both clubs were looking forward to the new aquatic facility, which they agreed would be of benefit, the conversation gravitated to the gains they expected to accrue from it. Although both clubs identified the need for a feeder system from local community recreational programs and lamented the high rental fees to use the new aquatics centre, they disagreed on the need to grow, with the for-profit club content with its current participation numbers. Strategies for leveraging the ICG were suggested by both clubs, but there was scant agreement as the two clubs viewed each other as competitors, and could not find common ground for leverage. Consequently, no action plan could be formulated by them jointly, and each club worried that anything they did as an individual club would be undermined by the other, or that the other club would free ride on its efforts. At this point, swimming was dropped from the action research effort. However, the team continued to monitor and observe the efforts of the swim clubs to benefit from the ICG.

Gymnastics. The gymnastics planning session was attended by representatives from four clubs – one from each of three clubs, and two from the other. The club representatives were quick to embrace the need to grow the sport and the potential of the ICG to grow participation in the sport for all clubs. As with the other sports, participants in the gymnastics planning session had been active in the sport for a lengthy period of time, and had consequently known each other for some time. The group was slightly larger and more diverse than the group representing the other two sports, so the discussion was lively and remained focused on the needs of the sport, rather than the needs of individual clubs. This group was slow to get to strategies and tactics, as the breadth of ideas generated was a function of the diversity of participants, clubs, and experience in the room. Although there was enthusiasm for the planning process, the participants found it difficult to identify specific actions, and to determine specific responsibilities for implementing actions. The action plan was not well formed during the planning session. The group size may have contributed to a sense among participants that someone else will/can do this. The resulting initial action plan is shown in Table 3.

Implementation Phase

The role of the research team during the implementation phase was to support implementation of the action plans developed during the planning phase. Each of the sports was to tailor its strategies to suit their specific ideas and needs. Observations before and during the event demonstrated that little was accomplished during the preparation for implementation because clubs lacked necessary resources and capabilities, as described below.

Track and Field. Prior to the event, Track and Field had developed a sound strategy to use the event for broadening the base of participation in the club. The members had identified the need to target pre-, during and post-event in order to capitalize on the opportunity afforded by the ICG

and the recent renovations of the local track and field facility. However, as the event approached, planned actions were simplified or set aside. Licensing agreements for the event prevented promotions inside the event itself, so flyers were developed to be distributed outside the venue. The research team supported the club by developing the advertising material that was then distributed via windshield flyers on two days during the event. In total, 117 were distributed by placing them onto the windshields of cars parked outside the track and field competition venue.

In order to enable the contest specified in its action plan, and to amplify interest, the club sought to set-up a tent just outside of the track and field venue to promote the club and sport, as well as offer some autograph signing opportunities with the club's elite athletes, some of whom were (upcoming) Olympians. These local heroes could easily attract attention from younger children to come and visit the promotional tent. The licensing constraints of the event did not allow the club to set up such a tent in the vicinity of the facility. Of the other strategies devised in the plan, none was implemented on either end of the event as the club could not bring the necessary human and physical resources to bear.

Gymnastics. The initial action plan became daunting as there was a lot going on in terms of club structures and the potential development of new gymnastics facilities during the lead up to the ICG. Only two of the four local clubs agreed to work together to promote the sport (these two clubs merged a year after the ICG). As those clubs found it difficult to develop a plan and work towards implementation, the research team took an active supporting role. Two meetings were held to flesh out the action plan, and to work on implementation. During the first meeting, six weeks in advance of the ICG, the clubs showed the research team the flyer that had been produced and handed out at three parades/demonstrations (Canada Day Parade, Windsor Crossing, Sport Fit Demo). The flyer was generic and did not highlight the ICG or any of the athletes who would be

competing at the event. No further demonstrations or parades were planned prior to the ICG at that point in time. One of the club coordinators who was working on the sport components with ICG was to explore the possibility of coordinating with the Opening or Closing Ceremonies. Additionally, Bingo Cards were to be developed to be used on site as spectator incentives for prizes.

In addition to the previously planned action, the group also decided to provide on-site information about gymnastics for spectators. One of the club members was tasked with liaising with the ICG gymnastics announcer to animate and inform the audience about gymnastics, including values, rules, judging, and local details. Finally, the group also agreed to add the ICG as an option on Fall 2013 and Winter 2014 registration forms for new members to check when answering the question, “How did you hear about X Club?” It was intended to track the effect of the ICG and any associated leveraging efforts.

At the follow-up meeting held two weeks prior to the ICG representatives from both clubs reported that neither club had initiated any of the tactics identified in the preceding meeting. The Bingo Cards had not been developed, and no connections for demonstrations or inclusion in the Ceremonies had been accomplished. The representatives complained about the lack of time available, and the paucity of human resources available to make these things happen. While the research team offered to support their efforts, both clubs were concerned that whatever the research team developed could not be implemented because the clubs lacked the necessary time and resources to do anything. Although pooling resources might have mitigated the problem, each club worried that the other might then benefit at the expense of the other. So, each was reticent to partner or to initiate individual action.

Outcome Phase

Post-event workshop

Seven representatives from all three sports (2 for gymnastics, 3 for swimming, and 2 for track and field) shared their reflections on ICG and expressed sport and/or club specific outcomes during the one-day post-event workshop.

Beneficial outcomes. There was general agreement that the ICG had created a small degree of local buzz about youth sport, and even a bit of development for local sports. Gymnastics representatives reported that they were pleased to see a general (non-gymnast) audience at the event, which they deemed to be useful exposure for the sport. Swimming representatives noted a novelty effect due to the new facility, to which they attributed the largest attendance a swimming competition had yet attained locally. Track and field representatives reported an increase in new registration for cross country, and attributed the increase to the ICG. Opportunities for athletes, coaches, and referees to obtain international experience were also identified as beneficial outcomes from the ICG for all three sports. The media attention that each sport obtained through the event was also deemed to be positive.

Non-beneficial outcomes. Despite the positives noted, there were some clear negatives, which had not been anticipated. Although the two swimming clubs had to work together to support administration and refereeing at the ICG, their relationship did not improve. Gymnastics also experienced increased tension among the clubs. Meanwhile, a new track and field club was endeavoring to form, and sought to attract athletes from the existing club, which rendered new tensions in that sport. These tensions among clubs illustrate the difficulties inherent in promoting a sport when its clubs are in competition with each other. As the sport representatives noted, the problem was exacerbated because there was no opportunity to showcase what clubs had to offer

because, as host of the event, the city insisted on showcasing the city rather than any sport or its clubs¹. They also felt that the sport could not be showcased because rules were not explained and excitement was not generated at the venues during the event – a factor that made the lack of cooperation beyond the venue all-the-more necessary, but harder to generate. Further, since the event took place outside the normal competition calendar, it was hard to align any promotional activities with the standard promotional methods that clubs had in place.

Missed opportunities (What might have made the ICG more beneficial?). The combination of incidental benefits and unexpected negative outcomes led the representatives of each sport to conclude that benefits could have been amplified, and negatives thereby minimized. Track and field and gymnastics representatives argued that there should have been more interaction with the ICG organizing committee so that the event could have been better staged while also doing more to promote the clubs directly. As an illustration of a specific tactic pursuant to that end, a gymnastics representative commented that the non-gymnastics audience should have been provided demonstrations of the ways that gymnastics can benefit performance in other sports. There was a consensus that partnerships should be built within sports, across sports, and with community organizations to share resources and to enable leverage. In particular, they agreed that a media strategy needed to be developed to generate narratives that would promote youth sport in general, and each sport in particular. The need to build capacity within and across sport clubs to enable leveraging tactics like these was noted as a prerequisite for future event leveraging.

Post-event interviews

The interviews revealed three themes describing factors that undermined intended strategies and tactics for local sport organizations to leverage the ICG: (1) there is a pervasive

¹ The city embarked on a separate ICG legacy project for Windsor-Essex: “In Sport WE are one” (Windsor Star, 2013b), a children’s health promotion initiative through the schools; sport clubs were not on their radar for this initiative.

expectation that hosting a sport event will engender new levels of sport participation; (2) sport clubs did not have the necessary relationships with the event organizing committee to enable promotions through the event itself; and, (3) sport clubs lack the necessary human and financial resources to engage in leveraging. These themes elaborate and confirm findings obtained immediately prior to and during the event.

The problem with the underlying assumption that hosting a sport event will create new sport participation was described by an informant from track and field, who pointed out that the participants are the same young people who are already highly committed to the sport:

I think it's really centered around the elite kids. Yeah, [the ICG] brought sport into everybody's eyes, but ... having the kid already playing travel make the ICG team is not a participation success; that is a continuation. (TF 2)

This particular statement reflects that the local youth selected for the cities' teams, were those who are already highly involved in their sport. While the ICG showcased sports at an attainable level for youth, interviewees noted that the entertainment value of the event was insufficient to drive a nonparticipant to train and compete. The fact that the specific age and level characteristics of the ICG made the event uniquely suitable tool to attract new child, pre-adolescent, and adolescent participants, in the absence of complementary marketing initiatives, its entertainment value was insufficient to generate interest in participation.

The limitations posed by the lack of integration of sports with event organizing were a consequence of the fact that the city, which enabled the event, sought to have the city itself (rather than the sports) promoted through the event. As one of the gymnastics informants put it, "There was a lot about how it [ICG] would promote the city, and how the city would take advantage of it, and how it would help the city, but not necessarily how it would help all our individual sports"

(GYM 1). In other words, because the event was intended as a promotional tool for the city, sport participation benefits were disregarded.

This problem was exacerbated by the unwillingness of clubs to band together to forge their own partnerships to enable promotion of their sports. The clubs viewed one another as competitors for participants, competitive success, and consequent revenues. Although most clubs had an interest in promoting themselves, the fact that they were unwilling to cooperate kept sport promotion off the organizers' agenda. Organizing the event was demanding enough without trying to coordinate efforts among unwilling clubs, and if the organizers did a sport promotion without one or more clubs, they could be accused of favoritism. So, it was in their interest to put promotion of sport participation aside. Informants bemoaned the lack of cooperation and the consequent effect. One said, "There needs to be a unified approach to sports throughout the entire community; it can't be individualized groups trying to work by themselves" (SWIM 1). Another said, "If there's no co-operation or ... if there isn't going to be a partnership between the organizers and the grass roots clubs, it is very, very difficult to get any [sport participation] results" (TF 2). Nevertheless, the sport club representatives expressed a wish that the event organizers had found a way to promote them, despite their resistance to cooperation among themselves.

The lack of human and financial resources (aka: organizational capacity) was regularly mentioned as a barrier. A track and field assistant coach summarized the problem described by representatives from every club, "Basically, half a dozen people do ninety percent of the work ... and you can only fit so much in" (TF 2). When the issues of organizational capacity were probed, respondents noted that the issue was not merely the number of workers, but also their skills, and the resources they could bring to bear. The people doing the work were aficionados of the sport, but

they typically lacked marketing expertise. Further, clubs were tightly budgeted, and lacked the necessary resources to hire help or to produce and distribute marketing collateral.

Discussion

At first blush, it might seem that incorporating an event into marketing to build sport participation using ELF should be fairly straightforward. After all, the event attracts attention, and the athletes' performances are featured. Yet, our findings show that mere attention and interest are insufficient to render new participation, as previous work also shows (Weed et al., 2015). Implementation of the necessary strategies and tactics to leverage participation from a sport event is the core of ELF, but it requires added initiative, which is its core challenge (cf. Bretherton, Piggin, and Bodet, 2016).

Of course, if there is a pervasive expectation that the event will foster participation, it would seem unnecessary to make the effort to leverage the event. Event bids typically make the claim that events will have that effect, even though research shows the claim to be unfounded. As a consequence, it is only after the event is over that sport organizations recognize that they have missed an opportunity (Misener et al., 2015; Taks et al., 2014). Opposing forces are at play. Event bidders and organizers want to claim that their event is worth the effort and the public investment, but in the case of sport participation, that claim seems to dampen enthusiasm for actually making the effort to create participation outcomes. The first task, then, is to foster a clear understanding among local sport clubs that the promised benefits will only materialize if they, themselves, do the work to obtain them. To no small degree, this requires that administrators of local sport clubs are taught to disregard the public relations rhetoric of event bidders and organizers.

Yet, the necessary strategic planning and implementation may be stymied by the competition among local clubs – both within and between sports. The value of having competitors

find common ground for cooperation has been demonstrated in other industries (Walley, 2007). It may be particularly difficult to obtain in sport, however, as competition is intrinsic to sport itself (Roberts & Chick, 1984; Sharpe, 2003), and sport clubs seek to thwart cooperation if it is forced upon them, even for their own benefit (Harris & Houlihan, 2016). In order to overcome the distinctive challenges for coordinating sport organizations that compete with one another, it may be necessary to create governance structures that do not rely on club members and volunteers, and possibly to create a centralized authority for club coordination, perhaps in the form of a commissioner (Chalip & Scott, 2005). In other words, a precondition for strategic leveraging of an event by sport clubs seems to be structural adjustments to mitigate the barriers created by competition among those clubs.

Although such adjustments may be necessary, they are unlikely to be sufficient. In the first place, event organizing is an enormous task. If the same people who would be required to leverage an event are also engaged with hosting it, the demands of hosting the event will displace any effort to leverage. This has also been found in the case of economic leverage (Chalip, 2004). Separating the human resources devoted to event organization from those assigned to event leverage seems to be essential. Yet, cooperation between event organizers and those who are leveraging is clearly essential in order for goals to be shared and tactical implementations to be enabled.

Local level sport clubs may need to be engaged with leveraging, but they are likely to lack the financial and human resources necessary to do so. The volunteers and employees they have are already engaged with running the club, and they may already have procedures for recruitment. They may lack the time or marketing expertise necessary to leverage the event, and the club may lack the resources to provide the support they would need to do so even if they want to leverage. Those were certainly problems here, and they have been noted elsewhere (Bretherton, Piggin, &

Bodet, 2016; Harris & Houlihan, 2016). Building the capacity of sport clubs to leverage an event is a necessary preliminary task. That includes recruitment of necessary human resources, training in the requisite marketing skills, and creation of partnerships with local businesses, media, and universities.

Finally, it is useful to recall that not all sports will be in a position to build participation, even if event bidders and organizers advocate that they should. Necessary preconditions include adequate space for training, sufficient coaching personnel, and an appropriate number of officials and administrators. If the capacity to enroll and serve new participants is not developed prior to the event, leveraging would be pointless. Sport events might well be used to build sport participation. The fact that they have not yet proven capable of so doing may be a consequence of the lack of strategic vision for incorporating them into marketing efforts to build participation. So doing is not a straightforward task, but findings here suggest that the necessary means are apparent and feasible.

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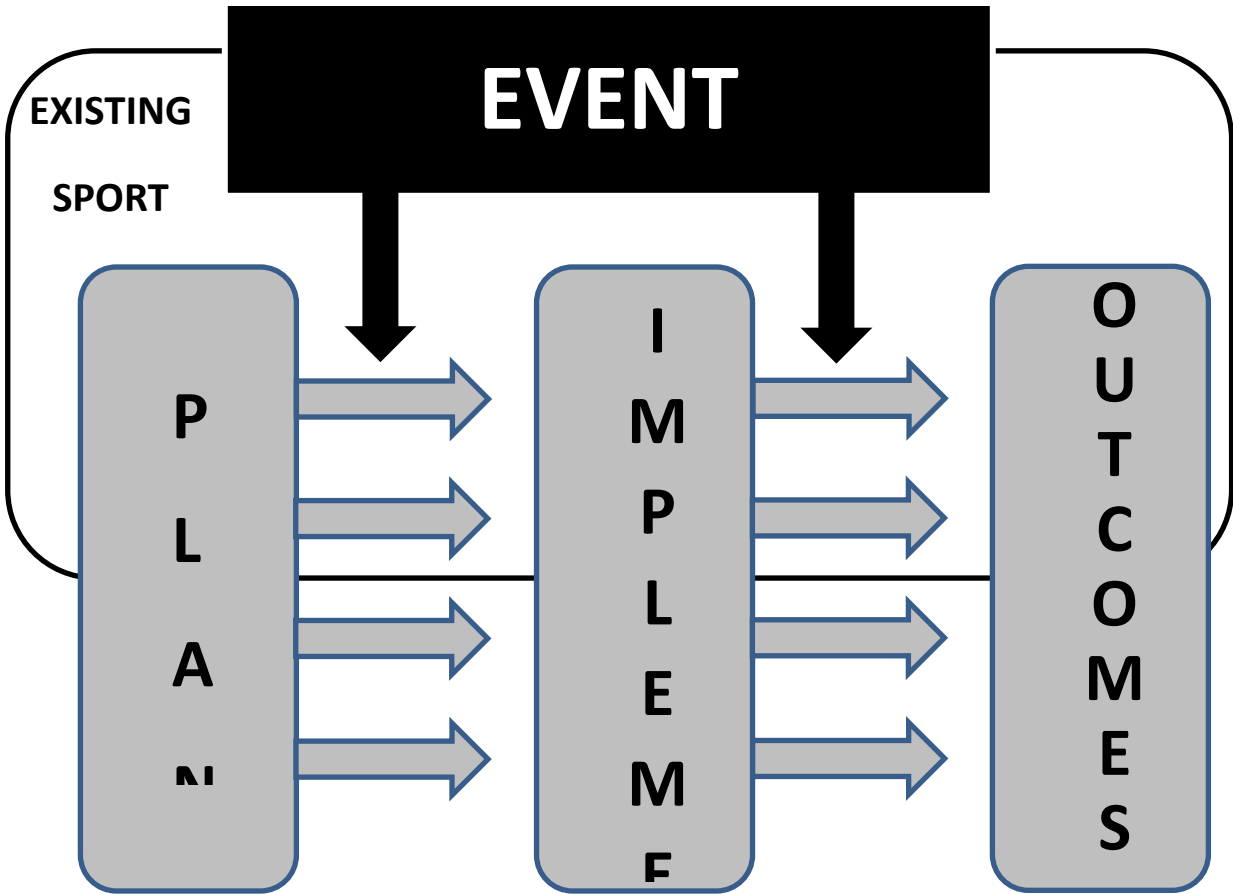


Figure 1: Event Leverage Framework (ELF)

Table 1: Overview of the Study Participants: Sport, Club and Role Identification

Sport	Planning Phase Meetings and workshops (per sport) n=14	Outcome evaluation	
		One day post-event workshop (sports combined) n=7	Interviews one year post event n=9 [Pseudonym]
Track and Field			
Club 1	BM1 ³ <i>BM2</i> CO1	BM1 ³ <i>BM2</i>	BM1 ³ [TF 2]
Club 2			HCO [TF 1]
Gymnastics			
Club 1	<i>BM1</i> ¹ CO1 CO2	CO3	<i>BM1</i> ¹ [GYM 2] VOL [GYM 3]
Club 2		<i>HCO</i>	<i>HCO</i> [GYM 1]
Club 3	HCO VOL		
Club 4			HCO [GYM 4]
Swimming			
Club 1	HCO ¹ <i>CO1</i> VOL1 VOL2	HCO ¹ <i>CO1</i> ²	HCO ¹ [SWIM 3]
Club 2	<i>HCO</i> ² CO1 ²	CO1 ²	<i>HCO</i> ⁴ [SWIM 2] CO1 ² [SWIM 1]

Note. BM = Board Member; HCO= Head Coach; CO = Coach; VOL = Volunteer; # refers to a certain person;

¹ also technical directors in their sport, interviewed during the selection phase;

² also assistant competition organizers

³ also an assistant to the athlete selection

⁴ also a meet manager

Bold = participated in three phases; *Italic*: participated in 2 phases.

Table 2: Action plan developed for Track and Field

Action Plan: Track and Field (developed at initial planning meeting)	
Distribute flyers to elementary schools (club already does this)	
Promotions specific to ICG	
<i>Pre-ICG</i>	Distribute flyers and video display to Community Centres Coupon program for prize redemption at ICG ICG Exclusive special event invitation to summer training participants Video contest – Participation in track and field is fun! (embed club)
<i>ICG</i>	Social media push Link to prize redemption – tweet/post photo of self with prize Link all contest prizes to club membership
Develop new posters and enhance flyers to attract new participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move from informational, to sell benefits • Develop potential slogans and communication themes 	
Develop a Progress Report for participants in Spring Prep events <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • map progress and show next steps in the sport 	
Build database for use in marketing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing and past participants • Contest participants 	
Develop ongoing public relations plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create media grid • Build and implement social media plan 	

Table 3: Action Plan Gymnastics

Action Plan: Gymnastics	
Distribute flyers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track all flyers produced • Track events where distributed • Include “how did you hear about XClub” on registration forms post-ICG 	
Promotions specific to ICG <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute multi-club flyers onsite • Bingo Card promotion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Collect experiences to win ○ Focus on gymnastics skills • Cross-promote at other sport sites (flyers, demos, etc.) • Secure animated announcer for ICG gymnastics to promote the sport/enhance knowledge 	