Leveraging 2nd Tier Status: London’s Bid for the 2013 World Figure Skating Championships

Richelle Clark, The University of Western Ontario
Laura Misener (Advisor), The University of Western Ontario

Abstract 2012-063 Thursday, May 24, 2012 1:10 PM

Poster (Madison Ballroom)

It is common practice for cities to draw upon previous the resources and knowledge of successful events in hopes of securing future events. In this respect, cities are attempting to leverage these past successes to build their sport event portfolio. According to Chalip (2006), the purpose of studying event leverage, “is to identify and explore event implementations that can optimise desired event outcomes” (p.112). The strategies and tactical leveraging information should be considered in the pre-planning stages and during an event in order to obtain a desired outcome (Chalip, 2006). This idea becomes useful for cities as they can use and reuse similar strategies and tactics to attain the preferred outcomes from hosting sporting events. Within the limited leveraging literature scholars have begun to acknowledge social leveraging tactics as a means of building relationships, (Misener & Mason, 2006) and as a means of social development (Smith, 2010). These social leveraging initiatives include positive impacts on small businesses, increase tourism, and opportunities for sport development (Smith, 2010). The broadening awareness of the potential of leveraging tactics and opportunities associated with events has also been recognized in small markets as there is much to gain from hosting a sport event including, networking relationships, economic benefits, and place promotion marketing benefits (Brockinton, 2003). These smaller market cities are typically considered to be second tier cities, which are defined as spatially distinct areas of economic activity, distinct from larger urban metropolises' metropolises' (Markusen, Lee & DiGiovanna, 1999). These types of cities have been argued to offer a distinct competitive advantage in terms of attracting meetings and conventions over larger urban centres. A growing body of literature (Hiller, 2000; Black, 2008; Cornelissen, 2004; Misener & Mason, 2008, 2009) has focused on these second tier cities that have leveraged their unique resources to obtain sporting events. This is particularly important in terms of how these cities are leveraging their second tier status to showcase their city. To investigate the unique leveraging tactics of smaller second tier cities, a case study of London Ontario is employed.

The investigation of London, Ontario was chosen as the case study because of the recent awarding of the 2013 International Skating Union (ISU) World Figure Skating Championship. The city, with a population of just over 350,000 people is located in south-western Ontario Canada, has a well documented list of national and world class events including: 2001 Canada Summer Games, 2005 and 2010 BMO Figure Skating Championships, 2007 World Synchronized Skating Championships, 2008 World Under-17 Hockey Tournament and soon to be the 2013 ISU World Figure Skating Championships. The purpose of this case study was to examine how the past successes within the city of London have been leveraged for 2013. The study also addresses key relationships that have impacted the bid process and creative alternatives that have been employed to remain competitive. This second tier city is a unique investigation as they have an impressive list of previously hosted events that have required little to no additional infrastructure. The city has a strong volunteer base (Doherty, 2003) and a varying degree of events coming to town. What is it about the city of London that draws a constant stream of second order events every year, and more specifically, elite skating events?

In order to investigate the leveraging tactics used within the city of London, several methods have been employed. First, a document analysis was conducted that included the bid documents and the city documents that related to the 2013 ISU Figure Skating Championships. These documents provided information and facts that have been used to understand the strategies and tactics used by the city during a bidding process. Second, interviews with key event personnel took place which provided confirmation on facts and event information. The unstructured interview format allows flexibility to the design of questions and the probes. The interview questions were designed based on the document analysis and reflect the theoretical framework which was guided by key city official’s expertise. Written documentation and e-mail communication have been collected for referencing and corroboration purposes.

The city of London has hosted three successful skating championships to date. London Ontario falls under the jurisdiction of Skate Canada who governs figure skating in Canada. When the 2013 World Figure Skating Championships were awarded to Canada, the governing body had the opportunity to pick specific cities that were worthy of hosting such an event. Skate Canada approached London due to the city’s previous experience, expertise
and relationships. Being a second tier city meant that London had to draw on as many positive aspects as possible to display that the city was capable of hosting a world event. A representative from Tourism London explained that their relationship between Skate Canada had been promoted through previous events which ultimately helped the city to win the 2013 worlds. The fostering of relationships between both parties helped establish trust, communication, and understanding; all vital in the awarding of 2013. While facility could have been a breaking point for the awarding of the championships, London framed the “downfall” as a selling feature that would guarantee a sell-out crowd. This was imperative to the ISU standards and London utilized the downfall as a leveraging tactic. In addition, London has taken the opportunity to operate a community based initiative outside the venue that incorporates the downtown core and local businesses during the event. In other words, London has incorporated social leveraging tactics around event celebrations (Chalip, 2006) into the event, which will foster relationships between the community, small businesses, and the tourists from the event. The presentation will focus on how London has created a unique second tier position and niche for itself by leveraging their second tier resources in an effort to foster an ongoing event hosting strategy.