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Understanding Urban Development Through the Use of an Events Portfolio

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(including questions)

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It has become increasingly more difficult for cities, big or small, to differentiate themselves in the global marketplace. Consequently, events can offer the means for cities to stand out and distinguish themselves if events are strategically positioned in a way that enhances the overall municipal product. What is known about sport and urban strategic processes (i.e. tourism, city branding, city development) has focused mainly on mega-events in large scale cities (Burbank, Andranovich & Heying, 2002; Hall, 1992; Getz, 2005) with few notable exceptions (i.e. Chalip & Leyns, 2002; Veltri, Miller & Harris, 2009). Cities that host small-scale events (local tournaments, regional competitions, National and World single sport events) are recognizing the potential for positive tourism impacts, community development and increase economic activity for local business (O'Brien & Chalip, 2008; Higham, 1999; Misener & Mason, 2006). This has been investigated by scholars who have attempted to conceptualize how cities of various sizes are strategically using events for broader urban processes (Moscardo, 2007; Taks, et al., 2012). One theoretical perspective that has received increasing attention, is the use of event portfolios; a systematic approach that involves various stakeholders and provides maximal benefits to a community when events are leveraged with a strategic mindset (Ziakas & Costa, 2011).

The research on event portfolios has demonstrated the need to pay greater attention to the interconnectivity of the event processes in order to create the desired economic and tourism outcomes for a city or region (Ziakas, 2010). In particular, the interconnections within the social, political and economic environments are key. Notably, there is a knowledge gap in understanding the unique context of small-scale Canadian cities seeking to position themselves for tourism and economic enhancements. Thus, this research is attempting to fill this gap and add to the expanding literature on event portfolio's by examining the ways in which one small-medium scale Canadian city has attempted to distinguish itself in a crowded events marketplace through the development of a strategically developed events portfolio. Through this study, researchers will gain valuable knowledge in how city's go about strategically scheduling and hosting events for the greater urban and regional development and acknowledging potential drawbacks that can come from a particular city's strategy.

Small-scale events have shown to provide cities with positive social, economic, and environmental enhancements (O'Brien & Chalip, 2008; O'Brien, 2007) such as increase employment and structural developments (Walo, Bull & Breen, 1996), and leave less of a financial burden on the host city once the event is over (Higham, 1999). Shonk, et al. (2012) noted that city officials and private businesses now prefer to bid on small-scale events due to the ease in more manageable city logistics of smaller scale of events.

Given the overwhelming scholarly focus on first order events (i.e. Olympic Games) and the increasing attention to second order events (i.e. Commonwealth Games) research that examines how smaller-scale cities can remain competitive in a cluttered global market is essential. The need has grown to understand the strategic processes and synergies involved in hosting small-scale cultural and sporting events for urban development. The events portfolio literature has focused mainly on small-scale cities that host small-scale events (Ziakas & Costa, 2011; Gibson, Kaplanidou & Kang, 2012) since small-scale cities are struggling to compete on the global market, there is a need for cities to strategize in how they host events and plan for local development. Ziakas and Costa (2011) investigated an events portfolio in Texas, USA, and found several key components: 1) portfolios encompass various cultural and sporting events to meet the communities needs (unify the community); 2) an integrated component with the city's tourism mix; 3) fostering relationships between city officials and event organizers. Chalip & Costa (2005) found that city branding is also a strategic element that must be leveraged within a portfolio or within a city's other sports and attractions offered to maximize the destination brand. The investigation of how event portfolios are used within cities has allowed researchers to better understand how events fit within the broader city strategy and urban planning and development.

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The purpose of this study is to examine the strategic use of sporting events, in particular 'ice' events (skating and hockey) in the development of an events portfolio. In particular, we focus on three central research questions that guide the research process: 1) How have the sporting events (in particular 'ice' events) been selected and utilized as part of the city's strategic planning process?; 2) How have civic actors used events to strategically 'brand' the city?; 3) How do sporting events 'fit' within the broader processes of the 'event portfolio'? These questions will provide insight on how a small-scale city positions itself for greater urban development and also supply scholars with knowledge on how these strategies and processes are created and executed.

A single case study method of a small-scale city within Ontario, Canada is appropriate for this research as the city has been identified as a unique case because it has strategically positioned events for tourism and community development. Through semi-structured interviews with key city actors, document analyses and onsite observations (Creswell, 2007; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) a better understanding of the city's strategic processes for furthering its urban development has been developed.

We will focus our discussion on the results about the strategic event portfolio which suggests that this city has paid particular attention to 'ice' events within its portfolio, though, it is unclear if there is a strategic focus driving these specific events. This city has used these 'ice' events to build a brand for the city which compliments with what Chalip and Costa (2005) have explained is necessary for building a positive destination brand. The city has a strong focus on sport events, however the key actors have recently turned their attention to other avenues such as cultural events to captivate new audiences. By balancing the interests of the community through different events, the city has attempted to bring the community together to enhance the spirit and pride of the locals (Walo, Bull and Breen, 1996). Lastly, the city has a strategic focus on leveraging their facilities in order to obtain further events. The events must compliment the size of the local venue to be considered by the city which Higham (1999) noted in his commentary.

References

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