Introduction

During the past decade, there has been considerable academic research in terms of sport-for-development related projects (Lyras 2007, 2011; Lyras & Peachy 2011; Coalter 2007; Reich & Pivovarov 1994; Sugden, 2006; United Nations, 2005). Despite the increased interest in the socioeconomic impacts of sport, there is an absence of recognition of the role of sport as potential engine of development (Levenmore, 2008), as well as lack of empirical evidence on the actual contribution of sport and events on intergroup togetherness and overall community development (Schulenkorf, 2012). Thus, researchers have acknowledged the need for the development and application of strategic frameworks and models that would assist event managers with planning, management and leveraging of development projects for wider social norms (Schulenkorf, 2012).

Review of Literature

Sport for Development Theory (SFDT) (Lyras, 2007, 2012a, 2012b; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011) was developed to help understand the structures, processes, conditions, and program components of SFD interventions that can facilitate positive impact and produce liminality and communitas (Chalip, 2006). SFDT and social leverage theory (Chalip, 2006) suggest that the blend of sport with an educational, festive, and cultural dimension creates conditions of belongingness, fosters a creative sense of community, and promotes peak experiences. Lyras (2007, 2012a, 2012b) proposed five programming components as determinants of effective SFD interventions: a) impacts assessment; b) organizational; c) sport and physical activity; d) educational; and e) cultural enrichment. Moreover, Schulenkorf (2012) developed the Sport-for-Development (S4D) Framework as a management tool to measure direct social impacts and sustainable social outcomes for communities. The author further suggested the need for the empirical test and validation of the proposed framework.

Purpose

The purpose of this case study is to illustrate an application of the S4D Framework by utilizing the case of a regional sporting event in Greece. Components of the framework that were evaluated included the change agent, community participation, and social impacts. Potential long-term social outcomes (leverage, sustainability, and growth) of the event were also explored.

Background Information on the Mini Marathon

The idea of the Spetses Mini Marathon was conceived in 2010 by a private event management entity in Greece. The vision was to stage an annual, mass participation sport event in the iconic island of Spetses in collaboration with the local Municipality. The first two events occurred in 2011 and 2012, respectively. In 2013, the event featured two unique running races: 25km Run (full naturalistic round of the island) and the 5km Run (historical round of the town), as well as open water swimming (2.5km & 5km) and children’s races. Approximately 3950 athletes participated in 2013, marking the event as one of the most popular mass participation, regional sporting events in southern Europe.

Method

This case study utilized a qualitative approach and data were collected at the 2012 and 2013 Mini Marathons. Triangulation of data was used in order to acquire information related to the S4D Framework: (a) documentation (press releases, Internet sources); (b) participant observation; and (c) semi-structured interviews with engaged stakeholders (members of organizing committee, local business owners, sponsors, and athletes). The constant
comparative method was used in order to allow for themes and patterns related to sport-for-development aspects to emerge from the multiple sources of evidence (Merriam, 1998).

Application of the S4D Framework

Change Agent: While communities may be overwhelmed with the organizational aspects of planning and hosting an event, the private event management entity of the Mini Marathon served as a change agent that involved the Municipality of Spetses in the planning and implementation phases of the overall project. Based on Schulenkorf’s (2010) model of Community Empowerment, the change agent removed barriers of initial resistance by the Municipality and the locals in terms of hosting the event, as significant return on investment to the island was recorded even within the first event. The private company served as a mediator or anchorman that stimulated the connection and unity of various stakeholders within the island under a common sense of purpose, while building trust and appreciation with the local community.

Community Participation: The private entity responsible for organizing the event invested in a “genuine partnership” (Midgley, 1998) with the community, as they gradually involved municipal administrators and the residents in the developmental process, problem solving and decision-making. Indicative of this genuine relationship is the organizing committee’s investment in the volunteer program, which is managed exclusively by a local. In 2013, more than 250 volunteers (predominantly from the island) supported the Mini Marathon. The gradual, progressive involvement of the local authorities and citizens into the event have served as an effective strategy for stimulating initiation, community empowerment, and overall social development within the organizational context of the specific sporting event.

Socioeconomic & Environmental Impacts: Interestingly, a plethora of hotel owners did not even operate their premises during the first event in 2011. By 2013, all the accommodation sites of the island were sold out and the Bureau of Commerce reported an estimated economic impact of 500000 euros. For instance, all athletes wore a special bracelet that allowed them to have discounts in businesses affiliated with the event. The organizers promoted the local culture and customs of the island; upon completion of the races, local house ladies prepared authentic home made delicacies for the participants by utilizing primarily the island’s products. The event organizers hosted an exhibition of domestic art and displays that promoted the heritage and history of the island. Finally, the “Spetses Mini Marathon Sustainability Initiative” was implemented in order to activate a series of ecological initiatives and practices: athletes were able to submit only electronic applications, 100 bicycles were provided to staff and volunteers for transportation during the event, and 24 recycle bins were donated to the Municipality. The goal of the event is to be paperless and reduce carbon footprint by 30% until 2015.

Discussion

This study attempted to further our knowledge regarding the S4D Framework by utilizing the empirical example of a regional sporting event. Results illustrated the key role of the change agent in providing knowledge and technical expertise to the event, the empowerment of the community through its gradual and organic involvement with the event, and the sustainable social, economic, and environmental impacts to the region. Indeed, there is an imperative need for identification of key performance indicators (KPIs) based on the development of a quantitative instrument that could be applied to a variety of sport-for-development projects (Schulenkorf, 2012). The constant investigation of the sport-for-development phenomenon from an event management, planning, and organizational context will expand this line of research with significant implications in practice. Through such an understanding, the institution of sport can potentially serve as a catalyst for community empowerment and civic engagement through sport initiatives.