Leveraging Events for Sport Participation: The Case of the Japanese National Sports Festival

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Facilities/Events - Other (Elite Sport) Friday, June 2, 2017
20-minute oral presentation (including questions) 1:50 PM
Abstract 2017-188 Room: Oxford

Purpose of This Study
Sporting events have various impacts on the host community, including economic, tourism, physical, sociocultural, psychological, and political impacts (Ritchie, 1984). Of these impacts, researchers have often examined the economic (e.g., Gratton, Shibli, & Coleman, 2006; Kasimati, 2003) and social impacts (e.g., Inoue & Havard, 2014; Taks, 2013). Although previous studies primarily evaluated whether sporting events generate any impacts, a more important question is how and why impacts can be generated through strategic planning. To fill this gap, Chalip (2004, 2006) proposed the sport event leverage framework, which is concerned with strategies to maximize benefits from sporting events. Although the sport event leverage framework suggests how event organizers can manage the impacts of sporting events, this framework is not without limitations: it fails to explicitly explain how sport participation can be increased from the events. The sport participation perspective is crucial because the promotion of sport participation is a central policy agenda and host communities expect that sporting events can influence people’s sport participation behavior (Taks, Green, Misener, & Chalip, 2014; Weed et al., 2015). Given this perspective, the research question for the present study is: What strategies and factors are successfully employed to leverage sporting events for increased sport participation?

Theoretical Background
The sport event leverage framework proposed by Chalip (2004, 2006) is useful for understanding strategies that maximize the economic and social impacts of sporting events. Although this framework demonstrates how the economic and social impacts can be generated from sporting events, the strategies identified in this framework cannot be directly applied to the impacts that events may have on sport participation. Studies examining the short-term impacts of large-scale sporting events, such as the Olympic Games and World Cup, showed that these events have no or limited impacts on sport participation (e.g., Toohey, 2008; Weed et al., 2015). Given the negligible impact of sporting events on sport participation, Taks et al. (2014) identified eight potential strategies, such as increasing the involvement of schools with sporting events and hosting activities specific to a youth audience to magnify the event’s impact on sport participation. However, these strategies are based primarily on the perspectives of particular stakeholders, such as athletes and members and coaches of sport clubs. Because the host community is responsible for maximizing the events’ impact (Agha, Fairley, & Gibson, 2012), the perspectives of other key stakeholders in the community need to be examined. Consequently, the current study attempts to empirically identify factors and strategies used to increase sporting events’ impact on sport participation from the perspective of an important stakeholder group, namely sport policy makers, by conducting multiple case studies.

Method
A case study approach represents an appropriate way to answer “how” or “why” questions (Yin, 2003). We therefore employed a multiple case study approach to examine strategies and activities used by host communities of the Japanese National Sports Festival (hereafter “Festival”). The Festival is the annual inter-prefectural multi-sport event featuring high-level national competitions with the purpose of promoting sport at the grass-roots level. The Festivals are hosted by one of the 47 prefectures each year (Japanese Sports Association, n.d.). In 2016, the 71st Festival was held with a total of 45 events for different sports. A city or a town within the host prefecture hosts each individual event. Taks et al. (2014) pointed out that mega-sport events are “too large, too mediated, or too distant from the local population to effectively enhance sport participation rates” (p. 217). The Festival represents a desirable setting to analyze the impact on sport participation because it is a mid-size event. Moreover, given that previous sporting event studies focused mostly on North American or European contexts (e.g., Toohey, 2008; Weed et al., 2015), the examination of the Japanese context may provide new insight into the promotion of sport participation through...
events.

Specific cases were selected based on the results of a preliminary two-stage survey. In Stage 1, a survey was conducted with representatives from prefectures (N = 40 for a response rate of 87%) and prefectural sport associations (N = 35 for a response rate of 76.1%) to identify multiple communities within each prefecture that successfully leveraged the Festival for sport participation in their communities. Based on the results of the first stage survey, in Stage 2, a similar survey was conducted at the local city level: respondents included representatives of local governments (N = 87 for a response rate of 57.6%) and sport associations (N = 83 for a response rate of 56.1%) in the selected cities based on the results of Stage 1. Through the two stages, five cities were purposively selected as cases that most successfully used the Festival to promote sport participation. Within these cities, interviews were conducted with policy makers and sport association representatives (N = 11) who were directly responsible for hosting the Festival.

All interviews were transcribed and translated into English by a translator fluent in Japanese and English. One of the authors who conducted interviews developed preliminary codes reflecting factors and strategies used for promoting sport participation inductively by reading the transcripts. Other two authors who did not conduct interviews independently coded and categorized the data using the preliminary codes and modified the initial codes when necessary (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). After coding all interviews, the three coders discussed the results to establish a common understanding. To confirm the validity, peer debriefing was conducted by an external researcher who reviewed the research process and the findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Finally, the data from each case were compared to the other cases to identify commonalities and differences in the strategies that were used to leverage the Festival for increased sport participation. This cross-case analysis provided a triangulation of the findings, offering a holistic understanding of the research question. (Yin, 2013).

Findings
The analysis identified four key factors and strategies that were used to leverage the Festival for promoting sport participation: identifying a key person for enrooting sport in the community, establishing a clear vision for sport promotion during the post-event period, developing the relationships among community stakeholders, and cooperating with local schools. For example, multiple communities examined in this study had leaders who established local sport clubs and initiated sport programs after the Festivals. During the post-event period, policy makers formed the relationships with local schools to establish interscholastic athletic teams. These strategies created new opportunities for community residents to participate in sport continuously, which, in turn, strengthened the relationships among residents and heightened their local identities through sport participation.

Discussion
The current study contributes to the sport management literature by identifying event leveraging efforts for increased sport participation. Our findings confirm the applicability of the strategies found by Taks et al. (2014) to a different context and extend their findings by demonstrating additional strategies, such as identifying a key person, for promoting sport participation through events. Our findings clearly explain the mechanism of generating the event’s impact on sport participation through planned strategies, further providing a deeper understanding of sporting event impacts in the context of a midsize event. From the practical point of view, our findings provide new knowledge for sporting event organizers and policy makers to manage sporting events and post-event impacts for enhancing sport participation.