Exploring Partnerships in Sport Event Delivery

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Introduction
When hosting a sport event, multiple stakeholders come into play throughout the organization and execution process. The success of the event requires organizers to work collaboratively with the stakeholders to achieve their common objectives. There has been increasing discussion among scholars that sport events, especially small-scaled sport events that are compatible with community capacity, can generate substantial economic and social benefits to the local community if properly leveraged (Gibson, Kaplanidou, & Kang, 2012; Taks, Chalip, & Green, 2015). The literature further points out that partnerships among stakeholders enable the effective leveraging of sport events and create sustainable outcomes for the host community (O’Brien & Chalip, 2008; Ziakas & Boukas, 2014). Therefore, involving community partners is becoming increasingly necessary to sport event legacy delivery (MacKintosh, 2011).

Given the lack of exploration on partnerships in small-scale sport events, the purpose of this study is to understand (a) what partnerships are being built to achieve the goals of local sport events, and (b) how the partnerships are being leveraged to create sustainable event outcomes for the local community.

Literature Review
Drawing upon partnership and stakeholder theories, we adopted Babiak’s (2003) definition of partnership as it characterized partnership in the organizational context. As such, a partnership was described as “a voluntary, close, long-term planned strategic action between two or more organizations with the objective of serving mutually beneficial purposes in a problem domain” (Babiak, 2003, p. 6). One key characteristic of a partnership is that it involves a range of stakeholders who share both benefits and responsibilities resulting from their joint ventures (Gray 1989; Welty, Peachey & Cohen, 2016). A stakeholder is defined as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives” (Freeman, 1984, p. 46). Although stakeholders may have significant influence in the organizational network, only those who commit collaborative effort towards the common goals can be seen as the partners (Frooman & Murrell, 2005; Jamal & Stronza, 2009).

Hayhurst and Frisby (2010) have pointed out that “the world of sport is a world of partnerships” (p. 79) where public sectors, private firms and non-profit organizations work together to mobilize resources and achieve strategic goals. Indeed, partnerships were deemed as a ‘necessity’ rather than an ‘option’ in the implementation of sport programs and events (Mackintosh, 2010). By networking with local sport councils, facility providers, sport clubs, universities and corporate partners, community sport organizations are able to strengthen their own capacity in terms of managing resources as well as to create lasting social benefits to the community (Misener & Doherty, 2009). In the sport event context, Chalip (2001) denoted that an effective event leveraging plan required collaborations among stakeholders. This was echoed by O’Brien (2006) and Ziakas et al. (2014) who indicated that partnerships were crucial for cultivating the economic and social outcomes of sport events that benefited the community in the long run. However, little research has examined the process of partnership building and or maintenance for sport event delivery, especially the small-scale community-based sport events context. Moreover, there’s a lack of knowledge on how partners work together to sustain the positive impacts of sport events. To address these issues, qualitative interviews were conducted and illustrated in the following section which is followed by a general discussion of the results.

Method
Using snowball sampling (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014), eight sport commissions located in different counties
across Florida and South Carolina were selected. The local sport commissions were chosen because they are the major agencies that host sport events and create event impacts in the local communities. Specifically, we started with the directors in three of the sport commissions, and then asked them to recommend other sport commission directors in the adjacent counties. Semi-structured interviews were/will be conducted either through Skype or face-to-face using an interview guide that was developed from the partnership theoretical frameworks indicated in the literature. Responses from the interviews were/will be tape recorded, transcribed and coded. The coding process involved three stages: open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Miles et al., 2014). Given the limited time of abstract submission, one interview has been completed so far. Therefore, we submit it as an ongoing project with the remaining seven interviews to be conducted in the next three months.

Results and Discussion
The preliminary results from the first interview showed that the sport commission has built various types of partnerships with government bodies, hotels, sport facilities, universities and private firms in order to achieve its mission, which is to bring in economic impacts to the county through hosting sport events. Most partners of the sport commission are funding-based in the sense that they provide grants or in-kind support (e.g., equipment, facilities, hotel room discount etc.) in exchange for the enhancement of economic benefits of hosting sport events for the county the sport commission is located. In addition, some partnerships involve exchange of knowledge and human resources. For example, the sport commission will inform their partners about the incoming event schedule and then the partners give advice on when it is a good time to host certain events. Another example is that, by partnering with the universities and local sport teams, the sport commission can recruit enough volunteers to help with their events. This is supported by Babiak (2007) who identified that resource independency is an essential part of the partnerships and found financial and human resource independency to be the two main resources that partners rely on. Apart from the partners, we found that there were other stakeholders influencing or being influenced by the sport commission, such as residents and restaurants. This coincided with previous studies in that a stakeholder is not necessarily a partner. It could be any individual or group that can affect or be affected by another organization (Freeman, 1984; Freidman & Miles, 2002). In our case, the sport commission found it easier to bring in a sport event when residents were actively participating in that specific sport and showing their support for the event. For the restaurants, sport events bring more patrons to their establishments, thus benefiting from these events. Finally, consistent with the literature, we found partnerships were crucial in generating economic and social benefits from sport event hosting (Chalip, 2000, 2004; Ziakas & Boukas, 2014). On one hand, with the grants funded by the partners, the sport commission was able to bring in events that were more diverse, popular, and of bigger scale; thus bring more people into town to spend on hotels, restaurants, transportations and so on, providing an economic boom to the whole local industry. On the other hand, by working with local sport organizations and hosting different types of sport events, the sports commission created rich sport opportunities and extraordinary experiences (e.g. world-class event experience) for children and families who might have never experienced such events before, generating positive social benefits in the local community. In sum, the findings in our study advanced our understanding of the partnerships in sport event delivery and its critical role in sustaining the positive outcomes of sport events on the local community.