Building Capacity for Sport Participation with and Without an Event: Bringing Knowledge to Action

Marijke Taks, University of Ottawa
Laura Misener, Western University
B. Christine Green, George Mason University
Laurence Chalip, George Mason University

Sport Development - Sport Development (Community Sport) Saturday, June 1, 2019
Poster 9:20 AM
Abstract 2019-343 Room: Napoleon CD corridor

This study identifies the means by which local sport organizations can build capacity to cultivate participation in their sport, with and/or without the hosting of a major sport event. Previous work demonstrated the need to build marketing and management capacity in sport clubs to enable them to take the necessary steps to leverage an event (Chalip et al., 2017). To investigate the effectiveness of using events to increase participation, two scenarios for capacity building were tested: one with and one without an event. Athletics (ATL, with an event) and diving (DIV, without an event) were the two sports selected for this study.

An action research approach (Frisby & Millar, 2002) guided the research for two local clubs, one in each sport. The process started with conducting a survey among board members to capture the clubs’ overall organizational capacity (Misener & Doherty, 2009). This was followed by a workshop with sport club leaders to identify necessary assets (available and needed) to attract new participants (ATL & DIV), and to determine what could be used for leveraging an event (ATL). Goals were then formulated based on available assets and the cultivation of needed assets. Then, the research team worked with the clubs to further analyze their current marketing practices and capabilities. New marketing strategies and tactics were formulated for building participation (ATL & DIV), and for leveraging the event (ATL) through subsequent interactive meetings (in person, skype, by phone or e-mail). The National Track and Field Championships was the event to be leveraged for ATL. The process for ATL took ten months. At the time of submission, the capacity survey (step 1) for DIV has been completed. The research team is partnering with DIV in the coming months to complete the subsequent steps.

After substantial conversation and negotiations, the research team and ATL aligned their goals and expectations. Nevertheless, the research team was unsuccessful in helping ATL build their capacity to leverage an event. The lack of initiative of ATL to fully participate in the project, let alone leverage the event, was fuelled by insufficient human capacity and the club’s leaders’ firm belief that they were already doing the right things. Ultimately, ATL played a major role in staging the event, making the event more of an obstacle to build capacity, as it was drawing on all possible resources. When embarking on the same process with diving, it remains to be seen if the same challenges arise when trying to find common ground between the partners’ goals and expectations. The absence of an event may facilitate capacity building, as the focus of DIV will not be diverted towards hosting an event. These preliminary results confirm previous findings that clubs are unable to leverage an event to stimulate sport participation (Taks et al., 2018), and indicate that events may even constrain clubs’ abilities to build their capacity to stimulate sport participation. It is also clear that the necessary collaboration and partnerships require some reimagining of the ways that knowledge and practice are blended.