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Citation:

Ziakas, V (2013) Fostering the social utility of events: an integrative framework for the strategic use of events in community development. *Current Issues in Tourism*. ISSN 1368-3500 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2013.849664>

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## **Fostering the Social Utility of Events: An Integrative Framework for the Strategic Use of Events in Community Development**

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### **Abstract**

Although the use of planned events for achieving community development has received academic attention from different disciplines, the findings of these literatures are not systematically used towards developing a common understanding aimed at fostering their social utility. The challenge then is to study from an integrated inter-disciplinary perspective how the social value of events can be fostered and leveraged for community development. In addressing this challenge, the purpose of this conceptual paper is to shed light on the multi-layered processes that foster the social utility of events. To this end, the theoretical tenets of social leverage, event dramaturgy and social capital are employed and integrated. On this basis, a conceptual framework linking event processes and outcomes is proposed aimed to guide future inter-disciplinary research towards strategically incorporating events in community development. This line of research can eventually help create synergies between different event genres and implement joint social leveraging strategies, hence, fostering and magnifying their overall social utility for host communities.

Keywords: strategic planning, social utility, social leverage, community development, inter-disciplinary framework

## Introduction

The employment of events as a means for community development, aimed to obtain a range of benefits (Gibson & Connell, 2011; Moscardo, 2008; Smith, 2009), such as building group and place identity (De Bres & Davis, 2001; Derrett, 2003; Green & Chalip, 1998; Ramshaw & Hinch, 2006) or achieving urban regeneration (Gratton & Henry, 2001; Harcup, 2000; Hiller, 2000; Smith, 2012), have shifted the event management and policy attention towards the social and cultural dimensions of events (Balduck, Maes, & Buelens, 2011; Burbank, Andranovich, & Heying, 2001; Deccio & Baloglu, 2002; Deery & Jago, 2010; Delamere, Wankel, & Hinch, 2001; Fredline, Jago, & Deery, 2003; Reid, 2008; Robertson, Rogers, & Leask, 2009; Roche, 2000; Waite, 2003).

In this regard, the potential of events to create community networks, local citizenship, and social capital has been addressed (Arcodia & Whitford, 2006; Misener & Mason, 2006a, 2006b; Schulenkorf, Thomson, & Schlenker, 2011) along with their use to influence social renewal (Essex & Chalkley, 1998; Hiller, 2006; Jones & Stokes, 2003; Minnaert, 2011; Smith & Fox, 2007). Getz (2009) called for the need to institutionalize a policy paradigm for creating sustainable and responsible events. Likewise, the comprehensive Triple Bottom Line has been brought forward as a framework for the planning, management and evaluation of the social, economic, and environmental aspects of events (Hede, 2008). Most importantly, Chalip (2006) suggested the need for shifting attention from impact (ex post) to social leverage (ex ante) of sport events and accordingly a social leverage model for optimizing the social outcomes of sport events has been proposed (O'Brien & Chalip, 2008). However, due to the innate fragmentation

of the events sector (e.g., sport, cultural, business events, etc.) and the different disciplinary agendas, the tradition is that the different event genres are treated and studied separately. From a community development standpoint, a comprehensive study of events can enable mutually beneficial synergies that would optimize their social utility.

Whereas the empirical research to date on the strategic social planning of events is scant and merely focused on sport events (Kellett, Hede, & Chalip, 2008; Schulenkorf, 2010a, 2010b), it illustrates the potential of strategically using and leveraging events to achieve social outcomes (Schulenkorf & Edwards, 2012; VanWynsberghe, Derom, & Maurer, 2012). This line of research brings to the fore the diversity of contexts, types of events, levels of event-based interventions and subsequent objectives that shape social leveraging. Consequently, the social leverage of sport events provides a fertile ground to start studying the strategic social planning of all types of planned events. As such, this paper draws heavily upon the emerging social leverage studies on sport events.

An extension of strategic social leverage to all events requires a more holistic and interdisciplinary understanding of event processes and outcomes. Specifically, to fully understand and appreciate the implementation processes of social leveraging and their event outcomes, pertinent inquiries should not merely examine the contextual characteristics of events and associated strategies per se, but also explain their interactions occurring within the layers of a host community's social fabric that maintain or recreate its social order. This line of inquiry may also help scholars think about the different types of events (including events of different scale and magnitude) holistically and integrate them in a sustainable development framework. From this perspective also, the processes that lead to cultural invention of events can be examined in terms of

delivering a uniquely affective social experience to local people. In this respect, the strategic planning of events needs to identify the factors and mechanisms that allow the authentic creation of events capable of integrating the diverse interests and meanings that can drive lasting social change and incorporate events in a host community's development agenda.

The purpose of this conceptual paper is to shed light on the multi-layered processes that foster the social utility of events. For the purpose of this paper, social utility is defined as the accumulated social value that derives from an event as the result of implementing social leveraging strategies aimed at attaining and magnifying social capital, community capacity and positive social change. In other words, the paper seeks to understand the key dynamics associated with event planning and implementation of leveraging strategies. For this reason, the theoretical tenets of social leverage, event dramaturgy and social capital are employed and integrated, setting thus the grounds for the development of an integrative approach. On this basis, a conceptual framework linking event processes and outcomes is proposed with the intent to guide future interdisciplinary research towards strategically incorporating events in community development.

### **Strategic Planning and Social Leverage of Events**

The use of events for achieving community development has received academic attention from different disciplines, such as event management and tourism (Arcodia & Whitford, 2006; Carlsen & Taylor, 2003; Picard & Robinson, 2006), sport events management (Chalip, 2006; Misener & Mason, 2006a; Schulenkorf, 2009), leisure

studies (Hughes, 1999; Kyle & Chick, 2004; Sharpe, 2008), sociology and cultural anthropology (Costa, 2002; Green, 2002; Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006; Regis, 1999), geography (Brennan-Horley, Connell, & Gibson, 2007; Quinn, 2003; Waterman, 1998), urban studies (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 1997; Goldstein, 1997; Gotham, 2002), regional development (Janiskee & Drews, 1998; Jones, 2005; Rao, 2001), and cultural policy (Bell, 2009; Crespi-Vallbona & Richards, 2007; Garcia, 2004). Nevertheless, the findings of these literatures are not systematically used to provide an inter- and multi-disciplinary analysis aimed at fostering the social utility of events. In this regard, the challenge is to study from an integrated inter-disciplinary perspective how the social value of different event genres can be fostered and leveraged for community development. Such a perspective could eventually lead the field of event studies and management in the future towards a holistic theory for using events in community development.

Sport events represent one of the most popular genres that are employed by host communities to serve an array of purposes. Their appeal to people makes them attractive tools to achieve social ends. For example, Schulenkorf and Edwards (2012) investigated the opportunities and strategic means for sustaining and leveraging social event benefits arising from inter-community sport events in the ethnically divided Sri Lanka. They found that event organizers can focus strategically on children as catalysts for change; increase ethnically mixed team sport activities; provide event-related socio-cultural opportunities; combine large-scale events with regular sport-for-development programs; and engage in social, cultural, political and educational event leverage. The authors claimed that the implementation of these strategies can enable inter-community sport events to contribute to local capacity building and inclusive social change, which can

have flow-on effects to the wider community.

In another context, VanWynsberghe, Derom, and Maurer (2012) examined the social leveraging of the 2010 Olympic Games by focusing on Vancouver's post-Olympic 'Greenest City' initiative, which drew heavily upon the idea of sustainability. The study demonstrated how the 'Greenest City' initiative attempted to direct citizens' post-Olympic momentum to individual actions that enhance the collective well-being and prosperity of the City, hence, enabling Vancouver to make changes that improve its economic, environmental and social sustainability. Thus, this study offered evidence that governments engage in efforts to maximize social benefits from their intensive investments in sport mega-events and illustrated that the implementation of social leveraging strategies entails an iterative rather than a linear process.

As it is evident, the strategic planning for creating social value in events originates from the study of social leverage of sport events. In particular, Chalip (2006) was the first scholar to observe that the celebratory nature of sport events engenders a liminoid space that can foster social value, particularly through a sense of *communitas*. According to Chalip, the social value of events is grounded on the development of a heightened sense of community, which through celebration and performance in activities brings people from different social groups together. Thus, rather than relying on serendipitous processes expecting events to derive social benefits, Chalip suggested that strategic planning can be applied to design and produce certain beneficial social outcomes. In this respect, Chalip developed a framework for enabling and amplifying liminality and *communitas*. In doing so, event organizers should foster social interaction and prompt a feeling of celebration by enabling sociability among event visitors, creating

event-related social events, facilitating informal social opportunities, producing ancillary events, and theming widely.

Building on the above framework, O'Brien and Chalip (2008) proposed a model for the social leverage of sport events presupposing the presence of liminality in a focal event's space, which in turn generates two opportunities for social leverage. The first opportunity is the *communitas* engendered by the event and the second opportunity refers to the media attention that sport events attract. The opportunities for leveraging liminality require to focus event stakeholders' attention on targeted social issues and to use event media to set/change the community agenda for targeted social issues.

To enable social leveraging of events, Chalip (2006) recommends that narratives, symbols, meanings, and emotional impact can be designed so that they facilitate the creation and enhancement of liminality and *communitas*. Their social leverage may address the particular issues or needs of a host community such as social issues, building networks, and empowering community action. As Chalip notes, the above social outcomes may be furthered when the arts are used to complement sport and when commercial elements support social leverage. However, the variety of events challenges the development of a comprehensive approach by which seemingly antithetical components (e.g., commercialization versus social focus, sport spectacle versus arts' intellectuality, etc.) can be combined. To overcome this challenge, the study of social leverage needs to be extended to cultural events that encompass a variety of festival, arts, and carnival performances. This would help create leveraging synergies between sport and cultural events, hence, fostering and magnifying their overall social utility for host communities.



While O'Brien and Chalip's (2008) social leverage model of sport events is a functional and prescriptive framework of social strategies/tactics to be employed, it should be noted that community development entails complex processes that may have ambivalent results even when strategic planning is applied. For example, exploitation of proclaimed social benefits to communities (e.g., civic esteem, social inclusion, identity, etc.) are often merely legitimizations of elites (Sack & Johnson, 1996; Whitson & Macintosh, 1996), which use events to maintain their hegemonic status. What seems to lie behind such use of events is the maintenance of a host community's predominant social order. Hence, parochial interests may prevail, reinforcing discrimination against weaker social groups. For this reason, if it is to approach social leverage comprehensively, the processes for the development and maintenance of a host community's social order must be considered, as they influence, and in turn, are influenced by the events. Furthermore, the intent and authenticity of event elements must be questioned whether they contribute to meaningful social relationships or they are byproducts of discursive regimes (Foucault, 1977) and hegemonic assimilationist discourse (Foley, 1995) that aim to maintain gender, race and class inequalities (Foley, 1990).

Arguably, social leverage is more complex than event planning for obtaining economic benefits. The proclaimed use of events for a range of never-obtained benefits has developed a suspicion over the actual potential of events to benefit an entire community. To redress this happenstance, social leverage should move towards integrating events into a sound basis for the sustainable development of host communities. To do so, social leverage should address the social issues that agonize a

community using an event's affective meanings, symbols and narratives to convey authentic messages capable of enhancing their impact on people.

In this regard, Chalip (1992) suggested that multiple narratives, genres, and symbols can be created and utilized in sport events to create an affective connection with people. These elements create polysemic structures allowing an event to cultivate a greater array of emotions and meanings for participants (Harrison-Hill & Chalip, 2005). Consequently, narratives can be created to supply stories about the event, genres such as festivals or rituals can augment events and appeal emotionally to participants and attendees, and symbols can convey shared meaning. The use of polysemic structures derives from anthropological work on events and is related to the symbolic meanings enabled by events. Event dramaturgy provides a framework for analyzing the manifold socio-cultural meanings of events, and hence, it is a fundamental theoretical realm contributing to the study of using events in community development.

### **Event Dramaturgy and Social Order**

Anthropologists have long studied events as cultural performances and modes of exhibition or presentation. Turner (1974, 1984) suggested that events can be conceptualized as commentaries and critiques on, or as celebrations of, different dimensions of human relatedness. According to Turner, rituals, carnivals, festivals, spectacles, and sport events constitute on various levels and in various verbal and nonverbal codes, a set of meta-languages whereby a group of community not merely expresses itself but, more actively, tries to understand itself in order to change itself. On this basis, the selection of event elements and programming of activities can establish

common characteristics among different genres.

Central to this perspective is the thesis that events are forms of social drama culturally elaborated in different ways across societies. This thesis is based on Goffman's conceptualization of dramaturgy that used the theatrical paradigm (as a mode of symbolic action) to explain in general social action and behavior (1959). Turner (1984) applied the concept of dramaturgy to the context of events claiming that in any event the social drama is the major form of plural reflexivity in human social action. According to Turner, event dramaturgy is based on an imaginative range of ideas, which often drive participants in genre performances to display individual virtuosity in the symbols they select and in ways in which they control the proceedings and the actors. For example, Ziakas and Costa (2010) in exploring the rural celebration of Water Carnival in Fort Stockton, Texas that blends synchronized swimming with theatrical elements, demonstrated that the dramaturgic nature of this event creates a symbolic social space characterized by identification with local history, heritage and values/beliefs and a sense of community reconnection, as well as acknowledgement and recognition. Eventually, the organic interrelatedness of these mechanisms, enhanced by the sport and theatrical elements present in the event, facilitates the regeneration and reinforcement of a heightened sense of community and a strengthening of the community's social capital.

In order to analyze the symbolic event meanings that are conveyed and expressed by dramaturgy, events can be interpreted as dramatic stories (Geertz, 1973). From this perspective, events can be understood as dramatic performances wherein participants and audiences internalize shared meanings through projected event symbolisms that are enabled by the metaphorical messages that events convey. The relationship between the

metaphorical messages and the social order is meta-linguistic. In this regard, the expressive practices enacted in events and their symbolisms epitomize seminal issues or concerns through metaphoric discourse. In short, the meanings extracted from events constitute the event dramaturgy enacted and exemplified through the performance of expressive practices.

Nevertheless, the concept of dramaturgy has not been delimited within the context of event management for fostering the social utility of events. For this purpose, Ziakas and Costa defined event dramaturgy as “the extraction of shared meanings enabled by the projection and/or performance of symbolic representations in an event’s activities” (2012, p. 32). The conceptualization of event dramaturgy links performative behavior with the making of social order. It exemplifies that the performances enacted in events are meta-commentaries (texts within metaphoric messages) that respond to the problematics of public discourse and substantiate the symbolic foundations of social ordering. This process is substantially facilitated by liminality and associated *communitas*, thereby shaping the dramatic and performative dimensions of events that can foster their social value.

Turner (1974) described that it is a characteristic of all liminal or liminoid states that in them the factors of culture are deconstructed and often recombined in fantastic ways. Turner defined liminality as any condition of time and space outside or on the peripheries of everyday life wherein normal social rules and boundaries are suspended. Furthermore, Turner explained that the tribal-traditional rituals can be described as liminal events where there is seclusion and austere conformity to a ritualistic behavior, while the post-tribal-modernist events (festivals, sports, parades, etc.) can be described as

liminoid (liminal-like) since they are characterized by optation rather than obligation, individual rather than collective authorship, and secular rather than sacred settings and goals.

Liminal or liminoid states of events may have derivative social value for host communities outside the limited event context. By enabling meaningful social interaction among people without imposing social boundaries, liminality may enhance social networks and strengthen the social fabric of a community. For example, anthropological research demonstrated that ritual festivals in the Hinterland of Gold Coast featuring ceremonies and dance served as a mechanism of social cohesion for the host communities (Fortes, 1936). Furthermore, liminality provides a secure temporal space within which controversial social and political issues can be metaphorically addressed and discussed. This facilitates dramaturgy and the meanings that are extracted from events. For example, a study on the liminoid character of cricket festivals in the Caribbean illustrated that liminality serves as an opportunity to symbolically delve into the political economy of Caribbean life (Manning, 1981). Similarly, anthropological studies in other contexts and events showed that liminality enables meaningful metaphoric discourse such as carnivals in the Caribbean (Ho, 2000) as well as festivals in Latin America (Rasnake, 1986; Mathews-Salazar, 2006), Virgin Islands (Cohen, 1998) and Sardinia (Azara & Crouch, 2006).

The state of *communitas* created in events stems from liminality. According to Turner (1974, 1984), liminality may engender *communitas* in which event participants create a shared meaning and reconstruct social reality without racial, ethnic or linguistic boundaries. This takes place within the liminal or liminoid space and time of an event

that is outside the normal life. During such periods there is a temporary distancing from everyday life, often indicated by an absence of everyday rules and social status differences, which allows event participants to treat one another as social equals. *Communitas*, therefore, is a form of anti-structure fostering unmediated communication between definite identities and arising spontaneously in all kinds of groups, situations and circumstances (Turner 1974, 1984).

A seminal example of *communitas* studied in the anthropological literature is the event of sled dog racing. Although this race embodies mainstream American values of individualism and competition, it is constructed in such a way that outside roles and statuses connected with class and gender in larger society are not operative and are leveled so that an alternative moral order emerges that subordinates competitiveness to a celebration of cooperation (Kemp, 1999). As such, this event encompasses manifestations of competitive individualism and cooperation, hence, resolving the existential issue concerning the relationship of the individual to society. It seems therefore that the integration of individualism and community can be accomplished through periodic public performances with liminality and *communitas* facilitating this process. What is not clear, however, in the literature is what conditions or factors enable this process and develop an esoteric logic permeating events that is compatible with the goal of fostering liminality and *communitas*.

Consequently, events must be structured in ways that foster liminal or liminoid states. For this reason, inquiries on the strategic social planning of events need to probe not only on the objectives and means to achieve social leverage but also on the factors that influence the goals, benefits and implementation of social leveraging strategies

affecting the community as a whole. Since the organization of events is a constant negotiation of a number of interests and sometimes antithetical values, events and their potential for social leverage have to be rethought and interpreted in relation to a host community's social order.

Accordingly, Geertz's classic work emphasized the interpretive role of events for people and communities at large. In particular, Geertz (1973) argued that symbols make up a culture and their uniqueness can be seen through the expression of social behavior. In this context, events are spaces denoting something outside themselves, and providing conduits for the production and expression of symbols. According to Geertz, all social interaction is symbolic and meaning is derived from how these symbols are constructed and put to use. In his seminal study of Balinese cockfight, Geertz in a celebrated aphorism, stated that cockfight "is a Balinese reading of Balinese experience, a story they tell themselves about themselves" (1973, p. 448). This account of cockfight reveals its interpretive function of providing a meta-social commentary upon the whole matter of organizing the social order. Thus, by interpreting the rituals and rites of a local event, it becomes possible to understand and appreciate the complexity of the underlying cultural structures through which meanings are shaped and values are expressed.

In an extension of this line of research, Handelman (1990) provided a notable analysis of planned events stressing their continuities and analogies. In particular, Handelman theorized planned events as dense concentrations of symbols, locations of communication that convey participants into versions of social order, and their mandate is to engage in the ordering of ideas, people and objects. Handelman also provided the following typology of planned events that helps to have a holistic understanding of their

roles and meaning in societies:

- Events that model the lived-in world: they make a transformation happen that affects directly social orders.
- Events that present the lived-in world: they hold up a mirror to social orders and reflect versions of the latter.
- Events that represent the lived-in world: they offer propositions and counterpropositions about the understanding, construction or reconstruction of social orders.

Handelman explained that his position for the above typology is closer to a technology of events for the identification of the logics of their design, which are embedded in cultural patterns and imbue these designs with significance. These designs are never static, nor complete in themselves. They are configurations that potentially enable social orders to act upon or to relate to themselves in radically different ways. Thus, for Handelman all the above three types of events are ways of signifying order in the worlds of their participants. Events of presentation are the dominant forms of occasion that publicly enunciate and index lineaments of statehood, nationhood, and civic collectivity presenting ideal patterns of social life. The vast majority of the modern world events can be classified as events of presentation dealing with the substantiation of affirmation and providing axiomatic icons of versions of social realities. Events-that-model are found mostly in traditional societies where events had the capacity to transform tribal social orders, while common events that re-present are the carnivals (DaMatta, 1984), which do work of comparison and contrast in relation to social realities.

The above analysis provides the conceptual basis for the understanding of events



as dramatic stories that provide liminal or liminoid experiences to the event participants, and convey particular meanings for a community constructing or reaffirming its cultural identity. This understanding can guide event planning to cultivate the sets of symbols, narratives and ancillary activities that are appropriate to the design of events and pertinent strategies for achieving social outcomes. The conceptualization of events as dramatic stories can also provide a basis for the generation of synergies between different event genres enabling, on the one hand, multiple expressions, and, on the other hand, nurturing conceptual continuities among them (e.g., through the use of symbols, themes, and narratives).

Events as dramatic stories can also be ritualistic references to seminal passage moments of human life. Myerhoff (1982) suggested that the construction of such rituals can help handle human and cultural crises since there is a profound therapeutic value in the recognition and ritualization of recurrent problems involved in the maintenance and repair of human relationships and in assigning meaning to what subjectively may seem to be merely pain and loss. For example, rites of passage can be used as ancillary events or embedded in large-scale events such as festivals to signify and symbolically explore phases of human or social transitions.

Overall, a dramatological and interpretive perspective illustrates that events can contribute to the social development of a host community by providing opportunities for event participants and attendees to share liminoid experiences and their associated meanings; to create *communitas* so that event participants can relate to each other without the boundaries of normal social roles; to test, celebrate or reaffirm identity; to promote cultural ideology; to create and enhance social capital and strengthen thus the social

fabric of the host community.

### **Events and Social Capital in Community Development**

The study of social leverage needs to analyze how the dynamic processes and outcomes of events are interconnected with a host community's social fabric. For example, Falassi (1987) explained the social function and symbolic meaning of festivals that provide host communities the opportunity for expression of overt values that are fundamental to their ideology and worldview, to their social identity, to their historical continuity, and to their physical survival. Moreover, Quinn (2009) argued that the significance of festivals and events lies in the meanings they hold for both local and visiting populations, and in both their leisure and tourism functions, calling thus, for the need to align more closely different disciplinary approaches in the interest of creating a holistic understanding of the nature, meanings, and management of event and tourism relationships.

The event experiences and meanings attached to them vary since the interpretations of individuals, social groups, and communities are affected by a number of personal or socio-cultural factors. This complicates the understanding of symbolic meanings and the design of appropriate event settings, program and human interactions aimed at achieving social outcomes. In this respect, Wooten and Norman (2008) suggested that an analysis of the symbolic meanings created by objects and settings provides a new way to investigate the leisure, tourism and event experience. This means that all event components (e.g., merchandise, objects on display, food vendors, music, volunteers, location, etc.) should be examined how they contribute to the overall event

experience. Moreover, the analysis of symbolic meanings requires a convergence of interdisciplinary approaches to understand the relations between dynamic processes and social outcomes of events. As Quinn (2009) argued, closer links should be usefully drawn between the research focused on understanding the dynamics of process and that which seeks to plan, implement and market festivals.

From a sociological perspective, Roche (2000) adopted a multi-dimensional approach in the analysis of mega-events and expos, proposing the need for a combination of dramatological and contextual perspectives in understanding the meaning and role of events in the shaping of structure, change and agency in modern society. This integrated perspective provides a basis for explicating the different meanings and roles of events as leisure practices. It also concurs with Quinn's (2009) suggestion that conceiving of events as phenomena that are embedded in diverse spatial, cultural, social and political environments is fundamental to fully understanding their relationships with leisure, tourism and the development of communities.

Another perspective has been put forward by Arai and Pedlar (2003), who provided a communitarian conception of leisure using the notion of social capital to examine the potential contributions of community structures to social cohesion, trust, mutuality, co-operation and openness. In the context of community development, the pertinence of the communitarian perspective is critical in fostering relationships and social networks for the development of common well-being. A central tenet of communitarianism is that people in (post)-modern societies should move beyond individualism and conspicuous consumption and engage in social activities of shared meaning that will promote justice, mutuality and cooperation (Etzioni, 1995; McIntyre,

1992). In this respect, it is suggested that leisure practices provide the means to create shared meaning and communities of celebration (Borgmann, 1992). Participation in communities of celebration entails people coming together in sports, festivals, hobbies, volunteering and the arts and finding in these leisure activities common and public goods (Arai & Pedlar, 2003). Trust and cooperation can be nurtured through the participation in cultural activities, from group dancing to songfests, to community theater, to rap festivals (Putnam, 2001). On this basis, participation in events is crucial for the social development of a community, enhancement of social networks and creation of social capital.

Despite the fact that the communitarian approach criticizes the commercialization of leisure practices, it suggests ways that events can be utilized for the common good and social development of a host community. As event management is predominantly focused on the commercialization aspects of events, the tenets of communitarianism can help develop a more balanced approach on commercialization and social aspects of events. The study of event management should adopt a more integrated approach in viewing events as a means to build social capital for both economic and social development. Thus, it is important to consider from a holistic planning perspective, the potential utility of events in creating a community of celebration. In this sense, a host community's social development can be fostered in the focal practices of events, which connect groups of people who belong to different communities by providing opportunities to create shared meaning and build social networks.

Within a communitarian framework, the development of social capital is inextricably associated with cooperation and reciprocity. Putnam (1995) defined social

capital as the features of social life (networks, norms, and trust) that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives. Newton (1997) supported that social capital constitutes a force that helps to bind society together by transforming individuals from self-seeking and egocentric calculators into members of a community with shared interests, shared assumptions about social relations and a sense of the common good. From this perspective, the focus of strategic event management on creating social networks can be twofold: first, in enabling social interaction and improving informal networks through partaking in events, and second, in developing and maintaining an enduring network of event stakeholders to effectively collaborate in event hosting.

However, the problem for event management research lies in the difficulty to specify the means by which social capital can be transferred from events to civic settings. The study of social leverage may shed light on this area through an integrated perspective. Glover and Hemingway (2005) note that leisure can be a significant arena for the sociability on which social capital depends, and can be as purposive as other forms of activity providing opportunities for more unfettered social interaction, the creation of potentially richer social ties in which social capital can be generated. Moreover, Costa (2002) argues that events foster a festive sociability, which has a reflexive public sphere of its own that is central to the transmission of tradition. Along the same lines, Melnick (1993) noted the sociability among fans that sport events generate. The above remarks are in accordance with Chalip's (2006) argument for enabling sociability and celebration in event leverage. They also agree with the

communitarian perspective purporting that the sense of celebration can be a focal point where people create shared meaning.

In terms of building social capital for community development, Misener and Mason (2006a) set forth the following propositions if sport events are to be used in building community networks and fostering social capital: 1) community values should be central to all decision-making processes; 2) various stakeholders, particularly community interest groups, should be involved in strategic activities related to events; 3) collaborative action should empower local communities to become agents of change; 4) open communication and mutual learning throughout strategic activities related to events must be maintained to minimize power brokering.

The effective use of social capital in community revitalization depends on the potential to develop social capital at the neighborhood level (Jarvie, 2003; Rohe, 2004). In doing so, the different forms of social capital (bonding, bridging and linking), need to be distinguished as they have different consequences. Bonding social capital refers to links among people who are like one another, bridging social capital refers to links among people who are dissimilar (Vidal, 2004), and linking social capital refers to one's vertical connections to people in positions of authority (Woolcock, 2004). An emphasis of event management in one of these dimensions can determine their exclusionary, inclusive or vertical linking properties respectively.

Finally, the spatial and associated cultural components of social capital can influence the expression or maintenance of community networks. Thus, strategic event management for building social capital needs to consider the contextual particularities of host communities. For example, Mohan and Mohan (2002) supported that in attempting

to understand the nature of social capital it is important to recognize that its form will vary considerably depending on geographical and social context. This means that social capital is not a static and unchanging concept but it will vary considerably across space and time (Tonts, 2005). Consequently, in order to understand the conditions under which social capital can be created in events there should taken into account the regional, historical, political, economic and socio-cultural characteristics of host communities. To do so, an integrative framework that shows the links between event processes and outcomes would help in understanding how to effectively foster social capital through events and thus optimize their overall social utility.

### **An Integrative Framework for Fostering the Social Utility of Events**

The endeavor to foster the social value of events involves complex processes since aesthetic signs, cultural performances and event implementations are perplexed within a web of social relations and interactions that are shaped by the reproduction and/or contestation of power relations. For this reason, it is required an understanding of the ways that the social, political, economic and cultural context is intertwined with events. In turn, it is critical how event strategies impact upon social processes within the host community.

Towards this direction, it is useful to bear in mind that events are social constructions shaped by the negotiation of interests and exchange of resources between individuals and groups. Consequently, the study of events' social utility is substantially illuminated by the social constructivist theory. Social constructionism has its roots in the classical work of 'the social construction of reality' by Berger and Luckmann (1966) who

argued that all knowledge of everyday reality is derived from and maintained by social interactions that reinforce their common knowledge of reality. Since this common knowledge is negotiated by people, human typifications, significations, and institutions eventually come to represent an objective reality.

As has been highlighted, the strategic social planning of events is based on the presence of liminality, which can be cultivated by enabling social interaction and a heightened sense of celebration. The affective meanings, symbols and narratives of events can convey messages capable of enhancing their impact on people. The cultivation of liminality requires not only consider the conditions that facilitate or constrain its social effects but also at a more fundamental level embed events in community development policies. This does not always mean that local authorities should intervene in the social planning to leverage all events. When the local conditions or nature of an event allow it to perform effectively a seminal community role and achieve social outcomes without the involvement of local authorities, it would not be desirable for them to intervene. However, this is not the case with the majority of events, which do not operate under favorable conditions. Also, many events fail to effectively achieve social ends or their accomplishment is left to serendipity. Thus, social leverage should be applied if it is to attain and magnify the social outcomes of events.

The social leveraging strategies are implemented by local authorities and a number of stakeholders that interact shaping the meanings and/or roles of an event. This interaction can be traced into the negotiated arrangements that form the community's social order. The formation of a community's social order finds expression through events and may impose its own definition and interpretation of meanings. In this respect,



social order may, in turn, be reaffirmed or contested, and hence, events can be viewed as manifestations of negotiated social conditions that are produced by the interplay between the patterning of social order and the problematics of public discourse (Handelman, 1990).

On this basis, Figure 1 illustrates a conceptual framework of the multi-layered dynamics that foster an event's social value. This framework integrates the classical anthropological and cultural studies on events (Geertz, 1973; Handelman, 1990; Turner, 1974) with the event management perspective and social leverage (Chalip, 2006; Getz, 2005; O'Brien & Chalip, 2008). The rationale of this functional integration aimed to optimize the social planning of events is based on the notion of event dramaturgy (Ziakas & Costa, 2012) and the construct of social capital (Coleman 1990; Putnam, 2001), which can engender shared meaning and enable social change. This framework is intended to provide a theoretical basis for complementary perspectives relating to the social utility of events such as community capacity, collaboration and innovation by integrating and describing the key factors that shape the effective use of events in community development.

[Figure 1 to be inserted here]

### **Outline of the Integrative Framework and Theoretical Propositions**

The foundation of the proposed framework lies in the conceptualization of an event as a symbolic social space that provides the opportunity for expressing social concerns and issues through metaphoric discourse. Accordingly, the social outcomes of an event are obtained from the implementation of social leveraging strategies and the extraction of embodied symbolic meanings conveyed through dramaturgy, which in turn,

can bridge, bond or link social networks, hence, fostering the social capital of the host community. This process requires that event design supports and amplifies the meanings of dramaturgy and the objectives of social leverage. Therefore, the integrative framework proposes the following:

*Proposition 1.* An event provides a symbolic social space wherein the harmonious interaction of dramaturgy and liminality can enhance the impact of event meanings on people and reinforce perceptions of authenticity, thereby enabling social leverage.

*Proposition 2.* Event design may use elements and symbols to facilitate the harmonious interaction of dramaturgy and liminality and reinforce perceptions of authenticity, thereby enabling social leverage.

In particular, an event as a symbolic social space allows the enactment of a cultural performance, which is laden with symbolic meaning. The harmonious cultivation of event dramaturgy and liminality and their complementary interaction set the basis for the social leverage of events enabling to effectively take advantage of the engendered *communitas*. To achieve social leverage, event design should also enhance perceptions of authenticity about event elements and symbols that aim to optimize social outcomes and reinforce dramaturgical meanings. This kind of functional and conceptual authenticity can be achieved when event dramaturgy is compatible with liminality so that the meanings of events are heightened and express the concerns of people. For this reason, it is essential that event design embed the performative and dramaturgical elements of an event by being flexible enough to adjust its elements aimed at cultivating liminality in ways that it is compatible with dramaturgical meanings (Ziakas & Costa, 2012).

Events are social constructs bearing collectively assigned and generally

recognized meanings (Getz, 2008), which are the products of a cultural frame conveying symbolic representations or texts of the larger social order. In this regard, the expressive practices and shared meanings of events contribute to the (re)construction of social order where the reality is socially constructed by interconnected patterns of communicative behavior (Berger & Luckman, 1966). Consequently, the proposed framework adopts an ontological conception of events where social conditions and culture are continuously constructed. In this dynamic process, events bring symbolic interpretations to the public discourse by conveying meanings that respond to community needs and concerns. These meanings may foster social networks and enable collective action, hence, strengthening social capital, which, in turn, can affirm, transform or contest the social order. The resulting effect of events on the social order is enabled by the creation of a dramaturgical context that invokes the foundational components of a host community. It should be noted that events do not always generate social capital. This depends on the characteristics, processes and meanings of an event that need to be leveraged for fostering social networks and establishing mechanisms for the equal distribution of event outcomes. Therefore, the integrative framework also proposes the following:

*Proposition 3.* The equal distribution of event outcomes facilitates the unfettered involvement of social networks and builds linking, bonding and bridging social capital.

*Proposition 4.* The social capital generated from an event can become sustainable as long as it enables collective action pertinent to public discourse addressing community issues that respond to the (re)framing of social order and the need for social change.

From a tactical standpoint, the strategic use of event dramaturgy may set the following objectives: (1) to substantially connect people fostering social interaction and

sociability, (2) to symbolically re-create social relations interpreting social conditions, and (3) to celebrate aspects of central importance for a group or a host community. The means for accomplishing these objectives are interrelated and can be used jointly in event design. The primary means for fostering social interaction and sociability is the provision of social elements/activities (Getz, 2005). These can be social ‘mixers’ for event participants or attendees (inside or outside the venue) and informal social opportunities that enable social engagement (Chalip, 2006). Events can be occasions that bring together and (re)interpret various symbolic elements of social existence of a group or community with the effect of re-creating social relations and the symbolic foundations underpinning everyday life (Robinson, Picard, & Long, 2003; Turner, 1974). To foster a sense of meaning, symbolic theming elements can be layered throughout event spaces, embedded genres may add fascination and a sense of rejoicing, while narratives that portray fundamental existential issues can be created to capture public interest (Chalip, 2006). Theming should foster and reinforce the felt sense of meaningfulness that those who attend the event obtain but also should signal and enhance the celebratory atmosphere that surrounds the event (Chalip, 2006). Moreover, the sense of celebration can be amplified through ancillary events. The arts can be useful complements to events by enhancing the celebratory atmosphere (Garcia, 2001) and adding more sophistication (Chalip, 2006).

The interpretive function of events enabled by dramaturgy and its impact on social order constitutes a grounding lever for fostering the social utility of events as this is perceived by local people in their own terms. It is essential, therefore, that social leverage enable locals to interpret, contest, and express the conditions and influences that

make their lives. From this perspective, an event may convey alternative viewpoints of social ordering, which could be synthesized into a co-emergent meaning, thereby creating new social constructions. This process may essentially lead to a negotiated polytopia of views to emerge and debated with the potential of eventually integrating different or even antithetical perspectives. The notion of polytopia thus, needs to be contextualized in the social leverage of events. Polytopia is an ideal but elusive target that encompasses an emergent synergy of ideas, thoughts, dreams, sensations, ambitions, views, interests and agendas, evolving and synthesized within an inclusive event's symbolic social space as a result of stakeholders' interactions and exchanges. In other words, it is posited that the social capital generated in an event can be cemented and transferred outside the event context when a polytopia emerges dictating a continuous state of mind towards building a host community's capacity to develop its own approach and implement appropriate social leveraging strategies. Therefore, it is finally proposed:

*Proposition 5.* The different viewpoints conveyed by the social capital generated from an event can foster co-emergent meaning as long as they are synthesized into a new whole leading to a negotiated polytopia and community capacity-building.

### **Emerging Questions towards Fostering the Social Utility of Events**

Based on the integrative framework, Table 1 lists a range of emerging questions that can help to foster the social utility of events based on a common ground that integrates event processes and outcomes in community development. From this perspective, the fundamental task is to identify the most crucial social issues that can be addressed through the event. The implementation of social strategies requires collaboration that can be achieved by the formation of networks or alliances aimed at

coordinating the social planning and leveraging of events. By involving multiple stakeholders in event strategies, certain values should be placed at the core of event meanings in order to foster a common understanding for different stakeholders. On this basis, new event elements and augmentations can be added to convey and strengthen the intended meanings and values that aim to address targeted social issues. Moreover, metaphors and symbols can be incorporated into event theming to convey the intended dramaturgical meanings and bring attention to the targeted social issues.

To incorporate effectively metaphors and symbols into event theming, the intended dramaturgical meanings should be compatible with the liminoid character of the event. In other words, event planners should design the setting, program, elements and various social interactions in ways that dramaturgy and liminality act harmoniously and enable collective action. Also, attention should be paid on whether the incorporation of the intended meanings in event communications, to showcase the targeted social issues, overwhelms the performative character of an event. Similarly, the use of event elements should be carefully planned in order to strengthen or change public opinion on a targeted social issue. In terms of social outcomes, mechanisms should be established to equally disperse them among geographic areas and equally distributed them among different stakeholders as well as mitigate any unintended spillover effects. Finally, it must be questioned what factors or processes in social leverage threaten the authentic representation of an event's values.

By considering the multi-layered processes that foster the social utility of events, as delineated in the proposed framework, social leverage research and evaluation of events can be integrated. The integrative framework contextualizes social leverage as a

process tailored to serve local needs. Hence, host communities need to localize social leverage by developing their own strategies and tactics. This can be best achieved by involving wide and committed local participation in event implementations and decision-making. The application of the integrative framework suggests that the social utility of an event is generated through an iterative process in which event stakeholders have the opportunity for learning so that they can improve event implementation processes and build local capacities. Consequently, the primary task of strategic event planning aimed at fostering the social utility events is to create the apposite conditions that will enable local learning and capacity to be developed. To this end, the proposed framework by shedding light on the multi-layered processes, which shape event implementations and their social outcomes, shifts attention towards understanding the complex dynamics that foster the social utility of events.

Although the integrative framework helps explain the main processes and their potential interaction in fostering the social utility of events, it does not identify the factors that inhibit the attainment of positive social outcomes. Indeed, the potential for implementing effectively event-based social strategies is constrained by a number of long-lasting issues and processes that complicate the attainment of positive social outcomes or they can have unintended consequences. To elucidate the complexity of social leveraging processes and tackle the challenges in fostering the social value of events, the enduring issues and problems for their use in community development need to be explored comprehensively under the scope of an inter-disciplinary research framework. This pressing need for inter-disciplinarity has already been pointed out in the event studies literature (e.g., Getz, 2012; Getz, Andersson, & Carlsen, 2010; Page &

Connell, 2012; Quinn, 2009; Shipway & Fyall, 2012; Weed, 2012), which is necessary in order to fully capture and explain the multifaceted role of events in contemporary societies and improve their management practices.

[Table 1 to be inserted here]

### **A Comprehensive Framework for Research**

The proposed framework in this paper seeks to ground future inter-disciplinary research in the strategic use of events in community development. By integrating different disciplinary approaches, it can be eventually developed a holistic understanding of the processes and outcomes that foster the social utility of events. To implement social leveraging strategies effectively, there is also a need to examine the embeddedness of events in their spatial, cultural, social, economic, and political environments and how this affects the attainment of social outcomes. Such a comprehensive perspective may extend the study of social leverage to all event genres, thus, enhancing their synergies and overall role in community development.

However, there is a great deal that needs to be learned for using events effectively in community development. To provide evidence for the value and generalizability of the integrative framework, Table 2 suggests a research agenda investigating the areas of event dramaturgy, social leverage, event design, event outcomes, social capital and active citizenship, authenticity, polytopia, and sustainability. Although these areas represent distinct lines of inquiry having an extensive range of research questions, a comprehensive examination can reveal the common dynamics and issues that foster the social utility of events. For this reason, the central questions in each of these areas are presented with the



purpose to guide future research inquiries towards an integrative and synergistic approach. Pervasive to all these areas is the need to identify the means to capitalize on event meanings and optimize the social effects that events enable. Likewise, there is a need to examine how social event strategies can be embedded in a host community's structures and processes. There is also an overarching need to understand the ways and the conditions that the commercial elements of events can support social event leveraging. Furthermore, future research should explore the spillover effects that cause unintended consequences to host communities and develop mechanisms to identify, isolate and control them.

[Table 2 to be inserted here]

Event dramaturgy represents a neglected area from an event management perspective. By examining event dramaturgy, the factors that facilitate or constrain the construction and extraction of intended dramaturgical meanings can be identified. As such, it becomes possible to learn the ways that event meanings can be used to foster social networks and stimulate social change. The study of social leverage needs to identify the best means to formulate, coordinate and implement social leverage efforts. Also, a central issue is how the social purposes of events can be synergized with other forms of leverage in order to magnify the overall effects of events. The comprehensive examination of event dramaturgy and social leverage has implications for event design. Future studies can identify the elements of event design and/or combination of them that optimize the social value of events. Similarly, future research needs to examine the ways that sports, arts and other entertainment elements can be incorporated effectively into an event's programming.

In terms of event outcomes, the central issue is equity. There is a need to know how the positive outcomes of events can be equitably distributed among different stakeholders and how the effects can be dispersed in the geographic areas surrounding an event. There is also a need to know more about the relationship between the social capital generated in events and active citizenship. Specifically, future studies should examine how the generated social capital within events can be transferred to civic settings. Furthermore, there is a need to examine how the negative effects of social capital in events can be mitigated.

Authenticity is another central area of research related to the social utility of events. Future studies need to investigate the best means to convey authentically community issues representing the values and beliefs of different stakeholders. Another major issue for examination is the ways that commercial elements can be incorporated in events without compromising their social character. Polytopia is a novel concept that may shed light on social planning processes that enable locals to interpret the conditions that make their lives and develop accordingly their own approach by implementing suitable social leveraging strategies. Thus, future research needs to explore how an event can convey alternative viewpoints of social ordering and synthesize them into a co-emergent meaning that sustains social capital outside the event context, builds local capacities and enables social change. In terms of the sustainability of events, the central issues concern how the positive outcomes of events can be sustained, given their temporal nature, and how strategic event planning can be integrated with sustainable development.

In conclusion, the integrative inter-disciplinary framework developed in this paper dictates a comprehensive line of research that sheds light on the multi-layered processes

fostering the social utility of events. The integration of socio-cultural studies and event management disciplinary approaches can help scholars understand the relationship between processes and outcomes associated with event planning and implementation of social leveraging strategies. This line of research can eventually lead the field of event studies and management to find the best means to create synergies between different event genres and implement joint social leveraging strategies, hence, optimizing their overall contribution to community development.

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Table 1. Questions towards Fostering the Social Utility of Events

1. What are the most crucial social issues that can be addressed through the event?
2. What networks or alliances should be formed to formulate, coordinate and implement the social planning and leveraging of the event?
3. What values should be at the core of event meanings and stakeholders?
4. What new event elements and augmentations can be added to convey and strengthen the intended meanings and values that aim to address targeted social issues?
5. What metaphors and symbols can be incorporated into event theming to convey the intended dramaturgical meanings and bring attention to the targeted social issues?
6. Are the intended dramaturgical meanings compatible with the liminoid character of the event? If yes, what elements of event design should be fostered to optimize their effects? If not, what elements of event design should be altered to harmonize them?
7. How can intended meanings be incorporated in event communications to showcase the targeted social issues without overwhelming the event's performative character?
8. What event elements can be used to strengthen or change public opinion on a targeted social issue?
9. How will social outcomes be equally dispersed among geographic areas and equally distributed among different stakeholders? How will any unintended spillover effects be mitigated?
10. What factors or processes do threaten the authentic representation of the event's values?
11. What alternative viewpoints are conveyed through an event for resolving social issues and how could they be synthesized into a new whole co-emergent meaning?
12. What strategies and tactics can be implemented to engender a polytopia capable of achieving capacity building and social change?

Table 2. Research Agenda for the Strategic Use of Events in Community Development

General Areas	Central Research Questions
Event dramaturgy	What factors do facilitate or constrain the construction and extraction of intended dramaturgical meanings? How can event meanings be used to foster social networks and stimulate social change?
Social leverage	What are the best means to formulate, coordinate and implement social leverage efforts? How can the social purposes of events be synergized with other forms of leverage?
Event design	What elements of event design and/or combination of them can optimize the social value of events? How can sports, arts and other entertainment elements be incorporated effectively into an event's program?
Event outcomes	How can the positive outcomes of events be equitably distributed among different stakeholder groups? How can the effects of events be dispersed in the geographic areas surrounding the event?
Social capital and active citizenship	How can the generated social capital within events be transferred to civic settings? How can negative effects of social capital be mitigated?
Polytopia	How can an event convey alternative viewpoints of social ordering and synthesize them into a co-emergent meaning? What are the best means for enabling a polytopia to sustain social capital outside the event context, build local capacities and lead to social change?
Authenticity	What are the best means to convey authentically community issues representing the values and beliefs of different stakeholders? How can commercial elements be incorporated into events without compromising their social character?
Sustainability	How can the positive outcomes of events be sustained? How can strategic social planning of events be integrated with sustainable development?

Figure 1: An Integrative Framework for Fostering the Social Utility of Events



