

Identifying objectives for mega-event leveraging: a non-host city case

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to identify strategic objectives that can be utilized by non-host communities to leverage the opportunities provided by mega sport events. The unique context and timing of this study facilitates discussion surrounding a particular non-host community and how it can plan relevant objectives to best identify appropriate leveraging mechanisms.

Design/methodology/approach – The study adopted a qualitative approach, drawing upon a case study of Kobe City, Japan, a non-host city of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. Data were collected using diverse sources such as site visits, field notes, newspaper articles, destination marketing materials, archival data from sport and tourism facilities, and workshop with key stakeholders.

Findings – The within-case analysis identified four key objectives a non-host city could utilize to leverage mega sport events, namely, enhancing destination brand equity, integrating leveraging strategies with the existing event portfolio, fostering social capital, and strengthening corporate networks.

Originality/value – Research on event leveraging has typically focused on host cities, while there has been limited research attention on non-host cities. This paper highlights the importance of formulating shared objectives so as to provide a strong focus for relevant stakeholders, guide the deployment of resources, and create effective leveraging strategies. Few studies have focused on the planning of leveraging initiatives.

Keywords Tourism, Olympic Games, Sport, Destination marketing, Mega-events, Event portfolio

Paper type Case study

Introduction

Sporting events and the goodwill they embody are an important part of today's society. Not only do they provide entertainment, but they also act as catalysts for economic development, societal health, and even international diplomacy (Beesley and Chalip, 2011; Ritchie *et al.*, 2009). Internationally recognized mega-events such as the Olympic Games are said to bring unparalleled opportunities to the host community for economic and social advancement (Kim *et al.*, 2006). Sydney, for instance, used the 2,000 Olympic and Paralympic Games for urban regeneration. Similarly, when Beijing won the bid to host the 2008 Olympics, the government took the opportunity to introduce several sustained social initiatives (Liu *et al.*, 2014).

Many cities still believe that they can build their destination marketing efforts around events in order to optimize benefits derived from media exposure and to drive tourism and commercial investment (Westerbeek *et al.*, 2002). Recently, these claims have been called into question, manifested by moves of candidate cities to withdraw from mega-event bidding

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(News.com.au, 2017). While some stakeholders certainly benefit from hosting mega-events, evidence of positive economic benefits is unclear (Bell and Gallimore, 2015). Measurement of social and cultural impacts is even more challenging as they are intangible and thus more difficult to quantify (Minnaert, 2012; Ritchie *et al.*, 2009). The quality of outcomes, however, are dependent upon a concerted and coordinated approach to event leveraging, an emerging challenge faced by host cities and non-host regions within country (Chalip, 2004, 2017).

There is a growing sense that stakeholders must now approach the planning and management of events more strategically to justify the massive public investments required and to engender value beyond the immediate radius (Fairley, Cardillo and Filo, 2016; O'Brien and Chalip, 2007). Researchers have argued that achieving positive outcomes from event relies on event leveraging, referring to the strategic planning approach to event management in order to maximize the economic, social, and environmental gains from hosting an event (Beesley and Chalip, 2011; Chalip, 2017; O'Brien and Chalip, 2007). Traditionally, research has been preoccupied with post-event assessment, but has seldom considered how host and non-host communities can derive sustainable benefits in advance of such events (Beesley and Chalip, 2011; O'Brien, 2006).

This paper builds on existing leveraging research (e.g. Chalip, 2004, 2006; O'Brien, 2006; Tichaawa and Bob, 2015; Ziakas, 2015) to further examine the process of leveraging, given little is known about the strategic thinking that frames leveraging opportunities (Fairley and Kelly, 2017). Leveraging is designed to achieve a range of objectives (Fairley and Kelly, 2017), yet discussion on forming suitable objectives to effectively leverage mega-events is still limited, especially from a non-host community perspective. The purpose of this paper is to therefore elucidate objectives that a non-host city of a mega sport event could utilize as the basis for planning. By identifying and clarifying objectives for leveraging, relevant stakeholders would gain a shared vision and blueprint for allocating their resources. The resulting strategic planning would help non-host cities to integrate the mega-event into its destination marketing and development, and create a synergy with its overall mix of products and services (Chalip and McGuirly, 2004). The distributional impact of mega-event could then be expanded. Using the upcoming 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo as the research context, the case of Kobe City, Japan, provides a unique opportunity to broaden understanding of how non-host communities can start planning to maximize benefits generated by a prominent global event. The paper further contributes to the event literature by addressing issues that are important and relevant to non-host cities, while underlining the strategic planning process they could adopt, thus legitimizing public and private sector investment in mega-events.

Literature review

Strategic leveraging of mega-events

The term leveraging in an event context refers to the development and undertaking of activities surrounding an event in order to substantiate its long-term benefits (Chalip, 2004; O'Brien and Chalip, 2007). Leveraging is different to legacy planning in that the former focuses on the means to integrate the event into the destination's marketing and management, whereas the latter is event centered and focuses on post-event outcomes (Chalip, 2017; Taks *et al.*, 2015). The challenge for event organizers and related stakeholders, then, is to understand how to integrate the event into the destination in order to create a synergy with existing products, services, and experiences and to maximize positive impacts for the wider community (Chalip, 2017; Schulenkorf and Edwards, 2012).

Initial work on event leverage has typically focused on programs for economic development (Chalip, 2004). Chalip (2004) suggests that leveraging efforts planned to increase economic benefits can be classified into short-term or long-term focus. Immediate event leveraging refers to activities designed to optimize revenue and trade from an event, whereas long-term leveraging seeks to enhance a host community's image and brand

through marketing messages. The short-term leveraging objectives can be achieved by enticing visitor spending, lengthening visitor stay, retaining event expenditures, and using the event to enhance regional business relationships (O'Brien and Chalip, 2007). From a sustainable perspective, tactics such as featuring the event in destination promotion and showcasing the destination through event advertising would be critical applications to render lasting economic benefits (O'Brien and Chalip, 2007). Leveraging techniques involving the formation of a cross-institutional taskforce, connection with international business leaders, and specifically programmed networking functions have also been found to enhance international trade and commercial network expansion (O'Brien, 2006).

Leveraging programs can also generate positive social benefits for host communities (Bell and Gallimore, 2015; Chalip, 2006; O'Brien and Chalip, 2007). In particular, events offer opportunities to foster social interactions where a sense of collective identity is shared among participants (Ratten, 2016; Schulenkorf and Edwards, 2012). For example, Gibson *et al.* (2014) found that initiatives such as the "Football Fridays" program enacted by South African Government during the 2010 FIFA World Cup influenced the levels of enthusiasm and celebration experienced by residents. Through social leveraging, the positive power of the event can be harnessed to encourage sport participation (Weed *et al.*, 2015). Increased participation in sport, especially among socially excluded or vulnerable groups, has been associated with benefits such as improved health, reduction of youth crime, and empowerment (Minnaert, 2012). The findings highlight the importance of aligning events with the destination's current social issues, as sport events are unlikely to generate increased participation in isolation from these issues (Taks *et al.*, 2013).

Garcia (2001) examined the effectiveness of using social programs to leverage the Sydney Olympics. Despite the intention to incorporate arts events and cultural festivals to extend the appeal associated with the focal sport event, a lack of integration of these disparate activities and ineffective articulation of the function of cultural programs rendered the initiative unsuccessful. Similarly, Bell and Gallimore (2015) found that cultural events used by non-host communities to leverage the 2012 London Olympic Games generated disparate views about their success, as they had limited public exposure and appealed to a narrow group of participants. The issue highlights the challenge of merging a diverse range of activities and stakeholders for effective leveraging and synergy creation (Ziakas, 2015).

Non-host communities and leveraging

While a burgeoning body of literature has examined aspects of event leveraging within the host city, only a handful of studies have chosen to focus on non-host communities (e.g. Beesley and Chalip, 2011; Fairley, Cardillo and Filo, 2016; Fairley, Lovegrove and Brown, 2016; Lovegrove and Fairley, 2017; Tichaawa and Bob, 2015). Given their scope and level of investment, the impacts of mega-events can spillover to regions and peripheral communities that are not hosting the event (Deccio and Baloglu, 2002). Drawing on social exchange theory, Deccio and Baloglu (2002) examined non-host community residents' perceptions of the indirect impact of the 2002 Winter Olympic Games in Salt Lake City. Although the residents were generally ambivalent toward the event, they were very supportive of the promotion of the area during the Games, as the event was thought to produce long-term impact for the region's tourism. Other studies have found that while the majority of the residents in non-host cities of Weymouth and Portland of the London 2012 Olympic Games were supportive of the event, they were equally concerned about disruption to their life such as traffic congestion, parking issues, and potential increases in the cost of living (Chien *et al.*, 2012; Ritchie *et al.*, 2009).

Mega-events would not be possible without the support of non-host communities, in a sense that they provide a conducive environment where social interaction between visitors and residents is facilitated and development of a positive destination image can be supported

(Byon and Zhang, 2010; Rosenbaum and Wong, 2010). The fact that the spotlight is on the host city can discourage necessary planning (Chalip, 2017), but non-host communities are in a favorable position to benefit from leveraging for two reasons: the initial financial investment for the mega-event for non-host cities is minimal compared to the host city; and because non-host communities are not restricted by the event organization and management, they can devote all resources on leveraging. Any leveraging endeavor by non-host communities will not only capitalize on opportunities offered by the mega-event, but also provide much needed support to event success (Bell and Gallimore, 2015; Chalip, 2004).

A common finding in studies undertaken on leveraging by non-host cities (e.g. Fairley and Kelly, 2017; Fairley, Cardillo and Filo, 2016; Fairley, Lovegrove and Brown, 2016; O'Brien and Gardiner, 2006) suggests that integrating the leveraging initiatives with the region's destination development strategies and establishing a well-coordinated network of alliances may expand the distribution of benefits. For example, O'Brien and Gardiner (2006) demonstrated that peripheral communities of mega-events could create sustainable benefits through attracting and hosting pre-event training camps, suggesting that forming enduring networks with international sport teams could increase media coverage of the non-host communities and additional tourism to the region. Fairley, Cardillo and Filo (2016) and Fairley, Lovegrove and Brown (2016) showed that effective leveraging requires the event organization to work closely with government and key stakeholders. Using the case of the 2015 Asian Football Confederation Asian Cup, the authors suggested that event leveraging through the exploitation of existing resources and networks helped achieve key legacies including tourism, trade and investment, and multicultural engagement.

Leveraging of mega-events is not an easy endeavor. Fairley, Cardillo and Filo (2016) and Fairley, Lovegrove and Brown (2016) investigated regional residents' perceptions toward volunteering at the 2018 Commonwealth Games. Given that non-host residents would have to travel in order to volunteer at the event, constraints related to distance, travel costs, time, and existing commitments were identified as inhibitors. While the residents acknowledged that volunteering at a mega-event would be a once-in-a-lifetime experience, the historical rivalry between the host and non-host cities influenced the perceived benefits. Similarly, Beesley and Chalip (2011) cautioned that the peculiar context in which an event operates can influence the leveraging approach. For example, the historical competition between Beijing (host city of the 2008 Olympics) and Shanghai (a non-host city) necessitated the leveraging plans to be localized and adapted. In another study, although not focused on non-host communities, specific contextual factors such as speed of internationalization, networking complexity, and religious elements were found to drive or inhibit sustainable event leveraging (Kaplanidou *et al.*, 2016). These findings highlight the importance of understanding the specific context of non-host communities for effective leveraging.

Overall, a review of event leveraging literature reveals three key points. First, most research focuses on leveraging strategies of a host city. Second, prior studies tend to investigate events staged in western countries, given the limited number of mega-events held in eastern cultures (e.g. Beijing, 2008 Olympics; Liu *et al.*, 2014). Third, most research to date has examined the effectiveness of leveraging at the completion of the event, rather than the strategic process required before the event takes place. To address these gaps, this paper proposes to explore the non-host city context and identify the leveraging objectives that non-host cities could establish in order to capitalize on opportunities presented by mega-events. Understanding leveraging objectives is important because they provide a shared vision, frame strategic directions, and stimulate planning (Bell and Gallimore, 2015). They also act as a blueprint for outcome measurement. Results will shed light on the nexus between leveraging objectives and mechanisms, inform the development of leveraging strategies, and maximize the distributional value of mega-events. Because research on event leveraging is still evolving, a systematic

approach is needed to understand various issues that might influence leveraging, and to broaden the current conceptualization of leveraging (e.g. Chalip, 2004). Part of this systematic process, then, needs to include an examination of non-host cities and the complexity of their idiosyncratic contexts. This paper used the case of Kobe City as a non-host city of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games to identify and discuss potential objectives that will provide the impetus for effective leveraging.

Method

The aim of the present study was to identify the objectives a non-host city may use to guide the strategic planning of leveraging. The present research adopted a case study method relying upon data obtained from documentation, observation, and interviews. The approach was considered appropriate in the current research context, as it allows an understanding of multi-level social and institutional factors that underlie the phenomenon while shedding light on the dynamics present within a single setting (Eisenhardt, 1989). The project was a joint undertaking between the authors and the Kobe City Government. The case analysis was supported by a background literature review of mega-event impacts and leverage from host and non-host cities, followed by a combination of observation and unstructured interviews in Kobe. To help develop understanding of the research context, following prior investigations (e.g. Beesley and Chalip, 2011; Bell and Gallimore, 2015), data were also obtained from press articles, destination promotional materials (e.g. press release, tourist information), and archival documentation from sport and tourism facilities (e.g. fact sheets, event calendars, photographs, and video recordings). Approximately 120 Tokyo Olympic related news articles from *The Japan Times* and *Asahi Shimbun* between 2016 and 2017 were reviewed. For the field research, two of the authors traveled to Kobe in January 2017 and visited several sporting and tourism sites identified as highlights by the city's administrators. Having investigators make the site visit in teams enhances the creative potential of the study and confidence of the phenomenon observed (Eisenhardt, 1989). The authors compared and combined their extensive field notes for analysis and reporting.

During visits, the researchers observed and questioned management of the facilities in relation to latent details of size, cost, upgrading plans, age of facilities, usage patterns, target markets, and alternative uses for venues. As event leveraging requires linkages among government, industry, and community organizations (Bell and Gallimore, 2015), a half-day workshop was conducted to facilitate identification of issues and factors that either contribute to or inhibit leveraging efforts. The authors interacted extensively during the workshop, attended by approximately 20 government, tourism, sport, university, and industry representatives. Data collected from the meetings and field observations were collated with the secondary data to identify the city's leveraging objectives, expectations and challenges shared by concerned stakeholders. Adopting the protocols suggested by Lindolf and Taylor (2010), thematic analysis was employed to code qualitative comments captured during the authors' interactions with the key stakeholders.

Research context

Kobe formed the case study area under investigation. The city is the administrative and economic center of Hyogo Prefecture in Central Japan. Wedged between Rokko Mountain and Osaka Bay, Kobe has a population of just over 1.5 million and is the sixth largest city in Japan. The construction of the port in 1868 helped the city to create a vibrant and multicultural environment, with many major national and international companies choosing to position their headquarters in Kobe (Oliva and Lazzarotti, 2017). Internationally, Kobe maintains sister-city relationship with several metropolises, including Brisbane, Barcelona, Rio de Janeiro, and Marseille.

Politicians in Tokyo are sensitive to risk that non-host taxpayers will be left to shoulder the post-Olympic debt and may not be invested with anticipation or enthusiasm toward the events (Johnston, 2016). Thus, initiatives have been developed by the Cabinet Office to encourage cities, towns, and villages across Japan to serve as Olympic “host towns” – local governments that are not hosting the event but will welcome Olympic and Paralympic delegations for cultural and sport events prior to the Games (Kobe, 2017). The program has been created to promote educational and sport exchanges between local residents and visiting athletes, with financial support offered by the central government (Kobe, 2017).

Kobe is experienced at hosting mega-events, being one of the host cities for the 2002 FIFA World Cup. It has registered with the Cabinet Office to host athletes and pre-Games training camps in a bid to foster international friendship, boost tourism, and advance economic development. In this respect, it will face strong competition from other cities in the region. For example, Osaka has registered to host Australian athletes prior to the Games, while the city of Izumisano plans to target athletes from Uganda as it has an existing relationship with the city’s cotton manufacturing industry (Johnston, 2016).

Findings and discussion

Data were categorized through constant comparison with prior studies (e.g. Chalip, 2004; Fairley and Kelly, 2017; O’Brien and Chalip, 2007), resulting in the identification of four context-specific objectives for Kobe: enhancing destination brand equity, integrating leveraging strategies with the existing event portfolio, fostering social capital, and strengthening corporate networks. The following section discusses these objectives as well as the drivers and inhibitors that could influence the attainment of these objectives by means of representative comments.

Enhancing destination brand equity

One of the key issues that was extensively discussed at the workshop and raised by several key stakeholders during site visit related to Kobe as an attractive yet overlooked destination in Japan. One workshop attendee highlighted:

Kobe is one of the core pillars of the Kansai region [...] the heart of Japan. Our unique geographic location offers many sights that visitors cannot experience elsewhere. The city is serviced by international flights to over 70 destinations and has outstanding public transportation system.

Another attendee noted the fit between the city and sport events:

We all love sport! Our Vice-Mayor, for example, is a passionate rugby fan and he strongly endorses our city’s connection with sport events. Kobe’s love for sport makes it an ideal sport tourism destination.

Maximizing Kobe’s destination salience, attributes, and experiences, or its “brand” (Gartner and Ruzzier, 2011) appeared to be one potential leveraging objective that would prove valuable for the non-host city. Visitors’ ability to recognize or recall the destination refers to brand awareness, whereas their overall impression that encompasses functional and symbolic associations defines brand image (Gartner and Ruzzier, 2011). Enhancing the destination brand was considered to be one of the strategic priorities for Kobe by the key stakeholders, because a salient brand facilitates visitors’ destination choice and enhances its capabilities in bidding and hosting mega-events (Chalip and Costa, 2005). Since other non-host cities in Japan will be similarly vying for media exposure and tourism, to remain competitive, Kobe needs to ensure that it has high brand salience among potential event spectators and visitors. If people can easily conjure up unique and favorable images

associated with the city, they are more likely to place it in their travel consideration set (Keller, 1993). An industry representative added:

It would be important to understand what young travelers think about Kobe as a tourist destination, those Millennial tourists, because they are the future customers. Kobe needs to offer experiences that match with this market's interests.

When it comes to destination attributes and experiences, Kobe has numerous strengths, making it an attractive destination especially among domestic tourists (Japan Tourism Agency, 2016). For example, Kobe has a refined and elegant cityscape with an exotic atmosphere. It boasts one of the oldest hot spring towns, Arima Onsen, and is also only a short distance away from many world heritage sites in Nara, Himeji, and Wakayama. Kobe is probably best known for its beef as well as varied western style cuisines and delicacies, given its history of early settlement by western merchants as port city. As traveling to a distant destination with potential culture/language barriers often increases perceptions of risk (Reisinger and Mavondo, 2005), the diverse restaurant choices including halal foods could provide international travelers with a sense of familiarity and reduce perceived risks of traveling to the area. Furthermore, many of the city's tourist attractions and infrastructure already use multilingual signage, making it a tourist friendly destination. Its ability to cope with significant visitor numbers has been demonstrated through experience at hosting major sport and cultural events.

Although Kobe has many assets, the portrayal of an exotic and nostalgic port city does not seem to resonate with the international market, and Kobe is seldom ranked as a top Japanese tourism destination among western tourists due to limited awareness or interest (Andonian *et al.*, 2016). One informant lamented:

Unfortunately, tourists don't spend enough time in Kobe. We are shadowed by our more famous neighbors and tourists often just visit Kobe in a day trip. However, Kobe is more affordable than Kyoto or Osaka. Tourists should consider having more over-night stays here.

Kobe has approximately the same number of domestic tourists as Kyoto, but its inbound international tourists are only a third of Kyoto's (Japan Tourism Agency, 2016). Kobe's proximity to nearby regions can also be a natural disadvantage. For instance, while there is a cruise port terminal in Kobe, most cruise liner passengers prefer to venture to other more prominent destinations during their brief stay.

The absence of a "unique selling proposition," distinctive destination identity, and insufficient customer-driven marketing present the biggest challenges to Kobe. Since increasing recognition of a destination is one of the first building blocks of destination brand equity, Kobe needs to focus on developing an attractive destination brand and increasing brand awareness among first-time travelers, while targeting repeat visitors with specific experiences and unique benefits. This may be achieved through mechanisms such as the development of marketing collateral from international visitors' viewpoints, promoting Kobe via its sister cities, or identifying sports teams that have an image fit with the city and use them as destination ambassadors (Fairley and Kelly, 2017).

Integrating leveraging strategies with the existing event portfolio

In addition to being a non-host city of the 2020 Olympic Games, Kobe itself will be one of the host cities of the 2019 Rugby World Cup and 2021 Kansai World Masters Games. The stakeholders are understandably proud of the city's sports and business event facilities. One government administrator stated:

Kobe boasts a thriving sports scene and we have several renowned stadiums with state-of-the-art facilities. The city will be an ideal pre-event training site for a variety of sports events, such as rugby, soccer, swimming, and table tennis.

A key stakeholder noted:

Our world-class convention facilities include the International Conference Center, International Exhibitions Halls, and Portopia Hotel. They help to ensure Kobe's competency in competing with other cities in terms of MICE promotions.

The mega-events may draw media attention and bring tourists, but they will only have a passing effect on the destination brand if they are not aligned with the destination's current product/service mix (Chalip and Costa, 2005). An informant shared the view:

We hope people will not just visit Kobe for the mega-events. We want them to come back for different experiences. For example, we have the famous fashion week. That's why there is a popular saying that if you can't go to Paris, go to Kobe!

An important objective, then, is to leverage the event with the city's existing event portfolio and enable integration with its destination marketing (O'Brien and Chalip, 2007). An event portfolio is "a strategic tool rather than a random collection of miscellaneous events that are hosted in a community" (Ziakas, 2014, p. 329). The planning of an event portfolio involves the collection of events that share operational resources or thematic relatedness to create synergy and generate strategic opportunities, such as media interest and tourism (Chalip, 2004; Ziakas and Costa, 2011). An event portfolio can also help overcome seasonality of tourism, facilitate knowledge transfer among stakeholders, and access volunteer pools (Ziakas, 2014). It can either be used to capitalize on the destination's infrastructure or be employed as a branding mechanism (Ziakas, 2014).

Kobe's event calendar highlights the international influence, which includes conventions and exhibitions; annual festivals such as Kobe Jazz Street Festival; commemorations such as Luminarie; and prominent sport events such as Kobe Marathon. According to an administrator, in February 2017 alone, the city hosted five international and domestic conventions and conferences and five sports events. A key event in 2017 was highlighted by another administrator:

This year the city celebrates the 150th Anniversary of Port of Kobe. A range of events will be held throughout the year, including the sailing ships festival, fireworks, food events, exhibitions [...]. We have invited Japanese and international government officials and Japanese celebrities to participate in some activities. Hopefully these will generate international interest.

Despite the numerous events and festivals that take place throughout the year, the plan to leverage the upcoming mega sport events through the destination's current event portfolio seems limited, as illustrated by one venue manager's understanding of leverage:

Maybe we could develop a celebration program and invite top players of The Kobelco Steelers [the city's rugby team] as special guests?

The mega-event may act as a one-off drawcard that attracts international tourists and put the city on the map, but the sports, cultural, and community events are those that enable a destination to reach a wide range of audience with different interests. Therefore, event leveraging, destination marketing, and event portfolio development must work in synchronicity.

Given the divergence between sport and cultural events, cross-leveraging starts with an understanding of how events complement each other, so as to determine if a single or a series of events can be used to leverage the sport events (Ziakas, 2015; Ziakas and Costa, 2011). Some events in the current portfolio may be leveraged to serve as momentum building or lead-in activities for the mega-events (Beesley and Chalip, 2011). Alternatively, existing events may be adapted to capitalize on the venues or built structures intended for attracting pre-Games training camps. If the events are symbolically connected through

theming, they engender opportunities such as promoting repeat visitation and generating flow-on tourism (Ziakas, 2014). Small-scale events may be further developed to enrich the city's tourism offering and destination brand (Ziakas, 2014).

Leveraging through the city's existing event portfolio can be difficult since multiple stakeholders are involved (Ziakas and Costa, 2011). This is further highlighted in the following quote:

We need to have more collaborations among the government, industry, and academia, to work together towards improving Kobe's sport and tourism development. I think there needs to be more dialogues like this [workshop] and we need to use research to inform decisions.

The challenge will be how best to bring together fragmented stakeholders who may have conflicting goals, interests, and expectations. In particular, small events may lack the resources and know-how to undertake such complex task (Ziakas, 2015). A bottom-up planning process proposed by Ziakas (2015) seems to offer an appropriate solution, whereby coalitions including both event and non-event stakeholders strategize together in order to effectively deploy local resources, instantiate a shared identity, and garner resident support.

Fostering social capital

Key stakeholders in Kobe concurred that mega-events have the potential to create a festive atmosphere and bring the community together. Several respondents noted:

Japan is committed to rebuilding from the Great East Japan Earthquake. Hosting the 2020 Olympic Games would provide a pathway to reconstruction and show a new form of our country that is determined and resilient and has recovered vigorously from the disaster.

A key informant further illustrated the spirit of the local community:

Kobe is truly multicultural: there is a large Indian community and the second largest China Town in Japan [...] several mosques and kosher restaurants in the city. People here are not as pretentious as those from Kyoto, or as crude as residents from Osaka.

Alongside these comments, discussion with the key stakeholders at the workshop revealed community coherence as a key concern in strategic planning. Given residents are an important stakeholder group, the third objective for Kobe is to foster residents' identification with the community and enhance their sense of empowerment through various leveraging means. Empowerment describes a phenomenon where members of a community are highly involved in the change process, through active problem solving, decision making, implementation of actions, and evaluation of the outcomes (Boley *et al.*, 2015). Research has shown that resident perceptions of empowerment can significantly influence their attitudes toward tourism development (Boley *et al.*, 2015; Maruyama *et al.*, 2016). If the tourism activities champion the local culture, the community is likely to gain an increased sense of pride; in contrast, a change in social fabric created by tourism may cause an erosion of confidence and community cohesiveness (Maruyama *et al.*, 2016). There is a growing sense of unease among municipalities that the post-event debt will need to be shouldered by taxpayers living outside of Tokyo (*The Japan Times*, 2016). This sentiment was evidenced in a discussion:

Governments in prefectures and municipalities outside of Tokyo are concerned about how the costs of hosting the Olympic Games will be shared and covered [...] I think many local businesses and residents are still concerned how Olympic related debts will influence our economy.

Apart from the financial concerns which may discourage residents from being supportive of the Games, the pre-existing issues and intricacy of cultural contention (Lovegrove and Fairley, 2017) between the East (Kanto) and West (Kansai) region further dampens

residents' enthusiasm. As Tokyo is in the Kanto region, and Kobe within the Kansai region, the rival relationship between Kanto and Kansai (Lau, 2015) implies that the Kansai region may have limited inclination to work in alliance with Tokyo. One informant stated:

Many Kansai people don't really care about the 2020 Olympic Games as it is in Tokyo. Kansai residents seem to be more enthusiastic about the Rugby World Cup and Kansai World Masters Games because these events are not just about Tokyo.

In a similar mega-event context, Beesley and Chalip (2011) found that the historical competition between Beijing and Shanghai impacted on the cities' approach and inclination to collaboration for the 2008 Olympic Games. A way to overcome this hurdle is perhaps to consider leveraging mechanisms that are relevant or meaningful to residents, so as to reach the grassroots and ignite interests.

To this end, Kobe could tap into its strengths that distinguish the city from other municipalities in the Kansai region. First, as a port city, traditionally it is more accepting to international influence. The city has an ancient tradition of community inclusion in the decision-making process, and was the first in Japan to support the creation of local associations for economic development which facilitated collaboration and promoted a shared planning process (Oliva and Lazzeretti, 2017). Second, a history of garnering the community to overcome natural disaster caused by the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995 positions Kobe in terms of strength in volunteerism and community connectedness (Shaw and Goda, 2004). The city's government envisioned a long-term recovery plan to build a creative and resilient city (Oliva and Lazzeretti, 2017). Consequently, the local community has been actively engaged in the decision-making process, and in some cases, even promoted projects for restoration. This has strengthened the cooperation between government and community associations and resulted in a strong volunteer movement (Oliva and Lazzeretti, 2017).

The city's social initiatives further help to cultivate a volunteer base, as in the case of a welfare complex called Shiawase-no-Mura (Village of Happiness). It offers integrated facilities to promote exchange and personal interaction involving all people especially disabled and elderly residents. One informant noted:

Shiawase-no-Mura offers many facilities including a hot spring, health and medical centers, and sports and recreation facilities. For hosting pre-Games training camps, this could be an ideal place [...]. Many retired people come here to study courses such as foreign languages [...]. they could be great volunteers.

As the residents have a strong volunteering tradition, they can be encouraged to actively participate in event leveraging, especially when the initiatives are perceived to provide long-term benefits for the community. The collaboration may also boost a greater sense of accountability, camaraderie, and empowerment through consultation, communication, and participation. As a result, residents' initial negative attitudes toward an event hosted in the rival region can be mitigated. Thus, social capital should be viewed as a vital objective to be maximized.

Strengthening corporate networks

Mega-events further provide Kobe unique opportunity to generate commercial benefits for the economy. There was a consensus among the stakeholders about the potential economic benefits of the upcoming mega-events:

A hot discussion here has been how to develop the sport industry and grow it into the industry that supports Kansai's economy by taking advantage of this great opportunity. The development of sport can promote the development of other industries. For example, sport and healthcare are considered having an inseparable relationship, or sport and tourism.

With the aims of increasing attendee spending and retaining event expenditure in the region, fully capitalizing on local business services, culture and local labor can be an impactful way to leverage the event (O'Brien, 2007; O'Brien and Gardiner, 2006). One of the stakeholders suggested:

Some large corporations have an interactive museum here. At the Kawasaki Good Time World, visitors can ride on a train or flight simulator. The interactive displays may further incorporate some elements of sport. ASICS has a museum at its headquarters, and visitors can have some hands-on experiences in sport.

Another one envisioned a long-term leveraging goal with respect to business collaboration and network expansion:

In Japan, there is an increasing importance of establishing new technology and systems for supporting the elderly and disabled people. The Olympics and especially Paralympics may inspire industries to work together to find a solution for this important social issue.

Thus, expanding and strengthening business networks represent a sensible fourth leveraging objective.

A number of major Japanese and international corporations currently have their headquarters in Kobe, including ASICS, Kawasaki Heavy Industries, Mitsubishi Motors, Protector & Gamble, Nestlé, and UCC Coffee. Some of these companies are also sponsors affiliated with the Olympics or its constituents (e.g. the sport goods company ASICS is a Gold Partner of the 2020 Olympics as well as a major sponsor of the Australian National Rugby Union Team Wallabies). Given their common location and potentially shared interests, these companies can be mobilized to support Kobe's leveraging initiatives, connecting with the local community and demonstrating corporate social responsibility through sponsorship or cause-related marketing strategies (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005). In doing so, it is critical to align values inherent in the event with activations in partnership with local businesses and sponsors (Chalip and McGuirly, 2004). The augmentations might include celebratory events such as networking dinners, competitions, and other similar opportunities to socialize, achieve, exchange, and learn. Specially themed programs can even be linked to these companies' current facilities.

There are also opportunities for sponsorship activation strategies to target the regional market. For example, if the Wallabies visit Kobe for a game or pre-event training camp, its sponsor ASICS, which is also an Olympic Gold Partner, could invite children from local schools to participate in the event. Given sponsorship activation involves the use of a variety of marketing communication strategies to generate multiple brand contact points (Cornwell *et al.*, 2005), Kobe will provide a less cluttered environment for consumer engagement compared to the host city Tokyo, which indirectly boosts the value of Olympic sponsorship. Engaging local business networks in leveraging planning entails collaboration, coordination, and partnership (Ziakas and Costa, 2011). Given the complex and diverse range of stakeholders involved, the government may take the lead role to connect actors in the network, to ensure the process is inclusive, to identify strategic priorities, and to negotiate trade-offs (Ziakas, 2015). This can be nurtured through specially designed workshops or more formally, a cross-institutional taskforce, similar to the Olympic Business Roundtable established for the Sydney Olympic Games to facilitate discussion on leveraging (O'Brien, 2006).

Leveraging requires not only forming inter-organizational relationships but also capitalizing on inter-city or inter-country relationships, which may include Kobe's existing sister-city relationships internationally. The importance of using sister cities

to strengthen corporate networks and relationship was highlighted by several government administrators:

We expect both Kobe and Brisbane to have a better understanding of each other's attractiveness through research and information exchange. Further development of friendship between Kobe and Brisbane in various fields including sports and education is highly expected, in addition to the existing exchange programme for high school students.

Some of these sister cities such as Brisbane, Barcelona, and Rio de Janeiro have also hosted mega-events in the past. One informant added:

Kobe has registered with the Cabinet Office to host teams from Australia, Canada, and the UK for pre-Games training. If we are successful with the bidding, the athletes will be invited to school visits, sport education, and cultural exchange programme. Also, hosting the teams could facilitate our collaboration with specific industries in these countries, such as the biomedical industry in the UK.

Sister cities can be targeted well in advance of the event to access business networks and build commercial investment. In addition to the potential knowledge transfer from these sister cities, opportunities exist to recruit national teams to base their pre-Games training camps in Kobe, by having ongoing networking initiatives and relationship building (O'Brien and Gardiner, 2006) with and through its sister cities.

Kobe is well-positioned to host athletes and their families as the city boasts world-class stadiums and sport centers as well as several accommodation options close to training facilities. Although the quality of training facilities meets the international standard, modernizing and upgrading facilities would enhance overall appeal. For sport teams/organizations concerned with brand image, securing media coverage and commercial sponsorship, Kobe represents strong opportunity. It offers a quiet and secure sanctuary away from the crowds and intensity of Tokyo, especially during the Olympics.

Conclusion

While mega sport events have the power to contribute economically and socially to host regions, current research focus on event impact evaluation has yielded mixed results. Beesley and Chalip (2011) argue for the research focus to shift from outcome-oriented event evaluation to a more analytic focus on event planning and implementation. They suggest that such an approach would extend the immediate visitation-related impacts to long-term outcomes such as destination repositioning, tourism growth, and business network development. The present research aims to extend this line of enquiry by examining mega-event leveraging from a non-host city perspective, and reports a useful exploratory case study of Kobe in relation to opportunities linked to the upcoming Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. In keeping with Chalip's (2004) conceptualization, we argue that strategic objectives that encapsulate opportunities the mega-event offers need to be identified first, before specific leveraging strategy can be deployed. The case study reported in the current research extended Chalip's (2004) original model of event leverage and revealed four important objectives that a non-host city such as Kobe ought to exploit, namely, enhancing destination brand equity, integrating leveraging strategies with the existing event portfolio, fostering social capital, and strengthening corporate networks.

The findings that a non-host city could use the mega-event for enhancing destination brand equity through event media are consistent with Chalip's (2004) argument. From a long-term leveraging perspective, non-host cities could aim to develop a salient, unique, and favorable destination brand in order to capture media attention, sustain interest from visitors, appeal to international sport teams, and attract trade and business investment. In Kobe's case, while the city boasts abundant tourist attractions, its current market

positioning does not seem to resonate with the international market and lacks a distinctive identity. There is potential for Kobe to capitalize on the Olympic opportunities and advance its international tourism. To this end, event leveraging must be integrated with the destination's marketing strategies (Chalip and Costa, 2005). A reasonable first step would be a destination audit to determine the city's unique selling proposition and to identify experiences that resonate with international visitors. This will help determine what changes need to be made through event leveraging, and how the city may be re-positioned via mega-events. A multi-national consumer study can be employed to collect information on international visitors' viewpoints, in order to inform the formulation of destination marketing strategies. Such information could also be used to profile international markets and explore the type of visitor experiences that would appeal to those markets. The task may be managed more effectively through a public-private partnership (Andonian *et al.*, 2016).

A better integration between the non-host city's existing event portfolio and the mega-event could maximize the destination's appeal and should thus be considered an important leveraging objective. Consistent with the arguments by Ziakas (2014, 2015), it is argued that non-host cities could aim to cross-leverage its diverse event portfolio with the mega sport event to broaden the flow of benefits and generate further opportunities for the destination. This entails the bundling of event experiences with the city's product and service mix, as suggested by Chalip and McGuirly (2004). For example, in the case of Kobe, existing cultural events or milestone celebrations may take place in sport venues or structures to generate media attention. Friendly competitions, mini tournaments or visits by international teams may further showcase the facilities and signal expertise. Alternatively, specially programmed business events that foster international exchange can be held to reinforce the destination's connection with the Olympic heritage. The findings from this research echoed the argument by Fairley and Kelly (2017) to suggest that leveraging strategies need to be integrated in destination marketing. As Bell and Gallimore (2015) stated, given cross-leveraging involves a range of stakeholders, establishing a steering group that involves cross-sectorial stakeholders from sport, visitor economy, volunteering, health, and cultural sectors may facilitate collaboration. A "champion" may then be identified within various sectors to inspire their members and spearhead strategy development.

There is a potential value of the non-host city to benefit from its rich community assets. In Kobe's case, not only does the community demonstrate a strong sense of pride and cohesion, it is also resilient in a sense that the city made a steady recovery from the Great Hanshin Earthquake. The surge of volunteerism after the disaster to help rebuild the city and support victims contributes to the development of volunteering resources and strength (Oliva and Lazzarotti, 2017). In line with prior research (e.g. Fairley and Kelly, 2017), results from the present study suggest that engaging residents and fostering social capital should be viewed as a leveraging priority. Specifically, non-host cities should consider aligning event leveraging with targeted social issues (O'Brien and Chalip, 2007). If the initiatives are deemed beneficial for the community, Kobe residents' identification with the city, a renewed sense of responsibility and citizenship may activate their willingness to volunteer (Minnaert, 2012). Examples of such initiatives may include incorporating the national or international sport teams into school's sport or education curriculum to build confidence; providing sport-linked entertainment and social networking opportunities for under-privileged residents; or events hosted by female athletes to inspire female entrepreneurs or help set agenda for social issues, such as domestic violence. Indeed, the city's current social welfare establishments can be drawn on to support the development of a volunteer base to involve disabled or elderly residents as well as other socially excluded groups. The festive atmosphere and "communitas" (O'Brien and Chalip, 2007) can further attract media attention (Shaw and Goda, 2004) which in turn, will enhance the destination's brand image.

Finally, this study extends the arguments of O'Brien (2006) and Chalip (2004) to suggest that the non-host city's extensive commercial activities and strong relationship with its sister cities serve as a solid foundation to explore business leveraging programs. Based on this strength, event leveraging should aim to strengthen corporate networks and relationships. For Kobe, the city's vibrant and dynamic economy offers a pool of potentially committed sponsors, whose sponsorship activation can help promote the city. The sponsors' existing relationships with sport teams or athletes, for example, ASICS' sponsorship of the Wallabies, can be mobilized for leveraging such as pre-Games training camps or destination promotion. Businesses that are associated with the Olympic Games and headquartered in Kobe are presented with a unique opportunity for hosting international associates and networking. As mentioned previously, specifically designed business development programs that break the professional boundaries, such as one that involves sport, healthcare, and biomedical innovation, could bring together diverse stakeholders and offer new business opportunities. Additionally, Kobe's sister cities can be targeted for business leveraging initiatives, through connection with international business leaders and network access. As suggested by O'Brien (2006), existing relationships can create an appropriate network procuring context well in advance of the mega-event while fostering trust and bonding among corporate and public actors.

In summary, the present research follows Chalip *et al.*'s works to explore issues and challenges regarding mega-event leveraging. In addition to the leveraging objectives identified by Chalip (2004) (i.e. optimizing total trade and revenue obtained and enhancing destination's image), this paper suggests that mega-events provide non-host cities a multitude of opportunities for long-term destination development, through integrating the existing event portfolio, fostering social capital, and strengthening corporate networks. This paper highlights the need to develop a clear vision that provides overarching guidance on mega-event leveraging. In the case of Kobe, the identified strategic objectives could offer a strong focus for stakeholders involved, spearhead the deployment of the city's resources, and facilitate successful and sustained leveraging. The case study also illustrates that expectations are likely to differ among a diverse range of stakeholders. To prevent working in silos, a cross-sectorial steering approach to event leverage planning may be adopted. Our study extends Chalip's (2004) model by suggesting context-specific objectives for a non-host city of an upcoming mega-event, and discusses potential leveraging mechanisms that could benefit the region in the long run.

Future research directions

While this research provides a discussion of useful objectives a non-host city could employ for effective leveraging, more research is needed to explore other potential objectives and to examine the long-term impacts of specific leveraging initiatives for both host and non-host cities. For example, in this study, the leveraging objectives for Kobe were identified from informal interviews and discussions with stakeholders who are mainly in the management or administrative positions. It is well known that community leaders like to upsell or possibly exaggerate "how good their community is" (e.g. Djaballah *et al.*, 2015). A useful next step would be to explore if residents share the same views and how they perceive the value of leveraging initiatives, through a cross-sectional survey. This should provide a balanced review. Similarly, other stakeholders' perspectives on leveraging, such as volunteer organizations, sponsors, and non-profit organizations, are critical for the planning process. Flowing from this, a longitudinal study that tracks how such perceptions change over time as well as factors leading to these changes would be useful. Such investigation will provide important theory building blocks for the leverage literature.

Furthermore, more empirical studies are required to determine if leveraging objectives and mechanisms vary across non-host communities and the factors that influence such variation (e.g. distance to the host city, destination life-cycle), or if objectives and mechanisms change based on event types. A similar case analysis could be replicated in

other non-host communities to determine whether different objectives could be identified and compared. Finally, development of a conceptual model outlining key antecedents, barriers and facilitators to successful leveraging, and how objectives and outcomes are most reliably assessed would be useful to guide subsequent investigations.

The next few years are exciting times for mega-event host nations, such as Australia for hosting the 2018 Commonwealth Games and Japan for hosting the 2019 Rugby World Cup and 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. These mega-events provide an avenue for further identifying and examining issues in relation to leveraging. A comparative study between host and non-host cities or a cross-cultural investigation warrants future research efforts. Such studies will broaden our understanding of factors that facilitate or inhibit the planning and implementation of event leveraging.

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