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“The Show Must Go On”:
Event Dramaturgy as Consolidation of Community

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Abstract

Event dramaturgy and cultural performance have not been examined in the literature from a strategic standpoint of fostering the social value of events. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the case of Water Carnival, a celebratory event in a rural community of South-West Texas, demonstrating the essence of this event as a symbolic social space wherein event participants instantiate a shared and valued sense of community. A hermeneutical approach was employed, interpreting the event and its symbolisms as a text, combined with findings from ethnographic fieldwork including participant observation, in-depth interviews and analysis of archival documents. The study examines the ways that dramaturgy in Water Carnival helps frame the ongoing public discourse for community improvement and enhances social capital. The implications of the study for social leverage of events are discussed. It is suggested that a foundation for strategic social planning is the understanding of events as symbolic social spaces and their embeddedness in community development, which can be accomplished when events are pertinent to public discourse, address community issues, represent an inclusive range of stakeholders, and promote cooperation.

Keywords: Event dramaturgy, cultural performance, hermeneutics, liminality, social leverage, community development

“The Show Must Go On”:

Event Dramaturgy as Consolidation of Community

Despite the fact that the use of events as tools in regional development is extensive (Butler, Hall, & Jenkins, 1998; Higham & Ritchie, 2001; Janiskee & Drews, 1998; Rao, 2001; Roberts & Hall, 2001; Robinson, Picard, & Long, 2003; Xie, 2003), there has been little research regarding the factors and processes that contribute to a wide range of outcomes such as building social capital, or enhancing community capacity for development (Moscardo, 2008), and especially investigating the social consequences of events within the context of rural communities (Reid, 2008). From a community development standpoint, even when events are successful their outcomes are often serendipitous due to the lack of strategic planning (Chalip, 2006), while processes of political hegemonization and commodification contest the identity, meaning and authenticity of events (Brennan-Horley, Connell, & Gibson, 2007; Crespi-Vallbona & Richards, 2007; Jeong & Santos, 2004; Rubenstein, 1990; Stewart, 1986; Waterman, 1998). In such cases the potential of events to generate beneficial social outcomes remains unrealized as well as negative impacts from events may arise for host communities.

How could the above happenstance be mitigated or avoided? In order to balance the policy objectives, events' goals and diverse stakeholders' interests, a programmatic approach can be useful in fostering and sustaining the social value of events. Accordingly, Chalip (2006) proposed the need for the social leverage of sport events arguing that event organizers should seek to prompt a feeling of celebration and enhance social interaction aimed at fostering liminality. The concept of liminality refers to a sense

of an overtly sacred experience felt within the space-time of the event, during which normal social boundaries are suspended and alternative social constructions are explored. This results in the creation of *communitas* that is a form of anti-structure characterized by a heightened sense of bonding and shared communal purpose among event participants wherein racial, ethnic, linguistic or social class boundaries have ceased to apply (Turner, 1969, 1974). In essence, liminality provides a safe social condition for attention to be paid to social issues and thus can generate a lasting social value in terms of building social capital or alleviating social problems (O'Brien & Chalip, 2008).

On this basis, O'Brien and Chalip (2008) proposed a social leverage model and argued that the presence of liminality in a focal event's space generates two opportunities for social leverage, namely the *communitas* engendered by the event and the media attention that an event attracts. The opportunities for leveraging liminality require that host communities focus event stakeholders' attention on targeted social issues, which can be achieved through four tactics: (1) aligning the event with targeted social issues, (2) aligning values between targeted social issues and focal sport subcultures, (3) lengthening visitor stays, and (4) enticing engagement with targeted social issues. Event media can be used to set/change the community agenda for targeted social issues, which can be achieved by showcasing social issues via event advertising and reporting and using the event in issue-related publicity.

Social leverage may address the particular issues or needs of a host community such as social issues, building networks, and empowering community action (Chalip, 2006). This programmatic approach bears the potential to strategically incorporate events in regional community development encompassing the economic, social, and

environmental aspects that concern the public discourse. In view of that, O'Brien and Chalip (2008) emphasized the need for sustainable leverage of sport events pushing towards the triple bottom line. Along the same lines, Weed (2009) suggested that the planning of sport events should not only be concerned with leverage (i.e., maximize benefits) but also with mitigation (i.e., minimize negative impacts). These advances raise the potential of extending social leverage to all event genres and developing a comprehensive social planning framework.

It seems therefore that the underlying issue is to think more holistically and strategically about the roles of events and seek to integrate them with the ongoing public discourse that expresses the needs, moods, values, and beliefs of local people. A programmatic approach grounded on a host community's capacity to cultivate those shared meanings that generate positive social conditions may more effectively embed events in sustainable community development efforts. To do so, we need to understand the contextual dynamics (and processes) that facilitate or inhibit the extraction of shared meanings within the space of an event. Such meanings are enabled by the performance of expressive practices and projection of symbolisms, which may be enhanced by liminality. This understanding can help host communities to strategically develop a performative and symbolic social space for events aimed at achieving community development. In this context, performance and dramaturgy have an effect on the potential of events for social leverage.

The role of performance and dramaturgy has not been explored from an event management and policy perspective. Research has not adequately addressed how the creation and uses of dramaturgy in events may help host communities achieve

community development. From this point of view, it is heuristically useful for event management research to examine the event design in terms of the interrelationship between dramaturgy and liminality in order to foster the social value of events and use them in a programmatic framework that embraces leverage strategies as well as embeds events in community development.

This study complements and extends the examination of the case of Water Carnival, a celebratory event in a rural community of South-West Texas, which builds, reconnects and strengthens the community's social fabric (Ziakas & Costa, 2010). The study examines how the dramaturgic essence of Water Carnival creates a symbolic social space wherein event participants instantiate a shared and valued sense of community. On this basis, the paper examines the ways that dramaturgy in Water Carnival helps frame the ongoing public discourse for community improvement and enhances social capital by producing and defining community through performance in the event's activities. In this context, the potential for leveraging Water Carnival is discussed.

Cultural Performance and Event Dramaturgy

The character and symbolic context of events conveys an array of messages to participants, attendees, and the outside world. According to Handelman (1990) events are dense concentrations of symbols and locations of communication that lead participants into versions of social order, and their mandate is to engage in the ordering of ideas, people and things. Handelman (1990) supported that through events, a culture has the capacity to conserve and to process information about itself. In this respect, events are culturally constituted foci of information processing. They are a summarized pronouncement and manifestation of what is known, through which local people

celebrate and parade their identity. Most importantly, events are occasions for the intensification of what social order knows itself to be and for the validation of this knowledge. In other words, events attempt to display social order as understood by its creators. This takes place mainly through images that mirror the collective and/or elite perceptions of what the mindsets and the feelings of participants ought to be.

Handelman's (1990) analysis of events is grounded on Geertz's (1973) interpretivist/semiotic approach on events as "stories that people tell themselves about themselves" and Turner's (1969, 1974) notion of social drama and ritual, which conceptualizes the ways that events instantiate shared meanings. In this context, it is important to understand that the public discourse in events is a reflection of a host community's practical and existential issues that shape the meanings that an event conveys. In turn, these meanings are going back to nurture a local community's social order, which may be ultimately reaffirmed, transformed or contested.

How could we understand the interplay of performance and dramaturgy from a community development standpoint? Event dramaturgy entails the extraction of shared meanings enabled by the projection and/or performance of symbolic representations in an event's activities. Event dramaturgy is a mode of symbolic action (Goffman, 1959) that its enactment takes place through a kind of performance that exemplifies expressive and dramatic dimensions (Schechner, 2003). Turner (1969, 1974) theorized such performances as forms of rituals and social dramas that are expressed collectively through events. Thus, it can be said that the interplay of performance and event dramaturgy shapes a symbolic context in which communities validate or recreate the conditions that make up their social order. In this regard, community events provide

symbolic social spaces enabled by a dramaturgical semantic context that projects the elemental grounds of a host community.

According to Conquergood (1998) performance can be understood in multiple ways, including as mimesis (imitation); as poiesis (construction); as kinesis (movement). In this context, performance itself in events can be dramaturgical. This may entail a view of performance as struggle, as an intervention, as breaking and remaking, as blending, exploring and rediscovering, as a meaningful socio-political act (Conquergood, 1998). In essence, the act of performing intervenes between experience and the story told (Langellier, 1999). This mediates event dramaturgy since the way a performance is done describes performative behavior. Here a distinction between the concepts of performance and performativity needs to be made for the interpretive analysis of events. Performativity refers to the power of discourse to reproduce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains (Butler, 1993). In other words, it is the “doing” (or performing) while the “done” (or text) is the performance. The interplay between performing and text shapes the dramaturgical meanings of events and constitutes the object of their analysis and interpretation.

The formation and extraction of meanings is essential if event organizers and host communities seek to capitalize on dramaturgy for creating beneficial social outcomes from events. For this reason, event dramaturgy can be understood as a path that shows us the ways meanings are constructed and extracted by event participants as well as the factors that facilitate or constrain the development of an event’s symbolic social space. In particular, we need to develop an understanding of the conditions that influence the creation and enhancement of intended shared meanings in events. This entails the

examination of the expressive practices enacted in events in relation to the construction of an array of symbolisms that epitomize issues or concerns through metaphoric discourse. A related issue concerns how dramaturgy can be enhanced by liminality, which is a core element for the social leverage of events. This line of inquiry may derive a number of implications for event design/management and community development.

In general, the formation of a community's social order is interrelated with events (Handelman, 1990). It finds expression through events and may impose its own definition and interpretation of meanings. From this perspective, events can be viewed as manifestations of negotiated social conditions that convey symbolic interpretations, which in turn affirm, transform or contest the social order. According to Handelman (1990) events can present (mirror), model (transform), or re-present (contrast) the social order. These three types of events signify order in the worlds of their participants. Events of presentation mirror and affirm ideal patterns of social life providing axiomatic icons of versions of social realities. These are the most common in the modern world and Water Carnival is such an example. Events-that-model are found mostly in traditional societies where events had the capacity to transform tribal social orders, while events that re-present are found in the modern world, though not very often, and do work of comparison and contrast in relation to social realities. Recognizing the cultural logic of event design (its dramaturgical role and meanings) can help us understand how the different genres and their elements create or re-create social conditions by combining dramatic, performative and ritualistic dimensions.

For example, Lewis and Dowsey-Magog (1993) in their study of the Maleny 'Fire Event', which is held annually at the climax of a large folk festival in Australia,

demonstrated that the revitalization and recreation of rituals fosters an unusual degree of participatory interaction, which is combined with a shared belief system. In general, different genres such as rituals (Fortes, 1936; Walter, 1981), festivals and carnivals (Derrett, 2003; DaMatta, 1984), spectacle and sport events (MacAloon, 1984; Rockefeller, 1999) can be used to express different beliefs or celebrate different occasions. The challenge for event organizers and host communities is to create synergies and event augmentations between the different genres aimed to amplify social outcomes and achieve lasting social change.

What is essential for community development is the creation of a secure space where otherwise contentious issues can be signified, addressed, discussed, or contested. As the anthropological literature clearly demonstrates liminality in events enables metaphoric discourse (e.g., Cohen, 1998; Errington, 1990; Goldstein, 1997; Ho, 2000; Manning, 1981; Mathews-Salazar, 2006; Rasnake, 1986) whereby event participants and attendees can be engaged in conversations that are ostensibly about the event, but that also explore concerns of social, political, and existential nature (Chalip, 2006). Such discourses provide the opportunity for cultivating and leveraging narratives that capture the positive effects of events and prompt social action towards creating or sustaining meaningful community development.

Method

A hermeneutical approach was employed for interpreting the event and its symbolisms as a text. The hermeneutics approach seeks to elucidate and make a practical understanding of human actions explicit by providing an interpretation of these actions (Packer, 1985). In this approach the unit of study is the symbol, its meanings and

experiences as these are being extracted from the event's dramaturgical discourse. The study adopted an ontological conception of events as symbolic social spaces wherein culture is continuously constructed. The aim was to discover the structure and dynamics of the symbolic webs of meaning (Geertz, 1973) and intersubjective space (Gadamer, 1994) of the event that evolves to integrate a culture. Since this study was part of a larger ethnographic study, the analysis was constantly informed by data and findings from participant observation, in-depth interviews and analysis of documents, specifically local newspaper articles and community/event reports.

Fieldwork for this study was conducted in Fort Stockton, Texas, a relatively remote rural community, located in South-West Texas. This community has a population of approximately 7,800 people and its ethnic composition is about 70 percent of Hispanic origin and 30 percent Caucasians. Fort Stockton's economy is based on ranching, a prison system and oil production. After having suffered from oil crisis and having faced population decline, Fort Stockton has sought to diversify its economy and improve the quality of life in the community. Visitation has been a key driver in generating revenue taking advantage of the town's location as a passing point between San Antonio and El Paso. Thus, although Fort Stockton is not a destination, it is a passing point between destinations and a portion of its local economy is based on hotels and restaurants. A number of historic monuments (e.g., fort, museums) are promoted as tourism attractions for the travelers. In view of that events have been seen as a suitable strategy to entice passing travelers to extend their stay in Fort Stockton and spend money in the community.

Data collection included observation of the Water Carnival rehearsals and performances, 12 semi-structured interviews with event organizers, volunteers and community leaders, informal interviews as well as review of archival material/documents. Participant observation entailed attending Water Carnival, eating in local restaurants and cafes, and socializing informally with local people. The first author conducted the majority of the fieldwork and explained the purpose of his visit to local people. Both authors attended the 3 day celebration of Water Carnival and the Parade. A research journal was used to write fieldnotes.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants including the members of the Water Carnival organizing committee, volunteers, and local officials. The duration of key informant interviews was between 40-60 minutes and the interviews were tape-recorded. Questions centered on learning the respondents' opinions about Water Carnival, what it means for them to be involved with the event, what it means for the community and the ways that the event contributes to the life of the community. Informal interviews were conducted when it was convenient with event volunteers, attendees and residents and lasted about 10-15 minutes. Respondents were interviewed in public spaces and were asked to provide their views on Water Carnival. Since tape-recording was obtrusive and practically inconvenient, detailed notes were kept of each interview. Questions were similar to the semi-structured interviews and aimed to compare, cross-validate or contrast views and feelings on the issues under examination.

Stepwise replication was applied in data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The two authors dealt with data separately and in effect conducted their inquiries independently employing a standard protocol for qualitative content analysis (Berg,

2004). After the completion of their individual analyses, they examined the emerging themes and findings that each had identified trying to make interpretive sense of the phenomena under study (the event's symbolisms) and understand their significance. The resulting themes, patterns and conclusions that derived from data analysis were further scrutinized by returning to the literature for triangulation (Eisenhardt, 1989). The presentation of the findings follows a narrative style describing Water Carnival and interpreting its symbolic meanings for local culture.

Organization of Water Carnival

Water Carnival takes place in the town's swimming pool, which is located within the community's major park. The swimming pool provides Fort Stockton with a unique site. Built on the natural Comanche springs, which provided in the past irrigation to the farm area north of town, the beauty and bounty of water has fascinated residents and tourists since the founding of the town (Flores, 2000). Water Carnival serves, therefore, as a remembrance of the town's history and a symbolic commemoration of the abundance of water that gave birth to the town.

Water Carnival is a local show that is planned, staged and performed exclusively by local people. It is described by locals as water extravaganza, a family affair, a local beauty pageant, a time of reunions, and most of all tradition. The theme and the director of the show are different each year. The show includes synchronized swimming and choreographed dance acts that are performed by local people of different ages in the thematic framework of a musical. There are approximately sixteen water and dance acts per show and each act is distinct in terms of choreography, music and costumes. The themes resemble Hollywood characteristics and make reference to successful films and

musicals. The yearly themes help to shape the intended messages as appropriate and enable public discourse around the event. The show is repeated for three consecutive evenings starting on Thursday with the last performance on Saturday.

The importance of the show and its all-embracing celebratory character is heightened by ancillary events and festivities. Beauty pageants categorized in divisions based on age precede each night's performance of the show. Thursday night is for the divisions of Tiny-Tot (3 to 4 years old) and Wee Miss (5 to 7 years old) contestants. Friday night is reserved for Sub-Teen (8 to 10 years old), Miss-teen (11 to 13 years old) and Junior Miss contestants (14 to 16 years old). The Miss Fort Stockton (17 to 22 years old) beauty pageant is held Saturday night with the swimsuit and evening gown competition. On Saturday, which is the last day of Water Carnival, a parade is held on the central street of town. This is one of the largest parades hosted by the community. Winners from the previous nights' pageants participate in the parade as well as Miss Fort Stockton contestants. Most of the event participants parade along with school reunions that take place during the time of Water Carnival to celebrate their local West-Texan and American identities. The festivities of Water Carnival reach their conclusion not only with the parade but also with public gatherings and speeches where community members inform the community about emerging issues and recent developments in their town.

Water Carnival is essentially a community-driven event that is institutionalized and has its own non-profit designation. The Water Carnival Association is the non-profit entity responsible for the event. The members of the board of directors are elected by the membership of Water Carnival Association to serve as the organizing committee of the event. The Association has about 100 members from all walks of life with local

businesses and families constituting the majority of its members. There are different hierarchical categories of membership associated with a sliding fee structure from \$10 to \$500. From an organizational standpoint, membership in the Water Carnival Association helps to assemble different stakeholders of the community to coordinate the planning and implementation of the event throughout the year. Here lies the basis of collaboration and of building bridges for social networks that support Water Carnival and its operations throughout the year. The Water Carnival Association reflects also the importance and all-embracing character of the event for the community.

The planning of Water Carnival is a year round project. The Water Carnival board of directors, which is the organizing committee of the event, meets on the first Wednesday of every month to plan the show. Each year the board calls for citizens to apply for the job of director by submitting ideas and a script for the following year's theme. The board works its way through the applicants until they agree on a script. The author of the winning script becomes the director of Water Carnival, which in itself is a major honor. Then a contract is drawn up between the board and the director. The contract requires that there be a set number of scenes involving specific age groups. The directorship is the only paid position. Scripts are accepted in late January.

After the selection of the script, plans begin for the implementation of that year's show. The prop crew is a vital part of Water Carnival. They build all types of props pertaining to the theme of that year's show. Another vital part of the show is the use of glitter and lighting. Because the show takes place at night, it requires plenty of glitter and lights. Also, rehearsals for the acts begin about six to eight weeks before the show's scheduled opening time. Practice times are held every day on specific times. Starting on

the last Sunday before the Thursday's performance, several rehearsals are held daily until the show's opening.

Water Carnival is characterized by the participation of families. Over 250 children, teens, and adults actively participate each year in Water Carnival. Parents and their kids take part in various stages from producing to performing in the show. There are water and dance acts for all ages. This makes Water Carnival a truly family show, which is articulated by everyone involved in the event. Generations of families have participated in Water Carnival. This facilitates the passage of local history, values and identity from one generation to the next. One resident who was involved for years with the event pointed out: "I grew up, I participated in Water Carnival. My kids grew up here, they all participated. So generations and generations participate in Water Carnival."

The feeling of civic pride enhances individuality for those who take part in Water Carnival. This is pervasive to everyone involved with Water Carnival and the youth is enculturated into the values promoted by the event. Many kids participate for consecutive years in Water Carnival. From a functional standpoint, the built-in familial character of Water Carnival facilitates communication among the family networks in the community. In a small rural community like Fort Stockton, family networks are important and their participation in a large community event helps frame their relationships. In this context, the socialization of the youth takes place. Also, gender roles are promoted to children, as an example through beauty pageants, which define femininity for young girls. In addition to the local values and tradition, youth is taught lessons like the value of dedication to achieving a common purpose, working as a team, and developing a sense of community pride.

Performance and Dramaturgy in Water Carnival

From an event design perspective, Water Carnival is a show that blends in a Hollywood-like musical, a sporting recreational activity (synchronized swimming), with the arts (theater, music and dance) augmented by beauty pageants and a parade. In other words, Water Carnival stands between sport and the arts encompassing multiple forms of performance that convey an array of associated meanings and eventually create a community driven ritual-like event celebration. Such an event can be described as in-between. Participation and performance in the acts of Water Carnival helps people reproduce and express their own sense of place and their own understandings of who and what they are. Sense of place is closely allied with an understanding of both community and identity (Ryden, 1993). This expression takes place through the metaphoric enactment of choreographed synchronized swimming (i.e., symbolic reference to the water as the fundamental element of local tradition) and theatrical/dancing acts (i.e., symbolic reference to the community's creativity and capacity to stage local shows).

In Water Carnival, relationships of trust, cooperation and friendship are maintained through the staging and preparation of the event throughout the year by the volunteers. The preparation for implementing the event involves about 500 volunteers who participate as cast and staff in staging the various aspects of the show such as performing in the show or working in decorations, sound and lights, promotion, ticketing, etc. Also, many people are being "support personnel" to the cast and staff chauffeuring the children to hours of practice, keeping meals warm, filling in at work for colleagues who are at rehearsals or building sets and props and generally being encouraging. It is this "space" that brings local people together working for the staging of the event. In turn,

local people who do not participate in the event come as attendants to watch and socialize with friends and relatives.

In this regard, Water Carnival encourages cooperation and generalized reciprocity. The event can be seen as a mechanism of social cohesion: the community consolidates itself socially and morally by the very act of working together in the project. Through the preparation of staging the show, event volunteers build relationships. The local organizers assign involved responsibilities to every one, which bind them to a common task. This includes the preservation of their tradition by passing it upon the next generation and thus reaffirming the loyalty to each other and of children and parents. The social integration is resuscitated in the phases of staging the show.

In the symbolic space of the event, community identity is enacted at a referential level in which local people engage in a celebration. They mobilize notions of tradition and history, theater and swimming to enact a community with resonance in their local context. The social imaginary is constructed not through striving for exemplary performance (athletic or artistic) but at a second level of abstraction through referential performance by local people who perform moderately synchronized swimming and dance acts or imitate in a carnival-like atmosphere famous professional performers (i.e., movie stars or singers). An event participant made the following observation regarding the nature of performance in synchronized swimming:

I think about our Water Carnival during every summer Olympics. When they have the swimming and the synchronized swimmers and all of that. And I look at that on TV and I say: You know we have six and seven and eight years old kids doing not the same thing but similar. And I look at that and I think. It's kind of neat to be able to watch something in the Olympics and you got some six, seven, eight years old kids that are emulating what they see in the Olympics. Not the same and none of them will ever get to the Olympics but it gives them a sense of pride to be able and tell their friends "I can do something like that."

In these meta-performances (performances about performance) local people of all ages and abilities are able to participate and perform. Almost all acts are performed in groups and aim to denote the spirit of collaboration in the community. As most local people declare, Fort Stockton is blessed because all people work together. Water Carnival is the occasion that demonstrates this belief for local people and affirms their desired image (i.e. as a vibrant town) to the neighboring communities.

The carnival element of the event is a metaphor serving to create a caricature of the American lifestyle and a joyous fantasy that links local identity to Hollywood and consequently to the material wealth and glamour of a capitalist, consumer oriented economy. An event participant pointed out:

Water Carnival is something that is more about fantasy, it is not real. For example, the wall that we painted was meant to resemble all the stores that were in the main street in the 50s and not specifically what the stores actually looked like. So it was made up. But it really helps creating the context of how things were back then.

In essence, Water Carnival is an eclectic assemblage of elements associated with a search for local tradition. There are icons from how life was in the past in the decorations and symbols used in the show. For example, the theme of the 2006 show was “A Walk to Remember” reviving how life was in the community in 1950-1960s. Nostalgia for the past exemplified a homogenous image that connoted local tradition. Water Carnival, hence, conveys a coherent image and a common historical reference that the whole community can instantiate giving the impression that it has always been a part of Fort Stockton’s life. Since the first time it was conceived and organized (in 1936), the community regards Water Carnival as an entrenched local tradition. The grounds of the event’s status can be summarized as follows:

First, Water Carnival conveys local history. The aura of the past has been incorporated into the event through the decorations that are crafted by volunteers (e.g., an image of main street during the 50-60s, dressing and music from the 60s). In addition, the event takes place in the swimming pool that is named Comanche Springs commemorating the historic springs that, in essence, gave birth to the town. A symbolic component of history is reflected throughout the scripted scenes; for example by referring to sports like football or softball and their importance for local life. The use of the past, albeit selective, gives Water Carnival the same sense of permanence and stability that longer traditions have. Another element of permanency is each year's program where there is a hall of fame section listing the themes, the directors and the winners of the Miss Fort Stockton Pageant since 1936. Also, the Annie Riggs museum has a space dedicated to Water Carnival exhibits illustrating that it is part of the local history.

Second, Water Carnival appears to be diachronically stable because many people are committed to making it endure since it was instituted in 1936. The community also mobilizes the prison system in the area and inmates offer their labor during event preparation. A special brochure is published with the show's program that has all the information about that year's production and the history of the event. This is distributed to all hotels and restaurants in town so that visitors can be enticed to attend the event. As mentioned before, some local businesses embrace the theme of Water Carnival. For example, in 2006 a local bank was all decorated in a 60's theme. A juke box playing Elvis Presley's music was visibly positioned at the lobby, iconic cars from the 60's were parked in front of the bank and employees all dressed the part, hence embracing the sense of celebration that Water Carnival conveys.

Third, the parade culminates Water Carnival and takes place on Saturday, the last day of the event on the main street of Fort Stockton. The parade seeks to assemble both the past and present of the town (e.g., in 2006 class reunions from the 1950s through the 2000s paraded). Also, the parade projects the collective spirit of the community and values of individualism through the promotion of local companies. For instance, cars that participate in the parade bear the logos of local companies. In this grand parade the townspeople state symbolically what the collectivity believes in and wants itself to be. In that moment, it is as if the community asks and answers the following questions:

- Who are we?

As an event organizer pointed out: “A small rural community in West Texas that continues the tradition of pioneer days.”

- How do we feel about ourselves?

As an event volunteer pointed out: “We are a strong community and feel proud of our achievements.”

- Why are we who/what we are?

As a local official pointed out: “Because we know as a community how to work together.”

As many local people declare, nothing defines Fort Stockton better than Water Carnival. It is a seminal and defining moment for local people. The event is viewed as more than a celebration. As a community official pointed out: “[Water Carnival] is the bringing together of hundreds of local residents, for hundreds of hours, to produce something meaningful that will be remembered in the future.” The fact that Water Carnival is a product of collective endeavor, a project that reflects the capacity of the

community to create and maintain something meaningful on its own, based on volunteer work, derives a considerable sense of civic pride. This sense of communal accomplishment is closely associated with the enhancement of a sense of community. In Water Carnival, local people stage and perform their own show for an audience that includes a large number of people much like themselves to instantiate shared meanings and values, hence building a heightened sense of community.

As local people state, Water Carnival is one of the institutions that make Fort Stockton unique. This kind of distinctiveness is sought by the community in order to define its position in the local area and the world at large. To point out their distinctiveness as a community in Texas, Fort Stockton encompasses something more than the West Texas identity. Fort Stockton seeks to be identified as a “unique place”, a strong community that embodies the practices of collective action despite the innate problems of a rural isolated town and factional interests. The staging of the event illustrates their intent of achieving distinctiveness. As such, it is intended to be perceived by outsiders. The following quote printed in the local newspaper presents the experience of a visitor:

I had heard of Water Carnival before, but never really understood it until I visited the Comanche Springs Swimming Pool. I was truly amazed Thursday and Friday at the sheer size of the spectacle. I have no idea how it stacks up against years past, but either way, I was very impressed. I had never seen anything like it. In any case, it's always great to see a community support the achievements of its own, and that's what I really saw this weekend. From the ooohs and aahs of the pageants to the large crowds both nights I attended, it was clear that Fort Stockton does a great job of supporting its own. All told, everyone involved should be extremely proud of their final product. They all did a fantastic job, from the prop crew to the lighting folks to the kids of all ages in the acts. (*Fort Stockton Pioneer*, 2005)

Discussion: Sustaining the Community

a. Reconciling Individualism and Collectivism

The understanding of Water Carnival as a cultural performance requires to be viewed as operating not only within a local system of cultural meanings and community obligations but also within a much wider and more encompassing system of political and economic values, constraints and interests. As Errington (1990) points out the American way of life is characterized by the free enterprise system functioning in competitive terms wherein individuals strive to be successful so that they will be perceived as having a valued individuality. However, for such a system to thrive and not end up in self-destruction, it is believed that competition should not produce individualism that leads to aggressively unmitigated displays of self-interest. In other words, as competitors, people must be able to stand on their own two feet but as neighbors they should be sociable, obliging and able to work together toward common goals.

Water Carnival is an example of an event attempting to symbolize that the community values of neighborliness are linked with the free enterprise values of capitalism. In particular, the volunteer work represents the illustration that the community is brought into existence in such a way that the sacrifice of individuality becomes an enhancement of individuality. The residents of Fort Stockton can regain a sense of individuality on the collective level through their involvement in Water Carnival. As a member of such a remarkable project and supportive community, each member feels special. The fact that Water Carnival is planned, organized and staged solely by the efforts of a substantial number of volunteers is overtly a source of considerable local pride. This achievement shows that the energy of individual enterprise can indeed be linked with a sense of civic responsibility. In other words, it denotes that the opposition

between individualism and community is not irreconcilable. Volunteers and audience seek to validate themselves and each other in essential ways through their role in the community, through demonstrating their individuality, neighborliness and entrepreneurial success. A volunteer pointed out: “We take it very seriously but we have fun at the same time. We feel proud about our community and ourselves by being part of this event. Nobody is paid. This is all volunteer work.” Another volunteer pointed out:

These men and women stay up at the pool until 2 A.M. and later to get everything done. I don't think the public really realizes how much work is involved in the production of the show. All of the volunteers, we make the show what it is.

The entrepreneurial success is symbolized and promoted mainly through the beauty pageants. In particular, all contestants in the beauty pageant bear in their sashes the name of a sponsoring local company. This is rather symbolic because there is no financial exchange involved except in some cases the donation of dresses to the contestants. Therefore, this is clearly a way to promote local businesses and illustrate that the community is strongly committed to supporting local businesses. As the mother of one of the pageant contestants shared:

Oh no! The purpose is not at all to get money from the sponsoring business; the purpose is to support the business and have them represented in the pageant. If they want to help with the dress that's great, but it is not expected. Usually you support family or friends that have businesses.

This kind of meta-social commentary reconciles the value of individualism inherent to a capitalist culture with the spirit of collectivism that Water Carnival promotes. Through the social imaginary of collective effort, a semantic context is created wherein individualism and collectivism are negotiated and reconciled. Collectivism is promoted through the extensive involvement of volunteers in organizing the event, the group performances and the participation of people of all ages and physical abilities to

perform the acts. The issue is not excellence but participation and working hard to be able to perform. Individualism in turn is promoted since the salience of the event for the local community encourages local business owners to have their names printed on the sashes of beauty pageant contestants in order to advertise their individual businesses, serving thus their own agendas. Also, the only competitive element of Water Carnival that rewards winners is the beauty pageant where individual winners are announced at the end of the show and their picture is added to the permanent Water Carnival exhibit at the main local museum.

Therefore, Water Carnival affirms to locals (and to visitors) that their community is characterized by the harmonious and productive interplay of the values of entrepreneurial competition with those of cooperation, neighborliness and family. Water Carnival thus stands out as a culmination and representation of their collective efforts. The event conveys the meta-message that collectivity is capable of dealing with the problems of the community and that the community is supportive of individual business and enterprises, which are promoted throughout the event (mainly during the beauty pageants).

Overall, Water Carnival represents a case in which a local show has become a symbolic social space for the cultivation and celebration of the local sense of community. In this context, the residents of Fort Stockton address the existential tension of the antithesis between individualism and collectivism in their lives. They develop a sense of community, which is not problematic since it does not cause the loss of individuality which is a major source of self-worth. On the contrary, the integration of individualism and community is accomplished through public group performance by conveying a sense

that individuality is enhanced rather than diminished by collective life. Such performances in Water Carnival are reflexive occasions wherein event participants display and reaffirm their particular sense of community. Therefore, the event is a symbolic means for clarifying the patterning and problematics of social relations with resonance to public discourse. It enables the enactment of expressive practices that serve as a metaphor for the maintenance of the community's social order.

b. Reflexivity in Water Carnival

The above symbolic meanings that are extracted through dramaturgical elements of Water Carnival reflect and help to construct shared values that stabilize its social order. The presentation of social conditions that the event mirrors requires reflexivity by the actors in terms of a constitutive consciousness that acknowledges the existing nature and state of the community's life. Thus, performances like Water Carnival need to be analyzed not only as defining a community's sense of itself but also a community's understanding of its position in a broader socio-political context.

In this regard, a complex and implicit problem is that the resolution of the contradiction between individualism and community, which is experienced at the local level, may serve to perpetuate other contradictions concerning the nature and state of Fort Stockton's community. For example, the reference to the past's racial tensions tends to be avoided in the event when in its inception in 1930s Hispanics were not allowed to enter the swimming pool and thus participate or attend the event (Flores, 2000). Today, Water Carnival features predominantly mainstream American themes and cultural elements although the majority of people who are involved with the event are Hispanics. It seems

that they perceive this as an opportunity to celebrate and parade their American identity and symbolically demonstrate their integration in the community.

This seems to be associated with the symbolic structure of the event that is intended to present selective versions of Fort Stockton's social order, those that are deemed as desirable for the maintenance and development of the community. In this regard, the event mirrors the predominant value system, socio-economic and political arrangements as well as a historical reference that characterize the community. It is rather a metaphoric proclamation about the components that the community is built upon and it seeks validation by the community members. While this end is attained through the dramaturgical meanings that are extracted, there is limited effort by event organizers to systematically foster liminality within the context of the event. For example, there is no planned effort to break down social distinctions, status roles or political and other hierarchies, or to make alternative models. Similarly, there is no planned effort to suspend social conventions and rules since event participants are not stripped of their antecedent status and do not acquire one to which the categories and classifications of their socio-cultural state have ceased to apply. Consequently, there is minimal opportunity for taboos to be lifted, daily roles to be denounced, and structures to be altered within the time and space of Water Carnival. On the contrary, such manifestations would be viewed as unsafe situations causing discomfort and doubts about the community; a community that, perhaps due to its economically stressed status, seeks to maintain and reaffirm the rules, hierarchies, and social conventions that ensure its survival. This stabilizing role of Water Carnival for the community seems to prevail

against other possible roles that the event could have such as being an agent of contesting and transforming predominant social arrangements and structures.

In particular, the status and hierarchies are reflected primarily through the membership of Water Carnival Association, which maintains different hierarchical membership levels (with differentiated fees). On this basis, prominent businesses, families and individuals maintain and demonstrate their social status, shaping at the same time the character of the event through the election of the board of directors. The board of directors sets the rules that permeate the staging and performance of the event. In this context, the beauty pageants that precede the performance of the show exemplify the social convention of femininity as a norm of behavior.

By their very nature, the beauty pageants epitomize the expression and perpetuation of feminine stereotypes and rules that surround the contest. The choice of the community to include beauty pageants reflects the intent to maintain and project conventional values that stabilize the community's social order. In the same regard, the staging and enactment of the show follows the social conventions of a Hollywood-type extravaganza implicitly seeking to homogenize the community. This is critical for the ethnic integration. The community achieves to consolidate itself as a collectivity celebrating American ideals. For Hispanic people this is an affirmation of their role in the community and equal integration with Anglos. Thus, the event consolidates the community primarily through the enactment and celebration of mainstream American themes and ideals. In other words, Water Carnival creates a sense of bridging solidarity by bringing the community together based on the common symbolic references that the event provides (i.e., history, collective work, and sense of community), which is critical

for the reconciliation of tensions and the survival of the community. Yet, the limited opportunities to systematically cultivate liminality do not reinforce the possibility for event participants and attendees to reassemble or construct alternative (and even contrasting) models for interpreting the terms and conditions that shape the community and could envision or implement drastic transformations.

Overall, Water Carnival is embedded in cultural patterns that imbue its design and implementation with an array of symbolisms, rules and social conventions. These enable individuals and groups of the community to act upon or to relate to themselves by publicly enunciating feelings of civic engagement. The presentation of ideal patterns of social life is exemplified by axiomatic symbolisms and metaphoric discourse that deals with substantiating the affirmation of the community's social order. In this context, the factors of predominant social order are not sought to be deconstructed and recombined in a way that could frame a social change agenda.

c. Strategic Planning for Community Development: Intended vs. Unintended

From a community development standpoint, the context of symbolism that heightens a celebratory atmosphere enhances the seminal character of Water Carnival for the community and enables Fort Stockton to utilize the event for achieving social development. This entails primarily a sense of community, common purpose and togetherness, which ultimately enhance the community's social capital. Despite the attainment of social ends, event organizers and local officials do not employ strategic planning for leveraging the event. Rather the planning of Water Carnival is embedded in patterns of tight-knit social networks, political arrangements as well as long-established practices that characterize the community. These parameters are the driving forces that

shape the implementation of the event in the absence of a strategy to leverage Water Carnival. The seminal role of the event for the community and its emphasis on event tourism (with a main focus on visiting family and friend type tourism that invites former citizens back to reunite with the community) primarily guide the planning decisions. For example, the brochure of Water Carnival's program, which has all the information about that year's production and the history of the event, is distributed to all hotels and restaurants in town so that visitors can be enticed to attend the event. Also, the local museum has an exhibit dedicated to Water Carnival, which connects a tourism attraction of the community with the event. This is part of the Tourism Department's effort to utilize Water Carnival as a community asset and integrate it with its tourist product mix.

In terms of community development, Water Carnival presents ad hoc efforts that are intended primarily to integrate the community. In the absence of a strategic approach, a number of experiential practices are followed, which over the years shaped successfully the planning of Water Carnival deriving beneficial outcomes. In particular, ancillary events and activities are organized. The school reunions that are scheduled during Water Carnival foster sociability, reconnection of the community as well as an invitation for out of town family and friends to visit. Also, public meetings and speeches about the town's developments serve as social gathering points and the parade amplifies a sense of celebration. Theming is employed in Water Carnival with some local businesses (primarily those who are members of Water Carnival Association) embracing entirely the theme of Water Carnival. This extends the celebratory character of the event into the daily life of the community. Also, the whole community is invited to participate in the parade and embrace the theme of the show by entering a float in the parade. Finally,

event publicity for Water Carnival uses narratives to portray the desired of the community as a small but strong and friendly town, which builds the identity of the community. However, the lack of social leverage strategies leaves missed opportunities for breaking down social distinctions, status roles or political and other hierarchies, suspending social conventions and rules as well as lifting taboos in order to construct alternative models and structures.

Undoubtedly, there is ground for a strategic approach to be employed in the planning of Water Carnival, especially in the context of synergizing economic and social leverage. Although the entire leverage potential of Water Carnival remains unrealized, from a community development standpoint it attains the critical goal of bridging divisions, hence consolidating the community and sustaining its social order. This evidenced solidarity and associated social capital could be magnified through the employment of an explicit strategic planning approach that could seek to foster liminality as a leverageable resource and implement lasting social change.

Conclusion

The staging of Water Carnival show appears to be able to embrace the genres of theater, music, dancing, sport, and spectacle creating a symbolic social space, which has the capacity of reassembling the value system of the community. The event dramatizes a fundamental ideological conflict between cooperation and competition, individualism and collectivism, social benefit and/or economic interest. The creation of dramaturgical meanings in the event helps negotiate and compromise the above antithetical attitudes. In other words, a value/belief system is created and promoted through Water Carnival's preparation and participation in its associated festivities, performance in the show, and

spectatorship. In turn, Water Carnival is used primarily as a means of fostering community cohesion.

Notwithstanding the economically stressed status of Fort Stockton, which suffered from oil bust and subsequently faced population decline, Water Carnival provides this town with a semantic distinctiveness enabled by the symbolic context that nurtures shared meanings and collective spirit in response to the ongoing public discourse for community improvement, enhancement of quality of life, diversification of local economy and overall regional development. The metaphoric discourse shapes the basis for the cultivation of a collective logic that intuitively supports and stabilizes the community's social order.

The planning for using events in community development primarily requires that we develop conceptual frameworks for understanding the interplay of performance, dramaturgy and liminality as an integrated process and their harmonious compatibility, how event participants perceive their experience and how meanings are extracted. Each of these questions begs for future research that has directly practical implications for how to create event designs and use them in order to increase the social value of events. In this regard, we need to know more about how to devise and implement the appropriate social leverage strategies and tactics that are in synergy with event dramaturgy.

As the case of Water Carnival demonstrates, the limited opportunities to foster liminality are related both to the intent of local people to homogenize their community (i.e., by precluding unsafe situations such as contesting social conventions and structures that could harm the social stability of the town) and to the lack of strategic planning. The event brings people together, enhances sociability and interaction, and builds social

capital consolidating the community. The lack of strategic planning, however, leaves missed opportunities to suspend or reflect on the social conventions, taboos, and rules that are predominant in the community and build alternative structures or hierarchies that invert normal social rules and statuses as generally happens in carnivals (DaMatta, 1984).

For contextualization purposes it is important to state that Water Carnival is the most significant event within the community's event portfolio, elsewhere it was referred to as 'the heart of Fort Stockton's portfolio of events' (Ziakas & Costa, 2010). Usually it is not necessary for a single event to embody different aims and outcomes for the community or to perform both bonding and bridging functions of social capital since those tend to be 'event portfolio' level objectives. However, given the centrality and significance of this specific event to this community it would be unwise to not highlight the importance of strategic planning in this situation since it directly and strongly influences the whole portfolio and the range of positive outcomes that can be achieved for the community.

From a strategic planning standpoint, this study shows that the distinction between intended dramaturgical meanings and liminality is important for community development. Host community planners and event organizers need to consider and analyze the performative and dramaturgical elements of an event first, then decide on the intended meanings for extraction and finally alter and adjust the elements of event design with the purpose of cultivating liminality in ways that it is compatible with those meanings.

Overall, there is a need for a comprehensive approach in the planning of events for social purposes integrating contextual, dramatological, and managerial approaches.

As this study shows, a starting foundation for strategic social planning is the understanding of events as symbolic social spaces and their embeddedness in community development, which can be accomplished when events are pertinent to public discourse, address community issues, represent an inclusive range of stakeholders, and promote cooperation. Building on that, future research needs to examine the structural elements of events as they affect the dimensions of performance and dramaturgy and can be synergized with social leverage in ways that create, enhance and maintain social capital. The purpose of such an examination would be to suggest strategies that events can be used in community development based on a common language and understanding of the versatile roles and multifaceted value that events have for host communities.

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