



## North American Society for Sport Management

### Abstracts

#### **Event Portfolio and Rural Community Development**

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Although there is substantial knowledge regarding the impact of events on economic development, event planning, urban policy as well as tourism development (Crompton, 1999; Sack & Johnson, 1996; Roche, 1994; Chacko & Schaffer, 1993) it refers mainly to large or middle-scale individual events hosted by a city. Recently, however, there have been several developments in the way we think about events as a tool for economic and social development for communities. On one hand there is a line of studies that call for a shift in focus from impact to leverage, more specifically, instead of assessing the impact that a certain event had on the local economy (post-facto) one could strategically leverage intended outcomes (a-priori). On the other hand, there has been a recent focus on the value of recurring small-scale events versus one-off large events. Authors assert that small-scale events can play a vital role in fostering a community's enthusiasm for events and building its capacity to host larger events (Jago et al., 2003; Chalip, 2004). Also in terms of destination marketing, it has become apparent that the strategic incorporation of sport events into destination branding requires that each event be cross-leveraged with others in the destination's event portfolio (Chalip, & Costa, 2005). Therefore, a community can create or enhance a portfolio of events that take place at different times of the year and that appeal to consumers across the range of psychographic profiles to which the destination seeks to appeal (Schreiber & Lenson, 1994; Getz, 1997; Chalip, 2004). This requires the identification of the best means to leverage the events portfolio and create synergies among the different events.

This study employs ethnographic methods to examine the existing factors that facilitate or impede the incorporation of an event portfolio into the economic and social development of a rural west Texas community. With the purpose of conducting fieldwork, the first author lived in Fort Stockton for approximately 1 month during the summer of 2005. Fort Stockton is a small rural community in west Texas, relatively isolated and located on I-10. Its economy is based mainly on oil production, the prison system and service to the local ranching industry. This community is a passing point for travelers who go to Big Bend or El Paso. It is also characterized by having a substantial event portfolio with includes small and large sport and special events that are run throughout the year. Indicative events include the Big Bend Open Road Race, Sheep-dog Trials, Water Carnival, Harvest Fest as well as other various sporting events.

Data gathering included participant observation, interviews and review of archival materials. By living in the community, the first author observed the daily life of Fort Stockton, which specifically included informally socializing with locals, eating at local restaurants, mingling in local hangouts and attending local events. A research journal was used to log observations. In addition, ten one-hour formal interviews with community leaders were obtained. When permitted interviews were taped, otherwise notes were taken during and after each interview. Additionally, various printed material were collected with the aim of gathering background information on the community and its marketing. All printed materials were analyzed and cross-referenced with the observation and interview notes with the purpose of adding depth to the findings.

Data suggested that there were two main factors that facilitate the incorporation of events as a tool for local development in Fort Stockton. The first one was the

governmental partnership among the County, the City and the School District. These three entities operate as a single unique alliance. Interviewees agreed that the unique structure presents significant advantages. It facilitates active communication and stimulates collaboration among the diverse entities involved in the planning and organization of events. It enables effective mobilization of resources (e.g., human, facilities and monetary). It encourages coordination among the key players including event managers, destination marketers and the host community's local authorities to ensure access to the facilities and delivery of services. And finally it creates a natural space for social networking among key community stakeholders. The second major factor is the fact that several major entities (e.g, Parks and Recreation and Economic Development Corporation) consistently create or bring events to Fort Stockton. It is a general consensus that there is a proliferation of events in the community.

The findings from this study allow us to demonstrate the value of social networks, coordination across different economic sectors and multi-levels of government as well as the value of a large portfolio for a community's economic and social development. However, the findings also allow us to demonstrate that in order to fully leverage a community's event portfolio it is insufficient to have a portfolio of events; it is insufficient to effectively mobilize resources among different organizations; it is insufficient to have organizations that enable social networking among key stakeholders. Therefore, it is essential that we look at all three aspects as parts of an integrated whole and therefore study and understand them in concert. Further work is needed to explore the issues discussed above from an integrated perspective.

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 Last Update: 05/25/2006



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