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Leveraging events to ensure enduring benefits: The legacy strategy of the 2015 AFC Asian Cup

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 21 July 2015

Received in revised form 5 January 2016

Accepted 28 January 2016

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Legacy

Leveraging

Event tourism

Trade and investment

Multicultural engagement

2015 AFC Asian Cup

ABSTRACT

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Asian Cup is the largest soccer event on the Asian continent. Australia hosted the 2015 AFC Asian Cup which provided the nation with an opportunity to not only celebrate the sport of soccer, but also leverage the event to deliver enduring legacies. This case study examines the three key legacies of the 2015 AFC Asian Cup which were tourism, trade and investment, and multicultural engagement, and considers the leveraging strategies that were implemented to achieve the stated legacies.

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Teaching note

1. Introduction

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Asian Cup is the largest soccer event in Asia. Since its inception in 1956, this event has grown in popularity and is now hosted every four years. In January 2011, Australia was awarded the right to host the 2015 AFC Asian Cup. The AFC Asian Cup provides its host nation with an opportunity to not only celebrate the sport of soccer, but also leverage the event to deliver enduring legacies. Consequently, this case study provides students with an opportunity to examine the intended legacies of the 2015 AFC Asian Cup in order to gain a greater understanding of the potential benefits an event can deliver to a host nation if leveraging strategies are implemented correctly.

Prior to its staging, the 2015 AFC Asian Football Cup was touted as one of the most significant sport events to be hosted by Australia since the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. This was largely due to the significant trade and investment relationships between Australia and the competing Asian nations, including China, Japan, and South Korea. This case study follows Michael Brown, the CEO of the Local Organising Committee (LOC) for the 2015 AFC Asian Cup. Specifically, this study explores the challenges that Michael faced as the CEO, focusing on the development of the event vision, strategic objectives and leveraging strategies used in order to deliver enduring legacies to the host cities, and to the nation of Australia as a whole. While it was the role of the LOC to manage all operational elements of the tournament, they worked closely with government

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2016.01.003>

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and key stakeholders to enhance leveraging opportunities which would deliver enduring legacies. The LOC identified three legacy objectives: (1) increasing inbound tourism to Australia from Asian markets; (2) increasing trade and investment between Australian and Asian companies; and (3) engaging multicultural communities across Australia.

The 2015 AFC Asian Cup took place over 23 days in January, 2015, and saw 32 soccer matches played in five of the country's largest cities: Brisbane, Newcastle, Canberra, Sydney, and Melbourne. Melbourne hosted the first game of the tournament and Sydney hosted the sold-out final round, which saw the Australian Socceroos defeat The Republic of Korea 2–1 in extra time. Since the conclusion of the event, reports suggest that the 2015 AFC Asian Cup set new records for attendance, television audiences and social media engagement, making it the most watched AFC Asian Cup in history (*The Roar, 2015*). The LOC originally forecasted combined attendance at the event at 350,000; however, this figure was exceeded, with aggregate attendance figures totalling around 650,000, which equates to an average attendance of 20,000 per match (*Hill, 2015*). The 2015 AFC Asian Cup reached a global audience of over one billion through broadcast media (*Hill, 2015*). Further, engagement with fans through social media was successful, with the event's official Twitter hashtag reaching 2.69 billion followers by the end of the semi-finals. These attendance and media statistics resulted in many accolades for the LOC including the Chairman of the AFC hailing the tournament as the most successful Asian Cup held to date. However, Michael was aware that part of his responsibilities included ensuring a lasting legacy of the event. A strategic approach was taken to ensure engagement across all key stakeholders.

Various strategies to achieve each of the three legacy objectives were devised and activated before, during, and after the event. The case details the leveraging strategies that were used to deliver the three key legacy outcomes: tourism, trade and investment, and multicultural engagement. This case study provides students with an opportunity to gain a greater understanding of event legacy and leveraging, through analysing and developing strategies based on a real world example. For a related case study on Australia's position in the AFC please see [Fairley, Lovegrove, Smith, and Tyler \(in press\)](#).

2. Leveraging events

This case provides students with fundamental lessons on the importance of leveraging events to maximise event outputs. The 2015 AFC Asian Cup presented Australia and its host cities with an opportunity to leverage the event in order to increase tourism from Asian countries to Australia, increase trade and investment with participating Asian nations, and engage Australia's culturally diverse communities. The celebration of soccer was used as a basis for the development of strategies to achieve these legacies. Research has emphasised the importance of leveraging events in order to successfully deliver long-term benefits to the host communities ([Chalip, 2004, 2006, 2014](#); [Chalip & Leyns, 2002](#)). [Chalip \(2006, p. 112\)](#) defines event leveraging as the identification of "strategies and tactics that can be implemented prior to and during an event in order to generate particular outcomes". [Chalip \(2004, 2006, 2014\)](#), [Beesley and Chalip \(2011\)](#), and [Kellett, Hede, and Chalip \(2008\)](#) are useful readings that provide an understanding of the concept of event leveraging.

Students should be encouraged to consider and discuss the three legacies identified by the LOC for the 2015 AFC Asian Cup and also think creatively to identify further legacy opportunities. For example, research has suggested that there is legacy potential around event volunteering (e.g., [Fairley, Gardiner, & Filo, in press](#); [Fairley, Green, O'Brien, & Chalip, 2015](#)) that was not identified as a key legacy strategy for the 2015 AFC Asian Cup. Students should assume the role of CEO of the LOC to answer the following questions:

1. Identify three legacy objectives that could be achieved from Australia's hosting of the 2015 AFC Asian Cup. The answers may include legacies that were not officially used in the 2015 AFC Asian Cup strategy. Students should be encouraged to justify and rank their chosen legacies. How would Michael Brown justify these legacy objectives to relevant government and industry stakeholders?
2. Identify the key stakeholders that would be central and important in the development and implementation of each legacy. Students should be encouraged to consider how they would identify and network with key stakeholders in order to achieve the legacy objectives.
3. Students should be encouraged to develop leveraging strategies to achieve the legacy objectives that could be implemented before, during, and after the event to achieve maximum outcomes. Students should compare and contrast their strategies to what was actually done around the 2015 AFC Asian Cup. Students should be encouraged to make a case for why their proposed leveraging strategies would have been more successful (or not) than the ones that were used by the 2015 AFC Asian Cup

The following section considers each legacy and its related leveraging strategy separately.

3. Tourism

The Asian region is home to some of Australia's most important tourism markets ([Tourism Australia, 2015](#)). Hosting the 2015 AFC Asian Cup provided Australia with a unique opportunity to target Asian markets in order to increase inbound tourism both directly through attracting attendance at the event ([Kim & Chalip, 2004](#)), and indirectly through media exposure of the event (cf., [Getz & Fairley, 2004](#)). The LOC noted that soccer was a potential uniting factor for Australia and

Asian countries, and could be leveraged in order to entice Asian tourists to travel to Australia. Participating Asian nations such as China and Japan represent two out of the top five inbound markets for Australia based on total trip expenditure (Tourism Research Australia, 2014a). China continues to have the largest market share, in addition to being the fastest growing inbound tourism market in Australia (Tourism Research Australia, 2014b). In 2014, record visitors from other Asian countries including Hong Kong, India, Malaysia, Taiwan and Singapore were achieved (Tourism Research Australia, 2014b). The following questions and prompts can be used to guide a class activity based on the development of tourism-related strategies:

1. Students should form groups and brainstorm potential tourism strategies that the LOC could use in order to further promote Australia within participating Asian nations. Students could choose one or multiple competing countries and develop strategies to leverage the event in order to maximise tourism growth in the country or countries of choice.
2. Students should be encouraged to consider the relevant tourism stakeholders in their leveraging strategies. Students should then pitch their idea to a group acting as the Local Organising Committee (LOC) for the 2015 AFC Asian Cup. Students should research and detail the structures and governance of outbound tourism in the markets of choice. Students should provide advice to the LOC on the key stakeholders that the LOC should engage in order to maximise the tourism benefits to Australia? Country and cultural-specific issues and policies should be considered.
3. Students should design strategies that could be activated in the target market to increase direct and indirect tourism relating to the event. The marketing campaigns should be pitched to a group representing the LOC and key Australian tourism stakeholders. Cultural and contextual variables should be considered in formulating the marketing communications.

4. Trade and investment

In order to establish and further develop relationships between trade and investment partners in Australia and Asia, a business matching program, Match Australia, was specifically developed by the LOC in conjunction with Austrade. Match Australia is the “Australian Government’s business networking program that connects Australian businesses with global partners through major sporting events” (Australian Trade Commission, 2015, para. 1). The LOC understood that powerful community leaders within Asian nations were often associated with soccer associations, thus emphasising the potential role that soccer could play in terms of establishing a trade and investment legacy. Consequently, the 2015 AFC Asian Cup was used as a platform to invite high-level government and business officials to visit Australia and to network with key stakeholders from Australian companies. This was done with the intention of positioning Australia as a preferred education, trade and investment partner. Research suggests that the successful execution of major events has the potential to project a new image of the host community (Gratton, Dobson, & Shibli, 2000). In this case, the 2015 AFC Asian Cup was used to re-image Australia as a superior destination for trade and investment. This concept is further supported by Carlsen and Taylor (2003, p. 17) who believe that mega-events “create impetus for international trade and investment”. Thus, the creation or further development of trade and investment ventures is readily accepted as a key long-term outcome of mega-events (Carlsen & Taylor, 2003; Gratton et al., 2000).

Two of Australia’s most important exports are coal and iron ore, with countries in North Asia representing the primary market for both resources (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2012). This is just one example of trade industries that connect Australia and Asian nations that could be used as a basis for connecting business delegates. Instructors should encourage students to consider key industries that link Australia and Asia and strategies that can be leveraged through the event. Activities and questions for the class include:

1. Students should be encouraged to identify key trade and investment industries that connect Australia and Asia. Further, students should be asked to identify key trade and business officials in each of the participating nations that are associated with the sport of soccer. With the knowledge of both the industries and officials that connect Australia and Asia, students should develop strategies that the LOC could use to forge strong relationships with these high-powered stakeholders. Strategies should consider ways in which networking opportunities can be provided around a shared interest in soccer and the event. Students should compare and contrast their strategies with that used during the 2015 AFC Asian Cup. Students should pitch their strategies to the LOC and Frank Lowy, President of the Football Federation of Australia (FFA).

5. Multicultural engagement

Community support is a key contributing factor towards the success of an event (Gursoy & Kendall, 2006). One way to maximise community support for an event is to engage the community through the event in order to ensure positive perceptions towards the city’s hosting of the event (Chien, Ritchie, Shipway, & Henderson, 2012). The LOC identified community engagement as a key legacy—placing a particular emphasis on engaging the multicultural communities that are abundant within Australia. The Australian population is diverse, with increasing migration from the Asian region. The proportion of migrants born in Asia now represents 33% of the overseas-born population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). Previous research has noted that there are cultural differences in how individuals interact with events (e.g., Fairley, Lee, Green, & Kim, 2013). One strategy that the LOC developed and implemented in order to engage communities through

soccer was to appoint 200 community leaders from Asian–Australian communities as Community Ambassadors for the event. These ambassadors each held leadership positions across business, sport, and community, and were responsible for holding events, making local media appearances, and coordinating fans to support teams. Instructors should use Thoma and Chalip (2003) as a resource to discuss how appointed community members felt a greater sense of connection with the event, and therefore worked to engage other members within their community, resulting in greater support for the event. Students should assume the role of the LOC when undertaking the following activities and questions:

1. Identify key community groups that should be targeted with multicultural engagement programs for the 2015 AFC Asian Cup. Students should be encouraged to support their claims through the use of statistics. It may be useful for the students to profile each of the groups so they have a clear understanding of the cultural similarities and differences. Students should then be asked to compare and contrast their group profiles and priorities with those used by the LOC in their multicultural engagement strategies.
2. Develop strategies that could be used to engage the different multicultural communities. Students should be encouraged to consider potential issues that could arise when attempting to engage different cultural communities. Students should then compare and contrast their strategies with those used by the LOC including the ambassador program. Students should be asked to discuss how the differences in strategies may result in similar or different outcomes.

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Leveraging events to ensure enduring benefits: The legacy strategy of the 2015 AFC Asian Cup

Case study

1. Introduction

In 2006, Australia changed its confederation affiliation from the Oceania Football Confederation (OFC) to the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), which led to its successful inclusion in the FIFA World Cup for the first time since 1974. In 2010, Australia unsuccessfully bid to host the 2018 and 2022 World Cups; the event was awarded to Qatar under controversial circumstances. However, with soccer's growing popularity in Australia, the Football Federation Australia (FFA) recognised an important opportunity to capitalise on hosting a major international soccer event. In July 2010, Australia submitted a bid to host the 2015 AFC Asian Cup. The AFC Asian Cup is the largest soccer tournament in Asia, bringing together Asia's top soccer teams every four years. In January 2011, it was confirmed that Australia was awarded the hosting rights of the 2015 event. Since the day it was awarded, the event was touted as the most potentially significant international sporting event in Australia since the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. The significance of the event was considerable given the country's strong push to conduct business with Asian markets, which was demonstrated in the Asian White Paper released by the federal government (Australian Government, 2012).

Michael Brown was appointed as the Chief Executive Officer of the Local Organising Committee (LOC) for the 2015 AFC Asian Cup in December 2011. Only weeks prior to being appointed CEO of the LOC, Michael had been considering his retirement after a long and successful career that traversed executive-level positions within the Australian Football League and Cricket Australia. However, now, after successfully staging the 2015 AFC Asian Cup, Michael has indefinitely postponed his retirement and has just accepted the role of CEO of the LOC for the 2017 Rugby League World Cup. For the first time in over three years, Michael allowed himself a brief moment to stop and reflect on his time as the CEO of the LOC for the 2015 AFC Asian Cup.

From the moment he was appointed as CEO of the LOC, Michael knew he had a monumental job in front of him. He recognised the significance of his position within the 2015 AFC Asian Cup, and the impact his actions had not only on the staging of the event, but on the enduring benefits that the event could provide in the years following the event. The strategic objectives were established in the early stages of the planning process so that strategies could be developed and implemented in order to deliver on the event's objectives, and provide long-lasting benefits.

2. The AFC Asian Football Cup

Established by the Asian Football Confederation in 1956, the Asian Football Cup is the second oldest continental soccer competition after Copa America. The inaugural tournament consisted of just four participants: Hong Kong, South Korea, South Vietnam, and Israel, but has since developed into one of the world's largest soccer contests and is considered to be the Asian equivalent of the Euro Championship. With 47 Asian nations vying for 16 positions within the event, more than half of the world's population was represented during the qualifying matches—demonstrating the sheer magnitude of the event.

After examining the attendance and viewership figures from the event, Michael felt that the 2015 Asian Cup had been a great success. This was reaffirmed by the AFC president hailing it the most successful Asian Cup held to date. From the 9th to the 31st of January 2015, five Australian cities played host to the AFC Asian Cup. The events were held in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Newcastle and Canberra. Initial estimates before the event suggested that the event would attract around 45,000 international visitors to Australia, and over 650,000 attendees throughout the event, making it the single largest soccer event to be held in Australia (AFC Asian Cup 2015 Australia, n.d.). Actual attendance figures far exceeded original expectations, with aggregate attendance totalling around 650,000, and an average attendance of 20,000 per match (Hill, 2015). Additionally, the event reached a global television audience of over one billion people, and successfully reached 2.69 billion Twitter followers by the end of the semi-finals (Hill, 2015).

The LOC was formed as a subsidiary company of the Football Federation of Australia (FFA). The LOC worked in conjunction with the AFC, FFA, and the World Sports Group (WSG), in addition to the Queensland, New South Wales, Victorian and Australian Capital Territory state governments in order to successfully execute the event (AFC Asian Cup 2015 Australia, n.d.). The event was jointly funded by the Australian Government and four state governments to the amount of AUD\$61 million (The Asian Football Confederation, 2011). Throughout his time as CEO of the LOC, Michael knew that there were high expectations placed on his shoulders to make this event a success in the eyes of all stakeholders.

Michael believed that the strategic objectives of the 2015 AFC Asian Cup should reflect the objectives of each of the key stakeholders. However, like all events, objectives could not be set until an overall event vision had been devised. Thus, Michael and his team embarked on the task of developing the event vision and strategic objectives of the 2015 AFC Asian Cup.

3. Event vision

Michael and his team were responsible for creating a well-defined vision to guide the event. The 2015 AFC Asian Cup aimed “to deliver a world-class event that celebrates Asia’s rich football culture and leaves an enduring legacy for the game in Australia” (AFC Asian Cup 2015 Australia, n.d.). While this vision statement points to a legacy “for” the game of soccer, the focus of long-term benefits from hosting the event extended beyond the sport itself. Specifically, three strategic pillars further supported this vision:

1. delivering a world-class event;
2. providing a celebration of Asia’s rich soccer culture; and
3. ensuring the competition leaves an enduring legacy.

(AFC Asian Cup 2015 Australia, n.d.)

These strategic pillars provide a focus for all LOC activities. Delivering a world-class event of this scale posed significant challenges for the LOC, one of which was the successful delivery of enduring post-event benefits or legacies. The third of these strategic pillars, “ensuring the competition leaves an enduring legacy”, encompassed three key themes that would last long after the 2015 AFC Asian Cup. The legacy strategy was threefold and included tourism, trade and investment, and multicultural engagement. Therefore, it was essential that the development and implementation of strategies to address the strategic pillars were considered in the initial planning stages.

4. Event strategies

Michael reflected on what he and his team had done in the lead-up to the event to ensure the longevity of positive outcomes for the host cities and country. He remembers thinking that large-scale events such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup provide host cities with the opportunity to harness the positive impacts of the event to maximise long-term benefits. While these types of events provide the “opportunity” to provide such benefits, there is very little evidence of long-term benefits that support this claim (NoTO2024, 2016). Anthony knew that this may have been due to a lack of forward planning. Thus, planning outcomes for the 2015 AFC Asian Cup required the coordination and collaboration of the host organisation in conjunction with key stakeholders to develop the three legacy objectives. Michael remembered the many meetings that he had attended with various tourism stakeholders to discuss a potential tourism legacy.

5. Tourism

The tourism industry is of significant importance to the Australian economy. For the 12 months ending in March 2014, international visitor expenditure in Australia achieved a record \$29.6 billion, an increase of six per cent on the previous year (Tourism Australia, 2014). The Asian region is acknowledged as the primary source of growth in visitor expenditure, representing 47% of total expenditure from March 2013–2014 (Tourism Australia, 2014).

Michael’s initial estimates predicted that 45,000 international visitors would visit Australia as a direct result of the event, numbers that would contribute to the 500,000 anticipated attendees across the tournament. However, Michael knew that he could leverage the event for tourism gain before, during, and after the event, especially as the Asian region is home to many critical and growing tourism markets, and is the largest source of inbound tourism to Australia (Reisinger & Turner, 2002). Thus, understanding how the Asian market differs from other tourism markets is essential in designing marketing campaigns to appeal to these key markets. For example, visitors travelling for leisure-related purposes are increasingly more prevalent across many Asian nations including China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, India and Indonesia (Tourism Australia, 2014). Chinese tourists are generally characterised by their desire to share and experience their foreign holiday with friends and family (Tourism-review, 2014). Further, the Chinese market seeks to experience and learn about a wide region as part of a structured tour provided by a travel agency (Tourism-review, 2014).

The event was expected to generate \$23 million in additional expenditures from visitors (AFC Asian Cup 2015 Australia, n.d.), with the potential for this figure to be increased with the implementation of strategic leveraging. In order to capitalise on the international visitors that were expected to follow their teams to Australia for the event, the LOC needed to work with relevant tourism stakeholders to devise and implement strategies to increase the number of visitors, length of stay, and visitor expenditure (Chalip, 2004, 2006, 2014). Thus, the LOC worked with Tourism Australia, in addition to the local state tourism organisations in the states of the host cities, including Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ), Destination NSW, Tourism Victoria and Australian Capital Tourism (Business View, 2015), to develop tourism strategies. One such strategy run in conjunction with Tourism and Events Queensland saw Brisbane featured in an episode of *I, Supermodel*, a Chinese television show watched by over 60 million viewers (Tourism and Events Queensland, 2015). The episode featured a fashion parade hosted in Queen Street Mall, which showcased top Australian and Queensland designers while also incorporating elements of the 2015 AFC Asian Cup through including soccer players on the catwalk. The show provided an opportunity to promote Brisbane as a leading fashion destination to a large Chinese market, while also presenting its reputation as a “new world city”. Despite the benefits that this opportunity presented as a means of further leveraging the event, difficulties arose when attempting to measure the outcomes of such an initiative.

While some of the tourism strategies used the event as a means to promote tourism, other tourism initiatives were more specifically based around event time. Michael knew that cultural and sporting events represent significant drawcards for tourists when selecting a destination to visit (Tourism Research Australia, 2014). From 2012–2013, roughly 100,000 international visitors travelled to Australia specifically to attend a cultural or sporting event (Tourism Australia, 2014). These visitors characterise a desirable market, as they generate a higher yield by staying longer and, on average, spending more than twice as much as all other international visitors (Tourism Australia, 2014). In order to capitalise on this significant market, Tourism Australia partnered with the LOC to develop a campaign called “The beautiful game is about to get more beautiful”. The campaign included print, digital, and television broadcasts, which were launched in October and November of 2014. The campaign was rolled out in conjunction with international travel agents and launched in the three primary target markets of China, South Korea, and Japan. The purpose of the campaign was to increase awareness of the event while promoting Australia as a tourism destination to both soccer and non-soccer fans (Tourism Australia, 2014). Thus, the campaign aligned with Australia’s national tourism strategy known as Tourism 2020, which identifies growing demand in the Asian region as an area of strategic significance (Tourism Australia, 2015). Michael was happy with the tourism-related achievements and so his mind then moved onto reflecting about the strategies designed to bolster trade and investment.

6. Trade and investment

Over the past 20 years, the economies of China and India have expanded at an exponential rate, tripling their share of the global economy and increasing their economic size by almost six times (Australian Government, 2012). This growth is forecast to continue, with the Asian region expected to account for close to half the world’s output by 2025 (Australian Government, 2012). In 2012, the Australian Government published a document, *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper*, detailing the importance of forming a sustainable relationship with Asia over the next 100 years. Thus, the 2015 AFC Asian Cup provided Australia with a crucial opportunity to use the event as a means of establishing trade and investment relations with these important emerging economies. Michael was excited that seven of Australia’s top ten trading partners are from the AFC region. Further, Australia’s top four export markets—China, Japan, South Korea, and India—are all members of the AFC. For these reasons, the 2015 AFC Asian Cup was identified as a key opportunity to develop and leverage social, economic, and cultural ties with Asian nations by the federal government. Thus the term “football diplomacy”, was created to use a common interest in soccer to establish networks that encompass political, business, and community-related engagement (Bubalo, 2005). Strategies to bolster trade and investment focused on cross-sectional linkages between various stakeholders of the event, including organisations operating within both the private and public sectors. Michael recalled that through pairing and matching businesses, and through providing networking opportunities for industry leaders, it was hoped that investment and trade relationships could develop leading to positive impacts on the local markets and economies. For example, Australia is the world’s largest exporter of iron ore (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2011). China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea represent Australia’s largest markets for iron ore, accounting for 96.8% of Australia’s total iron ore exports in 2011 (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2012). All of these countries qualified for the 2015 AFC Asian Cup. It is not often that those involved in the mining and exporting of iron ore have the chance to communicate with, or meet, those purchasing the products. Thus, Michael noted that the event provided Australian iron ore exporters with an unparalleled opportunity to network with, and develop stronger relationships with their Asian buyers.

In order to capitalise on this significant opportunity, the Australian Trade Commission, known as Austrade, partnered with state and territory governments to develop a program called Match Australia. Austrade is responsible for assisting Australian businesses, education institutions, tourism operators, governments, and citizens to contribute to Australia’s economic prosperity through providing information, advice and services (Australian Trade Commission, 2014). Match Australia was designed to facilitate networking opportunities between Australian and Asian businesses. For example, business delegations were hosted during the 2015 AFC Asian Cup to encourage networking and help establish high-level connections through the event.

In addition to creating business, trade, and investment relationships throughout the 2015 AFC Asian Cup, Michael remembered one of his favourite parts of his role, engaging the multicultural communities of Australia.

7. Community engagement programs

The community engagement strategies were designed to engage the soccer community within Australia as well as the multicultural communities from AFC nations. Michael reminisced that one of the most exciting parts of his role was to interact with the many excited multicultural communities and ambassadors within each of the host cities. With around 1.7 million soccer participants in Australia, it was envisioned that the event could help grow participation and the supporter base for soccer in Australia. Around 80 million people played soccer across the Asian region in 2014 (AFC Asian Cup 2015 Australia, n.d.). This figure was expected to grow to 380 million people within the six years after the 2015 AFC Asian Cup (AFC Asian Cup 2015 Australia, n.d.). Asia represents the largest television audience for the FIFA World Cup, and is considered a key growth area for soccer (AFC Asian Cup 2015 Australia, n.d.). The strong interest in international soccer events is thought to be a key driving force behind this predicted growth. However, to date there is no substantial evidence indicating that sport events stimulate sport participation (e.g., Weed et al., 2015).

Soccer is one of the few sports that links Australia with Asia. Consequently, one of the primary objectives of the event was to celebrate multiculturalism through soccer. Encouraging multicultural engagement was central to this strategic objective. Around two million Australian residents are of Asian descent, and 27% of the country's population that is born overseas is from Asia (AFC Asian Cup 2015 Australia, n.d.). Michael knew that he could use soccer as a vehicle through which to connect the many and diverse cultural groups within Australia.

Michael also reflected on the programs that were specifically targeted at youth. The LOC promoted multicultural engagement programs through the development of educational resources for primary school children. Additionally, Four Diegos Media developed an online educational resource aimed at students from grades three to six (Football Federation Australia, 2013). This community engagement program was designed to encourage the education of Australia's youth about the Asian region through soccer.

In 2013, the Asian Cup 2015 Communities program was developed as a means of engaging multicultural communities through soccer. The stated goals of the program were based on three primary strategies:

1. Community events: The LOC will participate in a variety of multicultural festivals and events;
2. Media: The LOC will partner with multicultural media organisations to increase reach to the relevant communities; and
3. Community ambassadors: The LOC will identify key ethnic leaders within multicultural communities and appoint them as official community ambassadors.

(The Asian Football Confederation, 2013)

Consequently, in 2014 the 2015 AFC Asian Cup partnered with the National Multicultural Festival. This partnership provided an opportunity to promote the event to the relevant communities, and also to deliver on the first of the abovementioned program activities.

Through another initiative, the LOC funded a program run by Red Elephant Projects whereby approximately 200 community ambassadors were appointed across the five host cities in 2013. The community ambassadors who have heritage from the 16 competing nations were appointed as a means of engaging multicultural communities. The program primarily focused on Chinese, Japanese, Iraqi, Korean and Iranian communities. The ambassadors had varied backgrounds and experience, from managing community organisations to running foreign-language newspapers within their local communities (Football Federation Australia, 2013), worked with the LOC for over 18 months. The program used various methods to reach the desired ethnic communities, including multicultural media campaigns, language advertisements, multicultural film festivals, and soccer events. The multicultural programs were touted as a huge success and were attributed as a major driving force behind the exceptional ticket sales for matches not involving Australia, which had an average attendance of 14,727 (Bossi, 2015). As a result of the success of the program, the FFA is considering continuing the community ambassador program, and further expanding it to include ambassadors from non-Asian communities. It is believed that this could further strengthen the multicultural foundation upon which Australian soccer has developed.

Michael and his team reflected on the three legacies that the LOC set out to achieve. He wondered whether there were other potential legacy strategies that they could have achieved. He reminisced about the many meetings that he had attended with many stakeholders over the course of his tenure as CEO of the LOC. He was amazed at the variety of people with whom he had met and established close relationships during the lead-up to the event. Anthony then received a knock on his door: it was time for him to start planning his next event, the 2017 Rugby League World Cup. As he walked out the door, he was hoping that the strategies that the LOC had put in place with the 2015 AFC Asian Cup were successful in creating a lasting legacy. Although the 2015 AFC Asian Cup only spanned 23 days, the event had the potential to bring numerous benefits that last well into the future.

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