

‘Out of the Black, Into the Big Blue’ on a Single Breath: Sport Event Value Co-creation as Symbolic World-making

Abstract

Building upon the perspectives of sport value co-creation and symbolic action, this study employs a hermeneutic analysis of the socio-cultural dynamics shaping value in events. It examines the symbolic co-construction of a participatory small-scale event and the attached meanings that instantiate perceptions of value. We investigate a free-diving event held in the Greek island of Amorgos commemorating the 1988 film ‘Big Blue’. Fieldwork was conducted during the event, including focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and observation. Findings demonstrate the event’s dramaturgic hypostasis acting both as symbolic social space and multi-stakeholder value co-creation platform. Three overarching themes epitomize the actors’ experience: connecting, communing and belonging. This reveals a dramaturgical world-making stage in which co-creative instantiators embody meanings that coordinate interaction, communicate information, integrate resources, and evaluate value. Our study calls for comprehensive dramatological inquiries embracing the collective embodiment of events as social dramas that enable collaboration through the instantiation of shared meanings.

Keywords: Small-scale events; value co-creation; dramaturgy; symbols, cultural performance, social leverage

Sport management scholarship has recognized that value in sport services and events cannot be created solely by sport organizations, but instead is co-created by networks of actors (Gerke, Woratschek, & Dickson, 2020; Hedlund, 2014; Kolyperas, Anagnostopoulos, Chadwick, & Sparks, 2016; Uhrich, 2014; Woratschek, Horbel, & Popp 2014). Value co-creation is one of the central tenets of the Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) that posits the joint value creation by the organizations and the customer (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008). Woratschek et al. (2014) put forward the Sport Value Framework (SVF) supporting that sport organizations can provide a platform to enable the range of stakeholders to co-create value through a collaborative process in which they integrate resources from their social networks. The challenge thus for sport organizations is to connect a range of stakeholders to one another as partners. This can be done through the configuration of a value network platform that incorporates stakeholders of the entire service delivery system. Consequently, in the case of sport events, the SVF regards them, not as products or even services, but instead, as exchange platforms where different actors (e.g., organizations, athletes, fans and other stakeholders) offer value propositions and depend on integrating the resources of others to create value. To this end, sport event value co-creation lies in coordinating the contributions and interaction of all the actors involved through reciprocal relations and collaboration.

While the SVF provides a network perspective in shaping sport event value co-creation, it merely reflects a functionalist-operational approach and has been mainly applied to the context of spectator experiences (Horbel, Popp, Woratschek, & Wilson, 2016; Kolyperas, Maglaras, & Sparks, 2019; Kolyperas & Sparks, 2018; McDonald & Karg, 2014; Woratschek, Durchholz, Maier, & Ströbel, 2017). Participatory sport events present considerably complex dynamics linked with the nexus of sport activity, subcultural identification, place attachment, culture, and social capital that consecutively affect experience, sense of community, reciprocity and collaboration (Green & Chalip, 1998; Hinch & Holt, 2017; Zhou & Kaplanidou, 2018). Little is known within sport management literature about how participatory events are co-created as the result of the interaction between participants and other stakeholders. Nonetheless, evidence from the general event management literature reveals processes of value co-creation through stakeholder participation (Prebensen, 2010) and empowerment of residents (Della Corte, Sepe, Storlazzi, & Savastano, 2018), identifies

mechanisms of value co-creation in festivals (Mervi, Suomi, & Lepistö, 2019), and points to the role of event design in the creation of value in social systems (Orefice, 2018).

Crowther and Donlan (2011) were among the first to interpret events as a value creation space exemplifying that they provide a setting suitable for the reciprocal creation of value. This perspective concurs with the anthropological notions of liminality and associated *communitas* engendered within the space-time of events, which may overturn conventions, roles and norms of everyday life, while exploring alternative social constructions (Turner, 1974). In this context, events create a heightened experience with attendees being more relaxed, uninhibited, and open to new ideas, thereby enabling the achievement of objectives more closely aligned with relationship-building, collaboration, and value co-creation. Along the same lines, the notion of social leverage for sport events by Chalip (2006) was grounded in the Turnerian roots of liminality and *communitas* as sources of fostering social interaction and a feeling of celebration. On these premises, events may take a collaborative character providing an environment ripe for the reciprocal creation of value (Crowther & Donlan, 2011). This is crucial for event management because value is co-created by the interaction of a multiplicity of stakeholders; thus, an event can be understood as a stakeholder ecosystem, in which value is co-created by the complex interaction of a network of disparate stakeholders with different identities, values and interests (Pera, Occhiocupo, & Clarke, 2016).

Given that value co-creation is based on social interaction, academic research has begun to address the resonance of social practices that foster value. Co-creation is thus viewed as a dynamic, multi-layered process that is embedded in stakeholders' social contexts and attendant relationships, kinship meanings, collaborative commercial companionships, or tribal rituals (Rihova, Buhalis, Gouthro, & Moital, 2018; Rihova, Buhalis, Moital, & Gouthro, 2013, 2014). The social context is inextricably linked with the cultural, symbolic and ritualized nature of events (Getz & Page, 2016). Likewise, the role of symbols in value co-creation has been put forward in the business-marketing literature (Akaka et al., 2014) highlighting their capacity to guide actors in co-creating shared meanings, which assists them to establish the value of their interactions and achieve integration of resources. The role of symbols in events can be comprehensively analyzed through a dramatological perspective rooted in cultural anthropology and

performance studies that examine symbolic action and dramaturgy in collective performances interpreted as social dramas (Schechner, 1985, 2003; Turner, 1974, 1982).

From a dramatological perspective, events can be understood as symbolic social spaces conducive to dramaturgy that enables metaphoric public discourse, expressing the desires, dispositions, ideals, and worldviews of people (Ziakas & Costa, 2010a, 2012). Dramaturgy constitutes a mode of symbolic action (Goffman, 1959; Handelman, 1990; Turner, 1974) conveying concomitant representations and dramatic stories that epitomize the co-construction and extraction of shared meanings (Ziakas & Boukas, 2013, 2014). The meanings thus are enabled by the performance of expressive socio-cultural practices and projection of associated symbolisms. In this respect, the intersection of dramaturgy and value co-creation merits research attention in terms of the synergistic dynamics that affect the extraction of shared meanings within the space of an event. This understanding can help to strategically develop event ecosystems as performative, symbolic social spaces and multi-stakeholder platforms for value co-creation.

Despite the rich evidence from cultural theory documenting the symbolic value of events and their effect on redeveloping the symbolic foundations of social life (Geertz, 1973; Handelman, 1990; Kapferer, 1991; Manning, 1981; Peacock, 1987; Turner, 1974), there is limited application within sport management. Subsequently, even though sport is integrally pervaded with drama and symbolic meaning, comprehensive studies of dramaturgy in sport events and services are still lacking. Understanding value co-creation as symbolic action can yield insights on the collaborative dynamics that enable social leverage outcomes to be co-created as a result of reciprocal interaction among multiple stakeholders. In this regard, cultural theory and dramaturgy can be profitably used to complement and expand extant literature on sport event management co-creation. In light of this thesis, the purpose of this study is to examine the symbolic co-construction of value in the staging of a participatory small-scale sport event. The study concerns a nascent free-diving event named ‘Authentic Big Blue’ (ABB), hosted in the Greek island Amorgos. Thematically, this event is based on the ‘Big Blue’ film. Elite free-divers participate in this competition, which also includes celebratory film elements tied to the sport’s subculture. Given the event’s novelty

linked to cinema, the ABB presents a unique context for examining its co-creation through means of symbolic action.

Symbolic Value Co-creation in Sport Events

To set a common ground for exploring the multi-layered dynamics of symbolic value co-creation in sport events, the following literature streams are reviewed and integrated. They comprise theoretical perspectives on multi-stakeholder service ecosystems, event value creation space, and events as symbolic social spaces.

Multi-stakeholder Sport Event Value Co-creation

Co-creation has been defined as consumer creation of value based on the SDL (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008). Accordingly, value propositions are offered in a collaborative and interactive logic in multiple exchange relationships. As SVF dictates, sport events should be regarded as platforms where different actors co-create value within a network (Woratschek et al., 2014). Hence, an event's value proposition can be construed as a platform that fans, athletes, spectators and other actors can use as a means of providing their value propositions. From this standpoint, the main purpose of sport event organizations is to connect different actors as partners in order to co-create the event. In so doing, the resources that can potentially be integrated in the process of value co-creation depend on the specific context of a sport event (e.g., scale, type, institutions, history, culture, business environment, etc.). Although the context varies across the wide range of sport events, common collaborative value processes become evident through a service ecosystem prism. Service ecosystems are defined as "relatively self-contained self-adjusting systems of resource-integrating actors connected by shared institutional logics and mutual value creation through service exchange" (Lusch & Vargo, 2014, p. 24). This conceptualization reveals the dynamic social context underlying value co-creation processes. It represents a systems-oriented view of value co-creation that broadens the scope of interactions to a network of actors and highlights the dynamics of social systems driven by exchange.

Actors can essentially be seen as stakeholders who have different interests. Pera et al. (2016) highlighted the view of 'multi-stakeholder ecosystem' within which value co-creation is generated and shared by stakeholders with separate identities, antithetical

values, or competing agendas and goals. This view accounts for systemic interactions of value co-creation components, interdependencies between stakeholders and their adaptation contingent upon changing environments and situations. Gyrd-Jones and Kornum (2013) defined a stakeholder ecosystem as the configuration that encompasses both the network nature of relationships and the range of subcultures that make up this ecosystem. The development of the concept of business ecosystems stems from the notion of value networks but takes a different meaning. Wieland, Polese, Vargo, and Lusch (2012) supported that a business ecosystem is different from a network in that each instance of resource integration, service provision, and value creation, alters the nature of the system and thus the context in which value creation is established.

More specifically, value co-creation occurs within the system through series of interactions, which integrate actors' resources in a complementary manner (Vargo & Lusch, 2011). Value complementarity is the synergy created when an array of stakeholders collectively generates more value than the sum of the value each actor creates alone (Gyrd-Jones & Kornum, 2013). In this fashion, value synergies derive from encounters that enable creative resource integration and mutual learning; therefore multi-stakeholder ecosystem co-creation is a purposeful process that builds upon collaborative behaviors and attitudes, led by a common purpose, where actors can reciprocally benefit from the outcomes of co-creation (Pera et al., 2016). Within an ecosystem, relationships are triggered by the sharing of informal norms, symbolic meanings and codified rules, facilitating actors to enhance the exchange of value co-creation practices (Della Corte et al., 2018). The co-creation of meaning takes place at the social level where it is negotiated by the individual meaning that each actor brings in the social environment (Dominici, Yolles, & Caputo, 2017).

In the context of sport events, the focus has been primarily on their public viewing. Horbel et al. (2016) maintain that social aspects dominate the value perception of spectators, which derives from social interaction and hedonic components such as atmosphere and entertainment. Woratschek et al. (2017) reveal two motivations for passive sport consumption: the freedom to move around and the intercultural contact by socializing with fans from different countries. Furthermore, as sport event consumption takes place in different contexts (i.e., TV or stadium attendance and public viewing), the roles of fans change. Along these lines, Kolyperas et al. (2019) illustrated how fans evaluate, redefine, and reposition value propositions through their roles as

assimilators, adaptors and authenticators. In a participatory sport event context, the only study to date is by Grohs, Wieser, and Pristach (2020) who examined an event as a brand assemblage, illuminating how heterogeneous brand actor-networks are united and reference each other through the interplay of resources and practices in their attempts to co-create meaningful experiences. They found that value co-creation is enabled by providing operand (tangible) and operant (intangible) resources, recognizing resource dependencies, understanding the types of value desired and the practices deployed by different actors, and fostering structural and role alignment processes.

Event Space as a Value Co-creation Platform

According to Crowther and Donlan (2011), events comprise inherent qualities that are aligned with SDL thinking. They argued that events can be seen as an opportune setting for the mutual exchange of operant resources fuelling relationships between network participants. Therefore, they conceptualized the event space as a setting where organizations coalesce and interact with participants. Likewise, Prebensen (2010) suggested that an event can be an arena to enhance exchange of ideas, foster business contacts, provide fora for continuing education and training, and facilitate technology transfer. By extension, Della Corte et al. (2018) point out that events generate norms, meanings and symbols, and assume that the role of institutions can facilitate the creation of service ecosystems. Consequently, event design formats should enable stakeholders to become co-designers of value systems. Considering events as platforms for long-term stakeholder engagement and as catalysts of value systems, the role of design is not only to orchestrate meaningful experiences but to facilitate collaboration, integrating resources and building on stakeholders' skills and knowledge (Orefice, 2018).

In their conceptualization of events as value creation space, Crowther and Donlan (2011) underscored that events present a conduit to achieve more frequent and consistent conversations among stakeholders creating an interactive, reciprocal and social environment. This parallels Putnam's (2001) types of bridging and bonding social capital that can be engendered in events, connecting disparate individuals and binding similar ones respectively (Ziakas, 2016). Also, Gyimóthy and Larson (2015) explored value co-creation strategies in festivals that use social media to intensify community building and the co-creation of tribal identity. Equally in the sport domain,

Kolyperas and Sparks (2018) examined value co-creation in Fan Fests demonstrating that their essence lies in the social interaction among fans. Hedlund (2014) suggested that both a feeling of membership in sport fan consumption communities and participation in their rituals lead to increased future intentions to attend the team's games, purchase the team's merchandise, and recommend the team's games to others. Ritualized behaviors have been documented as fan productivity associated with satisfaction and team identification (McDonald & Karg, 2014). Emotional and symbolic values are enhanced during games to the extent consumers perceive participation in the creative pre-game stages (Erhardt, Martin-Rios, & Chan, 2019).

Within the realm of festivals, Rihova et al. (2013) developed a framework conceptualizing the social layers of customer-to-customer value co-creation that occur in the liminoid space of an event. This framework suggests that co-creation takes place within attendees' social sphere with value emerging in four distinctive social layers and associated practices respectively: detached single customers, known-customer group-bonding, temporary *communitas* or unknown customer communities, and ongoing neo-tribes/customer communities. In this regard, festivals offer an opportunity for varied customer social divisions to bond, socialize and commune in one place, and to develop long-lasting, neo-tribal communities of interest. Later, Rihova et al. (2018) identified a range of social practices that facilitate the emergence of positive affective, social, functional and network value outcomes. They argued that value improvement opportunities may be identified by understanding the meaning structures and resources used in practices such as encouraging the display of symbolic objects and artefacts to strengthen a sense of community, belonging, and social identity. Thereby, symbolic value propositions can be linked with social practices to amplify the attached shared meanings. Symbolic value is created from representing something other than the obvious function of a service (Saarijärvi, 2012). Therefore, organizations should consider how to engage additional resources to their processes that reinforce symbolic meanings extracted from the overall consumption experience (Prebensen, Vittersø, & Dahl, 2013). Collective meanings are enabled and reinforced through the use of symbols and broader symbolic expression (Geertz, 1973; Gergen, 1994; Turner, 1974).

Akaka et al. (2014) explore the role of symbols in value co-creation in order to progress a more nuanced understanding of how actors communicate, act together and reconcile perspectives as they integrate and exchange resources to create value for

themselves and for others. They suggest a conceptual framework that encapsulates the way in which value co-creation results from the integration of resources and interactions among multiple actors. According to this framework, symbols guide actors in enacting particular practices that enable the co-creation of shared meanings, which in turn help actors determine the value of current and future interactions. In this vein, symbols support the coordination of interaction, the communication of information, the integration of resources, and the evaluation of value, among actors. While the symbolic capacity of sport is well-documented (Chalip, 1992; MacAloon, 1984; Manning, 1981), within the emergent sport management value co-creation literature it has not yet been addressed. Drawing upon cultural theory, we can shed light on the interconnection of social practices, symbolic expression and co-construction of shared meanings that enable collective action. The significance of collective action lies in getting people to act in concert to achieve common objectives, build community networks, and cooperate to address issues or undertake joint problem-solving (Laumann & Pappi, 1976), which is central for the value co-creation of events (Crowther & Donlan, 2011; Della Corte et al., 2018; Orefice, 2018; Rust, 2019).

A Dramatological-Performative Lens

Cultural performance theory provides a comprehensive perspective for understanding the symbolic dimensions of events (Conquergood, 1998; Schechner, 2003). A performance lens illuminates the dramatic, ritualistic, theatrical, aesthetic and performative modes that humans construct the social environment through the enactment of expressive cultural practices (Foley, 2004). This encompasses a scrutiny of the expressive practices performed in events to divulge the meaning of symbolisms and accompanying metaphoric discourse that typify important ontological, existential or socio-political matters. This lens draws on Clifford Geertz's (1973) and Victor Turner's (1969, 1974) anthropological work on events. Specifically, Geertz adopted an interpretivist perspective construing events as 'texts' conveying 'stories that people tell themselves about themselves' (1973). Turner introduced the view of events as ritualistic social dramas, interpreting them as instances that bring together and (re)interpret different symbolic elements of the social reality of a group or community, with the result of re-creating social relations and the symbolic foundations underpinning daily life (1969, 1974). Ensuing ritual theorists regard events as ritual-like or intensely

ritualized expressive practices contending that these performances engender objectified symbolic representations or metaphoric 'texts' of the social order.

Geertz demonstrated that events are patterned by culture manifesting values and meanings. In his classical account of the Balinese cockfight (1973) as a ritual practice, Geertz interpreted the local cultural structures through which natives shaped meanings and manifested symbolically their beliefs and values. On this ground, he suggested that symbols make up a culture and their uniqueness can be seen through the expression of social behavior. Geertz focused on the interpretive reading of meaning that events provide or make accessible to their participants who through these narratives interpret their order of things. Turner added the necessity for cognitive and emotional experience that can be known to people only through the enactment of dramatic performance. Turner brought forward that events are commentaries and critiques on, or as celebrations of, different dimensions of human relationships. Accordingly, events embody in various verbal and nonverbal codes, a set of meta-languages whereby a community not simply expresses itself but, more actively, seeks to understand itself in order to change itself.

In a similar vein, Peacock (1987) argued that the drama enacted in public performances and rites provides examples of symbolic action, that is, life-acted-out with which audiences can empathize and in real life emulate. This thesis views symbolic action as an active agent of the social process, as much a cause of change as a response to it. Peacock, thus, supported that drama should be studied as thoroughly as economic systems or social organizations in order to understand how society functions. In addition, Kapferer (1991) stressed the importance of aesthetics to the analysis of ritual performance, which is itself constitutive of what it intends and expresses; hence, a variety of performance genres can be used in rituals to transform the experience, its meanings and open up new possibilities. Kapferer claimed that dramatic performance in rituals is able to heal and recreate the self of participants by restructuring the organization of ideas and their relation to action.

Indeed, the symbolic function of events makes them not only vehicles for addressing social issues but also assists them become references to crucial moments of human life. In this regard, the value of ritual embedded within events is vital for helping to deal with crucial moments of human life passage episodes. Such ritualized and

ceremonial events constitute symbolic rites of passage that cannot only help people mark their transitions to life, but can also help handle human and socio-cultural crises as evidenced since antiquity (Van Gennep, 1909). There is clearly a therapeutic value in the symbolic recognition, dramatization and ritualization of critical problems whereby it is possible to engage in the maintenance and repair of human relationships and in assigning meaning to what subjectively may seem to be merely pain and loss (Myerhoff, 1982).

Arguably, the symbolic context of events has the capacity to embody metaphoric text messages that contain underlying subtexts. Handelman's (1990) work is particularly useful here illustrating events as dense concentrations of symbols and sites of communication that guide participants into versions of social order by instantiating the ordering of beliefs, values, human subjects and objects. For Handelman, a culture can process information about itself through events. Thus, events epitomize a summarized pronouncement and manifestation of what is known, whereby attendees celebrate and parade their identity. Handelman maintained that events are circumstances for the magnification of what social order knows itself to be. In other words, events are mandated to put on show social order as understood by its originators through projecting metaphoric messages and subtexts that reflect collective perceptions of what the mindsets of attendees ought to be. To illustrate comprehensively the roles and meanings that events have for social structures, Handelman provided the following typology:

- Events that model the lived-in world. They cause a transformation that affects directly social orders. These events are found mostly in traditional societies where community rituals had the capacity to transform tribal social orders.
- Events that present the lived-in world. They mirror social orders and reflect versions of them by presenting ideal patterns of social life. The vast majority of the contemporary world events belong to this category, affirming identity and providing axiomatic icons of versions of social realities.
- Events that represent the lived-in world. Events of this type offer propositions and counterpropositions about the understanding, construction or reconstruction of social orders. The most common example is the carnival, which does work of comparison and contrast in relation to social realities. Particularly, DaMatta

(1984) in his study of the Brazilian carnival demonstrated its capacity to prompt the ‘inversion’ of everyday life and redefine the social world; also the dislocation of objects (social roles and values) from one domain to another interpolates, inverts, and reinforces the routine in rituals. In this vein, the carnival offers propositions and counterpropositions about the understanding or (re)construction of social orders. The aim is a search for consistency that in fact is never obtained in real life but in ritual is accomplished through the idealized versions of the social world.

According to Handelman, the above typology is closer to what can be described as a ‘technology’ of events. From this structural-interpretive perspective, we can easier identify the logics of event design, which are deeply intertwined with cultural performative patterns. Their collective embodiment and representation imbue these designs with meaning and significance. These designs are ever-evolving and never complete in themselves. They can be best understood as configurations that enable social orders to act upon or to relate to themselves. In this regard, Handelman’s typology is heuristically useful for understanding the symbolic ways events signify order in the social world of their participants.

We can borrow this cultural reading to illuminate the logics and management of sport events bearing in mind, however, that anthropologists would not probably favor a functional analysis of events. Even the terminology they use is different labeling events as ‘performative genres’ or ‘public performances’. This outlook highlights their view of events as spaces denoting something outside themselves, as meta-commentaries, providing conduits for the production and expression of symbols (i.e., objects, characters, or other concrete representations of ideas, concepts, or other abstractions). The term symbol connotes ‘to bring together’ or ‘to come together’ and it was conceived of as the representation of the important, yet not existing in concrete actuality (Eco, 1984). It could also denote the invisible appearing in the visible or bringing into being something absent (Handelman, 1990). Consequently, the relational quality between certain elements of event design formats, which are present and absent constitute the symbolic structure of events.

To fully appreciate the symbolic role and meaning of events, we can employ the angle of dramaturgy. This approach examines the expressive and dramatic dimensions

of events that enable symbolic action (Schechner, 2003). Event dramaturgy is defined as the extraction of shared meanings enabled by the projection and/or performance of symbolic representations in an event's activities (Ziakas & Costa, 2012). Dramaturgy originates from Goffman's (1959) use of the theatrical paradigm that explains social action, encounters and behavior. Goffman contended that all social interactions are staged and thus people are always involved in role-playing, in constructing their multiple identities. Turner (1969, 1974) further theorized that these performances often take the form of rituals and social dramas expressed and performed collectively in events. Thus, it can be said that performance and dramaturgy shape a symbolic social context in which event attendees may reaffirm, contest or transform the conditions that make up their social order. Schechner (2003) considered performance as a constant process of transformation and pointed out that important social interactions are affected performatively by means of theater and ritual. In this regard, events can be conceptualized as symbolic social spaces that construct a dramaturgical background invoking and communicating the fundamental worldviews of their participants.

According to Conquergood (1998), performance can be analyzed and appreciated in multiple ways, including as imitation; construction; and movement. Also, performance itself in events is of a dramaturgical nature. This encompasses a chaotic vision of performance as breaking and remaking, separating and blending, or exploring and rediscovering; as an expressive socio-political act (Conquergood, 1998). As such, events reflect negotiated social conditions that convey symbolic interpretations of affirming, transforming, or contesting the social order. Understanding the cultural logic of events, as reflected in their dramaturgical discourse, can uncover the co-creation dynamics that construct social conditions by blending dramatic, performative and ritualistic dimensions. This view highlights that value co-creation is the result of multi-dimensional social and psychological elements that interact, thereby defining a viable socio-cultural arena (Dominici et al., 2017). Rituals are crucial in constructing communal experiences, memories and meanings through enabling a chain of social interactions (Collins, 2004) that can transform people's feelings into emotional energy crystallized as collective effervescence, conviviality and sociability, whereby relationships are nourished and shared identities are shaped (Sterchele, 2020). Symbols alongside liminality are indispensable components of the ritual process in building collective unity or sense of *communitas* (Turner, 1969). A dramatological lens, therefore, views event value co-creation as part of expressive culture, interpreting the

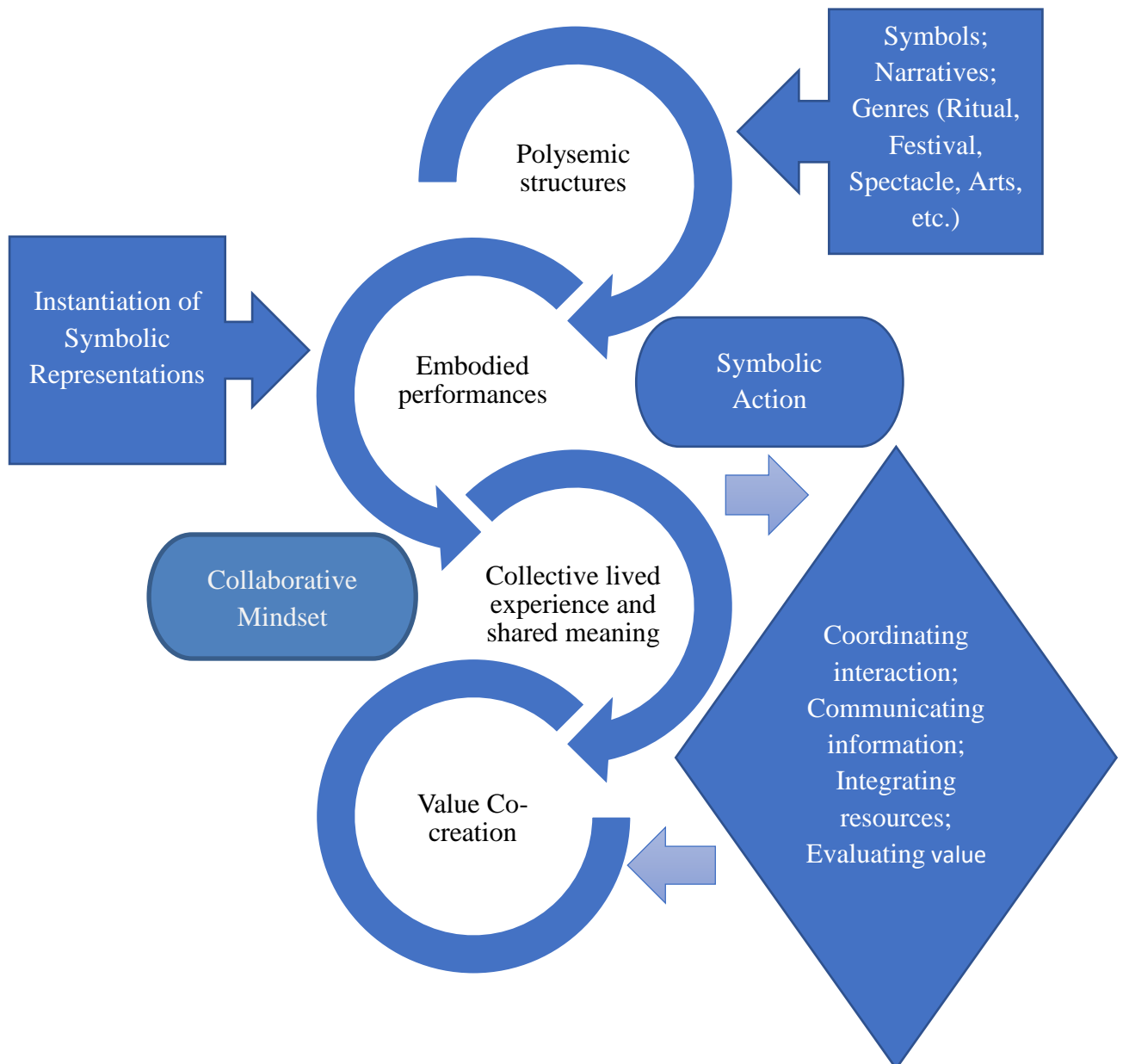
collective performance of polysemic signs such as symbols, narratives, and genre elements. These signs help to convey co-creative shared meaning through the lived event experience expressing commentaries about the nature and conditions of the social world. Value co-creation, thus, can be viewed as a process of symbolic world-making with the potential to envision alternative social structures and transform social reality (Tzanelli, 2018). This approach coincides with the social poetics view on communication that opens up for the ontological and reality-generating aspects of language and it illustrates how people are able to co-construct their surroundings in transformative and reflexive ways (Larsen & Madsen, 2016) through embodied and situated dialogue (Cunliffe, 2002).

Consequently, what is essential for value co-creation is the cultivation of a safe space to foster dialogue through metaphoric discourse (Cohen, 1998; Manning, 1981; Rasnake, 1986). Attendees can be engaged in conversations that are ostensibly about the event and also explore socio-political or existential issues (Chalip, 2006). Such discourses provide the opportunity for cultivating and leveraging narratives that may prompt collaborative action. In this vein, the co-construction of conversational space fosters value co-creation by intertwining the event with its host community (Mervi et al., 2019). Conversations express negotiation that responds to interests concerning value and achieving agreement over meaning (Dominici et al., 2017). The social leverage perspective emphasizes the role of liminality for cultivating a safe space in which also *communitas* can be engendered (Spaaij & Schulenkorf, 2014). To do so, Chalip (2006) recommends that events be designed to foster social interaction and prompt a feeling of celebration by enabling sociability among event visitors, creating event-related social events, facilitating informal social opportunities, producing ancillary events, and theming widely layered symbols across public spaces.

The role of expressive cultural performance and dramaturgy has not been explored within sport management. Because of its nature, the amalgamation of film and sport, the ABB represents an opportunity to explore these phenomena with regards to value co-creation. Examining this event as a symbolic social space allows for the exploration of the value co-creation underlay, by which events foster shared meanings and guide multi-stakeholder action. To make clear our perspective, we developed a conceptual framework that underpinned the study. Figure 1 shows that through a dramatological lens we can examine how symbols, narratives and genres as polysemic

structures instantiate symbolic representations in embodied performances of actors producing a collective lived experience and shared meaning. Symbolic action is thus performatively and jointly experienced nurturing a collaborative mindset that enables event co-creation by coordinating interaction, communicating information, integrating resources, and evaluating value. A dramatological inquiry shifts attention on the interplay of factors and mechanisms this is achieved. In all, with this framework, we take a step forward, moving from conventional and fragmentary dramaturgical applications to a more comprehensive and dialectical dramatological perspective that synthesizes symbolic action and management pragmatism in the study of events.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for a Dramatological Inquiry into the Symbolic Value Co-creation of Sport Events



Methodology

Context

This study investigates the ABB free-diving international tournament in the Greek island Amorgos. The island is the easternmost island of the Cyclades island group, mostly known for being featured in Luc Besson's 1988 film - *Le Grand Bleu* (The Big Blue) in addition to the Monastery of Hozoviotissa, and its beaches (GNTO, 2020). The event commemorates the film's legacy. Its storyline centers around the rivalry between the protagonists - Enzo and Jacques, two childhood friends, now world-renowned free-divers. It is based, however heavily adapted for cinema, on the real life of French free-diver Jacques Mayol and has been described as a cult classic providing insights into the free-diving community (IMDB, 2020). In 2017, the first ABB was organized to celebrate the association between the film and the location attracting international participation. The following year, the second tournament was organized in conjunction with the 30-year anniversary of the film release doubling to more than 40 athletes. The event is held in September, lasting approximately 2 weeks, starting with a training week followed by the tournament. The competition week starts with a welcome reception and ends with a closing ceremony. The event is held concurrently with the 'Amorgos Gastronomy Week', initiated and coordinated by ABB, celebrating the local food culture (ABB, 2020; Municipality of Amorgos, 2020). The main stakeholders of ABB are event organizers, competitors and their guests, transportation parties, hotels and restaurants, medical services, travel agents, sponsors, competition judges, equipment providers, and media.

Fieldwork was conducted during the event in 2018, including focus groups, semi-structured interviews and observation. The real challenge in understanding value co-creation is related not only to the simple analysis of the ways in which actors interact to co-create value, but also to the investigation of the elements that influence their behaviors and relationships (Dominici et al., 2017). Hence, rather than focusing on co-creation practices, we chose to examine the underlying socio-cultural processes that render meaning and foster co-creation. We took different roles in the research to address positionality and enhance reliability of the study (Adler & Adler, 1987). The first two

authors with no involvement/experience in free-diving were outside observers, while the third author being a free-diver and ABB participant provided access to the event and first-hand experience. Our different views and insights were compared throughout data collection and analysis.

Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative methods were employed to explore the symbolic co-creation of event value. In line with the dramatological perspective (Ziakas & Costa, 2010a, 2012), qualitative methods were selected as most appropriate because they provide an interpretive lens for understanding the co-construction of shared meaning that shapes the underlay of value co-creation. Based on SVF, the study focused on the meso-level of the event ecosystem.

During the event (16th-23rd September 2018), four focus groups comprised of mixed stakeholders (n=19) were conducted (each group with 4-6 participants), accompanied by individual semi-structured interviews (n=23). Purposive sampling was applied including those involved with ABB (event organizers, sponsors, suppliers, attendees, and local authorities). As the event is international, the focus groups were conducted in English, while the interviews in English or Greek according to each interviewee's fluency. The first two authors conducted the interviews and focus groups in communal spaces lasting 20-40 minutes. All of them were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. An overview of focus group participants and interviews are listed in Table 1. Interviews continued until theoretical saturation was reached with no new data emerging. Throughout fieldwork, observations were periodically recorded separately by the first two authors. They focused mainly on ABB activities, atmosphere, actor interactions and experience. Information gathered from these observations was used to suggest probes for interviews and to help make sense of and interpret the results.

Table 1: Overview of participants in focus groups and individual interviews

FOCUS GROUP	ROLE	GENDER	COUNTRY
1	Diver	Male	Poland
1	Diver	Female	Serbia
1	Event volunteer	Female	Greece
1	Diver	Male	Greece
1	Safety diver	Female	Greece
2	Spouse to athlete	Male	Iceland
2	Diver	Female	Ukraine
2	Safety diver	Male	Belgium
2	Safety diver	Female	Latvia
2	Diver	Male	Greece
2	Diver	Male	Greece
3	Safety diver	Male	Greece
3	Competition judge	Male	Cyprus
3	Spouse to athlete	Female	Greece
3	Diver (also assists with medical issues being a certified MD)	Female	USA
4	Safety Diver	Male	Greece
4	Event volunteer	Female	Greece
4	Diver	Male	Greece
4	Spouse to athlete	Female	Greece

INDIVIDUAL ROLES GENDER COUNTRY
INTERVIEWS

1	Event organizer	Female	Greece
2	Restaurant owner	Male	Greece
3	Sponsor	Male	Greece
4	Photography Exhibitor	Female	Greece
5	Spectator	Female	UK
6	Hotel owner	Female	Greece
7	Sponsor	Female	Greece
8	Event volunteer	Female	Greece
9	Business owner	Male	Greece
10	Spectator	Male	Sweden
11	Safety Diver	Male	Greece
12	Diver	Male	Greece
13	Safety diver	Female	Greece
14	Local authorities	Female	Greece
15	Diver	Female	Bulgaria
16	Restaurant owner	Female	Greece
17	Diver	Male	Greece
18	Spectator	Female	Spain
19	Spouse to athlete	Female	Greece
20	Hotel owner	Male	Greece
21	Business owner	Female	Greece
22	Spectator	Male	Bulgaria
23	Media	Female	Greece

Participants in focus groups and semi-structured interviews were selected based on representation from the 1) event organization perspective, 2) local stakeholders, and 3) external parties. Starting with the external parties, they can be divided into divers/athletes and their spouses/family members and friends:

- Divers come from all around the world to partake in the tournament, experience the location and its association with the film and be part of the free-diving community.
- Spouses/family members and friends to athletes who travel to support them.

Local stakeholders are mainly the hospitality (restaurants and hotels) industry, including transportation operators providing support and services for the competition and its guests. The event organization is represented in focus groups and interviews by several different groups:

- The event organization is made up by management, staff, and volunteers.
- Safety divers are central to the competition execution and many of these are divers themselves at other competitions.
- Competition judges are part of the operational side of the competition.
- Medical support services are also central as free-diving is a high-risk sport.

Finally, a number of third-party stakeholders were involved in the event:

- In 2018, an exhibition featuring photography underwater was added to ABB.
- The event organizers work in closely with a number of sponsors from different sectors such as tourism, transportation, equipment, food and beverage, skin care, and medical services.

The focus groups and individual interviews were based on a set number of themes but allowed for follow-up questions exploring new areas when it was deemed appropriate. The full interview guide is in Table 2. This approach aimed to extract attitudes, opinions, perceptions, or beliefs of multiple actors about ABB and cross-validate them comparing findings from focus groups and interviews. The focus group technique permits the researcher to understand the participants in a more ‘natural’ conversation compared to individual interviews. Furthermore, in a focus group, participants can learn from each other, leading to more enriching encounters and data

(Greenbaum, 2000; Liamputtong, 2011). In this study, individual interviews were conducted in combination with dual moderator focus groups; one moderator oversaw the progression of the interview while a second moderator made sure that all areas of the interview are covered. The individual interviews focused on capturing discreet perceptions, while focus groups attempted to retrieve insights, which would be difficult to access without interaction between participants, resulting from the cascading effect of human interaction where one individual stimulates memories and ideas of another. Furthermore, focus groups allowed securing the vernacular speech of the participants, which was central to understand the free-diving community.

Table 2: Interview Guide

OPENING

- Name and role/contribution/
- What is special about the ABB event?

MAIN

- **Warm-up section**
 - Motivations for involvement in the event?
 - How did the involvement happen?
 - Thoughts about the event so far (please give examples)?
 - Can it be improved (please give examples)?
- **The Big Blue movie**
 - Have you seen the movie (BB)?
 - When did you first see it? What was it like?
 - How has it influenced the event (e.g. characters, story, locations, scenes)?
 - Have you seen this/evidenced at the event (please give examples)?
 - Is the movie (legacy) celebrated? The event? The island? Please give examples.
- **Roles, support, fellowship and impacts**
 - Who is invited to the event?
 - How do they contribute?
 - Event contribution to local community?
 - Open to different people?
 - Is it a collective free divers experience? How?
- **Socio-contextual process**
 - Are there enough resources for the event?
 - What is your relationship with the event? For how long has it existed?
 - Is your voice heard? If so, how?
 - Do people stay engaged/committed throughout the year? If so, how?
 - Which organisations do assist?
 - How do different actors contribute?
 - What is the purpose of the ceremonies at the event?
 - How does the event impact the community?
 - Are free diving values reflected in the event? If so, how?
 - What are these values?
 - What are the most valuable parts of the event?
 - For free diving/sport/physical activity?
 - For local community?
 - For other people?
 - What are the future challenges?

CLOSING

- Anything somebody would like to add?

In data analysis, a hermeneutical approach was adopted interpreting the event symbolisms as a text in order to practically understand the actions of actors (Packer, 1985). Hermeneutically, the unit of study is the symbol, its meanings and experiences as these are extracted from the event's dramaturgical discourse (Ziakas & Costa, 2012). The purpose was to discover the structure and dynamics of the symbolic webs of meaning (Geertz, 1973) and intersubjective space (Gadamer, 1994) in the event that enable value co-creation. Data were analyzed iteratively using a constant comparative method to develop inductively themes (Weiss, 1994). Stepwise replication was applied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) subjecting transcripts to line-by-line analysis by each author separately compared with observations. Then identified themes were discussed to come up with an agreed structure. A dialectical interplay between data and literature was applied to compare/contrast the themes for triangulation (Eisenhardt, 1989), while the outsider-insider researcher positions grounded the interpretation and reliability of findings.

Results and Discussion

The results are presented in the order that themes emerged as part of the dramaturgical discourse exemplifying the event co-creation experience of actors. Three overarching interdependent themes are identified: connectedness, communion and belongingness. These themes traverse the instantiation of meanings and permeate the symbolic co-construction of value in the event. Consequently, the themes are categorized in a set of elements coined 'instantiators', namely, openness and inclusivity, sense of community, ritual and celebration, trust, and bonding. The term is used to capture a choreographed-like stage of symbolic performative conduits that embody the co-creation of shared meanings and reveal the internal logics of the event's design. This metaphor serves to illustrate that the themes epitomizing actors' lived experience cannot be viewed alone, but are instead, organically interrelated complementing and adding value to one another. It is then delineated how the understructure (hypostasis) of the event enables symbolic value co-creation alongside its pragmatic manifestations.

The Dramaturgical Stage: A Choreography of Instantiators

Instantiating Connectedness

Openness and inclusivity. Although free-diving is a highly demanding sport that is not for everyone, the ABB demonstrates an open-door outlook in the logics of its design. Everybody involved with the event expressed its inclusive character both for free-divers and non-athletes. This marks the ABB as an open space connecting different actors. For example, a participant said:

It is really easy to be part and get along. Many of us, we're from different parts of the world, for this competition, and we eat together, we dive together. It's a very beautiful experience because we share a love for the ocean and we're all here for the same reason and everybody loves the depths. So it's easy to get on and you have some old friends and you meet a lot of new people.

Moreover, the organizers attempted to open the event to non-athletes by adding the spectators' boat, whereby interested parties could attend the competition on-site. A spectator stated about this experience:

Free-diving is a very personal sport, so there are not many people involved, there are no spectators. What they are trying to do this year is to invite people to come and watch. So it's more of a spectacle for people who cannot dive but when they see somebody doing it then they can somehow connect to this person. When I went to the spectators' boat this morning, we were all like okay you are crazy but still it is very exciting. We felt connected in a way, maybe a little bit jealous.

In addition, live streaming of diving until 10 metres was put in place so that people could watch athletes in a large screen. At the same time, the hosting of the gastronomic week as a synchronized concurrent event increased audience attendance at both events with free-divers visiting the food and wine activities and gastronomic spectators attending free-diving. Thus, both events complemented the experience of visitors and participants engaging them in activities with opportunities to co-mingle and connect. All the above event augmentations offered value propositions that crossed sport and culture widening the appeal of the event.

In symbolic terms, enunciating an all-embracing attitude is an open invitation for athletes and non-athletes to take part in, and further become involved with the event, which is a foundation for multi-stakeholder value co-creation (Pera et al., 2016). By

diminishing barriers to entry the event space and partake in its activities (apart from explicit financial requirements), conviviality and sociability were practically enabled with the effect of fostering a sentiment of connectedness among attendees that built bridging social capital (Putnam, 2001). Although participatory sport events tend to appeal predominantly to targeted subcultures (Green, 2001), openness in ABB can be explained by the fact that it is a new event trying to establish itself, and thus welcomes participation, involvement and support from as many people as possible coming from different walks of life. Still, this brings together a diverse mix of actors and markets that shape the inclusive character of the event.

Sense of community. Evidently, the celebratory nature of the event linked to the Big Blue film, established a liminoid sport-film space, standing between free-diving imaginaries and normal life. Within this space, the norms of everyday life were transcended giving shape to alternate possibilities for elevating connectedness among attendees. Liminality thus, helped create a heightened sense of community among participants and attendees to feel as equals, and hence, form spontaneous *communitas*. A free-diver explained:

From the very first moment I arrived I sensed this, like it's a celebration for freediving, I don't feel like it's a competition. I don't feel the stress between the athletes. I don't see something like this, not even like I'm going to be the first. This is something very rare because usually when we are in a competition everyone is much more stressed and focused on winning. But here we are like a family.

Along the same lines, another participant added:

The organizers, the sponsors, the athletes, everyone are not detached. Here it's like we are all an extended family. I feel like E [referring to another diver] is my sister now that I met her. So, we are all like a family of the ocean. And we are all very well connected because the ocean for a lot of us is our home.

Connectedness through an emergence of *communitas* was built around the imaginary ideals of the ocean and their symbolic meanings for free-diving enthusiasts. However, a sense of community is distinguished herein to fully capture the actors' ABB experience as it is a more long-lasting precondition for the formation of *communitas*, which is spontaneous and ephemeral. The creation of a heightened sense of community and emergent *communitas* is a well-established quality of sport events that composes

their resulting value (e.g., Getz & McConnell, 2011; Green & Jones, 2005; Shipway & Jones, 2007; Zhou & Kaplanidou, 2018). Its symbolic significance in ABB lies in connecting participants like a family to celebrate their love and passion for the ocean representing affective imaginaries, such as the sea depth, the infinite and freedom, or the film and free-diving itself. Here, although particular imaginaries and attached meanings vary among participants, they all stem from a common ontological source, an understanding that they all form an ‘ocean-based’ community. This channels attention and action towards co-creation of ABB enabled by the liminoid sport-film intersection within the event space, the elevation of a lasting sense of community, and the development of temporary *communitas*. In this regard, connectedness in ABB mirrors ideal horizons of being and possibilities of becoming as typically projected by events of presentation (Handelman, 1990). The dialectics between being and becoming imbues with symbolic significance the event and its dramaturgical essence that enable stronger modes of association for participants and attendees. Therefore, in reading the subtext of ABB’s dramaturgical discourse, it is inferred that it expresses a symbolic statement about the event’s underlying meaning as ‘an open avenue, a way of being and becoming.’

Instantiating Communion

Ritual and celebration. The embodiment of ideals and meanings in ABB was realized and enhanced through a series of celebratory symbolic rituals. Communion and performance in these rituals shaped a collective experience of sharing common values. First and foremost, a critical augmentation of the event that worked as a symbolic ritual for free-divers to celebrate their love for the sport and the ocean was the underwater gallery. The gallery helped to direct attention and emotional energy to a common purpose blending art and sport. In an athlete’s words:

That was the most wonderful experience I ever had as a free-diver. That evening there were both free-divers and scuba-divers. It was very easy for the scuba-divers to see the gallery because they had oxygen tanks; they were staying under the water as much as they liked. For us, it was going up and down, staying there only for the time we could hold our breath. It was night at 23:00 and the two caves around 17 metres under the water [place of the gallery] were lightened creating a mesmerizing atmosphere. We were diving and staying in the caves for 2-3 minutes as long as we could hold our breath and then going up to the boat. Along with the scuba-divers, there was always someone in the caves. I

dived about 20 times in total. The gallery-diving was scheduled for half an hour but it lasted more than one hour because we were all fascinated and neither got tired or cold although the weather was not good.

Another athlete described the atmosphere and emotions felt:

The bubbles from the scuba-divers' tanks were something that added a unique feel as I was diving. There were springs of bubbles on the surface coming from the breathing of scuba-divers, so it was like we were diving into a cloud of bubbles. I felt like I was inside a fairy tale. There was such a nice lighting; the photographer used underwater lenses with special filters that toned up the colours of the photographs made from stainless steel. I felt warmth and peacefulness.

The above descriptions of the underwater gallery experience indicate the performative value of taking part in an activity that is for the very few who celebrate the epitome of free-diving as they define it (on a single breath). Being there and diving to see the gallery is a public proclamation of their identities as free-divers. The ritual-like atmosphere was amplified by photography and lighting in the natural place that free-diving takes place. A thorough socio-cultural analysis of the gallery can be found by Tzanelli (2020) who analyzed its essence as part of a magical-realist exploration, an embodied, relational and affective journey between the aquatic underworld and the above terrestrial world. The gallery symbolically juxtaposes, but also attempts to ease, the tensions and antitheses between these two worlds: as the magic, experienced at the sea-bottom, of somatic and mental freedom, binding free-divers in small communities of play, conviviality, affect and respect for nature is dissolved into pragmatism and compromise of partaking in an international commodified network of artwork striving for recognition. The synthesis of free-diving and photography exemplifies the potential of coalescing sport and the arts performatively and symbolically in order to magnify their somatic, affective and intellectual synergistic effects (Chalip & McGuirty, 2004; Long & Sandle, 2019; Ziakas & Costa, 2010a). They can thus enhance polysemic, hedonic, atmospheric, authentic and imaginative dimensions of the event experience (Ziakas & Costa, 2010a). Accordingly, the social outcomes of events such as building networks of collective action may be furthered when the arts are used to complement sport (Chalip, 2006).

Furthermore, efforts to explicitly link the film and the event were made and thereby 'ritualize' event participants and attendees into the meaning(s) of Big Blue. In

consecutive years, cast and crew of the film came at the event, while also classic scenes were re-enacted. A respondent explained:

Last year they were re-enacting scenes from the movie, like making pictures of the guys running across the shores, the same as in the beginning of the movie. It was very interesting to hear the stories about how the movie was filmed and that brought a lot of value because you have some people who actually took part in the movie.

Overall, the aforementioned symbolic rituals intensified the liminoid event experience of athletes and non-athletes, celebrating the sport of free-diving and commemorating the film. They served as special occasions and symbols of unity for enabling attendees' communion, mutual focus and affective engagement with the event. Rituals are common in sport events to celebrate transitions and accomplishments, or build community and identity (Chalip, 1992; MacAloon, 1984; Sterchele, 2020). In ABB, the immanent nature of its symbolic rituals fusing sport and the arts helped infiltrate affective meanings and ideals framed around the ocean, while highlighting the importance of co-constructing the event experience as actors co-performed interacting in the events' activities (Giovanardi, Lucarelli, & Decosta, 2014). According to Handelman (1990), events are devices of praxis that merge horizons of the ideal and the real, to bring into close conjunction attitude and action. Thus, ritual performance interactions and their symbolic meanings within the liminoid space of ABB set up a cohesive dramaturgical stage to implement acts of fellowship by bringing in contributions of different actors in the co-creation process of the event. The dramaturgical discourse succinctly voices a symbolic statement about ABB as 'a journey on a single breath', thus intensifying the dialectics between the real and the ideal or being and becoming. It can therefore be said that the making of value co-creation in sport events highlights the role of ritual as a performative channel of interaction and symbolic action.

Instantiating Belongingness

Trust. Belonging to the community of free-divers entails expressions of trust and group solidarity. This moral quality of free-diving is a characteristic inevitably imbued in the event. For example, an athlete said regarding the safety divers: "We have a lot of trust to each other because if something happens [referring to the dives]; they would come and help you at once. This is very important." Another highlighted the

feelings around the event: “There is a lot of camaraderie. Like everybody is taking care of each other. They want the best for everybody else.” Trust is fundamental for performing and participating in the event, which enables the building of long-standing relationships and enhancement of resultant social capital. A respondent emphasized:

We are not diving alone, so I am going to dive with these guys because I know they are going to save me, so you always rely your life on your friends; even if you don’t have anything to talk about around the dining table, you just know that this relationship is so special.

Trust, apart from a functional imperative of practicing safely free-diving, is also a symbolic expression that grounds the development of exchanges and collaboration in events (Adongo & Kim, 2018; Arcodia & Whitford, 2006; Ziakas & Costa, 2010b). Based on trust and durable social relationships, actors in ABB appeared to be more comfortable working together, sharing tasks and information (i.e., registration, promotion, transportation, welcoming guests, etc.), and brainstorming to solve logistical problems. By articulating the role of trust, participants symbolically offered a value proposition catering for the well-being and welfare of all contributors. Therefore, trust between event actors reaffirmed feelings of belongingness to the wider group of free-diving enthusiasts as well as fans of the film and cemented solidarity amongst them resulting in the enhancement of the event’s social capital.

Bonding. As with trust, a sense of belongingness manifests within the event strengthening tight-knit relationships among participants and fostering thus bonding social capital. For example:

It is a good opportunity to meet people from other countries and make new friends. For example, I met a person last year and I knew him only for a week [during the event] as a teammate safety diver and we continued to talk [after the event] through social media. But he had an accident and passed away. He is not here this year and this is very sad. And I was wondering, how can I be so sad for this guy that I only knew for one week?

Another respondent pinpointed that special bonds are formed because of the shared interests participants have. “This event brings us together to share our love for the sea, the film, free-diving that bonds us.” And another respondent highlighted the importance of traveling. “Part of the sport is also traveling together. You go to places because you know there’s going to be a bunch of friends there.” Indeed, the act of traveling heightens

the sport event experience providing opportunities for unfettered social interaction, reinvigorated comradeship, and affective connection with a sport community (Buning & Gibson, 2016; Coghlan & Filo, 2013; Getz & McConnell, 2011; Shipway & Jones, 2007), amplified by destination components such as culture, heritage, environment, servicescape, etc. (Chalip & McGuirly, 2004; Harrison-Hill & Chalip, 2005; Ziakas & Boukas, 2012). Being temporarily away from home is a liminoid borderline zone in itself (Andrews & Roberts, 2012), which reinforces the effects of narratives, rituals and symbols to prompt collective action and engender *communitas* within the event spaces, composing a meaningful communal experience for traveling aficionados (Ziakas & Boukas, 2014). Put otherwise, the role of ‘traveling together’ and being separated from the everyday life adds significance and alternate possibilities in the event experience.

Bonding in events, and generally the creation of bonding social capital (Putnam, 2001), is a commonplace characteristic driven by sport subcultures (Fairley & O'Brien, 2018; Green, 2001; Green & Chalip, 1998) and neo-tribal idiosyncrasies (Gyimóthy & Larson, 2015; Lundberg & Ziakas, 2018). In ABB, statements of participants about creating bonds through the event can be construed as symbolic expressions of the elements that strengthen their relationship to the event and among them, including the ocean, the film and free-diving. This reveals a broader cosmology, with the event symbols and meanings being privileged points of penetration into other social and cultural universes (Handelman, 1990). The ABB dramaturgical discourse concisely puts across a metaphoric message to approach alternative ‘(sea-)worlds of discovery and solidarity’, hence building representational blocks of cohesion that unite event participants and attendees. In this vein, attention is routed towards what connects participants to co-perform and co-construct the whole event experience. Given its openness and inclusivity, the ABB is able to counterbalance the inherent exclusionary effects of bonding social capital keeping open access to anyone who would like to join.

Synontological Hypostasis and Co-creation Processes

As shown, dramaturgy encompasses the production of metaphoric texts or statements (subtexts within messages) that accentuate meaning through the performance and lived experience of instantiators. Indeed, the symbolic enactment of drama in events is inherently representational and performative (Handelman, 1990). In ABB, instantiation of meaning is uncovered by the underlying themes of

connectedness, communion and belongingness that illustrate in tandem the internal-cultural logic of the event's organization and design. Connectedness promotes 'modes of association' projecting the event as 'a way of being and becoming.' Communion prompts 'acts of fellowship' envisioning the event as 'a journey on a single breath.' Belongingness cements 'blocks of cohesion' imagining through the event alternate '(sea-)worlds of discovery and solidarity.' The organic relatedness of these themes amplifies instantiation adding significance to the event and its dramaturgical discourse of meanings that give shape to the dialectics between the ideal and the real.

The analysis of instantiators not only illustrates how actors are connecting, communing and belonging to the free-diving community of ABB, but also uncovers a twofold co-creation of symbolic value in the event. First, it reveals the underlying hypostasis (state) of the event and its particular constituents comprising the free-diving sport dynamics (trust and bonding), film legacy, event augmentations, and event atmosphere (open, celebratory and ritualized). They compose an underlay that enhances the event's symbolic social space conducive to value co-creation by helping to co-express and co-perform shared meanings. This underlay is coined 'synontological hypostasis' as the conjunction of film (fictional) and sport (non-fictional) gives shape to the event wherein fictional entities interact with non-fictional reality. Synontology is a convergence of two ontological states: that which features the fictional entity, and that which features the fictional entity's non-fictional manifestation (Trauvitch, 2018). Second, understanding instantiators helps disentangle the attendant set of interacting factors that facilitate symbolic value-co-creation processes. Accordingly, this set of factors due to their symbolic, synchronic and performative character can be understood from a dramatological perspective, as an allegorical choreography of instantiating conduits that enable the co-creation of shared meanings and produce pragmatic value manifestations.

The synontological convergence of fiction and reality bestows naturally the event with a resonant dramaturgical fabric. Going back to Handelman's typology, the ABB is primarily an event of presentation mirroring the social worlds of free-divers and reflecting ideal versions of life connected to the ocean, comradeship and nature. This affirms their membership to the global free-diving community, while providing symbolic performative channels for connecting, communing and belonging within the event as a means of working together towards its co-creation. At the same time,

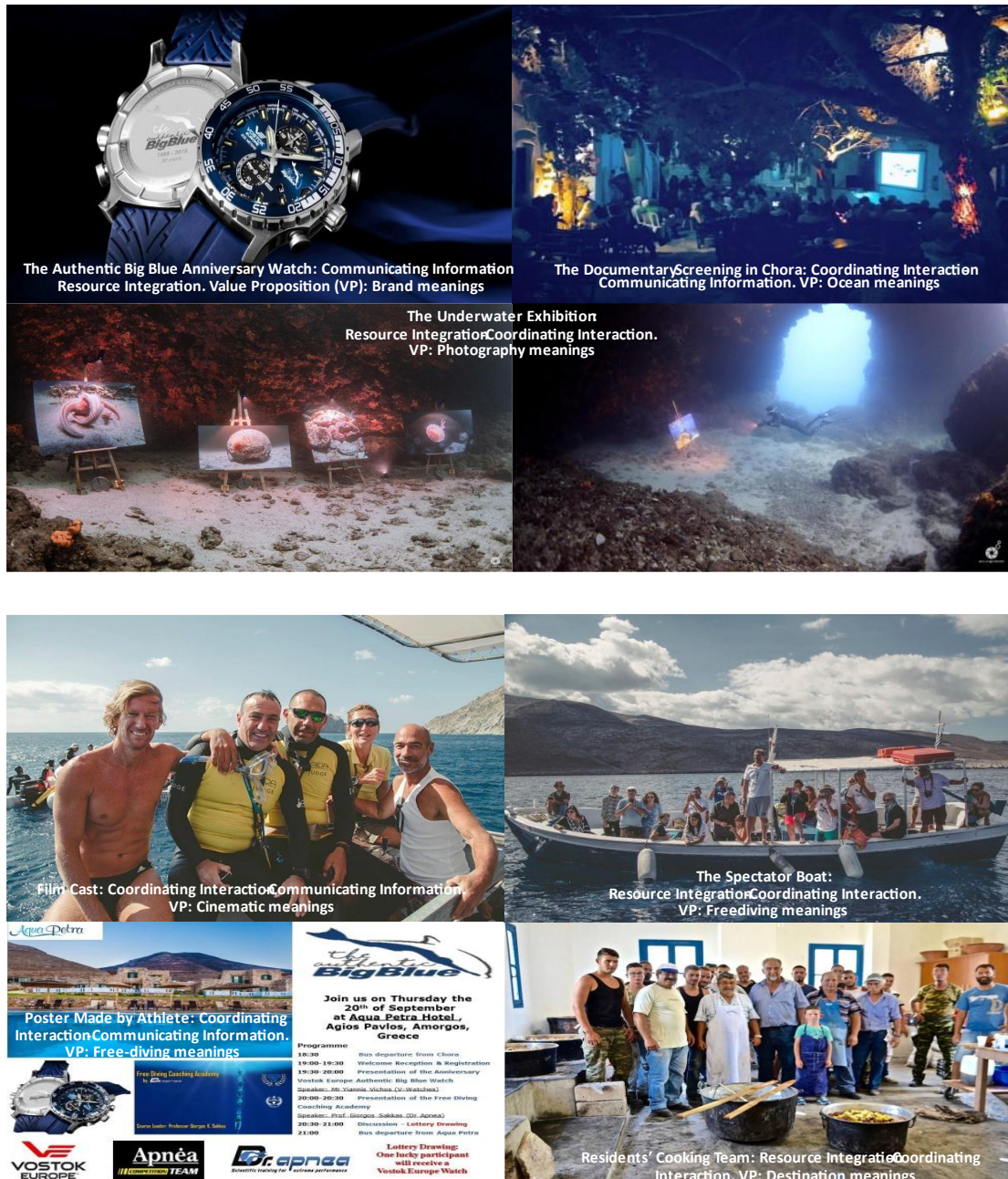
however, the interchanges of the fictional and the real also represent alternative contrasting views of the world and the place of free-divers in it, offering dialectically propositions and counterpropositions about the understanding or (re)construction of their social worlds. For example, the film story projected popular versions of edgework (risk-taking), bravado, masculinity, ethnical stereotyping, sea-bottom allure and a quest for the unknown. In ABB nonetheless, the interpretations deviated considerably and varied themselves with the main ones proposing the value of environmental consciousness, self-awareness, esoteric balance and poise, cultural learning, group solidarity, cooperation and entrepreneurial behavior in staging the event. The juxtaposition of fictional and pragmatist symbolic representations creates co-emergent meaning with the potential to compose a polytopia of ideas and perspectives (Ziakas, 2016). This synontological dramaturgical frame underlies the ABB's capacity to both mirror and contrast versions of the socio-cultural worlds of free-divers in terms of their relationship to the oceanic underworld and nature, and to facilitate collective processes of symbolic value co-creation.

To further support our analysis, we provide in Figure 2 illustrative examples of the symbolic co-creation of value in ABB. This shows the anniversary watch designed by a sponsor celebrating the 30 years of the film and launched in ABB, a documentary screening about the history and values of free-diving, the underwater gallery exhibition, participation in ABB of film cast and crew, the spectator boat, a promotional poster made by an athlete, and the residents' cooking team for the event. Each example contributes two-dimensionally to the symbolic co-construction of value.

In particular, the anniversary watch has symbolic value connecting explicitly the film and the event, conveying congruent brand values attached to free-diving, thereby integrating resources (sponsor contribution) and communicating information about the event to target audiences. The documentary screening conveys symbolic meanings framed around the ocean that free-diving enthusiasts cherish and as such communicates this symbolic information to participants and coordinates sportsmanship interaction within the ABB. The underwater exhibition conveys symbolic meanings through photography in the depth where free-diving takes place demonstrating resource integration (photographer volunteering and arts contribution) and coordinating interaction through the symbolic ritual enacted by free-divers to visit the gallery together. The invited participation of film cast and crew helps revive the film within

the ABB bringing to the fore the cinematic meanings and thereby coordinating interaction of participants based on their shared love for the film that marked their involvement with free-diving and communicating pertinent information about the event (again, an explicit linkage to the film and its meanings). The spectator boat opens up free-diving to non-participants projecting the value of free-diving and enables resource integration as well as coordination of interaction through the engagement of spectators in ABB. Also, a promotional poster made by a free-diver participant communicates information about a presentation taking place within the ABB regarding a free-diving coaching academy and the launch of the anniversary watch, which integrate resources and coordinate interaction in the event space. Finally, the residents' cooking team represents the local involvement in ABB projecting the value of the destination and its food culture, integrating thus local resources and coordinating resident interaction in the staging of ABB.

Overall, the symbolic co-construction of value in ABB exemplifies as connecting symbols the film, the destination, and the ocean. These focal and idealized symbols cement concerted effort and offer different value propositions to event attendees. Additional symbolic elements such as the launch of the anniversary watch, film cast and crew participation, or the documentary screening provide information projecting to outsiders and insiders the event and its scope. Moreover, integration of resources is achieved in staging event augmentations, with embedded event elements such as the spectator boat, underwater photography exhibition and gastronomic week; these act as symbolic representations, as intensifying pronouncements of the event's significance and lived experience. Resultant evidence of participants evaluating the event's value is found on conversational narratives sharing their experience as manifested below in the data.



Sport Event Value Manifestations

Instantaneous Authenticity

Participants expressed their perceived value of the event experience linked to their connection with the film. This connection acted both as motivator for participating in ABB and verification of the event's perceived authenticity in relation to the film narratives, symbols and images. As noted:

In the movie they are not real free-divers, they are actors. It's based on some real free-divers, but I'd like to feel like it's for real. The movie was so nice, so I really wanted to dive in front of the monastery, just like in the movie.

Perceptions and icons created by the film were expected to be encountered, lived and validated from the event experience. As a participant explained: "The feeling of the movie was a passion about diving and the sea. So by coming here I wanted to have, for real, images of the water, the blue, the sea [...] even when you walk in the streets you recognize the feel of it [passion]." Another respondent mentioned: "For me, it [the event] is the revival of the film. All of it feels like no one else has ever done this before." Therefore, authenticity is an evaluation of the event's value, a lived experience of recreating the 'reality' of the film and reconfirming the identity of free-diving as a sport. In another respondent's description, perceived authenticity meets personal expectations and takes the participant to another dream-like world.

It is like they said in the ceremony: when you arrive here, you open the door and you wonder: is this staged? Have you done this especially for me? This is how everything is. This is exactly how I felt when I came here, it is like being in a movie set, like walking around in a postcard.

Similarly, another description reveals the performative value-in-experience:

I feel that only now I understand the real meaning of the Big Blue since I dived here. Before it was just the title of a movie, an image. Now it has all that character and difficulty. Blue underwater with eyes open and no mask is a different blue from watching on the surface. Here underwater is like infinite all around you and you feel like a little drop in this blue ocean.

An important part of the event is the quest of underwater gallery for finding authenticity 'on a single breath', by experiencing the gallery on the spot and in its natural environment. This marks the relationship of free-divers with the underwater world, as an effort of capturing the moment, while approaching the infinite of the sea's bottom by holding the breath. Authenticity, in this sense, is only instant and its search in the underwater world by free-divers helps to construct alternative realities as instantiated in the event space. For example, a respondent described his experience of diving in the underwater gallery:

I didn't feel alone although several times I was on my own in the cave. The lights were attracting small fish, the caves were full of fish going around the lenses, which alongside the lights and photo-frames gave a dreamlike

dimension. Because it wasn't me and a photo against, but there was fish in-between moving around. For a moment, when I put my hand in front of a lens, fish came and sit on my hand, I was feeling the fish passing through my fingers, touching me, and pushing me, which is something unique, to be able to touch fish when you dive. That was like touching the inconceivable, like it was not real.

In general, sport is a form of physical activity associated with authenticity mainly due to its somatic performance and uncertainty of outcome (Hinch & Higham, 2005). Re-enactment events can enable perceptions of authenticity by recreating the past and offering opportunities to relive it (Carnegie & McCabe, 2008). The ABB has in its structure both elements (sport and film re-enactment), hence providing a stage for co-creating authenticity symbolically and performatively.

Shared Identity

The construction and reaffirmation of sport identity as free-divers is an anticipated and valued outcome for event participants. In the words of a respondent:

Last week a free-diver and a tech diver [with scuba-gear] were in the 60-70 meter in the arc of the blue hole together. Funnily enough, we called it "Interspecies", because it's like two different kind of people using different types of talents and machinery to achieve the same goal, right? But you really realize that when you hang around free-divers and tech divers they are not the same. Their personalities are like black and white, completely. We have the hippie-dippies and we have the nerds.

Furthermore, identity is linked to the film, performed and celebrated in ABB. As stated:

I saw this movie when I was a child. The next time I watched it, I was an adult and I started freediving because it's like you're not a free-diver if you haven't seen this movie. For us it's like homework before we come to dive here. And this is what we celebrate [at ABB]: Our love for the Big Blue [sea] and freediving. That's what makes this event a success.

The film as a seminal symbol of unity channeled free-divers towards a life celebration and collective effervescence in ABB that reaffirmed their sport identity. In doing so, the event provided attendees with an array of unifying symbols and activities that enabled collective action. The construction and celebration of identity is a regular function of events (De Bres & Davis, 2001; Green, 2001; Kruckemeyer, 2002). In ABB,

identity is manifested as co-created event value enhanced by the symbolic meanings of the film and its performative lived experience in the event, which are intimately tied with nostalgia.

Relived Nostalgia

Memories of the film and its impact on individuals were evident in nostalgic sentiments expressed by participants, which drove them to take part in ABB. As mentioned:

I saw the movie in the early 90s. I was at first a scuba-diver when I was about 18 years-old. When I saw the movie, I loved so much all this feeling about the depth. I wanted very much to visit Amorgos for this reason. So, the first time I did free-diving on my own, I remember being surrounded by this big blue, and I understood this feeling that you just hear your pulse and nothing else.

Another respondent said:

Diving here wakes up some emotions that you had when you first watched the movie. That's the magic about this tournament. I remember that last year my best dive was in Agia Anna and I think it was because I liked the whole scenery as this is the main place that the movie was shot.

Likewise, another diver highlighted: "It is a nostalgic place and hence so great to dive in front of the monastery [major film scene]." The evaluation of co-created value by participants appears to give worth to the event's capacity to not just commemorate the film, but also to provide opportunities for reliving their personal affective connection to the film, this time collectively. Arguably, the intersection of emotion and memory elevates the value of sport experiences (Gordon, 2013; Sterchele, 2020). Nostalgia, therefore, drives people to relive an experience, which is often augmented by symbols and genres such as film, music and sport (Fairley, 2003; Gammon & Ramshaw, 2007; Mason, Duquette, & Scherer, 2005). Simply put, new memories are formed as old memories are acted upon (Fairley, Gibson, & Lamont, 2018). As shown in the sport and tourism literature, the concept of nostalgia is multifaceted (Fairley et al., 2018), being associated not only with longing for the past, but also with socializing, self-identification, and group identity, and it also provides self-actualization and self-contentment to people (Cho, Ramshaw, & Norman, 2014).

Implications for Theory and Practice

In this study, we employed a hermeneutic approach drawing upon the anthropological tapestry of insight on events. By moving forward in developing a comprehensive and dialectical dramatological perspective, we sought to balance and integrate cultural theory with marketing and management within the context of sport event value co-creation. In fact, the vast majority of sport management scholarship on events to date has been functionalist focusing merely on operational aspects of delivery and marketing. Subsequently, emerging literature on sport value co-creation is grounded primarily in market exchanges, institutional logics, motivation studies and consumer culture theories (e.g., Kolyperas et al., 2019; Woratschek et al., 2017). This study's hermeneutic dramatological approach adds an alternative comprehensive reading to the phenomenon of value co-creation in sport events, seeking thus to advance the conceptual lenses of research and discourse. It demonstrates that the internal logics of ABB's organization and design are congruent with liminality and *communitas*, thereby enabling metaphoric discourse and the event's symbolic value co-creation. Symbolic action promotes modes of association among aficionados' horizons of being and becoming, prompts acts of fellowship within a cosmic journey on a single breath, and builds blocks of cohesion for co-creating alternate worlds of discovery and solidarity. In this manner, event design, social leverage and value co-creation become reciprocal processes complementing and reinforcing each other.

While the findings of this study corroborate previous research that value co-creation is context-specific (Horbel et al., 2016), more importantly, they shed light on the interactions occurring within the socio-cultural worlds of event goers. They reveal that value is laden with symbolic meaning that instantiates worldviews and ideals of event participants to co-create alternate world-realities. It is thus shown that the event constitutes a symbolic social space featuring a set of instantiators that embody co-performed shared meaning ripe for collective effort. In this way, we proffer that events instantiate symbolic action conducive to multi-stakeholder value co-creation. The study also indicates the value-in-experience (Chen, Drennan, & Andrews, 2012; Erhardt et al., 2019); as to take shape, value is co-performed and co-experienced by actors in the event ecosystem. There is enough evidence to suggest that value co-creation is a multi-layered process comprising symbolic and pragmatic layers. This insight stresses the need for employing interdisciplinary approaches to better understand the multi-

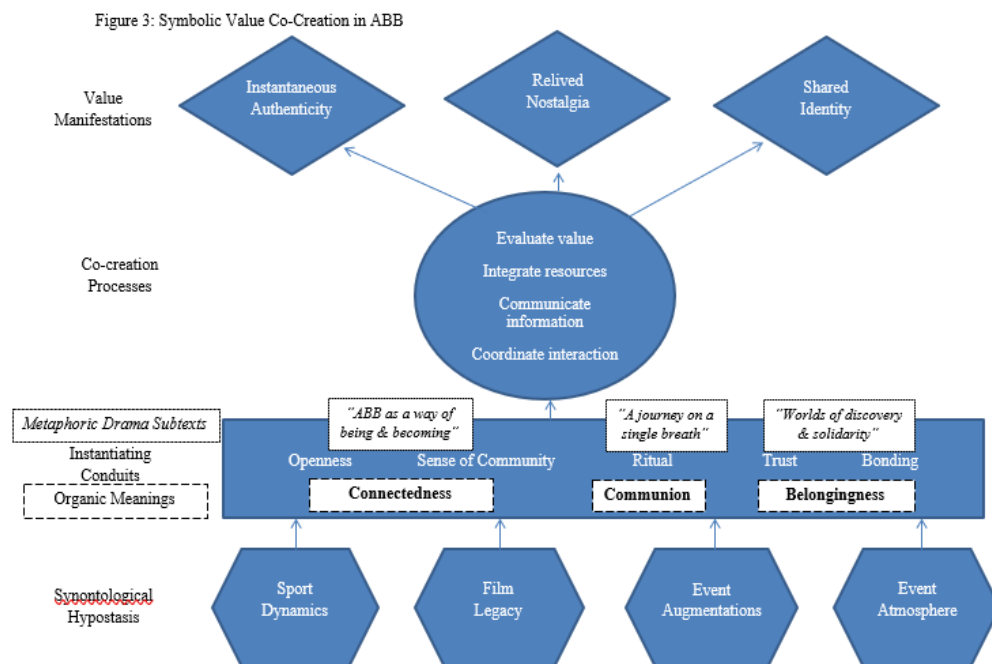
dimensionality of value co-creation and thereby identify the factors and mechanisms that enable the authentic co-creation of events accommodating diverse interests and meanings.

This study conceptualizes and brings forward the critical role of instantiators in enabling the symbolic value co-creation of an event as they constitute the internal logics of its organization and design. Our findings agree with Pera et al. (2016) who suggest that a polyphonic process of co-creation is enabled by trust, inclusiveness and openness. Although a multi-stakeholder ecosystem may be based on interaction, participation and cooperation, this does not necessarily imply co-creation. The power of trust, inclusiveness, and openness is critical to enable innovative resource integration and mutual learning (Pera et al., 2016). Additionally, important influencers of the event experience include the sense of belonging, atmosphere, place, reputation, authenticity and immersion (Rust, 2019). The practical implications of this study suggest that events should incorporate the above elements into their design, embedding polysemic structures, and adding augmentations that intensify co-performance and foster a conversational space allowing for metaphoric discourse. However, further research is needed to identify the means for effectively leveraging these elements and their interaction effects in order to enable event value co-creation.

Our study suggests that the perspectives of social leverage and value co-creation overlap and their integration can considerably benefit concerted efforts to foster the social value and collaborative dynamics of events. Their mutually beneficial interrelations can be thoroughly examined through a dramatological lens that establishes a common ground for treating events as symbolic social spaces. This bears important implications for event design. According to Chalip (2006), narratives, symbols, meanings and emotional impact can be designed in ways that facilitate the creation and enhancement of liminality and *communitas*. Within liminoid spaces, practices of sharing and collaboration can be nurtured to stage events collectively and thus co-create value. In essence, this contributes to the social utility of events in terms of building networks and capacities for collective action. A cornerstone here is the harmonious cultivation of dramaturgy and liminality in event design formats incorporating metaphors and symbols into event setting, program and theming (Ziakas, 2016) so that meanings, social interaction and perceptions of authenticity are reinforced expressing the genuine concerns of people (Ziakas & Costa, 2012). On this basis,

synergy between the economic and social leverage of events can be facilitated addressing the pressing dual need for sustaining their commercial viability and community benefits (Schulenkorf, Giannoulakis, & Blom, 2019).

The findings of our study bring to light the groundwork of their (syn)ontological hypostasis based upon the harmonious confluence of sport and the arts through the subsequent use of polysemic structures (symbols, genres, rituals and narratives), alongside the socialized aspects of bonding and sense of community. They indicate that co-creation is a suite of stakeholders’ ongoing value-creating social practices (Rihova et al., 2014, 2018), which can be scrutinized through a dramatological lens. Figure 3 brings together the components and parameters that shape symbolic value co-creation in ABB. It shows the synontological hypostasis of the event as its groundwork underpinning a set of instantiating conduits that epitomize metaphoric messages and subtexts of shared meaning. These, in turn, facilitate co-creation processes and the manifestation of perceived value. This schematic representation is an integration of symbolic apparatuses and functional mechanisms lying underneath ABB’s co-creation.



As shown, the analysis of instantiators can help reveal the symbolic co-construction of value within an event by detecting its underlying hypostasis and representational constituents that provide conduits for shared meaning. These compose an underlay that strengthens the capacity of the event as a symbolic social space

conducive to value co-creation. To this end, a critical parameter is to enable actors to co-express and co-perform shared meanings. In the ABB case, this is enabled by the conjunction of film and sport, which more broadly points to the potential of coalescing sport and the arts performatively and symbolically in order to magnify their synergistic effects (Chalip & McGuirly, 2004; Long & Sandle, 2019; Ziakas & Costa, 2010a). This may increase polysemy allowing complementarity among different event elements that amplifies the experience and attached meanings of participants. Following Handelman's typology and its application to this study, we contend that event dramaturgy can be used to connect people fostering social interaction and sociability; symbolically re-create social relations interpreting social conditions; and celebrate important aspects of a group or community (Ziakas, 2016). As illustrated, all these roles are pivotal for symbolic value co-creation.

Most importantly, our dramatological analysis herein moves past conventional views that the drama enacted in events merely reflects society or legitimizes established values. Rather, it indicates that dramaturgy triggers a dynamic co-creative process opening up new avenues of experience and understanding. To thoroughly appreciate this process, events should be treated as cultural performances, as social symbolic spaces, analyzing their text in relation to each event's design format and underlying polysemic, symbolic and performative structure. Such treatment uncovers how the event drama enables collective action to redefine and re-create social spaces, relations and systems.

Finally, based on the findings of this study, we argue that more research attention is needed to systematically investigate the role of symbolic action in sport event value co-creation. Dramaturgic analyses read the subtext of events. We have expanded on these premises, offering a broader dramatological framework aimed at capturing the intersection of performative, dialectical and management processes. This line of inquiry can prompt future interdisciplinary studies that further the foundations of sport event management and value co-creation. For example, symbolic value co-creation can be examined more systematically and comprehensively through a cohesive lens of event leveraging (Taks, Chalip, & Green, 2015), active event tourism experiences (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010), subculture and identity (Green, 2001; Green & Chalip, 1998), and serious leisure to explain the behavior of participants (Getz & McConnell, 2011; Green & Jones, 2005). Future studies need to adopt a wider outlook

set to examine how sport events can be co-created and cross-leveraged with the arts and/or the host destination's overall product mix. By considering the cultural polysemic context within which events are embedded, we can develop comprehensive accounts that reveal the co-creative characteristics and attributes of sport events that, in turn, facilitate collaborative organizational processes and generate positive outcomes.

Conclusion

This paper contributes equally to various interrelated but distinct bodies of knowledge, including sport management, sport tourism, event management, and broader tourism literatures. It does so by integrating conceptually dramaturgy and value co-creation within the context of a small-scale sporting-event ecosystem. It provides thus an alternative view of the event as a choreographed stage of symbolic elements and their embodied performances, thereby shedding light on the internal logics of its design and the symbolic co-creation of event value. The paper fills a wide gap in the sport management scholarship and allied disciplines. Although sport is organically infused with drama and symbolism, the role of dramaturgy has been diachronically overlooked. For instance, performance of community (Kruckemeyer, 2002) and metaphoric discourse (Manning, 1981) through symbols, rituals, genres and narratives are not sufficiently examined neither in the general marketing nor in the sport-event-tourism management literatures. As Dominici et al. (2017) support, cultural attributes of products/services prompt communication through symbolism; hence, shared meaning results from an ongoing process of 'negotiation' among stakeholders and their constant adaptation to changing conditions. This paper sets the ground for future inquiries to investigate how shared meaning in sport events and services is co-constructed through negotiation and adaptation that symbolic value co-creation enables. It, thus, calls for integrating cultural theory into value co-creation literature in order to reveal collective processes of symbolic shared meaning affecting the sport event ecosystems.

A limitation of the study is that it does not examine the macro-level of the entire network of event stakeholders (e.g., governing authorities, residents, etc.). However, it sheds light on how interactions among actors within the event ecosystem are enabled through symbols. Subsequently, by applying a dramatological lens, we sought to

uncover the under-layer that renders meaning through the instantiation of symbols and their embodied performances. We argue, therefore, that value co-creation is co-performed and co-experienced by means of symbolic action crystallizing and amplifying shared meaning for participants. The processes underlying symbolic co-construction of value in sport events merit research attention especially with regards to enabling collective collaborative practices.

To conclude, our study seeks to advance understanding of value co-creation in sport events and services pinpointing its overlap with social leverage and event design. From this common standpoint, event management can be fruitfully grounded upon the cultural logics that instantiate meaning and order in the worlds of participants. It thus builds a robust ground for further multi-dimensional analyses to examine the junction of social, symbolic and management processes. Dramatological inquiry shifts the focus on the collective embodiment of events as social dramas that enable collaboration through the instantiation of shared meanings. This perspective complements established inquiries on value co-creation practices and expands attention towards the role of symbolic collective action in engaging effectively multi-stakeholder participation to co-construct the event experience.

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