

## **IS HOSTING A SPORTING MEGA-EVENT EVER WORTH IT TO THE HOST CITY? IMPACT OF HOSTING SPORTING MEGA-EVENTS ON RESIDENTS' SENSE OF COMMUNITY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The present study empirically investigates a model of residents' intention to support the Asian Games based on the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and social exchange theory (SET). The model proposes that residents' intention to support hosting a sporting mega-event, mediates the relationship between the benefits they perceive in serving as host and their sense of community. The results indicate that the perceived positive benefits and intention of residents to support, affect their sense of community. Thus, in order to develop a sense of community of residents, these aspects should be enhanced in researchers' models. The findings of this work will provide authorities and event organisers with comprehensive and multidimensional knowledge about the positive impacts of hosting mega-events, as well as information important to determining the likelihood that their objectives will be realised as expected. Finally, certain theoretical and managerial implications are also discussed.*

**Keywords:** Sporting mega-event; Hosting a sporting mega-event; Perceived benefits; Intention to support; Sense of community; Asian Games.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Since the successful marketing of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games and the associated economic impacts, it has been argued that sporting mega-events generate positive economic consequences for nations, regions, and communities (Malfas *et al.*, 2004). So-called "global properties" (O'Reilly *et al.*, 2008:392) of sporting mega-events such as the Olympics have made a tremendous impact in the economic, social and tourism as political sectors of host nations (Parent, 2008). In recent years, however, considerable scepticism has emerged regarding the exaggeration of economic costs and benefits of hosting sporting mega-events (Liu & Wilson, 2014). Although general perceptions of mega-events have dominated the huge economic impacts, hosting a sporting mega-event has not been considered anymore as the goose that laid the golden eggs. Beyond these financial burdens, political, social and environmental problems of the host countries and cities have raised resulting from a large influx of 'outsiders' to the hosting places during the short-term period (Kim, 2004).

While previous studies have largely focused on the economic benefits to a city or region, the active participation of local residents has also emerged as a major variable in whether or

not the hosting of a mega-event will be successful (Baek & Kim, 2013). Gibson *et al.* (2014) argued that one of the most influential benefits of hosting a sporting mega-event is invisible values, such as a sense of pride and feeling of community in local residents. Most of the planning, preparing and managing of these events are often dedicated to volunteer corps comprised of local residents (Kim *et al.*, 2010). Thus, local residents' intention to support, meaning their willingness to engage in voluntary cooperation to realise common goals and solve problems related to the mega-event, is now considered a significant contributor to its success or failure (Prayag *et al.*, 2013).

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Much attention has been given to the advantages and disadvantages of the economic impacts. Also, recent studies (Bull & Lovell, 2007; Ritchie *et al.*, 2009) have already focused on the merits of social and cultural perspectives related to hosting these types of events. Hence, this research will use empirical evidence to investigate local residents' sense of community, their intention to support the planning of an event and further explore the community's role in and contribution to the success of such events.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Impact of sporting mega-events**

Hosting mega-events, such as the Summer or Winter Olympics, requires a considerable investment of human, financial and physical resources from host communities (Haxton, 1999). As argued by Kim and Petrick (2005), research on sporting mega-events tends to focus on economic criteria; less work has addressed the social and cultural impacts of hosting such events. The literature is scarce with regard to the role and importance of local residents in hosting major sporting events (Preuss & Arne Solberg, 2006).

Hosting sporting mega-events can generate a substantial range of positive and negative impacts, such as economic, tourism/commercial, environmental and political outcomes (Ritchie, 1988). However, the consequences of hosting a mega-event continue to be controversial; often, organisers find themselves asking if it is actually worth it. Rosentraub (2006:23) claimed that the positive economic impacts expected from sporting events and facilities are the modern equivalent of "the emperor's new clothes". Other work has suggested that the cost associated with mega-events may yield significantly negative effects for the host area (Deccio & Baloglu, 2002). Nevertheless, many studies have focused on assessing the economic aspects (Crompton, 1995; Mahony *et al.*, 2000) and ignored the intangible impacts on host communities (Wang & Pfister, 2008), because these intangible elements tend to be difficult to assess (Swindell & Rosentraub, 1998). Thus, one distinctly important aspect of the current study is that perceived indirect, non-monetary support can be used by local residents to build a sense of community.

### **Social Exchange Theory and Theory of Reasoned Action**

Social Exchange Theory (SET) has been most often utilised to explain residents' support, since it is able to reflect various views based on experiential and psychological outcomes (Waitt, 2003). The theory posits that the more local residents believe that the anticipated benefits from a mega-event will surpass the expected cost, the more they will support the event's occurrence

(Gursoy & Kendall, 2006). In general, mega-events are likely to simultaneously stimulate both positive and negative impacts. However, the majority of political leaders and organisers tend to inflate the expected benefits and ignore the negative aspects, since there tends to be intense competition to host these types of proceedings (Kim *et al.*, 2006). This can result in maximising the positive impacts from hosting such events and the negative impacts being minimised to the point of distortion.

In addition, the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) explains that a person's behaviour is driven by behavioural intention. The TRA postulates that individuals tend to make logical and rational choices to reach reasonable decisions (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The theory also assumes that a person's behaviour is a function of his or her beliefs and attitudes toward engaging in a specific behaviour (Ajzen, 2001). According to the TRA, an attitude is a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular 'object' with some degree of favour or disfavour (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Intention is the best and most proximal predictor of behaviour (Conner & Armitage, 1998). In the current research, the object is "Asian Games," the intention is "to support those games" and the resulting behaviour is "building a sense of community". Thus, the theoretical foundation for this study can be found in SET and the TRA, which are used to explain the relationship between hosting a sporting mega-event and developing a sense of community among the residents.

### **Perceived benefits of hosting a sporting mega-event and the resulting sense of community**

The topic of residents' perceived benefits from mega-events is well recorded (Ritchie *et al.*, 2009). Sporting mega-events are primarily single, short-term, conspicuous proceedings, but they are likely to provide long-term positive benefits to the communities that host these events (Kim *et al.*, 2006). Hosting sporting mega-events, such as the Olympics and FIFA Soccer World Cup may provide opportunities to build a sense of community, a process that involves group commitment and social bonding (Lee & Krohn, 2013). This sense of community refers to feelings of belonging that members have, that they identify with and are attached to a group and are committed to mutual advancement (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). It is a long-term challenge to build a level of connectedness, belonging and support within a community (Dugas & Schweitzer, 1997). However, one of the most notable perceived benefits of hosting these types of events is the creation of exactly that sense of unity (Yolal *et al.*, 2009). Gursoy and Kendall (2006) found that there is a direct relationship between the perceived benefits of mega-events and level of residents' sense of community. This empirical evidence led to the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1.* Residents' perceived benefits from sporting mega-events are positively associated with the development of a sense of community.

### **Perceived benefits of hosting and intention to support a sporting mega-event**

Attitude refers to the degree to which a person positively or negatively evaluates a value or object (Allport, 1966). The literature on festivals and events has revealed that belongingness-related attitudes influence emotional support for events that are culturally and historically meaningful (Roemer, 2007). Similarly, the attitudes of local residents play a pivotal role in anticipating their intention to support special group celebrations (Chen & Raab, 2012). In terms of mega-events, Gursoy and Kendall (2006) argued that attitudes toward perceived benefits and costs affect the support shown for mega-events. Prayag and colleagues (2013) found that there was a positive relationship between local residents' attitudes and their support for the 2012

Olympic Games. Based on the theoretical and empirical findings in the literature, the following hypothesis was developed:

*Hypothesis 2.* Residents' perceived benefits of sporting mega-events are positively associated with their intention to support them.

### Support of a mega-event and the sense of community

A sense of community is invisible and intangible, but also a vital part of creating a healthy environment. A sense of community arises from a shared vision, where an evident sense of purpose creates value for individuals' ideas and contributions; it includes working or sharing in response to particular issues, for the purposes of celebrations, and generally for problem solving (Derrett, 2003). The key characteristics of festivals and events are individuals' sense of community and celebration provoked by specific occasions (Goldblatt, 1997). According to findings of the study of Ohmann *et al.* (2006), a sporting mega-event strengthens residents' sense of community and improves the relationships among people of different member groups. Such events also trigger residents' positive attitudes toward and intention to support such events. However, limited attention has been devoted to the empirical study of the relationship between residents' intention to support a mega-event and their sense of community. Therefore, the present study constructed the following null hypothesis to explore this issue:

*Hypothesis 3.* Residents' intention to support a sporting mega-event is positively associated with residents' sense of community.

## METHODOLOGY

### Data Sample

Data were collected from residents of Incheon, South Korea, which was the host city of the 2014 Asian Games.

*Table 1.* DEMOGRAPHICS OF SAMPLE (N=350)

Variables	Categories	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	204	58.3%
	Female	146	41.7%
Age (years)	18-20	115	32.9%
	20-29	72	20.6%
	30-39	48	13.7%
	40-49	50	14.3%
	50+	65	18.6%
Period of residency in Incheon City (years)	1-5 years	38	10.9%
	5-10 years	66	18.9%
	10-20 years	160	45.7%
	20+	86	24.6%

A total of 800 Incheon residents were interviewed, and 380 agreed to participate. The sample of 350 respondents for the actual data analysis included 146 females. Participants were  $28.5 \pm 7.45$  years old. A more comprehensive description of the sample's demographics can be found in Table 1.

## Measurement

### *Hosting a sporting mega-event*

To measure the construct related to hosting a sporting mega-event, this research modified and adopted a total of 16 items from previous work by Lee (2011), due to the scale's practicality and reliability.

### *Intention to support*

The conceptualisation of Andereck and Vogt (2000) makes the identity theory a suitable framework for understanding residents' perceptions and attitudes. Thus, the present study modified and adopted four questions.

### *Sense of community*

To measure the variables related to residents' sense of community, five items of psychological sense of community (PSC) scale were adopted from the study of Nasar and Julian (1995). The scale was utilised by many previous works in terms of hosting an event. All items were operationalised using a five-point Likert-type scale that included 'Strongly Disagree,' 'Disagree,' 'Neutral,' 'Agree,' and 'Strongly Agree.'

## Data analysis

The collected data were analysed using the SPSS 22.0 and AMOS 22.0 statistical programmes. The data analysis method used to test the measurement model consisted of the following steps: a descriptive analysis, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), a correlation analysis, and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) technique.

## RESULTS

### Scale validity and reliability

A CFA showed that there was a good fit between the measurement model and the data ( $\chi^2=505.667$ ,  $df=269$ ,  $p<0.001$ ,  $CFI=0.939$ ,  $TLI=0.932$ ,  $RMSEA=0.050$ , and  $SRMR=0.450$ ). This indicated that the overall goodness-of-fit level was acceptable (Hair *et al.*, 2006). Table 2 shows the factor loadings ( $\lambda$ ), composite reliability (CR), Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) and average variance extracted (AVE) for each of the constructs. These tests revealed that convergent and discriminant validity were satisfied, indicating that the items measured were reliable and valid.

### Structural model

The goodness-of-fit of the structural models was assessed via a ratio of the chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) to its degrees of freedom ( $df$ ), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker Lewis index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardised root mean square residual (SRMR). The goodness-of-fit indices indicated that the structural model was of an acceptable fit to the data ( $\chi^2=101.925$ ,  $df=51$ ,  $CFI=0.968$ ,  $TLI=0.958$ ,  $RMSEA=0.053$ , and  $SRMR=0.040$ ). Thus, the collective evidence supported that the structural model was of a good fit.

**Table 2. MEASUREMENT MODEL AND RESULTS OF CONFIRMATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS**

Measurement items	Loading ( $\lambda$ )	$\alpha$	CR	Ave
<b><i>Perceived benefits of hosting a sporting mega-event</i></b>		0.83	0.86	0.54
<i>Economic &amp; industrial aspects</i>		0.82	0.89	0.54
An increase in hotels and other accommodations	0.76			
Accelerated development	0.79			
Improved public services (police and public services)	0.79			
Brisk exchange with domestic and foreign tourists	0.67			
General increase in tourism	0.67			
<i>Social &amp; cultural aspects</i>		0.84	0.85	0.53
Pride from living in Incheon City	0.75			
Increased leisure and recreation opportunities	0.70			
Venues for resting and cultural spaces after the Asian Games	0.75			
Promotion of the excellence of Korean culture	0.66			
Improved domestic profile of Incheon City	0.78			
<i>Physical &amp; environmental aspects</i>		0.82	0.84	0.56
Smooth traffic flow	0.68			
Easy access to nearby tourist attractions by public transportation	0.79			
Improved landscape	0.71			
Expanded road network	0.65			
Improved traffic signals	0.66			
Well-preserved natural environment promoted as a tourist attraction	0.71			
<b><i>Intention to Support</i></b>		0.82	0.83	0.55
Will participate in related presentations and seminars and give opinions	0.81			
Will participate as volunteers at the event	0.79			
Will visit the event venue	0.70			
Will recommend that friends and families visit the venue	0.65			
<b><i>Sense of community</i></b>		0.80	0.84	0.52
Meet the needs of the local community	0.72			
Local problems solved by residents joining forces	0.66			
Local community working for residents' benefit	0.67			
People can rely on each other in the local community	0.71			
Enjoyment of benefits thanks to belonging to the local community	0.59			

 $\alpha$ =Cronbach's alpha

AVE=Estimate of Average Variance Extracted

CR=Construct reliability

**Table 3. TESTING STRUCTURE MODEL**

Hypothesised relationship	Standard Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	SE	CR	Results
H <sub>1</sub> : Perceived Benefits → Sense of Community	0.448	0.082	6.033***	Supported
H <sub>2</sub> : Perceived Benefits → Intention to Support	0.506	0.086	7.167***	Supported
H <sub>3</sub> : Intention to Support → Sense of Community	0.335	0.064	4.749***	Supported

\*\*\* p&lt;0.001

SE=Standard Error of parameter estimate

CR=Construct reliability

The first hypothesis postulated that hosting a sporting mega-event would positively affect residents' sense of community. The results presented in Table 3 provide support for this hypothesis ( $\beta=0.448$ ;  $p<0.001$ ). The results for the second hypothesis revealed that hosting a sporting mega-event would positively affect residents' intention to support that event ( $\beta=0.506$ ;  $p<0.001$ ), providing additional support for H<sub>2</sub>. The third hypothesis proposed that residents' intention to support a sporting mega-event would positively affect their sense of community. The results also supported this hypothesis ( $\beta=0.335$ ;  $p<0.001$ ).

### Mediating effect of the intention to support

To test the mediating effect of the intention to support a sporting mega-event, this study utilised the bootstrapping analysis procedure, proposed by Preacher and Hayes (2004), as a powerful tool for mediation analysis. As seen in Table 4, the mediation analyses showed that hosting a sporting mega-event was significantly associated with residents' intention to support that event ( $\beta=0.169$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), demonstrating a direct effect between the constructs. Furthermore, residents' intention to support is a significant partial mediator of the relationship between their perceived benefits and sense of community (lower bounds=0.154, upper bounds=0.286,  $p=0.014$ ). In summary, the findings confirmed that all of the hypotheses were supported.

**Table 4. MEDIATING EFFECT OF INTENTION TO SUPPORT A SPORTING MEGA-EVENT**

Path	Direct Effect		Indirect Effect		Total Effect	
	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE
Perceived Benefits → Sense of Community	0.488	0.207	0.169	0.130	0.617	0.145
Perceived Benefits → Intention to Support	0.506	0.184	-	-	0.506	0.120
Intention to Support → Sense of Community	0.335	0.215	-	-	0.335	0.104
Mediation Path	95% Confidence Interval				<i>p-Value</i>	
	Lower Bounds		Upper Bounds			
Perceived Benefits → Intention to Support → Sense of Community	0.154		0.286		0.014	

 $\beta$ =Unstandardised Beta

SE=Standard Error of parameter estimate

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

Recently, communities have come to realise that hosting sporting mega-events may not be a guaranteed boon for emerging economies. Such beliefs are reinforced by the financial crises suffered by Greece and Brazil after the 2004 and 2016 Olympics, respectively. Nevertheless, most cities still believe that hosting a sporting mega-event will bring positive impacts, such as infrastructure and resource development, as well as economic benefits. In particular, it has been suggested that studies on the impacts of sporting mega-events should address psychosocial impacts in order to gauge the level of acceptance of local residents (Crompton, 2004). Thus, the aim of the present study was to identify local residents' perceived benefits from hosting a sporting mega-event, determine their psychological support of that event, and understand how these might affect the development of residents' sense of community.

The results of this study are in line with previous work on this topic, highlighting the relationship between the perceived benefits of hosting a mega-event and residents' sense of community (Derrett, 2003; Gursoy & Kendall, 2006). As Derrett (2003) has suggested, values and beliefs of individuals in their community are linked with and shaped by specific festivals and events. Such values, interests and aspirations are likely to build residents' sense of community and contribute to the group's sense of wellbeing and overall development. Thus, hosting a sporting mega-event can be considered a contemporary form of media for promoting local residents' expectations and general social development. The findings of this study confirm that residents' perceived benefits from hosting such events are significantly associated with their sense of community (Hypothesis 1). It is readily apparent from the example of the 2002 FIFA Korea/Japan World Cup that hosting a sporting mega-event can contribute to a sense of unity among nations, elevating harmony and cooperation. Thus, hosting a sporting mega-event could be a useful tool for integrating diverse and divided communities.

In sport and tourism research, much ambiguity continues to surround the relationship between residents' perceptions of and intentions toward mega-events (Andereck & Vogt, 2000). Poor conceptualisation and operational measures of the concepts of perception and intention have impeded researchers' understanding of the nature of each relationship (DuCharme & Brawley, 1995). Based on SET and the TRA, this research treated residents' perception of hosting a sporting mega-event and their intention to support that event as conceptually different constructs. As hypothesised (Hypothesis 2), the findings indicate that there is a significant relationship between an individual's perception of hosting a sporting mega-event and their intention to support that event. Such results concur with the findings of previous studies (Prayag *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, to stimulate residents' positive perceptions of this type of endeavour, it may be necessary for authorities and event organisers to encourage local residents' active participation in and support of the mega-event in order to ensure its success.

Previous research has revealed that residents' volunteering experience (Doherty, 2009) and attendance of festivals (Derrett, 2003) can encourage their intention to support mega-events and contribute to the development of a sense of community. The findings of these previous works are supported by the validation of Hypothesis 3 in this study. The greater residents' intention to support a mega-event is, the more intense is their sense of community. Accordingly, the results suggest that authorities and event organisers should evaluate residents' intention to support mega-events prior to proposing plans for hosting.

As mentioned above, many candidates to become host cities have raised concerns that hosting such events might prove to be a loser's game, since hosting has become more and more costly. As a consequence, a number of communities have avoided competing to become hosts.



However, the hosting of such events is likely to increase residents' quality of life, and this study suggests that attitudes to the contrary should be changed, especially when considering the increased pride and self-esteem associated with the host process.

The current research argues that host cities for sporting mega-events should consider both the economic and non-economic goals of such endeavours in order to maximise the overall possible value of the event. As yet unaddressed topics include the negative aspects local residents may recognise about mega-events, what types of respondents actually support such events and common debates that emerge in a host city or community. Additionally, attitudes, perceptions and impacts can be quite different before, during and after sporting mega-events. The inclusion of these additional factors in future research will affect and make more accurate and comprehensive the collected information on the impacts of hosting these types of spectacles. Thus, the present study opens the door to future work addressing residents' attachment to and involvement in hosting practices, as well as their negative perceptions and longitudinal evaluations associated with their community committing to serving as hosts for these events.

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