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Title:

Community Participation and Support of Mega Events: Pre and Post Evaluation of 2012 Olympics

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Abstract: (Your extended abstract must use **Normal style**, and should be no longer than 1500 words following a research paper structure (e.g., introduction, theoretical foundation/literature review, research methodology, research findings, and conclusions and implications.). The box will ‘expand’ over multiple pages as you add text/diagrams into it. Please insert tables and/or figures in the body text of your submission if you have any.)

Introduction

Mega events greatly influence tourism growth, whilst tourism is the leading growth sector in international service trade (Fourie and Gallego, 2011). Recently, mega events (for example: Olympic Games, World Expos) are locomotives for tourism development in general, and collaborative tourism development in particular, within the hosting area (Lamberti et al., 2011). Whilst several studies such as Gursoy and Kendall, (2006) and Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, (2011) discuss the locals’ support on mega events and development towards positive and negative impacts, this study’s contribution is based on the correlation of community participation and impacts towards the residents’ support and its examination through time (before and after the mega event), whilst its main contribution relates to the inclusion of the community participation construct in the model. It further contributes to the literature through the pre and post investigation of residents’ participation in decision making focusing on the Olympics.

Theoretical Foundation

Large-scale events such as the Olympics have impacted long-term tourism to the host country, and have improved the locals’ quality of life (Deccio and Baloglu, 2002). Still, mega event decision making and planning involves a predominantly political planning approach, which allows little input from local residents (Roche, 1994), whilst the more democratic approach to mega event planning is surely more difficult to implement. As a result, countries adopt it less frequently, or adopt it in name only (Haxton, 1999).

The literature includes several studies focusing on locals’ perceptions towards the impacts of mega events (Lorde et al., 2011) and residents’ support according to perceived positive and negative impacts (Zhou and Ap, 2009). Grant (2004) suggests that with a carefully crafted and reflexive process of tourism planning, stakeholders and residents can have a profound influence in decision making. Still, the extent that community participation can affect the overall support of mega events is limited. In addition, scholars perceive the since the Olympics is the world’s largest peacetime event, it has substantial economic, social, political and other benefits for the host nation, region and city (Toohey and Veal, 2000). Considering the far greater extent of Olympics towards other mega events also in terms of their size, their target markets, the promotion, advertising and exposure in mass media and their overall impact on local communities (Getz, 2008), creates the need of further investigation for the importance of locals’ perceptions in decision making.

Research Methodology

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This paper examines the extent that community participation and perceived impacts affect the residents' support in mega events, and more specifically, the Olympic Games. This examination is based on the connection of two primary researches. The first one has been conducted a couple of months (May and June 2012) before the Olympics, whilst the second one has been conducted a year later (May and June 2013). Three structural models have been created. The first one examines the perspectives of locals before the Olympics, the second one after the Games, and the third one is actually the connection of these two, also including autoregressive (simplex) analysis. Using latent analysis the models examine the community participation before (intention of participation) and after (actual participation) of the Olympics. Factor analysis is used in order to determine the influence of community participation for the direct support of mega events and through perceived benefits and costs. Through the creation of an autoregressive (simplex) structural model, the research demonstrates the influential extent of community participation and the impact on community support in mega events before and after the 2012 Olympics.

Both researches focused on adult London residents living in the city for at least the last three years. They were conducted during different days and times on weekdays and weekends. For the sample size determination – for both researches – a conservative response format of 50 / 50 per cent, (meaning the assumption that 50 per cent of the respondents have negative perceptions, and 50 per cent have not) was adopted; whilst at least 95 per cent level of confidence and 5 per cent sampling error was selected. This means that a minimum of 400 respondents had to be examined in each research. Out of 800 people asked to participate on the research in each stage, 447 in 2012 and 412 in 2013 completed the questionnaire. The respondents were selected through a purposive sampling method at the eight major train stations (Waterloo, Victoria, London Liverpool Street, London Bridge, Charing Cross, Euston, Paddington, and King's Cross) in London (100 per train station were asked to participate). The train stations are located in different areas of London, all having an obvious significance for transporting the tourists and attendants of the 2012 Olympics, whilst they are also connected with the London underground, including people in the sample who travel from one part of the city to the other. On the basis of the literature review and research framework, the questionnaire comprises five parts: (1) community participation, (2) perceived costs of the Olympics, (3) perceived benefits of the Olympics, (4) community support for the Olympics and (5) demographic characteristics of residents.

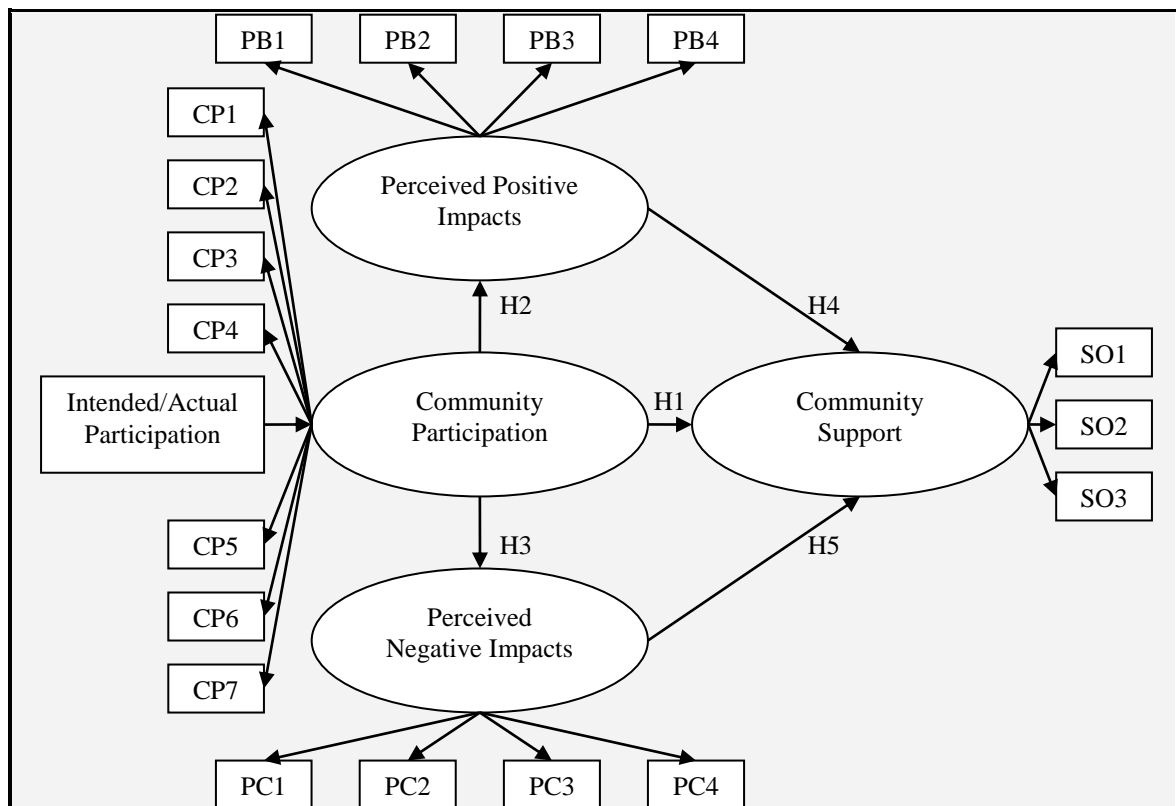
Figure: The Proposed Model

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Findings

The results indicate that before the Olympics, even if the Londoners provided great support, the community participation's direct influence for the final support is not high, but its influential extent through the mega event's perceived benefits and costs is crucial for the determination of the final output of community perceptions. In addition, since community participation had a positive stance and locals highly appreciate this opportunity, the influence on the perceived benefits is much higher than this in the perceived costs. After the Olympics, the analysis revealed a considerable direct influence of community participation for the support of mega events, whilst the perceived benefits and costs continue to be important for determining locals' perspectives. Moreover, the autoregressive analysis (pre and post evaluation) indicated a considerably higher influence towards perceived benefits, whilst the proportion in perceived costs is significantly lower. It also indicated a distinct increasing relation towards community participation and events' support. These findings were also interpreted under the widespread perspective to Londoners that the 2012 Olympics were a very successfully organised mega event, whilst the direct benefits were shortly appeared during and after the end of the Games.

Conclusions and Implications

The host population seems willing to support forthcoming mega events, and also contribute to their success, something that can be ensured to a great extent through its participation in decision making in further planning processes. In addition, the support of locals to mega events seems to be strengthened after the Olympics, maybe because of the widespread perspective of the well organised Games. Local participation in mega event decision making is of significant importance in the success of the events and in further tourism development and planning. The implementation of SET has revealed the importance and influence of community participation in the support of events in pre post and throughout time periods.

Despite the contribution to research, there are limitations. First, if repeating the study in a different locality one must implement carefully the general nature of the research since some issues, such as destination brand name (exceptionally strong in the case of London), national economic and business environment, and the local community's societal and cultural background can produce different outcomes.

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Second, the research did not examine aspects such as visitor perceptions and the involvement of local companies and enterprises in decision making. Thus, one should interpret the research findings with caution.

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