Psychological Support from Local Residents for Hosting Mega-Sporting Events: A Case of Super Bowl XLVI

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The Super Bowl is amongst the biggest one-day, competitive, televised sporting events in the world. According to Nielsen (2010), there were more than 106 million people who watched the 2010 Super Bowl on television in the U. S. making it the most watched television event in history (Nielson, 2010). Because of the heavy public attention on mega-sporting events, civic boosters and community residents often discuss hosting a Super Bowl Game or other similar mega-sporting events. Given the public attention that the host city draws during these events, it is important to address the impacts upon the local residents. While there are numerous economic impact studies written to support various planning approaches (Gursoy & Kendall, 2006), relatively limited research has been carried out to discuss residents’ psychological supports.

The psychological support from local residents plays an important role in the tangible and/or intangible justifications to increase residents’ involvement for the more democratic planning approaches and long term sustainability for hosting mega-sporting events in the future. Success of sporting events not only relies heavily on the goodwill of the local residents but also the longevity of the positive impacts is likely to be determined by the level of local residents’ supports for the sporting events (Deccio & Baloglu, 2002). This study builds on research on externalities defined as economic or social effects which are benefits or costs that occur from an economic activity that affect people other than those directly involved in a market transaction (Santo, 2010).

The purpose of this study was to assess local residents’ psychological support prior to hosting a mega-sporting event and to report preliminary results as to which factors of support affect local residents’ attitudes toward hosting future mega-sporting events using the case of 2012 Super Bowl in Indianapolis. This study provides a theoretical model to examine local residents’ psychological support factors using structural equation modeling which helps the understanding of local residents in the process of supporting of hosting mega-sporting events in future.

The questionnaire for this study was developed and modified from the previous work involving perceptions of a women’s professional golf event (Lee, Shin, & Park, 2009) and other studies involving examinations of psychological perceptions of mega-events. Further refinement of the survey instrument was done through two pilot studies. The initial pilot study (n = 73) examined reliabilities for each proposed factor and compared to the findings of Lee, Shin, and Park, (2009) to ensure the stability of the items and collection procedure. Further data was collected as part of the second pilot study (n = 170) and examined using confirmatory factor analysis to highlight the potential sources for lack of fit between the proposed model and the data. The results of the two-part pilot study revealed four positive perception factors; image and awareness of the host community, resource development, business development, and positive economic impact. Three negative factors were also found; perceptions of increased traffic and crowding, societal concerns, and negative economic impact.

The primary data for this study was collected using a self-administered questionnaire from residents of the host community. Data collection took place in public spaces of different types and at different times at locations within the core of the host community. Responses from non-residents were not included in the analysis. As part of the CFA process, each item for each factor was examined for fit, and a parsimonious model was achieved resulting in 3 items for each factor, except resource development (4 items) and image and awareness (5 items). The final model was a good fit to the data (χ² = 688.3, df = 229, CFI = .927, SRMR = .053, RMSEA = .057).

The next step was to identify the effect of factors on the resulting feelings for hosting mega sporting events in the future. This factor was measured using a 5 item scale measuring feelings toward hosting and investing in future sporting events. Positive perceptions had a stronger factor loading overall than negative perceptions (standardized loadings: positive=.83 and negative=-.12). The impact of each individual factor was also examined to identify which factor had the most effect on feelings toward hosting future events. The four positive factors had relatively similar factor loadings on the factor of support for future events (image and awareness=.309, resource development=.333, business development=.318, and positive economic impact=.377) and the negative factors were similar (negative economic impact=.071, societal concerns=.052, and traffic/crowding=.065).

The results from this analysis indicate that prior to mega-sporting events, the perceptions of positive outcomes from the event...
have the strongest relationship to feelings toward hosting future events. As it is widely accepted, managers and marketers of the host community and the event develop plans for fostering positive feelings toward the event, they should rely most heavily on the positive outcomes. While the negative factors were not as strongly related, they were still significant indicators of feelings toward future events. Part of the plans for growing community support should include ways that the negative impacts might be mitigated.

The primary purpose of this study was to assess local residents’ psychological support prior to hosting a mega-sporting event prior to the event. Research in the future should take into consideration how these perceptions might change following the event. It is possible that the negative perceptions might play a greater role in feelings toward future events once the resident has experienced some of these potential negative outcomes. Comparison between pre and post feelings should be examined to highlight ways to address post-event concerns.