A Cross-Cultural Examination of the Antecedents and Consequences of Hosting an International Mega-Event

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Research on mega-events such as the Olympic Games has documented both the economic and social impacts of individual Games (Blosser & Mihalik, 2006). With the potential for economic impacts reaching over $5 billion, tourism exceeding 2.6 million, and employment topping 2 million full and part time jobs for an individual Olympics, these mega event merit additional examination, not only as individual Games, but as a collective series of mega-events (Price Waterhouse Cooper, 2004), Seoul’s ‘Harmony and Progress,’ Barcelona’s ‘Friends Forever,’ Atlanta’s Celebration of the Century,’ Sydney’s ‘Share the Spirit,’ Athens’ ‘Welcome Home,’ and Beijing’s ‘One World, One Dream’ each represent the mission and spirit of that respective Games. When aggregated and averaged, an examination reveals patterns in the impacts of a mega-event such as the Olympic Games. With the International Olympic Committee suggesting that the evaluation of future bids will include criteria to evaluate planning to maximize positive post-event impacts, it is imperative to investigate how cultural and socioeconomic preconditions may influence the short- and long-term success of the mega-event, and may thus connect to post-event circumstances.

The purpose of this study is to identify antecedents and consequences related to the Olympics. Specifically, post-event economic and social impacts are considered. The supporting theoretical framework stems from commonly accepted use of antecedent-behavior-consequence framework, employing modified theoretical subframes of antecedent-event-consequence to answer these research questions: What antecedents can be identified as influential in the success of the Olympic Games? How do post-event economic conditions and venue usage compare between Games? Is there a cultural or socioeconomic influence on ‘success?’ A Cross-Cultural Mega-Event Model is developed to present common antecedents that precede the conduct of the mega-event, which subsequently yields identified consequences.

Utilizing case study, document review, and structured interview methodology, this study examines the antecedents and consequences of hosting an international mega-event, with particular emphasis on venues, economic impacts, and socio-cultural impacts. Mega-events were delimited to the Olympic Games, which were purposefully selected based upon their global presence, the consistency in their governance, and their ability to facilitate a cross-cultural comparison. A review of the conduct of each Summer Olympic Games since 1988 was conducted. In addition to the examination of surrounding reports generated by media and by those involved in the conduct of the event, including the review of specific archived documents, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key officials and/or experts affiliated with specific Olympic Games to obtain additional qualitative insights.

Antecedents examined can include: existing facilities, location, socio-economic status, nature of event, civic engagement levels, political motives, consequences that feed back into antecedents of next event, and so forth. They are generated by a thorough review of literature, and document review that informs the structured interviews. Consequences identified can include: social pride, civic engagement, political gain, facility usage, economic impacts, and the likelihood of future hosting opportunities, among others.

The implications will be discussed, including the possible application to other mega-event in any location with varied cultural and socioeconomic preconditions. For example, other mega-events could include: Winter Olympics; Paralympics; World Special Olympic Games; World Cup; Commonwealth Games; and many more. Recommendations will be made, both for further study and for strategic applications, based on the findings.