Business Networking Legacy Planning in Qatar from the 2022 World Cup

Ahmed Al-Emadi, Qatar University
Kyriaki (Kiki) Kaplanidou, University of Florida
Michael Sagas, University of Florida
Abdoylaye Diop, Qatar University

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Introduction

Mega events can bring a number of changes in the country selected to host the event. From the moment the host country decides to bid, to the moment of selection and throughout the preparation for the event hosting, there are opportunities to leverage the event to achieve long term legacies. One of the potential legacies of the event lies in the idea of business networking (Manzenreiter, 2008). Many opportunities are born from the creation of business relationships among the host country entities involved in event planning and international organizations that oversee the successful delivery of the event. Recent studies have discussed the concepts of innovation, networking, risk taking, and pro-activeness in business development initiatives such as the development of small-medium enterprises and the increase in a country’s exports (Ciravegna, Lopez, & Kundu, 2014; Dimitratos, Amorós, Etchebarne, & Felzenszttein, 2014). Given that the literature regarding a successful legacy framework underlines the importance of planning (Kellett, Hede, & Chalip, 2008; Preuss, 2007), our study aims to understand the process that creates sustainable business legacy outcomes that derive from the hosting of a mega sport event in early stages of planning the event. The following research questions guided our study:

1. How does a mega event such as World Cup create new business networking legacies and what are they?
2. How do the relationships among actors influence business networking outcomes?
3. What are the factors that facilitate or impede networking with other organizations?
4. Do organizations adjust their working relationships to achieve effective collaborations for the mega event hosting?
5. Does the cultural context of an Islamic country influence the way of doing business?

Method

Given the exploratory nature of the study, a qualitative methodology was deemed appropriate to gather data that would offer depth and richness. The research team conducted 24 semi-structured interviews. For this study, impacts were defined as short term changes while legacies were defined as long lasting outcomes that extend beyond the event. An interview guide was developed based on the previous literature. The semi-structured interview guide included the research questions of the study as well as a few introductory questions about overall expected impacts from the 2022 World Cup for Qatar as a warm up to the business networking questions. Seventeen interviews were in English and were transcribed verbatim and 7 were in Arabic and then translated and transcribed in English.

Data analysis. The 24 interview transcripts were inserted in Nvivo 10. The data were coded by two researchers. Before the full completion of the coding, the researchers compared the coding schemes of a smaller set of interviews to make sure consistency was established in the names of open codes that had the same content. A sample of coded interviews was sent to a third independent researcher to verify the validity of the codes. We followed Miles’ and Hubermann’s (1994) framework analysis to code the data. First, the reading of the interviews allowed for data familiarization. Then we identified a thematic framework that related to concepts discussed in the literature review but also allowed for emerging codes to be included in the results. The thematic framework also guided the nature of the interview questions that related to impacts of mega events and business networking. Then, indexing or open coding took place. Then, the researchers engaged in charting, a process which groups the indexed data in themes (Srivastava & Thomson, 2009). The analysis resulted in 20 themes related to business networking and development and legacy planning. The final step of this process was mapping and interpretation. In this stage the themes were examined for relationships and were further clustered into 6 larger themes.

Results

From the analysis the themes included: networking complexity, country constraints and facilitators, speed of change,
and business networking legacy outcomes that included innovation, cultural change, social and human capital development, and regional perception change through business development. Taken together, these theme describe process factors to achieve long term legacies. Looking at the extent of variability in responses for each theme across participants we observed the following: networking complexity was referenced by all 24 participants, cultural change by 23, country constraints and facilitators by 19, social and human capital development by 17, innovation by 12, regional perception change through business development by 9 and speed of change by 7. Looking at the results collectively we can identify factors that can describe a process for the business legacy development resulting from a mega sport event such as the 2022 World Cup. These factors include context factors (type of mega event and country), business legacy drivers and barriers (country constraints and facilitators, speed of internationalization, networking complexity) and sustainable (long term) business legacy outcomes (cultural change in doing business, innovation, social and human capital development, regional perception changes through business development).

Discussion
The purpose of this study was to explore the process that creates a sustainable business networking legacy from the catalytic effect of hosting a mega sport event. The results of the study suggest a model of legacy planning, development and desired legacy outcomes as perceived by stakeholders 8 years before the event is hosted. These outcomes focus on the context factors such as the nature of the event itself and the profile of the host country, and how collectively they create drivers and barriers for long term business development with enduring effects for the host country. The enduring effects included shifts in culture of doing business with Western influential parties, innovation that permeates certain fields such as venue construction and new ideas in event delivery, lasting social and human capital development and changes in perceptions of the region in the eyes of the World through business developments. Looking back at the literature, we propose that drivers and barriers connect with a number of discussions made about the notion of business networking having specific economic, technical and social aspects ((Håkansson & Ford, 2002). These relationships are complex, and involve a diversity of actors that need to work together to create long lasting business legacies (Håkansson & Ford, 2002; Hohenthal, Johanson, & Johanson, 2014; O’Brien & Gardiner, 2006).