The Social Impact of Sporting Events: A Scoping Review and Future Research Direction

Daichi Oshimi, University of Ottawa
Shiro Yamaguchi, University of Marketing and Distribution Sciences

Background
Early studies on the impacts of sporting events have focused on their economic impact to assist politicians and event organizers in validating sporting event bids (Crompton, Lee, & Shuster, 2001). Since these early studies, there has been a shift in focus from the following: (1) tangible to intangible impacts (Preuss, 2007), (2) large to small events (Wilson, 2007), and (3) impact to leverage (Chalip, 2014). Social impacts are considered mostly intangible (Balduck, Maes, & Buelens, 2011), although tangible social impacts, such as infrastructure projects stimulating social connectedness, can also be identified (e.g., Kaplanidou, 2012). There is a sense that the research on the social impacts of events on communities has “come of age” (Deery & Jago, 2010). Despite the increased focus on research in this direction, there have been a few attempts to perform comprehensive literature reviews on the social impact of sporting events in the sports management literature. Therefore, this contribution seeks to review the progress of social impact studies of sporting events to answer the following research question: what do we know from previous social impact studies on sporting events and what do we need to know moving forward? Specifically, this scoping review aims to examine the social impact literature concerning theoretical perspectives, methods used, and specific findings.

Scoping Review
A key strength of the scoping study is that it can provide a rigorous and transparent method for mapping areas of research (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005), especially where an area has not been reviewed comprehensively (Mays, Roberts, & Popay, 2001). The scoping review was conducted taking the following five steps (Arksey and O’Malley, 2005): (1) defining the aforementioned research questions, (2) formulating the review protocol, (3) searching the literature, (4) extracting the literature, and (5) charting the data and summarizing the results. The review protocol contained the delineation of the search terms, databases, and screening criteria. “Social impact” and “sport event” were used as the search terms. Two academic databases were identified, namely, SPORTDiscus with Full Text and Science Direct, as well as manual searches with Google Scholar of familiar articles. To safeguard the quality of the review, only original academic journals, articles, English journals, and available full text journals were considered as additional criteria. Forty-one articles were screened against the literature selection criteria, after removing several irrelevant articles. Finally, the authors summarized the results and identified potential future research directions of the social impact of sporting events.

Results
Concerning the theory of the extracted articles, over half (53.7%) of the studies utilized social exchange theory. Social representation theory, social leverage, triple-bottom-line, and destination image were used in 26.8% of the studies. Concerning research objects, mega events (e.g., the Olympic Games) and international sporting events (e.g., the Pan American Games) were considered as the target event in 75.6% of the cases. Local residents were selected as the research sample in most of the cases (65.9%), while non-host residents appeared in 19.5% of the studies. Quantitative analyses (e.g., regression analysis) were used in most studies (80.5%). Most surveys were conducted in three patterns—pre-post event (26.8%), pre-event (14.6%), and post event (29.3%). Studies that applied other patterns accounted for 19.5% (i.e., pre-during-post, pre-during, during-post, and during events). Furthermore, five out of six studies (83.3%) utilizing a quantitative approach for pre-post event comparison (e.g., t-test) showed that the pre-event scores were higher than the post-event scores, where positive or negative, implying that residents overestimate both the positive and negative social impacts of sporting events before hosting the event.

Discussion and Future Research
The scoping review, using two primary databases and two main keywords (i.e., “social impact” and “sport event”), revealed a set of core articles on social impacts of events, which assist in framing future research directions of social
impact studies in the sports management literature. First, given that most studies have focused on mega sporting events by applying quantitative methods, further research should be replicated for non-mega sporting events (e.g., local marathon). Furthermore, the use of more extensive research methods, such as qualitative studies, is required because these methods are useful for clarifying how and why social impacts can be generated (Chalip, 2006), which could prevent residents from overestimating the social impact of sporting events (Oshimi, Harada, & Fukuhara, 2016). Second, the heterogeneity of a host community (Deery & Jago, 2010), such as demographic and psychographic variables (e.g. involvement in events or sport), should be considered to better understand the social impact mechanisms. Segmentation research (e.g., Ma & Rotherham, 2015) and incorporating moderating variables into the analyses (Seiders, Voss, Grewal, & Godfrey, 2005) could be one option in this direction. Furthermore, the recent focus on personal psychological benefits of sporting events, such as residents’ happiness (Taks, Littlejohn, Snelgrove, & Wood, 2016), well-being (Yolal, Gursoy, Uysal, Kim, & Karacaoglu, 2016), or quality of life (Ma & Kaplanidou, 2016), call for measuring social impact based on “personal experiences” rather than “perceptions” of social impacts of events, especially given the fact that these perceptions are usually framed by the media (e.g., Sant & Mason, 2015). Thus, exploring the antecedent variables that influence host residents’ emotional experience through an event and associating the experience with the development of sport (or events) could be a key future research direction in the sports management literature.