Social Impact of the 2018 Winterlude Triathlon: An Experience Approach of Non-Attendee Residents

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Past research on social impact of sports events on local communities has traditionally measured benefits and drawbacks based on perceptions of the non-attendee residents (e.g., Balduck et al. 2011; Inoue & Havard, 2014). The main difficulty with using a perception-based model is a latent bias about positive impact of sports events generated, among others, through media framing (e.g., Sant & Mason, 2015). Sports events are often lauded for their ability to accrue positive benefits (e.g., economic, social, environmental; e.g., Holmes et al., 2015). However, various researchers have critiqued events for their frequent inadequacy in delivering these perceived benefits (e.g., Coalter, 2004; Weed et al., 2015).

Whether or not events produce desired benefits depends on the point of analysis, namely which stakeholders’ perspectives are being taken into account (i.e., sport organizations, individual athletes, teams, spectators, business people, sponsors, politicians, host communities and the media; e.g., Parent, 2016). This contribution takes the perspective of the non-attendee residents, because their quality of life and/or well-being can be directly impacted by the event (e.g., Fredline, 2013; Schlegel et al., 2017). More specifically, we examine how non-attendee residents experience the effect of an event in their host community. Focusing on experiences is important as it provides more realistic results of the “real” social impact of events. To that end, classic social impact dimensions are reframed in terms of actual personal experiences (e.g., Sairinen & Kumpulainen, 2006).

Past research has mainly focused on social impacts of large-scale and mega sports events such as the FIFA World Cup (e.g., Heere et al., 2013) or Olympic Games (e.g., Kaplanidou, 2012). These studies have shown that the positive impacts are primarily constrained to a transient "feel-good factor" which fades quickly upon the conclusion of the event. This feel-good factor is sometimes referred to as psychic income (e.g., Gibson et al. 2014; Maenig & Porche, 2008), and often overshadows the direct negative experiences of residents such as road closures, disruption or displacement effects (e.g., Holmes 2015).

The effect of small-scale events on the positive and negative experiences of non-attendee residents is not well understood. This research fills this gap by analysing how non-attendee residents experience the social impacts of a small-scale sports event. In order to capture the event’s effect, data are collected before, during and after the event. Experiential measures prior to the event act as a control when compared to the measures during and after the event. The event under investigation is the Ottawa Winterlude Triathlon; a small-scale annual event hosted in February. The triathlon is part of the Winterlude festival, which is considered a valuable cultural event in the host city. The event attracts 350 to 400 participants, who will skate 8km on the Rideau Canal, followed by 8km of skiing and 5km of running. This research separates the Winterlude Triathlon from the cultural event as a whole in order to directly measure how the triathlon affects non-attendee residents’ experience.

Method
Sample and data collection
Data will be collected between January and March 2018, on-site in a public space near the event by inviting passerby to fill out a survey (electronically on an iPad or using paper and pencil). Data collection will occur at three time intervals: three weeks prior, during, and three weeks after the event. It is expected that a total of one hundred surveys will be completed for each time interval, aiming for a total response of 300. Respondents who complete a survey before and/or during the event, will be given the option to participate in the follow up surveys (during and/or after).
Survey and measurements
The survey includes three sections: (1) social impact experiences; (2) the level of involvement with the event; and, (3) demographic variables. Social impact experiences are measured with five factors: social cohesion (four items; Inoue & Havard, 2012), community spirit (three items; Gibson et al., 2014; Gursoy et al., 2011), feelings of (un)safety (three items; Kim et al., 2015), community involvement (three items; Peterson et al., 2008), and sport participation (three items; Taks et al. 2015), all measured on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1- Strongly disagree to 7- Strongly agree. All the constructs were reframed to reflect “personal experiences” rather than “perceptions” of social impact (Taks & Rocha, 2017). Involvement is measured by eight semantic differential items, ranging from 1 (e.g., Boring) to 7 (e.g., Exciting) (Shank & Beasly, 1998). Socio-demographic characteristics include age, sex, place of residents (postal code), and income level.

Data analysis
Factor analysis (EFA) will be performed on the social impact experience items to determine if the same factors persist given that these items have been reframed from their original versions. Internal consistency of the scales and discriminant validity will be tested by calculating Cronbach’s alphas and AVE respectively. Social impact experience of the event will be tested by comparing results from before, during and after the event using ANOVAS. Hierarchical regressions will be used to explore to what extent the level of involvement and/or demographic variables explain social impact experiences of the non-attendee residents.

Expected Results and Implications
The results of this study will yield valuable insight on the social impact of events on non-attendee residents in the context of small-scale events, using an experience-based framework rather than a perception-based framework. The study will reveal whether small-scale events of this nature affect residents in a positive social manner (or not). It will help cities and event organizers to gain better insight in the claims that can be attributed to these types of events (or not).