Understanding the Global-Local Nexus in the Context of the Olympic Games: Implications for Managing Community Development through Sports Mega-Events

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Despite many criticisms, the pursuit of sport mega-events, particularly the Olympic Games, is still a popular developmental tactic. The popularity derives from the Olympics being the most globalized sport event that can contribute to national and local development (Lee & McGuire, 2009; Roche, 2000). More recently, hosting sport mega-events is linked to the incentives of globalization (Black, 2007). Particularly, the desire of local units and governments in post-developmental nations including China, Russia, Brazil, South Africa, and South Korea to build political and cultural connections with the global sphere has been demonstrated by their relentless bid applications.

However, little is known as to how host communities experience the process of globalization as well as the incorporation of the host community's locality into the management of the Games. Specifically, as the Winter Olympic Games are moving to countries where winter sports are not a core part of their sporting culture (e.g., South Korea and China), the relationship between the Olympics and host communities has been increasingly convoluted. Thus, this study aims to understand the influence of hosting the Winter Olympics on the host community's process of globalization and development. The host community of the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympic Games, Daegwallyeong-myeon in South Korea, is the focus of investigation. To achieve the goal, world-systems theory (Wallerstein, 1974) and theories of globalization including glocalization (Robertson, 1992) and gorizontalization (Ritzer, 1995) were utilized as frameworks.

This study utilized global ethnography (Burawoy, Blum, George, Gille, Gowan, Haney, et al., 2000) to assess the process of Olympic-driven globalization and its influence on the host community. Multiple types of data were collected through four months of fieldwork in the community of Daegwallyeong-myeon during the summer of 2017 and the winter/spring of 2018. Observations, interviews with local residents, local government officials, and employees of the PyeongChang Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (POCOG), field notes, collection of media and archival data were conducted. The three groups interviewed for this study were the major stakeholder groups residing in Daegwallyeong-myeon. A total of 40 interviewees participated in this study. All interviews were conducted in Korean, transcribed verbatim, and important quotes were translated to English by the author who is fluent in Korean and English. Data were analyzed through low-level coding, high-level coding, a priori coding, and lastly, selective coding.

Findings identified five key themes from the data, categorized as: a) perception of underdevelopment: disconnection between the local and the global, b) POCOG’s institutional management of the global standard, c) POCOG as a negotiator between the global standard and the locality, d) the residents' perspectives on the global standards and regulations, and e) aspiration to globalize Daegwallyeong-myeon. I argue that the global and the local underwent both consensus and cacophony. Daegwallyeong-myeon showed a strong aspiration to grow to the global level (Ritzer, 1995). In doing so, the local was perceived as the periphery, and the global was perceived as the core (Wallerstein, 1974). Theoretical and practical implications will be suggested and followed by directions for future research.