



HOSTING MEGA EVENTS

Modeling Locals' Support

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Abstract: This study develops and tests a structural model to assess key factors on residents' perceptions of the impacts of the 2002 Winter Olympics as a mega tourism event and how these perceptions affect their support. The model is based on previous literature and uses data collected during the event. Community backing for mega events is affected directly and/or indirectly by five determinants of support: the level of community concern, ecocentric values, community attachment, perceived benefits, and perceived costs. There are interactions between costs and benefit factors, and support relies heavily on perceived benefits rather than costs. Theoretical and managerial implications are discussed. **Keywords:** determinants of support, residents' attitudes, perceived impacts, support model, mega events. © 2006 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Résumé: L'accueil des méga-événements: modelage du soutien des habitants. Cette étude développe et met à l'essai un modèle structurel pour évaluer des facteurs clé pour les perceptions des habitants au sujet des impacts des Jeux Olympiques d'hiver 2002 comme méga-événement de tourisme et voir comment ces perceptions influent sur leur soutien. Le modèle est basé sur la littérature antérieure et utilise des données cueillies pendant l'événement. Le soutien communautaire des méga-événements est influé directement et/ou indirectement par cinq déterminants: niveau de préoccupation communautaire, valeurs écocentriques, attachement communautaire, bénéfices perçus et coûts perçus. Il y a des interactions entre les facteurs liés aux coûts et bénéfiques, et le soutien dépend beaucoup des bénéfices perçus plutôt que des coûts. On discute des implications théoriques et gestionnaires. **Mots-clés:** déterminant de soutien, attitudes des habitants, impacts perçus, modèle de soutien, méga-événement. © 2006 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, mega event planning involves a predominantly political planning approach, which allows little input from local residents apart from the initial election of political representatives (Roche 1994). Veal (1994) refers to this approach as hallmark decisionmaking, where the plan to proceed with a project is made first, and attempts are later made to justify it (Haxton 1999). Recently, a more democratic approach to such planning has emerged as an alternative, which

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combines both technical rationality and participatory democracy in the overall planning process (Getz 1991; Haxton 1999; Jafari 1990). As suggested by Haxton (1999), the more democratic approach to mega event planning is arguably more difficult to implement and as a result less frequently adopted, or adopted in name only.

Successful implementation of the more democratic planning approaches, such as Toronto's bid for the 1996 Summer Olympic Games and Calgary Olympics, suggests that community involvement and support may transform such occasions more into urban festivals likely to become significant urban experiences for hosts and guests (Hiller 1990). While active support is likely to transform a mega sporting event into an urban festival, it is also possible that active opposition to hosting it may lead to delays, legal action, and abandonment of projects. Therefore, it is important to assess the level of support/opposition and to understand the antecedents of support/opposition by locals for local governments, policymakers, and businesses (Haxton 1993; Hernandez, Cohen and Garcia 1996). Conceptually, this may even suggest some form of benchmarking or barometer approach for better estimation of when and if there are concerns with future planned proceedings. Since community involvement in planning is a relatively recent phenomenon, it is to be expected that research into locals' support for hosting these venues is quite limited.

In contrast, research into local residents' support for these occasions generally is abundant. Indeed, its importance has been widely recognized by planners and businesses that have to take the views of the host community into account for the success and sustainability of their investments (Williams and Lawson 2001). This component of the "environmental" scanning and monitoring process has become relatively common for strategic destination management, although with little formal documentation. The studies reported tend to look at tourism as it relates to specific communities, some of which may rely heavily on these venues, while other research looks at communities that depend little on them. In the latter case, residents may be unaware of the magnitude of the contributions or of the negative aspects. The findings reported in these diverse studies suggest some inconsistencies in the relationships, and the sophistication of the modeling has been suspect, in fact, mostly descriptive. A more formally documented modeling approach may be more appropriate.

The purpose of this study is to concentrate on a mega sporting event, an obtrusive tourism venue (Webb, Campbell, Schwartz and Sechrest 1971), which would be much more conspicuous to the residents' life space, raising their awareness levels and probably making them more reactive. This would be an extreme case on a spectrum of "in your face" or obtrusive tourism, as opposed to "small inconspicuous events" that may not impinge on the locals' life space in terms of awareness levels and may not cause emotional, social, or cognitive reactions. The latter type of venues and activities may be unobtrusive in a community (Gursoy and Rutherford 2004). Such specification would allow a better understanding of the actual perceived impacts and the support in a magnified, obtrusive setting. Specifically, the intent of this

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