

WestminsterResearch

<http://www.westminster.ac.uk/westminsterresearch>

Citizens' attitudes towards mega-events: a new framework

Smith, A., Ritchie, B.W. and Chien, P.M.

NOTICE: this is the authors' version of a work that was accepted for publication in *Annals of Tourism Research*. Changes resulting from the publishing process, such as peer review, editing, corrections, structural formatting, and other quality control mechanisms may not be reflected in this document. Changes may have been made to this work since it was submitted for publication. A definitive version was subsequently published in *Annals of Tourism Research*, 74, pp. 208-210, 2019.

The final definitive version in *Annals of Tourism Research* is available online at:

<https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2018.07.006>

© 2019. This manuscript version is made available under the CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 license

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

The WestminsterResearch online digital archive at the University of Westminster aims to make the research output of the University available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the authors and/or copyright owners.

Whilst further distribution of specific materials from within this archive is forbidden, you may freely distribute the URL of WestminsterResearch: (<http://westminsterresearch.wmin.ac.uk/>).

In case of abuse or copyright appearing without permission e-mail repository@westminster.ac.uk

Citizens' attitudes towards mega-events: a new framework

Mega-events are currently experiencing a crisis caused by the reluctance of municipal authorities and their citizens to take on onerous hosting obligations. Referenda in Hamburg, Boston, Innsbruck and Krakow suggest that the majority of residents do not want their cities to bid for the Olympic Games. The results of these recent plebiscites contrast with academic studies conducted pre-, post- and during events which have shown that residents perceive these projects positively (Hiller & Wanner, 2011). Mega-events can generate positive social and economic benefits (Waitt, 2003, Gursoy & Kendall, 2006), especially if the associated symbolic-emotional narratives are effectively leveraged (O'Brien, 2006; Smith, 2014a).

This research note critiques and develops the conceptual foundations of research that seeks to establish resident attitudes towards mega-events. We argue that there needs to be a better appreciation of the relative influences of personal versus collective costs and benefits, as well as more understanding of the willingness of residents to trade short term impacts for those that occur over the longer term. For example, attitudes may be underpinned by willingness to trade temporary inconveniences (e.g. disruption) for lasting gains (urban regeneration) or to exchange short term benefits (event atmosphere) for long term costs (ongoing financial liabilities).

The most commonly used theory underpinning work on attitudes towards mega-events is social exchange theory [SET] (Waitt, 2003). This approach is based on the idea that residents are likely to support mega-events as long as they believe positive outcomes exceed negative ones (Gursoy, Yolal, Ribeiro, & Panosso Netto, 2017). Despite its prevalent use, there are multiple issues with research based on SET. This theory is used rather superficially

and is often over-simplified, making applications appear routine and pointless. Most researchers ignore the resource exchange aspect of the theory – the give and take involved – by focusing too much on the *outcomes*. Research is required to better understand the contributions residents make both actively (volunteering, attending) or passively (tolerating inconvenience, paying extra taxes), and what they gain or lose - personally and collectively - in return. As mega-events are not static and often aim to achieve long-term objectives, we also need to understand how these exchanges evolve over time (Waite, 2003).

We argue that researchers need to look beyond SET towards the notion of social dilemmas (Dawes, 1980). These are ‘instances where short term self-interest is at odds with long term collective interest’ (Van Lange, Joireman, Parks, & Van Dijk, 2013, p.126), a definition that highlights temporal and collective dimensions underplayed in SET. Social dilemma theory can be adapted by researchers to help understand mega-events that result in significant personal impacts, but also shared costs and benefits. Social dilemmas are usually used to explain decisions about behaviour (Weber, Koppelman, & Beswick, 2004) but they can also be deployed to explore attitudes – important antecedents to behaviour. The theory emphasises the importance of group norms in affecting attitudes and encouraging cooperation amongst community members, which also overcomes a limitation of SET. Social and media influence may pressure on how residents should behave even if that behaviour doesn’t lead directly to personal gains.

A social dilemma may exist in a mega-event context as these projects can generate economic, environmental and social benefits for some social groups, such as urban elites and politicians, at the expense of other members of the community (Smith, 2014b). The (self) interests of individuals may not align with the collective interests of the host community. In

tourism studies, Chien, Richie, Shipway, and Henderson (2012) claim to be the ‘first to conceptualise residents’ reactions to event development in the local community as a social dilemma’ (p. 460). They regarded local residents as individuals torn between collective and personal interests rather than as rational decision makers. Chien et al.’s work used open-ended comments to highlight a potential social dilemma but did not measure it empirically. More research is needed to understand the nature of the dilemmas involved in mega-event projects, identifying the type of dilemmas as well as their potential influence on attitudes.

Not all social dilemmas are the same. Two actor dilemmas are based on the interdependency of decision making (e.g. the prisoners’ dilemma), but less-known dilemmas that involve more than two actors are more relevant to mega-events. Multiple person dilemmas can involve ‘*social fences*’ – also known as ‘give some’ dilemmas - where individuals sacrifice something for a collective cause, usually a public good (Kollock, 1998). This is highlighted by the conceptual framework we have developed to represent the range of attitudes towards mega-events and their foundations. Mega-events may be positive even if they result in personal losses (see Position C, Figure 1). For some, paying more taxes or enduring transport problems may lead to negative attitudes, but others’ faith in the wider benefits may overcome a negative assessment of personal net outcomes. This type of collectivist thinking may also underpin some negative attitudes. Fans who will personally benefit from a mega-event because they want to use new facilities provided may still oppose projects if they believe it is not a good thing for the city as a whole (Position F). There may be some selfish people who are positive about the event simply because they experience personal gains, despite knowing it is not in the best interests of the wider community (Position A). In these instances, supporting the staging of a mega-event is a ‘*social trap*’ or a

‘take some’ dilemma involving actions that generate positive outcomes for the individual with negative outcomes for the collective (Van Lange et al., 2013).

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

Social dilemmas over resource usage, conflict, and management have been studied by psychologists, economists, sociologists, and political scientists (e.g., Rothstein, 2000; Van Lange et al., 2013; Weber et al., 2004), but tend to be overlooked in tourism and events research. There are some fascinating social dilemmas associated with mega-event projects. For example, organisers usually request that local people change their travel arrangements to assist event operations. By adhering to this request, citizens may contribute to the wider success of the event. However, some act selfishly and ignore the advice, hoping that other citizens will conform. If everyone ignores the advice and transport systems become grid locked, both the event and the citizenry lose out. This is further complicated by the emerging realisation that if everyone conforms the transport systems tend to benefit, but local businesses do not (Jones, Woolley, & Currie, 2015). Another example is the temporary loss of public amenities during a mega-event. Citizens are often asked to ‘sacrifice’ free access to public spaces so they can be used as venues or for support facilities (Smith, 2014b). Research by Lowes (2002) highlights that accepting such inconvenience is regarded by event advocates as part of a citizen’s ‘civic duty’ because it helps to secure economic prosperity.

Supplementing ideas from SET with those from social dilemmas is also useful in terms of the added emphasis on temporal considerations. Existing research on attitudes to mega-events highlights that these change markedly over time (Ritchie, Shipway, & Cleeve, 2009), with overly positive pre-event assessments sometimes leading to post-event

disappointment (Kim, Gursoy, & Lee, 2005) or, conversely, *a priori* cynicism giving way to *a posteriori* positivity (Hiller & Wanner, 2011). Many studies on mega-events are conducted pre-event and, whilst this helps to better understand support/opposition, it gives an unrepresentative account of attitudes because expectations are revealed rather than outcomes. There are other important temporal considerations. The inherently long-term objectives of mega-events such as image change and urban regeneration/gentrification need to be addressed in any research that purports to assess attitudes towards mega-events. We advocate longitudinal research that captures attitudes towards mega-events at different times (pre/during/post-event), but also that which tries to assess trade-offs between individual and collective costs/benefits that exist at different time scales. For example, people may be positive about events because, despite individual short-term costs (e.g. inconvenience and congestion during the event), they expect long-term benefits (e.g. the regeneration of their city). This means doing research at different times, but also doing research that simultaneously addresses different timescales. Only through such analysis can attitudes towards mega-events be fully explored; and only through temporally sensitive research can the shifts in attitudes noted by researchers be fully explained.

By assessing how a population is distributed across Figure 1, scholars can better understand resident attitudes towards hosting mega-events. This original framework highlights the need for evaluations of personal costs and benefits – the basic premise of SET – alongside consideration of collective costs and benefits that may also influence overall attitudes – an idea from social dilemma theory. The framework also emphasises the need to analyse these attitudes over time. Existing research tends to assume residents adopt (the more obvious) positions E, B or D, but we suggest mega-events research needs to recognise that (the more subtle) positions A, F and C may better represent (and explain) resident attitudes.

This conceptualisation also encourages stakeholders to think about how positions may shift over time and why attitudes exist. Proximity to event sites, length of residency, and media reports are some potential contextual factors that may shape social dilemmas, but other individual factors such as pro-social behaviour, emotions, and personal experiences may also be significant influencers (Ostrom, 1998; Weber et al., 2004).

Our new framework can be used to generate knowledge about the relative significance of personal and collective impacts and the ways that these intersect (via trade-offs) to determine overall attitudes. It represents a fusion of ideas from the theories of social exchange and social dilemmas and should assist researchers who are exploring mega-event impacts, but also those evaluating other large scale tourism projects.

References

- Chien, P. M., Ritchie, B. W., Shipway, R., & Henderson, H. (2012). I am having a dilemma: Factors affecting resident support of event development in the community. *Journal of Travel Research, 51*(4), 451-463.
- Dawes, R. M. (1980). Social Dilemmas. *Annual Review of Psychology, 31*(1), 169-193.
- Gursoy, D., & Kendall, K. W. (2006). Hosting mega events: Modeling locals' support. *Annals of Tourism Research, 33*(3), 603-623.
- Gursoy, D., Yolal, M., Ribeiro, M. A., & Panosso Netto, A. (2017). Impact of trust on local residents' mega-event perceptions and their support. *Journal of Travel Research, 56*(3), 393-406.
- Hiller, H. H., & Wanner, R. A. (2011). Public opinion in host Olympic cities: The case of the 2010 Vancouver Winter Games. *Sociology, 45*(5), 883-899.
- Jones, A., Woolley, J., & Currie, G. (2015). The London summer 2012 Olympic Games: threat of disruption and business reaction. *Event Management, 19*(2), 187-210.
- Kim, H. J., Gursoy, D., & Lee, S. B. (2006). The impact of the 2002 World Cup on South Korea: Comparisons of pre-and post-games. *Tourism Management, 27*(1), 86-96.
- Kollock, P. (1998). Social dilemmas: The anatomy of cooperation. *Annual Review of Sociology, 24*, 183-214
- Lowes, M. (2002). *Indy Dreams and Urban Nightmares*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- O'Brien, D. (2006). Event business leveraging: the Sydney 2000 Olympic games. *Annals of Tourism Research, 33*(1), 240-261.
- Ostrom, E. (1998). A behavioural approach to rational choice theory of collective action: Presidential address, American Political Science Association, 1997. *The American Political Science Review, 92*(1), 1-22.

- Ritchie, B.W., Shipway, R., & Cleeve, B. (2009). Resident perceptions of mega-sporting events: A non-host city perspective of the 2012 London Olympic Games. *Journal of Sport & Tourism, 14*(2-3), 143-167.
- Rothstein, B. (2000). Trust, social dilemmas and collective memories. *Journal of Theoretical Politics, 12*(4), 477-501
- Smith, A. (2014a). Leveraging sport mega-events: new model or convenient justification? *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events, 6*(1), 15-30.
- Smith, A. (2014b). 'Borrowing' public space to stage major events: The Greenwich Park controversy. *Urban Studies, 51*(2), 247-263.
- Van Lange, P. A., Joireman, J., Parks, C. D., & Van Dijk, E. (2013). The psychology of social dilemmas: A review. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 120*(2), 125-141.
- Waitt, G. (2003). Social impacts of the Sydney Olympics. *Annals of Tourism Research, 30*(1), 194-215.
- Weber, J. M., Kopelman, S., & Messick, D. M. (2004). A conceptual review of decision making in social dilemmas: Applying a logic of appropriateness. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 8*(3), 281-307.