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Research Paper

Impacts and implications of an annual major sport event: A host community perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the impacts of the World Golf Championships HSBC Champions tournament in Shanghai, China, as perceived by host community residents over the past 10 years, and how those perceptions affected their attitudes towards the future hosting of this event. An empirical study was carried out and data collected from 1047 Shanghai residents using structured questionnaires. Multiple factor analysis identified six factors underlying the perceived impacts of the event. It was found that after over a decade of continuous staging, the WGC-HSBC Champions did not affect the life of most local residents due to their low awareness of the event. Despite that, the study also found that residents' positive perceptions led to their support for the future hosting of the event, which confirms the usefulness of social exchange theory in explaining residents' perceptions. Finally, implications for destination managers are discussed to ensure the needs of both visitors and residents are addressed.

1. Introduction

With stable economic growth over the past three decades and closer integration into international markets, major destinations in China, such as Beijing and Shanghai, are now joining in the competition for a place in the global city roster. In its 13th Five Year Plan (2016–2020), Shanghai, the largest city and the economic powerhouse of China with a population of 24 million, has formulated and implemented a strategy to develop itself into the world's leading center of commerce and finance, as well as one of the top tourist destinations in the world, by the year 2020 (Shanghai Municipal Government, 2016).

Since this strategy was introduced, Shanghai has used a lot of different actions to pursue the above goal, including its policy for mega-events. The Shanghai World Expo 2010 has been the most significant mega event in Shanghai's mega-event strategy, with a direct investment of about 28.6 billion yuan (US\$4.2 billion) and a record-breaking attendance of 73 million visitors (Qu, 2011). The Shanghai World Expo 2010 was only a one-off event; the mega-events policy is, however, a part of the long-term strategic plan for Shanghai. The policy therefore includes many annual major events. Certain types of annual major events have witnessed considerable growth during the last decade. Since Shanghai hosted the Tennis Masters Cup in 2002, the city has hosted an increasing number of high-profile annual international sport events and gradually developed a pattern of six annual major sport

events, including the Formula 1 (F1) Grand Prix, the Association of Tennis Professionals World Tour Master 1000, the World Golf Championships (WGC) HSBC (Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation) Champions, the World Snooker Masters, the Shanghai International Marathon, and the International Association of Athletics Federation World Diamond League.

The mega-event strategy has been in place now for almost a decade. Given the considerable resources invested, it is necessary to analyze what benefits have resulted from this investment. The current literature is dominated by studies that have primarily focused on the impacts of the Shanghai World Expo 2010 (Ye, Scott, Ding, & Huang, 2012). Rigorous studies that evaluate the impacts of Shanghai's major events, including annual major sport events, are limited. However, as a city that has hosted over one quarter of China's international major sport events in recent years (Wang, 2008), Shanghai's experiences and achievements are not only important for the city itself, but also may help to enlighten other destinations across China and other developing countries that are implementing similar strategies. Therefore, research on the impacts of Shanghai's annual major sport events is needed from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

When researching the impacts of major events, it is crucial to look at motives of a mega-event strategy in order to define the role of the major event within its specific socio-economic and political context. One of Shanghai's main ambitions in its mega-event strategy is to bring

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positive impacts to the life of its residents as evidenced by the main slogan of the Shanghai World Expo 2010 'Better City, Better Life' (Larsen, 2014). Accordingly, there is a need for research on local residents' perceptions of the impacts of Shanghai's major sport events.

Many previous studies of mega-event strategy have been focused on a single perspective, such as economic impact (Preuss, 2004). However, governments have tended to use mega-event strategies to achieve the goal of city development in a more comprehensive manner, integrating economic, social, cultural, environmental, brand, and sport development impacts. Consequently, there is a need for research to adopt a more comprehensive approach.

Even though there has been limited research on the impacts of Shanghai's annual major sport events, there has been no study related to the impacts, especially the leisure-related impacts, of both the sport of golf and golf sport events in China. No local resident perceptions' research to date has examined the WGC-HSBC Champions specifically. The pace of academic research is far behind the development of China's golf industry. According to the China Golf Industry Report 2015, the total numbers of golf courses has grown to 438, and the number of core golfers (those at least 18 years old and playing at least eight rounds per year) has grown to 390,000 (Chao Xiang Group, 2015). In 2015, 136 national and international golf events were on the schedule of the China Golf Association, whereas in 2009, the total number was only 81 – (China Golf Association, 2009, 2015). Given this growth in China's golf industry, more academic research is needed to fill the gap between literature and practice.

Coinciding with this growth in the golf industry in China, a number of international golf events have been held there, including the WGC-HSBC Champions event. This is a professional men's golf tournament sponsored by HSBC and was held successfully at the Sheshan Golf Club in Songjiang, a district of Shanghai, from 2005 to 2011. Initially, it was a stand-alone professional golf tournament and was only considered to be a top international golf event in China. From 2007, however, the event became one of Shanghai's top six annual major sport events with the Shanghai mega-event strategy and in 2009 its status was elevated to become a WGC event.

After moving for one year to Mission Hills Golf Club in Shenzhen, the owner of the WGC-HSBC Champions moved the event back to Shanghai and claimed that this event would be held there permanently. This move was supported by the Shanghai Administration of Sport, who believe this event is one of the best proof that Shanghai is capable of hosting mega-events and the hosting of events improve the status and influence of Shanghai as a metropolitan city. This move saw the event increase its prize money to US\$8.5 million and its status was further elevated by becoming part of the PGA Tour's FedEx Cup schedule. All these changes have made this event in line with the other three World Golf Championships played in the United States, and a key part of the 2013 European Tour's Final Series (WGC-HSBC Golf Champions, 2013).

In consideration of the status of this event, the objective of this study was to explore the perceptions of local residents towards the impacts of an annual major sport event – the WGC-HSBC Champions. The research questions investigated were:

- (1) What are the basic level of awareness of the WGC-HSBC Champions professional golf tournament on local residents in Shanghai, China?
- (2) What are the attitudes towards the impacts the event has on local residents?
- (3) What are the attitudes of local residents towards Shanghai hosting the WGC-HSBC Champions professional golf tournament in the future?
- (4) What are the factors that influence local residents' perception of and support for the WGC-HSBC Champions professional golf tournament?

The first section of this paper presents a review of the literature that emphasizes residents' awareness and perceptions, perceived benefits

and costs of major sports events, measurement of perceptions, and the theoretical framework. Based on this literature review and the research questions outlined above, the methodology used to answer the research questions is then described. Following the explanation of the findings, some theoretical and managerial implications are presented.

2. Literature review

2.1. Awareness and perceptions of residents

In this research, awareness is defined as the recognition of the name of the WGC-HSBC Champions, and perceptions involve 'the picking up of information about the world made available to the perceiver by various sorts of physical stimulation' (Schwartz, 2004, p. 93). In this context, the information, as a crucial stimulation, should be the primary focus of awareness. Some researchers have noticed this relationship and investigated participants' awareness of events before assessing their perceptions. Liu (2013) asked foreign tourists to recall the name of Shanghai's major annual sport events. The result showed that the highest level of awareness was the Shanghai F1 Grand Prix (24.7%), while the awareness of the WGC-HSBC Champions was below 1%. Chen (2011) investigated local residents' awareness of eight annual tourism events in Macao and got a similar result. Both authors focused on the overall perceptions of all annual major events in general, so their research included respondents who could recall at least one annual major event. In other words, the participants who did not know the Macao Open Golf Tournament or the WGC-HSBC Champions, but knew other events, could also be involved in the research. However, Kaiser, Wolfing, and Fuhrer (1999) indicated that actual awareness is a prerequisite to a person's perceptions and attitudes. Moreover, unlike Liu's and Chen's research, the current study aims to explore residents' perceptions towards the WGC-HSBC Champions specifically. Therefore, this study not only assessed residents' awareness of the WGC-HSBC Champions but also considered their awareness as the prerequisite of investigating their perceptions towards the impacts of this event.

The perceived success of an event is often determined by the enthusiasm of the local community (Gursoy, Kim, & Uysal, 2004). Furthermore, residents tend to think more about whether the hosting of the event has been worth it after the event had finished (Hiller & Wanner, 2011). Therefore, understanding the perceptions of locals, as well as the factors that influence their perceptions and supporting attitudes, is crucial in evaluating the success of an event and achieving favourable support for it. Although a number of studies have examined the impacts of major sport events on the host community (Ye et al., 2012), most of these previous research projects have taken place in western countries. China's traditional Confucian culture makes it distinguishable from mostly Western countries where the majority of previous research originated. Encouraged by traditional Confucian culture, Chinese citizens are more likely to follow the mainstream consensus values and to respect or tolerate their government (Chen, 2011; Liu, Broom, & Wilson, 2014; Zhou, 2010).

2.2. Perceived benefits and costs of major sport events

Economic impacts are considered as the main driver behind the rapid growth of major sport events (Crompton, 1999). However, it is argued that local authorities have paid too much attention to economic impacts and ignore social and cultural impacts of major events (Bull & Lovell, 2007). Residents' perceptions towards a major event can be influenced by perceived economic, social and environmental benefits and costs (Ritchie, Shipway, & Cleeve, 2009).

Furthermore, many researchers have found that non-economic impacts are more related to the perceptions of residents than economic impacts. Baldock, Maes, and Buelens (2011) found that economic and tourism development were not perceived by local residents as a benefit after the Tour de France, while cultural interest

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