



# Longitudinal impacts of a recurring sport event on local residents with different level of event involvement

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## ABSTRACT

Many of the studies that examined the impacts of major sport events have been cross-sectional and focused on one-off mega events such as World Cup and Olympics. In addition, athletes participating in those events usually are of elite level, and community members from the host city rarely have a chance to be involved as participants. While local residents in the host city could be involved in an event with various roles (ex., participants, spectators and non-participants), they could, thus, have different degrees of association with the event. Such differences could be reflected in many areas, such as knowledge of the event, attention level, or perception of the event. Thus, this study aims to investigate such differences in the setting of a recurring, mass participatory sport event (Standard Charter Hong Kong Marathon, SCHKM), and further examines the changes in residents' perceptions overtime utilizing data collected before ( $n = 944$ ), during ( $n = 884$ ) and after ( $n = 838$ ) the event from Hong Kong residents. Findings indicate that residents' level of involvement is a significant determinant of both positive and negative impact perceptions and those impact perceptions are likely to change over time. Residents who participated in the marathon reported a significantly higher positive impact perceptions and significantly lower negative impact perceptions compared to spectators and other residents. Negative impact perceptions reported were significantly higher during the event compared to negative impact perception reported before or after the event. Theoretical and practical implications of the findings are discussed.

## 1. Introduction

Major sport events have increased in importance for modern cities as they bring multi-faceted impacts to the host community (Bakhsh, Potwarka, Nunkoo, & Sunnasse, 2018). In addition to event-driven economic benefits they convey (Bob & Swart, 2009), policy makers also view major events as a tool to enhance image or exposure of a host city and ultimately revitalize economies and wellbeing of the local community (King, Chen, & Funk, 2015; Potwarka & Banyai, 2016; Smith, 2006). Because of these views, sport event tourism has become one of the most rapidly growing tourism segments as evidenced by the swift increase in attention given to this topic by tourism scholars (Kim, Jun, Walker, & Drane, 2015; Pop, Kanovici, Ghic, & Andrei, 2016; Weed & Bull, 2009). In 2016, the global sports tourism sector accounted for 12.12% of international tourism market (Technavio, 2017). More importantly, sport events have also been reported to generate numerous intangible benefits to host cities, such as increasing sense of community, national or civic pride, cultural identity, sport participation, and

quality of life (e.g., Crombie, 2011; Freeman, 2012; Kerwin, Warner, Walker, & Stevens, 2015; Leng, Kuo, Baysa-Pee, & Tay, 2015; Pfitzner & Koenigstorfer, 2016).

Because of positive impacts of sport events, an increasing number of communities are planning to develop sport events or compete fiercely to host these events (Gursoy, Yolal, Ribeiro, & Panosso Netto, 2017). Previous studies suggest that socio-cultural and psychological impacts stemming from sport events are more significant than economic outcomes (Kaplanidou et al., 2013). Thus, focusing on social impacts as an outcome of a major sport event may be warranted. Previously, studies on social impacts of sport events have been mainly cross-sectional and focused on one-off elite athletic events such as World Cup and Olympics that took place without participation of community members as competitors in those events (Gursoy, Chi, Ai, & Chen, 2011; Kaplanidou et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2015; Kim, Gursoy, & Lee, 2006; Liu, 2016). Consequently, researchers have not paid much attention to impacts of type of events where they recur annually with active residents' participation as competitors. The current study serves to fill this gap and

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enhance our understanding of social impact perceptions of those events where most locals are participating athletes in the event.

This study aims to examine the longitudinal change in residents' perception of social impacts resulting from a recurring, mass participatory sport event. While several previous studies have compared before and after event effects, context of this chosen event allows the research team to collect data on the date of the event from residents who participate in the event, in addition to the pre- and post- event data collections from participants. Compared with one-off elite athletic events, this chosen recurring annual mass participatory event can potentially create a sustainable sport culture, as well as fostering a sense of pride and social cohesion in the community (Major Sports Events Committee, 2018).

The event being examined in this study is the Standard Charter Hong Kong Marathon (SCHKM). The SCHKM is among the largest sporting events that are regularly hosted in Hong Kong. The marathon was first held in 1997, and it was recognized among the IAAF Silver Label Road Races by the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) in 2013. It was upgraded to the Gold Label Road Race in 2016 after 20 years of improvement. The event has grown tremendously over the years – from a race of just around 1000 participants to the largest participatory sport event in Hong Kong with > 74,000 runners participating in Marathon, Half Marathon, 10 km Race, Youth Dash, Family Run, 10 km and 3 km Wheelchair Races in 2018, signifying its major sport event status in Hong Kong. The marathon is also recognized as a “Brand Hong Kong Event” by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (Hong Kong Amateur Athletic Association, 2018). The SCHKM is supported by the Hong Kong Tourism Board, whose mission is to market and promote Hong Kong as a travel destination worldwide (Hong Kong Tourism Board, 2018), as well as by the Major Sports Events Committee (MSEC). Both organizations are subsidized by the Hong Kong government and their funding trickles through to the SCHKM in order to accomplish their missions.

It is reasonable to assume that mass participatory recurring events will bring different types of impact to the hosting community in comparison to one-off elite athletic events. Furthermore, the event is likely to have a cumulative impact on the host community over time since it has the capacity to turn the host city into an ‘active sport tourist’ destination, attracting a steady stream of amateur sport competitors to visit the city and participate in the event every year (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010). This helps enhance the host city's tourism portfolio and build a brand for the city (Parent, Eskerud, & Hanstad, 2012). Additionally, a mass participatory event like a marathon provides an excellent platform to promote a sustainable sport culture and to foster social cohesion in the community as the majority of participants are local residents. As a result, the host community social impacts can become more relevant and directly tied to their quality of life (Kaplanidou et al., 2013). Therefore, it is crucial and valuable to examine the impacts of events such as SCHKM. Longstanding history (20 years) of the event should yield substantial data that reflects impacts of the event on the community, as well as perceptions local residents have on the event. Additionally, a better understanding of how these impacts are perceived by local residents over time may help in event planning and in turn increase support for more events (Bagiran & Kurgun, 2013; Sharma & Gursoy, 2015).

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Social exchange theory

In order to conceptualize community attitude toward tourism, previous studies have employed the social exchange theory (SET) to illustrate the relationship among the factors that influence the attitude (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010). In the tourism context, SET depicts local residents' perception of tourism development as positive when those individuals receive more benefits

from the tourism industry, and some residents perceive tourism development as negative when they perceive incurring more cost because of it (Gursoy, Ouyang, Nunkoo, & Wei, 2018). Understandably, those who possess positive attitudes would support continuous development of the industry and vice versa. Using the SET and other existing literature at the time, Gursoy and Rutherford (2004) developed a theoretical model that examines the direct/indirect effects of tourism impacts on the local community, as well as the factors that would influence the local residents' support to the industry. Those factors include level of community concern, eco-centric values, utilization of tourism resource base, community attachment, state of the local economy, economic benefits, social benefits, social costs, and cultural benefits. Similarly, the study conducted by Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2010) also suggests that residents can perceive both benefits and cost from economic, environmental, social and cultural aspects of tourism, and their support to the development of tourism industry is dictated by their area of residence and the amount of benefit garnered directly and/or indirectly from tourism. In applying Gursoy and Rutherford's (2004) findings to this study, factors such as community concern, economic benefit, social benefits, social costs and cultural benefits seem to be compatible with the factors examined currently.

#### 2.1.1. Social impact

While recurring events can have multidimensional impacts on host communities, social impacts of these events have received little attention in the literature. To date, event studies have focused largely upon measuring economic rather than social effects, mostly in the contexts of major one-off events (Kim & Jeon, 2017). Empirical research on social impacts of major recurring sport events is limited (Yao & Schwarz, 2018), yet an understanding of such impacts on residents is critical to the event success and long-term sustainability (Balduck, Maes, & Buelens, 2011; Jorgenson & Nickerson, 2016).

Definitions of social impacts are often adopted from tourism studies, as sport events could also be perceived as touristic activities (Balduck et al., 2011). A widely accepted definition is from Hall (1992), p. 67, in which he defines social impact as “the manner in which tourism and travel effect changes in the collective and individual value systems, behavior patterns, community structures, lifestyle and quality of life”. Using this definition, some authors have suggested that social aspects of economic and environmental change should be included in the same scope (e.g., Fredline & Faulkner, 2000). This broader definition of social impacts sometimes leads to identification of enormous number of possible effects as many impacts could have a social dimension. Fredline (2005), therefore, suggests summarizing event impacts into three domains: economic, environmental and social. In line of this view, Malfas, Houlihan, and Theodoraki (2004) proposed that economic impacts should be viewed via the socio-economic perspective and, therefore, should be referred as the monetary influence of an event that helps advance the social status of the host community. They also cautioned that most of the direct income derived from an event-ticket sales, merchandizing, television and sponsorship rights- usually does not have major effect on the economic development of the host community because most of that income is used to pay the expenses for organizing the event itself. Instead, the majority of economic impact resulting from a sport event should be considered in terms of the potential of increasing the city's profile as a tourist destination, as well as the place for future business and other commercial investment. In the long term, it is these subsequent activities that would create new jobs and contribute to the financial well-being of the host city or region (Gursoy & Kendall, 2006).

The exposure a major sport event can potentially bring to a city is one of the most crucial socio-economical contribution to the host community. For example, a longitudinal study related to the image of the city of Calgary before and after it hosted a Winter Olympic Games has shown a substantial positive impact on the awareness and knowledge level of the city, especially in Europe and the US, when compared to other Canadian cities (Ritchie & Smith, 1991). In another study of the

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