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## Research Paper

## Residents' support for a mega-event: The case of the 2014 FIFA World Cup, Natal, Brazil

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the impacts of residents' trust along with other factors such as community concerns, eco-centric values, and community attachment on local residents' perceived impacts of and their support for the 2014 FIFA World Cup, Brazil. A theoretical model developed on the premise of social exchange theory is tested utilizing data collected from the residents of Natal, Brazil, that hosted three games of the 2014 FIFA World Cup. Findings indicate that expected benefits is the most critical determinant of locals' support/opposition for hosting a mega-event in their community. Trust is found to have the strongest influence on locals' perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of the game. While the community attachment is found to have significant impact on costs perceptions, community concern significantly influences locals' benefit perceptions. Theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed.

## 1. Introduction

The costs associated with hosting mega-events such as the Olympics or the FIFA World Cup are likely to be higher than the economic benefits the events are expected to generate (Giesecke & Madden, 2007; Madden, 2006). Still, destinations continue to submit their bids and invest enormous amount of resources in the process, hoping that they will be selected as the host of an international mega sporting event (Gursoy & Kendall, 2006). In most cases, submitting a bid for hosting a mega-event tend to be a politically driven process to derive such advantages as increased international publicity and recognition, enhanced branding and image of the destination, development of new sporting venues, economic regeneration, and community pride (Chien, Ritchie, Shipway & Henderson, 2012; Pillay & Bass, 2008; Prayag, Hosany, Nunkoo & Alders, 2013). Studies also suggest that when it comes to hosting a mega-event, host community residents tend to place more importance on the positive social impacts such as community pride and international recognition than on the positive economic impacts an event can generate (Gursoy, Chi, Ai, & Chen, 2011; Prayag et al., 2013). Furthermore, residents view these mega-events as mediums that can help build social cohesion by reinforcing ties within a community (Gursoy, Kim et al., 2004).

While hosting a mega-event can generate significant benefits for the host community, these benefits may be offset by the negative economic, environmental, and socio-cultural impacts which may result in opposition from local residents. As suggested by previous studies, the success of any form of tourism development relies heavily on the support from local residents (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c; Nunkoo & So, 2016; Nunkoo, Smith, & Ramkissoon, 2013; Olya & Gavilyan, 2016; Park, Nunkoo, & Yoon, 2015; Ramkissoon & Nunkoo, 2011). Their hospitality is a must for providing a satisfactory experience for visitors as well as spectators. Anger, apathy or mistrust of local population can have negative influences on visitors' satisfaction with their experiences by making them feel unwelcome (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004). It is therefore critical to understand local residents' attitude toward any form of mega-event development and its determinants to achieve the goal of favorable host community support for the development (Sharma, Dyer, Carter, & Gursoy, 2008).

Several studies have examined residents' perceptions of hosting mega-events in their communities and the factors that are likely to influence their support utilizing the social exchange theory (SET) (Gursoy & Kendall, 2006; Prayag et al., 2013; Zhou & Ap, 2009). While these studies have identified a number of factors such as perceptions of costs and benefits, community concerns, community attachments, and

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environmental concerns as critical determinants of residents' attitudes, trust which is an important component of SET (Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2016; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011a, 2012a; Nunkoo & Smith, 2013) has been rarely considered by existing research. The bidding and planning process of mega-events tend to be a politically charged process with minimal involvement and inputs from locals who may not receive much economic benefits from the development. Therefore, residents' trust in government and organizers may have a significant influence on their perceptions of mega-event impacts.

It is worth acknowledging that residents' trust have received some attention from tourism scholars (Nunkoo, 2015; Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2016, 2017; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011a; Nunkoo, Ramkissoon, & Gursoy, 2012; Nunkoo & Smith, 2013; Olya & Gavilyan, 2017). Nevertheless, these studies considered trust in the context of non-intrusive forms of tourism development which have different magnitude of impacts on local communities when compared to single and short-term obtrusive events such as World Cup Games. This is an important omission in existing literature because trust is context specific, where residents may trust government in some respects, but not in others (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). Because the trust heuristic is tied-up to the consequences association with a certain type of development, it becomes more salient for those types of development that require communities to sacrifice more with little in return (Hetherington, 2004; Hetherington & Globetti, 2002; Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2017) as in the case of mega-events (Giesecke & Madden, 2007; Madden, 2006). Such a proposition has been verified empirically in political science (e.g. Hetherington, 2004) and tourism (Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2017).

To-date, the role of residents' trust in shaping their opinion toward mega-events is unknown to researchers, limiting our understanding of the consequences of political trust in such contexts. Existing models of residents' support available in the tourism literature therefore need to be revisited by including new variables such as trust and tested in new contexts. Any research that investigates the context-specific nature of residents' trust makes valuable theoretical contributions to a field of study (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2001; Christensen & Lægred, 2005; Levi & Stoker, 2000; Wang, 2005). Therefore, this study examines the influence of residents' trust, along with their level of community concerns, eco-centric values, and community attachment on their perceptions of a mega sporting event, namely, the 2014 FIFA World Cup, Brazil. In turn, perceptions of impacts are proposed to influence support for the mega sporting event. Fig. 1 presents the model being tested in this research. The model is developed from the existing literature (e.g. Gursoy & Kendall, 2006) and has as theoretical basis the SET.

## 2. Mega-event discourses in Brazil

The study of residents' support for mega sport events fits well with public discourses on Brazil. Brazil hosted the first mega sporting event

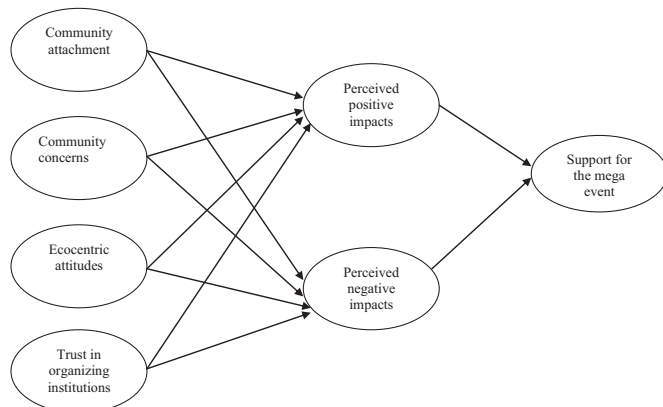


Fig. 1. Theoretical framework of the study.

namely, the American Football Championship in 1919 and eventually the South American Games in 1922 (Santos, 2014). More recently, the country had the privilege of hosting two additional high profile mega sport events: the FIFA World Cup Games in 2014 and the displacement of disadvantaged the Summer Olympic Games in 2016. Such projects are considered by the government as catalysts for social and economic development and as promotional opportunities to expand tourism development and increase foreign direct investment in the country (Schausteck de Almeida, Bolsmann, Marchi Júnior, & de Souza, 2015). Bidding for and hosting mega sport events is also a way for the Brazilian government to gain power, promote economic success, and show diplomatic importance which in turn bring a geopolitical balance between the North and the South within the context of global politics and international relations (Cornelissen, 2010; Curi, Knijnik, & Mascarenhas, 2011; Maharaj, 2015; O'Neil, 2001). As a result, government policies in Brazil have been attuned to accommodate and promote mega-event development. Santos (2014) discusses how the government relate mega sport events to international politics and labels Brazil as 'an emerging power establishing itself in the world of international sports mega-events' (p. 1312). However, despite the expected economic, social, and political benefits of mega sport events, it seems that such developments have not lived to the expectations of the Brazilian people.

Mega sport events have benefitted mostly the commercial elites in Brazil who exert considerable power in the development process (Schausteck de Almeida et al., 2015; Henne, 2015). Curi et al. (2011) and Maharaj (2015) discuss how mega-event development in the country perpetuates socio-economic inequalities, marginalizing the poor and violating human rights. Social inequalities arising from mega-event development in Brazil create distinctions and confrontations between what Curi et al. (2011) labelled as 'first and third world persons but not on an international or continental level, but inside one and the same city' (p. 142). It is estimated that the 2014 FIFA World Cup Games led to the displacement of around 170,000 Brazilians and violations of workers' rights, coupled with a high level of labour exploitation (Maharaj, 2015). Contributing to the unrest are the heightened perception of corruption and lack of transparency in the mega-event planning process which have bred a culture of distrust in event planning bodies in Brazil (Henne, 2015; Maharaj, 2015; Spalding et al., 2014). Corruption is inherent to and a systemic problem in mega-event development in the country. Brazilians have not taken long to express their disenchantment with mega-event development. The country saw massive protests against the 2013 FIFA Confederation Cup in several cities (Gaffney, 2016; Maharaj, 2015). Brazilians protested against increase in transports fares, corruption, lack of public services, and increase in crime rates and poverty level resulting from the development. In a country where public discourses on mega-event development and its consequences are more than ever fervent, understanding the community perspectives on the impacts of mega-events is more than ever important. Such an investigation can aid government and event developers in designing appropriate measures to gain public support for mega developments in Brazil.

## 3. Modeling resident's attitudes towards mega-events

The model to be tested in this study has its theoretical basis in the SET and builds on the results of earlier studies. Several researchers have examined how residents' perceptions of costs and benefits of a mega-event may influence their support/opposition for hosting such a development in their community (Gursoy & Kendall, 2006; Prayag et al., 2013; Zhou & Ap, 2009). SET suggests that individuals determine their willingness to participate in any exchange after carefully examining the rewards and costs the exchange can generate. According to this theory, perceptions of the impacts of mega-events are likely to be formed based on the expected costs and rewards of the exchange between residents and the mega-event development. Consequently, individuals who view the exchange as generating more benefits than costs may perceive the

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