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Conceptualizing the Social Impacts of Sport Tourism Development

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Sport tourism development yields diverse impacts on host destinations, usually through the hosting of mega sporting events, ranging from quantifiable economic gains to intangible aspects like social impacts. However, prevailing research largely emphasizes economic aspects, leaving the notion of social impacts and their measurement contested. This gap emerges due to the elusive nature and uncertain sustainability of these impacts, prompting a call for critical examination. This paper offers a review that delves into the anticipated social impacts arising from the development of sport tourism. It identifies six key social impacts deemed significant and elucidates the conventional methodologies employed for their measurement. These highlighted impacts include sport related benefits, social cohesion, inclusivity and diversity, volunteering and upskilling, destination branding, and disaster preparedness. By synthesizing this knowledge, the paper charts a trajectory for future research endeavors. This agenda responds to the evolving landscape of sport tourism and its changing dynamics, while also emphasizing the integration of social impacts into the framework of sustainable development.

Keywords mega sporting events, legacy, destination, community, well-being

1 Introduction

Sport is important to our society due to its profound and lasting effects on the communities

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(Bradish & Cronin, 2009). Sport tourism, characterized by the participation in or observation of sports as an integral part of travel, is one of the fastest growing sectors in tourism (Hirtz & Ross, 2010). Sport tourism destinations, such as Melbourne in Australia and Barcelona in Spain, have emerged as vibrant hubs that uniquely blend the thrill of sports and the allure of travel. The convergence of sport and travel creates a unique experience, as visitors are drawn to witness athletic events that celebrate achievement and hard work, while engaging in other cultural activities (Deery, Jago, & Fredline, 2004). This special form of tourism has been the subject of considerable research given its ability to draw tourists, attract global media attention, promote the destination, and entail significant infrastructure investment (Avraham, 2014).

Because sport tourism generates economic benefits to the host community, usually through the hosting of major or mega sporting events, research efforts have predominantly concentrated on the economic ramifications of sport tourism, considering quantifiable outcomes such as revenue generation, job creation, and investment influx (Ritchie, Chien, & Shipway, 2020; Pappalepore & Duignan, 2016). The examination of social impacts has remained relatively limited due to their qualitative nature and inherent challenge of precisely determining their extent (Ritchie, Shipway, & Cleeve, 2009). Despite the wide-ranging effects that sport tourism, particularly mega sporting event induced tourism, can have, this paper narrows its focus on the intricate interplay between sports, tourism, and the social fabric of the host communities. In doing so, it highlights the existing disparity and underscores the urgent need to delve into and gain a comprehensive understanding of the social dimensions of sport tourism.

The domain of social impacts is complex and multi-dimensional, spanning individual, community, host city, and even national levels (Ritchie et al., 2020; Smith, Ritchie, & Chien, 2018). Unlike economic benefits that can be quantified, social impacts remain elusive due to their intangible nature (Ritchie et al., 2009). These impacts encompass a wide range of aspects, such as fostering civic pride, strengthening of social capital, enhancing destination image perceptions, and cultivating novel business networks (Mair, Chien, Kelly, & Derrington, 2023; Mair & Duffy, 2018). However, it is crucial to acknowledge the dual nature of these impacts, which can entail both benefits and costs for residents and the broader community (Chien, Ritchie, Shipway, & Henderson, 2012; Fredline & Faulkner, 2001).

This paper provides an overview of the existing literature regarding the conceptualization and evaluation of social impacts within the context of sports tourism. Its primary aim is to challenge the prevalent perspective, assess the current state of the field, address pivotal research questions, and identify avenues for advancing reliable and practical social impact assessment

methods. By shedding lights on the less-explored facets of social impacts, this paper enriches our understanding of the influence of sport tourism on host destinations and lays the groundwork for future research endeavors.

In the subsequent sections, we will delve into six major categories of social impacts outlined in the existing literature: Sport related benefits; social cohesion; inclusivity and diversity; volunteering and upskilling; destination branding; and disaster preparedness. These discussions will establish a comprehensive foundation that not only enriches our understanding but also lays the groundwork for future empirical research dedicated to advancing the sustainable development of sport tourism.

2 Sport Related Benefits

Social impacts associated with sport tourism naturally involve sport related benefits including sport participation, infrastructure development, community health, and the advancement of pathways to elite sports (Mair et al., 2023). While some aspects of these impacts are tangible and can be readily measured (e.g., the number and type of infrastructure developed), others are less obvious and more challenging to evaluate (e.g., how the infrastructure is used by the local community to enhance physical and mental well-being).

Conventionally, effects related to sport participation are evaluated using surveys, both cross-sectional and longitudinal, that assess the frequency of participation and engagement in grassroots sports and physical activities (e.g., Carmichael, Grix, & Marqués, 2013; Weed et al., 2015). Multi-item Likert scales are often employed to measure residents' sports participation, access to community sporting facilities, health, and subjective perceptions of well-being (e.g., Al-Emadi et al., 2017; Cleland, Ellaway, Clark, & Kearns, 2020; Kaplanidou, 2017). However, there is a lack of consensus regarding whether mega-events definitively elevate sports participation at the grassroots level (Bauman, Bellew, & Craig, 2015; Toohey & Taylor, 2008). For example, prior research indicates that while sport participation is frequently highlighted as a central element of mega sporting event legacy, positive outcomes materialize only when host governments actively engage the community, formulate strategies to sustain relevant activities, and effectively coordinate efforts of various government sectors as well as stakeholders (e.g., Cleland et al., 2020; Reis, Frawley, Hodgetts, Thomson, & Hughes, 2017). Several post-event industry reports also yield inconclusive results concerning the notion that mega sporting events enhance the extent of physical activity among local residents (e.g., London East Research Institute, 2007; Office of the Commonwealth Games, 2019).

Assessment of sporting infrastructure developed as a result of event or sport tourism development also involves the use of community surveys, gauging opinions on liveability and the extent of facility utilization and satisfaction (e.g., Kaplanidou, 2012; Kim, Jun, Walker, & Drane, 2015). Notably, these measures are often conducted in conjunction with quality of life evaluations, which could introduce the possibility that residents' views of the new infrastructure are shaped by their wider perceptions of their overall quality of life (Mair et al., 2023).

The influence of sport tourism development on a host country's elite sporting development and pathways is typically examined through the country's performance on the global stage (e.g., Chen, Zheng, & Dickson, 2018; Karadakis & Kaplanidou, 2012). While there is some evidence indicating that sport tourism initiatives, especially the hosting of mega sporting events, can create momentum in elite sport success (e.g., Toohey & Taylor, 2008), research explaining why this momentum tends to wane in the years following the event remains limited. The concept of the aspirational nature of elite sports and its potential impact on inspiring activity within the host population remains underexplored and warrants further investigation (Grix, & Carmichael, 2012).

3 Social Cohesion

In the context of sport tourism, the concept of "social cohesion" holds paramount significance. Governments and policymakers frequently leverage mega sporting event as a strategy to promote sport tourism, while fostering a sense of community, connectedness, and active participation within a destination (Duffy & Mair, 2017). High levels of social cohesion are closely linked to positive perceptions of well-being, quality of life, and the smooth functioning of society (Kaplanidou et al., 2013). Nonetheless, examination of social cohesion remains relatively limited in academic research, and a consensus on a universally accepted approach for measuring this vital social impact is yet to be established. Instead, researchers often turn to the assessment of civic pride and social capital to better understand the underpinnings of social cohesion (Gibson, Walker, Thapa, Kaplanidou, Geldenhuys, & Coetzee, 2014). Measurement of social cohesion, therefore, frequently involves self-report surveys among residents, employing Likert scales and focusing on related concepts such as social capital and civic pride (e.g., Al-Emadi et al., 2017; Duignan, Pappalepore, & Everett, 2019; Li, Hsu, & Lawton, 2015).

While the term "civic pride" lacks a clear definition, it is commonly associated with collective sentiments about a place that contribute to a shared and cohesive community identity (Wood, 2006). In the tourism literature, several studies have revealed a positive correlation between

mega-events and the degree of civic pride among residents, extending beyond the host city to include the entire host country (e.g., Chi, Ouyang, & Xu, 2018; Gibson et al., 2014; Karadakis & Kaplanidou, 2012; Liu, Broom, & Wilson, 2014). Social capital, on the other hand, is a multifaceted construct encompassing the intricate web of social structures and interactions within societies (Coleman, 1988). It can be understood as an anticipation within a community of regular, honest, and cooperative behavior grounded in shared norms (Gibson et al., 2014). High levels of social capital yield a range of positive outcomes, including the creation of a resident society, the nurturing of community bonds, the promotion of collaborative interactions, and the empowerment of the community at large (Ooi, Laing & Mair, 2015). Research has highlighted that mega-events can contribute to an increase in social capital, driven by elevated perceptions of quality of life and well-being (e.g., Kaplanidou, 2012; Kaplanidou et al., 2013). This increase is further associated with bolstered community spirit, intensified national identity, and enhanced social cohesion (e.g., Liu et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2015).

Notably, studies have also highlighted the potential negative impact of sport tourism development on social capital, particularly if the initiatives lead to issues like congestion, noise, heightened crime rates, or other anti-social behaviors and cultural conflicts (Chiam & Cheng, 2013; Kim & Petrick, 2005). In particular, these negative effects can emerge as a result of hosting a mega sporting event (Mair et al., 2023). Despite the limited research into the enduring effects of sport tourism development on residents' social capital, it is evident that the complexities of measuring these impacts amidst evolving social, political, and economic contexts pose significant challenges (Kaplanidou, 2012).

4 Inclusivity and Diversity

Both scholarly investigations and anecdotal evidence emphasize that inclusivity and diversity has emerged as essential focus of sport tourism development. Diversity pertains to the array of differences or variations within a group, while inclusion encapsulates how these diverse members are treated and how they perceive their experiences (Nichols & Ralston, 2011; Ziakas, 2015). As such, social inclusion refers to a process aimed at enhancing the involvement of individuals and groups in society (Mair et al., 2023). It is achieved when individuals of diverse cultural backgrounds, genders, ages, religions, socioeconomic statuses, and abilities feel valued and empowered, and have access to opportunities and resources to enhance their community (Laing & Mair, 2015).

Traditional methods for examining diversity encompass surveys and interviews employing

surrogate indicators (e.g., Al-Emadi et al., 2017; Chen & Tian, 2015; Zhou & Ap, 2009). These proxies involve elements such as the perceived acceptance of diversity, the viewpoints of minority groups including migrants, refugees, the homeless, and indigenous populations regarding their involvement and influence in decision-making, access to resources and opportunities related to tourism or mega sporting event projects, and the extent of any negative behaviors directed towards specific minority groups (e.g., Chen & Tian, 2015; Gibson et al., 2014; Minnaert, 2012; Pappalepore & Duignan, 2016). For example, Lee, Arcodia, and Lee (2012) show that multicultural festivals can foster tolerance of diversity within communities. Still, research exploring how sport tourism impact diverse groups within the host community remains scarce.

Research focusing on the legacies of mega-events further underscores their potential to enhance residents' perceptions of social inclusion (e.g., Kaplanidou et al., 2013; Kim & Petrick, 2005). Cross-sectional surveys are often conducted prior to, during, or shortly after the conclusion of mega-events to illustrate the effects of these events on social inclusion (e.g., Chiam & Cheng, 2013; Gibson et al., 2014; Kim & Petrick, 2005). Another avenue of measurement involves the monitoring and content analysis of social media posts and comments (e.g., Kirilenko & Stepchenkova, 2017). Consequently, uncertainties persist regarding the long-term and causal impacts of mega-events on social inclusion within host cities and countries. Similarly, potential negative consequences of mega-events on social inclusion, such as exacerbating social and cultural divides within communities, remain underexplored (e.g., Minnaert, 2012). Despite research efforts in establishing the relationship between mega-event development and residents' perceptions of inclusivity (e.g., Gursoy, Yolal, Ribeiro, & Panosso Netto, 2017) as well as their trust of relevant government and organizing committees (e.g., Nunkoo, Ribeiro, Sunnassee, & Gursoy, 2018), the existing literature leaves the underlying drivers of this relationship ambiguous (Chi et al., 2018; Ouyang, Gursoy, & Sharma, 2017; Prayag, Hosany, Nunkoo, & Alders, 2013). Two inherent challenges arise and warrant further research attention: addressing confirmation bias stemming from the selected survey participants or the nature of the questions asked, and navigating the influence of cultural and political factors on respondents' perspectives regarding event impacts (Li et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2014; Tournois, 2018).

5 Volunteering and Upskilling

Volunteers are individuals who provide their labor, expertise, skills, and experiences to organizations without receiving monetary compensation (Mair et al., 2023). Hosting mega sporting events as part of the sport tourism development heavily rely on these volunteers, known

as episodic volunteers due to the short-term or one-time volunteering opportunities (Lockstone & Baum, 2009).

Volunteers in the sport tourism context typically include older individuals (Dickson, Darcy, Johns, & Pentifallo, 2016), students, individuals with short-term employment contracts, and those transitioning between part-time or unskilled positions (Gornostaeva & McGurk, 2013). This is because sport tourism in general, and mega-events in particular, have the potential to serve as a catalyst for enhancing the skillset of the local workforce and retaining skilled individuals who initially came to the host community for the event (Kirby, Duignan, & McGillivray, 2018). The process of upskilling, accomplished through volunteer training and experiences, has been associated with elevated educational standards across the wider population, improved employability, and the cultivation of transferable skills applicable in future work, volunteering engagements, and other life domains (e.g., Kirby et al., 2018; Nichols & Ralston, 2011; Werner, Dickson, & Hyde, 2015).

Existing literature suggests that hosting mega sporting events generate a positive social legacy (e.g., Nichols & Ralston, 2011; Fairley et al., 2016). However, the commitment to continue volunteering after a mega-event may not persist (Ralston, Lumsdon, & Downward, 2005; Ritchie et al., 2020). Factors contributing to this temporary nature of volunteering include inadequate government funding for future events or sport activities and insufficient support from organizing committees to establish a lasting volunteering legacy (Nichols, Ralston, & Holmes, 2017). The link between volunteering at a mega-event and sustained volunteer engagement warrants further research efforts.

While volunteering is widely acknowledged for its positive effects on well-being which stems from newfound friendships, deeper community connections, skill acquisition, and the preservation of mental and physical health, there is a lack of universally accepted measures to evaluate the long-term effects of volunteering as a result of sport tourism development (Minnaert, 2012). Previous research has examined the impact of mega-events on education and skill enhancement through community consultation projects and volunteering studies (e.g., Fairley et al., 2016; Nichols & Ralston, 2011). These studies typically involve participants providing self-reported information about their volunteer experiences and the lasting benefits. However, a common limitation is the absence of a baseline for comparing education and skills after the event. Moreover, post-event studies conducted after a considerable time lapse often inadequately consider the influence of external factors on volunteers' skills and employment prospects, including broader economic conditions (e.g., Fairley et al., 2016).

6 Destination Branding

One of the most discussed social impacts of sport tourism is its influence on destination branding, shaping how the host location is perceived and recognized. The concept entails marketing strategies that shape a destination's image and enhances its reputation (Knott, Fyall, & Jones, 2015). This involves conveying a promise of a distinctive and memorable experience unique to that specific location (García, Gómez, & Molina, 2012). The implications of destination branding reach far and wide, affecting the development of tourism, trade, investment, education, and sport (Knott et al., 2015).

Contemporary research indicates that hosting a mega sporting event as part of sport tourism development can significantly influence a destination's brand image, often due to the extensive global media coverage that generates exposure and enhance attractiveness (Kaplanidou et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2015). Some studies suggest that assessments of a destination's brand image tend to become more favorable during the event (e.g., Lepp & Gibson, 2011). However, post-event findings are less consistent, with researchers reporting a decline in brand image perceptions (e.g., Kirilenko & Stepchenkova, 2017; Rojas-Mendez et al., 2019). Critically, the reliability of certain post-event studies may be questioned as they lack comparable pre-event surveys to objectively measure changes in post-event perceptions.

The trajectory of a destination's brand strength before, during, and after a mega sporting event seems to heavily rely on event coverage in mainstream and social media (Kirilenko & Stepchenkova, 2017; Rojas-Mendez et al., 2019). Many facets of a destination's brand, including general awareness, brand association, attitude, reputation, perceived experience, and quality, are intangible, reflecting the strength, favorability, and distinctiveness of its brand equity (García et al., 2012). These aspects are commonly assessed through surveys and interviews, often within broader studies that gauge overall perceptions (e.g., Chen & Tian, 2015; Lepp & Gibson, 2011; Rojas-Mendez et al., 2019). In contrast, elements like exposure, intention to visit, and brand loyalty are measurable and quantifiable. These elements can be evaluated through metrics such as the frequency of destination brand mentions during event broadcasts, repeat visitor statistics, and tourism expenditure (Chalip et al., 2003; Jago, Dwyer, Lipman, van Lill, & Vorster, 2010). Still, research regarding the effect of sport tourism and mega sporting events on destination brands remains fragmented and unsystematic. Most post-event studies take a short-term focus and are conducted within a year of the event's conclusion (e.g., Kim & Petrick, 2005; Rojas-Mendez et al., 2019). Those with a longer timeframe often overlook external factors

that may influence the destination's brand image (e.g., Kaplanidou, 2012; Liu et al., 2014).

7 Disaster Preparedness

In the realm of sport tourism, disaster preparedness carries significant social implications, encompassing measures aimed at preventing, anticipating, and mitigating the impacts of both natural and human-made calamities (Miles & Shipway, 2020). In particular, the scope of mega sporting events, due to their sheer scale and global attention, exposes them to unique and elevated risks spanning from public health and environmental concerns to technological and economic vulnerabilities (Miles & Shipway, 2020). Although the specific nature and array of risks can vary among events and destinations (Walters et al., 2017), these risks often become entangled with or escalated by the occurrence of disasters like cyclones, earthquakes, cyber threats, and acts of terrorism (Mair et al., 2023). The unprecedented disruption brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 serves as a stark illustration of how such disasters can profoundly affect tourism development, events, host communities, and a multitude of stakeholders (Toohey & Taylor, 2008; Wong & Chadwick, 2017).

To minimize the adverse repercussions of disasters, past mega-events have employed strategies and protocols such as risk assessment, disaster simulations, security arrangements, crisis communication, disaster mitigation plans, and allocation of resources (Toohey & Taylor, 2012). Notably, many of these disaster preparedness measures can leave behind a lasting social impact, fortifying communities against future disasters. The 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, for instance, witnessed the adoption of security measures and legislative changes that endured beyond the event's conclusion, thereby fostering community resilience to potential threats both physically and operationally (Shipway, 2018; Toohey & Taylor, 2008).

To date, scholarly investigations into disaster preparedness within sport tourism often employ methodologies such as case studies, in-depth interviews, and content analyses of mainstream media coverage (e.g., Toohey & Taylor, 2012). Insights from these studies underscore the vulnerability of destinations that lack robust preparedness measures, rendering them susceptible to catastrophic risks (Wong & Chadwick, 2017) and potentially giving rise to public distrust, misconceptions, or anxieties (Konstantaki & Wickens, 2010). Other studies examine the awareness and perceptions of risks and disaster preparedness from the perspective of spectators and tourists. These studies often aim to establish a correlation between perceived risks and destination visit or event attendance (e.g., Walters, Shipway, Miles, & Aldrigui, 2017). However, the availability and analysis of quantifiable data in this domain remain limited, primarily

due to the fact that evaluating the efficacy of disaster preparedness measures hinges on the occurrence of a disaster itself. The postponement and cancellation of various mega-events, including the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games due to the COVID-19 pandemic, offer researchers a unique opportunity to scrutinize the effectiveness of diverse disaster preparedness plans, including their capacity to safeguard the well-being of athletes over time and reassure traveling sports enthusiasts (Walters et al., 2017).

8 Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of the social impacts of sport tourism reveals a complex web of interactions that extend far beyond the boundaries of the sporting arena. From sport related benefits to inclusivity, diversity, and disaster preparedness, sport tourism development and associated mega sporting events wield a significant influence on various dimensions of society. The insights gained from these discussions underscore the need for ongoing research to better understand, assess, and harness these impacts for the benefit of host destinations, local communities, and beyond. Looking ahead, several avenues for future research emerge. First, a deeper examination of the long-term effects of sport tourism and associated event development on host communities is warranted. Tracking changes in social impacts over extended periods can shed light on the legacy of such initiatives. Additionally, investigating the interconnectedness of different social impacts can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how they collectively shape the host destination. For example, exploring how mega sporting events promote understanding among different social groups and reduce biases can lead to strategies that capitalize on these events' potential for positive change in physical and mental well-being. Moreover, disaster preparedness presents a critical avenue for future studies. Given the increasing frequency of unexpected crises, understanding how sport tourism development contributes to a community's resilience and analyzing the effectiveness of disaster mitigation plan can yield helpful insights for refining destination marketing strategies to enhance a destination's global image.

Moving forward, future research should also examine the potential adverse outcomes of sport tourism on social dynamics, such as increased crime, displacement of marginalized groups, anti-social behavior, and short-term economic booms followed by downturns (Chiam & Cheng, 2013; Minnaert, 2012). By understanding these potential pitfalls, strategies can be formulated to mitigate negative impacts and ensure that the benefits of sport tourism are more evenly distributed. Employing interdisciplinary approaches, advanced data analytics, and longi-

tudinal studies can provide richer insights into the social impacts of sport tourism. Collaborations between academics, destination marketing organizations, and local communities can foster a more holistic understanding of the intricacies involved. By addressing these research directions, we can harness the power of sport tourism to drive lasting positive change within societies across the globe.

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