

Going Deeper To Get A Wider View — Uncovering Bias In Developing A Comparative Framework For Event Impact Assessment

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Aim of the research/project

As the costs associated with bidding and hosting of mega-events continues to escalate, the need to establish the benefits of these undertakings rises in step with governments coming under increasing scrutiny over the investment in sports events (Preuss, 2015).

Despite the billions spent each year in bidding for, and hosting major sports events; the assessment of claimed benefits lacks a recognised or comparable method for assessing the hosting of major sporting events, with each federation, organiser or agency applying its own methodology.

Despite an increasing body of research on event outcomes and potential classification frameworks, the mega-event dominant research focus neglects other events and their potential impacts; hampering current and prospective hosts from critically reassessing their event portfolio, bidding more selectively, and grounding events within their longer-term development plans and financial resources.

The Global Sport Impact (GSI) project, a partnership between Victoria University and Sportcal UK, sought to explore whether a conceptual framework for the comparative assessment of event impact across events of different scale and type, and across recurrent editions could be established.

Theoretical background

The terminology for the associated and myriad of impacts the hosting of events can have on the organizer has morphed to one of 'legacy' but without any agreed definition of either the term itself or its constituent components (Gratton & Preuss, 2008).

Without a clear definition of legacy, its dimensions or the time over which benefits can be accrued increases confusion in determining how to measure an event. The GSI's focus on 'impact' rather than 'legacy' is therefore not semantic but represents a determination to create a more constrained framework that allows smaller, higher frequency events to be considered alongside quadrennial large scale events on a comparable and consistent basis.

The development of the conceptual framework was grounded in a initial literature review of 200+ papers on dimensions of event impact and of existing frameworks of event legacy assessment (Mair & Whitford, 2013; Preuss 2015; Thomson et al., 2013).

The review identified six core areas (Pillars) of event impact, namely: economic, social, sport, media, brand and environment under which 30 sub-areas (Drivers) identified were able to classified. From 350+ potential measures identified, 200+ metrics were included for rating their importance and reliability in assessing event impact.

Methodology, research design, and data analysis

The pre-testing of the framework with practitioners, specialists, and scholars and found the dimensions to be robust and broadly consistent at the higher order pillars when combined with the drivers identifying specific dimensions.

As "an iterative multistage process, designed to transform opinion into group consensus" (Hasson & Keeney, 2011) a Delphi study enabled the GSI project to determine a larger consensus from a diverse independent views across a global panel of experts, with Sportcal's subscriber base ensuring the views of government, national and international sporting associations, city officials and event practioners were added to VU's academic network.

The consensus ratings on each of the proposed conceptual framework's core elements of pillars, drivers and measures was established across three survey rounds, with each respondent's previous weightings re-presented for amendment or confirmation in the following round. The outcome delivered both a 'top-down' (Pillars) and 'bottom-up' (Measures) scaling method.

The approach towards consensus is academically rigorous but this paper highlights how individual consensus scores can mask significant differences and bias within the expert views.

Results, discussion, and implications/conclusions

Discussion of selected analysis and findings from three rounds of the study will seek to highlight how differences in the weightings assigned to six core impact areas reflect a lack of cross-discipline perspective in research rather than objective assessment; how differing expectations of event owners and event hosts compounds existing concerns around responsibility and risks for event outcomes; and lastly the degree to which a top-down assessment of impact area weightings is consistent (or not) with the ratings on the metrics used to assess the events impact performance.

Uncovering the potential for bias within respondents' perspectives enables their influence on the consensus scores to be explicitly addressed, and reduces the risk of the conceptual framework being skewed by panel composition, and places the importance each dimension in the context of overall event impact, not of researcher interest. These findings are critical to removing biases from a potential framework, and avoiding under/overstating an events' impact especially across events of differing scale.

Future plans include application of the consensus weightings to the event data on 2,500+ events held by Sportcal and making them subject to further expert review.

References

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