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Host population perceptions of the social impacts of sport tourism events in transition countries

Evidence from Croatia

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to empirically investigate residents' perceptions of social impacts from co-hosting the 2009 World Men's Handball Championship (WMHC09) in a small Croatian city – Split – in response to the need for social impacts research at a variety of sport tourism events and locations. Additional analysis was performed on a number of socio-demographic factors that may affect the magnitude of residents' perceptions.

Design/methodology/approach – A quantitative methodology was employed using a convenience sampling method. A drop and mail-back technique with self-completed surveys was used. A total of 92 completed surveys were returned. Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis tests were used to test for patterns of social impacts across demographic variables.

Findings – Overall, respondents' perceived the social impacts from co-hosting WMHC09 as mostly positive. However, the majority of respondents believed that the public monies spent on a new arena construction should have been allocated to construct facilities for which there is a greater public need (healthcare centers, schools, etc.). Variations in respondents' perceptions generally could not be explained by their socio-demographic characteristics.

Practical implications – Any future decisions to use public monies for one-time financially intensive events should perhaps be subjected to a decision by a popular vote.

Originality/value – This is one of the few studies to examine the residents' perceptions of the social impacts of sport tourism events in transition countries. It also extends social exchange theory and reports validity and reliability of the social impacts scale.

Keywords Sport tourism, Events, Social impacts, Resident perceptions, Transition countries, Handball, Tourism, Sports, Croatia

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

An estimated cumulative television audience of 26.29 billion and a total of 3.35 million spectators at 64 sold out games watched the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany. It was broadcast to 214 countries on 376 channels, and a total of 73,000 hours were dedicated to its media coverage (FIFA, 2007). The 2004 Summer Olympics, staged in Athens, Greece, provided even more – the cumulative TV audience estimated at 40 billion (Horne, 2007), along with 5.3 million ticketed spectators (Embassy of Greece, 2004). Moreover, an estimated 3.9 billion viewers watched parts of the Summer Olympics in Athens on TV, with a total of 35,000 hours of media coverage.

Both the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics represent a sport tourism mega-event. "Sport tourism events refer to those sport activities that attract tourists of which a large percentage are spectators [...] [and] have the potential to attract non-residents, media, technical personnel, athletes, coaches and other sporting officials" (Kurtzman



and Zauhar, 2003, p. 44). Mega-events are defined as “large-scale cultural (including commercial and sporting) events, which have dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance” (Roche, 2000, p. 1). Additionally, the volume of a mega-event should exceed one million visits and its reputation should be that of a “must-see” event (Marris, 1987). Conversely, a sport tourism event that does not meet the criteria above might instead be referred to as either small, medium, or major event. The theme of this article, that is, the 2009 World Men’s Handball Championship (WMHC09) – hosted in Croatia – featured over 400,000 spectators in 110 games, 1.58 billion in cumulative TV audience, and 1,420 hours of media coverage on 90 channels (International Handball Federation (IHF), 2010; Rowland, 2009). Thus, it is apparent that WMHC09 figures pale in comparison to those for the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup. What is more, the WMHC09 attendance falls well below the one-million-visitors criteria, as defined by Marris (1987). Therefore, WMHC09 may not be considered a mega-event, but rather a major or a medium sport tourism event.

Irrespective of size, events are recognized internationally as an important component of sport tourism (Getz, 1997; Gammon and Robinson, 2003; Penot, 2003; Sofield, 2003; Zauhar, 2004), and are becoming a strong component of tourism destination development and marketing (Mules and Faulkner, 1996; Ritchie and Smith, 1991; Tassiopoulos, 2005). It is also generally understood that events can have positive and/or negative economic, social, and environmental impacts on host communities (Bull and Lovell, 2007; Fredline *et al.*, 2003; Getz, 1991; Jeong, 1995; Kim and Lee, 2006; Lee and Han, 1999; Ntloko and Swart, 2008; Ritchie, 1984; Turco *et al.*, 2003). While research on the impacts of sport tourism events has focussed primarily on the economic effects, the social impacts are empirically under-researched (Ohmann *et al.*, 2006). Recognizing this imbalance, in recent years, researchers have paid increasing attention to the hitherto neglected social issues of sport tourism mega-events (Bob and Swart, 2009; Fredline *et al.*, 2003; Jones, 2001; Ntloko and Swart, 2008; Ohmann *et al.*, 2006; Ritchie and Adair, 2004; Turco *et al.*, 2003; Zhou and Ap, 2009).

Despite these recent research tendencies, there is still a paucity of empirical research on the social impacts of sport tourism events in countries in transition and developing countries. To date, most social impacts research has focussed on sport tourism events in developed countries, such as Germany, France, UK, Australia, South Africa, etc. (e.g. Bull and Lovell, 2007; Fredline, 2005; Higham, 1999; Ohmann *et al.*, 2006; Preuss and Solberg, 2006), while research on events in transition and developing countries remains an uncharted territory. The term “countries in transition” denotes a distinct group of countries undergoing a grueling social, political, and economic transformation from a centrally planned economy to a market-based one (Goic and Bilic, 2008). This process of transition began in the late 1980s following the fall of both the Berlin Wall and the communist system. Thus, transition countries comprise the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including the former Soviet Union (United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), 2011). In some transition countries (e.g. Croatia), all aspects of the already arduous social and economic transformation were further exacerbated by war (e.g. Croatia’s 1991-1995 War of Independence). Consequently, while eight countries, who joined the EU in 2004 (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia) have for the most part completed the transition process (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), 2006), Croatia and several other countries are still struggling.

Even though Croatia is expected to become the 28th member of the EU on July 1, 2013, the country is still internationally scrutinized for corruption in all segments of

society and the lack of judicial independence. As a case in point, Croatia's former Prime Minister Ivo Sanader (2003-2009), who abruptly resigned in the middle of his second term in office, was charged by Croatian authorities in two (and counting) high-profile corruption indictments in December of 2010. On that very same day, just hours before it became clear that prosecutors wanted him detained on corruption charges, Sanader fled to Austria, where he was subsequently arrested, and is currently awaiting extradition to Croatia. Moreover, some estimate that corruption in Croatia during the 2000-2010 period amounted to several billion euros.

Taken together, these examples suggest that the social fabric in Croatia cannot be understood simply by looking at developed and other non-transition countries. Because of its turbulent past, compounded with the breadth and magnitude of the ongoing comprehensive changes since the late 1980s, separate investigation appears warranted in the case of Croatia and other countries in transition. Furthermore, understanding social impacts of sport tourism events in a variety of social, political, and economic contexts appears an important avenue for research, because social impacts are thought to vary depending on the host destination's unique historical, cultural, economical and environmental background, as well as on the nature, scale, location, and duration of the events (Barker, 2004; Fredline, 2005).

To help fill this research gap, in this article we empirically explore residents' perceptions of social impacts from co-hosting one major (as opposed to mega) sport tourism event (WMHC09) in one small city (Split) in a transition country (Croatia) – an issue that is not well covered in the literature. Additionally, we examine age, gender, employment in tourism, length of residence in the city, and other socio-demographic factors that may affect the magnitude of residents' perceptions.

An overview of WMHC09

The World Men's Handball Championship, organized by the IHF since 1938, is a biennial event staged in odd years. WMHC09, hosted by the Croatian Handball Federation, was staged in seven cities in Croatia between January 16 and February 1 of 2009. Six out of the seven host cities constructed brand new indoor arenas, while one arena underwent renovation. The Championship featured 24 competing nations, 110 games, 10,000 local volunteers, 1,568 media personnel, and over 400,000 spectators, including 10,000 fans from abroad (IHF, 2010; Rowland, 2009). Both opening (Croatia vs South Korea in Split, attendance 12,000) and closing (final Croatia vs France in Zagreb, attendance 15,200) ceremonies and games were sold out. To promote WMHC09 internationally, the Croatian National Tourist Board did a series of presentations in the capitals of 13 participating countries (Croatian Ministry of Tourism, 2008).

Split, a co-host city for WMHC09, is the second largest city in Croatia, with a total population of approximately 175,000 (Croatian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2001). In terms of tourism, the number of tourists visiting Split grew steady from 119,454 in 2002 to 211,299 in 2008, reflecting an overall 77 percent increase (Croatian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2010). Similarly, the number of cruise ships (and cruise ship passengers) in the city increased by 183 percent (539 percent) from 82 (20,616) in 2002 to 232 (131,833) in 2009 (Split Port Authority, 2010). Despite the evident growth in tourist arrivals, for many decades Split has served as merely a transit point for tourists en route to the adjacent Adriatic islands of Brač, Hvar, Šolta, Vis, Lastovo, and Korčula. For instance, between 2002 and 2007, while a total number of tourist arrivals soared, tourists' average length of stay plateaued between 1.8 and two nights. Lately, however, the marketing efforts of local tourism authorities have been directed at extending

tourists' length of stay in the city. Whether the result of a conscious effort or sheer coincidence, in 2008 and 2009 tourists' length of stay increased to 2.2 and 2.4 nights, respectively. In this context, the staging of the WMHC09 sporting event was welcomed as an important push toward positioning the city as an international tourist destination.

While Split is a small city by global standards, it is not new to hosting international sporting events. In 1979, it hosted the 8th Mediterranean Games, involving 2,048 athletes from 14 nations competing in 26 different sports. In 1990, the 15th European Athletics Championships were also held in Split. Most recently, in 2010, Split hosted the IAAF Continental Cup (formerly known as the IAAF World Cup) in athletics. That being said, between the 1979 Mediterranean Games and WMHC09, very few athletic facilities have been constructed in Split. Therefore, the construction of the new Spaladium Arena for WMHC09 was Split's largest financial and infrastructural project in almost three decades. As can be imagined, in the months preceding the Arena, a staunch public debate developed over cost-effectiveness of such a major undertaking. Some argued that allocating public funds for alternative projects (e.g. schools, hospitals, etc.) would better serve the public's interest.

Nevertheless, the Spaladium Arena was completed in December of 2008, and is part of the partially completed Spaladium Center, a large sports, entertainment, and business complex (Spaladium Center, 2008). When completed, the center will also boast a 25-storey business tower, an 11-storey garage with 1,500 parking places, and a substantial amount of retail space. The Spaladium Center project is a public private partnership between the city of Split and the consortium of three private companies. As part of the project deal, both the city and the Croatian Government must each pay half of the HRK 2.46 million monthly lease to the consortium (HRK = Croatian Kuna; Kuna = marten in English, €1 \approx HRK 7.4 in May of 2011) or roughly a total of €4 million per year for 30 years. Consortium's responsibilities include financing, designing, obtaining permits, constructing, and managing the center's facilities over the next 30 years. After this period, the consortium will hand over the sports-entertainment complex to the city. Overall, the goals of the Spaladium Center project are to fulfill residents' sport, recreational, cultural, and entertainment needs; position the city as the region's business, sports, and cultural center; and create new jobs.

Countries in transition

While transition is a broadly used concept, the demise of the communist system across Central and Eastern European countries in the late 1980s has given rise to a new meaning of an otherwise generic concept. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall, all of the formerly communist nations became "countries in transition." Although some developing countries can claim that they have been "in transition" for several decades (e.g. Turkey, India, and Egypt), and many developed countries can point to periods of transition (Goic and Bilic, 2008), the notion of "countries in transition" exclusively applies to the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including the former Soviet Union (UNSD, 2011).

In the transition countries, during the decades leading to the fall of the Berlin Wall, private-sector entrepreneurship was restricted, confined, hampered, suppressed, and even illegal (Goic and Bilic, 2008). Now, after more than 20 years since the onset of the transition era, the free market economy surprisingly still remains an elusive concept in many, albeit not all, aspects of society at large. Therefore, the process of introducing modern market mechanics into Central and Eastern European transition countries

continues with a specific task of significantly altering the host population's social, economic, political, and environmental attitudes and behaviors. However, host population's perceptions and behaviors are products of complex and long lasting past processes, and thus take time to change. In fact, a business culture in the transition countries cannot be explained exclusively either by their communist heritage or by their journey through transformation.

For instance, some countries that are still in transition (i.e. Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo), earned their independence from the former Serbia-dominated Yugoslavia through a bloody war that lasted up to several years. Meanwhile, other countries in transition (i.e. Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia) completed their transition process and joined the EU in 2004 (EBRD, 2006). Despite having encountered disparate obstacles and rates of progression through transition, both sets of countries (i.e. the war-stricken vs the war-free countries) share some common traits. From the developed country perspective, all transition countries either went or are still going through similar processes and face or have faced analogous developmental issues. To this extent, countries in transition may be considered as relatively homogenous, thus warranting further scientific inquiry about the potential (dis)similarities between developed and transition countries.

Tourism, social impacts, and the social exchange theory (SET)

Empirical research investigating and identifying positive and/or negative social impacts of tourism on host communities is voluminous (e.g. Andereck *et al.*, 2005; Ap, 1990; Ap and Crompton, 1998; Brunt and Courtney, 1999; Carter and Beeton, 2004; Gursoy *et al.*, 2002; Haley *et al.*, 2005; Khan and Ata, 1994; Lankford and Howard, 1994; Mason and Cheyne, 2000; Northcote and Macbeth, 2005; Teye *et al.*, 2002; Tomljenovic and Faulkner, 2000; Tovar and Lockwood, 2008; Williams and Lawson, 2001). The majority of studies have been based upon the resident/host perception approach and SET (Huttasin, 2008; Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2011; Tovar and Lockwood, 2008). SET suggests that residents view tourism impacts more positively when the benefits of tourism outweigh its costs (Ap, 1992). Conversely, when the costs of tourism exceed its benefits, residents view impacts negatively. In this sense, tourism social impacts denote "short term consequences that become apparent in the form of immediate and noticeable changes in the quality of life of the host communities and their adjustments to the tourist industry" (Ohmann *et al.*, 2006, p. 130).

Putting SET to the test, researchers have found that when locals perceive that the benefits outweigh the costs, they support future tourism development in their community (Gursoy and Rutherford, 2004). However, although many studies have adopted SET to explain the benefits from tourism, they appear to provide an understanding only of the economic benefits, while neglecting the non-economic ones (Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2011). For instance, scholars have focussed on economic indicators such as income, tax revenue, employment, consumer spending, and level of economic dependency, when in fact an exchange process may also engross non-economic benefits such as social, aesthetic, community pride, and other intangible variables (Wang and Pfister, 2008). Contextualizing the above arguments to the present research, this study proposes that the non-economic benefits derived by the local residents are in the form of satisfaction with the different dimensions of community life that are affected by tourism development in the area. These in turn are proposed as determinants of local community's perceptions of the social impacts of a sport tourism event.

The social impacts of sport tourism events

In small economies and countries with a big public sector, such as Croatia, staging a major sporting event requires substantial investment, and the largest part of it is typically funded by the public domain (Lyck, 2006). Local and national residents play an important role in this process, because if residents welcome a particular event, politicians are more willing to allocate public monies to fund that event (Preuss and Solberg, 2006). Thus, it is important that any discussion of a sport tourism event considers residents of the host destination and takes into account how hosting an event at a destination may impact upon the quality of life of the local population (Fredline, 2005). If residents' views are neglected, they may respond with withdrawal of support for the organizations and authorities which promote the event, unwillingness to work at the event or in the tourism industry, lack of enthusiasm in promoting the event by word of mouth, and hostility to visitors manifested in overcharging, rudeness, and indifference (Crompton and Ap, 1994). Since hosting a sport tourism event can produce a range of positive and negative social impacts (Preuss and Solberg, 2006), understanding both event social impacts and residents' perceptions of these impacts may enable action that could ensure that the positive social impacts outweigh the negative (Delamere, 2001). Similarly, as support for staging of major events is reliant upon residents' perceptions, it is important that they are assessed so that policies can be developed that maintain the support of the host community (Ohmann *et al.*, 2006).

Higham (1999), Fredline (2005), Preuss and Solberg (2006), Ohmann *et al.* (2006), and Bull and Lovell (2007) have all identified social impacts that may arise as consequences of sport tourism events (as opposed to events in general), and these are summarized in Table I. Only Higham (1999) does not present any positive social impacts of sport tourism events, suggesting they are mostly negative. In contrast, all other authors acknowledge positive social impacts in addition to the negative ones. Furthermore, Fredline (2005), Ohmann *et al.* (2006), and Bull and Lovell (2007) identify sense of community as a positive impact, while poor fan behavior (Fredline, 2005; Higham, 1999; Ohmann *et al.*, 2006) and crime (Ohmann *et al.*, 2006; Preuss and Solberg, 2006) are viewed as negative impacts. Overall, it is difficult to fully document the multitude of possible social impacts because of the unique features of each location and sport tourism activity (Fredline, 2005). In terms of the types of events and locations examined in these studies, Higham (1999) discusses mega-events, Ohmann *et al.* (2006) covers a mega-event (FIFA World Cup) in a large city (Munich, Germany, population 1.28 million), Bull and Lovell (2007) explore one leg of a mega-event (Tour de France) in a small city (Canterbury, England, UK, population 150,000), Preuss and Solberg (2006) compare secondary data on five different events (Olympics, FIFA World Cup, EURO, Rugby World Championship, and Nordic World Ski Championships), whilst Fredline (2005) reviews residents' perceptions at three different events (Australian Formula One Grand Prix, Australian Open Tennis Tournament, and Rugby World Cup).

In sum, the overview of sport tourism event scholarly research suggests that a number of social impacts, both positive and negative, may be apparent at certain events and destinations, yet not at others (Ohmann *et al.*, 2006). However, due to limited empirical evidence, it is unclear why these differences exist. Hence, more social impact research at a variety of sport tourism events and locations is needed (Ohmann *et al.*, 2006). That being said, it appears that the existing research on social impacts of sport tourism events has centered on developed countries (e.g. Bull and Lovell, 2007; Fredline, 2005; Higham, 1999; Ohmann *et al.*, 2006; Preuss and Solberg, 2006), while

Positive social impacts	Negative social impacts
Developing cross-cultural partnerships	Changes in community structure
Development of skills among planners	Commercialization of activities which may be of a personal or private nature
Enhanced country pride	Congestion/overcrowding
Enhanced international recognition of region and values	Corruption
Enhanced national identity	Culture shock
Enhanced national pride	Dislocation of local residents
Enhanced resident pride	Disruption of local lifestyle
Festival/fun atmosphere	Distortion of true nature of event to reflect elite values
Future use of new facilities	Fan delinquency
Heritage preservation	Heritage destruction
Impacts on sport	Increase in (organized) crime
Improved interethnic relationships	Increased housing/apartment rent
Improved leisure facilities	Increased housing/apartment prices
Improved local infrastructure	Increased interethnic tensions
Increased awareness of non-local perceptions	Infrastructural congestion
Increased community spirit	Legitimizing of ideology and sociocultural reality
International understanding	Locals avoid places frequented by fans
More cultural events	Misunderstandings leading to varying degrees of host/visitor hostility
More entertainment opportunities	Modification of nature of event or activity to accommodate tourism
More shopping opportunities	Prostitution increase
Opportunity for family togetherness	Reductions of psychological well-being due to perceived loss of control over local environment
Self-actualization	Road closures
Sport/health promotion	Suppression of human rights
Strengthening of local values and traditions	Tendency toward defensive attitudes concerning host region
Unique/interesting event	Unused facilities
	Use of event to legitimate unpopular decisions

Table I.
Social impacts of
sport tourism events

Sources: Bull and Lovell (2007), Fredline (2005), Higham (1999), Ohmann *et al.* (2006), Preuss and Solberg (2006)

events in transition and developing countries remain under-researched. Additionally, the evidence is mixed as to what factors affect residents' perceptions of social impacts (Fredline and Faulkner, 2000). For instance, research on the relationship between tourism and impacts suggests that residents benefiting from tourism report both higher levels of support for it and more positive impacts from it (Husbands, 1989; Lankford and Howard, 1994; Madrigal, 1993). Yet, in another study, residents' perceptions of social impacts are found not to depend on whether employment is related to tourism or a sport tourism mega-event (Ohmann *et al.*, 2006).

Owing to these findings, it appears important to understand how social impacts are perceived in transition countries such as Croatia. Through an empirical assessment of residents' perceptions of the social impacts of WMHC09, this article seeks to make a contribution in the needed direction.

Methodology

Since social impacts frequently have a dissimilar effect on different members of the host community, they are often hard to quantify and, thus, difficult to measure objectively (Fredline *et al.*, 2003). For this reason, social impacts are most commonly examined through the measurement of residents' perceptions (Fredline, 2005), for whom these perceptions are reality (Sillanpää, 1998). In this study, perceptions were measured through a four-page self-completed questionnaire written in Croatian, administered to a sample of 200 residents of the city of Split (population 175,000) in Croatia. The 200 surveys with stamped pre-addressed return envelopes were distributed via convenience sampling. More precisely, authors and ten of their friends and colleagues each dropped off 15 or 16 surveys in mailboxes of their closest neighbors within their respective city sections. Here it must be stressed that the city comprises 27 sections, that each of the 13 individuals who dropped off surveys resides in a different section of the city, and that these 13 city sections are scattered evenly around the city. Also, unlike many other cities around the globe, Split does not have a single section or part of a section where residents are significantly more affluent than residents in other sections or parts of a section. Instead, residents with dissimilar interests, attitudes, beliefs, and demographics are evenly distributed between and within the city's sections.

Nevertheless, convenience sampling is a non-probability technique, and as such, its generalizability to a larger population is limited (Malhotra, 1996). The most obvious reason for using convenience sampling is cost-effectiveness, i.e. the respondents are relatively easy to reach. Convenience sampling is also used in theory research and exploratory studies when the researcher wants an inexpensive and quick way to discern whether further research is warranted.

Since the goal of this study is theory research beyond the research setting (i.e. to empirically explore the social impacts of a sport tourism event in a transition country), it is the theory that should be generalizable, rather than the particular empirical results (Calder *et al.*, 1981, 1982; McGrath and Brinberg, 1983). Thus, given the goals of this study, a non-probability convenience sample of Split residents was somewhat justified because these residents were expected to be broadly familiar with the issues surrounding WMHC09.

Resident questionnaires were distributed within a few days following the end of WMHC09. Our survey instrument was based on the survey developed by Ohmann *et al.* (2006), and adapted to the Croatian context. The questionnaire comprised eight multiple-choice questions and 16 Likert-type items – evaluated by two social science research experts. The subsequent pre-test of the survey on ten students revealed only a few typos that were easily corrected. The final instrument comprised three parts. The first part aimed to identify some of the characteristics of the respondents by using five multiple-choice questions. This included length of residence (<1 year, 1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-20 years, 21-30 years, 31-40 years, and >40 years), is the respondent a handball supporter (yes or no), did the respondent follow WMHC09 matches (yes or no), at which location did the respondent predominantly follow WMHC09 matches (home, live in the arena, at friend's/family, in café/beergarden/konoba/trattoria/etc. public viewing on big screen, and other), and did the respondent avoid any public places and facilities such as shops and public transportation on days when WMHC09 matches took place in Split.

The second part of instrument contained a 16-item measure of residents' perceptions of social impacts from WMHC09 in Split. Of the 16 randomly ordered

items, ten of them investigated the perceived positive social impacts, whereas six explored the negative social impacts. While the former were borrowed entirely from Ohmann *et al.* (2006), the latter were part borrowed from the same source and part adapted to the context of this research. Specifically, Ohmann *et al.*'s (2006) three separate items for crime, organized crime, and prostitution in our study were merged into one category – crime – where a respondent was given the opportunity to select among various types of crimes, such as theft, violence, burglary, corruption, prostitution, and other. The reasoning behind this merge is straightforward. Both organized crime and prostitution are still crimes, albeit of a different magnitude than, say, petty crime, such as theft. Therefore, it makes sense to combine them under a single category – crime. Similarly, unlike football games, known for notoriously rowdy, often thuggish, and occasionally prostitute-seeking male-dominated crowds, handball matches typically attract entire families and orderly spectators. Thus, since prostitution is likely of little, if any, relevance, at any handball event, we decided to de-emphasize it in our survey instrument.

Moreover, Ohmann *et al.*'s (2006) question about the increased tensions between ethnic groups in the city was excluded from our instrument, because Split is a small and an ethnically homogeneous city (over 95 percent of the total population are Croats). Additionally, given the highly publicized policy debates over the best allocation of public monies, which took place before and during the construction of a new arena for WMHC09 in Split, we added one item reading: the co-hosting of WMHC09 in Split resulted in missing the opportunity to use public monies to construct facilities for which there is a greater public need (healthcare centers, schools, etc.). The third and final part of the instrument included questions about participants' gender, age, and whether respondent's current employment is related to tourism or events like WMHC09. Once collected, all data were entered into SPSS for further analysis.

Analysis consists of generating descriptive statistics, testing for patterns of social impacts across demographic variables, and assessing reliability and validity of the social impacts scale. In relating social impacts (a response variable) to seven predictor variables (age, gender, employment in tourism, length of residence in the city, and other socio-demographic factors), the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U (M-W *U*) and Kruskal-Wallis (K-W) tests were performed due to ordinal nature of the data. M-W *U* tests were performed for predictor variables with two subgroups, whereas K-W tests were used for predictors with three or more subgroups. Validity and reliability were examined via exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and Cronbach's Coefficient α , respectively (Carmines and Zeller, 1979; Cook and Campbell, 1979; Gursoy and Rutherford, 2004).

Findings

Respondent characteristics

Of the 200 distributed questionnaires, a total of 92 respondents returned the self-administered surveys, thus representing an overall 46 percent response rate. Just over two-thirds of the respondents (Table II) were female (69 percent) and between 15 and 29 years of age (68 percent). When compared to census data, our sample features a greater proportion of females (69 percent sample vs 52.2 percent census) and those in the 15-29 age group (68 percent sample vs 21.2 percent census). Three-fifths (60 percent) of the respondents have been residing between 11 and 30 years in the city. A total of 70 percent reported that they were handball supporters, while only 11 percent reported that their current employment is related to tourism or events like

Variable	Number	%	Valid %	Impacts of sport tourism events
<i>Gender (N = 92)</i>				
Female	64	69.6	69.6	
Male	28	30.4	30.4	
<i>Age (N = 92)</i>				
15-19	10	10.9	10.9	
20-29	53	57.6	57.6	
30-39	8	8.7	8.7	
40-49	11	12.0	12.0	
50-59	8	8.7	8.7	
60 +	2	2.2	2.2	
<i>Employed in tourism (N = 91)</i>				
No	43	46.7	47.3	
Not (currently) employed at all	35	38.0	38.5	
Retired	3	3.3	3.3	
Yes	10	10.9	11.0	
<i>Length of residence (N = 92)</i>				
<1 year	1	1.1	1.1	
1-5 years	8	8.7	8.7	
6-10 years	4	4.3	4.3	
11-20 years	33	35.9	35.9	
21-30 years	22	23.9	23.9	
31-40 years	9	9.8	9.8	
> 40 years	15	16.3	16.3	
<i>Handball supporter (N = 92)</i>				
Yes	65	70.7	70.7	
No	27	29.3	29.3	
<i>Followed WMHC09 matches (N = 91)</i>				
Yes	79	85.9	86.8	
No	12	13.0	13.2	
<i>At which location followed WMHC09 matches (N = 79)</i>				
At home	45	48.9	57.0	
Live in the arena	11	12.0	13.9	
At family/friend's	5	5.4	6.3	
In café/beergarden/trattoria/etc.	18	19.6	22.8	
Public viewing on large screen	0	0.0	0.0	
Other	0	0.0	0.0	
<i>Avoided public places on WMHC09 matchdays (N = 92)</i>				
Yes	26	28.3	28.3	
No	66	71.7	71.7	

Table II.
Characteristics of surveyed respondents

WMHC09. The vast majority of respondents (86 percent) followed WMHC09 matches, of which 57 percent did so from home. Only 28 percent avoided public places and facilities such as shops and public transportation on days when WMHC09 matches took place in Split.

Because of the insufficient number of respondents in the 60 + age group (<5), this group was merged with the 50-59 age group to create a new category, 50 +, with ten (10.9 percent) respondents, in the later analysis. For the same reason, three groups representing the length of residence (<1 year, 1-5 years and 6-10 years) were merged into a new category, 0-10 years, with 13 respondents (14.1 percent). Similarly, three groups comprising the employment in tourism variable (no, not employed at all, and retired) were combined into a new category, not employed in tourism, with

81 respondents (89 percent). Moreover, two groups representing the location of WMHC09 viewing – at family/friend’s and in café/beergarden/trattoria/etc. – were merged into a new category, at family/friend/café.

Perceptions of social impacts

Respondents’ perceptions in terms of both positive and negative social impacts are presented in Table III. In relation to positive social impacts, respondents’ agreement was strongest with statements that hosting WMHC09 strengthened community ties, was positive for national identity, and increased country pride. However, most respondents disagreed with statements that WMHC09 hosting improved the city’s leisure facilities and increased the number of cultural events and shopping outlets. In terms of negative social impacts, respondents disagreed with all but the following statement: The co-hosting of WMHC09 in Split resulted in missing the opportunity to use public monies to construct facilities for which there is a greater public need (healthcare centers, schools, etc.).

Social impacts and selected demographic characteristics

The association between social impacts and selected demographic characteristics was examined on three levels (Table IV). First, we explored the effect of independent variables on each of the 16 items (i.e. statements) making up the social impacts scale. Second, we looked at the effect of independent variables on all positive social impacts combined. We did this by creating a new variable in which valid responses to all ten positive social impacts items were summed and averaged for each respondent.

Perceived impact	Strongly disagree 1	2	3	4	Strongly agree 5	\bar{X}^b	Rank	N
<i>Positive impacts</i>								
Stronger sense of community	6.5 ^a	8.7	8.7	31.5	44.6	3.99	1	92
Positive for national identity	8.8	11.0	23.1	23.1	34.1	3.63	2	91
Increased pride for my country	13.0	9.8	14.1	31.5	31.5	3.59	3	92
Increased pride of being a Split resident	18.7	13.2	17.6	25.3	25.3	3.25	4	91
Arena construction a positive outcome	15.2	18.5	17.4	25.0	23.9	3.24	5	92
Increased national pride	19.8	11.0	31.9	19.8	17.6	3.04	6	91
Improved city infrastructure	16.7	12.2	34.4	23.3	13.3	3.04	7	90
Improved leisure facilities	29.9	23.0	23.0	17.2	6.9	2.48	8	87
Increased number of cultural events	26.1	28.4	25.0	15.9	4.5	2.44	9	88
Increased number of shopping places	39.3	22.5	21.3	10.1	6.7	2.22	10	89
<i>Negative impacts</i>								
Missed opportunity to use public funds for other more needed facilities	15.1	14.0	19.8	22.1	29.1	3.36	1	86
Increased housing/apartment rent	22.2	16.7	31.1	18.9	11.1	2.80	2	90
Increased housing/apartment prices	25.3	25.3	37.4	8.8	3.3	2.40	3	91
Locals avoided places frequented by handball fans	28.6	35.2	16.5	14.3	5.5	2.33	4	91
Poor fan behavior	45.1	17.1	18.3	7.3	12.2	2.24	5	82
Crime increase	59.1	21.6	12.5	3.4	3.4	1.70	6	88

Table III.
Respondents’ perceived
social impacts of
WMHC09

Notes: ^aValid percentage; ^bmean ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree

An identical procedure was performed to investigate the effect of independent variables on all negative social impacts combined. Third, we examined the effect of independent variables on both positive and negative social impacts combined. We accomplished this by first, reverse coding the items measuring negative social impacts, followed by creating a new variable in which valid responses to all 16 positive and negative social impacts items were summed and averaged for each respondent.

The findings in Table IV suggest that demographic characteristics generally do not affect respondents' perceptions of positive and negative social impacts. Yet, on the level of individual items, three social impacts are worth mentioning in this context. The effect of the handball supporter on sense of national identity is strongly statistically significant ($p = 0.000$), thus implying that handball supporters find WMHC09 co-hosting more positive for national identity than non-supporters. The effect of tourism job relatedness on national pride is moderately significant ($p = 0.008$), hence suggesting that those holding a tourism-related job believe that co-staging WMHC09 is more positive for national pride than those whose job is unrelated to tourism. In addition, a perception that locals avoided places frequented by handball fans during WMHC09 was stronger for respondents who had avoided public places than for those who had not ($p = 0.008$). The flagged p values for the remaining social impacts indicate few marginally significant differences attributable to different levels of perception.

Looking at the effect of independent variables on all positive social impacts combined yielded only two marginally significant differences. Both handball supporters and those who followed WMHC09 games held more positive views of social impacts from co-hosting WMHC09 than non-supporters and those who did not watch WMHC09 matches. In terms of all negative social impacts combined, only one marginally significant difference surfaced. Namely, respondents who avoided public places held more negative perceptions of social impacts from co-staging WMHC09 than those who did not avoid public places during WMHC09. The examination of the influence of demographic characteristics on aggregate social impacts (i.e. both positive and negative social impacts) produced only one marginally significant difference. Handball supporters generally held more favorable views of aggregate positive and negative social impacts from co-hosting WMHC09 than non-supporters.

Validity and reliability

To assess validity, all 16 items were factor analyzed in an attempt to discover underlying patterns in data without sacrificing the data's original integrity. However, for an accurate EFA, one needs an adequate sample size, which is partly determined by the nature of the data (MacCallum *et al.*, 1999). Namely, while EFA is generally a "large-sample" procedure, it is an error-prone procedure even with very large samples and optimal data (Costello and Osborne, 2005). That is, the two common rules of thumb regarding sample size (i.e. the minimum level of N or the minimum subject-to-variable ratio) are neither valid nor useful (MacCallum *et al.*, 1999). Instead, the level of communality plays a critical role. When the mean level of communality is at least 0.7, a good recovery of population factors in sample data can be achieved with samples that would traditionally be considered too small for EFA studies (i.e. when N is well below 100). The initial EFA of data with 16 items produced the mean level of communality of 0.68. Dropping the variable with the smallest communality (i.e. arena construction a positive outcome, $h^2 = 0.564$) achieved the desired outcome, resulting in the 0.7 mean level of communality.

Table IV.
Association between
social impacts and
selected independent
variables

Perceived social impact	L ^a	H ^b	W ^b	WL ^a	A ^b	G ^b	A ^a	T ^b
<i>Positive impacts combined</i>								
Increased pride for my country	0.089	0.022*	0.032*	0.059	0.564	0.581	0.055	0.312
Increased national pride	0.895	0.204	0.336	0.560	0.379	0.923	0.597	0.079
Increased pride of being a Split resident	0.134	0.036*	0.098	0.264	0.626	0.908	0.132	0.008**
Positive for national identity	0.179	0.093	0.042*	0.247	0.881	0.996	0.361	0.082
Stronger sense of community	0.130	0.000***	0.201	0.026*	0.347	0.134	0.010*	0.939
Arena construction a positive outcome	0.456	0.065	0.126	0.444	0.203	0.300	0.560	0.136
Increased number of shopping places	0.811	0.826	0.088	0.270	0.145	0.109	0.543	0.463
Improved leisure facilities	0.191	0.832	0.015*	0.172	0.308	0.368	0.074	0.402
Increased number of cultural events	0.138	0.082	0.151	0.931	0.294	0.319	0.390	0.518
Improved city infrastructure	0.738	0.966	0.054	0.225	0.814	0.122	0.267	0.995
<i>Negative impacts combined</i>	0.020*	0.036*	0.058	0.013*	0.661	0.100	0.213	0.260
Locals avoided places frequented by handball fans	0.455	0.621	0.180	0.602	0.025*	0.109	0.536	0.849
Increased housing/apartment rent	0.184	0.626	0.452	0.517	0.008**	0.601	0.467	0.593
Increased housing/apartment prices	0.120	0.978	0.014*	0.147	0.112	0.936	0.513	0.427
Crime increase	0.090	0.975	0.011*	0.367	0.952	0.826	0.144	0.387
Poor fan behavior	0.160	0.881	0.183	0.581	0.117	0.246	0.075	0.402
Missed opportunity to use public funds for other more needed facilities	0.630	0.157	0.627	0.831	0.016*	0.026*	0.825	0.588
<i>Positive and negative impacts combined</i>	0.378	0.286	0.332	0.502	0.641	0.513	0.141	0.942
	0.251	0.010*	0.104	0.297	0.150	0.835	0.292	0.151

Notes: L, length of residence; H, handball supporter; W, watched WMHC09 games; WL, watching location; A, avoided public places; G, gender; A, age; T, tourism-related job. ^aKruskal-Wallis (K-W) test. ^bMann-Whitney U (M-W U) test. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.002$

After rerunning EFA with 15 items, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.656, and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($X^2 = 413.723$, $df = 105$, $p < 0.001$). Both of these measures indicated that the data were appropriate for factor analysis (Norman and Streiner, 1994; Pedhazur and Schmelkin, 1991). Moreover, the Cattell scree test and the "Eigenvalue > 1 " criterion suggested a five-factor solution accounting for 70 percent of the variance (Table V).

Factors 1 and 2 account for most of the variance in the data (26.4 and 17.9 percent), whereas factors 3, 4, and 5 account for 9.3, 8.6, and 8.1 percent of the variance, respectively. Using a factor loading cutoff of 0.50, the factor loadings (Table VI) indicate that, for the most part, the scale representing positive social impacts loads on two separate factors. The first factor consists of five positive social impacts items (country pride, national pride, city pride, national identity, and sense of community), and is labeled identity and unity. The second factor comprises items shops, facilities, and events from the positive social impacts scale, and is labeled venue. EFA further reveals that the negative social impacts scale loads on three separate factors. Thus, the third factor consists of two negative impact items – place avoidance and real estate prices. This factor is labeled real estate and traffic. The fourth factor, labeled infrastructure and rent, contains items rent and missing facilities from the negative impact scale and item city infrastructure from the positive impacts scale. The fifth factor comprises items crime and behavior from the negative impact scale, and is labeled conduct. Overall, only one observed variable (rent) loaded on more than one factor and no observed variable loaded on more than two factors.

The results of reliability analysis indicate that the α coefficients equal 0.79 and 0.62 for the nine-item positive and six-item negative social impacts scales, respectively. Thus, the α value for the negative social impacts scale appears somewhat below the minimum acceptable guideline of 0.70 for new scales (DeVellis, 2003; Nunnally, 1978). Neither scale could be improved by deleting any item.

Discussion and conclusion

While the majority of research on the social impacts of sport tourism events has focussed on developed countries (Bull and Lovell, 2007; Fredline and Faulkner, 2000; Ohmann *et al.*, 2006; Preuss and Solberg, 2006; Ritchie and Adair, 2004), this study focussed on empirically exploring the social impacts, as perceived by residents, of a

Component	Total	Total variance explained	
		Initial eigenvalues % of variance	Cumulative %
1	4.253	26.582	26.582
2	2.706	16.913	43.495
3	1.477	9.233	52.729
4	1.311	8.192	60.921
5	1.244	7.776	68.697
6	0.867	5.418	74.115
–	–	–	–
–	–	–	–
16	0.148	0.927	100.000

Note: Extraction method: principal component analysis

Table V.
Results of EFA for
social impacts

Item	1 ^a	2 ^b	Component 3 ^c	4 ^d	5 ^e	Communality Estimates (<i>h</i> ²)
Increased national pride	<i>0.851^f</i>	-0.018	0.006	-0.019	-0.118	0.739
Stronger sense of community	<i>0.850</i>	0.129	-0.071	0.138	0.001	0.764
Increased pride of being a Split resident	<i>0.806</i>	0.084	0.091	-0.004	-0.021	0.665
Positive for national identity	<i>0.782</i>	0.063	0.107	0.203	-0.037	0.669
Increased pride for my country	<i>0.756</i>	0.081	-0.004	-0.188	0.208	0.657
Increased number of cultural events	0.025	<i>0.842</i>	-0.005	0.030	0.127	0.727
Improved leisure facilities	0.153	<i>0.808</i>	0.184	0.186	-0.085	0.752
Increased number of shopping places	0.140	<i>0.607</i>	0.476	-0.120	0.326	0.735
Locals avoided places frequented by handball fans	-0.029	-0.029	<i>0.782</i>	-0.071	0.159	0.643
Increased housing/apartment prices	0.085	0.271	<i>0.774</i>	0.157	0.032	0.706
Improved city infrastructure	0.177	0.435	-0.023	<i>0.732</i>	0.012	0.758
Missed opportunity to use public funds for other more needed facilities	-0.072	-0.142	0.012	<i>0.690</i>	0.400	0.662
Increased housing/apartment rent	0.055	0.099	<i>0.599</i>	<i>0.630</i>	-0.013	0.768
Poor fan behavior	-0.045	0.176	-0.014	0.149	<i>0.813</i>	0.717
Crime increase	0.038	-0.011	0.232	0.057	<i>0.740</i>	0.606
Cronbach's α	0.85	0.70	0.66	0.55	0.42	

Notes: ^aIdentify and unity; ^bvenue; ^creal estate and traffic; ^dinfrastructure and rent; ^econduct; ^fitalic font indicates loadings > 0.5 threshold. Extraction method: principal component analysis; rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization

Table VI.
Factor loadings for
social impacts

sport tourism event – World Men's Handball Championship – in a transition country. Additionally, this study also examined the effects of several socio-demographic factors on residents' perceptions. Overall, the empirical research suggests that residents' perceptions of the social impacts from co-hosting WMHC09 were mostly positive.

The less tangible positive impacts relating to pride and community togetherness were identified as key issues by the respondents, thus corroborating Fredline's (2005) findings from the case studies on the Rugby World Cup and the Australian Open Tennis Tournament. The few tangible positive impacts that were not realized are improvements in leisure facilities and increases in the number of shopping places and cultural events. Negative impacts, such as crime, fan behavior, and the cost of real estate appear not to have been important issues. This is consistent with the findings by Ohmann *et al.* (2006) regarding the FIFA World Cup. However, missing the opportunity to allocate public monies to build other more needed facilities, such as healthcare centers and schools – instead of having spent the funds for the new arena construction – was perceived as a non-trivial issue.

This last point seems to be a key point of difference between transition and developed countries, as identified in this study. It intuitively makes sense that the state of healthcare, citizen services infrastructure, and the overall quality of life in developed countries fare much better than in transition countries. In developed countries, the high standards of products/services in the private sector have in turn raised residents' expectations when they deal with government organizations. Hence, citizens have grown accustomed to both expect and receive more and better services and facilities from the government. Moreover, there has been a cultural shift within both local and national governments – away from organizations that are focussed on managing and maintaining a complex internal structure to ones that put the resident at the heart of

the process, providing support services designed to deliver that objective. In comparison, in transition countries, both the quality and the availability of facilities and service options available to citizens – in private and government sectors alike – are generally lackluster and inferior. Consequently, residents' expectations from both local and national governments in transition countries are much higher, as compared to developed countries.

In terms of the socio-demographic characteristics, they generally did not explain variations in residents' perceptions, thus validating similar findings by Ohmann *et al.* (2006). However, two differences should be noted. Contrasting handball supporters and non-supporters, the former held more favorable views of both aggregate social impacts and in the case of a single impact on the sense of national identity. In addition, although residents benefiting from tourism experienced higher levels of national pride than those whose job is unrelated to tourism, residents' overall perceptions of social impacts were found not to depend on whether employment is related to a sport tourism event. Interestingly, this finding confirms Ohmann *et al.*'s (2006) results, while refuting those who suggest that residents benefiting from tourism report more positive impacts from it (e.g. Husbands, 1989; Lankford and Howard, 1994; Madrigal, 1993).

Limitations of this study are threefold. First, a convenience sampling method is typically considered a drawback, thus future research could involve the use of a probability (i.e. random) sample from the general population. Yet, despite the limitations of convenience sampling, the findings in this study apply to at least some Split residents, and to some citizens of Croatia and other countries in transition. A second limitation derives from the over-representation of females and those in the 15-29 age group in the sample. A third limitation is that the negative social impacts subscale appears less robust, as evidenced by the resulting Cronbach's α and EFA.

Limitations notwithstanding, this study offers both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it contributes to the under-researched area of social impacts of sport tourism events in transition countries. Specifically, it introduced the important yet often not reported notion of appropriateness of public funds allocation, which is essentially an opportunity cost issue. In this sense, it appears noteworthy that in terms of negative social impacts, respondents disagreed with all but the following statement: The co-hosting of WMHC09 in Split resulted in missing the opportunity to use public monies to construct facilities for which there is a greater public need (healthcare centers, schools, etc.). One way of interpreting this finding is that any future plans to use public monies for one-time financially intensive events perhaps should take a back seat to more important resident issues, i.e. affordable/subsidized housing, schools, kindergartens, retirement homes, healthcare clinics, etc. While this study does not provide enough evidence to absolutely support this interpretation, it certainly provides some great face validity to it. This finding upholds Barker's (2004) and Fredline's (2005) perspective whereby social impacts of sport tourism events are thought to vary depending on the host destination's unique historical, cultural, economical and environmental background, as well as on the nature, scale, location, and duration of the events.

In a practical sense, the results highlight that either local or national legislative bodies (or both) should conduct referendum or a sample opinion poll before taking on any long-term financially intensive project involving the use of public monies. As a case in point, the newly constructed Spaladium Arena in Split has hitherto been used only sporadically at best, and certainly nowhere near the level that would justify its annual operation cost. At the same time, the city is in dire need of subsidized housing,

schools, and kindergartens are overcrowded, waiting lines for retirement homes are in excess of two years, and the state of hospitals (other than the newly constructed maternity ward) is generally appalling. Had the city government initiated a public discussion about the proposal of the new arena construction, and then submitted it to a popular vote, the outcome may have been different, and certainly in tune with the majority's needs and expectations.

The findings and the limitations of this study provide directions for future research in the area of sport tourism events' social impacts. First, more scholarly research in transition and other non-developed countries is needed in order to advance our understanding of this complex phenomenon, which in turn may enable us to better manage the social and other impacts of sport tourism events. Second, the finding that perhaps the money was not well spent on the event –along with the subsequent interpretation that one-time publicly funded financially intensive events perhaps should take a back seat to more important resident issues – is one that should be re-visited in future studies, however in greater detail. Third, future studies should strive to increase the credibility and validity of the results through cross verification of data via several research methodologies (i.e. triangulation). Fourth, steps should be taken to ensure that the sample is reflective of the area's demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Fifth, based on this study's α coefficient and EFA figures, the negative social impacts scale may need further calibrating.

Moreover, empirical studies should also report reliability and validity of the survey instrument employed. Also, the reason behind labeling the increase in shopping facilities as a positive social impact may need to be re-visited. Namely, the number of malls and shops in Croatia in general, and in Split in particular, has mushroomed since 2000. Except for tourism and retail trade, Split does not have any manufacturing to sustain its long-term development. In such context, the oversupply of shopping outlets and the related over-reliance on retail sector as a generator of local GDP are growing concerns for the host community, not to mention the development of a culture that is permeated by consumerism. Needless to say, an increase in the number of shopping opportunities can thus be viewed as a negative social impact.

In conclusion, residents' affirmative perceptions of a sport tourism event and its social and other impacts are critical drivers of both hosting a successful sport tourism event and ensuring sustainable development for the host community. Therefore, understanding residents' attitudes toward a given event is pivotal for winning their support and reducing unwanted outcomes for the host population.

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