
4

Social Impact Assessment

Learning objectives

Know how to conduct a Social Impact Assessment (SIA) for events and tourism.

Understand how events and tourism generate social impacts on:

- Individuals and families
- Social groups and sub-cultures
- Communities (where people live)
- Events and event organisations
- Businesses
- Tourist destinations
- Politics and government
- Whole societies and nations

Learn SIA methods with relevance to events and tourism:

- Resident and stakeholder surveys
- Ethnography (participant observation)
- Socio-cultural data analysis
- Case studies
- Measuring social capital

4.1 Introduction

Social and cultural change can occur slowly, sometimes invisibly, and in many directions at once. It will usually be difficult to differentiate the changes caused or influenced by events and tourism from wider forces and trends in society. The approach taken in this chapter is to first define social impacts and social impact assessment, then examine the wide range of social impacts that could be the subjects of SIA.

A series of figures presents types of social impacts that should be considered for the major subjects of IA, starting with individuals and ending with whole societies. In each of these tables there are suggested goals, methods and indicators. Specific types of social impact are expressed as goal statements, mostly

benefits to achieve. The SIA process is then discussed, including methods of particular relevance to SIA for events and tourism.

Special attention is given to the concept of *social capital* and how it can be assessed. Not only is social capital an important topic in the literature and apparently of interest to many policy makers, but exploring how to measure this concept is indicative of the challenges related to other social and cultural theories and concepts. Refer back to Chapter 3 for a parallel discussion of how to construct a theory of change model for social integration and inclusion.

For related history and topical overviews, readers are encouraged to consult books that give the big picture, including *Exploring the Social Impacts of Events*, edited by Richards et al. (2013), and *Event Studies* by Getz and Page (3d. ed., 2016).

4.2 Social impacts

There has been a tradition of blaming tourism and events for many negative social impacts, and the list of these is long: crime, prostitution, gambling, inflation, displacement of the poor from affordable housing, in-migration for jobs resulting in conflicts, and a general failure to ensure that all residents benefit from economic development. Most recently the conversion of housing to temporary rental accommodation has become a major issue in many cities, giving rise to protests by residents who feel displaced from affordable housing by an influx of tourists.

'*Over tourism*' no doubt means a lot of different things, but exceeding capacity is clearly implied, and the debate inevitably turns to regulation and imposing limits. Although Edinburgh is a world-renowned festival city and most residents are supportive, an article in the newspaper *The Scotsman* in 2018 illustrates some of the concerns people have when event tourism becomes dominant. Brian Ferguson authored this piece. The headline was "The future of Edinburgh's world-famous festivals is at risk by growing public anger over their impact, an official report has revealed", and specifically the article claimed that "dissatisfaction has been growing steadily over the last five years, according to the findings of new opinion polling carried out among people living and working in the city." Problems were attributed to the large influx of tourists into the historic heart of the city at peak periods, resulting in traffic and crowd congestion. In turn, this made it more difficult for residents to use public transit and "get on with normal life". (<https://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/public-fury-at-festival-impact-reaches-an-all-time-peak-1-4737466>).

Edinburgh's festival impact studies measure social impact in a number of ways. In 2015 (BOP Consulting, 2016a) a set of social-impact questions were asked across all the events, finding that 75% of respondents agreed or strongly

agreed that “attending the festival has given me the opportunity to spend some quality time together with family and friends”, and 57% agreeing or strongly agreeing that “the festival is an event that brings your community together”. Regarding civic pride, 89% of residents agreed or strongly agreed that “the festival increases my pride in Edinburgh as a city”. For construction of a civic-pride scale, see Wood (2006).

Tourism and events are also frequently credited with positive consequences, including host-guest relations leading to peace and understanding. Add to this heritage preservation, including the valued cultural traditions performed at events, community development and urban renewal, and the broad notion of enhancing quality of life through events. Other potential benefits are provision of new leisure and entertainment facilities and more choice through events, community development, and economic prosperity.

Social capital has become a major area of interest for researchers, including questions of its definition, origins and uses. This connects to discussions of event goals and legacies. Individual, group, place and national identity have been attracting a lot of attention from event scholars. Engagement, involvement and transformational outcomes of event participation are a relatively new and challenging topic. Other important themes, many in need of theoretical development, include: events as places for socialization (linked to co-creation of experiences and social integration); social inclusion (linked to issues of power and equity in society); host-guest bridging and the fostering of understanding; elitism versus democratization; emancipation of women and groups without power; attracting attention and the legitimation of groups, nations and ideals; the capacity of communities to host events, the growing use of social media, and impacts on diverse stakeholder groups.

The discourse on social impacts continues to expand. Moscardo (2007) pointed to social capital formation, enhancing community capacity and support for non-tourism related products and services as three areas of social impact that support regional development, while Reid (2007) examined the social impacts of events in rural areas. Reid argued against a simplistic labelling of positives and negatives, and identified several little-discussed themes: trust and respect; breaking down social barriers; releasing stress and tension; forgetting hard times; being affiliated with success; a resistance to change; the affects of costs associated with attending; expectation of government assistance; and greed.

Sharpley and Stone (2012) identified three potential social impacts of events that benefit from multidimensional analysis. The first is place identity/meaning, which from the resident’s perspective can include place attachment. There are socially constructed meanings for events and places, events provide one important experience of community, and events and tourism can alter the physical environment. However, events lacking in cultural authenticity are not likely to foster place meaning for residents and might convey the wrong impression to