

RESIDENTS' SOCIO-ECONOMIC PERCEPTIONS OF AN INTERNATIONAL FAIR

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Abstract: Events allow a community to celebrate its uniqueness, promote itself, develop local pride and enhance its economic well-being. Events also have the potential to negatively affect the social and cultural environment in hosting destinations. Therefore, it is important to examine possible impacts events have. This study aims to examine residents' perceptions of the socio-economic impacts of an international fair on the host community, and if these perceptions vary according to socio-demographic characteristics. The results indicate that residents perceive the fair to create community cohesion, increase the place image, foster family togetherness and results in economic benefits. Results also suggest that residents perceive the fair resulting in economic and social costs. It is also found that there are significant variations across select demographic characteristics of the residents in terms of their perception of the impacts of the fair. The study ends with a discussion of findings and theoretical and managerial implications.

Key words: fairs, perceived impacts, socio-demographic characteristics

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INTRODUCTION

Event tourism is defined as the systematic development, planning and marketing of events (Tassiopoulos, 2005: 4). Events are mostly associated with the economic benefits that include tax revenues for government, more businesses for the locals and consequently employment opportunities, additional income and increases in the quality of life for local residents. Further, they contribute to improve public services, regenerate urban spaces and building new infrastructure (Bob & Swart, 2009; Kim & Petrick, 2005). Moreover, events result in long-lasting facilities created for the event used by locals. Consequently, events are organized by the communities to showcase their cultural heritage, promote their city, enliven the entertainment offerings for the residents, and attract tourists, thereby helping to improve the quality of life in destinations. Events also allow a community to celebrate its uniqueness, promote itself, develop local pride and enhance its economic well-being. Therefore, communities all

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around the world try to find creative ways to showcase their cultural heritage, and enlarge the cultural entertainment offerings for local residents (Rees, 2000; Cudny et al., 2012; Egresi & Kara, 2014). Consequently, destinations increasingly organize events such as festivals, fairs and celebrations in favour of expected benefits.

Literature on event tourism suggests that events also have negative impacts on the host community, local residents, local administrations and the environment (Gursoy & Kendall, 2006). Events may result in negative impacts such as: increases in prices of goods and services, crowding in public areas, traffic congestion, parking problems and an increase in crime and undesired actions (Jeong & Faulkner, 1996; Yolal et al., 2009). These negative outcomes of the events may result in disruption of quality of life at the destination. Expectedly, these impacts may result in visitor and community dissatisfaction. In that sense, residents oppose to events due to their dissatisfaction with the results of the events (Burbank et al., 2000). Moreover, residents may think that the public funds invested in event organization is a waste of taxpayers' money (Bob & Swart, 2009). Finally, Fredline (2004) suggests that conflict can occur between residents and visitors because of different standards of living, economic welfare, and purchasing power gaps. Therefore, an efficient planning and management of events require a thorough understanding of residents' attitudes and perceptions towards the event.

Among the several types of events, fairs lead the development of international business relations apart from their economic impacts on the destinations where fairs are organized. In accordance, there is a growing interest in events and fairs among academics. According to Getz (2008: 409-410), studies on the event tourism focused on economic impacts in 70's and 80's, then motivations of visitors and participants in 90's, and social, cultural and environmental impacts in 2000's. Further Getz (2008) notes that the perceptions of the local residents have been an important research topic in recent years. Studies on the fairs have examined motivations and purposes of participant firms, benefits of the fairs to the local economy, visitor motivations and experiences (Christopher & Emmanuel, 2012; Jung, 2008; Rinallo et al., 2010; Tanner & Chonko, 1995). However, the perceptions of the local residents towards the fairs are also important for successful planning and administration of the events. If host community believes that they are likely to benefit from the event, they are likely to feel good about attending and supporting the event (Yolal et al., 2015). Therefore, it is important for event planners and organizers to understand how local residents perceive the impacts of the fairs.

Although Turkey hosts numerous events, research on the impacts of the events on the local residents and their perceptions towards the impacts of events is limited. Thus, the purpose of the study is to examine the perceptions of the residents towards the impacts of Izmir International Fair.

It is expected that the findings of this study could help organizers, decision-makers and city officials to plan and manage the events thoroughly. The outcome of this research is likely to enhance our understanding of the perceived impacts of events, and thus provide useful insights for destination managers and marketers. This study utilizes social exchange theory (SET) as its theoretical framework. SET is a "general sociological theory concerned with an understanding of exchange of resources between individuals and groups in an interaction situation" (Ap, 1992, p. 668). According to the SET, the participants as social actors should have the initial justification to participate in a social exchange process with others. Moreover positive resident perceptions of an event may lead to their support in the event.

The methodology utilized for the purpose of the study is explained in the next section. Thereafter, the findings are presented. Finally, findings are discussed and implications for the managers are presented in the conclusion section.

METHODS

Study Site

The study was conducted in Izmir International Fair (IIF) being organized annually in Izmir, Turkey. IIF is the oldest tradeshow in Turkey with various product groups, considered the milestone of Turkey's fair and exposition industry and is also notable for hosting a series of simultaneous festival activities. The fair itself is not limited to a theme where the participants are generally simply required to expose products with export or import potential. The musical and other cultural events that accompany the commercial fair and that had actually started out as an auxiliary to attract popular interest for the event have become, over the years, a school by themselves. The 82nd Izmir International Fair which was organized from 29th of August to 8th of September, 2013, hosted 1125 firms from several countries and attracted more than 1.6 million visitors.

Data Collection

A structured survey instrument was used for the data collection. The survey instrument was developed in Turkish and had two sections. The first part of the questionnaire included a socio-economic impacts scale developed from the previous literature (Chen, 2011; Gursoy et al., 2002; Kim & Petrick, 2005; Sharma & Dyer, 2009; Yolal et al., 2012; Zhou & Ap, 2009). The scale was measured on a five-point Likert-type scale. Respondents were asked to indicate how strongly they agree or disagree with each item in the scale. The second part of the questionnaire included items to gather information about respondents' demographic characteristics such as gender, age, education level, occupation, and monthly income. Afterwards, a group of faculty members were requested to assess the content validity of the items that were identified from the literature. They were asked to provide comments on the content and understandability of each item in the scale.

Necessary changes on the items were made and the survey questionnaire was pre-tested on the first day of the IIF on 29th of August. A total of 38 respondents joined the pilot survey and they were asked to comment on the lucidity of the items. Based on the feedback and the results of the pretest, the questionnaire was finalized. Data were collected utilizing a self-administered questionnaire from individuals who visited the IIF between 30th of August and 8th of September 2013. The questionnaires were randomly handed out at the entrances of the fair area to the potential respondents and were collected upon their completion. A total of 500 questionnaires were delivered and of the 432 gathered questionnaires, 10 were incomplete and thus eliminated from further analysis. As a result, 422 usable questionnaires were retained for the analysis.

Analysis

The analysis of the study consisted of three steps. First, a series of descriptive analyses were conducted to examine the normality and distributions of the study variables. Afterwards, a principal component analysis with a varimax rotation was performed to identify the underlying dimensions of perceived socio-economic benefits of the IIF. Finally, a series of ANOVAs and t-tests were conducted to examine whether delineated dimensions differ among selected demographic characteristics.

RESULTS

The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1. The gender distribution of the visitors was slightly uneven, with 64.9% male and 35.1 % female. Most of the respondents had a high school education (35.8%), followed by university graduates (29.6%). While 52.6% of the respondents were blue collar employees, almost one third of them were unemployed or retired. Slightly one third of the respondents reported a monthly income between 401 to 800USD.

Table 1. Respondents' demographic profile

	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	274	64.9
	Female	148	35.1
Age	Younger than 20	51	12.1
	Between 21 and 32	213	50.1
	Between 33 and 44	79	18.7
	Older than 45	79	18.7
Marital status	Single	241	57.1
	Married	162	38.4
	Other	19	4.5
Education	Elementary school	68	16.1
	High school	151	35.8
	Vocational school	61	14.5
	University	125	29.6
	Graduate	17	4.0
Occupation	Blue collar	222	52.6
	White collar	63	14.9
	Unemployed/retired	137	32.5
Income (in USD)	Less than 400	98	23.1
	Between 401 and 800	135	32.0
	Between 801 and 1200	80	19.0
	Between 1201 and 1601	21	5.0
	More than 1601	22	5.2

The exploratory factor analysis of 28 items of impacts yielded six factors and explained 66.7 percent of the variance. Eight items were excluded due to their lower loadings. These factors were labeled as *community cohesion*, *destination image*, *social costs*, *economic benefits*, *family togetherness*, and *economic costs*. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy of .840 also indicated that patterns of correlation were relatively compact and yielded reliable factors. Barlett's test results indicated the appropriateness of the factor analysis ($p < 0.000$). Eigenvalues of these factors ranged from 5.71 to 1.01. None of the individual loading was less than .55, and the reliability coefficients of the delineated factors ranged from .898 for destination image to .645 for economic costs (Table 2).

A series of t tests and ANOVAs were conducted to examine if the delineated factor groupings of perceived impacts of the fair would vary across respondents' demographic characteristics of gender, age, education level and occupation. Findings indicated significant variations in perceived impacts across gender. Levene's tests for equality of variance results suggested that in all variables the variances were homogenous ($p > 0.05$ for all dimensions). A series of independent-samples t tests were conducted to identify the differences in respondents' perceptions due to gender of the participants. Results suggest that there was no difference in the scores of female ($M = 4.17$, $SD = .926$) and male ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.008$) participants in their perception of *community cohesion* $t(420) = -4.160$, $p = 0.678$. There was a significant difference in the scores of female ($M = 4.48$, $SD = .595$) and male ($M = 4.20$, $SD = .729$) participants in *destination image* dimension $t(420) = -3.884$, $p = 0.000$. These results suggested that female visitors placed significantly more importance on image. Similarly, a significant difference was found between the scores of female ($M = 2.63$, $SD = .957$) and male ($M = 2.83$, $SD = .940$) participants in *social costs* dimension $t(420) = 2.041$, $p = .042$. Significant differences were also found in the scores of female ($M = 4.33$, $SD = .635$) and male ($M = 4.18$, $SD = .669$) participants in *economic*

benefits $t(420) = -2.284, p = .023$. Finally, a significant difference was found in the scores of female ($M = 4.62, SD = .501$) and male ($M = 4.45, SD = .589$) participants in *family togetherness* $t(420) = -2.923, p = .004$. These results suggest that female visitors placed more importance on image, economic benefits, and family togetherness, while male visitors placed more importance on social costs.

Table 2. Factor analysis of fair’s socio-economic impacts

Impact items	Factor loadings	Eigenvalue	Variance explained	Reliability Coefficient
Community cohesion		5.713	27.204	.797
The fair increases the attachment of the residents to their community	.773			
The fair provides visitors an opportunity to meet new people	.744			
The fair creates a sense of pride among visitors	.736			
The fair strengthens the sense of community and identity	.724			
The fair contributes to the development of infrastructure	.561			
Destination image		2.455	11.688	.898
The fair enhances the image of the city	.860			
The fair contributes to the branding of the city	.829			
The fair increases the attractiveness of the city	.814			
The fair increases international recognition about the city	.761			
Social costs		2.261	10.765	.722
The fair increases crime in the city	.832			
The fair increases the use of alcohol/drugs	.821			
The fair causes ecological damage	.710			
The fair causes congestion and disorder	.632			
Economic benefits		1.342	6.390	.693
The fair stimulates local economy	.769			
The fair increases employment opportunities	.717			
The fair provides residents an opportunity to attend an international event	.611			
Family togetherness		1.228	5.847	.732
The fair provides parents an opportunity to have fun with their children	.835			
The fair provides family based recreation	.826			
Economic costs		1.018	4.849	.645
The fair overtaxes available community financial resources	.840			
The fair increases the cost of living	.803			
Total variance explained			66.744	.719

ANOVA results revealed some patterns that are worth mentioning (Table 3). It was seen that the perceptions of the participants did not vary according to their educational and income levels. Results indicated significant differences in participants’ age groups in their perceptions of the benefits of the fair for *community cohesion* [$F(3, 418) = 4.078, p = 0.007$] and *economic costs* [$F(3, 418) = 3.827, p = 0.010$]. Post hoc comparisons suggested that participants under 20 group ($M = 3.53, SD = 0.73$) and the 21-32 group ($M = 3.43, SD = 0.79$) placed more importance on *community cohesion* compared to older than the 45 years and older group ($M = 3.09, SD = 0.93$). A similar pattern also existed on *economic costs* dimension that participants under 20 ($M = 2.63, SD = 0.95$) and the 21-32 group ($M = 2.49, SD = 0.92$) placed more importance on *economic costs* compared to the 45 years and older group ($M = 2.13, SD = 0.94$). Occupation groups also displayed differences in terms of

economic benefits [$F(2, 419) = 3.241, p = 0.040$] and *family togetherness* [$F(2, 419) = 3.880, p = 0.021$]. Post hoc comparisons suggested that unemployed/retired group ($M = 4.34, SD = 0.56$) placed more importance on *economic benefits* than the blue collar employees ($M = 4.18, SD = 0.66$). Similarly unemployed/retired group ($M = 4.62, SD = 0.45$) also placed more importance on *family togetherness* than the blue collar employees ($M = 4.45, SD = 0.59$). Finally, results suggested that there were significant differences in *community cohesion* [$F(2, 419) = 4.156, p = 0.016$] dimension on the basis of participants' marital status. Single participants ($M = 3.42, SD = 0.83$) placed more importance on community cohesion compared to other group ($M = 2.87, SD = 0.90$).

Table 3. ANOVA results for perceived socio-economic impact factors

Impact factors		Elementary School N=68	High School N=151	Vocational School N=61	University N=125	Graduate N=17	F
Community cohesion	M	3.34	3.31	3.59	3.26	3.54	1.853
	SD	(.86)	(.92)	(.67)	(.82)	(.95)	
Destination image	M	4.27	4.38	4.38	4.20	4.14	1.645
	SD	(.76)	(.63)	(.67)	(.69)	(.24)	
Social costs	M	3.02	2.69	2.69	2.79	2.41	2.267
	SD	(.82)	(.95)	(.98)	(1.00)	(.79)	
Economic benefits	M	4.15	4.27	4.36	4.18	4.05	1.407
	SD	(.60)	(.59)	(.60)	(.75)	(.90)	
Family togetherness	M	4.59	4.51	4.36	4.53	4.61	1.558
	SD	(.53)	(.55)	(.66)	(.58)	(.45)	
Economic costs	M	2.45	2.44	2.37	2.47	2.00	1.006
	SD	(.90)	(1.02)	(.87)	(.95)	(.64)	
		Under 20 N=51	21-32 N=213	33-44 N=79	Older than 45 N=79		
Community cohesion	M	3.53*	3.43*	3.27	3.09*		4.078*
	SD	(.73)	(.79)	(.94)	(.93)		
Destination image	M	4.37	4.33	4.30	4.18		1.093
	SD	(.59)	(.67)	(.77)	(.74)		
Social costs	M	2.79	2.80	2.70	2.68		.447
	SD	(.93)	(.99)	(.93)	(.88)		
Economic benefits	M	4.21	4.25	4.25	4.15		.505
	SD	(.59)	(.65)	(.74)	(.65)		
Family togetherness	M	4.53	4.52	4.48	4.51		.102
	SD	(.59)	(.56)	(.59)	(.54)		
Economic costs	M	2.63*	2.49*	2.39	2.13*		3.827*
	SD	(.95)	(.92)	(.99)	(.94)		
		Blue collar N=222	White collar N=63	Unemployed retired N=137			
Community cohesion	M	3.36	3.40	3.31			.313
	SD	(.86)	(.83)	(.85)			
Destination image	M	4.26	4.19	4.42			2.994
	SD	(.73)	(.77)	(.58)			
Social costs	M	2.77	2.97	2.65			2.599
	SD	(.93)	(1.00)	(.95)			
Economic benefits	M	4.18*	4.15	4.34*			3.241*
	SD	(.66)	(.81)	(.56)			

Family togetherness	M	4.45*	4.50	4.62*			3.880*
	SD	(.59)	(.64)	(.45)			
Economic costs	M	2.45	2.45	2.38			.299
	SD	(.96)	(.93)	(.94)			
		Less than 400 N=98	401 to 800 N=135	801 to 1200 N=80	More than 1200 N=43		
Community cohesion	M	3.47	3.34	3.20	3.31		1.548
	SD	(.80)	(.81)	(.95)	(.96)		
Destination image	M	4.37	4.29	4.16	4.19		1.448
	SD	(.66)	(.64)	(.83)	(.81)		
Social costs	M	2.77	2.75	2.87	2.52		1.348
	SD	(.88)	(.90)	(1.04)	(.87)		
Economic benefits	M	4.29	4.26	4.11	4.02		2.376
	SD	(.61)	(.54)	(.81)	(.92)		
Family togetherness	M	4.55	4.48	4.45	4.47		.543
	SD	(.48)	(.59)	(.67)	(.54)		
Economic costs	M	2.60	2.47	2.31	2.23		2.267
	SD	(.98)	(.92)	(.92)	(.96)		
		Married N=162	Single N=241	Other N=19			
Community cohesion	M	3.30	3.42*	2.87*			4.156*
	SD	(.86)	(.83)	(.90)			
Destination image	M	4.28	4.32	4.27			.221
	SD	(.74)	(.67)	(.60)			
Social costs	M	2.80	2.74	2.64			.326
	SD	(.95)	(.95)	(.83)			
Economic benefits	M	4.20	4.24	4.40			.806
	SD	(.68)	(.64)	(.70)			
Family togetherness	M	4.45	4.53	4.76			2.906
	SD	(.57)	(.56)	(.42)			
Economic costs	M	2.35	2.50	2.10			2.394
	SD	(.93)	(.95)	(1.10)			

CONCLUSION

This study examines the residents' socio-economic perceptions of an international fair. Study findings suggest that local residents have a positive perception on the impacts of the fair. These findings are coherent with similar studies on the residents' perceptions of events (Turco, 1997; Jackson, 2008; Zou & Ap, 2009; Amenumey & Amuquandoh, 2010; Zou, 2010; Choe, 2011; Lorde et al., 2011; Yolal et al., 2015). Therefore, one of the main contribution of this study is that it examines not only residents' perceptions of socio-economic impacts of an international fair but their variation among select demographic variables. Findings indicate that residents have a reasonable perception on the impacts of the fair. This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on events by furthering the understanding of how people from different socio-demographic groups perceive the impacts of an international fair.

Izmir International Fair participants are relatively younger; most of them are under 32 years old and mostly male. Considering the fact that the fair offers visitors to see products of international companies, larger male participation in the fair is not surprising. This finding suggests that fair organizers should pay close attention to the needs and perceptions of young male participants while planning the fair. On the other hand, strategies developed according to other age groups and females may help organizers to attract these groups.

Results indicate the importance of the fair on building community cohesion. It is understood that residents value the fair as a tool for increasing their attachment to their community, creating a sense of pride and a sense of community, and identity. This information is of great value for the fair organizers and also for the local authorities. As such, it is important to promote the fair as a tool for increasing residents' attachment to their community. Further, the fair is appreciated as a tool for creating and maintaining a destination image. This is particularly important for attracting visitors to the city. Study results also suggest that the fair creates opportunities for socialization and family togetherness. This is particularly important for the well-being of the society, and offers opportunities to increase the quality of life in the city. Therefore, fair organization should focus on the needs and expectations of the families, and increase the opportunities for socialization.

In line with several studies, study findings suggest that residents perceive that the fair itself causes negative impacts such as traffic congestion, and crowding in public services (Amenumey & Amuquandoh, 2010; Chen, 2011; Choe, 2011; Gursoy et al., 2016; Mihalik & Simonetta, 1999). However, contrary to the results of the previous studies, it is seen that the residents do not believe that the fair increases alcohol consumption and crime. This finding can be explained by the quiet and peaceful atmosphere of the city. This can also be explained by the SET that those who perceive benefits also perceive lower levels of negative impacts (Andereck et al., 2005). However, it is still important to take precautionary steps to maintain quiet and serene environment. The fair organization and local authorities should work collaboratively in order to reduce perceived negative impacts of the fair. Increasing the parking space around the fair area, and taking precautions to ease the access to the fair area may help solve the problem. Such measures may also help to diminish possible impacts of the fair on the built and natural environment.

Residents believe that the fair does not contribute to the development of social services and the infrastructure. This is coherent with several studies (Jackson, 2008). This finding can be explained with the fact that the fair has been organized for more than 80 years, and expectedly its contribution to the infrastructure is minimal. On the other hand, residents believe that the fair stimulates local economy and increases employment opportunities. Promotion and publicity about the fair, and increasing the participant firms and visitors will boost the economic contribution of the fair to the destination. Results suggest that female visitors place more importance on image, economic benefits, and family togetherness, while male visitors placed more importance on social costs. These findings are coherent with the previous studies (Lee et al., 2013; Weaver & Lawton, 2013; Zou, 2010). Therefore, increasing the awareness of male residents may change their perception towards the fair. However, it is important to focus both males and females equally, and getting them participate in the fair events together is crucial for the well-being of the society. In that sense, increasing the number of events suitable for both gender, and especially the ones for the families will be of great help for the success of the fair.

Results also show that residents' perceptions vary across their age groups. Younger residents focus on the economic costs of the fair. This is expected due to higher unemployment levels in Turkey. As such, it is important to inform younger people about the economic benefits of organizing events. Similarly, they should be informed about the possible impacts of attracting more companies to attend the fair, and the importance of attracting them to invest in the region. As such, local firms should also be encouraged to participate in the fair and make investment agreements with the participating companies.

Occupation and education are important factors that determine individual's social status and lifestyle. Consequently, study results show that residents' perceptions of the impacts of the fair differ across their occupations and education. For example, unemployed/retired group place more importance on economic benefits and family togetherness. Since this group does not have any work obligations, they have plenty of time, and place more importance on family togetherness and socialization. Therefore, fair organizers should find creative ways to get people visit the fair several times and spend more time in the area. As such, organizing recreational events during the fair such as concerts, shows and participatory events may help all groups to enjoy their time during the fair, and consequently result in their support for the event.

This study reports the findings of a research on the residents' perceptions of the impacts of an international fair, and offers insights for the organizers and planners for future events. However, the study is limited to perceptions of residents. In order to display a more comprehensive picture of the impacts of the fair, future studies should focus on other stakeholders and their perceptions of the fair. In that sense, studying the perceptions of participant firms may help to extend our knowledge about the fair. Moreover, this study examines the influence of residents' socio-demographic characteristics on their perceptions of the impacts of the fair. It is also possible to include other factors that may alter the significance of socio-demographic characteristics on the perceptions.

Although the fair consists of several events such as shows, concerts and galas, this study is limited to the visitors of the fair. As such, future studies can handle each event separately and conduct researches on different aspects of these individual events organized during the fair. Future studies are also needed to understand residents' perceptions of the success of the fair, organizers and local authorities, and their satisfaction with several aspects of the fair. These studies may offer a sound understanding of the residents for the fair organizers which is prerequisite for successful future events.

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