

Original Research

Diving into a new era: The role of an international sport event in fostering peace in a post-conflict city

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates community development and social impacts of hosting an international sport event in a post-war city still marred by social divisions and internal conflict. Focusing on the case of Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, this research examines resident perceptions of the recurrent Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series event. The framework of Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) guides this inquiry toward understanding how sport events can help facilitate greater unity and peace in transitional settings experiencing persistent social divisions. Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with residents are supported by findings from a resident survey. The findings illustrate how sport events can help to transform communities in line with SDP goals by fostering spaces for social cohesion, generating collective pride, and offering new senses of possibility and opportunity for the city. These outcomes can occur even if the event organization is not explicitly driven by an SDP mission. Perceptions of trust and neutrality are important factors in how community members assess the event and its organizing body. This research highlights the role of international sport events in community development and calls attention to the importance of understanding local context and engaging a broad range of community members.

DIVING INTO A NEW ERA: THE ROLE OF AN INTERNATIONAL SPORT EVENT IN FOSTERING PEACE IN A POST-CONFLICT CITY

Sport events can create powerful spaces for unity as well as division, contributing to senses of social progress or reinforcing social divides between populations. Though research suggests that sport has the ability to bring together diverse groups of people (Dyreson, 2003; Spencer, 2011), sport events may also emphasize differences and divisions between geographic or social populations, such as between classes (Grodecki & Kossakowski, 2021; Jarvie, 2011) or team supporters (Bertoli, 2017; Šuligoj & Kennell, 2021). Positive and negative social impacts from sport may occur simultaneously (Spaaij, 2009). Although cities can experience economic and social benefits from hosting larger and/or international sport events, these events may also be perceived as disruptive to the community and local environment (Fredline, 2005; Kim et al., 2006, 2015). Much research on community impacts of sport events has focused on “mega-events” (e.g., Olympic Games), yet smaller international sport events including tours (multiple-destination event series) and other shorter-duration engagements may also lead to social impacts such as enhanced national pride, unity, and euphoria, potentially with fewer negative community impacts (Taks et al., 2015).

Though a sizable body of research has investigated community impacts of sport events, limited studies have

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investigated how sport events may be conducive to community development goals in post-war and post-conflict regions, including places facing ongoing internal social divisions and disharmony across ethnic enclaves. In seeking peace and economic recovery, such places are positioned to experience significant transformative benefits as event hosts. On an international stage, a sport event may help present a blighted city in positive light, facilitating senses of pride, hope, and possibility amongst residents. Moreover, sport event emphases on socialization, fun, and enjoyment can create positive environments for facilitating unity and togetherness in ways that may lessen intergroup tensions and conflicts (Schulenkorf & Edwards, 2010). However, such benefits may have limited demographic reach depending upon who participates (Mitchell et al., 2020).

Events are an important aspect of programs oriented toward Sport for Development and Peace (SDP), which has been defined as the “use of sport to exert a positive influence on public health, the socialization of children, youths and adults, the social inclusion of the disadvantaged, the economic development of regions and states, and on fostering intercultural exchange and conflict resolution” (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011, p. 311). Large sport events have been viewed as means to advance certain policy agendas; the United Nations, notably, promotes sports as means to achieve a broad range of social outcomes, including peace and conflict resolution (Toscano & Molgaray, 2021). As noted, however, it is common for sport events to contribute to social division, calling for greater inquiry into the conditions that determine social unity outcomes.

With these contrasting points in mind, the researchers inductively sought to understand residents’ perceptions of a recurrent sport event, its community impacts, and how the event could be leveraged to serve community development interests. A post-war city, growing as a tourism destination yet still encumbered by notable social divisions, provides a rich social context to consider the role of sport events in conflict recovery. The researchers centered this investigation upon the following question: can an international sport event produced by an externally located, multinational, commercial organization contribute to the facilitation of peace and social cohesion in a host city? If so, what characteristics of the event play key roles in helping to achieve positive social impact outcomes? With interests in understanding broad themes in residents’ perceptions as well as the nuances of individuals’ observations and perspectives, the researchers employed a mixed-methods approach. This inquiry of sport events, social cohesion, and peace begins with a literature review along two primary themes: sport events for social impact and community

benefits of hosting international sport events.

Literature Review

Leveraging Sport Events for Social Impact

Chalip (2006), one of the earlier scholars to call research attention to the social value of sport events, suggests that in order to maximize positive social outcomes sport events should be intentionally planned to foster social interaction, prompt feelings of celebration through sociability, facilitate informal social opportunities, provide ancillary events and social opportunities, and theme the event. Chalip brings attention to “the alteration of communal affect,” i.e., “liminality,” that can result from the energies of the event’s communal atmosphere. Importantly, Chalip notes that liminality can provide participants with a “safe place and time to explore otherwise contentious social concerns” (p. 111). Since Chalip’s initial call, a growing body of literature has begun to examine how to leverage sport events for social impact (e.g., Djaballah et al., 2015; Welty Peachey et al., 2013; Schulenkorf & Edwards, 2012). Results, however, have been unclear. For example, an examination of the impact of the Major League Baseball All-Star game in Kansas City revealed a post-event increase in social capital (Oja et al., 2018), contrary to the findings of Gibson et al. (2014) who reported slight decreases or no changes across five dimensions of social capital following the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. Different research on this same event found that the importance of ethnic identity to social cohesion decreased following the sport event (Heere et al., 2016), which could be beneficial to social capital. Local attendees may perceive greater social impact from a sport event if they perceive that it exhibits greater social responsibility and a sense of camaraderie (Inoue & Havard, 2014).

Much of the existing research highlights the importance of intentionality as a precondition of positive outcomes (Schulenkorf et al., 2016). Without strategic planning, impacts are haphazard and left largely to luck (Taks et al., 2015). Though intentional design is certainly likely to maximize the potential for positive impacts, sport may be associated with community development even when lacking intentionality, particularly for large-scale sport events that may have secondary impact. The existing research is mixed on the relationship between sport events and community development outcomes (Gibson et al., 2014; Oja et al., 2018), and thus more research is needed to better understand potential impacts.

Social impact may be especially desirable in places impacted by conflict or disaster. Prior research has

identified a need for more case-specific research examining the social impacts of sport events in places in stages of regeneration in order to better understand potential economic and social benefits for host cities (Wise & Perić, 2016). In an early investigation of SDP themes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Gasser and Levinsen (2004) describe means by which youth football clubs may transcend the sport's war-related associations and be used instead to create social unity, a strategy that has been similarly applied in Israel (Sugden, 2008). Research examining ethnonational tensions in the capital city of Sarajevo suggests that participatory sport organizations can play valuable roles in constructing narratives that help allay social divisions (Maslic, 2019).

Community Benefits of Hosting International Sports Events

Large-scale sport events have the capacity to generate a broad range of community social impacts. Factors contributing to residents' perceptions of social impacts may include economic benefits, community pride, community development, economic costs, traffic problems, and security risks (Kim et al., 2015). Residents tend to be cognizant of community benefits and are willing to cope with some degree of negative impacts if the expected positive outcomes seem worthwhile (Jackson, 2008). By hosting special events, communities may be able to build economic opportunities, bring community members together, facilitate spaces for socialization, and offer educational opportunities for visitors (Xie & Sinwald, 2016). Engaging respected individuals and institutions in the host region can be crucial in leveraging the social and cultural community benefits of sport events (Schulenkorf & Schlenker, 2017).

One of the more substantial longer-term benefits of hosting special events can be the creation of community pride (Deery & Jago, 2010). International sport event research from Croatia suggests that residents' perceptions of the dimensions of community development and community pride are closely intertwined (Perić, 2018). However, community benefits related to pride may be overstated, and some events may generate impacts more effectively than others (Storm & Jakobson, 2020). The extent to which hosting a sport event contributes to enhanced senses of unity or positive perceptions of national identity has varied across cases, and these benefits may not be long-lasting, particularly for single-occurrence events (Heere et al., 2013). Pride and esteem can have both positive and negative implications in terms of sports and fan engagement (Decrop & Derbaix, 2010), and competitions may aggravate existing inter-group conflicts, particularly when competing nations have a history of conflict (Deery & Jago, 2010).

International events such as the Olympics may create an experiential environment imbued with nationalistic messaging (Closs Stephens, 2016).

Conversely, sport events may also serve to create positively affective communal spaces. For instance, research pertaining to the 2014 FIFA World Cup found that the event's celebrative atmosphere was conducive to enhancing residents' subjective well-being (Schlegel et al., 2017). Hosting the Olympic Games has been associated with feelings of euphoria and elation amongst city residents (Waitt, 2003). With intentionality, sport events can potentially leverage the facilitation of celebratory atmospheres to achieve sport-for-development outcomes (Welty Peachey et al., 2015).

Community benefits of hosting sport events are often linked to tourism-based benefits. Public perceptions of sport event image can positively impact destination image (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007), but promotional benefits of hosting large sports events may be optimistically overestimated (Teigland, 1999). In transitional settings like post-conflict destinations, hosting sport tourism events has been found amongst residents to be associated with enhanced feelings of community ties, perceptions of national identity, and increased senses of pride in one's country (Pranić et al., 2012), and is often considered instrumental in regeneration or revitalization efforts (Wise & Harris, 2017).

Location and Event Background

This research focuses on the Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series event in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Mostar is a city rich with natural and cultural assets, but also notorious for internal conflict. Between 1992 to 1995, the city experienced some of the worst destruction and casualties of the Bosnian War (Bollens, 2007). At various stages, the city's Serb, Croat, and Bosniak populations, along with outside forces, fought against one another. In 1993, Stari Most ("the Old Bridge"), a UNESCO World Heritage site long associated with the city's Muslim Bosniak population, was destroyed by shelling from Croat forces. With the destruction of the bridge and other historic structures, Mostar's heritage and place image were greatly damaged (Wise, 2020). The bridge stood in disrepair for many years before its rebuild was completed in 2004. The city's population has remained largely geographically and socially divided between its ethnic-religious groups, although signs of change and unification have gradually begun to surface (Carabelli, 2018). The river has commonly been considered a geographical divider between the city's two main subpopulations (Catholic Croats, mainly in West Mostar, and Muslim Bosniaks, mainly in East Mostar),

positioning the river and the bridge as potent sites for memories, associations, and symbolism, as well as contemporary tourism intrigue (Forde, 2016). For over four centuries, this 24-meter-high stone footbridge has hosted a tradition of high diving, practiced mainly by younger men from East Mostar. Today, this provides a tourism highlight.

Noting the bridge's suitability for high diving and its uniquely picturesque setting above the Neretva River, the Red Bull organization first included Mostar on its World Series tour in 2015, continuing through 2022 (cancelled in 2020). The seasonal Red Bull tour typically consists of eight global stops, and Mostar is one of few to have maintained a regular spot on the tour. In Mostar, attendees from around the world crowd beneath the Old Bridge to watch an internationally diverse field of male and female competitors. The event weekend includes auxiliary events and activities such as a free, public music festival in the Old City featuring regional bands and performers. Red Bull, an energy drink brand known globally for its branded action sport events, uses the inspirational motto "giving wings to people and ideas" to describe both its products and sport events (Red Bull, 2022), but is not explicitly driven by social impact priorities in its competition programming. The tour has historically included a wide variety of destinations, some others which have also had histories of conflict (e.g., Dubrovnik, Beirut).

Two prior studies have examined community impacts of Red Bull sport events. Research on the Red Bull Cliff Diving competition in the Azores (Avelar et al., 2020) suggested that the event was broadly associated with positive tourism and economic development impacts and some perceived social and cultural development benefits. Research investigating a Red Bull-sponsored surfing event in South Africa (Ntloko & Swart, 2008) found support for a variety of community impacts, including entertainment value for residents, economic boost for local businesses, regional promotion, and facilitation of a sense of community pride; however, management considerations such as a lack of local representation in planning processes reflected community-level concerns pertaining to social and environmental impacts. Although the South African research provides some insights into event impacts in a place with history of segregation, neither of these previous studies specifically inquired about sport event impacts in a city aiming to recover from war or conflict.

METHODOLOGY

This mixed-methods research employs a pragmatic worldview to address the research problem through utilizing a diverse toolbox of research approaches and data (Morgan,

2007). The central method of phenomenology-based, in-depth interviewing is bolstered by preliminary survey findings toward understanding the event's community social impacts, reflective of both broad and nuanced aspects of residents' perceptions. The sequential explanatory design allowed researchers to first develop a broader, contextual understanding of adult residents' ($N = 408$) perceptions of tourism and community development in Mostar, based upon common variables used in the literature. Next, a smaller panel ($N = 14$) of residents participated in a series of three interviews each, employing Seidman's (2013) phenomenological interviewing process. Research was conducted in Fall 2019.

Quantitative Methods

A questionnaire was designed to gain an understanding about residents' perceptions of community development via sport events and tourism in Mostar. The instrument included general questions as well as items specific to the Red Bull event. Four questions pertained to perceived community impacts were adopted from the social impacts of hosting sport events scale developed and validated by Kim et al. (2015; adapted from Crompton, 2004). The survey was administered in the local language (Bosnian/Serbo-Croatian) following translation and back-translation by native speakers and a pilot test completed by five residents. Sampling was conducted using a probabilistic cluster approach with a predetermined list of public locations across different neighborhoods of the city (e.g., parks, plazas, shopping areas) during different times of day. At each location, the researcher (assisted by a local translator) invited all adult residents (18 years or older) present at that time to participate. The survey was described as focusing on tourism and events, rather than sports specifically. About 40% of those approached agreed to participate, resulting in 408 valid questionnaires. The respondents identified as 54% male and 46% female, with 63% being under the age of 35. Fifty-five percent were from eastern neighborhoods, 37% were from western neighborhoods, and 8% were from other areas (i.e., suburbs/villages). Data were analyzed using SPSS v.22.

Qualitative Methods

For the interviews, the population was delimited to younger adult residents of Mostar, reflecting a specific interest in understanding perceptions of residents who grew up in the aftermath of war and represent the city's future workforce, governance, and socio-cultural composition. Snowball sampling began with outreach at the local universities. Participants were required to have at least conversational proficiency in English, which is relatively common amongst younger residents. Nine women and five men ($Mage = 27$; R

= 18-42; Table 1) from a variety of neighborhoods and interests/professions completed the interview process with the same female, international researcher. Participants' personal involvement in sport varied from very little to primary occupation. Using Seidman's (2013) three-interview approach, each interview had a different focus: first, the participant's life history and backstory (e.g., life in Mostar, family background, education and profession, personal hobbies and interests); second, the participant's experiences with the phenomena being studied (the Red Bull event, as positioned within the broader context of events, tourism, leisure activities, and social interaction in Mostar); and third, reflection and follow-up. Interviews occurred over the course of one week. The three-interview format provided the researcher with opportunities to build rapport and intentionally revisit earlier themes and responses. This repetition, paired with comparative insights from the survey, helped enable an iterative and ongoing attention to the data, as has been recommended in qualitative, leisure-focused research to enhance trustworthiness (Rose & Johnson, 2020).

Table 1. Overview of interview participants

Name*	Gender	Age	Home neighborhood	Primary occupation	Personal engagement with event	Preferred activities and interests
Mirjana	Female	18	West Mostar	Student	Watched on TV/internet	Coffee with friends, park and riverside walks with friends
Lucija	Female	18	West Mostar	Student	Seen video clips only	Socializing at cafes and clubs, walks around the city with friends
Amin	Male	19	East Mostar	Athlete	Attended in person	Playing basketball (on city's team), hiking, outdoor sports, enjoying the city with friends
Karlo	Male	19	West Mostar	Student	Attended in person	Cycling, outdoor recreation, hanging out with friends
Vedad	Male	20	East Mostar	Student	Watched on TV/internet	Socializing, playing music, studying
Esmā	Female	20	Southeastern village	Student	Attended in person	Reading, movies, spending time with family, taking educational classes
Ivana	Female	24	West Mostar	Student/tour guide	Watched on TV/internet	Going to bars and clubs with friends, cinema, traveling, watching TV
Eva	Female	28	West Mostar	Salesperson	Seen video clips only	Going to nightclubs with friends, spending time with family
Katarina	Female	33	Western village	Teacher	Watched on TV/internet	Coffee with family and friends, watching movies, reading, crafts
Dragica	Female	35	West Mostar	Accountant	Watched on TV/internet	Dancing, learning foreign languages, cinema, coffee
Aldin	Male	35	Central Mostar	Teacher	Attended in person	Traditional dancing, music, gaming, traditional coffee
Alma	Female	35	East Mostar	Office worker	Attended in person	Hiking, climbing, outdoors, coffee with friends
Tarik	Male	36	East Mostar	Hospitality	Attended in person	Spending time at cafes with friends, music, watching TV, regional travel
Lana	Female	42	West/Central Mostar	International business	Attended in person	Dining out, gym workouts, movies and theater, spas, traveling

*All names have been changed.

Applying an inductive approach, the researchers recorded, transcribed, and analyzed the interview data using MAXQDA software, applying Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Van Kaam technique for phenomenological research. This technique facilitates an in-depth engagement with each participant's experiences, positioning, and voice (here complemented by the in-depth nature of the three-interview format). This process encompasses several distinct steps. First, all data are coded through an approach of "horizontalization" in which each section is considered with equal importance. Then, the researcher reduces data by reflecting upon the participants' lived experience and the phenomena in focus and identifies key excerpts and quotes. Next, the researcher compiles textural descriptions for each participant, followed by structural descriptions to observe themes across participants. Finally, the researcher synthesizes these textural and structural themes. For this research, two researchers reviewed the interview transcripts for key segments and themes in order to enhance trustworthiness of the findings.

FINDINGS

Survey Results

The survey responses provide a broad overview of residents' attitudes toward types of tourism in Mostar as well as perceptions of social outcomes specific to the Red Bull event, setting a stage of general understanding for the interviews to explore themes in greater depth. The survey's tourism-focused questions helped establish a baseline for understanding how residents perceive hosting visitors, broadly, and provided a comparison between sport event tourism and other types of tourism development. The tourism items (Table 2) revealed overall favorable impressions of tourism in Mostar, including support for tourism pertaining to large sports events ($M = 6.11$; $SD = 1.31$; 1-7 Likert-type scale). Tourism pertaining to the city's past 30 year's history was least favored overall ($M = 5.33$; $SD = 1.88$).

Table 3 presents responses to the questions pertaining to community impacts of the sport event. Overall, respondents perceived the event positively, with mean scores between 6 and 7 ("strongly agree" and "very strongly agree"). The highest-scored item was "the event enhances community pride," with a mean score of 6.45. Respondents also expressed strong agreement for the event's ability to enhance the sense of being a part of a community, provide an incentive for the preservation of local culture, and reinforce community spirit.

Table 2. Support for specific types of tourism development and promotion in Mostar and the surrounding region

Type of tourism	<i>n</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Tourism in Mostar (<i>general</i>)	406	7	6.14	1.25
Regional food, art, and music	396	7	6.26	1.12
Outdoor recreation [such as hiking, biking, rafting, fishing and swimming]	408	7	6.17	1.24
Large sport events [such as races, marathons, competitions, soccer matches, etc.]	405	7	6.11	1.31
Ottoman history and heritage	402	6	5.84	1.43
Yugoslavian history and heritage	404	6	5.65	1.57
History of the past 30 years [including the recent war]	406	6	5.33	1.88

Note. The Likert-type response scale (1 to 7) was presented with the following guidelines: 1 = extremely unsupportive, 2 = very unsupportive, 3 = somewhat unsupportive, 4 = neither supportive nor unsupportive, 5 = somewhat supportive, 6 = very supportive, 7 = extremely supportive. Items appear as they did on the survey instrument (pre-translation). Survey instrument asked: “On a scale of 1 to 7, please indicate how supportive you are of tourism development in Mostar and its surrounding region focused on:...”

Table 3. Resident perceptions of the Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series event, by mean score

Statement	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
The event enhances community pride	395	6.45	1.24
The event enhances the sense of being a part of a community	394	6.37	1.25
The event provides the incentive for the preservation of local culture	395	6.34	1.26
The event reinforces community spirit	395	6.33	1.34

Note. The Likert-type response scale (1 to 7) was presented with the following guidelines: 1 = very strongly disagree, 2 = strongly disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = strongly agree, 7 = very strongly agree. Statements appear as they did on the survey instrument (pre-translation). Survey instrument asked (pre-translation): “On a scale of 1 to 7, please indicate how much you agree with the following statement about the Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series event in Mostar.”

Interview Findings

Overview

The 14 participants had varying levels of engagement with the event, but all had at least seen clips on TV or the internet and were familiar with the event (Table 1). Although geographical delineations within the interview sample seemed to suggest some differences between the city's subpopulations in terms of engagement with the event, perceptions of the event were overall positive across all participants. The researchers identified four dominant themes pertaining to community event impacts: positive influences upon the city's recovering image and identity, communal appeal, event production and organizational strengths, and connections to local heritage and culture. These themes collectively imply positive social impacts in terms of social cohesion and collective pride.

City Image and Identity

External Perceptions. Mostar's war-blighted reputation created the contextual backdrop for understanding the impacts of tourism and events. Aldin, who works as a guide for international students, described how Bosnia and Herzegovina is commonly perceived:

The general image of us in the world is awful. That's my opinion...Everyone who sees Bosnia on the news, probably the first images are, like, war or grenades, smoke, destroyed buildings, and things like that. But the true image is completely the opposite.

Mirjana, a student, was of the opinion that tourists have been "very much drawn to the situation or the stigma around the city," specifically mentioning "the history, the poor people, the problems" and "the post-war situation and how everything looks." Echoing Aldin, Eva, a saleswoman from West Mostar, expressed hopes that tourists would leave Mostar with a "vision of some kind of modern version of this country," overriding preconceived notions.

Tourism and Internal Attitudes. In the interviews, it became clear that the topic of tourism was inseparable from the topic of community development in Mostar. In addition to the ways tourism can help extinguish external stigmas, participants frequently expressed how it impacted residents' own attitudes. For Tarik, who worked in hospitality, seeing tourists in Mostar equaled a feeling of progress: "it makes you feel like you are there, you are on the map, and you are important." Dragica, an accountant in her thirties, was hopeful that "if tourists come, we can forget all those bad things from the past." In Aldin's mind, tourism and

international events helped to bring an internal change of attitudes to Mostar:

Maybe we would be more aggressive, more mentally unsatisfied, or maybe we would be more 'in the box' if we were here only with ourselves. But being visited by a lot of people from different countries, it has to open your views, right? That's a good way of mind-changing, in a good way, right?

Perceptions of Mostar's Old Bridge provided indication of this attitudinal change. Mirjana explained that many Mostar residents "actually think of the Old Bridge as the divider and not the thing that connects two sides." Aldin, who had a mixed-ethnicity vantage point, believed a wider range of residents had more recently been expressing pride in the Old Bridge and its neighborhood:

After the war, Mostar was split between Muslims and Croats...Somehow Croats all the time rejected to accept this part of the town as their own. Nowadays, it's quite different...Someone who's Croatian, speaking about Mostar, nowadays he will mention the Old Town. He will say, 'this is the Old Town, Old Bridge, from my city.' And he will speak about it proudly.

This sentiment was reflected in Dragica's comments: from her Croat perspective the Old Bridge was "only one way of representing Mostar," yet it was "definitely the main thing that represents Mostar as a city, so the tourists first need to go there."

Sport Event Impacts Upon Place Perceptions. The interview series did not begin with the topic of the Red Bull event, so the topic was able to emerge organically in the conversations before being prompted. Participants described the event using words like "amazing" (Aldin), and often brought it up as the key example of an event that had helped to transform the city's image. In an opinion echoed by others, Lana stated that "Red Bull has brought to this city so much publicity," and she "like[d] seeing our city being presented in the world." For many participants, the event provided a clear source of pride arising from Mostar's backdrop of hardship and stigma. Alma, a mother in her thirties, explained that the event's international publicity made her feel like "all of the world, in that weekend, knows about Mostar and about Bosnia." Tarik saw the other tour stops as being "elite places," stating, "I think we are privileged to be on this world tour." For Amin, a local athlete, observing so many visitors during the event provided him with a sense of feeling "fulfilled." Vedad had a similar response: "afterwards, I felt proud of my city, that my – I mean our – bridge was elected as one of the jumping

spots for Red Bull Cliff Diving.” Ivana, too, said that she felt “proud,” after seeing Red Bull’s high-quality video clips online.

Communal Appeal of Sport Event

Overall, participants felt very positively toward the event, noting that it brought an upbeat, lively energy to the city. To Esma, a student, the event was “a 100% positive thing” for Mostar. Ivana, a tour guide, believed that the event “shows the best of Mostar.” The two potential deterrents to event attendance that participants mentioned were environmental factors: the summer heat (Karlo, Lucija, Mirjana, Tarik) and crowding (Karlo, Lucija, Mirjana, Tarik, Ivana, Vedad). However, the crowding had some positive implications, as Ivana explained why she thought the event was a positive way to experience Mostar: “It’s all people. Talking and crowded and happy and everything is full.” Lana similarly stated: “we see the city transform into a cosmopolitan sort of place. It’s dangerous, and [there’s the] music fest throughout the old city. So of course, everyone likes these effects of it.” For Dragica, the event inspired broad curiosity amongst residents: “People want to see what is happening.”

The common attitude that the event was available to everyone was articulated by Eva, who suggested that it provided a more inclusive opportunity to bring people together at the Old Bridge:

I think [the event] is great because it’s a combination of history, of the art of the bridge, of the action that comes from jumping, of an international event, and because it represents the West and the East of Mostar. A lot of people come together that usually don’t like each other [laughs] because of the politics. So, it’s great that it has something to unite them...Usually the Old Bridge represents the East side, but maybe because of the event it’s not so easily noticeable. I think that’s a really positive thing.

Several participants noted that the weekend-long event’s varied attractions helped to garner interest from a broader range of residents. Teasingly, Dragica said of herself and her sister: “she will go to the party and I will go to the jumping.” For Tarik, the event weekend offered people variety as well as a sense of escapism:

There is so much going on. Wherever you turn, there is a concert here, there is a concert there, there’s a street performance there...There is always something that takes your mind away.

However, Tarik mentioned that for him, the competition

was “too much adrenaline” (“it’s Red Bull, you know how it is,” he explained) given his adrenaline-laden wartime childhood in Mostar – providing a reminder of how the city’s dark history can arise in seemingly benign contexts.

Perceptions of Sport Event Production

Participants generally found the event production (operations and logistics, promotion, and attendee experience) to be both impressive and inspiring. Mirjana reflected upon the city’s transformation during the event:

It almost looks like it’s not Mostar, like it’s not our city, like it’s somewhere else, somewhere bigger, because it’s very professional and all the foreign people are there, and everybody is very, I don’t know, organized, and everything looks good on TV.

To Aldin, the event production was “a perfect example for our authorities of how to make something in a proper way.” He hoped that this event could inspire and guide future community productions, but was unsure whether this would be possible.

Several participants, including Tarik, expressed perceptions of mutual respect between the city and the event: “Mostar likes Red Bull and I believe that Red Bull likes Mostar, so I believe that we have good relationship with each other.” He elaborated further:

I don’t think that there are any negative aspects because they’re actually in compliance with everything. They don’t pollute. They don’t do any harm...They make the city great for a few days, greater...because there are a lot of stands, there are a lot of activities. There are a lot of opportunities. They hire local people for doing certain jobs and they help the community in this way.

Attuned to the athletes’ experience, Amin observed that “the residents here and the tourists here have given [the divers] so much love... and [the athletes] were in love with the city, in love with the locals, and the tourists too.” Lana and Tarik both noted that one of the athletes had personally cleaned up the event’s beach area from litter, which had caught local attention.

Some participants noted room for improvement for the event’s production. Karlo, who studied tourism at the university, provided a more critical perspective of the event:

It’s a great opportunity, but it kind of feels poorly organized, like they didn’t use the area around the bridge as well as they could have... It’s a good starting point, but I

think they could turn it into a great festival. Such as more parties, playing games, stuff like that.

Similarly, Vedad, another student with interest in regional planning, thought that the event organizers could do more to encourage visitors to explore different parts of Mostar, as it currently “brings people just to one place.” These comments illustrate some ways the event might be leveraged to make even greater community impacts.

The interviews commonly addressed the importance of having a well-known, outside (i.e., external to the Bosnian or former Yugoslavian region) event organizing body in creating both a more esteemed and a more inclusive event. Red Bull’s positioning helped to establish trust within the community and within visitors, because, as Alma stated, “Red Bull knows all of the world; everybody knows Red Bull.” In a city known for societal and political divisions, a foreign organizing body was perceived as more neutral. According to Eva, “people around here can be kind of, um, stubborn and principled and stuff like that. And someone who comes from the outside doesn’t have the same view of things.” Aldin, too, saw this contrast clearly: “[Red Bull] did more than our authorities did in the last 20 years. They did in one event,” he stated, expressing frustration that local authorities didn’t seem able to cooperate sufficiently to achieve something like this themselves.

Connections to Local Heritage and Culture

Widely, interview participants appreciated how the event was able to reflect and highlight unique aspects of their city and culture, both past and present. In addition to the historic setting, the coinciding music festival featured regional acts, and the live competition’s announcers spoke mainly in the local language. To Katarina, a teacher from Western Mostar, the Red Bull event provided attendees with a taste of “everything” Mostar: “You see Stari Most, you see the people in Mostar, you can eat cevapi, and have fun.” She explained that the event’s diving focus made her feel proud because most cities “have basketball, soccer...But we have jumping, and we are different, I think,” she said, laughing. Esma reflected upon televised interviews she had seen, in which athletes spoke about how the bridge venue presented a particularly meaningful setting: “it’s much more for them, even for them...It presents for them a story of a monument.” For visitors, residents, and event participants alike, local history and heritage seemed to play an important role in the experience of the event.

Several participants noted that the event helped to build upon local tradition and carry it into the future, providing an even greater feeling of pride for locals. Amin expressed that

he felt “proud” because Red Bull “chose us, they chose the city, and especially the bridge, and [they] add on to the history that we already have.” He described the relationship between the Red Bull event and Mostar as a “win-win situation.” Vedad expressed similar feelings:

I think [the event] emphasizes the tradition of diving into the Neretva River from the bridge. Diving here is all about diving from heights. It is an interesting combination, from the tradition that we have here in Mostar and then combining it with the cliff diving of Red Bull. I think that’s cool about it.

For Aldin, a key aspect of the event’s success was that it retained local character: “They basically adapted Red Bull to Mostar, not vice versa,” he posited.

Building Upon Local Tradition. Several participants expressed appreciation for how this event built upon the local bridge diving tradition and turned it into something even more exciting and impressive. Alma expressed that her initial thoughts were, “Finally! This thing is getting on some high level!” She further explained that “because it is Red Bull, they are athletes, they are not just ‘jumpers,’ they are much more than that. Everything is a show.” In Vedad’s opinion, “Everything is better than it used to be from the traditional jumping on the bridge because Red Bull invested in the cliff diving.” Lana appreciated how the Red Bull event brought more stylistic and geographic diversity: “The Red Bull event is much more fun because of the things [maneuvers] they do. Plus, the whole crew is international. Over here [for traditional jumping], most of the people are local, or from former Yugoslavia...plus they do only two sorts of jumps.” Participants provided indication that the Red Bull event had begun to become interwoven with the city’s own heritage: “it’s becoming a little bit of a tradition,” Esma mused.

Local Context of Sports. The broader social context of sports in Mostar arose in a few of the interviews (Mirjana, Lucija, Aldin). Mirjana explained that the city currently has two football teams, each with very active fan clubs—one based in East Mostar and the other in West Mostar. The teams’ respective supporters have been known to get in fights, especially on game days. In Mirjana’s perspective, “in America, [sports] all seem very fun and positive, and the sports make everybody excited. But here, it’s just scary.” Aldin reflected that this situation had improved in recent years, but affiliation with the city’s sports teams remained one of the more common and obvious ways for residents to assert their ethnic/religious identities.

In contrast, the Red Bull event provided Mostarians with a

competitive sport context based around awe, excitement, and respect. Dragica said she found the sport “fascinating” because “I admire those people who jump, who have courage, because I couldn't!” For Lana, this equated to a unique spectator experience: “what they're doing up there it's so incredible ... like you just live it. You look at them, the energy.” Karlo felt that the Red Bull event “inspires people.” However, he felt that there might be a missed opportunity in terms of local youth engagement: “I think that should be a bigger focus, since younger generations are the future, and Bosnia and Herzegovina has a lot of potential in that department, especially for extreme sports.” To him, the “sports scene” in Bosnia and Herzegovina was currently underdeveloped. “If this could get more people to get active,” he explained, “it'd be great both for Bosnia and Herzegovina and in general for sport.” Karlo recalled that his little brother had seen the competition and said “I want to do that!” adding that “When I was a child, I wanted to do all sorts of stuff like that, but I wasn't anywhere you could actually do it,” as sports facilities and programs had been lacking for him in West Mostar.

DISCUSSION

The interviews provided additional scientific evidence, aligned with the survey findings, of the event's positive role in generating positive social impacts. Schulenkorf (2012) describes sport-for-development projects as being particularly valuable in divided societies, where they may contribute to intergroup togetherness, social cohesion, and community empowerment. This research illuminated two main themes connected to these and other community social impacts. First, the event is uniquely positioned to create appealing and inclusive communal spaces within the city, facilitating social cohesion and opening opportunities for peaceful coexistence. Second, through showcasing the city's assets, exhibiting positive urban transformation, and modeling care and respect for the community, the sport event helps to generate a more collective form of pride amongst residents. These components create senses of progress and possibility for a city overcoming conflict.

Forging Spaces for Social Cohesion

As with the survey findings, the interviews offered indications of the event's positive abilities to foster community spirit, community pride, and a feeling of being a part of a community. In the interviews, participants articulated how the Red Bull event provided an exemplary exhibition of urban transformation through its ability to welcome all people. The presence of visitors and the event's international emphasis played key roles in fostering this new, inclusive sense of togetherness in an otherwise

familiar (and sometimes perceived as socially exclusive) East Mostar setting. This suggests that the event was able to construct a meaningful sense of liminality (cf, Chalip, 2006), facilitating social inclusivity within usually contested spaces.

Communal Appeal of Sport Event

Since the competition is a mostly free-of-charge event featuring male and female athletes and supporters from around the world, it is relatively well positioned to model ideals of inclusivity, distinctive from other sport events such as football matches, which have been noted to aggravate divisions in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Gasser & Levinsen, 2004; Hough, 2008) as well as in a variety of other international contexts (Svensson & Woods, 2017). It is important to note that none of the Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series Mostar 2019 competitors were from Bosnia and Herzegovina or neighboring countries, so this study did not reveal fan-based issues pertaining to nationalism or other more divisive manifestations of pride, which could arise in other scenarios

Nevertheless, an apparent lower level of engagement from Western residents (as evident in interviewees' respective attendance) and stated frustrations about event attendees not experiencing more of the city illuminate an opportunity for the event to reach a broader population. These findings correspond with Ntloko and Swart (2008), identifying a greater opportunity for Red Bull events to engage residents, potentially reducing negative community impacts while also allowing a broadened base of residents to enjoy the event's entertainment and emotional benefits (including community pride). In Mostar, supplementary offerings like the music festival appeared to diversify engagement and build excitement. This further supports advocacy from Chalip (2006) and Daigo and Fili (2020) for using ancillary activities and social/interactive opportunities to build conviviality and sense of community, leveraging sport events toward greater social impact. Chalip suggests combining arts with sports, which seems well-suited for Mostar, especially given how survey respondents showed strongest support for tourism based upon regional food, art, and music.

The festival-like, weekend-long format of the event allowed for greater anticipation amongst locals for the auxiliary events (music, after-parties, etc.) while also expanding the event's potential to increase community economic benefits. This contrasts with the Azores-based Red Bull Cliff Diving event, where research revealed lower satisfaction scores amongst attendees age 35 and under, and noted that its one-day-only schedule limited broader economic benefits

(Avelar et al., 2020). Annual repetition is another notable factor, as it may build destination loyalty and stronger senses of place attachment among visitors (Kaplanidou et al., 2012) and build awareness and support amongst residents (Bull & Lovell, 2007). Scholtz et al. (2019) suggest that residents' perceptions of positive social impacts from recurrent sport events may decline over time, yet residents in Mostar seemed to maintain strongly positive opinions after five years of hosting.

Perceptions of Sport Event Production

Against a local backdrop of ethnic divisions, the Red Bull organization was widely viewed as an unbiased outside party advantageously positioned to appeal to a wide range of residents. As was evident in the Sarajevo-based research from Maslic (2019), this research suggests that participants' sense of trust in the sport organization is an important precondition of whether offerings can help to foster outcomes of social cohesion and peace. Other research from Bosnia and Herzegovina suggests that a balance of local and international control and expertise can be integral to the success of sport programs in peacebuilding efforts, as the local organization can keep local people motivated and engaged, and the international organization can help maintain ethnic balance of participants and perceptions of management neutrality (Gasser & Levinson, 2004). Although the Red Bull event relies largely upon international organizing, it maintains local connections through the sport, as well as the chosen venues and entertainment.

Importantly, organizational "neutrality" does not have to equate to apathy. Event organizers with interests in charitable engagements or assessing and ameliorating their own operational impacts through corporate social responsibility efforts should carefully consider the potential place-based social impacts of hosting an event in a particular setting. Although social impacts of events can be far more challenging to measure than economic benefits (Fredline et al., 2003), strategies such as conducting a community profile can help organizers (or other interested parties, such as city officials) identify place-specific event goals, beyond just financial outcomes (Kaplanidou, 2020). Partnerships between practitioners and researchers/academia can help articulate goals, build capacity, and engage different sectors and disciplines (Whitley et al., 2019).

Prior research suggests that youth engagement strategies, specifically, can have powerfully broad-reaching social impacts. In the case of post-conflict Sri Lanka, Schulenkorf and Edwards (2010) suggest that engaging youth as

catalysts of peace and creating event-related social opportunities may help maximize opportunities for sport events to help foster peace amongst a divided local population. In Mostar, youth interventions and engagements (not limited to sport) have been seen as key avenues to either build peace or reinforce existing divisions (Laketa, 2019; Palmberger, 2019). In this research, youth engagement arose as a potential area of improvement for the Red Bull event. The Red Bull sponsors have already shown some interest in helping to foster local youth athletic involvement, such as by highlighting up-and-coming local athletes in past online press materials. Greater youth engagement could occur through additional offerings such as games for attendees, athlete meet-and-greets, and athletic training opportunities for local youth. This might hopefully inspire future engagement in sport. Research has indicated that one-off event attendance can be broadly influential in the intent to participate in sports (Ramchandani & Coleman, 2012); however, further tactics such as facility development may be needed for participation follow-through (Taks, et al., 2014). Sportsmanship can be a key component of how sport can facilitate social impacts (Maslic, 2019), and in this research several interviewees noted the positive words and behaviors of the athletes, suggesting strong potential for role modeling.

Peacebuilding Through Collective Pride

In a city well known for its residents' shared legacies of trauma, destruction, and divisions, the Red Bull event served as a reminder to residents of their shared community assets. The findings provide further support for the potentialities of sport events to help achieve community social benefits in transitional, recovering destinations, aligning with findings of other research pertaining to the former Yugoslavia region (e.g., Perić, 2018; Pranić et al., 2012). This research illustrates how a sport event can offer a re-envisioning of what a city's image and identity can be, while also celebrating local culture and traditions.

City Image and Identity

Building upon the survey's indications of strong resident support for tourism, the interviews suggested that Mostar residents commonly perceive tourism as a primary driver toward improved international reputation, re-envisioned internal associations with local places, and a more prosperous and peaceful future. The Red Bull event was able to build upon these benefits of tourism by adding additional layers of excitement and enjoyment for locals, emphasizing Chalip's (2006) notion that sport events can be positioned to create greater social impacts if they are not just about the sport competition itself, but also about making opportunities for festivity, socialization, and fun.

Participants appreciated how the event was able to use Mostar's existing environment, while also noting that the city felt completely transformed during the event—a recognition that seems reminiscent of Chalip's "sense that something important is happening" (2006, p. 110). Tourism research suggests that events designed to be more reflective of a city's character may lead to greater long-term tourism benefits by encouraging positive attitudes toward the city and more word-of-mouth referrals (Zhang et al., 2020). Similarly, events that are perceived to promote the host city/region and work to enhance community pride will likely be the most successful in the long term (Deery and Jago, 2010).

Mostar's inclusion in the World Series tour helped to facilitate place-based pride amongst residents from angles of self-evaluation as well as group association. Interview participants were simultaneously cognizant that it was an honor to be included in the tour and aware that Mostar was unique and special amongst the destinations. Prior research links sport events to enhanced feelings of community pride, particularly when service quality and social atmospheres are perceived as strong (Ribeiro et al, 2018) or when the occasion is promoted as a "hallmark" event (Waite, 2001). Hosting sport events has been found to contribute to national pride in young people, particularly among males who participate in sport (Leng et al., 2012). Building a local social identity can be a key element of an event's ability to influence community pride (Magno & Dossena, 2020). In this research, participants' feelings of pride for their city were reinforced as they observed the event's high production value, television broadcasting, visitor enjoyment, celebration of local sport and culture, and deferential behaviors from the athletes.

Connections to Local Heritage and Culture

In Mostar, a critical aspect of the event's ability to generate community pride appeared to be its connection to local attributes. Several interviewees brought up how the event was able to build upon – and for some, improve—the city's longstanding tradition of bridge diving, bringing new enthusiasm to the sport. Svensson and Woods (2017, p. 43) express interest in whether "indigenous" sports may be better positioned to overcome the "hegemonic ideals and patriarchal associations often found in more traditional, organized sports," which is a relevant consideration given Mostar's notoriously divisive football culture. Despite how bridge diving in Mostar is mostly associated with one ethnic population, the sport's deeply-rooted connection to the city seemed to generate a broad sense of pride across residents. Although the survey and interviews revealed the city's history to be a controversial topic for tourism, the Red Bull

event seemed to offer widely-accepted means to showcase the historic, symbolic bridge site. The event provided a strong example of how "old" can meet "new," and how a city's historical aspects—even in places with dark pasts—can enhance and make way for opportunities that are distinctly modern. Adaptive community use of heritage buildings is encouraged as means of community regeneration (Bullen & Love, 2020), and this research provides evidence of how sport events, too, can embrace this notion. New, positive, and more inclusive associations can be imbued into a site that has traditionally been a source of varied emotions.

CONCLUSION

This research provides evidence that hosting an international sport event can be an effective tool for social impact in a divided community, creating spaces and opportunities for social cohesion and collective pride. In examining the Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series in Mostar, the research suggests that these elements lay valuable groundwork for progress and peacefulness in a city seeking a new era. Survey and interview results converged and indicated that residents perceive this sport event as a largely positive force generating numerous community benefits, building upon many of the benefits observed from tourism, more broadly. Perceived to be a key driver of social and economic progress in the city and a celebration of some of the city's best aspects, the Red Bull event was widely noted to be a fun and memorable hallmark attraction for residents and visitors alike. The sport event provided residents with a strong example of how events can transform a city's feel and create welcoming and inclusive spaces, while also offering sport-based benefits such as athletic inspiration and role-modeling of sportsmanship.

The Red Bull event organizers did not explicitly state a social impact mission in Mostar, yet findings reflect a multifaceted array of community impacts resulting from the event. Although intentionality does not appear to be a prerequisite for community social impacts, there is sufficient evidence in this research that positive outcomes could be heightened or better leveraged with added intentionality. Ancillary event offerings and youth engagement could be expanded, and more neighborhoods could be engaged in event hosting and programming. These elements may require greater involvement of local knowledge and local stakeholders.

This research begins to identify some of the key elements of sport events that can contribute to positive social impacts. In settings with social divisions, the perceived neutrality of the event organizer (here, a well-known international

organization external to the region) may be instrumental in creative more welcoming and inclusive spaces and helping the community overcome local social and political barriers that might normally hinder development. By connecting with local traditions and places of significance, a sport event can serve a greater role in engendering senses of collective pride amongst residents. Promotional efforts and media broadcasting may further heighten feelings of pride and help blighted or stigmatized places find more positive reputations and identities. Complementary ancillary events may broaden the appeal of the sport event and open greater opportunities for senses of festivity and enjoyment.

Overall, these findings suggest that local perceptions of event impacts are highly connected to historical and social contexts. This illuminates the value of sport event planning and management processes that seek to understand, engage, and serve the host community.

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