

# AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE APPLICATION OF SENSE OF COMMUNITY IN A LOCAL FESTIVAL

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**Abstract.**—The purpose of this study was to identify and measure the empirical relationships between a festival and one of its possible social effects: residents' perceptions of a sense of community (SOC). A mixed research method was utilized to explore how a multicultural festival in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania affected residents' perceived SOC. Survey questionnaires were collected from 154 local residents and analyzed using Factor Analysis, Multivariate Analysis of Variance, post-hoc analyses, and content analysis. Education and ethnicity were significant predictors of a SOC, while gender and length of residency were not. These and other findings suggest that festival sponsors may wish to consider utilizing festivals not only to revitalize local economies but also to boost SOC among residents.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Festivals have become one of the fastest growing tourism attractions in the United States (Compton and McKay 1997, Getz 1997, Mayfield and Crompton 1995, Thrane 2002). From a community perspective, festivals provide visitors and locals with an outlet for spending money, and they often serve as an opportunity for building the image of the local community (Getz 1997). The effects of festivals on communities are often considered in terms of economic benefits since festivals can create revenue and attract business (Crompton and McKay 1997, Frey 1994, Thrane 2002, Tyrrell and Johnston 2001, Uysal and Gitelson 1994).

However, studies that focus only on economic benefits of festivals fail to account for the possible social and cultural effects on local communities (Delamere et al. 2001, Derrett 2003, Dwyer et al. 2000, Wood 2005). Delamere et al. (2001) suggest that a community-based festival can provide a platform for a sense of togetherness, social interactions, a sense of community pride, and intergroup cooperation. Bres and Davis (2001) studied a local community festival in the Midwest and suggested that festivals can enhance local/group identity and sense of togetherness.

This study aimed to identify and measure the empirical relationships between a festival and one of its social effects: residents' perceptions of sense of community (SOC). McMillan and Chavis (1986) described SOC as a kind of emotional attachment or social bonding between members. The SOC concept has been widely applied in both geographic and relational community research to understand the dynamics of community development and the means through which members influence each other via daily activities (Chipuer and Pretty 1999). This concept has previously been utilized in the field of education to understand the sense of community in a classroom (Rovai 2002).

The wide body of SOC research indicates that sense of community can emerge in many different social contexts including festivals. Derrett (2003) in particular analyzed four different community festivals in Australia and found a significant relationship between SOC and festivals. Rao (2001) found that festivals could serve as a venue for building trust and establishing strong reciprocal relationships among community members. Chwe (1998) noted that residents who participated in festivals also reported greater involvement in community-related activities following the event. Gursoy et al. (2004) found that festivals promote a sense of togetherness and cohesiveness.

## 2.0 METHODS

### 2.1 Setting and Sampling

Study participants were surveyed in 2005 during a local multicultural festival in the Southern Allison Hill community of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The festival was part of the community's revitalization effort and was connected to an anti-crime strategy funded by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. According to festival staff, the purpose of the festival was to increase general civic involvement by encouraging people to participate in community events. Approximately 1500 adults and children attended the one-day festival. One hundred and sixty-one participants were recruited through on-site intercept. The sample size was large enough to satisfy the goal of having a ratio of participants to variables greater than 5:1 (Hair et al. 2006).

### 2.2 Instrument

The questionnaire used in this study included 12 items modified from the Sense of Community Index (SCI) (McMillan and Chavis 1986). The three parts to the questionnaire focused on socio-demographic information, a modified festival SCI, and an open-ended question about participants' favorite aspect of the festival. There were four variables in socio-demographic information: gender (Gursoy et al. 2004), education status (Brodsky et al. 1999), ethnicity (Floyd 1998), and residency length (Perkins et al. 1990). The education status variable was categorized into two levels: 1) high school education or less, and 2) college education or above. The ethnicity question offered four response categories: Caucasian, African American, Asian, and Latino/a. The length of residency question had three response categories: 1) 10 years or less, 2) 11 to 20 years, and 3) 21 years or more. Subject matter experts examined all questions and items for validity.

### 2.3 Data Analysis

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches to understanding SOC effects. For the quantitative section, 19 items were generated from the SCI and entered into an exploratory factor analysis (EFA). The factors extracted from the analysis served

as dependent variables in MANOVA and subsequent post-hoc tests, including Descriptive Discriminate Analysis (DDA) (Field 2005) and the Scheffé test (Tabachnick and Fidell 2007). The Scheffé test was used to investigate how the groups differed from one another. DDA was utilized as another follow-up approach to identify the group difference across the levels of predictor categories. Unless otherwise noted, the threshold for statistical significance was set at .05 for these analyses. Finally, for the qualitative section, content analysis was used on responses to the open-ended question about participants' favorite part of the festival.

## 3.0 RESULTS

A total of 161 residents volunteered for the on-site interviews, but seven surveys were incomplete so the valid sample size was 154. Table 1 lists the study participants' socio-demographic characteristics.

A value of over .60 levels in the KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) measurement and a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity suggested that this dataset was suitable for exploratory factor analysis (Tabachnick and Fidell 2007). Factors were evaluated based on three criteria: eigenvalues, loading values, and scree plot (Mertler and Vannatta 2002). About 52 percent of the total

**Table 1.—Study participants' characteristics**

| Demographic Characteristics       | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender, N=154                     |           |            |
| Male                              | 55        | 36         |
| Female                            | 97        | 64         |
| Education Status, N=152           |           |            |
| High School Graduate and less     | 59        | 39         |
| College and Above                 | 93        | 61         |
| Ethnicity, N=152                  |           |            |
| African American                  | 45        | 30         |
| Asia Islander and Native American | 14        | 9          |
| Caucasian                         | 39        | 26         |
| Hispanic                          | 54        | 35         |
| Residency Length, N=153           |           |            |
| Less than 10 years                | 70        | 46         |
| 11-20 years                       | 46        | 30         |
| 21 years and more                 | 37        | 24         |

variance was explained in the analysis. Reliability analyses found that three factors (harmony, sense of attachment, and caring) were below the standard  $\alpha$  cutoff of .70 (Nunnally 1994). Due to the exploratory nature of this study, these three factors were retained even though their reliability coefficients were below the standard cutoff. This study used a four-factor solution, and factors were named acquaintance, harmony, sense of attachment, and caring (see Table 2). These factors also served as dependent variables for future statistical tests.

Based on MANOVA testing, there was no evidence to suggest a significant association between participants' gender or length of residency and the combined four SOC factors. However, education status and ethnicity were significant predictors for the combined SOC factors. For education status, MANOVA results revealed significant SOC effect differences in the two education categories, Pillai's Trace=.68,  $F(4, 164)=2.64$ ,  $p<.05$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.062$ . DDA showed that one out of two generated functions was significant, Wilkes'  $\Lambda=0.93$ ,  $\chi^2(4, N=154)=10.27$ ,  $p<.05$ . The Scheffé test results (see Table 3) also indicated that education level affected the acquaintance factor ( $F(1, 148)=9.98$ ,  $p<.05$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.071$ ). This suggests that participants with high school education or less

were more likely to agree that the festival had some influence on the items in the acquaintance factor than those participants who had some college education or above (3.80 vs. 3.48, respectively).

MANOVA results suggested a significant difference in the festival's effects on SOC across the four ethnic categories (Table 4), Wilkes'  $\Lambda = .87$ ,  $F(12, 379)=1.80$ ,  $p<.05$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.049$ . DDA found that the items in the harmony factor were most likely to separate the four combined SOC effects ( $\Lambda=.87$ ,  $\chi^2(12, N=154)=19.82$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The Scheffé test indicated that ethnicity differences were significant for harmony,  $F(3, 146)=3.04$ ,  $p<.05$ ,  $\eta_p^2=.050$ . Latinos were more likely than African Americans to agree that festivals increase harmony among neighbors (4.00 vs. 3.62, respectively).

In the final part of the survey, assessing the favorite part of festival, over 50 percent of participants highlighted the importance of the social aspects of the festival with comments such as "I came here to meet people." Some participants indicated that the festival helped them to socialize with people from the neighborhood. Overall, meeting people was the most important motivation for attending this festival.

**Table 2.—Factor Loadings, and Cronbach's Alpha Values of Factors in Festival SOC Index**

| Factor Names and Items                                                                       | Loading | $\alpha$ |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|----------|
| Factor 1: Acquaintance                                                                       |         |          |
| Many of my neighbors know me because of the festival.                                        | .82     | .71      |
| I can recognize most of the people who live on my block because of this festival.            | .79     |          |
| This festival makes my neighbors and I want the same things from this community.             | .52     |          |
| This festival helps people living in this community share the same values.                   | .40     |          |
| Factor 2: Harmony                                                                            |         |          |
| This festival makes people get along with each other better than before.                     | .75     | .60      |
| This festival can make problems in this community easier to solve than before.               | .73     |          |
| The festival helps me have influence over what this community is like.                       | .60     |          |
| Factor 3: Sense of Attachment                                                                |         |          |
| This festival makes me feel the South Allison Hill community is a good place to live.        | .81     | .58      |
| This festival makes me want to live in this community for a long time.                       | .68     |          |
| This festival makes me feel proud to live in this community.                                 | .57     |          |
| Factor 4: Caring                                                                             |         |          |
| This festival gives me more chances to talk with my neighbors in this community than before. | .82     | .54      |
| This festival makes me feel at home on this block.                                           | .59     |          |
| This festival makes me care about what my neighbors think of my actions.                     | .45     |          |

**Table 3.—Multivariate Analysis of Variance of SOC Factors by Education Status**

| SOC                              | Overall Mean | Education Status     |                   | F-value |
|----------------------------------|--------------|----------------------|-------------------|---------|
|                                  |              | High School and Less | College and Above |         |
| ————— Mean Agreement Score ————— |              |                      |                   |         |
| Acquaintance                     | 3.61         | 3.80 <sub>a</sub>    | 3.48 <sub>a</sub> | 9.98*   |
| Harmony                          | 3.81         | 3.93                 | 3.73              | 3.18    |
| Sense of attaching               | 3.88         | 3.89                 | 3.86              | 0.50    |
| Caring                           | 3.86         | 3.92                 | 3.82              | 0.83    |

Note: Overall agreement score was measured on a 5-point scale of 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Means sharing the same subscript differ at  $p < 0.05$  in the Scheffé comparison, two-tailed.

\*  $p < .05$

**Table 4.—Multivariate Analysis of Variance of SOC Factors by Ethnicity**

| SOC                              | Overall Mean | Ethnicity         |                 |           |                   | F-value |
|----------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------|-------------------|---------|
|                                  |              | African American  | Asia and Native | Caucasian | Hispanic          |         |
| ————— Mean Agreement Score ————— |              |                   |                 |           |                   |         |
| Acquaintance                     | 3.62         | 3.63              | 3.75            | 3.37      | 3.71              | 2.65    |
| Harmony                          | 3.80         | 3.62 <sub>a</sub> | 3.88            | 3.73      | 4.00 <sub>a</sub> | 3.04*   |
| Sense of attaching               | 3.87         | 3.89              | 4.06            | 3.80      | 3.87              | 0.58    |
| Caring                           | 3.85         | 3.77              | 3.71            | 3.81      | 3.99              | 1.37    |

Note: Overall agreement score was measured on a 5-point scale of 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Means sharing the same subscript differ at  $p < 0.05$  in the Scheffé comparison, two-tailed.

\*  $p < .05$

## 4.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Like the Sense of Community Index (SCI), this study found a four-factor solution to the relationship between attendance at a festival and sense of community (SOC). However, the four factors in this study have different factor loadings and names than the SCI factors due to the different settings (Chipuer and Pretty 1999). SOC effects varied according to residents' socio-demographic backgrounds. Specifically, people with less education tended to put more emphasis on the importance of meeting people at the festival than participants with more education. One of the possible reasons for this finding is that different education status might affect attitudes toward SOC at a festival. The findings also revealed that different ethnicities held different opinions regarding SOC effects during festivals.

From a community development perspective, some findings have suggested that SOC is positively associated with the degree of social involvement in activities like voting (Brodsky et al. 1999). Pro-social behaviors are more likely if there is a strong SOC, and different activities may increase the sense of community, especially in those communities with low income and diverse ethnicity characteristics. From this perspective, community-based festivals or events could increase residents' sense of togetherness and help them get to know their neighbors in ethnically diverse communities (Shinew et al. 2006). The management implications of this study are that festivals can serve not only as an outlet for spending and a tool for increasing a community's economic revenue, but also as a venue to unite residents in local communities. Based on this study, the social/cultural effects of festivals should be carefully considered by city officials and festival sponsors.

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