

Citizen Participation; A Lever for the Success of Major Events

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ABSTRACT

Major sporting, commercial or cultural events are opportunities to increase the value of the region. These events have a positive socio-economic impact, boosting the region's appeal in the short, medium and long term, and also become important markers of identity. Citizens play a number of essential roles, becoming direct targets, promoters of the region, partners in its appeal and influential ambassadors. An endogenous approach involves citizens in the development of their region. It is therefore essential to adopt this approach in order to reap the benefits. Citizen involvement gives local decision-makers the tools they need to combine qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single synthesis, so that events can make a real contribution to development. This research attempts to determine the impact of the 2030 World Cup, co-organised by Morocco, Spain and Portugal, on the Moroccan territory, while trying to understand how the population will consider and be able to contribute to such an organisation. The purpose of this research is to open the debate around the impact of the organization of this great event on the country-territory globally and on the host territory especially.

Keywords: Major events, Territorial attractiveness, Territorial marketing, Citizen participation, Territorial image

INTRODUCTION

Any big event organization involves many challenges in a country; in this case, Morocco. A project like that requires the active participation of citizens from the inception of the project to realization. Through civic engagement, there is a guarantee of the sustainability of an event or any activity on society. A want of the above has been restated by Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi in quotes, which is that the absence of civic engagement causes disconnections between initiatives and real needs.

This would also allow Morocco to host international events, such as the African Cup of Nations in 2025 and the FIFA World Cup in 2030, which would undoubtedly contribute positively to the economic state of the country and enhance its status before the international community. However, the success of large events is determined not only by how much infrastructure is set up but also by the involvement of the needs and expectations of local people.

But all of this doesn't matter much if the Moroccans are not participants but only passive observers of the success of such initiatives. It entails, therefore, that the conditions of efficient participation of the citizens should be studied from the experience of other countries hosting such events. It goes without saying that such events could only profit the Moroccan people: new jobs, foreign investment, tourism, and economic diversification.

Citizen Participation: Theory and Tools

Perception and Opportunities

The organization of major events in Morocco arouses varied expectations and perceptions among the population, where the perceived impacts and opportunities are often more significant than the actual dimensions of the event.

Economic outlook: These events offer an opportunity to boost the national economy, by increasing tourism, creating jobs and attracting foreign investment. Examples such as the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games and the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar illustrate this positive impact on economic growth.

Improving infrastructure: The organization of these events leads to significant investment in hotels, health services and transport, helping to modernize the country and improve citizens' quality of life.

Strengthening national identity: Hosting international events promotes Morocco's culture and history, reinforcing a sense of national identity and pride.

Participation in public life: It is crucial to encourage citizens to get involved in civic initiatives, enabling them to feel that they are agents of change, as demonstrated by the citizens' movements surrounding the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

Conditions of Meaningful Involvement

Involvement of citizens in a meaningful way concerning the organization of mega events must be guided by several key principles that ensure actual participation and management of the project in a transparent manner.

Transparency and access to information are cultivated through the consolidation of citizens' and decision-makers' trust in the objectives and decisions made through clear communication. This means creating accessible information platforms, regularly reporting on progress, and holding public consultations where every citizen can follow projects and actively participate in decision-making.

Participation and consultation: Citizens have to be included if the event is to meet their needs and aspirations. There will be open communication between the maker of the decision and the citizens, thereby giving them an opportunity to contribute their views in the design and implementation of projects. Forums of discussion, co-creation workshops, and surveys may be organized to collect ideas from citizens.

Mutual support, recognition of contributions: The many efforts of citizens and two-way communication will further develop their feeling of value and ownership in such a project; this will encourage further participation. There should be feedback mechanisms, and the citizens have to be informed about the project developments.

Equity in benefit sharing: Burdens and benefits emanating from an event need to be shared equitably in light of specific community needs, particularly the most vulnerable. This would mean equal opportunities for employment and economic development to all.

By respecting these principles of transparency, participation, reciprocity, and equity, the involvement of the citizens will be an accomplished fact, and they will turn out to be real partners for the accomplishment of events that correspond to their expectations.

Tools for Citizen Participation

In order to ensure real and effective citizen participation, as well as to endure over the realization of some major event, tools and methods have to be created through which the citizen has the opportunity to express his opinion while participating and co-creating decisions on conceiving a project. Below are the primary tools for citizen participation:

Online Platforms: These are simpler ways that create channels for citizens to participate in public life. This can be done through dedicated sites, online discussion groups, survey forums, and mobile applications. It aids in enhancing communication and provision of information by the authorities to the citizens over preferred digital modes.

Public forums and meetings: These provide face-to-face interaction for citizens and decision-makers with each other, from co-production meetings to dialogue and question-and-answer forums. Each step deepens mutual understanding and the specification of local needs.

Citizens' assemblies and representative bodies: Assemblies can consist of elected or specially chosen citizens and are one way to build a mechanism for the systematic involvement of citizens in the decision making process. All of the steps result in continuing citizen input.

Volunteering and citizen initiatives: Volunteering is a critical asset of the event for citizen participation, as it puts citizens in the shoes of organizers. This may include tasks as varied as welcoming visitors or organizing events.

These are information and awareness campaigns that mobilize citizens around the issues of the event and invite them to participate. It may be in the form of a workshop, publication, or social networking site campaign for informative and civic engagement purposes.

Benchmarking: Impact on Residents

Examples of Benchmarking Territories		
Territories	Events	Features
Barcelona (Spain)	1992 Summer Olympics	The Barcelona Olympic Games accelerated urban transformation: renovation of infrastructure, creation of public spaces, and restoration of old districts. They also exalted the brilliant Catalan heritage through great artistic events and tourism. On top of all, the city has enabled citizen participation, promoting in residents an approach to the organization of the Games as part of one's own identity.
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	2016 Summer Olympics	Rio had to deal with large-scale poverty, social inequality, and high states of crime, among many socio-economic issues before the 2016 Olympic Games. The post-Games legacy is highly controversial, particularly relating to the state's many infrastructure projects-incomplete or underwhelming in their scope. There are also criticisms regarding citizen participation; some observers believe that the population was not adequately put to work either in the decision-making process or in the management of the projects themselves.
Paris (France)	1998 Football World Cup	With the organization of thousands of major events over the last century, Paris is equipped with resources and expertise. The various events held within this city support the culture and tourism of the place, attracting millions of visitors every year. Moreover, events organized in Paris try to integrate them into the flow of local life through festive events that take place in order to foster local involvement.
Qatar (Doha)	Soccer World Cup 2022	Ambitiously, Qatar rapidly changed in preparation for the 2022 Football World Cup-with high-tech stadiums, luxury hotels, and even new transport infrastructure. The tournament has had some legacies for the economy: tourism, investment, and job creation have been awakened. On the other side, human rights controversies arose in respect of working conditions of migrant workers and further restriction of some personal freedoms.

Best Practice: The Olympic Games could represent a lever for city renewal, modernizing infrastructures and improving access to services. The cultural events proposed in the mega-events promote local heritage and provide more appeal for tourists. In addition, the initiatives relating to strengthening civic engagement make the citizens more involved and taken care of.

Mistakes to be avoided: For example, Rio de Janeiro represents all the social and economic problems accompanying the hosting of such a big event, not to mention those of inequality and poverty. One must avoid human rights disputes, together with the treatment of immigrant workers, just as it happened with the World Cup in Qatar. And it also cannot be allowed that investments leave as a heritage something highly polemic, just like what happened with the Olympics in Rio in 2016.

Lessons learned: Hospitality strategy is essential in event management because it ensures the quality and safety of the services; as the case study example of Paris leads. The event should be integrated into the citizens' lives and become part of a time of festivity and sharing. Lastly, the event must be organized and implemented in such a way that it is sustainable, to better ensure the protection of the environment and encourage ecological solutions.

Methodology

We carried out two studies simultaneously: a qualitative study and a quantitative study. The qualitative study was done with partners and stakeholders, and we acted through something called theoretical saturation. What's more, we stopped administering the questionnaires when we found that there was no other relevant stakeholder and that the comments were being repeated. And hence, at the end, we made 28 interview guides. The quantitative is the second study. Relying on 1,000 samples of the populations of Morocco who are in the range of 18 to 55 years old, it is proportionally divided accordingly to the number of their inhabitants per region.

Outcomes of the Research

Opinions of Moroccans on hosting major events

Through our research, we have come to know that organizing a major event develops:

Sense of Belonging and National Pride

Morocco has a long history of hosting major events such as the African Cup of Nations in 1988, the FIFA Club World Cup in 2013 and 2014, the Mediterranean Games in 2001 and the World Athletics Championships in 2005. These major international events strengthen Moroccans' sense of belonging and national pride. They also highlight Moroccan culture, history and traditions, helping to unite and show pride in being Moroccan. People feel closer to their country and their culture when they see their nation rise up and assert itself on the international stage.

Attachment to Land

Organising these events also strengthens people's attachment to their country. While investment in infrastructure, the promotion of tourism and the enhancement of Moroccan sites and landscapes all contribute to discovering the country and arousing interest in its heritage, Moroccans feel all the more attached to their homeland when they see their country developing and opening up to the world.

Involvement in Social Networks

The organisation of major events generates accumulated engagement on social networks. Citizens actively participate in online discussions, sharing opinions and experiences related to the event. Thanks to these online platforms, enthusiasm and national pride strengthen unity between citizens.

Interest in Similar International Events

The large-scale events organised in Morocco act as catalysts, sparking a desire among citizens to find out more about similar events abroad. This thirst for discovery fosters cultural enrichment and a better understanding of the world.

Engagement in Research on Issues Associated With Major Event Management

The organisation of major events in Morocco is arousing keen interest among young people in the topics associated with major event management. They are accessing more information and contributing through discussions on best practices and issues related to the management of a major event, in areas such as planning, logistics, security, tourism and the environment.

The study conducted on a sample of 1,000 people revealed that more than 68% of Moroccans were very interested in organising major events, in particular the 2025 African Cup of Nations, the 5 editions of the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup 2025–2029, the 2029 FIFA Club World Cup and the 2030 FIFA World Cup.

Analysis of Specific Events

95% of those questioned were very satisfied with the organisation of the CAN 2025.

The main motivation was that Morocco had already organised the CAN in 1988 and that the country's infrastructure could support such an event. Not to mention the real motivation provided by the enthusiasm generated by the CAN 2024 organised by Côte d'Ivoire. Morocco's passion for football is no stranger to this enthusiasm.

Over 50% of those questioned were unaware that Morocco would be hosting the 5 editions of the FIFA U–17 Women's World Cup 2025–2029.

Of those who did know, over 42% were positive about the event.

It was found that there was a generally positive perception of the event, mainly due to the intention to popularise women's football in Morocco.

For Morocco, the bid to host the 2030 FIFA World Cup reflects a national ambition and a strong desire to find its place on the international stage. Against this backdrop, the co-hosting of the 2030 FIFA World Cup is generating great expectations and a strong sense of hope among Moroccans.

All the information gathered shows that Moroccans have a generally favourable attitude towards the organisation of major events. Love of football, patriotism and belief in the country's ability are the main drivers of this feeling.

Citizen Participation

Moroccans are very interested in taking part in the organisation of major events, but regret the lack of practical information on how to get involved.

Enthusiasm and Uncertainty

80% of those interviewed wanted to get involved in organising major events, but expressed uncertainty as to how they could do so.

Among the young people interviewed, this enthusiasm was even more pronounced, with 100% of them expressing a desire to get involved, but also highlighting their lack of information on how to get involved.

The majority of young people aged between 18 and 30 were particularly keen to get involved and were eager to find ways of doing so.

Individual Initiatives and Expectations of Organizing Structures

40% of the young people assembled are already looking for a way to get involved independently.

60% of the young concerned people but also the vast majority of the other respondents expect concrete offers from the State and the structures involved in the organisation of events, especially with regard to the World Cup.

Common Vision of the Institutions

The same vision which the public administrations, elected representatives, and parties concerned with the holding of major events share is that they recognize the need for the involvement of citizens and consider it an indispensable factor in the success of these projects.

They say it is impossible to have a successful major event without active citizen participation.

They believe that the positive spin-offs of such events must derive benefit for all citizens and that there is a pressing concern to ensure that the legacy these events bring should be perpetual and beneficial to the population.

Transparency and Access to Information

100% of the young people interviewed are calling for greater transparency and easier access to information.

They want more media outlets and more sharing of information on social networks, as well as the creation of participatory platforms and the broadcasting of information on television.

The Question of Heritage

47% of those interviewed, both young and old, are wondering about the legacy of the events.

They are wondering what lasting legacy will be left and how the elements will contribute to the development of the country and improve the quality of life of its citizens.

Public institutions are aware of the importance of legacy and are committed to leaving a positive and lasting impact.

Recommendations for Morocco

The study highlighted the Moroccan population's enthusiasm for organizing major sporting events, as well as their desire for greater civic involvement.

Reinforce a Sense of National Pride and Ownership

Promote Moroccan heritage and culture : highlight Morocco's cultural richness, history and heritage throughout the events, by organizing exhibitions, shows, workshops and cultural events.

Include citizens in the celebrations : Create events and initiatives that enable citizens to express themselves, share their talents and feel part of the celebrations.

Create Concrete, Accessible Opportunities for Involvement

Develop participatory platforms : set up online platforms or structures dedicated to citizen participation, enabling citizens to put forward ideas, give their opinions and get involved in decision-making.

Ensure Transparency and Access to Information

Communicate proactively : Provide regular and detailed information on the organization of events, using multiple communication channels, including social networks, dedicated websites and traditional media.

Create spaces for dialogue : Organize question-and-answer sessions, discussion forums and public consultations to enable citizens to ask questions and share their concerns.

Implement a Sustainable Legacy Strategy

Define goals and priorities : Clearly spell out the terms for a sustainable legacy to be attained, together with the social, economic, and environmental development objectives.

Building Up Existing Civic Initiatives

Identify civic initiatives : Identify the existing civic initiatives within the sectors of sport, culture, and development.

CONCLUSION

Hosting of the mega-events in Morocco is a grand opportunity that will help the country place itself on the international stage, with economic, image, and attractiveness issues. This research indicates that Moroccan populations have a very high interest in such events, reiterating confidence in their national pride and commitment to the development of the country.

The results showed that organization of these events creates a sense of belonging and unity among Moroccans, as well as interest in their culture and history. However, there is frustration regarding access to information and tangible opportunities for participation by disadvantaged youngsters.

Citizen participation will have to be a clear, inclusive process between the public authorities themselves and stakeholders. It should involve the creation of means for the direct participation of citizens in issues of concern through, for example, participatory platforms, co-creation workshops, and volunteerism.

The success of these events will depend on the ability of the organizing structures to be responsive to the aspirations in terms of citizen participation, answering them, and creating an environment in which such involvement could flourish. By committing to transparency and openness, Morocco can make these events real engines for the development and progress of the Moroccan people.

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