SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND FESTIVAL ATTENDANCE

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Examining how festival involvement contributes to sense of community (SOC) is important to our understanding of how festivals impact the communities in which they exist; therefore, this study examines the relation between festival attendance and sense of community to provide insight, based on community psychology theory, into how festivals contribute to community development. Sense of community was measured using the Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS), and the relation between the BSCS and festival attendance was examined. Although no relation between overall SOC and festival attendance was found, the relation between festival attendance and the emotional connection factor of the BSCS suggests that festivals do contribute to SOC. Implications for practice and recommendations for future research are discussed.

Key words: Psychological sense of community (SOC); Festival; Resident; Confirmatory factor analysis

Introduction

Festivals have been described as celebrations of shared identity, values, and ideology (Getz, Anderson, & Carlsen, 2010). Furthermore, festivals have been regarded as opportunities for residents to overtly express their affinity to and identification with their community and to share their values and way of life with nonresidents, while simultaneously reinforcing their membership in the community (Getz et al., 2010; Rollins, Delamere, & Seppos, 1999). The celebratory core aspect of festivals have distinguished these events from other special events, and the reasons behind a community’s decision to host a festival have been grounded in cultural and social values and historical, environmental, or ideological/political significance (Getz et al., 2010). For example, festivals have often reiterated how a community’s culture or way of life has been influenced and shaped by the past, and festivals have involved a celebration of the significant contributions and achievements of an individual or
representation of the customs and practices of ancestors from a specific era in the community’s history (Rivera, Hara, & Kock, 2008). Furthermore, festivals have often been a part of the host community’s tourism destination marketing strategy to raise the profile of the community, generate economic benefits, including investments and employment, and contribute to the development of local pride and identity (Derrett, 2003; Rollins et al., 1999).

The implications of hosting festivals have been examined in the festival literature and much of the research has focused on the economic impacts and tourism potential of festivals (Chhabra, Sills, & Cubbage, 2003; Tohmo, 2005; Tyrrell & Johnston, 2001). The social and psychological outcomes of festivals have been examined less frequently, and much of the festival impact literature that goes beyond the economic impacts has examined numerous specific impacts as perceived by residents (Delamere, 2001; Delamere, Wankel, & Hinch, 2001; Fredline, Jago, & Deery, 2003; Rollins & Delamere, 2007; Small, 2007; Small & Edwards, 2003). Less research has looked at specific, theory-driven, social, or psychological constructs and their relation to community festivals. The following social and psychological implications of community festivals have been noted in the literature: social capital and network building, building community cohesiveness, and contributing to a sense of place and sense of community (Arcodia & Whitford, 2006; Derrett, 2003; Gursoy, Kim, & Uysal, 2004; Pickernell, O’Sullivan, Senyard, & Keast, 2007). Getz and Frisby (1988) have proposed that festivals and tourism are tools for community development and that “sense of community is the glue that can hold together a community development effort” (p. 73). Given that past research has demonstrated the importance of SOC for community development, examining the role of SOC in a festival context is important for understanding how festivals impact the communities in which they exist. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the relation between SOC and festival attendance to provide theory-driven insight into how festivals contribute to community development.

**Literature Review**

**Sense of Community**

The field of community studies was born from the work of the Chicago School in the early- to mid-1900s and evolved to include many aspects of community life. This body of work has employed a range of theoretical perspectives to better understand communities. In 1974, Sarason suggested that the key concept to understand the psychology of community should be Psychological Sense of Community (SOC). Since that time, SOC has received increasing attention in the literature and has been defined and described in numerous ways; however, Beeton (2006) noted that, despite varying definitions, descriptions of SOC have often included the following elements: empowerment; the existence of mutual interdependence among members; having a sense of belonging, connectedness, spirit, faith, and trust; possessing common expectations and shared values and goals.

In 1986, McMillan and Chavis presented a theory of SOC, which consisted of four components: membership, influence, integration, and shared emotional connections. *Membership* was described as “a feeling that one has invested part of oneself to become a member and therefore has a right to belong” (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9) and included clear boundaries, a sense of belonging, personal investment, common symbol system (shared history and family rituals), and a sense of security. *Influence* was characterized as:

> a bidirectional concept. In one direction, there is the notion that for a member to be attracted to a group, he or she must have some influence over what the group does. On the other hand, cohesiveness is contingent on a group’s ability to influence its members. (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 11)

McMillan and Chavis included trusting relations, freedom of expression, empowerment, and collective well-being as components of influence. *Integration and fulfillment of needs* was explained by McMillan and Chavis (1986) as:

> “... reinforcement. Reinforcement as a motivator of behavior is a cornerstone in behavioral research, and it is obvious that for any group to maintain a positive sense of togetherness, the individual-group association must be rewarding for its members.” (p. 12)
McMillan and Chavis considered status, social integration, resilience, and shared values as part of integration. 

*Shared emotional connections* was the final component of the SOC model described by McMillan and Chavis (1986), and they stated that “It is not necessary that group members have participated in the history in order to share it, but they must identify with it” (p. 13).

Shared events were said to contribute to SOC if they had the following qualities: contact, quality interactions, closure, shared importance, investment, honor, and spiritual bonding.

To examine the SOC theory and model described by McMillan and Chavis (1986), the Sense of Community Index (SCI) was created by Perkins, Florin, Rich, Wandersman, and Chavis (1990). Peterson, Speer, and McMillan (2008) stated that SOC research had arrived at a critical point because no study had been able to empirically confirm a four-factor model of SOC using the SCI. Peterson et al. suggested that a brief, valid, and reliable measurement tool was needed that could be used in community contexts in order for the sense of community research to move forward; therefore, Peterson et al. developed and tested the BSCS based on McMillan and Chavis’s four-factor SOC model. The resulting scale included eight items—two to measure each of the four factors. This scale has been validated by examining the results in relation to other variables theoretically related to SOC (Peterson et al., 2008).

*Festivals and SOC*

Chavis and Wandersman (1990) examined the role of SOC in stimulating community participation and community development and suggested that participation in neighborhood activities was influenced by three components: perception of the environment, social relations, and perceived empowerment and that these components are mobilized by SOC. Results of Chavis and Wandersman’s study indicated that SOC plays a “catalytic role in stimulating satisfaction with one’s residential environment, encouraging neighborhood relations, and enhancing one’s perception of personal and group empowerment to influence what goes on in their homes” (p. 72). SOC has been thought to play a significant role in neighborhood and community development, and Chavis and Wandersman noted that a strong, shared sense of community motivates and empowers people to take action and deal with problems and encourages participation through collective action, which is an important element in community development.

A study by Schwarz and Tait (2007) proposed that festivals contribute to developing a SOC. This is one of the few studies that has discussed SOC in a festival context, but this study did not specifically examine the SOC construct described by McMillan and Chavis (1986). Employing a case study approach, the researchers examined arts and culture event attendance and support for developing arts and cultural events. The results suggested a connection between recreation, events, arts and cultural production, and SOC. Although this work provided preliminary evidence for a connection between community festivals and SOC, it did not explicitly set out to examine the relation between these variables.

Festivals have been considered opportunities to contribute to SOC because they allow community members to share a purpose (Derrett, 2003). Furthermore, Derrett argued that festivals give residents a grand view of their community and that, by offering an opportunity for a sense of belonging, support, empowerment, participation, and safety, residents gain a SOC. The purpose of this paper was to examine SOC in a festival context. Specifically, this research examined the relation between festival attendance and SOC—as conceptualized by McMillan and Chavis (1986) and SOC was measured using the BSCS. To achieve the purpose, first, the factor structure of the BSCS was explored and then the relation between SOC and Festival attendance was examined. This study was guided by the hypothesis that SOC is positively related to festival attendance.

**Method**

As the purpose of this research was to examine SOC in a festival context, the research took place in a community that hosts a large annual festival. The data were collected in the town of Caldwell, Texas—which hosts the Kolache Festival every September. Caldwell is home to 3,719 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), and over 20,000 visitors attend the festival on an annual basis (personal communication,
April 15, 2010). The festival celebrates the Czech heritage of many of the town’s early residents, and the event festivities include live music, dancing, food, and demonstrations.

During the 2-month period following the 2010 festival, data were collected by distributing questionnaires door-to-door within Caldwell and asking heads of household (or their spouses) to complete and return the instrument. Up to two return contacts were made to each household (later the same day) to collect completed survey instruments.

Residences were selected using a multistage cluster sampling scheme (Babbie, 2011) where geographic census tracts were identified from the U.S. Census Bureau. Tracts were then randomly selected for inclusion in this study. Block groups, within the census tracks, were also randomly selected. Data collection began at randomly selected locations within each block group. In select neighborhoods, every household was visited because response rate was expected to be low in those neighborhoods based on known demographic characteristics.

The questionnaires contained items to measure residents’ sense of community, perceived festival impacts, festival attendance, community residency, and demographic characteristics. Given that the focus of this article is SOC in a festival context, the festival impacts data are not discussed here.

Sense of community was measured using the Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS) developed by Peterson et al. (2008). This scale was developed after questions were raised regarding the validity and reliability of the longer Sense of Community Index (SCI) that was created to measure sense of community based on McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) theory of SOC (Perkins et al., 1990). The BSCS was used in the present study to examine SOC in a festival context and included the following items: “I can get what I need in this community,” “this community helps me fulfill my needs,” “I feel like a member of this community,” “I belong in this community,” “I have a say about what goes on in my community,” “People in this community are good at influencing each other,” “I feel connected to this community,” “I have a good bond with others in this community.” Response options were based on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

As noted in the literature review, a relation between SOC and community festivals has been discussed in the literature, and case study evidence has suggested that participation in recreation, arts, festival, and event programming contributes to SOC (Schwartz & Tait, 2007). To date, no empirical evidence of this relation has been provided in the academic literature. To determine if there is a relation between SOC and community festivals, the relation between SOC and festival attendance was examined. A single-item question that asked respondents “How many years have you attended the Kolache Festival?” was included in the questionnaire.

Because festival attendance is likely influenced by residency in the community and length of time in a community has been shown to affect how individuals relate to that community (McCool & Martin, 1994), it was important to measure length of residency. A single item measure that asked residents “How many years have you lived in the community?” was used to measure length of residency.

Results

Description of Participants

In total, 348 people completed the questionnaire. Most of the respondents were female (59.8%), over 40 years old (60.5%), had some post-secondary education (68.4%) and had a household income over $50,000 (62%). The majority of the respondents identified themselves as White (66%) with less than a third identifying with another race (18.4% Hispanic, 11.8% Black, 2.9% two or more races, 0.9% other). Most respondents had lived in the community for fewer than 20 years (53.6%), and 50.9% had attended the festival for 10 years or more.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the BSCS

The objective of this study was to examine SOC in a festival context. To achieve this, first the factor structure of the BSCS was assessed and then the relation between SOC and festival attendance was examined. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the BSCS was undertaken to determine if the predefined McMillan and Chavis (1986) factor
model fit the BSCS developed by Peterson et al. (2008). Amos 6.0 (Arbuckle, 2005) was used to examine both the first-order four-factor model and the second-order structure of the scale where the four factors are intended to represent one SOC construct (Fig. 1). Many different goodness-of-fit indices have been consulted in evaluating a factor structure, and many authors have stated that multiple fit indices should be used (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Hu & Bentler, 1998). The discrepancy $\chi^2$ was 51.7, which is significant at $p = 0.01$ and the discrepancy-to-$df$ ratio value was greater than 2.0, which suggests a poor fit; however, it has been noted frequently in the CFA literature that, even though the chi-square fit of the model to the covariance matrix is poor, this does not guarantee that the model does not fit the data because chi-square easily attains significance with larger sample sizes (Hu & Bentler, 1998; Wright et al., 2010). Hu and Bentler have suggested consulting the SRMR and one of the following: CFI, TLI, B/89 and RNI, gamma hat, Mc, or RMSEA. As shown in Table 1, the four-factor solution provides a good fit to the data when using SRMR and CFI as the fit indices. Specifically, SRMR was 0.0374, and the CFI was 0.980, which suggests a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1998). The second-order CFA of the BSCS

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1.png}
\caption{Confirmatory factor analysis of the brief sense of community scale model. Model based on Peterson et al.'s (2008) brief sense of community scale.}
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had a discrepancy $\chi^2$ of 160.8, which is significant at $p = 0.01$, and the discrepancy-to-$df$ ratio value was once again greater than 2.0, which suggests a poor fit; however, the SMRS and CFI indices suggest an adequate fit because the SMRS was 0.0717 and the values for the GFI and CFI were all above 0.90.

**Relation Between SOC and Festival Attendance**

To explore the relation between SOC and community festivals, the correlation between the BSCS and festival attendance was examined (Table 2). The correlation between the grand mean for the BSCS and festival attendance was looked at while controlling for years lived in the community. Controlling for years lived in the community was necessary because this variable was believed to be related to both sense of community and festival attendance and therefore could act as a confounding variable when examining the relation of interest. The composite SOC score was obtained by calculating the grand mean of all BSCS items. Cronbach’s $\alpha$ for the eight-item scale was 0.905, indicating good internal consistency. The mean SOC score was 5.57 with a standard deviation of 1.02. A partial correlation analysis between SOC (grand mean score) and years of festival attendance, while controlling for years lived in the community, was executed. There was no significant relation between SOC and festival attendance when controlling for years lived in the community ($R^2 = 0.064$, $p = 0.235$). Next, partial correlations between SOC and each of the BSCS factors were examined. Although no significant relation existed between SOC and three of the four factors (i.e., needs fulfillment, membership, influence), there was a weak but significant relation between SOC and the emotional connection factor ($R^2 = 0.133$, $p = 0.01$).

**Discussion and Conclusion**

**The BSCS and SOC Model**

As the original measurement tool designed to measure SOC (the SCI) was not successful at capturing the four-factor model theorized by McMillan and Chavis (1986), a valid and reliable measurement
tool was needed. To address this issue, Peterson et al. (2008) developed the BSCS, and their research demonstrated that it reflected McMillan and Chavis’s SOC four-factor model. The results presented in this paper confirm the BSCS as useful for measuring the four-factor SOC construct, and although there was not a perfect fit to the data, a good fit existed between the eight items in the scale and the four factors and there was an adequate fit between the four factors and the overall SOC construct. With additional research and repeated use, the BSCS may, in fact, prove to be a good tool for exploring SOC and because it contains only eight items, it is particularly valuable to researchers interested in examining a range of variables without overloading respondents with survey questions. Furthermore, now that the BSCS has again proven to be useful for measuring SOC, it is possible to begin to examine more complex relations between the SOC factors and other variables. If, however, repeated use of the BSCS does not confirm that it captures the McMillan and Chavis four-factor model of SOC, the model may need to be revised.

**BSCS and Festival Attendance**

This study was guided by the hypothesis that SOC is positively related to festival attendance and was based on case study evidence and theory (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Derrett, 2003; Schwarz & Tait, 2007). Since no previous empirical studies have examined SOC in a festival context the relation between these variables was unknown; however, the null hypothesis that “no relation would be found between SOC and festival attendance” was not expected to be accepted. On occasion a null hypothesis is falsely accepted because of type 2 error. Type 2 error is often due to a low sample size; however, this was not an issue in this study since the population was approximately 3,700 and the sample included 348 respondents. Alternatively, it is possible that the measures used for the variables under examination impacted the outcome of the study. Specifically, this study used only festival attendance to examine the relation between the festival and SOC. Although this was a reasonable first step to begin exploring the association between festivals and SOC, there are additional variables that should be examined in subsequent research. Had another variable been used to examine festival involvement, it is possible that a relation between community festivals and SOC would have been found. The level of festival involvement should be further examined and could be measured by asking participants how much time is spent at the festival and the type of involvement (i.e., employee, volunteer, performer, attendee) and festival activities engaged in (e.g., shopping, attending a performance, participating in an activity). It seems reasonable to expect that the more involved someone is in the festival, the greater impact the festival would have on their SOC or vice versa. For example, an individual who attends many days of a multiday festival, volunteers for the event, and participates in many of the festival activities would likely have a strong SOC and may have both a greater sense of emotional connection and membership. If festival involvement variables can be identified that contribute to more than just a single SOC factor, we may find that festivals are related to SOC when controlling for number of years lived in the community.

SOC, as conceptualized by McMillan and Chavis (1986), has four components, and so it seemed reasonable to expect that festival attendance could relate to only one aspect of SOC. While the relation between festival attendance and SOC was not significant, the relation between festival attendance and the emotional connection factor suggests that festivals do contribute to this component of SOC. Given that the shared emotional connection factor refers to community members sharing a common history and or events, it makes sense that this is how festivals contribute to SOC. McMillan and Chavis (1986) stated that “strong communities are those that offer members positive ways to interact, important events to share . . . opportunities to honor members . . . opportunities to experience a spiritual bond among members” (p. 9). These opportunities, identified by McMillan and Chavis, are often at the heart of many community festivals.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) stated that shared events have the following features (which contribute to developing a shared emotional connection and SOC): contact, quality interactions, closure, shared importance, investment, honor, and spiritual bonding. Due to the fact that a link between festivals and shared emotional connections was found, future research should specifically examine these features of a festival and look at the relation between such features and SOC. Furthermore, the term festival is
used to describe a range of public community celebrations including ethnic, historic, arts and culture events with varying features including performances, vendors, participatory activities and competitions, and food and beverage pavilions. Future research could examine how different types of festivals are related to SOC and how the individual festival components contribute to SOC. These findings would be valuable to festival administrators who could use this knowledge of how festivals contribute to SOC in making key choices on areas in which to invest precious resources. For example, if public outdoor performances are shown to contribute more to sense of emotional connection than food and beverage services, then a festival might choose to increase the number of performances rather than increase the number of vendors given limited resources.

Another line of research that could evolve from this study is an examination of SOC within a festival community. In the present study, the geographic community was the community upon which the residents were asked to reflect; however, the festival itself could be considered a community and therefore research could explore the sense of festival community. This would provide insight into festival loyalty and repeat visitations, which are key issues with regard to ongoing festival sustainability.

It is possible that the findings presented here are unique to this particular community, and therefore, similar studies must be repeated in other communities to ensure that the findings are not an artifact of the context. Demonstrating a connection between festivals and sense of community, whether it be that festivals contribute to SOC or SOC leads to festival involvement, could be used by practitioners as a rational for hosting these community events, which is crucial, as competition for funding from government and sponsors is increasing. The research presented in this study did not attempt to unravel the direction of the festival SOC relation. Currently, it is unknown whether SOC leads to festival attendance or if festival attendance leads to SOC and so additional research is needed to clarify the relation, which will increase the practical implications of this area of research. Finally, once a greater understanding of the association between SOC and festivals is attained, the role this relation plays in community development efforts should be explored to provide a more complex and holistic understanding of the role of festivals within our communities.

References


