

Benefits of mega-events: The Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in Papua New Guinea

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Abstract

Mega-events create a powerful destination image for the host nation. This paper presents the benefits of mega-events in a host country. The study employed a research method where data were collected through online searches and analyzed thematically. The study found three major benefits. Firstly, APEC was seen to provide an opportunity for PNG to showcase a positive destination image to the world. Secondly, the infrastructures built for APEC will remain as legacies of mega-events and continue to benefit PNG. Thirdly, the study revealed that APEC in PNG helped the growth of the tourism and hospitality industry, which contributes to economic development. The study provides a better understanding of hosting a mega-event in a developing country.

Keywords: Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, destination branding, Divine Word University, economic, hospitality, infrastructure, marketing, mega-event, Papua New Guinea, promotion, tourism.

Introduction

In recent years, mega-events have developed into one of the most important platforms for countries to showcase their customs, attractions and values on the international stage (Dean, 2014; Knott et al., 2013). For the host nation, it is crucial to assess both positive and negative impacts of the mega-event on the residents, the businesses and the social wellbeing of the people (Dean, 2014; Knott et al., 2013). Examples of mega-events include the Rugby League (World Cup, FIFA World Cup, and the Olympic Games

(Dean, 2014; Knott et al., 2013). These events directly involve thousands of people, including athletes, official delegates, volunteers, media personnel, spectators and indirectly an audience of billions through media exposure (Dean, 2014; Knott et al., 2013). Hosting a mega-event involves many benefits such as infrastructure, nation branding, economic development, the establishment of international partnerships and helping tourism growth (Cashman, 1999).

This paper aims to answer the following research questions: (1) what are the benefits of hosting a mega-event? (2) How do mega-events help improve a destination image? Thus, the paper will discuss the benefits of hosting a mega-event on a tourism destination and how mega-events help improve a destination image.

Mega-events and nation branding

Mega-events are global events that get global media attention, which is a powerful tool for reinventing and branding a country's image (Higham & Hinch, 2009). They provide a great opportunity to market and showcase a destination with some degree of associated benefits for the host nation (Pryke, 2017). The benefits include positive destination image, infrastructure development, and investment and business opportunities (Berkowitz et al., 2007; Higham & Hinch, 2009). They also have the potential to promote national unity and infrastructure development (Gratton & Preuss, 2008). For instance, when Australia hosted the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000, it generated massive news coverage internationally and increased tourism growth and infrastructure development (Florek & Insch, 2011).

Similarly, when Papua New Guinea (PNG) hosted the 2015 South Pacific Games in Port Moresby, the awareness of PNG as a tourism destination grew, which was particularly important since PNG receives poor negative media publicity overseas (Oxford

Business Group, 2018; Pryke, 2017). In preparation for the 2015 Pacific Games, the PNG government built an array of state of the art sporting and other facilities in Port Moresby. These include the Rita Flynn Complex, Taurama Aquatic Centre, Bisini Sports Venue, Sir John Guise Indoor Arena, Sir John Guise Outdoor Stadium, Games Village, Sir Hubert Murray Stadium, Oil Search Stadium and the Kumul Flyover (Kenneth, 2016; Oxford Business Group, 2018). In preparation for the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Meeting, the PNG government and other donor agencies built world-class facilities such as the International Convention Centre and APEC House at Ela Beach in the shape of PNG's unique Lakatoi (traditional canoe) sail (Oxford Business Group, 2018; Pryke, 2017).

In 2018, new road infrastructure was built as part of the National Capital District's Road Rehabilitation Project comprising five bridges, a ring road and a road to the central meeting area of APEC House (Oxford Business Group, 2018). The private sector, especially the hotel industry, underwent major development, including the Hilton Hotel which has Kutubu Convention Center, the Holiday Inn Express and Stanley Hotel. These infrastructure projects were built for the South Pacific Games and APEC meeting but are still used today, being a legacy of mega-events (Oxford Business Group, 2018).

Media and destination image

Both positive and negative images of a tourist destination are reported through different mediums that help market a destination. According to Gartner (1993), these are called 'image formation agents' and relate to the mediums through which information is transmitted. The image formation process is a continuum comprising of different media that perform individually or combined to create a destination image appealing to tourists (Gartner, 1993; Khodadadi, 2013; Sonmez & Sirakaya, 2002). Gunn (1972) classifies two ways for the image of a tourist

destination to be formed: organically (unintentional information transmission) and induced (image formed by active promotion). The main difference between organic and induced images is the absence of control by destination management organizations over the organically created destination image (Gartner 1993).

The concern for the PNG Tourism Promotion Authority (PNG TPA) is there is no control over media reporting in PNG. The PNG Government spent a substantial amount of money on tourism development. For instance, in 2019 the PNG government allocated PGK50m to promote and market PNG as a desirable tourism destination but there seems to be less or no control over media reporting in PNG that filters and regulates media reporting (Oxford Business Group, 2019). It can be argued that its part of media freedom but must be reported based on facts (Sumb, 2020). Consequently, PNG continuously receives a very poor destination image among international source markets (Sumb, 2020). For instance, almost every day PNG on the front page of the *Post Courier* or *The National* have reports of violent crime, rape, murder and other related social issues (Sumb, 2020). This also includes travel warning posted by Australia, New Zealand, United States and European countries. The reports are centred on safety and security issues in PNG (Sumb, 2020).

Different media organizations regard safety and security as important news generators. Thus, when an incident related to safety and security occurs, the media becomes avidly interested in reporting to its audience about the incident (Khodadadi, 2013; Pizam & Mansfeld, 2006; Sumb, 2019). This has a negative influence on potential tourists in the generating markets when the issue involves world media coverage, which creates a strong negative image among potential tourists (Khodadadi, 2013; Sumb, 2019; Tan et al., 2017).

The literature has shown that the higher the frequency of such incidents and the more media coverage it receives, the greater the negative impact on the tourist demand (Khodadadi, 2013; Lauderdale et al., 2011; Sumb, 2019). The high rate of security and safety incidents causes changes in tourists' booking and cancellation of tours (Pizam & Mansfeld, 2006; Sumb, 2019/2017). This can be measured within a given period and corresponds with the frequency patterns of daily crimes committed (Pizam & Mansfeld, 2006). The potential tourists translate this as unacceptably high risk and might cancel their bookings or choose to book alternative and more secure destinations. It is, therefore, in the interest of the tourism industry and host country to try to balance the negative images by conveying a wider range of feature stories of attractions and tourism activities (Pizam & Mansfeld, 2006; Sumb, 2019/2017).

Thus, one way to promote positive destination image is through hosting international mega-events that get worldwide media coverage (Sumb, 2020). For instance, PNG hosted several international events in Port Moresby such as the 2015 Pacific Games, the 2017 Rugby League World Cup and the 2018 APEC meeting (Kenneth, 2016). These events not only promote tourism but also provide several other benefits such as infrastructure and economic development (Pryke, 2017).

According to Cashman (1999), mega-sporting events help form a powerful destination branding despite a previous negative image. The benefit of hosting a mega-event creates a positive destination image. Since the event is broadcasted internationally and viewed by many people around the globe, it is likely to promote the host destination.

Methodology

This research used a qualitative method to answer questions about the benefits of APEC meeting in Port Moresby, PNG. The

qualitative data were collected using desktop research such as searching websites, research papers and news articles to find evidence of benefits of APEC in PNG published between January 2016 and October 2020. These methods were used to collect data as all data were from secondary sources and online-based. Searches were done using the keywords “benefits of APEC in PNG”. The databases used include Wiley Online Library, Science Direct, JSTOR, Google Scholar and Research Gate. Searches were also made on organizational and governmental websites, such as those of PNG Tourism Promotion Authority (PNG TPA), Australian High Commission (PNG), Post Courier, The National and the Department of Pacific Affairs in Australian.

There were 22 papers found, which related to benefits of APEC in PNG. Of the 22 papers, 10 were from websites, 10 from research journals and the remaining two were news articles. Most of the papers were published in 2018, three in 2019, two in 2020 and one each in 2017 and 2016 respectively. Thus, not many scholarly academic articles were written about the benefits of APEC in PNG (Appendix 1).

The data were analyzed using the thematic analysis (Table 2) involving the following process:

1. 22 papers related to the research questions were reviewed and became familiar with the content.
2. An excel spreadsheet was created and all the titles of the papers, authors, year published and coding section were entered.
3. Codes were identified in all the papers
4. Themes were developed based on the codes
5. Themes were reviewed and started work on the scope
6. Finally wrote the findings and discussion (Knight, 2002).

Table 2. Coding of themes

Initial themes	Finding coding themes
Mega-events and nation branding	APEC promotes positive destination image
Image formation agents and mega-events	Infrastructure and legacies of APEC
	Economic benefits of APEC
	Security operations for APEC leaders

Findings and discussion

Positive destination image

It was found that there was evidence of a positive destination image for PNG. The country was on “global spotlight” when it hosted the APEC meeting (Australian High Commission – PNG, 2018). This placed PNG on the world map as global media attention was on PNG. It helped PNG showcase its culture, people and economy to the world (Wenogo, 2018). The APEC meeting was reported around the world and created a good image for the country (APEC, 2018; Business Advantage PNG, 2018). This was made possible by major media organizations from the “21 economics with 3500 media personals” (Post Courier, 2018). This includes China’s State Media the China Global Television Network group, CCTV News, Russian media, Japan, Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, People’s Republic of China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of South Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Republic of the Philippines, Russia and the United States of America (Post Courier, 2018).

The APEC was a historic event that promoted and marketed PNG in a single venue that was attended by media from around the world, who may have had perceptions that PNG is an unsafe tourism destination from rumours and stories (PNG TPA, 2018; Wenogo; 2018).The same sentiments shared by the Australian High Commission in PNG:

“Leading Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) experts say Papua New Guinea stands to benefit from being in the global spotlight when it hosts the APEC forum in 2018, including an anticipated boost

to investment, tourism and trade” (Australian High Commission-PNG, 2018, para. 1).

This contributed to the growth of the tourism and hospitality industry. The findings of this study are consistent with the literature on the benefits of the host nation in destination branding (Higham & Hinch, 2009).

Infrastructure and legacies

Most of the articles reported that in preparation for the APEC, the PNG Government and international donor partners such as China built several major infrastructures in Port Moresby (Kama, 2018; Kenneth, 2016; McLeod & Pryke, 2018; Oxford Business Group, 2018/19). These include the building of new and resealing existing roads, the building of the International Convention Centre and the APEC House.

The APEC also led to the building of the - Hilton Hotel and the Stanley Hotel (Kama, 2018; Jones, 2018; APEC, 2018; Oxford Business Group, 2018/19). China fully supported PNG to host the APEC meeting and funded major projects such as the redevelopment of PNG’s International Conference Center and the building of a grand boulevard connecting it to Parliament House (Zhe, 2018). However, to balance Chinese’s presence in PNG, the United States and its allies (Australia and Japan) used the APEC summit to announce their major projects to support PNG as highlighted by Oxford Business Group:

“In an effort to balance Chinese investment, the US and its allies Australia and Japan used the APEC summit to unveil a major project of their own, announcing a \$1.7bn plan to help PNG achieve its goal of supplying electricity to 70% of the population by 2030. Currently, less than 15% of the population, mainly those in urban areas, have access to a reliable supply of electricity, and this is seen as a major restriction to economic development” (Oxford Business Group, 2018, para. 10).

These findings on the value of infrastructure development for APEC are similar to that found in the literature (Berkowitz et al., 2007; Pryke, 2017). These are legacies of mega-events that remain for the long term in the host destination. The event is hosted for one or two weeks but the infrastructure remains and can be used for other future events. These are the direct benefits of hosting a mega-event (Cashman, 1999). For instance, as highlighted by Kama:

“The APEC show began with new hotels erected, roads paved and the construction of the spectacular APEC House on Ela Beach” (Kama, 2018, para. 2).

Economic benefits of APEC meeting

The articles reported that there was evidence of economic activities during the APEC meeting (PNGTPA, 2020; Pryke, 2018). For instance, Port Moresby residents received monetary benefits through their engagement as volunteers and cleaners while companies received contracts to provide transportation, hospitality, catering and other services (Wenogo, 2018). Also, all the hotels in Port Moresby were fully booked and cruise ships were brought to provide extra beds. This was stated by Werner in conference proceedings in Australia:

“Papua New Guinea hosted the APEC 2018 Summit in November 2018. Due to the shortfall of hotel rooms during the meeting peak times, the PNG Government decided to use three Cruise Ships, berthed in Fairfax Harbour, for providing the additional accommodation capacity”(Werner, 2019, pp. 437-443).

The meeting also aimed to raise awareness of the business opportunities and integrate the Asia-Pacific region economically by removing the trade barriers and keeping the spirit of trade, investments and business in the region (APEC, 2020; PNGTPA, 2020).

Security operations for APEC leaders

PNG is seen to have a negative destination image associated with safety and security issues (Kama, 2018; Lyons, 2018, Sumb,

2020/19/17; Wenogo, 2018). As discussed by Sumb in his paper titled Developing PNG's tourism sector:

“The media has reported on all types of crime committed in the country, with incidents making headlines both locally and internationally. Thus, the perception of PNG overseas is that it is a dangerous and unsafe tourist destination” (Sumb, 2020, p. 8).

This was a concern for the PNG government, which needed to ensure that there were no or a few incidents during the APEC meeting. This was made possible by the Australia Government in providing security assistance including the following (APEC, 2018):

- Australian Defense Force provided security assistance across the maritime, aviation and counter-terrorism domains.
- Training and capacity building for PNG Defense force to develop skills and capabilities
- Australian Federal Police provide training and improve infrastructure for Royal PNG Constabulary.
- A cybersecurity package including cybersecurity controls in ICT infrastructure and a Cyber Security Operations Centre.

Also, there was a heavy presence of the military in the country not only from Australia but other countries as well to protect some of the world's most powerful leaders who were attending the APEC meeting. The justification for taking such a measure could be for the following reasons. First, the world is experiencing unprecedented terrorism activities and anything could happen when world leaders were in the country. Secondly, PNG was rated as an unsafe city in the world by foreign media such as The Guardian. This is the quote from The Guardian:

“As the city, which is one of the most dangerous in the world, prepares itself for the arrival of an estimated 5,000-7,000 people including world leaders, CEOs and journalists, we asked our Papua

New Guinean readers what they thought of their country, the poorest in the Apec bloc, hosting the meeting” (Lyons, 2018, para. 1).

With such negative media publicity, PNG managed to host 2018 APEC leader’s meeting without any major incidents which promoted good destination image for PNG.

Conclusion

Mega-events have created a powerful destination image for a host nation with media coverage from all over the world. This paper presented the benefits of hosting APEC in PNG.

PNG benefited in three ways. Firstly, PNG was able to showcase a powerful destination brand, which resulted from a team effort between the private and public sectors. Secondly, PNG benefited from the infrastructure built by overseas partners and the PNG government. These are legacies of mega-events and will and continue to benefit the country. Thirdly, PNG experienced growth in the hotel industry, which could contribute to economic development and employment opportunities. APEC member countries such as Australia, United States of America, China, Japan, and New Zealand promised to support PNG in its development aspirations in business, trade and infrastructural developments.

Some foreign media feel that PNG might not be able to host APEC meeting successfully due to significant debts, the inability to maintain expensive new infrastructure and the diversion of scarce public funds away from priority areas, with benefits confined to the capital city. However, PNG was able to host APEC with these positive benefits as highlighted above in this paper. The findings of this study are based on a qualitative study and data collected through secondary sources. A future study of a similar event should include a quantitative method and primary data to build on from this study.

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Appendix

Summary of online sources

Author	Year of publication	Title of article	Source	Comments
PNG TPA	2020	APEC study reveals cruise tourism impacts in PNG	TPA Website	Generate revenue for PNG
Allan Sumb	2020	Developing Papua New Guinea's tourism sector	ANU Open Library - Research Paper	PNG's development challenges
Gebaue Werner	2019	Upgrade of Fairfax harbor berthing facilities for APEC 2018 Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea	Conference Paper	Cruise ships were brought into PNG to provide extra rooms for APEC visitors
Allan Sumb	2019	International visitors' perceptions of safety and security issues in Madang, PNG	South Pacific Studies - Research Paper	Poor destination image for PNG
Oxford Business Group	2019	Major construction projects in PNG ahead of APEC 2018	Oxford Business Group- Website	Major infrastructure development in PNG including APEC infrastructure
Shane McLeod & Jonathan Pryke	2018	2018 Australia-Papua New Guinea emerging leaders dialogue outcomes report	Lowy Institute- Research Report	Dialogue between PNG and Australia in preparation for APEC 2018
Bal Kama	2018	The 'year of APEC' – reflections on PNG in 2018	Devpolicy - Research Paper	People's expectations of APEC benefits & challenges
Kate Lyons	2018	Can they really pull it off?: the APEC summit comes to Papua New Guinea	The Guardian- News Report	Foreign media doubted about PNG's ability to host the APEC
Jonathan Pryke,	2018	Future scenarios for Papua New Guinea	Lowy Institute- Research Paper	Future development challenges for PNG if APEC not managed well

Jenny Hayward Jones	2018	Changing geopolitical dynamics for Papua New Guinea	Lowy Institute- Research Paper	Likely impact of PNG's hosting of the APEC summit in 2018
Australian High Commission, PNG	2018	APEC to put Papua New Guinea in the global spotlight	Australian High Commission- PNG Website	APEC promotes positive image for PNG
APEC	2018	Papua New Guinea's APEC turning point	APEC-Website	Opportunities and benefits of APEC
Jeremiah Wenogo	2018	For PNG's sake let's hope hosting APEC is for the better	Devpolicy Blog- Research Paper	Benefits of APEC in terms of infrastructure, employment and destination image
Oxford Business Group	2018	Papua New Guinea reaps benefits from hosting APEC summit	Oxford Business Group-Website	Benefits of APEC in PNG
Business Advantage PNG	2018	How the world's media reported on APEC 2018 in Papua New Guinea?	Business Advantage PNG - Website	Global media in PNG for the APEC
Post Courier	2018	Media on APEC in PNG	Post Courier- News Report	PNG was on the spotlight with 3500 journalists from all over the world covering APEC in PNG
Oxford Business Group	2018	A rising international profile and unique niche offering support tourism market in Papua New Guinea.	Oxford Business Group-Website	Hotel infrastructure development in PNG
PNG TPA	2018	PNGTPA sees APEC 2018 as an opportunity to promote tourism and improve economic growth	PNG TPA -Website	Opportunity for economic growth
APEC	2018	APEC promotes tourism in Papua New Guinea	APEC – Website	APEC promotes tourism in PNG
Gong Zhe	2018	Highways, schools and medical aid: How China is helping Papua New Guinea's development	CGTN-Website	China supports Infrastructure development
Allan Sumb	2017	New Zealand travellers' perceptions of safety and security issues in PNG	PNG Contemporary Studies. DWU Research Journal	Safety and security issues in PNG
Gorethy Kenneth	2016	2016 year end review	Post Courier – News Article	Major infrastructure developments in preparations for APEC