

## **ABSTRACT**

Chhabra, Deepak. Heritage Tourism: An Analysis of Perceived Authenticity and Economic Impact of the Scottish Highland Games in North Carolina (under the direction of Dr. Erin O. Sills and Dr. Carol S. Love).

Short-term events such as festivals are important components of heritage tourism. Heritage tourism provides economic benefits and cultural sustainability to local communities. This dissertation analyzes perceived levels of authenticity and spending by visitors to heritage festivals. The economic impact of visitor expenditures upon the host regions in North Carolina (USA) is also analyzed. Existing and potential visitor target markets are identified. The festivals studied are Scottish Highland Games, and analyses are based on survey data collected from Grandfather Mountain Highland Games and Flora Macdonald Highland Games held in North Carolina. Perceived authenticity is measured as the average authenticity rating of events offered at the Games and statistically related to visitor characteristics. Second, visitor expenditures are compared across age and income groups and regressed on other visitor characteristics, including the visitors' experience at the event. Finally, economic impact of total visitor expenditures is estimated with an input-output model that calculates income, output and value added impacts. The results provide useful insights for Highland Games and local government officials with respect to future promotion. Highland Games in the United States are staged authenticity, but this does not make them inauthentic. There are important differences in perceptions of authenticity among visitors with regard to gender and historical background. Tourist expenditures are positively related to annual household

income and distance traveled. When potentially endogenous attributes acquired at the Games (such as enjoyment) are added to the model, they increase the statistical significance of the model. Finally, the Highland Games visitor expenditures have the biggest economic impact on the lodging industry. This is followed by impacts on eating and drinking, admission and registration, gasoline and retail industries. Since the multipliers are small, the games have a rather small percentage impact on their host regions. However, they generate both large direct expenditures as well as indirect and induced effects. The results of this study show that the Highland Games boost heritage tourism in North Carolina by providing events perceived as authentic and economic benefits to the local community.