

Introducing a Conditional Support Framework: How young residents view the Olympic games

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ABSTRACT

While cost-benefit frameworks have dominated resident support research, they struggle to explain why governance quality increasingly shapes acceptance. This Research Note introduces the conditional support framework (CSF), which treats resident support as a contingent, revisable stance: granted, withheld, or withdrawn depending on perceived governance quality. Drawing on 74 semi-structured interviews and 14 focus groups (N = 146) with young residents aged 18 to 30 years in Lombardy, Italy, this study examines perceptions of the Milano–Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic Games. Findings reveal that support is contingent on four governance-related conditions: (a) transport readiness, (b) housing fairness, (c) sustainability credibility, and (d) local inclusion. Economic and reputational benefits were widely acknowledged, yet proved insufficient to secure endorsement when governance performance was questioned. By reframing resident support as governance-dependent rather than purely impact-driven, the CSF extends resident attitude research and offers a transferable lens for future research on tourism legitimacy.

1. Introduction

Residents' support is central to the success of tourism mega-events because it provides the political and social legitimacy required to justify public investment and policy decisions (Kim et al., 2025; Kim & Manoli, 2022). The IOC's and FIFA's ethics codes and sponsorship deals are also concerns for local communities (Anastasiadis & Spence, 2019; Petersen-Wagner & Lee Ludvigsen, 2024). Tourism research has often explained this support through social exchange theory (SET), which assumes that residents weigh perceived benefits against perceived costs and support development when benefits dominate (Prayag et al., 2013). Other lenses, including stakeholder theory, social representation theory, and social identity theory, have also been applied (Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012; Wassler et al., 2019). Yet this cost–benefit logic increasingly struggles to capture how residents judge mega-event tourism today. Governance quality, procedural fairness, and environmental credibility have become central to how communities assess these events, and SET was not designed to account for them (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Long et al., 2020; Monterrubio et al., 2020).

In this paper, we propose the conditional support framework (CSF) as a new lens for understanding residents' attitudes in tourism research: a

form of support that is granted, withheld, or withdrawn depending on whether tourism development is perceived as competently governed, socially fair, environmentally credible, and locally inclusive. The CSF moves beyond individual utility maximisation, conceptualising residents as embedded in shared cultural contexts, where collective representations, justice concerns, and institutional trust shape what counts as a "cost" or "benefit" (Li et al., 2015; Tyler, 2006). In political science, Levi (1997) shows that fairness determines whether citizens give, refuse, or withdraw consent. In legal settings, Tyler (2006) shows that legitimacy precedes compliance. The CSF is new to tourism research, extending the argument of Levi (1997) and Tyler (2006) into resident support. Where SET asks whether benefits outweigh costs, the CSF asks whether the conditions producing them are legitimate. We develop the framework abductively among young residents of the Milano–Cortina 2026 host region. Resident-support research has drawn mainly on older home-owning samples, leaving this generation largely unexamined despite bearing the long-run consequences of mega-event decisions. Foregrounding this generation is itself a contribution.

Mega-events now unfold under heightened public scrutiny of sustainability claims, housing affordability crises, and demands for transparent, participatory governance (Papagiannakis et al., 2024). The

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expansion of short-term rental platforms such as Airbnb, Booking and Vrbo has intensified housing affordability concerns, particularly among younger residents. This sharpens the question of who benefits from tourism growth and who bears its costs (Cocola-Gant & Gago, 2019; Gutiérrez et al., 2017).

At the same time, sustainability has also become a dominant narrative in mega-event planning (Higham & Miller, 2018), yet growing scepticism towards greenwashing and symbolic environmental measures risks undermining trust in event organisers and public institutions (Papagiannakis et al., 2024). These pressures are particularly acute for younger generations, who tend to combine more precarious material conditions with stronger environmental and social justice expectations (Dragolea et al., 2023). Despite this, studies of residents' support have tended to treat host communities as homogeneous (Dutt et al., 2022; Segota et al., 2024). Age and generation receive limited attention, even though they shape how people see tourism development and governance. Young residents' distinct exposure to housing pressures, labour-market precarity, and climate concerns therefore makes them a crucial population for examining how conditional support is constructed and negotiated (Cocola-Gant & Gago, 2019; Paramati & Roca, 2019).

By positioning the CSF as an analytical lens in a tourism context, this paper contributes to tourism management research in three main ways. First, it conceptualises resident support not as a stable outcome of cost–benefit calculation but as a contingent, revisable stance that depends on assessments of governance competence, distributive and procedural fairness, environmental credibility, and local inclusion (Kim & Manoli, 2022; Tyler, 2006). Second, it shows how the CSF suits tourism contexts where shared representations of tourism, mega-events, and sustainability are already charged, and where residents interpret new projects through existing narratives of trust, scepticism, and conflict (Hadinejad et al., 2019; Li et al., 2015). Third, it shows that young residents' support for Olympic tourism hinges on governance conditions rather than on economic gains alone.

2. Beyond social exchange: conditional support framework

2.1. The limits of existing theoretical lenses

SET has done important work in tourism research, treating the resident as a rational individual who weighs personal costs against personal benefits (Prayag et al., 2013). What it does not easily accommodate is a resident who withholds support not because costs outweigh benefits, but because the process feels unfair, the governance looks incompetent, or the sustainability claims sound unconvincing. By treating residents as purely rational actors, what is often ignored are the wider social, political, and community needs (Gannon et al., 2021; Hadinejad et al., 2019). Residents sometimes endorse tourism despite obvious negative impacts, and personal financial gain rarely predicts support on its own (Neuts et al., 2021; Qin et al., 2021). Smith et al. (2019) argue that SET underplays the temporal and collective dimensions of mega-event judgements; a single exchange metric cannot capture how residents form, withhold, or withdraw support (Gannon et al., 2021; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020). Also, SET has been criticised for treating residents as rational calculators and for predicting attitudes poorly, and reviews call for new frameworks (e.g., Hadinejad et al., 2019; Sharpley, 2014).

Social representations theory (SRT) offers the main alternative. It treats resident views as shared meanings, and it has long been used to study host reactions to mega events (Wassler et al., 2019). Critics, however, find the theory vague, better at describing views than explaining them, and weak at prediction (Voelklein & Howarth, 2005). Also, stakeholder theory positions residents as one interest group whose claims deserve weight in tourism planning (Byrd, 2007). Yet being named a stakeholder rarely gives residents real influence over decisions (Tosun, 2000). These lenses explain whose interests count and who identifies with tourism, but what remains unexplained is why

acknowledged benefits fail to produce support when governance is doubted.

2.2. Governance qualities as prerequisites

The framework developed in this research is designed for this gap. It draws on three established streams of social-scientific work: procedural justice and legitimacy theory (Tyler, 2006), social support theory (Cohen & Wills, 1985), and collective representation and cultural cognition (Li et al., 2015). Its central move is to treat governance qualities as prerequisites for support, not variables in a cost–benefit equation. SET treats procedural fairness, institutional trust, and environmental credibility as further inputs alongside benefits and costs (Gannon et al., 2021; Nunkoo & So, 2016). The CSF inverts this logic. When these qualities are absent, anticipated benefits do not convert into support, however large. Only once residents judge governance adequate do costs and benefits enter the picture at all.

Three assumptions follow from this shift. First, residents in the framework are not utility-maximising individuals but socially embedded actors. Shaped by shared cultural meanings and collective representations (Li et al., 2015), they ask whether the rules of the game are fair and legitimate before they ask what they personally gain (Tyler, 2006). Second, governance qualities operate as thresholds, so support fails when any single quality is breached, even when others remain positive. Third, support is conditional and revocable, not a stable trait, and can shift quickly as governance signals change.

2.3. Drawing on the social support tradition

To specify what "support" means, the CSF borrows selectively from the social support literature. Support is a relational resource whose meaning is set by who provides it, the local context, and the pressures residents face, not by its objective value (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Social support is multi-dimensional, and the same logic extends to resident empowerment in tourism (Cohen & Wills, 1985; dos Santos et al., 2024). CST draws two lessons from this literature: Support must be disaggregated by type and source, and the same gesture can read as genuine in one community and performative in another.

2.4. What the CSF adds to resident-attitude research

Conditionality is not new (Scheiber, 2026), but existing work does not explain how governance qualities enter support formation. SET extensions and procedural-justice accounts add fairness, trust, and credibility as inputs (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Nunkoo, 2016; Tyler, 2006). Government–public relationship work treats relationship quality as an outcome of cultivation, not a threshold (Kim et al., 2025; Kim & Manoli, 2022). Plaza-Mejía et al. (2020) catalogue variables without ranking them by importance. Recent conservation-of-resources work treats trust in government governance as a moderator softening overtourism's adverse effects on support (Liu & Minamikawa, 2026). Trust here is a buffer, not a prerequisite.

Studies of sport events sit closest to this setting (Kim et al., 2025; Scheiber, 2026), yet no lens explains when governance judgements block support. We therefore adopt an abductive design moving between this literature and young residents' accounts, presenting the resulting framework. Also, the CSF treats governance qualities as prerequisites: thresholds that must be met prior to forming residents' supportive attitude. This calls for tools that identify necessary conditions (Olya, 2020), which is a key finding of the current research.

3. Methodology

The study advances the CSF through an abductive qualitative design, being informed by existing literature on resident support and mega-event governance, while remaining open to how young residents

themselves articulated the conditions under which support can be granted (Gursoy & Kendall, 2006; Nunkoo et al., 2018). A qualitative approach is appropriate given the focus on how governance performance is interpreted, negotiated, and linked to legitimacy. The study does not empirically test the CSF in a hypothesis-testing sense. Instead, it develops and refines the CSF through qualitative thematic analysis by examining how young residents reason about the governance conditions under which Olympic support becomes possible or withdrawn. As such, and in line with calls to move beyond impact-based and standardised survey models of resident support toward more contextual, meaning-focused approaches, the design prioritises residents' meaning-making and evaluative reasoning about public decision-making processes (Scheiber, 2026).

The empirical context is the Milano–Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic Games, a polycentric mega-event spanning metropolitan, alpine, and peripheral destinations across Lombardy and neighbouring regions, reflecting broader trends towards complex, multi-sited mega-event governance (Kromidha et al., 2019). This dispersed hosting model intensifies coordination demands across jurisdictions and foregrounds questions of transport preparedness, housing regulation, sustainability commitments, and local inclusion—dimensions central to contemporary debates on mega-event legacies, governance, and resident trust (Nunkoo et al., 2018).

The study draws on 74 semi-structured interviews and 14 focus groups (72 participants), for a total of 146 participants. The 14 focus groups included four to six participants each and were conducted in person in university seminar rooms or in local cafés, depending on participant availability. Interviews were conducted also in person in similar locations and lasted approximately 30–60 min, while focus groups lasted approximately 60–90 min. Indicative interview and focus group guides used can be found in Appendix A and B respectively.

All participants were young adults (approximately 18–30 years old) residing in Lombardy. Most were university students or early-career workers, with a slight predominance of women in both focus groups and interviews (57% and 54% respectively—it is worth noting that while gender was recorded for sample transparency, no systematic gender-based differences were identified in the thematic analysis); the majority were renters, living alone or in shared housing, with some in family housing. A summary of the characteristics of the participants can be found in Appendix C. This cohort was selected purposively, as younger residents are particularly exposed to housing affordability pressures, dependent on public transport systems, and likely to experience the longer-term governance legacies of mega-events (Yamashita & Hallmann, 2025). Their structural position makes them especially sensitive to governance conditions highlighted in the literature, such as transport readiness, housing fairness, sustainability credibility, and local inclusion (Mair et al., 2021; Nunkoo et al., 2018). These considerations informed the choice of participant group, since they identified young residents as a theoretically relevant population for examining conditional support, while the analysis remained open to how participants themselves connected these issues to support, scepticism or opposition. Participants were recruited through university networks and local contacts to ensure diversity in educational background, employment status, and proximity to Olympic sites, in line with recommendations to capture heterogeneous resident perspectives (Sox et al., 2020). A control group from non-Olympic regions was not included because the study develops the framework from residents who are directly exposed to the host context.

Sample size was guided by the principle of information power, given the focused research aim, the specificity of the participant group, and the analytical depth enabled by combining interviews and focus groups (Kromidha et al., 2019). Data were collected between October and December 2025. All sessions were conducted in Italian, audio-recorded with informed consent, transcribed verbatim and translated independently by each researcher, and checked for accuracy before analysis by the whole research team.

Semi-structured interviews allowed in-depth exploration of individual evaluations of governance performance and legitimacy, while focus groups enabled observation of collective sense-making and how conditional support was negotiated discursively among peers, reflecting growing interest in residents' interpretations and meaning-making around mega-events (Yamashita & Hallmann, 2025). Interviews and focus groups were treated as complementary qualitative datasets, with neither assigned priority over the other. Rather than using triangulation to validate one dataset against the other, we used constant comparison to examine convergence, divergence and elaboration across individual accounts and collective discussions.

Data were analysed using an abductive form of reflexive thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's iterative principles of familiarisation, coding, theme development, review and refinement (Braun & Clarke, 2021, 2024). The analysis was not purely inductive in the sense of beginning from a theoretical blank slate. Rather, prior work on resident support and mega-event governance sensitised us to broad issues such as mobility, housing, sustainability and inclusion, while the specific themes, their meanings, and their threshold logic were developed through repeated engagement with the interview and focus group material. In this sense, the sampling rationale identified a theoretically relevant population, but it did not predetermine the final thematic structure. Instead, it was through a constant comparison across interviews and focus groups that four governance-related conditions (transport readiness, housing fairness, sustainability credibility, local inclusion) were developed as central to participants' evaluative reasoning.

Attention was given both to explicit references to event impacts (e.g., congestion, rent increases, environmental strain) and to underlying governance evaluations that shaped support or scepticism (e.g., perceptions of competence, fairness, credibility, and inclusion), consistent with evidence that trust, transparency, and perceived benefits and costs are central to residents' support (Gursoy & Kendall, 2006; Nunkoo et al., 2018; Yamashita & Hallmann, 2025). While sensitised by literature on resident support and governance, including SET-based models, the analysis did not impose predefined categories (Gursoy & Kendall, 2006). Instead, themes were developed to capture patterned ways in which support was framed as contingent upon specific governance conditions, in line with reflexive, flexible thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2020, 2024).

In more detail, the analysis proceeded through four linked stages. First, transcripts were read repeatedly to identify recurring expressions of support, scepticism, concern, and conditional endorsement. Second, initial codes were generated close to participants' language, including codes such as transport overload, temporary fixes, rent pressure, unfair distribution of benefits, greenwashing, lack of visibility and feeling excluded. Third, these codes were clustered into candidate themes by asking what kind of governance judgement each code expressed. Finally, the candidate themes were reviewed against the full dataset and refined into four governance conditions, which were then consolidated into the

Table 1
The four governance prerequisites and their threshold categories.

Governance prerequisites	Threshold category and definition
Competent governance	Competence threshold: institutional capacity is demonstrated reliably and persists as durable legacy rather than temporary provision
Procedural fairness	Distributive justice threshold: regulatory protections distribute tourism's costs equitably rather than concentrating them on renters and lower-income residents
Environmental credibility	Credibility threshold: environmental commitments are backed by concrete, verifiable practices rather than narrative claims
Social inclusion	Relational threshold: residents are addressed as participants rather than as recipients of an externally imposed initiative

four threshold categories presented in Table 1. The codebook recorded theme definitions, inclusion criteria, exclusion criteria, and representative extracts, while the thematic map documented the movement from first-order codes to governance conditions and then to the CSF conceptual model (they are both included in Appendix D and E respectively). The threshold logic was settled only when the four conditions proved stable across both interviews and focus groups.

Developing a detailed codebook and thematic map, as well as peer debriefing within the research team enhanced the analytical rigour and trustworthiness, as recommended in qualitative and mega-event governance research (Braun & Clarke, 2024; Kromidha et al., 2019). At the same time, researcher positionality was addressed reflexively throughout the study. The research team had prior scholarly knowledge of sport tourism and mega-event governance but no formal role in the organisation of Milano–Cortina 2026. Coding decisions and theme development were discussed within the team, and interpretations were repeatedly checked against the transcripts to avoid imposing prior assumptions onto participants' accounts. All participants provided informed consent, and anonymity and confidentiality were ensured throughout the research process.

4. Findings and directions for future research

4.1. Findings: how conditional support operates – the four governance conditions

Across interviews and focus groups, participants rarely described the Milano–Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic Games in terms of either simple enthusiasm or outright rejection. Instead, they often recognised possible economic, reputational, and infrastructural benefits while attaching their support to questions of governance performance. This conditional stance was captured directly by one participant's comment that “it all depends on how it will be managed” (FG1.2). Support was therefore not expressed as a fixed position, but as something that could be granted, withheld, or withdrawn depending on whether the Games were seen to protect everyday liveability and demonstrate institutional competence, fairness, credibility and inclusion. This cautious, evaluative stance is grounded in everyday liveability and institutional trust, echoing work in which governance quality, trust, and relationship quality condition the impact–support relationship (Gursoy et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2025; Nunkoo & So, 2016; Olya, 2020).

Four interrelated governance conditions structured this evaluative reasoning: transport readiness, housing fairness, sustainability credibility, and local inclusion. These conditions were developed through comparison across interviews and focus groups and are presented below, then consolidated into the framework's threshold categories (see Table 1). From a CSF perspective, they are not simply additional impacts to be added to a cost–benefit balance sheet. Rather, they operate as prerequisites. When they are not met, perceived benefits may be acknowledged but do not necessarily translate into support. This complements evidence that residents' support depends on how authorities manage infrastructure, fairness, and communication (Di Maddaloni & Sabini, 2022; Gursoy & Kendall, 2006; Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2017; Plaza-Mejía et al., 2020).

Transport readiness means keeping mobility working under event load and leaving behind durable improvements. It emerged as the most immediate and symbolically powerful of the four conditions. Participants framed mobility infrastructure as a “stress test” of institutional capacity, drawing on previous experiences of congestion to anticipate Olympic disruption: “when there are matches, parts of the city already go into blackout in terms of transport. So honestly, imagining the Olympics like this makes me worried” (FG5.3). Even where participants expected authorities to expand services – “they will probably add more trains and buses, but with that number of people it still won't be enough” (FG14.1) – support strengthened only when mobility investments were framed as lasting legacies rather than temporary fixes. This legacy

condition was expressed clearly, with Interviewee 64 arguing that: “The primary reason is definitely to use it for the Games, but I hope they will also be used in the future ... We'll have to see how it goes”. Similarly, focus group 9 participant 3 interpreted Olympic transport investment as a possible sign of belated institutional commitment noting that: “if they really improve the trains and keep them after the Olympics, then it's a good thing. Otherwise, it's just chaos for nothing”. The conditional logic was captured most directly by Interviewee 8: “It all depends on how it will be managed” (I8). The CSF interprets these accounts as competence thresholds. Residents condition their support on whether transport systems signal credible, legacy-oriented planning, not simply a positive impact feeding into approval (Gursoy & Kendall, 2006).

Housing fairness means sharing tourism's housing costs across renters, owners, and lower-income residents. It was the second condition, particularly salient among renters and early-career residents. Affordability is what residents experience; fairness is whether tourism's costs are shared equitably. The accounts below describe affordability, and we read them as evidence about fairness. Anticipated short-term rental inflation was framed explicitly as a matter of distributive fairness: “Airbnb prices will rise a lot during the Olympics, that's obvious. For tourists it's fine, but for us it becomes impossible” (I70). Another interviewee drew a clear distinction between winners and losers: “if you own a flat, you're happy. If you're renting, you're the one who pays the price” (I51). A similar distributive framing appeared in the observation that “for tourists it's an opportunity, for residents it becomes more difficult” (I13). The CSF conceptualises these narratives as fairness threshold. Residents were not rejecting tourism revenues per se but expected regulatory intervention to protect those with least power. This concern was not limited to the Olympic period itself but was connected to broader tourism-driven housing pressure: “Rent is already too high because of tourism. Lots of Airbnbs and tourists coming will raise prices even more” (FG2.2). Where such protections were perceived as weak or absent, support eroded despite recognition of broader economic gains (Gutiérrez et al., 2017). Even adaptive strategies – “I already know people who will go back to their parents' house during that period because it's too expensive to stay” (I62) – signalled that tolerance was being stretched to its limits.

Sustainability credibility means matching environmental promises with concrete, visible action. It was the third condition, operating primarily as a credibility filter. While participants welcomed commitments to reuse existing venues and promote public transport, doubts regarding authenticity were widespread. As one respondent put it, “everyone says it's sustainable, but there is a big risk that it's just greenwashing” (I38). This scepticism focused less on the language of sustainability than on delivery: “It depends on how they manage the flow of people and everything around it” (I29). Environmental concerns were particularly pronounced for mountain areas: “the Alps are already fragile. Bringing so many people there will have an impact, no matter how they present it” (FG4.5). Yet sustainability narratives gained traction when tied to concrete measures: “if they really use existing venues and organise shuttles instead of cars, then it makes sense to talk about sustainability” (FG7.3). The CSF treats these environmental claims as credibility thresholds. Legitimacy follows only when commitments are backed by visible, verifiable practices (Papagiannakis et al., 2024).

Local inclusion means treating residents as participants in the event rather than as bystanders. It was the fourth condition, shaping whether the Olympics were perceived as a shared project or an externally imposed initiative. Several participants reported minimal exposure to Olympic-related communication – “honestly, I haven't seen anything. No posters, no social media, nothing” (I11) – which fostered detachment: “it feels like something happening in Milan, not something involving us” (FG8.5). Another participant described the event as “a bit absent,” noting: “I haven't seen any information about Milan Cortina” (I69). Others explicitly linked visibility and engagement to legitimacy: “if they made it more visible in the city, with events or installations, maybe people would feel more involved” (FG7.4). This sentiment was echoed

by many participants, who also suggested that inclusion required making the event more present in everyday civic space: “Probably they could have promoted it better in more cities” and “make it more visible and a bit more tangible” (I36).
The CSF interprets these accounts as relational thresholds (summarised in Table 1 above). Residents extend or withhold support based on whether they feel recognised and included, in line with work on government–public relationships (Kim et al., 2025; Ramkissoon, 2020).

4.2. Theoretical synthesis and practical implications

These findings reframe residents' support toward mega sport events as conditional and governance-dependent. Participants widely acknowledged economic and reputational benefits, yet these did not secure endorsement where governance performance was questioned. This reframing extends SET-based models (Ap, 1992; Olya, 2020; Prayag et al., 2013) by suggesting that benefit–cost evaluations are filtered through perceptions of competence, fairness, institutional credibility, and inclusion, much as recent studies show that trust, relationship quality, and perceived crisis response moderate or mediate the impact–support relationship (Qi et al., 2023). The CSF, thus, offers a parsimonious lens for analysing under what governance conditions residents convert perceived gains into support, maintain a stance of watchful neutrality, or shift toward opposition. It also provides a conceptual bridge between qualitative accounts of “cautious endorsement” and the more standardised support constructs used in quantitative resident studies (Plaza-Mejía et al., 2020).

Fig. 1 presents the logic of the framework in three stages. SET weighs perceived benefits; the governance filter then tests the four pre-requisites; support is granted, withheld, or later withdrawn as conditions change.
For host governments and policymakers, the four governance thresholds identified here suggest that public legitimacy for mega sport events cannot be secured through economic promises alone. Policymakers should prioritise early, visible action on transport legacy planning and short-term rental regulation, particularly measures that protect renters and low-income residents, as these signal institutional competence and fairness before the event begins.

4.3. Directions for future research

Future research on the CSF in tourism could proceed in several directions. First, studies should explicitly model resident support as conditional on governance and relational thresholds rather than as a simple net balance of perceived benefits and costs. Meta-analytic work shows that perceived benefits strongly predict support, while perceived costs often have trivial or inconsistent effects, suggesting deeper mechanisms behind the “benefits vs. costs” imbalance (Gursoy et al., 2019). Future work could test CSF-inspired models in which constructs such as trust in government, perceived fairness, and empowerment operate as pre-requisites or necessary conditions for benefits to translate into support

(Olya, 2020). Analytical approaches like analysis of necessary conditions and multi-group SEM could be used to identify threshold effects and context-specific patterns (Olya, 2020).
Second, the CSF can help bring order to the proliferating list of variables that researchers have linked to resident support. Resident support research now incorporates tolerance (Qi et al., 2023), empowerment (Neuts et al., 2021), emotional solidarity (Munanura et al., 2023), and psychological human–place relations (Song et al., 2024). Future studies could test whether these variables function as conditional “gateways” that determine when perceived impacts, wellbeing, or solidarity actually result in attitudinal, intentional, and behavioral support (Plaza-Mejía et al., 2020). This would respond to calls to standardise what is meant by “support” and to unpack the “jungle” of overlapping measures (Plaza-Mejía et al., 2020). Future research should also examine CSF through an intersectional lens. This study foregrounded age, but conditional support is likely to be shaped by how age intersects with gender, income, housing tenure, migration background, disability and proximity to Olympic sites. These positions may affect which thresholds become most salient, such as housing fairness for renters or transport readiness for residents dependent on public transport.
Third, longitudinal and comparative designs are needed to examine how conditional support evolves over time and across tourism contexts. Existing work suggests that tolerance and trust can allow support to persist even when costs are salient (Qi et al., 2023), and that political or institutional trust becomes particularly important where greater sacrifice is required (Kim et al., 2025). Future research could implement pre–post and panel studies in destinations at different development stages (under-, optimally, and over-developed) to see how conditional thresholds shift with changing impacts, media narratives, and governance performance (Neuts et al., 2021). Cross-context comparisons (e.g., everyday tourism vs. hallmark events, nature-based vs. urban destinations, local residents vs residents in non-host regions) could test whether the strength and structure of conditional mechanisms vary systematically (Qi et al., 2023).
Finally, the CSF invites stronger alignment between theory and method. Such research would shift the study of resident attitudes from treating support as a static outcome toward understanding it as a dynamic, condition-dependent process embedded in governance structures and human–place relationships (Plaza-Mejía et al., 2020; Erul & Woosnam, 2021; Plaza-Mejía et al., 2020). Through repeated empirical validation across different context, the framework may develop into a theory of conditional support towards the sport events.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Argyro Elisavet Manoli: Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. Sungkyung Kim: Writing – original draft, Formal analysis. Philipp Wassler: Writing – review & editing, Methodology.

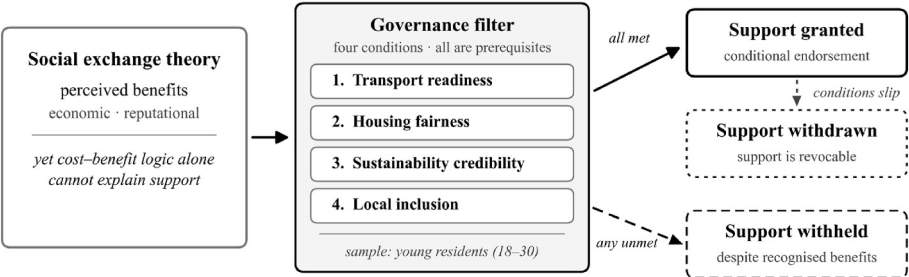


Fig. 1. Visualisation of conditional support framework.

Impact statement

Mega-events such as the Olympic Games require substantial public investment and reshape housing, mobility, and environmental systems in host regions. This study introduces Conditional Support Framework (CSF), demonstrating that residents' support is contingent upon governance competence, fairness, credibility, and inclusion rather than promised economic benefits alone. Drawing on extensive qualitative evidence from young residents in Lombardy, the findings identify four governance conditions-transport readiness, housing fairness, sustainability credibility, and local inclusion-that determine whether support is granted or withdrawn. The research provides practical guidance for policymakers and event organisers by highlighting how legacy-oriented infrastructure planning, proactive housing regulation, transparent sustainability implementation, and inclusive communication strategies can reduce social conflict and strengthen public trust. By clarifying how support must be earned through credible governance, this study offers actionable insights for improving mega-event legitimacy and enhancing residents' quality of life in host destinations.

Declaration of competing interests

We have no conflict of interest to declare. This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2026.105521>.

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