Consumers seeking for sport satisfaction can choose among various potential sport products and services. These sport activities are provided permanently (e.g. sport center), recurring (e.g. annual sport festivals) or as unique sport events (USE) like the Olympic Games and international competitions (Ritchie, 1984). Unlike permanent and frequent events, USEs are temporary products and typically awarded by periodical bidding processes, which require the supply of adequate mandatory facilities and urban infrastructure. However, these requirements are often ex ante inexistent and have to be provided by long-term investments into urban infrastructure (Solberg & Preuss, 2007). Hence, USEs are unique high risk investments (Chang & Singh, 1990), as unique initial fixed costs stand opposed to unique incomes during the event and uncertain incomes and utilization after the event (Roche, 1994). Consequently, initial costs usually exceed initial pre-events incomes, wherefore event committees regularly have to inquire public grants, funds or subsidiaries (Burgan & Mules, 1992; Kang & Perdue, 1994). Additionally, and unlike permanent and recurring sport events, annual cost of preserving the remaining facilities are not compensable by frequent event related incomes (Horne, 2007).

Despite the awareness of long-term risks associated with hosting temporary sport events, local politicians and officials justify the allocation of public money to USEs for some reasons. Primary, they hope for positive macro effects for the region such as economic growth, increasing awareness of local tourism points, improvement of local infrastructure and reinforcement of the international recognition (Bramwell, 1997; Hall, 1987; Ritchie, 1984; Spilling, 1996). Moreover, USEs are useful for long-term generation of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), which significantly affects the economic performance of a society (Dieckmann, 1996). On the micro level, mega sport events are beneficially to the local living conditions and well-being in the long-run (Fredline & Faulkner 1998; Hiller, 2000; Getz, 1989; Ritchie, 2000).

Although USEs are justified as a catalyst for economic and social development on macro and micro levels they are often controversially discussed by residents (Kim & Petrick, 2005; Ritchie et al., 2009). On one side, locals benefit from different positive long-term external effects through improvement of the urban infrastructure in the post-event phase (Essex & Chalkley, 1998). On the other side, they have to face monetary and non-monetary negative external effects before, during and after the event. Non-monetary negative impacts (e.g., noise, traffic and pollution) usually occur in tandem with monetary disturbance (e.g., increase or bad use of taxes). Regarding taxes, individual motives of politicians are critical, since USEs are the result of political objectives and intentions as a successful realization positively impact their political career (Benito et al. 2013; Getz, 1989; Hiller, 1990; Ritchie, 1984). These strong political influences often lead to cost escalations (Ross & Staw, 1986). Furthermore, residents are often concerned about the legacy of the facilities or missing concepts for a post-event use (Hiller & Wanner, 2011). For refinancing subsidiaries (transferred to USEs) politicians have two options: rising taxes or switching public money from other infrastructure projects (e.g. education, traffic) or public services (Crompton, 2000). In both scenarios, local residents experience negative external effects.

Assuming rational behavior of a local resident, the relation between his/her individual perception of external effects may determine his/her support for the USE. Support has been identified as a main factor for the success of USEs in the short and in the long run (Deccio & Baloglu, 2002; Zhou & Ap, 2009). Especially the amount of support in the pre-event phase seems crucial, since governing bodies often require positive plebiscite (Hiller, 1990), relocation of citizens (Hall & Hodges, 1996) or thousands of volunteers (Ritchie, 2000). Hence, a substantial number of existing studies have already investigated various determinants of ex ante residential support for USEs (Deccio & Baloglu, 2002; Mihalik, 2000; Ritchie et al., 2009).
In contrast to recurring events, most USEs include significant changes of urban infrastructure in the surrounding neighborhoods of the event areas. If the changes are just local it should affect the balance of positive and negative external since they seem to vary with distance to the main event area(s). Thus, residents living closer to the facilities may be more likely to benefit from the event or the remaining infrastructures then those living far away. This is likely to be critical if the “local” event is financed by public funds (Peacock, 1978). On the other hand, closer proximity to the facilities implicates higher negative external effects before and during the event (Fredline & Faulkner, 1998).

While most of existing research studies considers the importance of local support for UCEs, little attention has been paid to the spatial influence on it. Previous articles have focused on factors such as sport demand and distance, support for recurring events and demand for permanent sport offerings. Indeed, insights on spatial issues and their relationships with support for UCEs are rare. Nevertheless, a better understanding of spatial distance and support for USEs is an important matter referring to the unequal distribution of external effects associated with the geographical distance from a resident’s home to the event facilities. Hence, the objective of this study was to explore and describe the relationship between geographical location of residents and support for USEs.

In an attempt to illustrate such support-distance relationships we use a random sample of residents (n = 900) of Rio de Janeiro, host of the 2016 Olympic Games. Using support as dependent variable, we conduct an ordinal higher-order interaction regression including geographical distance (retrieved from Google maps) from the residents’ homes to all four main even areas as explanatory variables. The depended variable have an ordinal characteristic and ranges from 1 (totally not support) to 7 (totally support). We further controlled for age, income, and the Human Development Index of the district. First estimations indicate a positive and significant influence of distance on the support for the Olympic Games. These findings were confirmed for both the distance to main area only (“Barra da Tijuca”) and the distance to all four areas as interaction (“Barra da Tijuca”, “Copacabana”, “Maracana”, and “Deodoro”). To put it concrete, every additional kilometer to the main area increases the probability of a positive support by 0.3% on average. Residents at maximum distance (31km) to “Barra da Tijuca” have on average 8% higher probability to support the games compared to those living next to the main district. Hence, residents living closer to the facilities seem to react more sensitive to the negative external effects related to reconstruction of the city environments than to the positive effects in the future. Another explanation should be relocations and the loss of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Despite this, it seems very surprising to find spatial differences since both groups of residents (close and far) are effected from negative long run external effects in the same way (e.g. less investment in other public goods like education and health).

These findings have important implications for the local authorities and organizing committees. In particular, because they primary need the support of the population living close to the sport areas since residents living closer to the event are more important for volunteerism programs (Wicker & Sotiriadou, in press). Furthermore, the locals surrounding the facilities are more likely to get in contact with fans and visitor and, therefore should share a positive vision of the events. In this matter, local authorities and organization committees should intensify marketing and public relations actions in areas close to the facilities to stronger convince them from long run positive external effects.