Generating Social Capital through Major Sporting Events: a Social Network Analysis of UEFA Euro 2016’s Local Hosting Dynamics

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Socio-cultural Thursday, June 2, 2016 20-minute oral presentation (including questions)
Abstract 2016-068 3:35 PM (Legacy South 3)

Relevance/Significance to Sport Management

As the economic impacts of major sporting events have proven to be limited (Andreff, 2012, Preuss, 2004; Zimbalist, 2010), their social impacts are becoming the subject of a growing interest (Carey, Mason, & Misener, 2011). However, due to their variety and the intangible nature of some of them, these impacts remain hard to measure (Taks, 2013). Furthermore, the extant empirical studies (Balduck, Maes, & Buelens, 2011; Heere, Walker, Gibson, Thapa, Geldenhuys, & Coetzee, 2013; Kim & Walker, 2012) have rather sought to assess their existence than to understand how they can be produced. In this regard, several works consistently evoke the concept of social capital, which is presented as a possible impact of sporting events as well as a source of several other social benefits (Misener & Mason, 2006). The purpose of this study is to empirically measure and analyze the social capital generated by the UEFA EURO 2016 within community networks, based on a social network analysis (SNA).

Review of Relevant Literature

Sporting events’ social impacts are very diverse. They can be grouped into five main categories (from the literature review proposed by Djaballah, Hautbois & Desbordes, 2015): (1) social cohesion (including local citizenship, neighborhood connections, intercultural dialog, and social recognition of disadvantaged groups), (2) well-being (namely the psychological effects related to the enjoyment of attending or being involved in the event, and more generally its festive atmosphere), (3) sport participation (since major sporting events encourage the population to become more physically active), (4) human capital (skills acquisition at the individual level, and local expertise at the community level), and (5) urban regeneration (through the building or renovation of sport facilities and other infrastructures).

There seems to be a common denominator of these various impacts through the concept of social capital. First introduced by Bourdieu (1986) as an individual source of social dominance, it was progressively viewed as a more collective resource (Coleman, 1988; 1990). Putnam (1995; 2000) considered social capital as a property of communities, namely “the features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (p.167). From this perspective, it was then analyzed as a factor of economic growth, low crime rates or public health (Halpern, 1999), although some authors also pointed a negative form of social capital (Black and Hughes, 2001).

Sporting events can constitute an important source of social capital (Jamieson, 2014; Mackellar & Jamieson, 2015; Schulenkorf, 2012; Skinner, Zakus, & Cowell, 2008). At the community level, they can help build community networks oriented toward the improvement of local community’s quality of life. However, such positive social capital can only be generated on the condition that the needs and values of the local community – among which disadvantaged groups – are put at the center of the events’ strategies (Misener & Mason, 2006).

In this study, social capital is explored through the principles of social network analysis (SNA). SNA investigates social structures through the use of network and graph theories (Otte, Evelien; Rousseau, & Ronald, 2002). A social network can be defined as a specific set of links among a set of actors, with the additional property that the characteristics of these links may be used to interpret the social behavior of these actors (Mitchell, 1969). The community networks formed by the hosting of major sporting events involve a variety of heterogeneous actors (local authorities, corporations, tourism actors, sport associations, educational and social institutions) which do not necessarily share common goals and organizational cultures. While some community networks have shown to be effective to maximize the economic outcomes of an event, the same cannot be said for leveraging social benefits (O’Brien & Chalip, 2008). Hence, this study works on the assumption that the ability of a community network to generate a positive form of social capital – in order to derive social benefits from the hosting of the UEFA Euro
2016 – depends on the characteristics of the links created and mobilized between the actors throughout the hosting process.

Method

For comparison purposes, two host cities were chosen – Paris and Saint-Denis – based on convergence and divergence criteria.

As this is a research in progress, the data collection has begun in September 2015 (concomitantly with the launching of the event’s hosting projects), and consists of semi-structured interviews with key-actors of the community networks. The interview guide gathers questions pertaining to the role and objectives of each actor involved in various social projects (education, social integration, local citizenship, sport participation), and to the structure of the social capital generated (origin and characteristics of the relationships with other actors within each project). We use the snowball technique by interviewing all the actors mentioned in previous interviews, in order to reconstruct the overall community network of both cities.

The data analysis combines quantitative measures (size, density, cohesion, distance, bridges, centrality) using Pajek, a network analysis software based on mapping, and qualitative dimensions (direction, reciprocity, horizontality or verticality, and content of the relationships, nature and targets of the social benefits).

Expected results and contribution to the body of knowledge

- Provide a quantitative assessment of the social capital stock generated by a major sporting event within community networks.
- Identify patterns linking forms of social capital to social benefits for local communities.
- Compare the two host cities in order to identify seized and missed opportunities for the social leveraging of the event.

From a managerial perspective, this study intends to provide sport policy makers with guidance tools based on the identification and understanding of sporting events’ social outcomes, and the mobilization of community networks in order to build partnership strategies to achieve these outcomes.