The 2016 Rio Olympic Games and the Happiness of Brazilian Residents

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Abstract 2017-407 Room: Maroon Peak

Hosting mega-sport events like the Olympic Games or the FIFA World Cup generates significant revenues for their organizations (i.e., the IOC and FIFA respectively; Foley et al., 2012), but leave host communities with significant debt (e.g., Késenne, 2012). More research on mega sport events has started to focus on less tangible impacts of events such as positive feelings of pride or enhanced social capital among residents in the host communities (e.g., Chalip, 2006; Smith, 2013). This “feel good factor”, also referred to as psychic income (e.g., Downward et al., 2009; Waitt, 2003) is captured by Kavetos and Symanski’s (2010) expression: “... hosting does not make you rich, but it does make you happy” (p. 160). Questions remain however: (1) Do events actually make people happy? (2) Is this feeling of happiness sustained over time? (3) What are the underlying mechanisms that generate feelings of happiness (if at all)?

Findings of previous research investigating social impacts of mega-sport events, such as national pride, national identity, social capital (e.g., Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006; Gibson et al, 2014; Heere et al., 2013), negative social impacts (e.g., Balduck et al., 2011), social cohesion (e.g., Fredline 2006; Hiller, 1998; Shipway, 2007) are inconsistent, and often measure “perceptions” rather than lived “experiences”. However, it can be assumed that if feelings of belonging and community pride are actually experienced and enhanced through events, they may affect the overall emotional state of “happiness”, and so may the level of involvement with the event. Thus, one of the objectives of this study is to test the relationship between event involvement, experienced social impact, and social well-being of the residents.

The Sport Events and Residential Happiness Scale (SERHS; Littlejohn et al., 2016) uses both, a one item and a holistic approach to capture happiness. The holistic approach is based on the theoretical conception of Social Well-Being (SWB; Diener, 2000) and includes four components of SWB: overall happiness, satisfaction with life, positive affects, and reversed negative affects. So far the scale has only been tested in the context of non-mega-events (Littlejohn et al., 2016; Taks et al., 2016). The single item of overall happiness revealed significantly higher levels of happiness for non-attende residents, who were aware of the events; but no significant differences appeared for the holistic happiness measurements. Testing the scale in the context of a mega sport event allows to further validate the usage of the single item versus the holistic approach to measuring happiness and well-being of residents in the context of events. Therefore, this study will also allow to: (1) test and refine the SERHS in the context of a mega event, namely the 2016 Rio Olympic Games (OG); (2) reveal to what extent the hosting of the OG affected the happiness and well-being of Brazilian people (non-attende residents), while considering the social impact of, and involvement with the event; and, (3) test if feelings of happiness are sustained over time.

Method

Sample
During the 2016 Rio OG we sent an online questionnaire to 3909 alumni of a large Brazilian University (non-event attendees). The same sample will be used in a second data collection, six months after the Games. In the first data collection, 317 emails bounced back, while 402 people returned usable questionnaires (11.2% response rate). Respondents were mostly male (55.2%), aged 27.9 years old in average (SD = 6.05), and reported that paying the household bills would be at least somewhat difficult (46.1%).

Scales
(1) Event (Rio 2016 OG) involvement is a first-order latent variable (LV) represented by eight semantic differential items, ranging from 1 (e.g., Boring) to 7 (e.g., Exciting) (Shank & Beasly, 1998).
(2) Social Impact is a second-order LV, represented by five factors: social cohesion (four items; Inoue & Havard, 2012), community spirit (three items; Gibson et al., 2014; Gursoy et al., 2011), feelings of (un)safety (three items; Kim et al., 2015), community involvement (three items; Peterson et al., 2008), and sport participation (three items; Taks et al. 2015), all measured on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1-Strongly disagree to 7-Strongly agree. Note that while the constructs were retrieved from other studies, all items were reframed to reflect “personal experiences” rather than “perceptions” of social impact.

(3) Social Well-Being is a first-order LV, represented by three indicators: happiness (1 item; Kavetsos & Szymanski, 2010), satisfaction with life (3 items; Connoly, 2013) and life affect (8 items; Diener, 2000).

Results

Descriptive statistics showed that, on average, Brazilian respondents were somewhat happy of their lives (M = 4.61; SD = .86 – in a 6-point scale), relatively satisfied with their lives, health, and job (M = 2.98; SD = .49 – in a 4-point scale), and experiencing positive feelings (M = 5.04; SD = 1.02 – in a 7-point scale). Overall, they had a positive involvement with Rio 2016 OG (M = 5.62; SD = 1.44 – in a 7-point scale), but they have experienced low social impacts as a consequence of hosting the OG (M = 3.73; SD = 1.65 – in a 7-point scale).

All scales presented good internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alpha varying from .746 to .946 (Nunnaly & Bernstein, 1994). The values of the AVE were all above .50, indicating good convergent validity. All AVE were larger than the squared correlations of this construct with all others variables, indicating discriminant validity among constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Latent variables were moderately correlated and all correlations were significant at p < .001. The measurement model fit the data closely (CFI = .960; TLI = .952; RMSEA [90% CI] = .049 [.043; .054]; SRMR = 0.060).

The structural model also fit the data closely (CFI = .956; TLI = .950; RMSEA [90% CI] = .050 [.044; .055]; SRMR = 0.065). The path coefficient from event involvement to social impact was significant and large (γ = .574; p < .001), while the path coefficient from social impact to social well-being was significant but small in size (β = .156; p = .012).

Results of the second data collection will be available for the presentation.

Discussion and Conclusion

Results showed that (a) the more people were involved with the 2016 Rio OG, the stronger their social impact experiences; and (b) the higher their experienced social impacts of the Games, the happier they appeared to be. The “happiness” results are consistent with previous literature (e.g., Kavetsos & Symanski, 2010). The assumption that the level of involvement with the event and social impact experiences (e.g., Gibson et al., 2014) serve as underlying mechanisms to improve people’s social well-being (happiness, satisfaction, and positive affect), is supported by the findings. Results of the second collection will show whether these relationships can endure longer than the Games’ period (Maennig & Porsche, 2008). Besides a better insight into intangible benefits from mega-sport events, the findings also inform public (sport) authorities, as well as leaders of sport governing bodies, whose mandate it is to host sporting events of different sizes and impacts.