

## **RIO 2016 OLYMPIC GAMES AND THE SOCIAL IMPACTS OF MEGAEVENTS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY<sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT:** The objective of this work is to analyze the expected positive and negative impacts of the 2016 Olympic Games from the perspective of public policy managers of sports and leisure within Brazil. Previous research demonstrates that sports megaevents generate both positive and negative impacts for every host country and it is essential that the host nations use research to base the construction of their public policies within sports and leisure in order to minimize the negative aspects and amplify the positive ones. For this study, field and bibliographic was conducted. The field research was conducted via semistructured interviews with public policy managers of sports and leisure. Our findings indicated that in order to be effective, there needs to be adequate management and public policies that enable the population to practice sports and it can minimize the negative social impacts of 2016 Olympic Games.

**KEYWORDS:** Sports. Public Policies. Leisure Activities.

### **JOGOS OLÍMPICOS RIO 2016 E OS IMPACTOS SOCIAIS DOS MEGAEVENTOS: UM ESTUDO QUALITATIVO**

**RESUMO:** O objetivo deste trabalho é analisar os impactos positivos e negativos esperados dos Jogos Olímpicos de 2016 sob a perspectiva dos gestores de políticas públicas de esportes e lazer no Brasil. Pesquisas anteriores demonstram que os

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megaeventos esportivos geram impactos positivos e negativos no país anfitrião e é essencial que as nações sede utilizem a pesquisa como base para a construção de suas políticas públicas em esporte e lazer, a fim de minimizar os aspectos negativos e ampliar os positivos. Para este estudo, foi realizada pesquisa de campo e bibliográfica. A pesquisa de campo foi conduzida por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas com gestores de políticas públicas de esportes e lazer. Nossos achados indicaram que, para ser efetiva, é necessário que haja uma gestão adequada e políticas públicas que permitam à população praticar esportes, minimizando os impactos sociais negativos dos Jogos Olímpicos de 2016.

**PALAVRAS CHAVE:** Esportes. Políticas Públicas. Atividades de Lazer.

## **Introduction**

Sports megaevents have gone through tremendous changes since the 1960s and subsequently much attention has been focused on these events. Getz (1997) defines sports megaevents as “[...] events [that] are temporary occurrences, either planned or unplanned. They have a finite length, and for planned events this is usually fixed and publicized. Events are transient, and every event is a unique blending of its duration, setting, management, and people” (p. 4). In the 1990s, these events started to be used more and more in both developing and developed countries as a means to promote economic development, boost tourism, enhance national identity and social cohesion, and promote healthy lifestyles (SWART, 2001; KASIMATI, 2003; BOB & SWART, 2010). Consequently, there has been a lot of competition on choosing the host nations, since it has been argued that the games bring significant improvements to the host nation. With these megaevents, however, there are questions about what the likely impacts, both positive and negative, will be. Kirkup & Major (2007) argue that leaving suitable legacies has rightfully become a part of the dialogue in planning for how a megaevent will take shape. Additionally, Weed & Bull (2004) contend that the necessity to use sports megaevents to drive long-term developmental plans has placed the concept of event legacy within the actual event planning.

Brazil had the unique opportunity of hosting two sports megaevents in a row—the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games. This was not Brazil's first attempt at hosting a megaevent, as they put in bids for Brasilia 2000, Rio de Janeiro 2004, and São Paulo 2012. According to Curi (2013), the Pan American Games of 2007 in Rio de Janeiro is what opened the doors for Rio to host the 2016 Olympic Games. The Pan American Games were highly regarded by the international sports federations. While this was the first ever games hosted in South America, it was viewed favorably and many young athletes within Brazil were able to watch them live, which aided in their Olympic education.

With two major sports megaevents to be held in Brazil, the country earned some unusual names such as: “Sport Tsunami” (BRAZIL, 2015, p. 1), and “Comet of Sport” (SILVA *et al*, 2011, p. S1). Such words show the vast impact that sports megaevents can have in a short period of time. While nations around the world spend billions to host these events, the owners of such events like FIFA and the IOC have begun to chose developing nations to foster economic development in these countries. For instance, tickets to these events can be a significant part of the GDP of a developing country, which in Brazil's case is US \$40 billion. But the positive impacts are not just economic. Junod (2006) identify three key areas for potential benefits for the host country: social, economic, and environmental. In terms of economic benefits, these include: investments from outside of the host region, new infrastructure and sports facilities, rejuvenation and upgrading of existing facilities, and tourism. The social benefits include: encouragement within the local host community to engage in physical activity, cultivation of a culture of health and wellness, instilling pride in the host country, and provision of opportunities to engage the local community in skills development and voluntarism. The

major environmental impact can be bringing in the necessary funding to embark on environmental and heritage projects. The benefits outlined can be interrelated as well.

Despite high investments, research has shown that the economic benefits that many plan for are often overestimated (GRATTON; SHIBLI and COLEMAN, 2006, PREUSS, 2007). There is more evidence support for the long term social benefits (JUNOD, 2006; WALKER *et al.*, 2013). Additionally, when hosting a megaevent, the host country holds the burden of cultivating a space worth of accommodating the activity and its viewers. The event is now a reason for organizers to make substantial physical renovations to areas that are often overlooked, which results in some important environmental impacts. This includes the construction of new roads, enforcement of litter laws, and attention to eroded coastal areas. According to Malfas; Theodoroaki, & Houlihan (2004, p.2015):

[...] infrastructural development that is not directly related to the event often takes place, such as leisure facilities, commercial centres and open spaces, which aim to improve the physical appearance of the host city or region. Consequently, it has become increasingly common for mega-sporting events to be used as a trigger for large-scale urban improvement.

With this in view, we approach this investigation with the overarching research question: What are the positive and negative social impacts of the 2016 Olympic Games for sport and leisure managers in Brazil?

## **Methods**

To address the research question, we employed two approaches: field and bibliographic research. The first phase of bibliographic research utilized the library systems of UNIMEP, UNICAMP, Hofstra University, Google Scholar, and specialized

journals in the areas of physical education, sports, and public policy to access books, papers, dissertations, and theses. The key words used were: sports, megaevents, public policy, recreation, sports, society, and culture. In order to analyze the texts, we used the five phases of analysis by Severino (2007): textual, thematic, interpretative, questioning, and personal synthesis.

For the second stage of the project, we conducted semi-structured interviews to be consistent with our qualitative naturalistic ideology. Naturalistic inquiry was chosen because it allows the researchers to understand multiple, socially constructed realities. Several characteristics are inherent in naturalistic inquiry: natural setting, use of a human instrument, utilization of tacit knowledge, qualitative methods, purposive sampling, grounded theory, inductive data analysis, emergent design, and criteria for insuring trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, according to Minayo (1994), this type of research works with:

[...] the universe of meanings, aspirations, beliefs, values and attitudes, which corresponds to a deeper space of relationships, processes and phenomena that cannot be reduced to the operationalization of variables (p. 22).

We interviewed 10 sport and leisure managers active in the education field and/or departments of sport and leisure for the last 10 years (2005-2015). The interview data was interpreted based on the first stage of the investigation, the bibliographic research. We considered 10 as the minimum number of interviewees, since we had the criterion of data saturation. In order to reach data saturation, we considered four approximate answers. In case we could not reach this number in the group of the first 10 interviewees, we would have continued with the interviews. The 10 interviewees were enough for the purpose of the research. Data was collected using the semi-structured

interview method, which is considered by Triviños (1987) as one of the main ways of qualitative research in social sciences. The main question of the interviews was: what are the positive and negative social impacts of the 2016 Olympic Games? Key Brazilian interviewees were recruited from the cities of Campinas, Piracicaba, São Paulo and nearby areas. The first contact was made with masters and doctorate students from a private university that had experience in the last 10 years with public policies of sport and leisure in the educational sector or in some departments. As we had the first answers from the students, we asked them to name some other managers to answer as well. In this way, we would have the number of people we needed (ten). The interviews were done in person, by phone or *Skype*, depending on the distance.

Our field research did not present any risk to the interviewees and was approved by the Research on Ethics Committee, record 24/2015.

## **Results**

We interviewed 10 managers of public policies of sport and recreation who were or have been active in the educational field and/or departments of sports in the last 10 years. Seven of our participants were male and three were female. To protect their anonymity, we will refer to them with alphabets from (from “A” to “J”). Although the answers to the main question, what are the positive and negative impacts of the Olympics?” were varied, some managers agreed on some key points. We will employ the five different type of legacies associated with mega-events used by Chappelet & Junod (2006) to discuss our findings. These are: sporting legacy, urban legacy, infrastructure legacy, economic legacy, and social legacy. Sporting legacy refers to sporting facilities newly built or renovated for an event and which will serve some

purpose after the event has concluded. Urban legacy refers to buildings which were built for the mega-event, but which serve no sporting functions. Infrastructural legacy refers to the different types of networks, ranging from transport to telecommunications, which are renovated or developed for a mega-event and is maintained after the event is complete. Economic legacies look at the tourism and the setting up of non-tourism oriented companies that were attracted to the host region. Other factors that can be included are the number of permanent jobs created and changes in the unemployment rate of the host region or city. The social legacy addresses the “collective memory” of the event. An essential part of the social legacy of mega-events is the change in perceptions of local residents in the host city or country. Within each category, we will also report the positive and negative impacts outlined by our participants.

### ***Sporting Legacy***

#### ***Positives***

Interviewees noted several positives for the sporting legacy of Brazil. Interviewee “B” discusses the marketing for Brazilian teams, pointing out some famous soccer teams such as Flamengo, Vasco, Fluminense and Botafogo which could profit enormously if they can take advantage of the event and boost their brands. Interviewee “H” adds that one of the positive aspects is “the development of public policies of sports by different departments, more access to sport since it is everyone's right, as it is guaranteed by CF/88”. Additionally, Interviewee “I” argues that there is more awareness from the population and an evolution of sports. There are technological advances, improvements in training methodologies, sports infrastructure, and increased construction of special sports venues.

### *Negatives*

While there were a number of positives outlined, participants also feared that there would be some negatives of the sporting legacy of Brazil after the Olympic Games. Interviewee “A” contends that bad management can smear the image of our country. “The demolishing of sports venues for new ones to be built, which are already over budget [is very bad].” Interviewee “G” agrees with this assessment:

[...] when building of the Olympic Park, many people were forced out from their houses so construction could begin. The problem with the use of tax payers' money is that there should have been more private sector investments, since there was enough time for that. However, most of the money come from taxes paid by the population.

Interviewee “H” adds “enormous venues such as stadiums, which will be rarely used and the eviction of families for the constructions concerns me. Regardless of the amount of investments, even places such as Barcelona where the 1992 Olympics took place and it is highly regarded as a positive legacy, most of the cities and countries which host the games simply cannot cope with it satisfactorily and in the end, only negative aspects prevail.” Interviewee “I” points out that “all the infrastructure of the Olympic Park and training centers will not be well managed and used after the games are over.”

### *Urban Legacy*

#### *Positives*

Many interviewees did not address the positive urban legacies that could come from the games and instead focused on infrastructure and economic aspects. Interviewee “G” was the only participant that discussed buildings that were built for the event that had no sporting functions. “There are improvements of urban areas [and] revitalization



of the downtown area. There is also all the investment in safety, airports, hotels, tourism and other services.”

### ***Negatives***

Potential negative impacts were however discussed by many participants. Interviewee “G” argues “the impact on the environment is negative: too much litter, the use of water, the hotels, beaches, etc.” Interviewee “J” adds:

[...] megaevents are extremely complicated due to the scope and are also a huge undertaking and we don't have basic infrastructure. In the city of Rio de Janeiro and in so many others, municipal and state schools do not have enough space and proper equipment... [there was also] eviction of the people living in the areas designated to the Olympic Park construction...they will lose their history once the place they have built will be torn down.

### ***Infrastructure Legacy***

#### ***Positives***

When addressing the potential impacts on the infrastructural legacy in Brazil, many interviewees concentrated on the development and improvement in transportation, ports, schools and parks. According to Interviewee “C”, “from the moment Brazil was chosen to host the games, people idealized countless benefits infrastructure, training, development, etc. The ideas were that there would be strategic planning... [there were improvements in] airports and subways.” Interviewee “F” describes “the transformation the city is going through, the renovation of the port area, and that all the areas which are undergoing restructuring will be used after the games as recreational areas, schools, parks, etc.” According to Interviewee G “telecommunications was revamped because nowadays everybody is on social media (*Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram*). Also more awareness of the environmental impact will be focused on during this time.”

### ***Negatives***

There was some concern voiced about how the new infrastructure would be managed. According to Interviewee “F” “there must be partnerships between the private and public sectors. Government alone cannot manage these areas – “so I believe there must be a shared model of management between the public office which provides the place and the private sector which maintains this infrastructure along with the community which can help in the management as well”.

### ***Economic Legacy***

#### ***Positives***

The potential economic benefits of being a host country have been well noted in research. This is consistent with our findings. Interviewee “B” stated:

[...] the main positive aspect is tourism, Rio is already a famous tourist destination for Carnival and many people know Rio. You hardly find someone who hasn't been to Rio or at least doesn't know it by pictures, videos, etc. Another positive aspect is the growth and improvement of local trade, transportation, hotels, tourism and so on. Also there will be improvements in health care since hospitals must be prepared to handle the event, mainly because of the late epidemics of the ZIKA virus.

Interviewee “E” further contends “the positive impacts carry a number of dimensions: social, political, economic, cultural, scientific, among others.” According to Interviewee “J”, “the positive impacts will come for tourism, hotels and contractors because they will make more money.”

### ***Negatives***

Our participants also discussed the potential negative economic impacts that could follow the Olympic Games. According to Interviewee “A”, “they want to host the

games to make money from kickbacks of over budget estimates.” Interviewee “B”, “E” and “I” agree with this idea. “At first they have an estimate of costs, but in the end it will always exceed some amount that was already very high to begin with.” (Interviewee “B”). “Excess spending with the building of the Olympic park, advertising and other services that do not benefit most of the population and the lack of accountability about the spending of tax payer’s money (even though there are laws which demand that)” (Interviewee “E”).

“Excess spending is common place and regardless of initial estimates for the constructions, the amount will be a lot higher in the end. We had an initial estimate and now it is much higher, and this aspect of money related to the event bothers me greatly, specially at this moment of internal crisis. We have so many financial problems in basic areas that there should be a serious fact checking of accounts” (Interviewee “I”).

But it was not just excess spending that concerned our participants. Interviewee “G” also voiced some additional trepidation:

[...] a couple of weeks ago I read in an article that the IOC hasn't received a detailed list of the venues up to now. That is an outrage! It is tax payers' money and there should be more sponsors, but up to this moment, we don't know what the money is being used for. [There is also] lack of honesty from taxi drivers about fares and street vendors who will overcharge tourists.

Interviewee “J” added:

[...] megaevents emphasize the economic value rather than some improvement in people's lives. What happens is: the basics are left aside and the sophisticated is promoted – a wonderful stadium is built, fantastic tracks for running, a marvellous swimming pool – but if you look around, many people just don't have access to that; they can't use recreation venues, equipment, and so on. Therefore, it is a huge contradiction, if we look at it from an economic point of view. It is just for the upper classes.

## ***Social Legacy***

### ***Positives***

The “collective memory” of the Olympic Games was very important to our participants. According to Interviewee “B,” “the media and how hosting these events will give Brazil much more visibility.” “Another positive aspect is that the foreign athletes will know more of Brazil's reality and they will see the potential of our athletes” (Interviewee “C). “Brazil's self-esteem in hosting the games, the population, the social relations, the exchange of knowledge not only foreign but domestic as well, the volunteers, all the people involved behind the scenes and the viewers too”, the learning process as a whole are all good” (Interviewee “G). Interviewee “J” also notes

[...] the possibility of discussions, reflecting, thinking about the many questions related to such megaevents from sport in itself to broader aspects such as social, psychological and media related which are fundamental to the formation of professionals as well as citizens in general.

### ***Negatives***

There was also some anxiety about the potential negative memories that could be established following the event. According to Interviewee “B”:

[...] despite the increase in tourism, we cannot forget the outbreak of the ZIKA virus and other infectious diseases which have been diagnosed lately, and this could scare people away from the event. Some athletes will not be taking part in the games because of the risk of infection. Security is a big issue because of the high crime rate in Rio de Janeiro.

Interviewee “D” is a little skeptical “the positive impacts of the Olympics due to the current political crisis in the country will not be seen.” Interviewee “G” also adds:

[...] there will be hundreds of thousands of people coming from all over the world and this can contribute to the entry of a host of other diseases beyond the ones we already have here. There are vaccinations

for adults, but most people don't know about it, or they think they should be vaccinated only as kids or after they are elderly. Health should get more attention. Another negative aspect is prostitution, not only for adults, but for children too. It is a recurrent theme and there should be more focus on this subject by the media, at airports, or any other public venues.

Safety was also a concern for Interviewee “G.” “If everything goes smoothly, our image will be good. If something goes wrong, we will always be remembered by the tragedy because it will be forever remembered in our history; the fact that we are hosting the Games is already part of our history”(Interviewee “G”).

Discussions about the legacy of the games for physical education and the legacy of sport within Brazil also occurred. “Teachers of Physical Education classes should be taking advantage of the event to make students not only more aware, but [they are] more interested in the Olympics as a whole” (Interviewee “I”).

## **Discussion**

The findings from our study are consistent with prior studies on the legacies of sports megaevents. According to Bob; Swart e Smit (2010, p.1-2) “[...] legacy impacts are complex in that positive impacts for some may result in negative impacts for others [...] the larger the event the greater the legacy impacts (both positive and negative)”. The transformation the city of Rio de Janeiro has gone through because of the 2016 Olympic Games can improve people's lives. The construction of avenues, improvements in transportation, airports and sports centers are positive for the population. Our participants also outlined additional potential positive impacts such as improvement for performance of Brazilian athletes, increased visibility for Brazil, tourism, economic growth, development of public policies, new infrastructure, improvements in the city, transportation, sports venues, etc. These positive aspects are in accordance with past

research (MATHESON e BAADE, 2004; MATHESON, 2006; CORNELISSEN e MAENNING, 2010; LI, BLAKE e THOMAS, 2013).

As for potential negative impacts, our participants discussed security, the complexity of the political scenario, lack of management, lack of planning, environmental impacts, eviction of people from construction sites, bad management of venues after the games are over, lack of accountability for the money invested, excessive spending or over budget venues, overbilling of construction, priority for the Olympic Park aimed at profits, and lack of priority for other more important social, economic and cultural aspects for the general population. This is again consistent with past research about megaevents (BASSA e JAGGERNATH, 2010; CHAIN e SWART, 2010; MCKENNA e BOB, 2010).

One area of concern that has not been discussed in prior literature about about health epidemics. With growing concern about Zika Virus, Dengue Fever, and West Nile Virus, some of our participants expressed some fretfulness about how this may affect attendance at the Olympic Games and even cause some athletes to choose to not compete at all (PALAZZO, 2016; KILGORE, 2016).

The Olympic Games and other sports megaevents have gone through several significant changes since the 1960s, and established themselves in the 1990s as the biggest global events, thus making them the most coveted since it is believed that many improvements will occur within the host nations. Sports megaevents have a lot of complexity and are hard to be understood, analyzed and discussed because they involve many aspects that must be considered from the bidding, planning, and hosting perspectives. Special attention must be paid to the legacy that the event will leave behind for the host country.

Following the 2007 Pan American Games and the 2014 FIFA World Cup held in Brazil, there were not the anticipated positive returns for the population. Miagusko (2012) noted that the biggest legacy of the 2007 Pan American Games was to show the IOC that Brazil could host other events, but the costs were very high. The total cost in hosting the 2007 Pan American Games exceeded the initial budget of R\$800 million. Most of the additional costs were because of new construction and overbilling. Silva and Pires (2006) also point out there were a number of complaints filed to the Federal Court of Accounts about overbilling and unlawful public spending. Following the 2014 FIFA World Cup, Marcellino (2013) argues that there were similar issues: overbilling and unfinished constructions in addition to public sector investments. It is our contention that we will see similar problems with the 2016 Olympic Games.

Sports megaevents can generate both positive and negative impacts and leave numerous legacies to the host nation. If well planned and managed, these events can contribute to transformations within the host country's social, economic, and cultural legacies. However, finding ways to increase the positives and minimize the negatives must be at the forefront of any planning efforts.

## **Conclusion**

Our findings indicated potential positive and negative social impacts of Olympic Games 2016. In order to maximize the potential positive aspect, there needs to be adequate management and public policies that enable the population to practice sports. The negative social impacts included very high costs with no benefits for the population, misuse of public money, and lack of accountability for the money invested into this event.

These findings can contribute to the planning of megaevents in order to create better public policies of sport and recreation, so that people can enjoy these benefits while minimizing the negative aspects. Future studies should be conducted about the 2016 Olympic games to provide comparative data between the anticipated and the actual result of the the event. It is our hope that this study can contribute to the reflection and revision of concepts about sports megaevents and be of assistance to other host countries that will hold this events.

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