

Residents' perceptions on impacts of hosting the "Guimarães 2012 European Capital of Culture": Comparisons of the pre-and post-2012 ECOC

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Objectives | The nomination of Guimarães, a small city located in the northwest of Portugal, as European capital of culture (ECOC) in 2012 raised great expectations in the local community towards its socio-economic and cultural benefits. As noted by various authors, namely Kim and Petrick (2005), Kim, Gursoy and Lee (2006) and Gursoy, Chi, Ai and Chen (2011), residents tend to have high expectations about the benefits of hosting a mega-event, although they tend to recognize that some costs will result from it. Therefore, the present research was designed to examine the Guimarães residents' perceptions on the impacts of the 2012 European capital of culture (2012 ECOC) on the city and the municipality of Guimarães before and after the mega-event and the differences found between the two time periods.

Methodology | Data for this study were collected using self-administered surveys applied to the residents of Guimarães (the host city of the 2012 ECOC). Based on the aims of this study, the students of four public secondary schools and one professional school belonging to the municipality were used for obtaining the samples of the surveys. Students belonging to the 10th to 12th years of schooling were asked to fulfill the questionnaire, take it home and distribute it to their family members aged more than 15 years old. Data were collected twice from two convenience samples of Guimarães residents built as previously enounced: in the ex-ante period (from October to December 2011) and after the Guimarães 2012 ECOC (April and May 2013). Following the empirical literature, a total of 20 items was used to assess Guimarães residents' perceptions of the 2012 ECOC' impacts. Using the data collected prior to the 2012 ECOC, an exploratory factor analysis was performed to identify relevant dimensions of the perceived impacts (five factors were identified: three related with positive impacts and two with negative impacts). These factors were validated with the data collected after the mega-event. T-tests were performed to analyze the differences in perceptions before and after the 2012 ECOC.

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Main results and contributions | Since we had several variables (20) to measure the expected impacts of the 2012 ECOC, an exploratory factor analysis with a principal component method and varimax rotation was conducted to assess the number of underlying factors and to identify the items associated with each factor. Five factors with eigenvalues greater than one were extracted. These factors were labeled: community' benefits; economic, social and environmental costs; safety and infrastructures; changes in traditional practices and habits; and residents' benefits.

After identifying the impact factors, their mean scores were compared in order to investigate variations in Guimarães residents' perceptions before and after the mega-event.

Results of t-tests indicated that there were significant differences ($p < 0.05$) on two positive impact factors (community' benefits and residents' benefits) and one negative impact factor (economic, social and environmental costs). A possible explanation for this is that Guimarães residents expected the 2012 ECOC to generate many economic, social and cultural benefits and costs. Once the mega-event closed, they realized that the 2012 ECOC did not generate as many benefits and costs as they expected. And, on the other hand, in contrast to previous studies, in which residents realized, after the events, that they had underestimated some of the costs of hosting a mega-event (Gursoy et al., 2011), only one of those differences in negative items suggested that the expected cost was higher than Guimarães residents anticipated: 'changing habits'.

Limitations | The study performed made use of cross-sectional data from two time periods for investigating the influences of temporal effects. Ideally, when applying these type of studies, there is the need to collect data in several waves, including the before, during and after periods, from a panel of residents, in order to get a clear picture on the variation in perceptions, even if we can admit that to implement it is rather difficult and expensive. Being so, in several cases, researchers choose to conduct sectional studies in the pre- and post-event hosting. This was the option taken as well. The use of two different samples (pre- and post-event) is a limitation of the study but it is intrinsic to a cause-and-effect analysis. This problem of external validity suggests some prudence when extrapolating the results to the population, as some bias may occur. Furthermore, data were collected before and after the mega event (a few months after). Instead of collecting data just after the closure of the event, it would also be better to gather it one or two years after its occurrence, when costs and benefits can be fully assessed by residents.

Conclusions | This study aimed to measure expected benefits and costs of the Guimarães 2012 ECOC perceived by residents before the mega-event to be hosted and after its closure, and if the residents' perceptions changed based on the experience, throughout time. Results show decreasing mean values in all dimensions and items, except for changes in costumes and habits. Statistical significant differences were found in three impact factors: community' benefits, economic, social and environmental costs, and residents' benefits. It is believed that an attentive look to (monitoring of) the residents' perceptions before, during and after the events and, thus, the follow up of the variations in feelings eventually found, can help policy makers and mega-events planners to better understand residents and act accordingly, including the demystifying of unrealistic expectations of local communities. Additionally, through its contribution to determine the key issues behind the overall success or failure of the mega-event, this type of approach to the events' perceived impacts will also allow extracting recommendations which can later be used in the context of the planning and management of future mega cultural events.

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