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THE BRAZILIAN MEDIA AND THE SELECTION OF RIO DE JANEIRO TO HOST THE 2016 OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES

Abstract

The city of Rio de Janeiro was selected to host the 2016 Olympics and Paralympics Games [Rio 2016], increasing the amount of international attention focused on Brazil and its regional leadership. In this article, we investigate and describe how this event was perceived domestically in the aftermath of the announcement that Rio de Janeiro had been selected. Following a brief contextualization on the political, social and sport situation in Brazil in the years preceding its Olympic selection, we present the results of a content analysis of two national print media channels – one daily newspaper and one weekly magazine – in which we identify the major stakeholders and their interests, the challenges, and the possible legacies of Rio 2016. The study argues that, taking into account local specificities, similar discourses to past cases identified by the literature are also present in the print media, mainly the arguments of developmental discourse and identity signaling.

Key words: Olympic and Paralympic Games, Content Analysis, Media, Brazil.

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INTRODUCTION

On 2 October 2009, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) selected Rio de Janeiro as the host city for the Summer Olympics and Paralympics Games in 2016. Although at first glance the selection of a city to host a sport event might seem relatively simple, in the case of the Olympic Games the choice is quite sensitive. The selection of a South American city occurred for the first time, overcoming the competition from the cities of Tokyo (Japan), Chicago (USA) and Madrid (Spain) in the final phase of voting. Before that, the cities of Doha (Qatar), Prague (Czech Republic) and Baku (Azerbaijan) had also applied as aspiring cities, but were not able to proceed to the second phase of the process [International Olympic Committee 2009]. The selection of the host city for the Olympic Games is a process that lasts two years and has a manifest international dimension [International Olympic Committee 2007, 2008], requiring the fulfillment of various conditions that go beyond the evaluation of sport facilities.

The Olympic Games is more than just a sporting competition. It has been labeled as a 'mega-event' owing to its large-scale cultural character and mass, global appeal, being broadcast internationally by the major media [Roche 2000]. According to Horne and Manzenreiter [2006], three main elements explain the current and rising status of the Games: mass media technology, sponsorship and partnership agreements, and the promotion and visibility interests of the cities and countries which host the events. The last feature may help to explain the increasing economic and political investment of cities and countries in this high-risk international competition [Burbank, Andranovich, Heying 2002]. In light of the investment of about US\$ 40 million during the bidding phase [Comitê de candidatura Rio 2016, 2009] and the expected multi-billion dollars to be invested in the city during the preparation to host the Games, the selection of Rio de Janeiro may be said to have brought many prospects to both Brazilian society and the local media.

In this sense, the purpose of this paper is to identify how the Brazilian media presented the event of Rio de Janeiro's selection for the 2016 Games. In order to attain this research goal, this paper intends to identify the media arguments regarding the interested parties and their interest in the Rio Games, the challenges in promoting of the mega-event, and the possible legacies that it can bring to the city and to the country. Data collection included review of the two periodicals with the largest national circulation in their categories: the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo* (circulation of 330,655) and the informative magazine *Veja* (circulation of 1,222,922). Both periodicals were examined in the immediate aftermath of the

choice of Rio de Janeiro as 2016 host city. The material was analyzed through the content analysis method proposed by Laurence Bardin [1977].

The choice of media discourse is justified with respect to the historical social importance of mass media as an institution in spreading and building information and shaping public opinion. As described by Bourdieu [1983, 1997], the values, power and capital involved and defining this social organization are capable of changing or molding a situation into a new way of thinking and behaving. Considering the unique character and meaning that mega-sports events have in society, the media emerges as one of the fundamental institutions capable of interpreting this reality to further influence people's ideas and behaviors.

This paper is comprised of three sections. Firstly, we present some general information regarding the social, political and sport situation in Brazil in the first decade of the twenty-first century, i.e. the years that preceded the bidding and selection of Rio de Janeiro as 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games host city. Secondly, we describe the data collected at the *Veja* magazine and *Folha de S. Paulo* newspaper, in accordance with the categories selected. Finally, we develop final considerations on how the domestic arguments and perceptions may contribute to the general social understanding of sport mega-events.

THE BRAZILIAN SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND SPORT CONTEXT

A wider perspective on the economic, political and social contexts in Brazil may clarify the conditions of the Brazilian bidding for and hosting for sport mega-events. Socially, one can observe the coexistence of 'two Brazils'. On one hand, we have the 'Brazil of the top 10': it is the fifth largest country in the world both in area and in population (199 million people in 2012) and was the eighth biggest GDP in 2011. Regionally, its importance relies not only on the fact of its being the richest and largest country, but also because it has borders with ten of the twelve South American countries [CIA 2013]. On the other hand, the country's position in the World Health Organization's ranking of health system efficiency is the 125th among 191 countries, lower than neighboring countries such as Colombia, Suriname, Argentina, Paraguay and Venezuela [Tandon et al. 2000]. With respect to education, the country is the 65th according to the education index of the United Nation's Human Development Index. When combined with the other indexes in that summary index, the country's ranking is the 85th [United Nations 2013]. Even though these indexes have well-known limitations, they are useful resources for an overview of some of the social developments that are not visible

at the level of economic factors [see Kelley 1991]. For instance, on average 21% of the population does not have access to ideal levels of sanitation facilities and 10% of the population over fifteen years of age cannot read and write [CIA 2013].

Politically, the country is a constitutional federative republic, where presidential elections occur every four years (since 1985), and with compulsory and secret voting for all citizens aged from 18 to 70 years. The political headquarters are located in the capital Brasília, which since the 1950s succeeded the city of Rio de Janeiro. The host city of the 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games is currently Brazil's second largest in population and economically, behind the city of São Paulo [CIA 2013]. According to the Brazilian Tourism Ministry, 30% of the international leisure tourists visiting Brazil went to Rio de Janeiro in 2009 [Brasil 2009]. For international comparisons, the city of Rio de Janeiro had the world's 16th largest population in 2007, and at that time it was projected to attain the 31st largest GDP among cities worldwide in 2020 [Citymayors 2007a, 2007b].

The bidding for the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games took place during the Presidency of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Following his election in 2002, he commenced his first term in 2003 and was re-elected in 2006. His government tenure ended in 2010, and the Presidency was won by the candidate of his party, Dilma Rousseff. Given this political alignment, we may say that the bidding and organization of the 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games has been accompanied throughout by similar objectives and policies at the State level.

The insertion of Brazil in the international arena of sports' mega-events has a historical aspect, connected with Rio de Janeiro's preparation to host a 'second order' event [Black, 2008], i.e. the Pan-American Games in 2007. These Games were seen as a step toward making a bid to host a future mega-event [Curi et al. 2011], as more experience in handling big events was demanded during Rio de Janeiro's unsuccessful applications for the 2004 and 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games [Rubio 2010]. Gaffney [2010] takes into account an even longer historical approach, going back to 1919 when the South American Football Championship launched the important movement of 'city projects through sport events' in Rio de Janeiro. It is also important to note that Brazil hosted the FIFA World Cup in 1950, as well as the 1963 Pan-American Games in the city of São Paulo, and that the FIFA has selected Brazil to host the men's football World Cup in 2014 [Almeida et al. 2013a]. Although different sport governing bodies managed the bidding processes of the 2014 and the 2016 events, the political direction of the Brazilian government manifests a tendency to support these mega-projects, probably with the intention to boost the country's international image and its

‘soft power’ [see Almeida et al. 2013b]. In the Rio 2016 bid book, this aim was phrased as to “promote the modern Brazil internationally”. Other aims/visions include: that Olympic values sustain social and educational development; that the Games boost the transformation of Rio; that new territory is developed for the Olympic Games; that they create a regional sport axis in Latin America; and improvement of the Olympic brand through the experience of hosting the Games [Comitê de Candidatura Rio 2016, 2009].

In more recent years, Gaffney [2010] argues that the sports infrastructures work according to a neo-liberal approach, where urban and social developments use public investments to support private business interests. Despite this critical point of view, the Brazilian academic focus on sport was small until recent years, when sports’ mega-events have begun to receive the attention of scholars [Tavares 2011]. At the same time however, it should be noted that no wide social debate has yet taken place to discuss the intentions and aims of hosting sports’ mega-events, which would mobilize more interest and dedication on the part of scientists. Perhaps the only exception to this general conclusion is the article of Tavares [2005], addressing who are the ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ in the hosting of the Olympic Games. With the exception of this article, all the other scientific papers have been published after the choice of Rio de Janeiro in 2009. For this reason, it may be said that as an academic subject it is still a work-in-progress, and that a corpus of critical knowledge has not yet been built up. This paper aims to contribute to the building up of such a corpus.

WHO, HOW, WHY: THE INFORMATION DISSEMINATED BY THE MEDIA ABOUT THE SELECTION OF RIO DE JANEIRO TO HOST THE 2016 OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES

The magazine *Veja*, in its 2,133rd edition (year 42, number 40), dated October 07 2009, made the selection of Rio de Janeiro cover news under the title ‘Marvelous and Olympic’, accompanied by the illustrative image of the statue of Christ the Redeemer holding still gymnastic rings and wearing a t-shirt emblazoned ‘Rio loves you’. The front cover also announced that the magazine included a 21-page special edition about the subject. It is important to note however that in addition to the 21 pages filled with large photos and captions, this special edition also included 24 pages of advertisements from different companies. Among them, 20 advertisements specifically referred to the ‘victory’ of Rio de Janeiro.

The four articles of journalistic content included in the magazine manifested an optimistic position and used positive sports metaphors. In the first article, the idea that the selection as a ‘big victory’ was evident: ‘The Olympic Games are not just a competition among athletes anymore. They are spectacles of a unique capacity to boost economies and transform cities. This is the force of the conquered victory now.’ [Bortoloti, Soares & Rogar 2009a: 12]. In sequence, the benefits were listed and the expectation inflated: ‘the prognostics for Rio are extraordinary’ [Bortoloti, Soares & Rogar 2009b: 17]. The potential benefits were listed from three perspectives: firstly, the economic boost and generation of jobs; secondly, the transformation and development of the city (public transit, access, urbanism, the environment, and sports structures) and thirdly the transformation of Rio de Janeiro into a global city. In the words of the journalists’: ‘To organize an Olympiad, the first in South America, is a huge, modernizing and civilizing venture’ [Bortoloti, Soares & Rogar 2009a: 14].

The positive, sometimes poetical tone, is even used to present information about the steps that should be accomplished. The articles presented as a challenge the timely accomplishment of the candidate’s obligations, especially concerning the environment, urban infrastructure, accommodation and transportation – ‘The chronometer was triggered’, the title said [Bortoloti, Soares & Rogar 2009b: 14]. In addition however, some of the chronic pre-existing problems of the city were recalled, such as violence, slums and pollution. According to the journalists. they were consequences of ‘decades of abandon and decadency’ [Bortoloti, Soares & Rogar 2009c: 23]. But the positive discourse revolved around overcoming the past, matching the Olympic Games’ motto of ‘humans overcoming’ [Bortoloti, Soares & Rogar 2009c: 26].

The principal interested parties involved in both the negotiations as well as the execution of the mega-event were all highlighted in the articles: the Republic’s President (Mr. Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva), the governor of the State of Rio de Janeiro (Mr. Sergio Cabral), the mayor of the city of Rio de Janeiro (Mr. Eduardo Paes) and the president of the Candidacy Committee and the Brazilian Olympic Committee (Mr. Carlos Arthur Nuzman). But their reasons, either personal or institutional, were not addressed. Other articles superficially indicated the IOC as an interested party, because the event will be hosted for the first time in South America [Bortoloti, Soares & Rogar 2009c], and the city of Rio de Janeiro, because of the benefits of construction and development projects that were already planned [Bortoloti, Soares & Rogar 2009d]. According to the same article, the Rio de Janeiro port project was approved and an investment of US\$ 187 million

was collected for the first phase. For the Olympic Games, the estimate investment rises to US\$ 1.6 billion [Bortoloti, Soares & Rogar 2009c, 2009d].

Our analysis of the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo* brought different results. Its issue number 29,403 of October 03 2009 also contained a special edition on the selection of Rio de Janeiro. In this edition, 27 articles were dedicated to this event, with relatively impartial information in comparison to the magazine *Veja*, with the exception of seven authors' commentaries. In the first pages, the newspaper set out two opposing points of view. In one article, entitled 'A big hypocrisy' [Murray Neto 2009], the arguments were solely against the country hosting the event. In the words of the columnist: 'The decision of the International Olympic Committee was undignified. More than this, it was hypocritical. They tried to make history at the expense of the desperation of the poor.' On the other hand, other columnists pondered the challenges and potential legacies, leaning toward a perspective that 'it will be worthy'. These arguments were followed by a middle position, as in 'What about making this mega-event a way to improve in many aspects?' [Murad 2009: A3] or '[...] If, to do something, we keep waiting until the corruption finishes, we will never do anything. The challenge is to fight in order to make things right, and then it will bring permanent benefits.' [Couto 2009: D3]. Another point of view, more controlled than others, said: 'Rio won, we are all happy to have a new Carnival in October [...]. It is very good to win, but we should remember that it is just an Olympic Games' [Leão 2009: 20].

The informative articles were divided among those that presented 'characters' of the hosting selection or their institutions and the possible political benefits and visibility. Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva declared the 'burial of the mutt dog complex' and said that the victory represented the 'Brazilian conquest of international citizenship' [Coelho, Mattos & Rangel 2009a: 1]. At that time Ms. Dilma Rousseff, a minister and favored candidate for the presidential election, also obtained some profits. According to the newspaper as she '[...] earned a place as the main government authority here [in Brazil]' [Rodrigues, 2009: 6]. A similar observation was made with respect to the chief of sports institutions. The president of IOC, Jacques Rogge, won an internal political dispute, as he was perceived as a veiled supporter of Rio de Janeiro against Madrid, supported by the former president Juan Saramanch: 'The final dispute between Rio and Madrid exposed publically the divergence of two groups inside the IOC' [Coelho, Mattos & Rangel 2009b: 8]. However, it was also seen as a potential benefit to the IOC, making it a 'more democratic' institution by choosing the first host city in South America. In the national context, Carlos Arthur Nuzman won both a 'political and Olympic status'. His double conquest made him a possible candidate for

the IOC presidency and also a winner in his open, public national dispute with Ricardo Teixeira, the former president of the Brazilian Confederation of Soccer and the Local Organizing Committee of FIFA World Cup 2014 [Coelho, Mattos & Rangel 2009c: 9].

Regarding the challenges associated with the country's preparation, Folha de S. Paulo emphasized similar aspects as the *Veja* magazine, such as violence, poor infrastructure, lack of accommodations, transportation and pollution. However, other important issues also formed part of the paper's analysis: corruption, impunity, failure to attend to the population's basic needs, the amateurism of leaders of sports institutions, the non-integrated actions among the public and private sectors, and the unsuccessful 2007 Pan American Games. This last concern formed the special subject of attention of one article, which emphasized poorly-used sports facilities, broken promises and budget overflows [Torres 2009: 15]. Another remarkable criticism raised by the article was the location of Olympic venues, which will privilege a particular sector of the city that is not where most part of the population lives [Nogueira 2009: 10–11]. But the Olympics are also seen as a scenario of possible legacies, permanent improvements in areas such as the environment, security, urban and transportation infrastructure, widespread access of the general population to sports and a way to increase financial resources for promotion of sports. Other benefits would be generated in tourism, especially domestic tourism, and in the economy. As regards this point, reference made to a study demanded by the sports ministry that shows possible increases in direct and indirect jobs, private investments, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and some production chains – civil construction, services, oil, information and transportation, mail, and storage.

Following a descriptive orientation, another article in the economic section indicated the selection of Rio de Janeiro as the reason for the high stock exchange index in São Paulo during a day of losses on the international market [Vieira 2009]. According to a stock exchange specialist '[t]he choice of Rio de Janeiro as host of the Olympic Games was well received on the stock exchange, because it reinforced the sensation that now it is Brazil's turn' [Newton Rosa *apud* Vieira 2009: B10].

The expectations with respect to legacies in both the newspaper and magazine are relatively similar to those found by Silva *et al.* [2011], in which the scholars investigated five Rio de Janeiro newspapers from October to December 2009. By applying categories, expected legacies in the media were found to be focused on: transportation (25%), jobs (15%), environment (8%), public streets (8%), tourism (7%), public security (7%), and others. In their analysis:

We confirm that instrumental rationality, shortsighted, based on tangible results, has a much greater power of diffusion in comparison to substantive rationality. The instrumental one is more utilitarian, more objective (in the sense of quantified), but it does not mean that it is more important than fixing public policies, social legacies, institutional empowerment and cultural identities. The media has left in the distance the discussion about values, ethics and esthetics, accentuating the technical, economic and utilitarian aspects of the legacy. [Silva et al 2011: 953]

This analysis is compatible with the data found in this research, where the articles explored the symbolic conquest primarily from the political point of view. However, some columnists considered the ‘substantive’ rationality. José Geraldo Couto, in his analysis entitled ‘When does the future start?’, asks if this choice is not the right moment to overcome what he called ‘bipolar nationalism’. One pole is the suffering of the ‘dog mutt complex’, as the writer Nelson Rodrigues described it after Brazil lost the Soccer World Cup in 1950 to Uruguay in the Maracanã stadium in Rio de Janeiro. At the other pole are the moments of national pride and affirmation [Couto 2009]. Mário Magalhães supports the same argument: ‘If Rio is a metaphor of Brazil, the victory of 2016 draws a ‘national project’ that allows itself to think big’ [Magalhães 2009: 20]. A similar point of view concerning the ‘nation’ representation was present in an article in *Veja* magazine. ‘The fireworks [at the opening ceremony of 2016 Olympic Games] will celebrate the peace between Rio de Janeiro and its unparalleled nature, ending the war of waste, without truce, that victimized the most stunning bay of the world and made a wasteland of those forests that frame it.’ [Bortoloti, Soares & Rogar 2009b: 14–17].

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this final analysis, we analyse the national media focus on Brazil as the selected host of the Olympics and Paralympics Games in 2016. As could be expected, there are several points of view, discourses, analysis and arguments, in which the ‘voices’ were convergent and divergent according to different circumstances. This context, in sociological terms, is coherent, as each reality depends on a set of dispositions (formatives and generators) inherent to those who analyze it. In other words, a person who ‘reads’ a reality does so according to his/her own set of references [Bourdieu 1989; 1990; 2005; 2007]. In this sense, it was not our intention to judge any source or argumentation as best or worst, right or wrong.

On the contrary, it is important to consider *how* ‘voices’ and ‘realities’, in the plural, are being constructed and externalized by the media.

In our analysis of the media discourses, we found differences between the two sources. The weekly magazine *Veja* announced the selection with more involvement, sometimes using passionate language, abdicating journalistic neutrality in order to celebrate the ‘victory’ in a certain way. The daily newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo* contained more neutral and descriptive articles, in accordance with the expectations of the object ‘to inform’. At the same time, the opinion columnists generally turned to involvement and passion by showing satisfaction that the selection can offer opportunities for developing Rio de Janeiro and Brazil. Despite their relative euphoria, the analysts did not forget the infrastructure and corruption issues and other limitations to be overcome.

Besides the character of each media, the discourses presented similarities in the general discourse concerning sports’ mega-events, as identified in the academic writings. Based on the three categories described by Black and Van der Westhuizen [2004], *Folha* and *Veja* employed the developmental discourse for promotion of the economy and growth in the city, identity building, and signaling, among other socio-political aspects.

With respect to the first category, development would be attained through economic inputs and tourism income, investments into the urban area, the environment, and security and transportation infrastructure, with lesser emphasis on increasing the public’s access to sports and its funding. This ‘urban improvement argument’ concurs with the findings of Andranovich, Burbank & Heying [2001], who identified the use of mega-events to develop and increase investments by local politicians. In this case, it is valid to consider the faster availability of resources, such as the amount of money to carry out the construction. In the case of Rio, this function is especially important in light of the need to accelerate the complex bureaucratic processes for releasing funds for infrastructure. Politically, as local stakeholders are able to promote relevant ‘city makeovers’, their images are improved locally, nationally, and even internationally.

However, the possibility of overcoming past decades of insufficient investments also fits into the negative critiques of some international authors. For Horne [2007] mega-events should not be considered a panacea for development, and Hiller [2000] asserts that development becomes seen as priority, instead of a consequence. This argument appears frequently during the bidding for the mega-events, and the preparations and post-games effects show that these discourses and developments are not necessarily sustained.

With respect to identity building and signaling, the echo of the president's speech of 'international citizenship conquered' reinforced the idea that the country became recognized and Rio de Janeiro turned into a global city. The present and future construction of a such collective image of the population is accompanied by discourses using mega-events as evidence of "graduation" or "arrival" among the world's leading cities and countries—the achievement of "world class" or "world city" [Black 2007: 270]. As observed in the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa and the Cape Town's bid for the Summer Olympic Games, the discourses of 'a hosting country representing the integration of the whole continent' is also an element that needs to be explored [Desai & Vahed 2010; Hiller 2000; Pillay & Bass 2008; Swart & Bob 2004]. Especially the columnists used this pretense of world recognition to celebrate pride and improve the self-esteem of the Brazilians. As it is very unlikely that the columnists were pressured or censored to write exclusively positive things about the selection, we may consider that those journalists, who were not familiar to the mega-events' debates, were proud of their city and country on that day. Symbolically, for the society, this positive sensation expresses an initial impression that people may have when the city and country win an international bid competition.

In conclusion, our analysis of the media reports of the day following the selection allowed us to note the first impressions regarding why the city and country bid for the 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games, what they would bring for the city and the country, and what the 'victory' meant locally and nationally. This sort of analysis may be useful to understand how a climate of excitement and celebration is installed when a city successfully applies to host a mega-event, even if the social and political circumstances may vary during the preparation and hosting process.

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BRAZYLIJSKIE MEDIA I WYBÓR RIO DE JANEIRO GOSPODARZEM IGRZYSK OLIMPIJSKICH I PARAOLIMPIJSKICH W 2016 ROKU

Streszczenie

Rio de Janeiro zostało wybrane miastem-gospodarzem Olimpijskich i Paraolimpijskich Igrzysk w roku 2016, co zwiększyło skalę międzynarodowego zainteresowania Brazylią i jej regionalnym przywództwem. W artykule badamy i opisujemy jak postrzegano to wydarzenie w kraju po ogłoszeniu decyzji o wyborze. Po krótkiej kontekstualizacji sytuacji w Brazylii w odniesieniu do polityki, spraw społecznych i sportu w latach poprzedzających olimpijski wybór, prezentujemy rezultaty analizy treści dwóch drukowanych mediów – gazety codziennej i tygodnika, w której identyfikujemy głównych interesariuszy, ich interesy, wyzwania stojące przed organizatorami oraz możliwe dziedzictwo Rio 2016. Pomimo lokalnej specyfiki, w badaniu zidentyfikowano dyskursy podobne do przypadków wcześniej opisanych w literaturze przedmiotu, głównie odwołujące się do dyskursu prorozwojowego oraz tożsamościowego.

Słowa kluczowe: Igrzyska olimpijskie i Paraolimpijskie, analiza treści, media, Brazylia.