
SPORT EVENTS AND HAPPINESS

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Synopsis:

This study explores: (1) if two non-mega sport events affect the happiness of residents in the host community; (2) if feelings of happiness differ according to the type of event; and, (3) whether a temporal happiness effect (during and post events) can be discerned.

Abstract:

1. AIM OF ABSTRACT/PAPER - RESEARCH QUESTION

This study explores: (1) if two non-mega sport events affect the happiness of residents in the host community; (2) if feelings of happiness differ according to the type of event; and, (3) whether a temporal happiness effect (during and post events) can be discerned.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OR LITERATURE REVIEW*

The economic impact of events has come under scrutiny. Sport economists like Kavetsos and Szymanski (2010) claim that sport events do “not make us rich, but that they will make us happy” (p. 160). Since sport events have an apparent “feel-good effect” (e.g., Maennig & Porsche, 2008), it is worthwhile to accurately capture the feeling of happiness in the context of events. Most research analyzing the relationship between sport and happiness is related to active participation in sport (e.g., Dewar & Kavussanu, 2011; Downward & Rasciute, 2011; Rodrigues et al., 2011). However, findings regarding the relationship between elite sport success and happiness are inconsistent (e.g., Hallman et al., 2013; Davis & End, 2011). Furthermore, the link between sport events and happiness is far less understood. Few studies have analyzed this relationship, and the majority of these studies have mainly focused on mega sport events. For example, Kavestos and Szymanski (2010) found that the “feel good effect” from the World Cup was stronger than for Olympic Games. However, the longevity of this feeling is questioned (Maennig & Porsche, 2008) and little is known about the potential of non-mega sport events to create a comparable feeling of happiness among residents in host communities.

3. METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

Data were collected in the context of two events: the 2014 Ontario Summer Games (OSG) and the 2014 Ontario 55+ Summer Games (55+SG). A total of 618 questionnaires were collected over a period of three weeks from passers-by in two public places in the host communities; 447 cases (72%) were usable for further analysis. Three groups of respondents were distinguished: (1) aware of the OSG taking place in the host community (n=220), (2) aware of the 55+SG (n=57), and the control group (unaware of any event taking place; n=170). The questionnaire consisted of three sections (21 questions, 90 items): a happiness, an event, and a socio-demographic section. Happiness was measured in four different ways; first, generically through a vignette so that all respondents had a similar understanding of the concept (Hopkins & King, 2010), rating Sam's presumed level of happiness on a scale from 1=not happy, to 4=very happy (HAP_Sam). Next, personal happiness was rated as: (a) overall happiness (1 item, measured on a scale from 1=not happy, to 4=very happy; HAP_You); (b) satisfaction with essential life domains (3 items; scale from 1=not at all satisfied, to 4=very satisfied; SATIS); and, (c) social well-being (8 items, rated on a scale from 0=not at all, to 6=very much; SWB). ANOVAS were calculated to test for significant differences in happiness between the three resident groups, and temporal effects (during and post events).

4. RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS/CONCLUSIONS**

The respondents of the 55+SG group showed significantly higher scores on all three personal happiness variables than the control group. OSG respondents also showed a significantly higher level of happiness for one variable (HAP_You) than the control group. The results do not strongly support the notion that the types of events investigated here affect happiness in different ways, but they do demonstrate that people aware of events display higher levels of happiness. However, caution is warranted given the potential bias of reverse causality (Kavetos, 2011). Furthermore, neither the OSG, nor the 55+SG revealed a temporal effect (no significant differences in happiness scores from during to post event). However, the post event data collection was only within a one- (for the 55+SG) or two-week (for the OSG) interval. Future research should consider a longer post event time frame to more accurately test for potential temporal effects. Future research should also consider assessing the happiness of host residents longitudinally, and take into account their individual level of involvement with the event (Mutter & Pawlowski, 2014; Shank & Beasley; 1998). Moreover, socio-demographic variables (e.g., Downward & Rasciute, 2010, Rodriguez-Pose & von Berlepsch, 2014), and the weather during the event (which has been shown to impact emotional states) should be assessed and controlled for in analyses to discern event impacts (Connoly, 2013). Furthermore, this study should be repeated for a greater variety of events. It is possible that these types of NMSE are too small to trigger a substantial "feel good factor" to stimulate residents' feelings of happiness, as opposed to mega-sport events such as the FIFA World Cup (e.g., Kuper & Szymanski, 2012; Maennig & Porsche, 2008).

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