

# Attitudes Towards Olympic Gigantism: Evidence from Germany

**Prüschenk, Nathalie and Kurscheidt, Markus**

University of Bayreuth, Germany

nathalie.prueschenk@uni-bayreuth.de

## **Aim**

In the public and academic debate, the Olympic Games are criticised for being oversized and requiring excessive resources from the hosts. As a result, a number of applicant cities withdrew their bids for the Games, in several cases after negative referenda (Könecke, Schubert & Preuss, 2016). The size and growth of the Olympics is often discussed under the notion of Olympic gigantism (Preuss, 2004). However, while the phenomenon and drivers of Olympic growth have been described in the literature both for the Summer and Winter Games (Chappelet, 2002; Preuss, 2004), empirical evidence on the attitudes of spectators is missing. Therefore, this study investigates a data set from an online survey conducted in Germany prior to the controversial 2014 Sochi Winter Games with regard to constructs on Olympic gigantism. It is analysed which preferences and sociodemographic characteristics explain negative attitudes towards the size and costs of the Olympics.

## **Theoretical Background and Literature Review**

The Olympic Games represent a dynamic and multidimensional event platform. Multiple influences contribute to the growth of the Games. Therefore, Olympic gigantism cannot be explained by a single perspective or theory. Generally, a basic reason for the growth of the Olympics is the continuous commercialisation of the mega event (Preuss, 2004). The vested interests of economic, political and sporting stakeholders are underlying and reinforcing this process. In the literature, notably, the trends of internationalization (Pinson, 2016) and politicisation (Grix, 2013) of the Games are identified as drivers of Olympic gigantism. Hence, there are complex and abstract socioeconomic mechanisms that determine the problem. The spectators as the most important stakeholder group of the Olympic Games are therefore confronted with ambiguous communication signals and responsibilities (Preuss & Alfs, 2011). This leads to a blurred public and publicised opinion in cities that bid for or host the Olympics. However, basically, economic and political interests are blamed for the negative attitudes of the citizens (Könecke, Schubert & Preuss, 2016).

## **Research Design and Data Analysis**

These theoretical and qualitative insights from earlier research on Olympic gigantism are tested in this study on the above-mentioned data set. Although the sample size is restricted (N=192) and applies just to German TV spectators of the Olympics, it is a valuable first evidence on the issue. One reason is that the survey may be understood as a natural experiment because the public debate in Germany in the run up to the Sochi Games has been extremely critical and, thereby, the social environment was particularly negative. At the same time, this was helpful to motivate the participation in the survey which is a methodical challenge on such a global and abstract topic. Moreover, a targeted cluster sampling has been applied by inviting relevant social groups to the survey via email and social media. Therefore, the sample exhibits a substantial variance across social groups and comprises control groups of less sport interested people as well. The questionnaire contained 19 separate questions, ten of which featuring item batteries of attitude measurement with 5-point Likert scales. More than 30 variables were derived that measure (1) the interest in (winter) sports and the Olympic Winter Games, (2) behaviour in active and passive sports, (3) preferences towards the

Olympic event product, (4) attitudes towards critical issues of hosting Winter Games and (5) sociodemographics. For the data analysis, constructs of Olympic gigantism (i.e., statements that the Olympics are too large and too expensive) are regressed on these variables in ordered logit models.

### **Results and Discussion**

Interestingly, only 23% of respondents (somewhat) agree that the Olympic Winter Games are too large while 57% state that they are too expensive. Still, 64% find the Olympic idea important and amazing 82% appreciate the Olympic idea as integral part of the Games. This may explain why the size of the Olympics is not the key problem for the spectators since the size is closely related to the Olympic idea in terms of embracing the whole world and celebrating humanity. However, the majority believes that hosting the Games should be more modest. The regression results reveal that, all else equal, older, socially oriented and sporty respondents tend to criticise the high costs of the Olympics while women, wealthier and economy-oriented respondents as well as those who practice winter sports find the Games too large. In contrast, respondents who appreciate the Olympic idea are significantly and robustly less critical towards Olympic gigantism.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

The evidence suggests that the size of the Olympics is generally less controversial among spectators than the financial burden for the host cities. Regarding the sociodemographics and traits of critical individuals, the findings are mixed. But the International Olympic Committee should clearly strengthen the Olympic idea and the social commitment when organising the Games. This may reduce the criticism of Olympic gigantism.

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