STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVES ON HOSTING LARGE-SCALE SPORTS EVENTS

PEDRO DIONÍSIO,* ⬚ ANA BROCHADO,† ⬚ CARMO LEAL,‡ ⬚ AND ADRIEN BOUCHET§ ⬚

*ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Business Research Unit (BRU-IUL), Lisbon, Portugal
†ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (DINÂMIA'CET), Center for Socioeconomic and Territorial Studies, Lisbon, Portugal
‡Unidade de Investigação em Design e Comunicação (UNIDCOM-IADE), Universidade Europeia, Lisbon, Portugal
§Collins College of Business Management, Marketing and International Business, The University of Tulsa, Tulsa, OK, USA

Special events, in general, and sports events, in particular, are a major focus and revenue generator for cities that host these events. They are time specific, and they can have a variety of short- or long-term, positive or negative impacts, which contribute to both beneficial or harmful outcomes. If prolonged over time, these outcomes have been called "legacies." This study sought to explore key stakeholders' perspectives on the attributes needed to host large-scale sports events. The research concentrated on identifying the main factors that attract large-scale sports events to specific municipalities, motivations to sponsor these events, and the main challenges faced by official agencies during events. The data were collected from 22 participants in a focus group meeting including three main types of stakeholders: event organizers, event sponsors, and official entities. The interview transcripts were processed using mixed-content analysis methods. The results revealed that the main themes mentioned by event organizers are media coverage, sports infrastructure, sponsor brands, discipline in sports, event organization, event and city security, motivation, capacity (e.g., accommodations), stakeholder commitment, residents, and territorial impacts. Sponsors are usually large well-known firms, and discussions about them covered the following themes: event–sponsor fit, sponsorship returns, mega-event territorial marketing, brand strategy, and sponsorship competition. The main themes mentioned by official entities are accessibility, events that sell cities, destination visibility, security, protection of athletes and the public, hospitals, residents, changes, and territory. This study's findings contribute to the existing literature by focusing on the specific case of large-scale sports events and examining three main event stakeholders' perspectives. Managerial implications are also discussed.

Key words: Large-scale sports event; Event attraction; Event stakeholder

Address correspondence to Adrien Bouchet, Senior Associate Dean and Warren Clinic Endowed Professor of Sport Management, Collins College of Business, The University of Tulsa, Helmerich Hall, Room 302D, Tulsa, OK, USA. Tel: 918-631-2943; E-mail: adrien-bouchet@utulsa.edu

Introduction

Planning and hosting large sports events is a popular field of research (Hautbois et al., 2012). Previous studies have demonstrated these events have economic (Agha & Taks, 2015; Zimbalist, 2015), social (Kim et al., 2015; Taks et al., 2015), and environmental impacts (Chalip, 2018; Chalip & Heere, 2014). Sports events have also received increasing interest because of their capacity to generate tangible or intangible legacy outcomes (Chalip, 2018; Ramchandani et al., 2015).

The literature provides no universal definitions of different types of sports events, but scholars have attempted to develop a taxonomy based on event size and significance (Gammon, 2011; Müller, 2015; Taks et al., 2015). For example, Gammon (2011) and Taks et al. (2015) classify sports events into mega- and non-mega-sports events. Müller (2015) developed a classification of large sports events into three classes—giga-events, mega-events, and major events—based on a heuristic technique that combines the degree of visitor attractiveness, mediated reach, costs, and transformative impact.

Previous studies have mainly targeted high profile giga- and mega-events, such as the Olympic Games and Fédération Internationale de Football Association World Cup (Gao et al., 2019; Hautbois et al., 2012; Vitto et al., 2016). Smaller-scale, non-mega-events have also recently started to attracting researchers' attention (e.g., Ramchandani et al., 2015; Taks et al., 2015). However, large-scale (i.e., second-tier) sports events are still a relatively understudied area. According to Müller (2015), scholars "know comparatively much [more] about the Olympics [mega], less about the Football World Cup [large] and hardly anything about the other events [major], notwithstanding that many of these are not much smaller in size" (p. 639).

The present study sought to fill this gap and add to the literature by focusing on second-tier large sports events (e.g., city marathons). These events do not have the global appeal of giga-and mega-events, and they are smaller in size, scale, scope, and reach than their larger counterparts. Second-tier events also occur at a higher frequency, and they can be hosted by different types of cities and communities worldwide (Taks et al., 2015).

Hosting large-scale sports events is becoming increasingly important to municipalities and governments (O'Brien & Chalip, 2008; Schulenkorf & Schlenker, 2017). The revenue generated boost local economies and, equally significantly, provide more opportunities to market host municipalities. Cities that attract large-scale events enjoy numerous benefits including increased tourism, economic activity, and the ability to brand the host municipality (Karadakis et al., 2010). Thus, cities have become more proactive in their pursuit of these events (Cornelissen, 2008; Hiller, 2006; Smith, 2005).

Researchers (Hautbois et al., 2012; Vitto et al., 2016) have highlighted the role of stakeholder networks as a key success factor in winning bids for large sports events. The present study also sought to provide insights into different stakeholders' perspectives on attracting second-tier sports events. The current research identified, from the point of view of these events' varied stakeholders, the attributes, and determinant factors that municipalities need to strengthen in order to host large sports events.

Event stakeholders were asked to suggest which characteristics cities must have to host these events. The key stakeholders interviewed included event organizers, sponsors, and official entities (i.e., tourism officials, the fire brigade, and the police). The participants also specifically assessed the viability of attracting large-scale events to their municipality.

Three research questions were addressed:

RQ1: What are the main factors that attract large-scale sports events to specific municipalities?
RQ2: What makes firms sponsor large-scale sports events?
RQ3: What are the main challenges faced by official agencies (e.g., the police, fire department, and civil protection) during large-scale sports events?

This article is structured as follows. The next section presents a discussion of the literature with the most recent, relevant contributions to research on the subtopics involved in the concept of—and efforts to attract—large-scale sports events. The methodology section explains the techniques used to collect and analyze the data, after which the

findings are presented and discussed. Finally, the study's practical, managerial, and theoretical implications and limitations are elucidated, followed by suggestions for further research.

Literature Review

Large-Scale Sports Events

Non-mega-events have been examined less closely than mega-events on an economic and social level (Misener, 2015; Taks et al., 2015). Most authors who have focused on this topic have chosen to define what a mega-event is and thus, by default, to imply the same definition for large-scale events. However, various other perspectives can be found in the literature. Gammon (2011) considered non-mega-sports events to be hallmark events, conceptualizing them as major one-time or recurring events of limited duration. These are developed primarily to enhance awareness of tourism destinations and increase their appeal and profitability in the short and/or long term. Large-scale sports events rely on uniqueness, status to generate interest and attract attention in order to guarantee their success.

The distinction made between a large-scale and a mega-event is essentially one of size. For instance, Agha and Taks (2015) focused on the required local resources rather than event outcomes. In turn, Horne and Manzenreiter (2004) specified that two common standards used to differentiate between mega- and large-scale events are attendance and television viewership, which can depend on the host country's population.

According to Taks et al. (2015), non-mega-sports events are generally smaller in size, scale, scope, and reach than mega-events are. They also are one-off, discontinuous, and out of the ordinary. The cited authors further claim that, rather than focusing on analyzing these events' economic impact, promoters should estimate the net benefits for host communities.

Overall, researchers' varied approaches have generated considerable ambiguity around what constitutes a mega-event. Müller (2015) established four key dimensions of mega-events: visitor attractiveness, mediated reach, costs, and transformative impact. He author suggests that these events can be grouped into three groups by their size: major, mega-, and giga-events.

The present research focused on the understudied area of major sports events, namely, events organized by large countries or municipalities that can attract thousands of people coming from outside the host city (Müller, 2015). They are smaller than mega-events but enjoy significant media coverage. Major events also have a greater capacity to stimulate extensive participation in sports-related activities than small-scale non-mega-events do.

Stakeholder Theory

According to Freeman (1984), who is widely considered one of the founders of the stakeholder theory, any enterprise's success is directly linked to the motivations, desires, and needs of all the parties involved. These actors are called stakeholders, as opposed to shareholders in businesses. This theory proposes that management decisions can only be understood by considering the views—whether a private or shared perspective—of all groups and individuals (i.e., stakeholders) that can impact or be impacted by the organization in question (Freeman, 1984; Harrison et al., 2010; Mahon & Waddock, 1992).

Stakeholders can be defined as individuals, groups, and organizations that have an interest in firms' processes and outcomes and upon whom these firms depend to achieve their goals (Freeman, 1984; Harrison et al., 2015). However, other stakeholder groups are frequently included such as communities, special interest or environmental groups, and the media. Society at large can be considered a stakeholder, as in the case of sports events. A stakeholder conceptual framework, according to Parmar et al. (2010), helps to clarify how value is created and traded and to connect ethics and profits.

Reasons for Bidding for Large-Scale Sports Events

Sports events have always played an important role within municipalities (Cserháti & Polák-Weldon, 2013). However, the competition between cities seeking to host events is becoming increasingly intense (Cserháti & Polák-Weldon, 2013) in large-scale sports events.

Large-scale sports events generate significant spectator, media, and commercial interest, making sports events a key sector within the sports and

tourism industries. Hosting a sports event is a significant milestone in the history and reputation of any municipality (Kolotouchkina, 2018). Newman (2007) suggested that bidding for and delivering sports events has contributed to the reassessment of recent experiments in how mayors govern cities. According to Maennig and Vierhaus (2015), the prospect of hosting a large-scale sports event is attractive to many cities around the world. Notably, the only difference found between bid versus non-bid sports events is the bidding process.

Bids

Municipalities' desire to host large-scale sports events is justified by numerous arguments. The most persistent reason given is the supposed financial or direct economic gain for the host economy, but the lack of compelling evidence for this benefit is not encouraging (de Nooij & van den Berg, 2013). Bidding has become a complex, expensive process that needs to be initiated well in advance of the actual event. Walters (2011) pointed out that government policies play a key role in determining whether municipalities governing sports events can more effectively compete during the bidding process.

Bidding Conditions

Event bidding tends to involve a series of activities that lead up to a bid and that are often associated with major events (Berridge, 2010). Among other critical factors, Getz (2008) emphasized the role of excellent presentations in winning bids, and Berridge (2010) underlined the role of creativity in successful bids. Although studies have consistently shown that most large-scale sports events are overall economically unprofitable (Wilson et al., 2009), many scholars have noted that the planning stage of hosting an event plays a crucial role in assuring the event's positive legacy. Planning and hosting major sports events is a popular research topic, but far less is known about the bidding process and the determinants of winning bids (Hernandez & Restrepo, 2014; Koosha et al., 2013; Maennig & Vierhaus, 2016).

Event owners tend to focus on factors that ensure the events' successful delivery (Dunphy, 2006). These include the necessary government support, adequate event infrastructure, previous

event management experience, and the provision of quality information. Gao et al. (2019) suggested some practical lessons that managers need to keep in mind when they are planning a bid. First, a sports event might be good for society, but this outcome is not guaranteed. Second, the focus should be kept on key objectives shared by all stakeholders. Third, initiatives that primarily focus on developing sports or a more specific sport are not the same as sports for development, which seeks to generate individuals' social development through sports. Notably, these approaches' goals often conflict. Fourth, the management of media expectations is critical. Last, misconceptions within the relevant networks can and should be challenged respectfully.

The broad conditions needed for a bid to host a large-scale sports event are those that facilitate success in the final selection and the maximization of benefits during the pre-event, event, and postevent phases (Vitto et al., 2016). In reference to the budget, Zhang (2019) examined "the evaluated lowest bid price method" and concluded that this is not equal to "the lowest bid price method," nor is the former method the essential reason for the phenomenon of "winning the bid at a low price" (p. 1).

To understand the factors that make a bid successful, Dunphy (2006) investigated the perceptions of two parties associated with event bids: event bidders and event owners. Common success factors mentioned by these stakeholders include the required government support, suitable event infrastructure, previous experience managing events, and quality information. In addition, event owners tend to focus on those factors that ensure the event's successful delivery, while event bidders mention common success factors that enhance bids. These include past bidding experience, alliances, bid leadership, studies, quality information provision, appropriate figureheads, and an affective connection with those making the decision.

Critical or significant success factors are those that must be present to ensure projects' success and that need special, continuous attention so as to guarantee a good chance of success (Boynton & Zmud, 1984; Cserháti & Szabó, 2014). According to Persson (2002), the better the fit is between the bidders and the International Olympic Committee members' perceptions of what a bid offers, the greater the chance that the bid will win.

Municipality Hosts

Two factors that facilitate cities' success as hosts relate to the municipalities' size and sports infrastructure. All the definitions of essential factors include infrastructure as important in the large-scale sports events bidding process, but Koosha et al. (2013) argued that local organizing committees' views also play a significant role in winning bids. Emery's (2002) research also found that successful applications to host events are dependent upon an in-depth knowledge of networks, processes, and people.

Timeframes, conditions, and decision makers involved in bidding competitions vary greatly depending on the type of event, political situation, and frequently the contexts within governing bodies. Therefore, applicant cities often cannot provide the minimum conditions defined by the relevant governing bodies to win bids for sports events (Koosha et al., 2013).

Hernandez and Restrepo (2014) examined which common factors affect bids. These include, among others, secure resources, event legacies, media and international recognition, training opportunities for all the teams participating in events, athletes' satisfaction, and logistics. In contrast, Karadakis et al. (2010) reported that a positive, widely recognized image is a vital condition for successful bids. Koosha et al. (2013) noted that the availability of up-to-date sports venues and stadiums is a basic requirement for the successful hosting of sports events.

Westerbeek et al. (2002) sought to ascertain the most important elements considered essential to a successful bid by asking event owners and organizers. The cited authors found that the main factors leading to a winning bid are the ability to organize the event, political support, existing infrastructure and facilities, communication exposure, perceived accountability, team composition, and relationship marketing used to promote the event.

Determinants of Hosting Large-Scale Sports Events

As mentioned previously, the present investigation sought to add to the existing research by not limiting its analysis to the perspective of only one type of stakeholder involved in realizing large-scale sports events, including their views' effects on the events. Instead, this study focused on understanding various protagonists' vision regarding the necessary conditions for organizing these events. The research was guided by stakeholder theory; thus, this study concentrated on identifying different stakeholders' views and concerns, namely those of sponsors, organizers, and official agencies.

Sponsors' Views

Sports event planning and management is a complex undertaking that requires organizers to coordinate a number of interest groups dealing with a range of issues (Hall, 2004). In this context, Cornwell et al. (2005) reported that sponsorship has been defined as "a cash and/or in-kind fee paid to a property in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that property" (p. 1).

Corporate sponsorships' effectiveness is a function of the link between sponsors and events that target consumers' values, resulting in a transfer of clients' positive perceptions of events to the sponsoring brands, firms, or organizations. Speed and Thompson (2000) confirmed that sponsor-event fit, sponsors' perceived sincerity and ubiquity, and attitudes toward sponsors are key factors in generating a favorable response to sponsorships. Lee and Cho (2009) also ascertained that the personality congruence between brands and sports events is critical.

Sponsorship objectives are varied and often related to a range of brand and strategic objectives but exploiting events' associations is often the main objective for sports organizations' sponsors (Henseler et al., 2011). According to Funk (2008) and Pope and Turco (2001), firms become sponsors to satisfy various objectives such as relationship building, general entertainment for stakeholders, new business development opportunities, and brand equity enhancement. Irwin and Asimakopoulos (1992) proposed a six-step model to approach sport sponsorship management in seven dimensions, which second stage defines increasing awareness and improving the company's image as the main objectives.

Grohs et al. (2004) asserted that event–sponsor fit, event involvement, and exposure are the

dominant factors predicting sponsor recall. However, Nickell et al. (2011) report that, although sponsorship-linked marketing influences attitudes toward the sponsors, sponsorship's incremental impact is slight for brands, with either extremely weak or quite strong attitudes developed toward sponsors' brands. According to Quester et al. (2013), sponsorships have shifted increasingly from large professional venues to community-based properties as the latter can deliver an engaged audience and enable firms to show their corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Thus, sports policies have tended to be more influenced by CSR initiatives over time. This trend has led to an increase in sports event sponsorship reflecting both a social entrepreneurship and CSR perspective (Miragaia et al., 2017). Other authors such as Plewa et al. (2016) have also found evidence that sports-related properties' proactive community engagement is conducive to their sponsors' enhanced CSR image, especially when the properties operate on the national rather than grassroots level. CSR and social entrepreneurship influence not only relationships with consumers but also employee performance. Thus, sponsors' employees benefit from working in organizations concerned with social sharing (Miragaia et al., 2017; Plewa & Quester, 2011; Ulrich et al., 2014; Watt, 2010).

Other Facilitators' Views

Economic Impacts. Most of the research conducted thus far has focused on mega-events' economic and tourism impacts. These sports events are primarily organized to develop tourism, provide new business opportunities, or stimulate job creation, so studies have focused primarily on their economic impacts. Nonetheless, some empirical research has suggested that, although sports events offer potential economic benefits to host communities, the costs of holding mega-events may outweigh the benefits (Djaballah et al., 2015).

Residents' Support. Residents' perceptions of the social impacts of hosting large-scale sports events have become important factors affecting organizers' ability to obtain community-wide event support (Kim et al., 2015). Some authors have begun

to explore intangible social impacts that could help refine broader cost–benefit analyses (Wicker et al., 2012).

Pereira et al. (2015) argued that, instead of focusing solely on residents' attitudes and perceptions, organizers' attention should be shifted to sports events' social leverage. Thus, events can become mediators of social change and new social structures (Ong & Goh, 2018). Maennig and Vierhaus (2015) claimed that cities in which more than two thirds of the population supports sports event bids are normally favored during the bidding process. According to Moon et al. (2019), residents' perceived quality of life influences their support for events.

Security and Accessibility. Urban spaces are often crowded with visitors on event days, thus affecting accessibility to pedestrian spaces. A central issue is the role of police during these events (Hall, 2004) providing a sense of security and protection (Rothman, 1978).

During events, perceived pedestrian satisfaction with accessibility is related to visitors' perceptions of the ease of accessing event-related opportunities, which is based on the fulfilment of pedestrians' needs in urban spaces (Pratiwi et al., 2015). These authors also report that perceived accessibility is influenced by facilities, which they call "amenities."

In turn, safety pertains to the feeling of being safe and secure from crime and of mobility (i.e., pedestrian flow, pathway capacity, and proximity to key transit points). According to Chappelet et al. (2005), emergency risk evaluations included in municipalities' bids for large-scale sports events are generally qualitative rather than quantitative. Thus, strengthening bidding cities' emergency evaluations is critical in order to reduce host municipalities' risks.

Attraction of Tourists. Thousands of people regularly travel significant distances to attend their favorite sports events. Mackellar (2015) observed that event visitor income is a source of "new money" for local economies. Nonetheless, a range of costs are also attributable to events, including changes to normal visitation patterns (i.e., time switchers or casuals), injected income leakage, and the effects of opportunity cost.

Tourism is a multidimensional socioeconomic phenomenon that, from antiquity to the present, has always been related to leisure time activities (Mylonopoulos et al., 2017). Large-scale events play an invaluable role in the development of many tourism destinations, significantly contributing to event hosts' economy, enhancing awareness of host municipalities, and promoting the preservation of local culture (Wang & Jin, 2019).

Barker (2004) argued that event planners seek to maximize positive returns and minimize negative impacts (e.g., crime) associated with events. Thus, organizing committees must manage tourism-related duties and activities, satisfy the needs of international sports associations, sponsors, and other stakeholders (Cserháti & Polák-Weldon, 2013).

A key stakeholder in this context is the relevant governments (Walters, 2011). Although a range of factors underpin successful bids, political support is essential, particularly in the context of bidding for sports events. Kurtzman (2005) conceptualized sports tourism in this setting as the use of sports and related events as a vehicle for increased tourism.

Social Impacts. Overall, non-mega-sports events appear to provide opportunities for more positive and/or fewer negative social impacts and outcomes for host communities compared to mega-sports events (Djaballah et al., 2015). However, Taks et al. (2015) observed that researchers are still unclear about how medium-sized events actually affect the overall well-being of people living in host communities. The effects include aspects such as social life, urban regeneration, sports participation, environmental stewardship, or infrastructure.

Sports volunteerism is a phenomenon seen across the globe. Volunteers serve in a variety of capacities and provide the labor that enables sports managers to stage efficient, successful events (Kervin et al., 2015). Although studies have found that volunteers are essential to many events' overall operational success, recruiting and managing a voluntary workforce remains a challenge for many sports organizations (Cuskelly et al., 2006).

Sports Participation. Event promotors often claim that hosting major sports events will inspire increased participation in sports, but evidence of this link is scarce (Ramchandani et al., 2015). The cited authors identified different types of increases in postevent participation behaviors among both previously active and inactive respondents— ranging from "initial" to "lagged" effects. In addition, Derom and VanWynberghe (2015) observed that a general assumption is made that hosting and watching sports events are inherently inspiring, motivating host residents to be physically active.

Based on the annual submission rate of sport sponsorship proposals, a need exists for an objective proposal evaluation process. Thus, the present study developed a comprehensive evaluation model that serves this purpose. The proposed model was elaborated within the framework of a six-step sports sponsorship management approach. The steps are: (1) A review of the corporate marketing plan; (2) The establishment of specific sports sponsorship objectives; (3) The identification of evaluation criteria's weights; (4) Screening and selection processes; (5) The implementation of the selected sponsorship; (6) A postevent evaluation.

The proposed model's unique features address contemporary sponsorship objectives and practices including: (1) A comprehensive compilation of sports sponsorship evaluation criteria; (2) A categorical assignment of the criteria into common management and marketing dimensions; (3) An assignment of weight to each criterion based on predetermined sponsorship objectives; (4) The use of the weighted criteria, with a Likert-scale rating system, to evaluate proposals more objectively.

Methodology

Research Context

In 2017, Lisbon, a city of more than 500,000 inhabitants, was chosen to be the European Capital of Sport in 2021. This award was attributed by the European Capitals and Cities of Sport Federation (ACES Europe, http://aceseurope.eu/about/), a nonprofit association based in Brussels that annually assigns the status of European Capital, City, Community, and Town of Sport to new applicants. The title given by ACES Europe is based on the following criteria:

[The applicant's] principles of responsibility and ethics [must include] being aware that sport is a factor of aggregation of . . . society, improvement in the quality of life, psycho-physical well-being and integration within social classes in the community. ACES Europe awards the European Capital of Sport title, an initiative that has received the recognition of the European Commission in the White Paper. (Art. 50)

The award is intended to help the selected city to establish good sports policies and practices and host large-scale sports events that attract media coverage and spectators. Although being chosen the European Capital of Sports does not oblige that city to organize large-scale sports events, this award is also a good opportunity to mobilize different stakeholders in order to develop better sports practices. Thus, European cities often compete fiercely for this award.

Data Collection

Qualitative research provides opportunities to locate the genesis of a phenomenon, explore possible reasons for its occurrence, and codify what the phenomenon means to those involved. This approach helps determine if the experiences under study have created a theoretical framework associated with the phenomenon (Williams & Moser, 2019). Therefore, qualitative research contributes to a fuller understanding of the human condition in a perceived situation's different dimensions (Bengtsson, 2016).

Various authors have highlighted the advantages of focus groups compared to other qualitative methods, including synergy of ideas, a snowball effect on participants, the stimulation of exciting discussions, and spontaneity of expression (Malhotra, 2019). Regarding focus groups, McLafferty (2004) reported that researchers agree the main advantage of focus group interviews is the purposeful use of interactions to generate data and that this use of interactions distinguishes focus groups from other qualitative methods. This emphasis on interactions is reiterated by Morgan (1996), who went on to identify the three major components of focus group research: (1) a focus on data collection, (2) interactions as a source of data, and (3) the researchers' active role in creating group discussions to collect data.

In the present study's case, the data were collected in a focus group meeting that involved 22 stakeholders, including organizers of large events, major sponsors, and official entities. Out of a universe of six event organizers (i.e., running, cycling, triathlon, and sailing), four participants represented firms that had already organized large-scale sports events and that thus were considered to have the necessary organizational structures to coordinate these events (see Appendix 1). The sponsors comprised representatives of seven large firms, which included the banking, telecommunications, energy, and beverages sectors, as well as a multinational sports equipment company. These participants are part of a potential universe of about 20 firms that have been known to invest over half million dollars each as sponsors. These companies' traditional media partners were represented by two network television channels, out of a universe of four potential firms. Officials from Lisbon's Tourism, Police, Fire, and Civil Protection Departments were also present. Thus, this focus group represented around 50% of the universe of organizations that can become involved in large-scale events.

The focus group's main benefit was to allow all the participants to "feed off" of each other as they contributed new ideas. The discussion followed the guidelines for a dual-moderator group. Moderator 1—one of the authors, with extensive experience in conducting this type of sessions—was responsible for the session's flow. Moderator 2 ensured that specific topics were discussed, providing additional stimulus as needed during the discussion by asking probing questions (e.g., "Could you explain that more clearly?" "Please describe what you mean?" and "Can you give me an example of what you are referring to?"). Due to the large number of participants, the researchers selected a horseshoe design for the physical setting (see Fig. 1). To create a more relaxed ambiance, juice and cookies were made available to the participants.

The focus group lasted 2.5 hr, and the session was audio recorded with all the participants' consent. The session started with an introduction by Moderator 1. Then, Moderator 2 presented photos of the city of Lisbon as a stimulus and used a computer-based projective technique to elicit word associations with Lisbon. Moderator 1 was responsible for asking leading questions, following
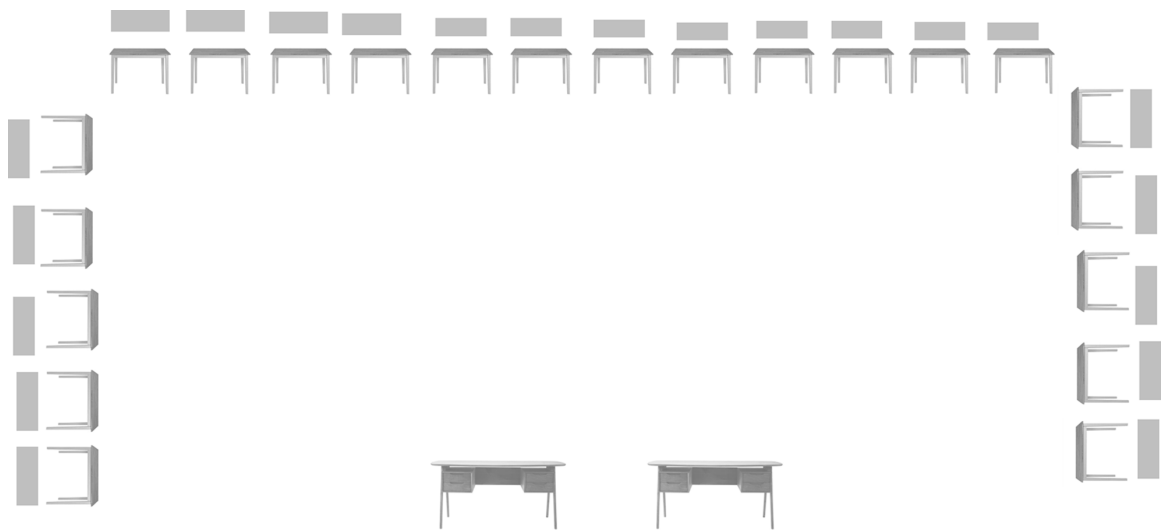
Figure 1. Focus group layout.

a guide previously prepared to obtain information addressing each research question.

After one main topic was discussed, Moderator 2 distributed a survey to the participants and asked them to use a 10-point scale to rate the importance of—and Lisbon's performance regarding—a set of predefined attributes. This approach was applied to avoid groupthink, ensuring each participant had the opportunity to express their ideas without interference. It was considered more relevant the perspective assumed by the participants after discussing the topic rather than the opinion that the participants expressed before the discussion of the topic in the survey. This greater importance attributed to the postdiscussion perspective is due to the fact that these types of decisions concerning the promotion of events are made in the context of detailed discussion of the fact, not being an impulse decision.

The information gathered during this survey was also transcribed.

Data Analysis

This study used a mixed-content analysis approach to process the focus group transcripts. In an initial quantitative step, Leximancer software identified the main themes and concepts and

the frequency of cooccurrence between concepts. Leximancer measured not only the presence of predefined concepts in texts (i.e., conceptual analysis) but also the ways in which these concepts are interrelated (i.e., relational analysis). Leximancer's main advantage is that it allows an inductive identification of themes in natural language texts, with minimal manual intervention by researchers (Brochado et al., 2018).

Qualitative research contributes to an understanding of the human condition in different contexts and perceived situations (Bengtsson, 2016). This method provides opportunities to locate the origins of phenomena, explore possible reasons for the phenomena's occurrence, and codify what experiences mean to those involved (Williams & Moser, 2019), which is why this method was chosen for the current research.

Content analysis is a method used to process qualitative data. This method's purpose, Bengtsson (2016) noted, is to organize and elicit meaning from the data collected and draw realistic conclusions from it.

The initial quantitative step via Leximancer's final output was a concept map. Concepts that settled near one another on the map appeared frequently together in the focus group's narratives. As in previous studies using these methods

(cf. Brochado et al., 2019), each concept cluster (i.e., theme) was matched in a second step with a set of narratives extracted from the focus group transcripts, which encompass the themes' main concepts.

Results

Large-Scale Sports Events: Three Types of Event Stakeholders' Perspectives

Large-Scale Sports Event Organizers' Perspectives. Event organizers were asked in the focus group to identify the main factors that attract large-scale sports events to specific municipalities. The content analysis of the focus group transcripts revealed that the main themes discussed by event organizers are events, infrastructure, territory, residents, brand, sports, organization, security, motivation, capacity, and commitment (see Fig. 2).

The events theme identifies the main characteristics of large-scale sports events and includes the following main concepts, considered subtopics: event, mega-(event), television, international (dimension), people, and budget. An event
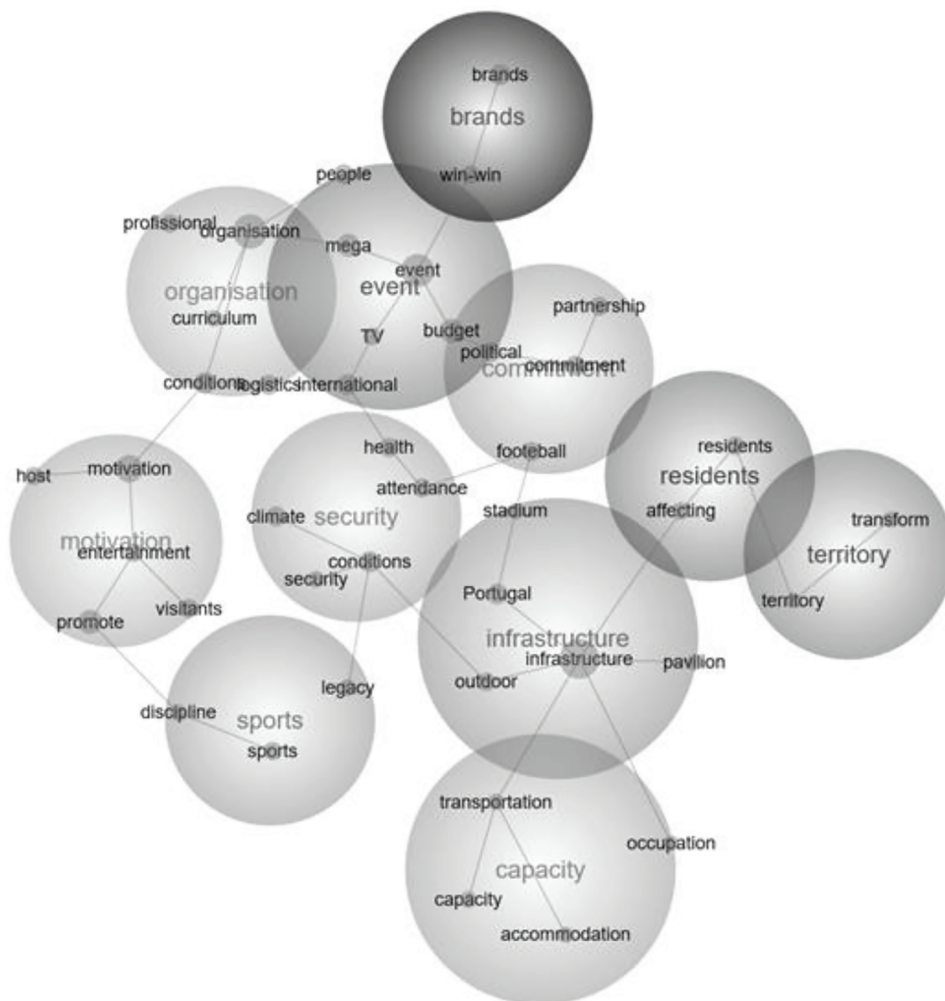

Figure 2. Large-scale sports event organizers—Concept map.

organizer summarized the theme by saying that "events are large scale for many reasons: . . . the budget, . . . [their] international dimension, international television, . . . [and] the number of people who come to the event."

The infrastructure theme covers the main facilities in which large-scale sports events can take place, encompassing the following concepts: infrastructure, pavilion, street, and stadium. A sponsor stated that "many sports [events] take place in pavilions, . . . [but] street sports is something that can influence [other sports], and that's the path currently being followed." Another sponsor suggested:

> The main focus here is not on stadium or pavilion events, . . . which doesn't mean that these can't be held here, but outdoor events offer the possibility of showing off [the host city]—whether through river [sports], . . . races, . . . triathlons, [or] . . . cycling competitions.

The territory theme includes the concepts of space and transformation, which refer to the possibility that sports events can contribute to the transformation of the spaces in which they occur and leave a legacy for the municipalities involved. An event organizer said, "[this involves] the territory where it [the event] takes place and . . . the territory that it transforms."

The residents theme joins the concepts of residents and affect. This theme highlights that large-scale sports events offer both benefits and disadvantages primarily to the host municipality's residents. An organizer stated, "there are events that end up contributing many things to the city, but they also bring great problems to those [who live and work] . . . here." In addition, "events are not always good for the [local] population." This organizer concluded that "we deeply affect people's lives."

The participants recalled that the city of Hamburg refused to continue with its application to organize the Olympic games because of a referendum of its population that reflected the event's potential negative effects. The focus panel members also think that street events, such as cycling, usually have a stronger negative impact on traffic and mobility.

The brand theme includes the concepts of brand and win–win (situation) and highlights the need for congruency between events and their sponsors. A participant mentioned that:

> The correct approach is to help the [sponsor] brands from the moment they identify themselves to ensure marketing campaigns are aligned and to create a win–win situation. I think that an alignment of strategies is what we are seeking to achieve.

The sports theme includes the concepts of sports, discipline, and legacy. This theme underlines the role of large-scale events in promoting participation in specific sports among the local population. An organizer shared:

> [Our goal is] to encourage the proper level of discipline . . . in sailing, . . . athletics, or cycling that encourages the residents themselves [to do sports]. A child, an athletic or cycling club, [or] a group of people watching their [sports] heroes on television [performing] somewhere nearby encourages, . . . develops [the willingness of], and motivates people to do sports more and more.

Another organizer maintained that "this brings up the question already mentioned here of legacy, that is, the legacy left for the local population."

The organization theme encompasses the concepts of professional organizations, curriculum, conditions, and logistics, which are characteristics that host cities should have to organize large-scale events. An event organizer said, "there are application processes that refuse to consider firms without a track record." Another focus group participant agreed with this, adding that "currently, if a big event lacks professional organization strongly focused on the event's organization, there's no way [it will succeed]."

Security includes the concepts of security, weather conditions, and health system, thereby encompassing factors that attract large events and that are linked with the host cities' characteristics, such as climate, safety, and healthcare. One participant stated:

> It's important that [host] cities have good health systems. When . . . [visitors from other countries] come . . ., they want to know whether, if they have any problem, they will have access to a good hospital [and] whether the health services are good. This is a determining factor.

This participant also asserted that "people are concerned about the existence of a good hospital, but they also ask about the city's indices of criminality and security."

Regarding the role of weather during events, a focus group member mentioned that "the New York City Marathon was cancelled because of it [bad weather]." An event organizer asked, "the weather? Is it a problem? . . . In our case, it's critical. . . . It's a point of concern because it can affect [everything]." In terms of minimizing climate-related constraints, another participant added, "it's somewhat up to the organizers to figure out when is the best time [for an event]. Of course, we're talking about international calendars—aspects that have to be aligned."

The motivation theme includes the concepts of motivation, host, entertainment, visitor, and promotion. The results for these topics show that the motivations of different host municipality stakeholders are of utmost important to large-scale sports events' relevance. An event organizer stated:

> You have to understand motivations. In what ways is the city motivated to host [the event]? . . . There must be a motivation, and that motivation can vary. The city can be motivated by self-promotion, or it could be motivated to entertain visitors. . . . This immediately creates differences between events.

The capacity theme includes the concepts of capacity, transportation, occupation, and lodging, which are considered quite significant in various contexts. The participants highlighted that the host cities' capacity is not an abstract concept and that it should be analyzed when considering the events' needs. An organizer argued:

> It's important that the destination has the necessary conditions to host the event, . . . [such as] transport systems. . . . [M]ore is needed than just a [theoretical] capacity, . . . [ensuring] instead the [city's] capacity to host the event.

Another participant stated that, "[regarding] the city's hotel occupancy [rate], what's important is the satisfaction of those who . . . [live and work] here."

The commitment theme includes the concepts of commitment, politics, and partnership. According to the focus group members, the attraction of large-scale sports events and successful applications to host international competitions are influenced by strategic partnerships. An event organizer suggested that "there has to be a political will." Another participant stated, "it's necessary [to deal with] political issues and [develop] some strategic partnerships with some private entities." In addition, "events [are] too expensive to organize . . . with[out] a consortium and an extensive alignment of public and private profit or non-profit entities. This can . . . [make events] viable."

Event organizers identified a variety of factors that contribute to cities' ability to attract major sports events. These factors include event size and characteristics (e.g., media coverage), sponsorship support, existing sports infrastructure (e.g., pavilions, streets, and stadiums), and hospitality services' capacity (e.g., transportation and accommodations). Security, residents' support, stakeholders' motivations, and political commitment are also important.

Large-Scale Sports Event Sponsors' Perspectives. The sponsors were asked to discuss why they decide to become sponsors. The content analysis identified the main themes in the transcripts of the focus group's discussion, and the Leximancer concept map confirmed the following themes in narratives about the events: event, return on investment, territory, brand, and sponsor (see Fig. 3).

The event theme was particularly emphasized by sponsors, comprising the concepts of event, fit, and values. These participants highlighted that the main criteria used to make sponsorship decisions are the sponsor–sponsee fit and event reputation. A sponsor said:

> When we sponsor an event, whether sports or other types, our sponsorship has to do with the brands' values and whether the event fits or doesn't fit with the brands' values and, [only] secondarily, the relationship between consumers and brands. Thus, if we look at the brands' target [consumers], we can immediately see what types of sports consumers like to do and appreciate—[whether they prefer] to do or watch [sports].
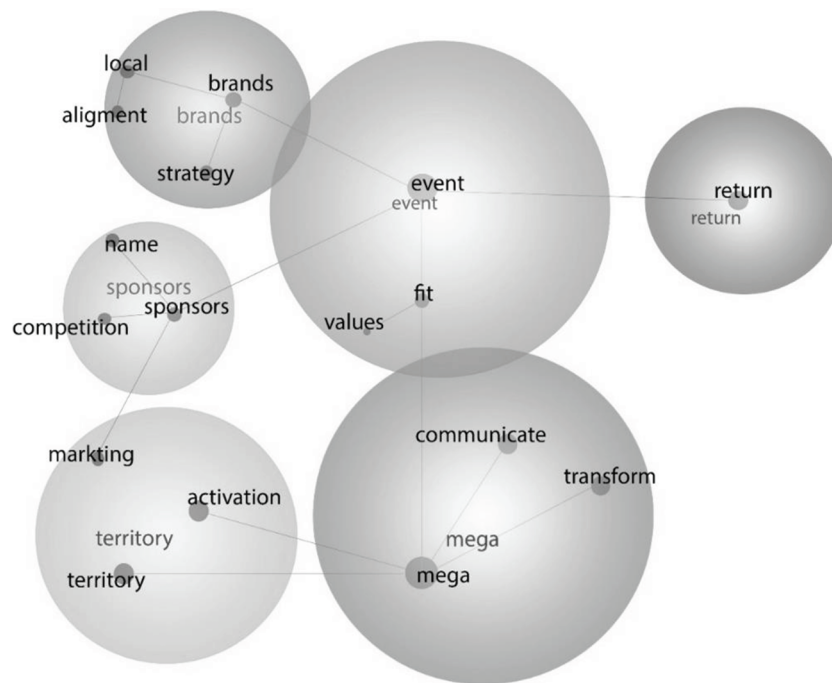
Figure 3. Large-scale sports event sponsors—Concept map.

Another sponsor stated:

> What makes us decide to support something? Well, first it must match previously defined strategies. The project has to have credibility, and then it [our decision] has much to do with the event's positioning, visibility, [and] reputation—if it [the project] fits with the brand's values.

According to the sponsors, the return on investment from sponsoring a large-scale sports event can be derived from either a direct impact on sales, an increase in brand awareness, or the generation of positive associations. No more concepts were integrated in this theme, which emphasizes the focus group's unanimity. In terms of measuring the return on investment, a participant reported:

> This is not always easy, but this is the sum of the number of times we participate that involve direct interactions and those that involve indirect interactions, including everything media-related, whether television . . . coverage . . . [or] other forms. Thus, there's a conjunction of aspects to consider. [When] sponsorships [require] more

than a certain level of investment—if they don't offer us enough return—this is a factor in why we opt not to be present.

Compared with other sponsors, a participant asserted:

> We have a unique feature that makes this [the question of return on investment] easier [to deal with], which is that we also sell during events. . . . Not all the brands do this. However, later we also check the value of sales.

The mega-(event) theme includes the concepts of mega-(event), activation, communication, and transformation. The results clearly show that events offer opportunities to brands, and top-of-mind brands can transform an event into a large-scale event. A focus group participant stated that, "Events are extremely important] to communicate brands, but a great brand also creates a great event, and, when brands decide to bet on an event, I can transform my event into a mega event with any brand from here."

The territory theme includes the concepts of territory, marketing, and activation. Sponsorship builds a relationship of proximity in consumer experiences. One sponsor stated, "however, the way that we activate and operate on the ground is different from other competitors. One of the brand's objectives is also [to increase] proximity [to consumers]." Thus, brand activation is one of the sponsors' major concerns about sponsorship investments, and this impact varies with events' size.

The brand theme includes the concepts of brand, strategy, local (sponsor), and alignment. A sponsor asserted, "these big events also are normally already aligned internationally, and they already come with their brands." Other adds that "many times, we have to act on what comes from outside in terms of their [the events'] existing alignments."

Not unexpectedly, the sponsor theme highlighted the concepts of sponsor, competition, and name, suggesting that the naming of the event allows sponsors to maximize the impact of sponsorships and generate more media coverage. According to a focus group participant, "what allows the competition to attain that level of competitiveness and participants is . . . that there are sponsors who associate their name [with events]. Otherwise, [the competition] wouldn't generate any revenue." A sponsor added, "some competitions are identified by the name of the major sponsor. The truth is that competitions have changed their name." Thus, event organizers identified sponsorship as an important variable that attracts large sports events. The results further reveal that the main motivation to sponsor these events is the sponsor–sponsee fit, which generates opportunities to develop positive brand associations and increase the number of customers.

Official Agencies' Perspectives. The main themes identified in the narratives shared by public officials are accessibility, event, destination, security, protection, hospital, residents, changes, and territory. The accessibility theme includes the following concepts: access, airport, tourism, and transportation. According to a focus group member, "many times the destination's appeal to tourists is fundamental because this guarantees more registrations due to the destination's greater attractiveness. . . . That makes all the difference." A representative of an official agency asked, "how do they arrive? Via the airport? What type of events are they? Who comes? How do they arrive? There's much work that has to be done beforehand by the police."

The event theme comprises the concepts of event, destination, sales, and city. A comment that summarizes this theme well is "[t]he event sells the destination, but the destination also sells the event." The destination theme comprises the concepts of destination and visibility. Official entity participants suggested an understanding exists that large-scale events contribute to increasing international awareness of host cities. A focus group member maintained that "above all, normally the greatest gain is in terms of visibility: the destination's visibility. Above all else, that [is what is achieved]."

The security theme includes the concepts of security, mobility, and people. The participants expressed their growing concern about security because of terrorist threats and attacks worldwide, which are linked with people's mobility. A participant also said, "traffic is, in our experience, [an issue] with these events. The bigger they are, the more we have to deal with security and mobility [issues]."

The protection theme covers the concepts of protection, the public, and athletes. Protecting athletes and the public is a major challenge for public agencies during large-scale sports events. An official agency representative shared, "to protect [people during] an event implies [dealing with] high[er] visibility and, therefore, a larger volume of both athletes—since this is a sports event—and of the public."

The hospital theme is linked with the importance of health service facilities and professionals. According to one participant, in previous events, "people were worried about whether a good hospital was available." The residents theme includes the concepts of residents, complaints, impact, and traffic. An official agency participant asserted, "residents are the ones who most often register complaints because of the problems that [arise] despite our best efforts and because they [residents] are facilitators." The changes' theme highlights large-scale sports events' legacy. An official observed that "this involves setting an objective for a location or area and, many times, using a large-scale event to enable those alterations."
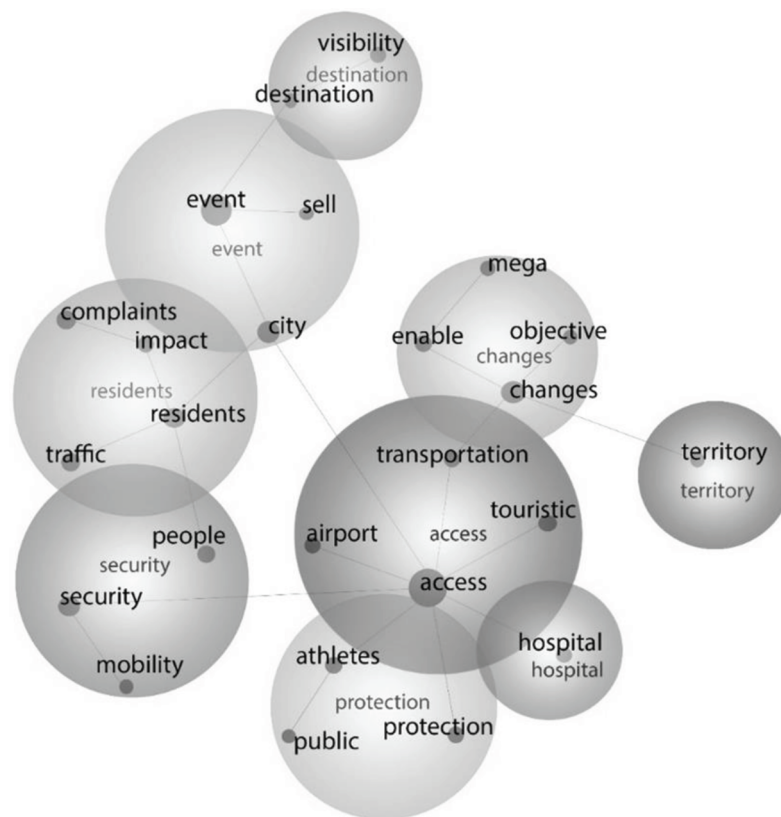
Figure 4. Large-scale sports event official agencies—Concept map.

In turn, the territory theme underlines that sponsorships build a relationship of proximity through consumers' experiences. A participant said, "the way that we activate and operate on the ground is different from other competitors. One of the brand's objectives is also [to increase] proximity [to consumers]." Official agencies face varied challenges when organizing large-scale sports events, including ensuring accessibility to the host city, controlling car traffic, providing health services, and protecting athletes and the public (Fig. 4).

Conclusion

This study sought to answer three research questions. The first question was related to the main factors that attract large-scale sports events to specific cities and was addressed by event organizers' comments during the focus group session.

The content analysis of the focus group transcripts also extracted the event organizers' main concerns about each factor.

The results include large-scale sports events' characteristics (e.g., media coverage), sports infrastructure, brand support through sponsorship, and the organization needed to provide ideal event conditions. In addition, other aspects were mentioned such as security, capacity (e.g., transportation and accommodations), different stakeholders' motivations, political commitment, residents' support, impacts on the host territory (e.g., transformation and event legacy), and the legacy of increased sports participation.

These findings confirm Boynton and Zmud's (1984) research, which identified the critical areas of success in attracting sports events, and Westerbeek et al.'s (2002) conclusions, which emphasize the nine main factors in winning bids. The present results are also in accordance with previous studies

that have highlighted the legacy of sports partici-
pation (Taks et al., 2013), commitment (Dunphy,
2007; Walters, 2011), infrastructure (Dunphy,
2007; Maennig & Vierhaus, 2016), media coverage
and expectations (Gao et al., 2019; Horne & Man-
zenreiter, 2004), organization and previous experi-
ence (Dunphy, 2007), motivations (Westerbeek et
al., 2002), security (Feddersen et al., 2007; Pratiwi
et al., 2015), residents (Moon et al., 2019), and ter-
ritory (Wang & Jin, 2019).

The current study's second research question
addressed the reasons for sponsoring large-scale
sports events from the sponsors' point of view.
Because they are already well-known firms, the
most cited motivation for sponsoring an event is
the generation of new, positive brand associations,
an improved sponsor–sponsee fit, and the spon-
sorship's contribution to increasing the number
of customers. The sponsor brands' gains in terms
of positive associations were already reported by
Henseler et al. (2011), and the sponsor–sponsee fit
was confirmed by Lee and Cho (2009) and Speed
and Thompson's (2000) findings.

Previous studies (Funk, 2008; Pope & Turco,
2001) have reported that firms sponsor sports events
to meet objectives such as relationship building and
brand equity. However, the present study's results
further reveal that sponsors assess sponsorships'
return on investment in three main dimensions: direct
impacts on sales, increased brand awareness, and the
generation of positive brand associations. Moreover,
the findings contribute to opening up future lines of
research by identifying the role of marketing and
brand activation in large-scale sports events. The
focus group participants revealed that multinationals
can apply different approaches to mega-events and
large-scale sports events of different sizes in order to
increase their brands' proximity to consumers.

The third research question was related to the
main challenges faced by official agencies in the
organization of large-scale sports events. Various
issues emerged in the focus panel's discussion:
access to the host city, car traffic, protection of
athletes and the public, and health services. One of
the participants' main concerns is related to acces-
sibility restrictions due to airports' limitations dur-
ing rush hours. Official agencies also value sports
events' legacy left to the host city because this
legacy can contribute significantly to the city's

development. Officials are worried about events'
effects on residents' daily life, which is an issue
confirmed by Pratiwi et al. (2015), who pointed
out the need to assure good accessibility, or Ong
and Goh (2018) and Scholtz et al. (2019), who sug-
gested events' impacts need to be measured.

The present study's analyses revealed that dif-
ferent stakeholders focus on the same factors. For
instance, both event organizers and public officials
highlight the potential negative effects of large-scale
sports events on residents, the importance of secu-
rity, and the territorial changes triggered by events
and their impacts. Event organizers and sponsors, in
particular, discussed the host territory's role.

These findings have managerial implications for
each type of stakeholder. For event promoters, the
critical points in terms of attracting sponsors is to
emphasize positive event–brand associations and
the fit between sponsor brands and events. Oppor-
tunities to increase the number of potential clients
and boost brand awareness are also pertinent argu-
ments. Finally, to attract official agencies' support
and collaboration, sports event promoters should
focus on improving their municipality's brand and
tourism development, which are strategies that usu-
ally produce immediate results.

In the context of bidding, event organizers need to
include data about the success of large-scale sports
events previously hosted by their municipality and
emphasize their city's strengths in applications to
host international events. After the decision to sub-
mit a bid is made, a communication plan should be
developed in order to emphasize all these strengths.

Occasionally, a sponsor's role is so important in
terms of revenue, especially in initiatives involv-
ing brand activation, that organizers may want to
rename the event or competition to include the
sponsor's name. Overall, sponsors need to use
sponsor–sponsee fit and events' reputation as the
main criteria for sponsorship decisions. The return
on investment of sponsoring large-scale sports
events may come from a direct impact on sales, the
generation of positive associations, and increased
brand awareness in the case of less well-known
firms. Investment results are directly linked to the
events' brand activation.

Finally, official entities look forward to improving
their city's brand image, especially through outdoor
events; however, to achieve success in this area, some

rules must be followed. These include preparing a good security plan, training to avoid terrorism threats against athletes and the public, establishing good relationships with residents, and emphasizing events' benefits to counterbalance the perturbations they cause mainly in terms of traffic. To ensure successful large-scale sports events, officials must also organize their municipality well in terms of transportation, health services, and other support systems provided by the police, fire department, and civil protection.

This study's limitations can be traced to the methods and sample selected. Ultimately, academic studies are judged by their generalizability, but qualitative research may sometimes put limits on how much findings can be generalized. In addition, it can sometimes be difficult to keep the group's attention particularly if a few participants dominate the session. These participants can sway the discussion in ways that are not productive. As noted previously, the present sample was drawn from a European municipality that has hosted large-scale sports events. However, the focus group participants were restricted to those involved in outdoor events such as running, cycling, competing in triathlons, and sailing.

In addition, the sponsorship managers who participated came from subsidiaries of international firms rather than the international headquarters of multinational firms. A difference could exist between the subsidiaries' view of sponsorships and their firm headquarters' perspective, so the findings may not accurately represent the international interests of these firms' sponsorships.

This study's results suggest various future paths of research. First, the distinction between medium, large, and mega-events needs to be more objectively defined. Second, researchers could get interesting results from studies focusing on understanding whether the ideal conditions required for the organization of large-scale sports events vary significantly with the size of the host country and type of sports involved. Last, given the growing disappointment with the legacy of mega-competitions such as the Olympics, researchers may want to investigate if this trend offers opportunities for other less large-scale sports events that can also have many benefits at a lower level of investment.

ORCID

Pedro Dionísio: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3951-1468
Ana Brochado: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8917-2575
Carmo Leal: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5474-9728
Adrien Bouchet: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0175-3552

Appendix 1: Focus Group Participants

Type of Participant/Entities	Participants' Functions
Official entities (6)	
National police	Commissioner 1, Commissioner 2
City police	Subcommissioner
Lisbon tourism	Head of research
Lisbon civil protection	Director
Fire brigade	Commandant
Promoters (5)	
Running races 1	Chief executive officer
Cycling races	Chief executive officer, Operation director
Sailing races	Operation director
Triathlon races	Chief executive officer
Sponsors (9)	
Bank 1	Marketing director
Bank 2	Marketing director
Bank 3	Marketing subdirector
Transport	Communication director
Energy	Brand director
Telecommunication	Marketing director
Beverage	Marketing director
Sports equipment	Marketing director, Marketing subdirector
Media sponsor (2)	
Tv chain 1	Marketing director
Tv chain 2	Director

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