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José Freitas Santos
Laurentina Vareiro
Paula Remoaldo
José Cadima Ribeiro

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URL:

<http://www.eeg.uminho.pt/economia/nipe>



Mega cultural events: Does attendance affect residents' perceptions of a city's identity?

J. Freitas Santos

Porto Polytechnic, Institute of Accounting and Business/CECEJ and Universidade do Minho/NIPE, Matosinhos, Portugal
jfsantossap.ipp.pt

Laurentina Vareiro

School of Management, Polytechnic Institute of Cávado and Ave, Barcelos, Braga
lvareiro@ipca.pt

Paula Remoaldo

Department of Geography – Institute of Social Sciences, Campus de Gualtar, Braga, Portugal
premoaldo@geografia.uminho.pt

J. Cadima Ribeiro

School of Economics and Management and NIPE, University of Minho, Campus de Gualtar, Braga, Portugal
jcadima@eeg.uminho.pt

Abstract

Events are frequently planned with a goal of attracting tourists to a destination. However, studies about the impact of a mega cultural event on residents' identity are scarce. This research is based on the premise that hosting a mega cultural event can, to a significant degree, change a few of the attributes of the city's identity as it is perceived by its residents. Specifically, the objective of the study is to identify the attributes of the city and compare the differences found between different groups of residents (attendees vs. non-attendees) before and after a mega cultural event. For this purpose, we focus our attention on Guimarães the ECOC 2012 (2012 European Capital of Culture) and the perceptions of the residents of this city. Several significant findings are reported and their implications for event managers and public policy administrators presented, along with the limitations of the study.

Keywords: city's identity; residents' perceptions of effects; mega cultural event; event-induced tourism; Guimarães, Portugal.

Introduction

A mega cultural event featuring music, dance, food, shopping, art, and other cultural activities can be supportive of community pride, improving its identity attributes into the minds of local residents. A mega cultural event, such as the European Capital of Culture (ECOC), is composed of a set of small and medium cultural events that take place during a year in the selected city. The quantity and diversity of these events is so large that it can appeal to residents having different cultural interests and tastes. If efficiently managed, this kind of event can contribute to improve a city's identity. The effect of events on the city's identity depends substantially on the media coverage of the activities developed during the event (reach and frequency) and the residents' attendance to the multiple cultural activities that take place there.

Although significant progress has been made in the image destination research stream, mainly in the tourism literature (e.g., San Martín & Rodríguez, 2008; Agapito, Mendes & Valle, 2010; Aksoy & Kiyici, 2011; Lopes, 2011), the research conducted to date on identity is limited from several points of view. First, it is frequently forgotten that the region's identity should be provided by residents' perceived attributes (attitudes, feelings, impressions) where the event takes place and not by tourists (domestic or international), as residents' awareness of their city is formed according to their cognitive evaluation of experiences and learning. Second, our use of the term *identity* refers to the internal collective state of mind (residents' point of view) that underlies the region's communication efforts and not the marketing literature concept of image, which focuses on the external foundation of the image (Hatch & Schultz, 1997) and the different external images held by external constituencies (e.g., tourists, central government, foreign investors) (Bromley, 1993). Finally, there seems to be a missing link between the role of mega cultural events and their impact on the city's identity in order to increase the perceived city's attributes and reinforce the bonds between the hosting community and the city. The evaluation of the impacts of a mega cultural event at the regional level is of particular interest, inasmuch as most of the benefits/costs are centred on tangible (physical, financial, technological) rather than on intangible resources (identity, image, reputation) (Langen & Garcia, 2009).

The objective of this paper is to improve our understanding of the general impacts of hosting significant or mega cultural events and, mainly, their positive (or negative) effects on the identity of a city before and after hosting a mega cultural event, such as an ECOC. We are driven to believe that mega cultural events influence the residents' perceptions of the city's identity. To attain the envisaged goal, the identity of the city of Guimarães will be evaluated in two different periods of time: before (2011) and after (2013) hosting the 2012 European Cultural Capital mega event.

To shed light on this issue, the research adopts a quantitative approach, using a survey to collect the opinions of residents on the city's identity attributes before and after the mega cultural event. For that purpose, two questionnaires were designed and administered to a sample of residents (snowball sampling) that were expected to be engaged, attend, or not attend the 2012 Guimarães ECOC. The questions contained in the questionnaire were based on the literature review and serve as a basis to evaluate the effects on the attributes of the city.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: in the first section, we translated the concept of identity from the corporate and marketing literature to a regional perspective and analyzed the role of mega cultural events; in the second section, a brief literature review provides an inventory of the potential impacts of cultural mega-events on identity, and particularly of previous European Capitals of Culture performed; the third section presents Guimarães, the city where the mega cultural event took place and the cultural activities of the annual program implemented; the following section identifies the research design used in the study; the fifth section is dedicated to the preliminary analysis of the empirical results; and the paper ends with the discussion of the results attained and a short mention to the management and public policy implications.

1. Literature review

Identity is a concept that can be imported from the research focused on corporate communication to the regional context (Ritchie & Smith, 1991; Bromley, 1993; Fombrun & Van Riel, 1997; Balmer & Greyser, 2003; Barnett, Jermier, & Lafferty, 2006). However, there are obviously similarities and differences between a region and a company (Passow, Fehlmann, & Grahlow, 2005). A region is like a company because it exists and operates within a competitive set, is dependent on resources and supportive behaviour, has to follow financial constraints, has to appeal to an audience, and has or should have a vision and a strategic concept, among other similarities. A region is different from a company because, in a democracy, the government is chosen by voters, the identity of the region can hardly be modified in a top-down approach, and cannot choose its internal audience (Passow, Fehlmann, & Grahlow, 2005). Therefore, in the adaptation of the concept to a regional context, the identity should be regarded as the perception that persons inside the region (residents) keep of their region. It indicates how the region presents itself to the internal community. To increase the self awareness of regional attributes, several actions could be taken by the organizers of an event: symbols, communication, and behaviour are the basis by which to mould the impressions of the local community towards its perceived identity.

The concept of regional identity is dynamic, multi-complex (Ernste, 2005) and subject to ongoing social processes, as it relates to an abundance of topics. Spatial identity relates to the individual's personal identity, and it is a social construct as well. People confer meanings to the observed characteristics of a place, making the environment more than just a collection of physical and material elements. People identify themselves with a certain territory, not only with the landscape, but with a whole set of attributes that encompass the culture, sociality, morality, tradition, and social system specific to that region (Raagmaa, 2001).

Paasi (2003) differentiates the "identity of a region" from "regional identity." The identity of a region refers to those distinguishing physical, cultural, and historical features of a region from another. Regional identity (or regional consciousness) refers to the extent to which people identify themselves with the region as a whole of institutionalized practices, discourses, and symbols (Messely, Dessein, & Lauwers, 2010).

Events are increasingly recognized as tools to enhance the identity of a region (Jago et al., 2003). They create awareness for the region, deliver culture, attract new visitors, offer quality services, and have long-term impacts on the region's image and reputation. A robust and strong identity is a key factor in the residents' pride, enhancing the attractiveness of the region in social, economic, and political terms.

Cities and regions have always competed with each other to host mega events (Bramwell, 1997). The competition is even fiercer when the event has a global impact and the expected returns on identity, image, and reputation are significant. A mega event is a large-scale event (Roche, 2000; Liu, 2012) that occurs sporadically and within a short period of time (less than a year) (Ritchie, 1984; Roche, 2000). By its nature, mega events have long-term consequences in the future of a city (Roche, 1994; Roche 2000), as they attract foreign and domestic investments; retain existing economic activities in the area; attract tourists, other visitors, and shoppers; and maintain in a more lasting manner permanent residents (students, elderly, etc.) (Gursoy et al., 2011; Freitas Santos et al., 2011; Getz, 2012).

Liu and Chen (2007) suggest that holding festivals or special events is an effective approach to enhance the image of the city. The same applies to mega cultural events, in particular when they have a significant economic impact on a region or city. These events enhance the community pride (identity), create positive impressions, and improve the region's image.

In a comprehensive review of literature about the measurement of the impacts of large scale cultural events, Langen and Garcia (2009) conclude that the impacts are not always necessarily positive, but can be negative as well. The potential positive effects include economic, social, cultural, political, physical, and environmental impacts. The potential negative effects include the increased cost of living (prices of goods, services, and properties), environmental damage, cultural inconsistency, and traffic congestion (Kim & Petrick, 2005; Herrero et al., 2006; Langen & Garcia, 2009; Ritchie, Shipway, & Cleeve, 2009; Freitas Santos et al., 2011; Getz, 2012).

The most relevant studies about the European Capitals of Culture were made by Myerscough (1994) up to 1994, Cogliandro (2001) to 2000, and Palmer/Rae Associates (2004) and Palmer and Richards (2007) for Glasgow (1990) and Brussels (2000), respectively. To some extent, the research about the ECOCs between 1991 and 2005 has attracted lesser attention (European Parliament, 2013). The first extensive research about the potential effects of ECOCs among different

audiences (residents, neighbourhood, tourists, firms, etc.) was made available by Liverpool ECOC 2008 [Bond, 2008; ENRS, 2010a); 2010b); Garcia et al., 2010; McEvoy, 2010]. After this period, due to a decision by the European Commission (Decision n.º 1622/2006/EC), the process of systematic evaluation by an external and independent entity became compulsory.

In 2009, an ex-post evaluation of the ECOCs was published for the first time, hosted by Luxemburg and Sibiu (2007), and Liverpool and Stavanger (2008) [COM (2009) 689 final]. The following year marked the time of Linz and Vilnius regarding the ECOC 2009 [COM (2010) 762 final]. In addition to these synthetic evaluations published in the Official Journal of the European Union, more detailed reports were made available by the European Commission regarding the 2010 (Essen for the Ruhr, Pecs and Istanbul), 2011 (Tallin and Turku), and 2012 (Guimarães and Maribor) ECOCs (Ecorys, 2011, 2012, 2013). Overall, these evaluations focused on the ex-post period and have adopted the same methodology and themes.

A study by the Directorate-General for Internal Policies – Culture and Education of the European Parliament – evaluated the long-term effects of the European Capitals of Culture (European Parliament, 2013). It investigated areas such as culture and image impacts, and one of the themes examined was image and sense of place. The sub-themes included the (re)positioning of the host city before and after becoming an ECOC; changing meanings associated with the city by its diverse local communities; and changing perceptions of the city by regional/national visitors and overseas tourists. It also assessed variations in the sense of identity and self-confidence of local communities before and after hosting the ECOC (European Parliament, 2013, p. 23). The study reviews the available literature from academia and the host city title, concluding that “there is some good evidence that ECOC hosts with a low profile before the event have experienced positive changes in terms of both internal perceptions and external responses, leading on to long-term improvement of their national and international ranking as top cultural and/or cultural destinations” (European Parliament, 2013, p. 113). A study evaluating the socio-cultural impacts of Liverpool 2008 European Capital of Culture on the socially marginalized communities pointed out the enhancement of quality of life, including participation and interest in cultural activities, accessibility and inclusion effect of the cultural event, and social outcomes in terms of the enhancement of the sense of place and local identity (Liu, 2014).

2. Guimarães and the Organization of the 2012 European Capital of Culture

The municipality of Guimarães has an area of 241.3 Km² and is located in the district of Braga in northern Portugal. The municipality is composed of 69 parishes, with a total population of 158.124 inhabitants (INE, 2012). The city of Guimarães has good road access, a railway connection with Porto, and is close to the Porto and Vigo airports and the Leixões, Viana do Castelo and Vigo seaports. Porto is the main city of the northern region of Portugal, and Vigo is an important Spanish city located next to the Portuguese border.

In previous years, Guimarães has suffered a small decline in its population (between 2001 and 2011, the population has decreased 0.9%), and the older population (aged 65 and more) increased (from 7.9% in 1991 to 13.7% in 2011). The low qualification rates of the Guimarães population are an obstacle to the socioeconomic development of the territory and its access to culture (Universidade do Minho, 2013, pp. 16-17).

Guimarães is located in a dynamic and entrepreneurial region, with a vast exporting tradition. Its productive specialization is based on traditional sectors (textile, clothing, and footwear), and most corporate entities are micro-, small- and medium-sized companies (Universidade do Minho, 2013, p. 17). In recent years, like many other regions in Europe, the northern region of Portugal, including Guimarães, experienced a gradual process of deindustrialization. To face this challenge, the political authorities of Guimarães have emphasized the importance of tourism as a driver for growth. This strategy is based on the historical heritage of the city, as it is considered the birthplace of Portugal (the birthplace of the first king of Portugal), with its medieval castle and its longstanding cultural traditions (popular festivities, erudite events, archaeological museum, cultural centre, etc.).

The richness of the historical and cultural heritage of Guimarães was recognized by UNESCO in 2001 through the classification of the centre of the city as World Heritage. The Guimarães European Capital of Culture 2012 (ECOC 2012) was part of the strategy followed by the local authorities to strength the awareness of the city and attract a new type of tourists (cultural tourists), from different regions of Portugal, but also from Spain (mostly) and other European countries. The European Capital of Culture program celebrated in 2012 its 27th edition. Being performed year after year, it became one of the most coveted initiatives hosted by the European cities envisaging the revitalization and diversification of their economies through culture. In the last years, the hosting of the ECOC has been seen by cities as an opportunity to: i) improve their image, boost their local economy and increase their tourist flow; and ii) strengthen their cultural life and cultural infrastructures (European Parliament, 2013).

The organizing committee of the Guimarães European Capital of Culture had available a budget of nearly 36.5 million Euros, 22.5 million of which were devoted to the implementation of the cultural program. The remaining 14 million Euros were divided between marketing and communication expenses and functioning expenses (Universidade do Minho, 2013). The slogan used to promote the 2012 Guimarães ECOC was “You are a part of it,” built on the proposed strategic positioning of the event and the idea that Guimarães, being the birthplace of the nation, was a place where all Portuguese would feel included. The heart was the chosen logo, used as a simplified communication element.

The advertising and communication campaign started in July 2010 and set as a motto, “It all happens in Guimarães.” The communication strategy was oriented towards four target audiences: local community; institutions, partners, and sponsors; event audience; and Europe. The cultural program was organized according to four axes, corresponding to four

programming areas: Community, City, Thought, and Art. The last one was divided into cinema and audiovisual, performing arts, music, art, and architecture. The cultural year was divided into four periods: a time for encounters, a time for creation, free time, and a time for rebirth (Universidade do Minho, 2013).

During 2012, about 1,300 cultural events took place in Guimarães. Music, cinema, and theatre together contributed to half of these events (respectively, 27.1%, 14.5%, and 8.0%). There was also a high number of exhibits and publications (8.2%), and conferences and seminars (6.8%). The cultural events took place in different parishes of the municipality, but the cultural centre hosted the majority of the events (18.9%), and many others occurred at indoor venues (ASA factory, etc.). The amount of events that took place in the public space and historic buildings was relatively low (6.5% and 3.2%, respectively) (Universidade do Minho, 2013).

3. Research Design

To evaluate the impact of ECOC 2012 on the identity of the city of Guimarães, a retrospective causal comparative analysis is the most appropriate approach to follow. First, this type of design requires that a researcher begin investigating a particular question when the effects have already been manifest. Then, the researcher must attempt to determine whether or not one particular event may have influenced another variable; that is, how the city's identity attributes were perceived by its residents after the event. Third, experimental research has been extensively recommended in business (Anderson & Simester, 2011; Davenport, 2009; Thomke, 2003) because "outcomes are simple to analyze, the data are easily interpreted, and causality is usually clear" (Anderson & Simester, 2011, p. 99). Finally, the city of Guimarães is a suitable example of a city that recently hosted a mega cultural event, specifically because it is of small-medium size (by European standards) and is geographically located in a semi-urban territory.

In this type of experimental design, the researcher investigates a particular question in two moments in time: first, when the effects of the event have not yet occurred, and later, when the effects have already occurred. The research process followed several steps, as advised by Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtler (2006).

The first step was to identify the variables of the study, which in this case were the seventeen attributes of the identity of Guimarães (folk music, other type of music, festivals and events, cultural life, writers, painting and sculpture, handcraft, dance, football, other open air sports, indoor sports, environmental quality, buildings and historical sites, museums, churches and chapels, university and scientific knowledge, and residents' participation in the safeguard of the city and of its patrimony). These attributes were included in a questionnaire, and the residents gave their opinion about each, using a five-point scale (where 1 is weak and 5 strong).

Based on the review of the literature, the second step envisaged the development of the following research hypotheses:

H1: When considering different groups of residents (attendees and non-attendees), before and after the event, significant differences become apparent in the city's identity attributes identified, derived from the ECOC 2012;

H2: Residents that attended or did not attend the activities of ECOC 2012 perceived identity attributes with greater strength after the event than before.

The next step was to select the participants. Based on the purpose of this study, the students of 10th to 12th learning levels of four public secondary schools and of one professional school located in the municipality were surveyed upon taking the questionnaires home. They were asked to have three members of their family (brothers, parents, uncles, and grandparents) complete them. This sampling technique assured the geographical coverage of the sample and the representation of three generations of inhabitants (15-24-year-olds, 25-64-year-olds, and those 65 or more years old) in the two samples used.

In the pre-ECOC period (during October and December 2011), 1000 questionnaires were distributed, and 510 were returned, of which only 471 were completely filled in, which corresponds to a response rate of 51%. In the post period (April and May 2013), 1400 questionnaires were distributed and 896 were returned, of which only 551 were used in the present study, corresponding to a response rate of 64%.

The difference in the number of surveys returned between the *ex-ante* and the *ex-post* period derives from two reasons: i) in late 2011, the quantity of questionnaires applied in the public secondary schools related to the 2012 ECOC overloaded the school capacity and hindered the implementation of our questionnaire; ii) this problem affected the process of delivering, collecting, and returning the questionnaires from the students' families. For these reasons, in the *ex-post* evaluation, we have opted by insisting that school teachers and students take back the questionnaires filled in by their families.

The fourth step was to select instruments to measure variables and collected data. As previously mentioned, data for this study were obtained using a self-administered questionnaire that was applied in two different moments in time (2011 and 2013) to residents of Guimarães. The first questionnaire was launched before the event, and in the present study, it is used as a benchmark (2011). The second questionnaire was administered after the event (2013).

During 2012, the ECOC offered a cultural program to the city integrating cultural activities of different kinds (dance, music, exhibitions, etc.). The visitors' behaviours during the event (e.g., traffic congestion, noise) were expected to affect the way residents see themselves, and a lot of symbols have been used (e.g., logos, brands, heroes) that could impact the identity of the residents of Guimarães. The change in the identity attributes of the city after the event was expected to reflect residents' assessment of the city's identity.

The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first one was related to the intention to attend/participate (*ex-ante* period), and attend/participate effectively (*ex-post* period) in the mega event (six questions). The second part was

associated with the perceptions of residents on the impacts of ECOC 2012 (two questions). The third part was devoted to the identification of the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (e.g., age, sex, marital status, level of education, parish of residence).

For the purpose of the present study, we have concentrated our attention on the second and third parts of the questionnaire, specifically on the question about the residents' perceptions towards the relevant attributes of the city of Guimarães before and after the event. A total of 17 attributes were given to be rated by residents in a 5-point measurement scale, where 5 was considered to be a strong attribute and 1 a weak attribute of the city. The last step included the analysis and interpretation of the data. For comparative purposes, the residents were divided into two groups: i) residents who, before the event, expressed strong interest in attending and effectively attended the event, and ii) residents who expressed no intention to attend the event and, as a matter of fact, did not participate in it. Typically, factorial analysis and inferential statistics are used to determine whether the mean for the groups are significantly different from each other.

4. Results

The presentation of the results begins with the demographic characteristics of the samples. A total of 471 and 551 residents were surveyed before and after the mega cultural event, respectively. In the end, approximately 58% of the residents were female, 96.5% were younger than 65 years old, 6.8% had a university degree, and 92.7% had incomes of less than €2500. Before testing the hypotheses, responses to the attributes of Guimarães before the event were factor analyzed using a principal component analysis with varimax rotation.

Table 1 - Factor analysis for attributes of Guimarães, before the ECOC

Attributes of Guimarães factors (Reliability alpha)	Loading	Eigen-values	Explained variance	Mean
1: Heritage and Environment (0.804)		4.822	28.366	3.952
Churches and chapels	0.792			
Museums	0.741			
Buildings and historical sites	0.692			
University and scientific knowledge	0.675			
Environmental quality	0.587			
Residents' protection of its patrimony and heritage	0.574			
2: Arts (0.680)		1.923	11.311	3.026
Writers	0.849			
Painting and sculpture	0.789			
Dance	0.459			
3: Sports (0.738)		1.772	10.422	3.636
Other outdoor sports	0.847			
Indoor sports	0.770			
Football	0.693			
4: Performances (0.667)		1.062	6.246	3.449
Festivals and events	0.851			
Other categories of music	0.720			
Cultural life	0.523			
5: Local arts (0.396)		1.004	5.903	3.501
Folk music	0.778			
Craftwork	0.502			
Total variance explained		62.249		

Source: Authors' own survey data. Notes: Extraction method – Principal component analysis; Rotation method – Varimax with Kaiser normalization; KMO=0.814; Bartlett's test of sphericity: p=0.00.

The results gathered are shown in Table 1. The analysis revealed five factors with eigenvalues greater than one, which, together, explained 62% of the variance of the original set of variables, and these were initially retained for further analysis.

An examination of the factor loadings suggests that factor 1 was related to respondents' perceptions towards the importance of Heritage and Environment to the identity of their city. Most of the items were related to tangible resources, such as "churches and chapels", "museums", "buildings, and historical sites", with higher scores implying the greater saliency of the attribute. Factor 2 measured respondents' perceptions about the saliency of the attribute of Arts, which includes "writers", "painting and sculpture", and "dance". Factor 3 measured respondents' perceptions towards the importance of the attribute of Sports in the identity of the city, which includes "indoor" and "other outdoor sports" and "football", which is a very popular sport there. Factor 4 was related to respondents' perceptions vis-à-vis the impact of

Performances and the items “festivals and events”, “other categories of music”, and “cultural life” on the identity of the city. The factor was termed as performances. Factor 5 was related to respondents’ perceptions towards the relevance of “folk music” and “craftwork” to the identity of Guimarães. The factor was labelled as Local Arts.

The coefficient alpha was computed for each of the five obtained attribute factor attitude scales. As can be seen in Table 1, these coefficients ranged from 0.667 to 0.804 for the first four factors, suggesting high reliability. The coefficient for factor 5 was 0.396, suggesting only moderate reliability. The mean scores for the five reliable factors were higher than 3. Consequently, these five factors and their items will be used as a baseline to compare the differences between the identity of Guimarães perceived before and after the ECOC2012.

The first hypothesis states that, when considering different groups of residents (attendees and non-attendees) before and after the event, there were significant differences in the city’s identity attributes derived from ECOC 2012. A comparison between different groups of residents before the hosting of the mega cultural event showed that the mean scores were significantly different in most of the factors. As displayed in the first four columns of Table 2, significant differences were identified between groups in relation to four factors (Heritage and Environment, Arts, Performances, and Local Arts). The only common dimension to the two groups was Sports, for which the *ex-ante* analysis showed no significant differences between groups including all items.

Table 2 – Inter-group differences between attendees and non-attendees, before and after the ECOC

Attributes	Before				After			
	Attendees (n=351)	Non-Attendees (n=52)	One-way Anova (a)	Differences between groups	Attendees (n=320)	Non-Attendees (n=193)	One-way Anova (a)	Differences between groups
Heritage and Environment	3.95	3.60	F =12.953	Yes	3.88	3.67	F =5.956	Yes
Arts	3.05	2.61	F =12.078	Yes	3.32	3.18	F =6.504	No
Sports	3.62	3.53	F =2.201	No	3.81	3.58	F =4.783	Yes
Performances	3.47	3.07	F =8.975	Yes	3.43	3.35	F =7.666	No
Local arts	3.52	3.13	F =6.571	Yes	3.65	3.44	F =4.408	Yes

Source: Authors’ own survey data. Notes: (a) One-way ANOVA for differences between three groups (group I: engaged participants; group II: attendees; group III: non-attendees).

After the event, the differences among groups showed that the event changed their perceptions towards the city due to the program implemented, but only on three factors. Regarding the dimension of Heritage and Environment, if we compared the attendees and non-attendees, we see that the differences are relevant. At the item level, the changes regarding “churches and chapels” and the “quality of environment” have not been perceived by the two groups of residents as substantially different. The other items reveal significant differences between attendees and non-attendees.

The factor of Arts showed significant differences in the way the groups positively perceived this particular kind of attribute after the event, with a major increase in mean values. Only the items “football” and “indoor sports” within the more general factor of Sports were statistically significant between attendees and non-attendees. This is consistent with the nature of the dimension, as some of the activities related to sports were only important for attendees, as the majority of respondents did not attend the games. In the case of non-attendees, the reason for the results found could be related to their affection, as some people are not keen on sports. All of the items of the dimension Performances showed no significant differences between attendees and non-attendees after the event. The factor of Local Arts showed significant differences for attendees and non-attendees after the event, with the exception being the item of “folk music”.

The results suggest that residents of Guimarães have changed their attribute perception between the two periods of time, and this evidence could be linked to the organization of the cultural mega event ECOC 2012. Thus, Hypothesis 1 is confirmed, as different groups of residents (attendees and non-attendees) showed significant differences in the city’s perceived identity attributes derived from the hosting of the ECOC 2012.

The second hypothesis states that the identity attributes of the city are perceived as having greater strength after the event than before by the residents that attended and did not attend the activities of the ECOC 2012 (Table 3). The results regarding attendees suggest that the attribute of Heritage and Environment and related items have not been influenced by the event. The same applies to the Performances factor. As can be seen in Table 3, the factor of Arts and respective items reveal significant differences, with mean scores increasing supposedly due to the activities developed during the mega cultural event. The inspection of the data revealed that the factor of Sports increased significantly due to the event. In relation to the factor of Local Arts, the mean scores showed an increase on all the items, although the item of “craftwork” revealed a statistical difference before and after the event.

Table 3 – Intra-group differences between attendees and non-attendees, before and after the event

Attributes	Attendees	Non-Attendees
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	Mean		t-value	Mean		t-value
	Before (n=351)	After (n=320)		Before (n=52)	After (n=193)	
Heritage and Environment	3.95	3.88	-1.488	3.60	3.67	0.601
Arts	3.05	3.32	5.110*	2.61	3.18	4.550*
Sports	3.62	3.81	3.152*	3.53	3.58	0.394
Performances	3.47	3.43	-0.845	3.07	3.35	2.404*
Local arts	3.52	3.65	2.082*	3.13	3.44	2.149*

Source: Authors' own survey data. Notes: * $p < 0.05$.

Regarding residents who did not attend the activities of ECOC 2012, from Table 3, we can infer that the ECOC did not impact significantly the Heritage and Environment factor among non-attendees, as the mean scores generally increased after the event, although without statistical significance. The same applies to Sports.

The factors Arts, Performances, and Local Arts, and related items show an increase among non-attendees, with the exception of the items "other categories of music" and "folk music", suggesting that the intangible attributes of the city's identity have been enhanced by the event. The Performances factor indicates that non-attendees were more greatly influenced by the event than attendees were. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was only partially validated, as two factors and the associated items seem not to have been changed significantly by the event among attendees and non-attendees.

Conclusion

The present study attempted to examine the impact of one particular mega-event, the 2012 Guimarães ECOC, on the perceived identity of the city held among the residents. Contrary to the initial expectations, the factor of Heritage and Environment and their items did not experience a significant increase after the event among the city's residents (attendees and non-attendees). However, the mean values for the six items were relatively high (above 4 in a five-point scale), suggesting that this dimension was perceived as relevant to the identity of the city. This could reveal mixed feelings among residents about the consequences of the mega-event in terms of the preservation of historical buildings and the general quality of the environment. As the results found were not statistically significant, we can infer that the perceptions towards the identity of the city have not changed significantly with it, keeping its relevancy among the other dimensions. This is consistent with the patrimonial value of the historical centre, as it was recognized by UNESCO, in 2001. On the other hand, the perceptions held towards the tangible cultural heritage of the city may have not changed significantly, also due to the fact that the majority of the activities which have been developed during the event took place outside the public space and the historical buildings (Universidade do Minho, 2013).

The dimension of Arts reflects a critical aspect of the ECOC 2012, as one of the axes of the program was art, which, for the aims of the event, has been divided into the categories of cinema and audiovisual, performing arts, music, and art and architecture. Overall, this programming area accounted for approximately half of the events (49.6%). The empirical results show a consensus among the residents, even non-attendees, about the positive effects of the 2012 Guimarães ECOC on their attitudes towards arts. This might be explained by the significant number of events (music, cinema, theatre) that took place during the ECOC, which increased the awareness of residents vis-à-vis the arts. Previous research has indicated that the identity of a city as a cultural destination could be improved by mega cultural events (European Parliament, 2013; Freitas Santos et al., 2011; Liu, 2014; Ritchie & Smith, 1991).

In terms of the Sports dimension, statistically significant differences were observed among attendees, while the relevance of different sports for non-attendees was neglected. This empirical evidence suggests that the contribution of sport activities for shaping the city's identity was limited to some segments of residents. As a matter of fact, sport activities were not chosen to be directly associated with the Guimarães ECOC by its organization due to some prejudice among cultural agents against some type of sports. Meanwhile, as noted by Ritchie and Smith (1991), regarding the Olympic Winter Games, the levels of awareness and the image of the city could be substantially improved if more activities had been promoted in this area. Nonetheless, the organization sponsored the main football team, while other sports received minor attention.

In relation to Performances factor during the Guimarães ECOC, it is undeniable that the cultural life of the city has been greatly intensified throughout the year 2012, with the implementation of almost 1,300 cultural events. Interestingly, significant positive differences were only observed among non-attendees. Hence, it seems that only the residents who did not attend the event have experienced a change in perception towards this particular attribute of the city's identity. A feasible interpretation for that can appeal to the huge amount of events that took place during the mega-event, which conferred an uncommon dynamism to the cultural life of the city and thus could be easily felt, even by non-attendees. The findings of the study commissioned by the European Parliament (2013, p. 113) show that "impacts upon the host city's existing cultural system and future plans for cultural activity are the most prolific areas of reported beneficial impact from ECOCs."

With respect to Local Arts, only non-attendees showed statistical significant differences caused by the impact of the mega-event, with an increase in the awareness of this dimension, particularly regarding the item of “craftwork”, which is more significantly related to open air trade fairs than with indoor restricted exhibitions.

Regarding the legacy for Guimarães, if local tourism authorities aim to extend the positive effects of the ECOC beyond 2012, the marketing strategy should seek to maintain the level of cultural activities, mixing smaller events with high profile ones, as stated by Ritchie and Smith (1991), Jago et al. (2003), and the recommendations made to the European Parliament (2013).

From these results, we can derive valuable implications for both event managers and public policy administrators. Firstly, the study captures an evaluation before and after the mega cultural event that reflects the impact that occurs with regard to the main attributes of the city's identity. This provides managers and administrators with a clearer set of attributes to analyze the effects of cultural activities on future event performance. Therefore, these findings can be used as a guide to manage more efficiently the dimensions of the city's identity and planning of future cultural events. Secondly, in a context of fierce competition among cities and regions for attracting tourists, investments, and residents, the creation of dynamic competitive advantages by cities must be based on soft attributes (e.g., quality of life, security, culture, urban lifestyle) rather than on hard factors (e.g., infrastructures, transportation). The improvement of the city's soft attributes after hosting a mega cultural event offer policy makers an opportunity to competitively differentiate the city's personality, both domestically and internationally.

The empirical results we got allow the policy makers and managers to align economic, cultural, and tourism development with the city's identity elements, image, and positioning. As many cities are beginning to compete regarding branding, there is a need to raise their profiles and create a differentiated identity. However, managers must be aware of the difficulties of the process, as a city's identity is the outcome of a diversity of regional perceptions that are often associated with the action of different political entities.

Finally, the city's identity is composed of multiple pieces that must be connected with the interests of different people. Our findings indicate the way in which different types of residents (attendees and non-attendees) have been involved in the ECOC2012, providing guidance to the adequate planning of future events. A bottom-up approach is recommended to managers in order to collect useful information by previously ascertaining whether different audiences expect to participate.

The evidence reported requires acknowledgement of the limitations of the current study that might constrain the generalization of its results. The first limitation concerns the samples used in the study: they are non-probabilistic, they differ in terms of size (non-proportionate), and the sampling unit and the unit about which the information was gathered may differ. However, no significant differences with regard to sampling characteristics (gender, age, education, income) exist, offering less concern about the representativeness of the samples. Additionally, the results of a causal-comparative research should be interpreted with caution, as not only the mega-event might have caused the observed effects, but also different categories of extraneous variables (history, maturation, mortality) may have influenced the changes that occurred between the two periods of time and the differences in perceptions found among the groups of residents who participated in the survey (Malhotra & Birks, 2007).

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