

Mega-events in the city of Rio de Janeiro: the possible contributions of SEA for mainstreaming environmental and social issues in decision making.

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Introduction: The Rio 2016 context

In 2016 the city of Rio de Janeiro will host the XXXI Olympic Games. The bid process involved seven cities candidatures and Rio was elected as the host city on October 2009.

Since then, a number of urban and infrastructural developments have been taking place in Rio, associated with a comprehensive campaign in boosting the global city image, the cultural and tourism marketing. The bid process was very much supported by national, state and local governments, in an effort to seduce and persuade international delegates and, at the same time, to convince general public that hosting such an international event “*will be an opportunity to deliver the broader aspirations for the long-term future of the city, region and country and an opportunity to hasten the transformation of Rio de Janeiro into an even greater global city*”.

Notwithstanding, three years to the kick off of the Rio Olympic Games, there is still an atmosphere of doubt as regards the promised deliveries in terms of event organization and urban investments, but also as regards the real benefits that will be actually achieved. The biggest concern is related to the legacy that will be left for local population, especially in terms of social and environmental benefits. Furthermore, a series of negative effects can already be identified.

This paper looks at the Olympic bid of the city of Rio de Janeiro particularly how environmental and social concerns have been taken into account in both phases: the Olympic bid and the pre-games planning and how SEA could have added up to this process.

1. Recent evolutions of the Rio Olympic Games

Hosting mega-events is a political initiative that is often perceived as an opportunity for transforming social, economic and environmental conditions of hosting cities. On the other hand, Olympic initiatives are often followed by public criticism when it comes to the legacy that will be left for local population and future generations. In the Rio context it's not different. Here we present a short brief of the main key elements that have raised concerns so far.

- *Lack of “strategicness” of environmental safeguards*

Environmental matters are being dealt so far on a project by project approach where strategic concerns appear to have no place on official practice. For instance, the sustainability approach of the Olympic Games highlights the need to incorporate sustainability design in facilities' construction but the building of facilities, transport and urban infrastructure are being implemented at the expense of the occupation of environmentally sensitive areas and populations' removal. The “heart” of the games will be the neighborhood of “Barra da Tijuca”, a controversial decision since it is classified as a region of conditioned occupation by the land use planning act and due to its significant number of environmental sensitive areas and mobility limitations.

- *Who wins and who loses?*

There is a general concern that economic, environmental and social benefits may not be experienced by the majority of people, especially the neediest and marginalized population. Instead these appear to be the most negatively impacted. For instance, security and peacemaking policies that are bringing urban development to slums, despite some positive results, have led to the phenomenon of real estate speculation and gentrification.

- *Limited opportunities for public participation*

Opportunities for public participation and hearings are restricted to project EIA public consultation, when most of key decisions were already made. This has led to a number of online petitions against controversial projects, such as the demolition of a local school to make way for a parking lot near the football stadium.

- *Lack of transparency on investments and environmental and social policies*

Brazilian authorities, in all administrative levels, have guaranteed financial support to staging successful Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2016. Most of these investments will come from the Federal Government Plan for Growth Acceleration (PAC), a national plan that has been widely criticized by its lack of commitment to environmental and social concerns and commitment to full and unrestricted growth at any cost. Furthermore, public private partnerships are taking place with limited opportunities for affected and interested parties' participation.

- *The long term approach and legacy of the games*

One of the main concerns raised by experts in Rio is related to the legacy of the Olympic Games and what such an event will leave in terms of long term benefits or negative effects for the host city. This is a major concern since the 2007 edition of the Pan American Games. This event took place in Rio de Janeiro and required huge amounts of public investments in sports facilities, which are now underutilized and require public investments to maintain its idleness. Non-material legacies are also a major concern, since such large-scale event is expected to impact in different extent the habits, memory, symbols and identity of a people. These issues need to be considered in an integrative and long term planning perspective.

2. SEA for Olympic Games

Olympic and Paralympic hosting cities have been dealing with strategic environmental issues in different and varied ways, but many SEA elements can be identified in past experiences.

A number of benefits from SEA application were already described in Olympic Games planning, such as connection and integration between plans, integration of environmental concerns with strategic planning, increasing of transparency through documentation of procedures, incorporation of the public, agency and experts' views among others¹. The 2000 Sidney Olympic Games is considered a milestone in terms of

¹ ZAGORIANAKOS, E. Athens 2004 Olympic Games' Transportation Plan: a missed opportunity for Strategic Environmental Assessment integration? *Journal of Transport Geography*, v. 12, issue 2, p.115-125, 2004.

incorporation of environmental guidelines and sustainability concerns, especially in terms of consideration of social impacts, emissions monitoring, and cooperation with NGOs. Since then, both International Olympic Committee and hosting cities have incorporated environmental elements in their discourse, official documents, candidature files, planning practice and marketing campaigns.

Strategic environmental assessment is one amongst a variety of instruments and planning tools that are being applied during bid planning, pre-games, games-time and post-games phases. Examples of SEA application come from the 2000 Cape Town Bid and the 2012 London Olympic Games.

3. SEA to the Rio context: possible contributions and approaches

There has been a growing debate on the need of strategic environmental assessments in Brazil, particularly due to limitations of project EIA, the lack of consideration of sustainability issues in strategic planning and the current development scenario that is heavily based on government investments in mega infrastructure projects and programs. An increasing number of voluntary SEAs are taking place, especially in energy, transport and tourism sectors.

Due to its controversial role in boosting local development we present a framework for analyzing the Rio de Janeiro Olympic initiative, based on SEA principles and procedures. This was based in three main elements: its purpose, SEA role and aims and its likely impacts. These are briefly analysed in the table below.

SEA of the Rio de Janeiro 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games	
Purpose	-
Why SEA	<p>The purpose of SEA is linked to a widespread Brazilian problem that is a lacking perspective of long term planning. The increasing concerns on the legacy of the Olympic games in Rio has to do with the fact that the Brazilian planning scenario often lacks a long term perspective, at the expenses of high level of investments and missing opportunities for discussing strategic priorities.</p> <p>Although adopted in political discourse, concerns on the legacy of the games and its long term impacts are lacking in official documents and planning practice.</p> <p>As in many Latin American countries, Brazilian political decisions are taken behind closed doors, with few opportunities for</p>

	<p>public participation. There is also a general lack of official planning documents and planning is conducted on a highly sectoral approach.</p> <p>In this case, SEA is needed because it could provide opportunities for a more integrated, participatory and transparent planning approach.</p>
Role and Aims of SEA	<p>The application of a SEA in such a context would have to ensure that environmental goals would be considered transversely, i.e. across all key sector policies (transport and mobility, urban development). In doing so, it would be possible to compare environmental performances of sector policies, ensuring public participation and accountability on strategic discussions and decision making.</p> <p>The adoption of SEA in the Olympic Games planning scenario may ensure that the complex and varied range of institutions and agencies involved would work more aligned around shared goals, visions and environmental values. This common and minimum agenda, that provides opportunity for sector integration, may reduce perceived and actual conflicts and contradictions.</p> <p>SEA needs to encourage the development and sharing of common environmental goals and values, and to raise the status of environmental issues on an equal stage as other policies and priorities imposed by political forces.</p>
Possible impacts of SEA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As in most Brazilian experiences SEA would represent an integrative plan per se. It would encourage long-term planning and the development, publication, dissemination and discussion of shared objectives, targets and indicators; - Increasing transparency and public participation, accountability and sense of control over strategic decisions; - Capacity building / Individual and Organisational learning; - More integrative and cross-sectoral policies; - More opportunities to monitor policies' impacts, development and public investments.

Conclusions

Analysis shows that SEA can be a useful instrument for dealing with strategic issues that have been not considered so far in the Rio case, mainly in terms of providing opportunities for long term planning; development and dissemination of shared sustainability objectives and goals; encouragement of more integrative and cross-sectoral policies; increasing transparency, accountability and sense of control over strategic decisions and the enhancement of planners and local community understanding of the impacts of the wide and complex range of developments that the city of Rio de Janeiro is about to experience in the following years.