

BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL THROUGH SAFETY AND SECURITY: A FOCUS ON SPORTS EVENTS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

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Abstract. Putnam's definition of Social Capital incorporates trust, cooperation, norms of civic engagement, and supportive networks. This study aims to explore the extent of the contribution of safety and security of Special Olympics World sports events in promoting a culture of trust, responsibility, and collective well-being relating to social capital. Through active collaboration with local communities, law enforcement agencies, emergency services, and volunteer networks, the sport event organizers can effectively leverage local resources, specialized knowledge, and community support to enhance the overall quality and safety of the event. These collaborations enhance the effectiveness of safety and security measures, facilitate seamless emergency response, and foster a sense of shared responsibility among all stakeholders to ensure the well-being of participants, spectators, and the host community. By nurturing social capital, the events can enhance safety measures, encourage active participation, and build resilience within the community, ultimately creating a secure environment for athletes, spectators, and all involved. In conclusion, we could consider the safety and security of Special Olympics World sports events to play a crucial role in building social capital.

Keywords: collaboration; law enforcement; community; shared responsibility

Introduction

According to Putnam, Social Capital (SC) is a multifaceted concept that encompasses trust, cooperation, norms of civic engagement, and supportive networks among individuals and groups (Putnam 1993). These elements of Social Capital are particularly relevant in the context of hosting large world events that involve people with disabilities, such as the Paralympic Games, Special Olympics (SO) World Games, and many other events. Such events pose unique challenges and opportunities for event organizers, who have to ensure the safety and accessibility of everyone involved in the event. The organization of large-scale international events invariably ushers in an intricate mosaic of safety and security considerations. Ensuring a secure and safe milieu for these patrons is of paramount importance (Stacey 2012). Consequently, a notable

quandary confronts individuals, organizations, and private entities alike, tasked with the responsibility of furnishing an environment that guarantees safety while fostering an enjoyable experience. The organization of a secure backdrop and gratifying engagement stands as a formidable challenge (Hall et al. 2012). This process holds particular significance within the context of Special Olympics world sports events, where the fusion of sport and inclusivity interlaces with unique safety imperatives. Special Olympics stands as a transformative global movement, dedicated to empowering individuals with intellectual disabilities through the transformative power of sports. Its mission revolves around fostering inclusion, self-confidence, and joy among athletes, while promoting respect, unity, and dignity for all (Mission 2018). Guided by unwavering values of acceptance, determination, and courage, Special Olympics envisions a world where every individual is celebrated for their unique abilities, and where diversity is embraced as a cornerstone of strength and unity (Article 1 2019).

Whether manifesting as expansive spectacles or more intimate gatherings, event organizers bear a shared responsibility of foundational legal obligations. Moreover, they face unique and unknown issues related to the specificity of the philosophy of the SO movement (Djobova, Kirilova 2021). These obligations extend beyond the mere logistical dimension to encompass the creation of environments not only secure but also thoughtfully attuned to the particularities of their intended activities. Concurrently, organizers shoulder the mandate of fashioning a secure ecosystem, one that envelopes spectators in an atmosphere conducive to the event's spirit.

Event organizers bear a shared responsibility of foundational legal obligations. These events coalesce athletes of diverse abilities, necessitating an intricately woven safety system that addresses unique vulnerabilities. Paralleling with that, the tailored provision of secure facilities extends beyond the physical realm. The notion transmutes into an embodiment of inclusive security, fostering an ecosystem that both protects against external threats and facilitates the comprehensive engagement of athletes with disabilities. Central to the effective fulfillment of these obligations is the pivotal role of international event coordinators, who engage in a collaborative matrix with a heterogeneous array of security entities spanning the local, national, and global spheres. According to Hall et al. (2012), the realm of safety and security planning for large-scale events encompasses an intricate web of stakeholders spanning a spectrum of roles. These encompass facility or event management, law enforcement agencies, emergency management units, fire services, emergency medical units, local and state governmental bodies, local community entities, public health officials, and public relations practitioners. A synergy among these diverse stakeholders assumes a position of pivotal significance, serving as the bedrock for the efficacious formulation of strategies and the seamless orchestration of responses to the array of safety and security exigencies that can arise.

This collaborative ethos is intricately interwoven with the broader construct of Social Capital and its principles of trust, cooperation, and collective engagement

among various stakeholders to ensure the well-being and protection of individuals with disabilities participating in sporting events.

Aim

This study aims to explore the extent of the contribution of safety and security of Special Olympics World sports events in promoting a culture of trust, responsibility, and collective well-being relating to social capital.

Methods

We applied documentary analysis, including theoretical-logical analysis, systematic approach (structural-functional, structural-component, and structural-integral aspect), comparative analysis, and field notes during the SO World Games. Qualitative data was gathered using interviews and life-story techniques conducted with stakeholders, delegation leaders, and coaches.

Results

The Olympic Games are the most widely recognized international sports event, bringing together athletes worldwide to compete in various sports. The Paralympic Games are a parallel event to the Olympics, specifically designed for athletes with physical, intellectual, or visual impairments. The Special Olympics World Games are distinct from both the Olympic and Paralympic Games. They are dedicated to athletes with intellectual disabilities. The focus of the Special Olympics is not solely on elite competition but also on providing individuals with intellectual disabilities the opportunity to participate in sports and experience the joy of physical activity.

The popularity of the Olympic Games, Paralympic Games, and Special Olympics can vary based on various factors such as cultural context, media coverage, and regional interest. However, historically, the Olympic Games are generally considered the most widely recognized and most numerous in terms of participants. The Special Olympics, while being the youngest among these events, ranks second in terms of participant numbers, showcasing its rapid growth and substantial engagement within the community – Figure 1.

Figure 1 provides a detailed overview of the number of participants in different editions of the Olympic Games, Paralympic Games, and Special Olympics, including both summer and winter versions (Pyeongchang under the spotlight as Special Olympics World Winter Games open, n.d.; Summer Olympics: number of athletes by gender 1896-2020 Statista, n.d; Winter Olympic Games participants/athletes Statista, n.d; The History of the Paralympic Games - Paris 2024, n.d; Winter Paralympics: number of participating athletes 2014; Statista. n.d; World Games. n.d.). This result allows for a deeper understanding of the extent of participation and international impact of each sporting event, highlighting their progress and importance in terms of diversity, athletic excellence, and community engagement.

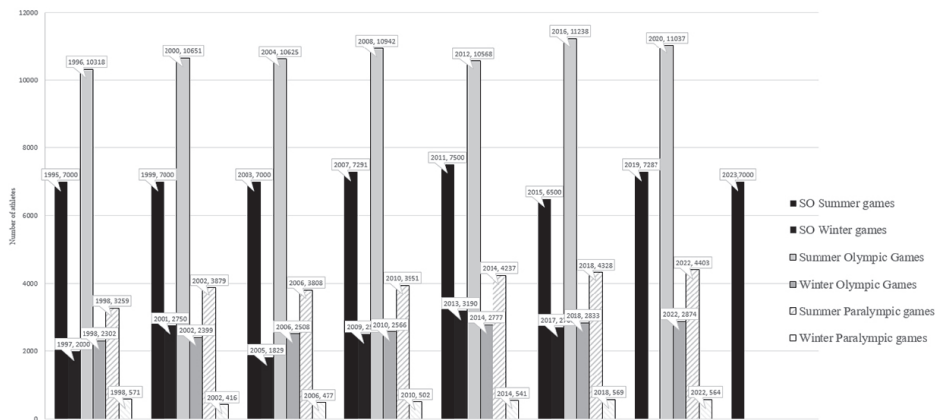


Figure 1. The number of athletes attended the Winter and Summer Olympic, Paralympic, and Special Olympics games conducted during 1995 – 2023

The safety and security measures implemented in World Special Olympics sports events contribute directly and indirectly to the enhancement of Social Capital within the event context (Djobova et al. 2020). The connection between safety and security and Social Capital can be delineated by the direct contribution of trust and confidence, collaborative engagement, and inclusive participation – Figure 2.

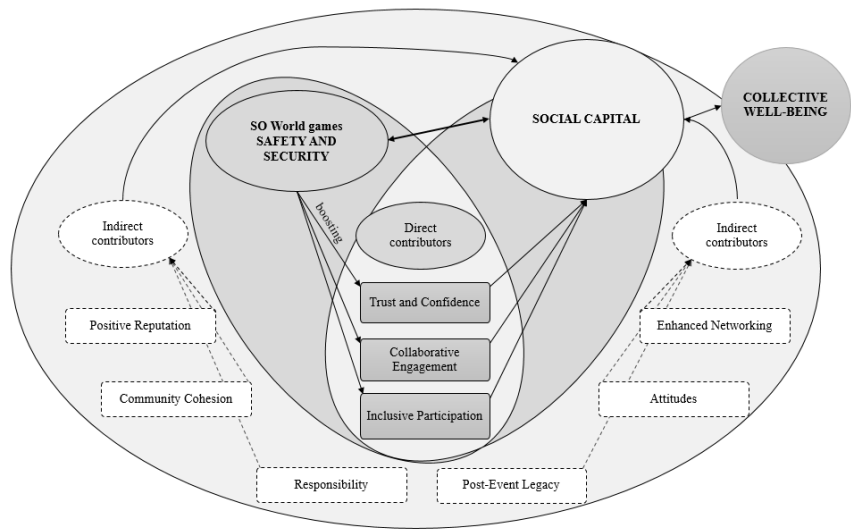


Figure 2. The interconnectedness between Special Olympics Safety and Security – Direct and Indirect Contributions to Enhancing Social Capital

Effective safety and security measures foster trust among participants, spectators, organizers, and relevant authorities. When individuals feel safe and secure, they are more likely to trust the event organizers and the overall event environment, thereby strengthening social bonds.

The collaborative efforts required to plan, implement, and communicate safety and security protocols necessitate the cooperation of various stakeholders. This cooperative engagement cultivates relationships and connections, thus nurturing the foundations of social capital.

When participants, especially those with disabilities, perceive that their safety and security needs are comprehensively addressed, they are more likely to engage fully in the event. This inclusive environment promotes a sense of belonging and shared identity, core components of social capital.

For the Indirect Contribution, contribute Community Cohesion, Positive Reputation, Enhanced Networking, and Post-Event Legacy. The presence of well-organized safety and security measures reflects a commitment to the well-being of all involved. This commitment strengthens community cohesion, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose among participants, spectators, and organizers.

Events that prioritize safety and security not only attract more participants and attendees but also garner a positive reputation. A positive reputation attracts volunteers, sponsors, and partners, expanding the event's network and enhancing its social capital.

Harmonizing security arrangements across events is a challenge. Safety and security planning requires coordination with various external agencies, organizations, and local authorities. This collaboration expands the event's network, connecting it with a broader community of stakeholders and enhancing its Social Capital reservoir. It involves collaboration among diverse stakeholders such as government bodies, law enforcement, private security firms, and Special Olympics International's security personnel. The security code emphasizes social capital's role in building trust among participants, volunteers, staff, media, sponsors, and partners. This fosters a secure environment, enhancing the well-being of all.

Effective safety and security practices leave a positive legacy in the community's memory. Communities that associate an event with safety and security are more likely to participate in future events and engage in collective endeavors, further bolstering social capital.

Discussion

The safety and security of World Special Olympics sports events have the potential to enhance Social Capital through both direct and indirect avenues. Social Capital embodies shared values and resources that enable collaborative efforts within a group to effectively achieve common objectives (Lexico Dictionaries n.d.). It can also be conceptualized as the latent capacity to obtain resources, favors, or information through personal connections (Kenton 2004).

The immediate impact of safety and security measures on the Social Capital of World Special Olympics sports events lies in affording participants, spectators, volunteers, and organizers the opportunity to engage in the event without apprehension or harm. This dynamic also nurtures a sense of reliance and collaboration among the diverse stakeholders engaged in the event, including athletes, coaches, officials, sponsors, media, and local authorities. Through the provision of a secure event environment, safety and security measures amplify the quality of social exchanges and relationships that transpire during the event.

The indirect contribution of safety and security measures to the Social Capital of World Special Olympics sports events resides in the amplification of the movement's core values and aspirations—embracing inclusion, acceptance, and unity (Special Olympics n.d.). The global stage of the World Games magnifies these ideals by assembling individuals with and without intellectual disabilities from diverse nations, cultures, and backgrounds to partake in shared competitions and celebrations. The protective shield provided by safety and security measures bolsters this demonstration, averting any disruptions or threats that could compromise the event's positive outcomes. Through these actions, safety and security measures foster the construction and preservation of a shared identity, norms, values, and interdependent relationships and trust among participants and spectators alike (Algan 2018). This ripple effect extends to the broader communities they represent.

In essence, the safety and security measures of World Special Olympics sports events play a pivotal role in augmenting Social Capital through immediate facilitation of trust and cooperation and, more fundamentally, through upholding the movement's overarching principles of unity, inclusivity, and acceptance.

Conclusion

The safety and security measures undertaken in World Special Olympics sports events contribute directly by building trust, promoting collaborative engagement, and fostering inclusive participation. Indirectly, they strengthen community cohesion, enhance the event's reputation, facilitate networking, and leave a lasting positive legacy. These collective contributions amplify the underlying principles of social capital, cultivating an environment of trust, cooperation, and shared purpose within the event context.

The Special Olympics World Games have risen beyond their role as a platform for celebrating the remarkable talents of intellectually disabled athletes. They have emerged as an exemplar of safety, security, and inclusivity, forging a distinct path in the realm of global sporting events. The meticulous and individualized approach taken to ensure the well-being of participants, spectators, and host communities has birthed a singular model of safety. This model not only fosters an environment of unwavering trust and unity across diverse backgrounds but also extends its impact

far beyond the event's duration. It creates an enduring legacy of cohesion and collaboration, reflecting how the Special Olympics' unique dedication to safety can catalyze the development of profound social capital, enriching societies worldwide.

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