


Happiness key in Rio's branding triumph

When Brazil was awarded the rights for hosting the 2016 Olympic Games, analysts were astounded not so much by the fact that Rio de Janeiro came out on top, but that it won so convincingly. Everyone in Olympic circles had expected that the presence of Barack and Michelle Obama in Copenhagen would tilt the voting towards Chicago.

 By [Dr Nikolaus Eberl](#) 13 Oct 2009

Outshining the Obama factor

In the end, Obama was upstaged by the Brazilian president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, whose impassioned speech to the IOC members won over a majority of the members. He was in tears when he realised the games had been awarded to Brazil.

[As Da Silva said](#): "All those people who thought we had no ability to govern this country will now learn we can host the Olympics. The world has recognised that the time has come for Brazil."

Da Silva played heavily on the fact that the people of the hosting nation make all the difference to the success of the games: "[The opportunity is now to extend the Games to](#) a new continent. It's an opportunity for an Olympics in a tropical country for the first time, to feel the warmth of our people, the exuberance of our culture and the sensation of our joy."

Happiness trumps wealth and technology

All four of the finalists - Chicago, Madrid, Rio de Janeiro and Tokyo - had the conditions to offer the necessary infrastructure and security, but Rio (whose nickname is "Cidade Maravilhosa" or Marvelous City "the happiest city in the world according to a survey by *Forbes* magazine," [Rio's mayor Eduardo Paes said](#) prior to the vote by the International Olympic Committee.

Ever since Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers appeared in the 1933 film *Flying Down to Rio*, the world has been fascinated with Rio de Janeiro. Popular perception of the city is infused with images of starry-eyed youngsters dancing into the dusk, backed by imposing mountains and dark sea.

That view has propelled Rio to the top of the list of the world's happiest cities. Famous for its annual Carnival festival, the second-largest metropolis in South America finished first among 50 cities in a recent survey conducted by market researcher Anholt GfK Custom Research North America.

The ultimate youth brand

"Brazil is associated with all these qualities of good humor and good living and Carnival," [says Anholt](#). "Carnival is very important - it's the classic image that people have of Rio, and it's an image of happiness.. *Brand Brazil is packed with images* which are consistently held by millions of consumers all over the world: ecstatic samba dancing at carnival time; the rainforests as endangered as they are exotic; sex, magic, beaches, sport, adventure, music, style, grace, *joie de vivre*... Brazil is the quintessential youth brand - it effortlessly elicits the range and type of associations in young people all over the world which brands like Nike or Pepsi would do almost anything to achieve."

It is hardly surprising that Nike thought it worthwhile to invest over £100m over five years into sponsoring the Brazilian football team, literally buying a share in the equity of Brazil's Passion Brand. In fact, the brand promise for 2016, "[Live Your Passion](#)", (which is about to be launched in dramatic fashion at Rio's Copacabana New Year Party) plays heavily on "the Brazilian peoples' way of getting passionately involved whatever they do", according to Carlos Nuzman, the president of Rio's 2016 Campaign.

Happiness key touch-point for brand equity

Interestingly, two of Rio's predecessors have made the top five happiest cities, the 2000 hosts Sydney at second spot, and the 1992 host city of Barcelona at third. In fact, it is the much vaunted 'Barcelona effect' that turned the once gloomy destination into a global attraction.

Barcelona has the best reputation of all for thoughtful post-Olympic infrastructure planning: a derelict industrial waterfront where the Olympics took place was transformed into a popular esplanade lined with affordable housing, and subsequently a knowledge-industry hub for young creative talents in media, design and information technology.

[The French historian Fernand Braudel wrote](#) that "[h]appiness, whether in business or private life, leaves very little trace in history." But a perception of happiness leaves a strong trace on the balance sheets of cities that depend on conventions, tourism and an influx of talent.

Not only does happiness benefit destinations, but it equally holds rich returns in investment for organisations. Most recently, McDonalds SA won the much-coveted 'Best Company to work for' Award by Deloitte and revealed that its employees' happiness has been a key factor in recording record profits for the South African operation in the current financial year.

Importantly, the award of the 2016 Olympic hosting rights to Rio might spell opportunity for an African city to bring the world's biggest sporting event to the one continent that has never staged it. South Africa might well be stimulated after the 2010 FIFA World Cup to put forward a city, possibly Cape Town or Durban, for hosting the biggest show on earth in 2020.

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