

Leveraging the 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games for organisational capacity building: the case of the UK national governing bodies of sport

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Leveraging mega sporting events for capacity building has been enjoying a growing academic interest. National Governing Bodies of sport (NGB) play a multifaceted and crucial role in the delivery of a successful Olympic Games. NGBs are also central to the governance of sport in each country as they constitute the backbone of National Olympic Committees who are responsible for entering athletes in the Games. Increasingly, NGBs have been under pressure to modernise and become more professionalised through building their organisational capacities (Houlihan and Green, 2009, UK Sport, 2003). In the context of the UK sport system, NGBs have a wider sports development role to grow and sustain participation in their sport and to deliver a community sport participation legacy that draws on the inspirational effect of the London Games.

Between 2009 and 2013 Sport England invests £450 million through 46 NGBs to deliver its strategy Growth, Sustain, Excel. Further £3million are distributed for improving their governance and £16million for coaching development. In relation to London 2012, in 2007 UK Sport established 'Mission 2012', which focuses on the performance of Olympic sport NGBs in three dimensions: athlete (e.g., athletes' performances, development, health and well-being); system (e.g., staff, structures, facilities and processes); and climate (e.g., culture, feel and day-to-day operation of the training environment).

However, very little is known about how the host NGBs has been using the Olympics to build their organisational capacities. Mega sporting events present NGBs with unique opportunities to capitalise on their symbolic and material powers. Strengthening the work of NGBs is of strategic importance as they have been entrusted with managing significant public funds and with providing services to a vast network of sport clubs, members and millions of participants.

Aim

To establish how NGBs have utilized the 2012 Games for capacity development by strengthening a range of core capabilities in an interconnected and holistic manner and who were the main beneficiaries.

Theoretical background

This study defines organisational capacity as an emergent combination of attributes, assets, capabilities and relationships that enable a NGB and its members to perform, develop and self-renew. It builds on the work of

Walters (2007) and MacKinsey (2001) and studies seven core aspects of organisational capacity including:

- i. Organisational skills development (i.e. the capability to act)
- ii. Organisational structure development (i.e. the capability to adapt, self-renew and relate)
- iii. Systems and infrastructure building (i.e. the capability to generate development results)
- iv. Knowledge creation (i.e. the capability to adapt, self-renew and relate)
- v. Human resources development (i.e. the capability to act)
- vi. Governance (i.e. the capability to achieve coherence)
- vii. Aspirations creation (i.e. the capability to generate development results)

Method

Following the conceptualisation of organisational capacity, a 43 item online survey with 54 Sport England funded and other organisations of Olympic, Paralympic and non-Olympic sports was carried out. In total, 25 sports on the Games programme and 14 non-Olympic sports, including 3 Winter Olympic and one disability sports, responded. The survey is being complemented by three in-depth case studies the results of which will be reported at EASM.

Results

The link between the Olympic Games and NGBs is not straightforward because of different sports' histories, size, turnover, organisational structure, clubs network and contribution to the Games. NGBs differ markedly in their approach to leveraging the Games. Eighteen out of 25 Olympic NGBs saw this as a central part of their overall sport strategy. No NGB of non-Olympic sport considered this to be a strategic issue and only three NGBs have taken a more holistic view of the Olympic Games by incorporating their potential into organisations' Whole Sport Plans. The rest of the NGBs have been using mainly single programmes and initiatives to engage with the Olympic Games on a more tactical basis. Although involvement in any programme is better than non-involvement, a fragmented approach limits the possibilities for organisational capacity building. A better understanding of how to leverage mega events such as the Olympic Games will allow sport managers to successfully plan and implement coherent strategies for organisational capacity building.

References

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