
“It’s integrated, it’s inclusive; it’s, well, just right!” Policy and Rhetoric in Measuring Impact of Sporting Events for Athletes with Disabilities

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Synopsis:

This research examines different forms of disability sport events management in terms organisational management and the implications for measuring legacy outcomes.

Abstract:

INTRODUCTION:

In the disability sport community, there has been a longstanding debate surrounding the coordination and management of sport events for persons with disabilities (Legg et. al, 2014). From one perspective, supporters argue that events should be fully integrated where all athletes compete alongside one another. Herein there is an integration of policies, management structures, and legacy planning. Alternatively, there are those who believe that events for persons with disabilities should remain distinct and separate in order to ensure adequate representation within all realms of management, communications, and legacy planning. This position emulates the existing Olympic/Paralympic ‘One Bid, One City’ agreement which has been in place officially since 2001. The trend for all major Games has been a move towards integrated management and planning structures. However, the majority of events remain as distinctive, separate events for athletes with disabilities. This change has important implications for the management of events, stakeholder relationships, and in particular for our interest the legacy outcomes associated with hosting events.

AIM OF THE ABSTRACT/PAPER:

The purpose of this paper is to compare two different events in terms of the interwoven narrative of legacy for disability sport resulting from the policy rhetoric and managerial focus for legacy. This will build upon the existing literature on Games legacy (e.g. Dickson et al, 2014; Gratton & Preuss, 2008; Grix, 2012). While a great deal has been written about the legacy of Olympic Games there is comparatively little on events for athletes with a disability and

the impacts of Games on the disability community (Misener et al., 2013). To address this shortcoming, the two events under study are the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games, and the 2015 Toronto Pan/Parapan American Games. These events were chosen due to their similarity in size and scale, but also because of the nature of the events. The Commonwealth Games has been an integrated event, inclusive of athletes with a disability since the 2002 Manchester Games. The Pan/Parapan American Games run in a similar fashion to the Olympic/Paralympic model where the disability sport event occurs two weeks after the 'main' event. Despite the functional differences in the events, the models for planning the Games have taken on a similar approach emphasising diversity, integration, and inclusion in all policy and planning aspects. For this paper, we focus on how the Organising Committee (OC) framed the event legacy for disability sport, the processes associated with planning these desired outcomes, and the structural implications of said approaches.

METHODOLOGY:

This paper is part of a larger, ongoing study examining leveraging of integrated and non-integrated events. For this particular portion of the study, we draw upon policy and planning documents, and strategic stakeholder interviews (n=31). Given our critical event studies perspective, we employed a rhetorical analysis of the policy and planning documents in order to understand the various texts as an interweaving of multiple overlapping discourses about legacy. This type of rhetorical analysis helps to illuminate the ways in which narratives are shaped to persuade stakeholders of a particular agenda. From here we conducted our interviews with each OC and legacy/leveraging groups (where present) to further examine how the narrative of legacy for persons with disability is being woven into the narrative.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

The results demonstrate the policy and planning rhetoric for each event are designed to persuade stakeholders about the value of the 'inclusive, diverse, and integrated' approaches to managing the event and the positive impacts (i.e. legacy). This rhetoric was also highlighted by top-level management of each OC, emphasizing the political role of senior management in framing a particular message about the impact of the events. However, this discourse is not mirrored in the managerial practices of either OC, albeit distinct differences emerged for each event. In the case of Glasgow2014, an integrated event meant that the disability sport elements were so integrated into the rhetoric that associated legacy plans were all but forgotten. The nature of the embeddedness meant that the OC 'assumed' positive impact for people with disabilities and disability sport. In terms of Toronto2015, the integrated planning approach took time to establish, and appears to be a secondary feature in terms of the managerial structure, albeit forced into the power dynamic due to the nature of the distinct event. The separated emphasis on legacy planning around disability sport is removed from the OC, whereas the legacy plans for the overall Games remain centralized in the OC. This has implications for the viability of legacy, measuring impacts, and speaks to the power structures dictating the 'value' of disability sport in event related outcomes.

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