

EVENT RIGHTS HOLDERS VERSUS HOST NATIONS: WHO IS ACCOUNTABLE, FOR WHAT, AND TO WHOM, FOR AN OLYMPIC GAMES?

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Abstract

Aim of Paper

To produce an Olympic Games, resources are needed, which come in part from the rights holder, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), and from the host nation. While the IOC holds the rights for the Olympic Games and helps the organizing committee prepare its Games operations, the host nation and cities typically provide funding, such as for venues, and contribute to Games-related services. While both sides contribute to making the Olympic event successful, all eyes are on the host country, which raises the question: who is accountable for what, and to whom, for the Olympic Games – the nation who hosts the event or the IOC who holds the rights and dictates how it should be run—and what are the consequences?

Theoretical Background

Accountability is a complex, polysemic concept that can be defined in broad terms as “the relationship between an actor and a forum, in which the actor has an obligation to explain and justify his or her conduct, the forum can pose questions and pass judgement and the actor may face consequences” (Bovens et al. 2008, p. 225).

Accountability includes many dimensions, notably: 1) accountability hierarchy (or administrative accountability), similar to a bureaucratic structure where hierarchy defines to whom you are responsible for your actions (Bovens, 2007); 2) political accountability which centers on the stakeholders, ensuring that the public sector is accountable to stakeholders’ needs (Romzek, 2000); and 3) democratic accountability which focuses on government actions and ensures that the government functions within what is deemed democratic behaviour (Bovens et al., 2008). Though each dimension entails its own specific challenges, political and democratic accountabilities bring additional issues (theoretical and empirical) to be put

under scrutiny.

Methodology

A case study (Yin, 2009) was used to evaluate the accountability structures for the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Winter Games and its organizing committee, VANOC. Fifty-three interviews were conducted before and after the Games among Canadian civil servants, as well as with IOC and VANOC members. Interviews, plus newspaper articles and the four-month Games-time daily diary from the first author, were inductively and deductively coded for accountability forms using ATLAS.TI 6.2 (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Higher-order themes were determined (i.e., results).

Results, Discussion, and Implications/Conclusions

The Canadian Government used a Results Based Management and Accountability Framework/Risk Based Audit Framework as part of its accountability regarding its time, decision-making, and public money used. All civil servants had a clear understanding of their accountability hierarchy (ultimately up to Parliament for the national level, and through city council to the general public for the host cities). The Federal Government was responsible for ensuring the security of all Games (national and international) participants, while the host cities were responsible for municipal services; both were responsible for the use of taxpayers’ money. While the Federal Government’s Games-related accountability structure focused on a government-wide approach, the host cities were focused on the general public for ultimate accountability.

In contrast, VANOC and the IOC had no visible accountability hierarchy, falling more into political accountability, relying on what was necessary for themselves and their stakeholders (primarily TOP sponsors). As an interviewee highlighted, VANOC and the IOC had a partnership relationship with the host nation, not a franchiser-franchisee hierarchical relationship. Because they were using political accountability, VANOC and the IOC placed importance on sponsors’ role and satisfaction. VANOC was also accountable to the sport federations. VANOC and the IOC were accountable for three aspects: the money spent in regards to advertising and promotions on behalf of the sponsors, their brand name, and ensuring the fair play of athletes and judges during Games-time.

The IOC’s rules and procedures seemingly hinder democratic accountability’s emergence. Even though the IOC claims ownership of the Games, it is ultimately the host city and nation who are remembered and held accountable by the public. Moreover, extrapolating from Bovens’ (2007) accountability definition, if the IOC does not face appropriate consequences for its actions (cf. Salt Lake City scandal), can we truly talk about accountability for the IOC? Thus, while the IOC may hold the rights to the Olympic Games, the governments have a much larger operational contribution and responsibility. We conclude that as the IOC gives its rights to an edition of the Games to the organizing committee to prepare the event, it must also allow the host nation’s government to hold ultimate accountability—and therefore part of the rights—for that edition of the Games, in line with public perception, if it is not prepared to follow through with its own proper accountability processes.

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