

EMBRACING THE GAMES? STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS FOR OLYMPIC LEGACY AT THE SUB-REGIONAL LEVEL

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Aim of the abstract/paper

The aim of this paper is to examine the effectiveness of a sub-regional multiagency strategic planning process in leveraging (Kellet et al. 2008) the legacy and benefits from the London 2012 Olympics. Despite the contested nature of the term 'legacy' (Girginov and Hills, 2009) there has been significant investment in planning for the legacy from the London 2012 Olympics at national, regional and sub-regional level, both in and outside of sport. Critical to the maximisation of the proposed legacy from London 2012 was effective collaboration of agencies from different sectors, including health, education, business, culture, the visitor economy, and sport & physical activity. Effective multiagency collaboration was identified in plans by Regional and Local Government agencies as being central to the delivery of national Government's legacy promises, and to make opportunities available to the wider UK population outside of London and its environs. To date the majority of studies of legacy from mega-events focus primarily on the host city and there are few studies of legacy in regions and sub-regions remote from the host city. This paper contributes to the developing literature on leveraging mega-events by examining a strategic planning process for legacy at the sub-regional level.

Theoretical background

There is a growing literature related to sport mega-events, the concept of 'legacy' and the management and leverage of economic and social benefits. These benefits have been conceptualised in terms of changes to "soft" and "hard" structures (Preuss, 2007). A more limited literature considers the type of strategy process (classical, processual or systemic) involved in legacy planning and the effectiveness of that strategy process in achieving these benefits (Bramwell 1997). A complicating aspect of strategic planning in this context is the multi-agency collaboration required to deliver the proposed benefits. Determinants of interorganisational relationships under these circumstances have been proposed to include legitimacy, stability, reciprocity, and efficiency (Babiak, 2007). This paper combines these three themes in the mega-event literature: what benefits were achieved by the strategic planning process; what was the nature of that strategic planning process; and what factors supported or hindered the effectiveness of that process.

Methodology/research design

This paper presents a detailed case study of the strategic planning process of the Legacy Steering Group in a sub-region of the north west of England and the impacts of that process for legacy across various sectors. This

research was commissioned by the Group which provided comprehensive access to documentary evidence and key informants. Three sources provided data for the case study: semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including members of the Group; documentary analysis of public and internal documents; and observation of events and activities coordinated by the Group. Respondent validation was used to confirm initial findings and to seek clarification where necessary.

Broad themes from the strategic management literature were employed as initial orienting concepts to guide the semi-structured interviews. Subsequent analysis of data followed an inductive approach to identify key themes relating to the effectiveness of the strategic planning to achieve the desired legacy framework outcomes and different perspectives of public sector bodies, commercial and educational partners and stakeholders. The production and presentation of a final report of the findings to the Group was used to validate the findings.

Results & implications

Key findings are that the approach achieved clear and tangible benefits with regard to sport & physical activity and culture (within the timeframe of the study) in the build-up to the Games in London. However, the benefits to the visitor economy and business are less obvious. Factors that supported the success of the collaboration were connections with national and regional structures, effective communication within the partnership and externally, individual group members who had enthusiasm and influence, the use of specific events to raise the profile and reputation of the region, and specifically the alignment of goals of the collaboration with those of the individual agencies.

There are clear implications for the extension of any broader legacy beyond 2012 in areas outside of London and the findings can also contribute to better understanding of the problems of the leverage of benefits outside hosting communities and across sectors.

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