

From A Failed Bid To The Golden Decade Of Hosting: Reimagining The Role Of Manchester's Failed Olympic Bid In Institutionalising British Hosting Policy.

Salisbury, Paul¹; Leopkey, Becca²; Tinaz, Cem³; Dowling, Mathew⁴

¹Coventry University, United Kingdom; ²University of Georgia, USA; ³Istanbul Bilgi University, Turkey; ⁴Anglia Ruskin University, United Kingdom

E-mail: ac5156@coventry.ac.uk

Aims of the research

The decision to or not to bid for major sporting events such as the Olympic Games has become an increasingly complicated endeavour in recent years with the escalating costs associated with hosting, increased rivalry from international competition, and wavering support from local stakeholders. As a result, cities are increasingly trying to strategically leverage benefits and legacies from hosting (Chalip, 2006; Leopkey & Parent, 2012) to foster support for the decision to bid and potentially host. Although there is a burgeoning body of literature focusing on successful bids (e.g., Westerbeek, Turner & Ingerson, 2002) and the actual hosting of the events, much less has focused on unsuccessful bids for sport events. This is interesting considering Oliver (2014) suggested that each bid, successful or not, can create a form of legacy for the candidates. As part of a wider research project investigating the possible positive outcomes of failed Olympic bids, this paper aims to develop a theoretical understanding of the development and centralisation of the British strategy for hosting mega-events, using institutional theory to consider how attitudes and approaches to hosting became embedded. The case of Manchester represented the first of a three case-study project aiming to explore how hosting legacies changed over time. In doing so, the research considers the institutionalisation of the bidding process, the possible limitations of the homogenisation of bids and the wider implications of failed bids for such events. More specifically, we evaluate the legacy of Manchester's failed bid for the 2000 Olympic Games in shaping national policy thereafter.

Theoretical background

The paper draws upon institutional theory, particularly the ideas of isomorphism, legitimacy, and institutional work (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2009) to illustrate how a new approach to bidding for sport events within the UK became widely adopted and implemented by organizations within the field. It has been suggested that organizational fields in the early part of their lifecycles exhibit variety in their approaches to dealing with particular problems, however, over time there is a push towards homogenization eventually resulting in isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). We argue that the sport event bidding process, as an increasingly institutionalized and embedded practice, continues to be adopted by cities for legitimacy rather than rational purposes and that bidding processes have been used by actors as a form of institutional work in order to shape the wider institutional context (Lawrence et al., 2009).

Methods

The paper draws upon qualitative data in the forms of semi-structured interviews (approximately 17) and document research (e.g., policy documents, archives, institutional documents and newspapers) that was carried out in the period 2013–2017. Interviews were carried out with stakeholders directly involved in the formation of the bid, the evolution of state-level hosting policy and also those charged with delivering the broad aspects of legacy, both locally and nationally, of the failed bid. Interview data, which was open-coded, is supported by content analysis of documentation released before the event in order to draw up public support.

Results

Manchester's bid for the 2000 Olympic Games, the culmination of the city's 12 year Olympic 'journey', had far reaching implications both nationally and locally. Locally, the failed bid(s) facilitated change within the city in terms of approaches to hosting and also the mechanics of city-level politics. Nationally, the bid represented a watershed moment in terms of UK hosting policy in that it represented the last of the city/sport-led bids for mega-events and instead led to the institutionalisation of hosting at the national scale. In essence, Manchester, as a failed bid city, was instrumental in initiating and supporting institutional change (with respect to the approach towards bidding/hosting) and was partly responsible for the strategic hosting process within the UK sporting and political landscape. From a theoretical perspective, we suggest that the practices of individual and collective actors (organisations) helped shape the institution: in this case the UK hosting strategy.

Conclusion

The findings of the study help us understand the proliferation of the desire to host in the 1990/2000s and also, perhaps, the recent decline in interest which could be attributable to too rigid forms of hosting and also the dilution of the mythical benefits of hosting mega-events.

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