

Managing Volunteering Legacy Of The London 2012 Olympics

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Volunteering is a vital activity in the delivery and success of the Olympic and Paralympic Games where the creation of both tangible and intangible aspects of a social legacy might be anticipated. However, whereas infrastructure development, physical regeneration and economic returns tend to be well documented, this is not the case with social legacies (e.g. Leopkey & Parent, 2012; Preuss, 2015). In particular, to date very little is known about managing mega sport event volunteer programmes, notably in the context of the Olympics. It was identified that more research is needed on characteristics of volunteers, their motivations, experiences, processes and outcomes of volunteering as well as volunteer programmes' strategic and operational design and delivery (e.g. Chanavat & Ferrand, 2010) and the potential of these aspects to influence the creation and delivery of a volunteering legacy.

This study fills these gaps via utilising the London 2012 Olympics as the primary context and its Volunteer programme (the Games Maker) as the case in point. By the time London staged the Games in 2012, volunteering had become a strategically planned and professionally managed activity that was also integrated in the host country's social policy. The concept of the Olympic legacy has also gained popularity and has been framed as a rational process designed to ensure a range of individual and social benefits from hosting the Games. To help understand the processes through which the volunteering legacy can be achieved, for whom, in what circumstances, and over which duration, the study adopted a critical realist evaluation approach (Pawson, 2013).

The main purpose of this research was to explore the management practices used by the Games Maker programme to deliver a desired social legacy. This was carried out within the historical context of sport event volunteering in the UK, such as the XVII Commonwealth Games in Manchester and the volunteer programmes associated with them. Since the Games Maker programme was embedded in the London 2012 Volunteering Strategy, the main Research Question was:

How did LOCOG manage the Games Maker programme to deliver on the promises outlined in the Strategy?

Methods

Longitudinal time horizon and various methods were used to collect a richer and stronger array of evidence to address the research question. Qualitative evidence included various documents, in-depth face-to-face interviews with 16 volunteers (before and 12 months after London 2012) and 5 LOCOG managers and volunteer coordinators (after London 2012), as well as participant observations carried out by the first author before and during the Games. Thematic analysis was used to make sense of the large volume of data and provide foundations for the results and a subsequent discussion.

Results and discussion

The study identified that the key ingredient of the London 2012 Volunteering Strategy was the commitment to use the Games as a way of inspiring a new generation of volunteers and contributing to the development and strengthening of the volunteering infrastructure at national, regional and local levels, thereby leaving a lasting volunteering legacy for the UK. This strategy was developed against a concern that many first-time volunteers can become one-time volunteers, and their volunteering journey would be limited to London 2012. The study analysed a number of factors that influenced the extent to which volunteers were able to transfer their Games Maker experiences beyond the Games. These included personal characteristics and motives, the value volunteers attributed to volunteering activities, quality of management before and during the Games as well as the political will and the organizational support after the Games.

The study concludes that LOCOG's major focus was on delivering an excellent Games Maker Programme rather than generating sustainable legacy. This contributed to the central principle of the Volunteering Strategy being violated, when the volunteering legacy became declared rather than delivered. This can be explained by the scale of London 2012, operational demands and strict deadlines which pressured LOCOG to focus entirely on recruiting, training and managing enough volunteers for the Games. LOCOG was successful in their initial target to recruit and manage 70,000 Games Makers, and was able to use the Games to generate interest among new volunteers. Yet, they neither prioritised, nor had the capacity to make first time volunteers become regular volunteers who would volunteer outside the distinctive context of the Olympic Games and sport.

Overall, this study extends the body of knowledge about social legacies of mega sport events and their governance, and can be highly beneficial for future bids and host cities.

References

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