

Planning For Sustainability: A Case Study Of The Implementation Strategy Of ISO 20121 For The 2018 Commonwealth Games

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Aim of the research

The concept of sustainability has become more prominent in event management since The 2012 London Olympic Games. One of the main legacies from that event was the involvement of the London Organizing Committee of the Olympic Games (LOCOG) in developing the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 20121. This sustainable event management system offers guidance and best practice to help event organizers improve the sustainability of event-related activity. The standard is becoming common practice across the events industry and is central in the delivery of a sustainable 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games (GC2018).

Given the lack of history of ISO 20121's implementation in major sport events, the lack of research investigating its implementation is not surprising. While GC2018 is not the first the major sport event to adopt ISO 20121, it is the first to begin the process right after being awarded the rights to host the Games. Therefore, the event presents a unique opportunity to understand how the standard influences the planning of a major event. Due to the lack of insight on the standard, the paper's exploratory research question is: What are the enablers and barriers to the adoption of ISO 20121 in planning a sustainable event?

Theoretical background

Sustainability has become an increasingly significant issue in the context of planning and staging major sporting events. While sustainability is often used synonymously with the environmental movement, it has emerged as a much more distinct and holistic concept since the turn of this century (Leopkey & Parent, 2012). The standard for what constitutes sustainable event management aligns best with Smith-Christensen's (2009, p. 25) definition of responsible events: "events sensitive to the economic, sociocultural and environmental needs within the local host community, and organized in such a way as to optimize the net holistic (positive) output."

The enablers and barriers of ISO 20121 were examined through an institutional work perspective. Institutional work is a growing area of research within institutional theory that seeks to understand "the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 264). While institutional work is relatively underutilized within the sport management literature, it has begun to gain traction. Within the context of this study, it was a useful tool to help understand the messy day-to-day practices of how sustainability is implemented into a major sport event during the planning phase of GC2018.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was adopted with 30 semi-structured interviews with city officials, members of the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games Corporation (GOLDOC) and other key event stakeholders. The study utilized semi-structured interviews which allowed questions to be theme-specific, but also tailored to the specific context and interviewee since the roles of participants varied greatly. Subsequent data were also gathered from various public and private organizational documents as well as field notes from three sustainability meetings. Data were analyzed through Template Analysis (TA), a type of thematic analysis that incorporates the development of a template used to code data.

Results and discussion

Findings revealed six key themes in relation to barriers and enablers of ISO 20121; *Defining, Construction of Normative Networks, Enabling Work, Embedding and Routinizing, Policing, and Undermining Assumptions and Beliefs*. While the institutional work framework is not based on a hierarchy, it is clear that some forms of work take precedence over others. Strategically defining 'sustainability' in the context of GC2018, could have aided more support from key stakeholders such as State Government.

The study has significant implications from a theoretical perspective. While adding to the burgeoning institutional work literature, the research also adds new insights to this theoretical framework. The current status of research employing institutional work concentrates on intended effects, with analyses based on retrospective accounts embedded in interviews and archival data (Lawrence, Leca, & Zilber, 2013). Studying institutional work as it happens highlights whether efforts are successful in shaping institutions, have no effect on them, or have significant but unintended consequences (Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2009).

From a practical perspective, the findings from this research are prescient as the implementation of the standard has become a requirement for future Organizing Committees (OCs) of the Olympic Games. Yet, outside of major events, the implementation of the standard has been lackluster to date. The findings from this research provide insight as to why acceptance across the sport events industry has not been as ubiquitous as expected, and how to increase awareness of sustainability issues within the industry.

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