

Assessing Olympic Legacy Claims: Evaluating Explanations of Causal Mechanisms and Policy Outcomes

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Aim

The aim of this paper is to unpack the logic of stakeholders in a critical evaluation of two London 2012 legacy programmes (i.e. Sport Maker and CompeteFor), critically reviewing the outcomes sought, and the actions adopted to achieve those outcomes.

Research Background

Olympic impact/legacy analysis as a research area has become a frequently discussed topic in the sociology of sport literature in general and in event management in particular since the 2000s.

Although there are widespread claims in terms of legacy benefits derived from the staging of the Olympic Games, there has been little attempt to identify in detail, and to evaluate, the explanations of generative causes of outcomes. For example, claims that the inspirational effect of staging and witnessing the Games will result in increased participation in sport among the wider population have generally failed to articulate and test causal explanations of the process of achieving desired outcomes. Similarly claims about the economic impacts (positive or negative) of the Games have tended to rely on statistical association of input and output measures rather than on identifying and testing causal accounts. Thus, the two cases we have selected for evaluation relate to using the occasion of staging the 2012 Olympics to generate positive outcomes in relation to sport volunteering, and to generating competitiveness in regional organisations bidding for London 2012 contracts.

Research Method

The methodology adopted in the investigation of each of these case study programmes involved an initial review of policy and promotional literature, and interviews with key stakeholders. Specifically, as for the Sport Makers programme, data were drawn from participant questionnaire surveys (n=94, with a 95% confidence level, the confidence interval is a maximum $\pm 9.2\%$), semi-structured interviews with two key delivery partners (i.e. the sub-regional Sport Makers programme leader, a sub-regional key stakeholder who supported promotion of the programme), and a review of internal policy and external marketing materials (including include key strategic documents at national and regional-levels; marketing and promotion materials, internal reports, and programme leader updates). Regarding the CompeteFor programme, the data sources included three semi-structured interviews with three key stakeholders of the CompeteFor programme (including two Business Leader from the Regional Development Agency, and a sub-regional key stakeholder who supported promotion of the programme). In addition, the regional statistical data collected by the Regional Development Agency was shared by Inspire Leicestershire (including Key Performance Indicators, e.g. number of contract wins and businesses registered and published); the key policy documents included, for example, a London 2012 consultation report for the East Midlands (titled, *Towards 2012*), and Leicestershire strategy for the 2012 Games.

Results and Findings

Through developing logic models for both Olympic legacy programmes, the logic of actions and outcomes, and stakeholders' assumptions about the theory of change and theory of action underpinning the programme were outlined in an explicit manner. In addition, the four tests of process tracing were used, where possible, to identify the necessity and sufficiency of the conditions for achieving intended programme outcomes. Evidence collected from both semi-structured interviews and document analysis suggest that the CompeteFor programme did not work effectively in achieving the outcomes sought. As for the Sport Makers programme, analysis from quantitative and qualitative data revealed that there was weak positive support for claims about the impact of staging the Games on motivation to engage with volunteering; the evidence in relation to the effectiveness and sustainability of activities was such that support for the achievement of longer term outcomes was not apparent.

Conclusion

Through the evaluation of the evaluations of the two programmes, this paper sought to unpack the complexity of the two cases – the logics used by the key stakeholders in seeking to achieve intended legacy outcomes via implementing 'integrated' programmes; through which we revealed that, the difficulty of assessing Olympic legacy claims lay in the failure of those stakeholders to build clear causal chains of Olympic-legacy in the first place, which results in subsequent legacy assessment falls apart, because of the inconsistency between the key stakeholders' view of underlying legacy assumptions and their actions taken to facilitate progress towards achieving intended legacy outcomes.

We therefore argue that transparency regarding evidentiary claims and inferences is critical to assessing Olympic legacy-claims because it can foster open communications between legacy-promise makers, legacy-programme operators, and legacy evaluators; in turn, this process makes sure that there is a consistency in the assumptions made and actions taken. It further reflected the usefulness of adopting process tracing as a strategy for outlining the process of Olympic legacy development, in terms of legacy assumption-making, resource-allocation, action taking and outcome evaluation at the case level.