

2013 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2013)

Leveraging Small-Medium Parasport Events for Community Development

Laura Misener, Western University

Socio-cultural

Thursday, May 30, 2013

**20-minute oral presentation
(including questions)**

Abstract 2013-060

3:25 PM

(Room 410)

Article 30 of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability states that persons with a disability should have the right to participate on an equal basis in community life including recreational, leisure and sporting activities (UN, 2009). The Government of Canada's Annual Report on Disability Issues reported that over half (50.6%) of people with disabilities would like to participate in more cultural and leisure activities in their spare time, but are prevented from doing so by barriers such as the need for assistance, inaccessible facilities and transportation, and the need for specialized equipment (HRSDC, 2011). Hosting sporting events can offer an opportunity to access scarce resources to create more accessible infrastructure (e.g. sport and recreation facilities, transportation), increase supportive services (i.e. coaching, volunteers, programs), and gain access to specialized equipment (e.g. Cashman & Darcy, 2007; Preuss, 2007; Dickson et al., 2012). While Taks et al. (2012) have determined that small-medium scale events are often missing the opportunity to leverage event related resources, Darcy and Appleby (2011) have suggested that parasport events are uniquely positioned to tap into new and existing resources to create enduring infrastructural and social legacies for the local disabled population. This research examines how small-medium scale sporting events are being leveraged to enhance accessible sport/physical activity opportunities and general accessibility to benefit local communities.

The Canadian Federal Government supports "the hosting of sporting events for communities not only as a stimulus to sport development, but also as an economic and community development tool" (Canadian Heritage, 2008). Further, the Ontario Ministry for Health Promotion and Parasport Ontario financially support events as means of enhancing public awareness of the Paralympic/ParaSport movement and disability sport; to provide host communities with an opportunity to make their communities barrier free, and leave a legacy for persons with a disability in the community (OMHP, 2012). Despite these policy objectives of using sport to enhance community accessibility and sporting opportunities for persons with a disability, little is known about how communities actually utilize events to realize these claims. Accessibility is about giving people of all abilities opportunities to participate fully in everyday life. The Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005) lays a framework for the development of standards of accessibility in all areas of community life. These accessibility standards are based in five key areas: 1) customer service; 2) employment; 3) information and communications; 4) transportation; and 5) built environment (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2005). Drawing upon these areas of accessibility, this research examines tactics, strategies, and schemes, used to address the five key areas of accessibility in hosting small-medium scale events. While the hosting of major sport events is often justified based on their economic impacts and tourism benefits, studies have shown that these impacts are often widely over-estimated and not sustainable (e.g., Porter & Fletcher, 2008). Much of this so-called 'legacy' research has focussed primarily on large-scale events such as the Olympic Games, and little research has examined sport events for persons with a disability. Darcy and Cashman's (2008) book on the Sydney Paralympic Games offers one of the few critical analyses of the legacy of parasport events framing the impacts in a similar fashion to that offered by traditional legacy literature. Legg and Gilbert's (2010) recent book on Legacies of Paralympic Games demonstrates sport events do offer the unique opportunity to create a lasting legacy for local communities, however there is a need to look at ways of utilising resources to build on the vast potential of parasport events for enhancing communities. Recent research by Cashman and Darcy (2007), and Legg and Gilbert (2010) theoretically supports the idea that hosting the parasport events have some impact on community infrastructural accessibility and enhancing disability awareness, yet there remains little empirical evidence in the area. There is an even greater lack of research focusing on small-medium scale parasport events and how these might impact community accessibility and parasport opportunities.

This project involves a multiple case study design, which is appropriate given the exploratory nature of the research, and the desire to develop theoretical frameworks from comparing the cases (Yin, 2008). I focus on two events, the 2011 World Sledge Hockey Championships held in London, Ontario; and the 2011 Ontario ParaSport Summer Games held in Sarnia, Ontario. The choice of the events was strategic in that I can compare the leveraging tactics and strategies for a single sport event (Sledge Hockey) and multi-sport event (ParaSport Summer Games). Three of the

2013 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2013)

five possible case study research strategies are used: 1) Document Analyses of Websites, brochures, bid and planning documents, print media, and event reports to understand how these design principles were integrated into the broader areas of accessibility; 2) Key Stakeholder Interviews with key personnel (e.g. members of local organizing committees, planning teams, accessible sport councils, and members of community sport organizations) involved in the planning and staging of the events and related legacy planning; and 3) Direct observations of upgraded and newly accessible facilities, equipment, and infrastructure (as a result of event) to gain a greater understanding of the accessible legacies of hosting parasport events.

People with disabilities are often prevented from participating in sport, recreation, and leisure because of barriers such as the need for assistance, inaccessible facilities and transportation, and the need for specialized equipment (HRSDC, 2011). Given the enactment of the Ontarians for Disabilities Act, communities need to find ways to address their shortcomings in all areas of services accessibility. This paper focuses on the preliminary results demonstrating the ways in which events are being strategically used to access scarce resources to create more accessible infrastructure (e.g. sport and recreation facilities, transportation), increase supportive services (i.e. coaching, volunteers, programs), and gain access to specialized equipment. In particular, the Sledge Hockey organization capitalized on the event opportunity to upgrade facilities, create an educational package for schools about sport and disability, and push the conversation on accessible tourism to the forefront. The event was uniquely positioned in the city to create these opportunities. On the other hand, the Ontario Parasport Summer Games failed to capitalize on this opportunity to create more accessibility, rather relying on the existing and limited infrastructure. This study is a starting point to address Weed and Dowse's (2009) call for empirical evidence of the processes and outcomes of hosting parasport events, and a means to create more effective strategies aimed to create legacies from these events. Given the lack of scholarly attention to disability sport, the results serve as an important foundation for beginning the broader examination of the potential of various sizes and scales of parasport events to create durable benefits for the host communities.

References

- Cashman, R. & Darcy, S. (2007). *Benchmark games: The Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games*. Sydney: Walla Walla Press.
- Dickson, T., Benson, A. M., & Blackman, D. (2012). Developing a framework for evaluating Olympic and Paralympic legacies: looking beyond the fun and games. *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 16(4).
- United Nations (2009). *United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with a Disability*. Available from <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=150>.
- Weed, M., & Dowse, S. (2009). A missed opportunity waiting to happen? The social legacy potential of the London 2012 Paralympic Games. *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events*, 1(2), 170-174.