Olympic Games Legacy Accountability and Governance

Becca Leopkey, The University of Georgia
Milena Parent (Advisor), University of Ottawa

Governance Thursday, May 29, 2014 20-minute oral presentation (including questions) (Conference Center B)

Abstract 2014-010 8:55 AM

The success of the Olympic Games is dependent on the ability to steer the collective action of all event stakeholders to ensure the actualization of goals and optimal use of resources in the delivery of the event, and more specifically the event’s legacy. Although associations between ‘good’/ ‘democratic’ and ‘governance’ has been prevalent in the management literature for over a decade, little research in sport management with the exceptions of Girginov, 2011 and Leopkey and Parent, 2012 has linked the concepts to the sustainable provision of sport event legacies. In order to achieve efficient and effective governance, one must consider the democratic elements associated with this process including accountability, participation, performance, and transparency. This research is part of a larger initiative that examined all four elements of democratic governance in regards to Olympic Games legacies. However since accountability is considered central to democratic societies and a basis for preventing the abuse of power by promoting responsiveness and providing a sense of assurance (Johnson, 2006; Thomas, 2008), this presentation will focus on the critical analysis of the accountability structures and processes associated with the governance of legacy at the Olympic Games.

The concept of accountability is complex, multifaceted, and controversial and as such there has been no agreed upon understanding or approach to achieve optimal accountability. For the purpose of this paper, accountability is understood to be “a social relationship in which an actor feels an obligation to explain and justify his or her conduct to some significant other” (Bovens, 2005, p. 184). Accountability can also be used to ensure organizations behave responsibly and respond appropriately to issues.

Case studies were developed for both the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games and the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games (Yin 2003). The cases were built from archival materials (over 300 documents) including official agreements, bid and hosting documents, as well as web site content and interview data (28 interviews). Data analysis occurred in the form of a content analysis using the qualitative data assessment software ATLAS.ti 6.0 that facilitated the coding and retrieval of the data by allowing the researcher to highlight themes that appeared. The data was first open coded to identify emergent and reoccurring themes relating to the governance of legacy at each of the Games. Following the identification and grouping of initial codes, axial coding was performed to further explore the relational aspects between the coded data (Corley & Gioia, 2004). Themes including the understanding and application of the concept of accountability, usage of accountability measures and mechanisms, types of accountability, and accountability reporting structures and practices emerged.

The findings from this research illustrate how event stakeholders saw accountability as essential and regularly associated it to the delivery of Games objectives including the provision of a sustainable legacy. In addition, a heightened use of accountability measures were linked to the burgeoning cost of delivering the event, the need to show a return on investment of the public dollars used to finance the Olympics, and the increased scrutiny placed on the IOC as a result of unethical practices in previous bid processes. Results also challenge one of the central tenets of governance, the decreasing role of the government in societal matters, by highlighting the prominent roles of the many government-related actors in the delivery of event legacy. Evidence also shows that stakeholders were accountable to multiple audiences including the local community, funders/sponsors, the IOC, and various levels of government. However, it was suggested that this fragmentation of accountability (Rhodes, 2000) could in fact have many consequences leading to the reduction in overall accountability.

In order to prevent the abuse of power by central stakeholders responsible for the implementation and governance of legacy at an edition of the Olympic Games, all stakeholders must be held accountable for their actions through scrutiny, review/analysis, and discipline. This can be accomplished through the provision of formal and informal rules, regulations, controls, and sanctions. However, this is not enough, as the development of a system or an organizational culture that encourages ‘good behaviour’ through a system of shared values and beliefs is also required.
to establish a solid foundation for decision-making. Thus, the behaviour must become institutionalized. If responsibilities are not properly fulfilled, formal controls and disciplinary actions should be imposed on those responsible.

References


