Attitudinal Changes as Legacy of an Integrated Parasport Event

Laura Misener, Western University
David Legg, Mount Royal University
Gayle MacPherson, University of the West of Scotland
David McGillivray, University of the West of Scotland

Diversity Abstract 2015-040
 Thursday, June 4, 2015
1:20 PM
20-minute oral presentation (including questions) (Joliet)

Extensive research has been conducted exploring the immediate impacts on host cities/regions of hosting large-scale events, however researchers have only more recently begun to focus on the long-term impacts of these events (Foley, McGillivray & McPherson, 2011; Preuss, 2007; Smith, 2009; Taks et al., 2014). This has become commonly referred to as event ‘legacies’. Much of this so-called ‘legacy’ research has focussed on large-scale events such as the Olympic Games, with a strong emphasis on economic impacts. Yet, many critical scholars have suggested that the practices surrounding the use of large scale sporting events for civic and economic development hold little value for local communities and local development activities (Misener & Mason, 2009). As a result, there is a growing demand from governments, citizens and sport organizations to show how these events can positively impact community development and broader social outcomes such as empowering disadvantaged groups, enhancing local community infrastructure, and increased community and sport participation (Grüx, 2014). In addition to the recognized dearth of empirical and longitudinal evaluations, is the reality that there is a paucity of research focusing on disability sport and events (Misener et al., 2013) and in particular their potential to create enduring infrastructural and social legacies for the local disabled population. Parasport (events for athletes with physical disabilities) events are considered to present a unique occasion to access scarce resources to create more accessible infrastructure (e.g. sport and recreation facilities, transportation), increase supportive services (i.e. coaching, volunteers, programs), gain access to specialized equipment, and potentially change attitudes about disability (Sherry et al., 2011). In fact, the International Paralympic Committee in section 5.2 of the Handbook specifically identifies four components of legacy to be included in the event hosting: 1) Accessible infrastructure in sport facilities and in the overall urban development; 2) Development of sport structures/organizations for people with a disability, from grass-roots to elite level; 3) Attitudinal changes in the perception of the position and the capabilities of persons with a disability as well as in the self-esteem of the people with a disability; and 4) Opportunities for people with a disability to become fully integrated in social living and to reach their full potential in aspects of life beyond sports (2007). While these objectives are part of the Paralympic agenda, they have received limited attention from the scholarly community, nor are they specifically part of the Olympic Games Impact evaluation guidelines, (IOC, 2014). Further, no research to date has examined other parasport events for their impact upon the stated goals of the Paralympic movement. Thus, this research is focused on addressing this gap. In particular, this paper, which is part of a much larger research project focusing on leveraging strategies and tactics of different forms of parasport events, centres upon one aspect of the third component of the IPC legacy: Attitudes and perceptions of people with disabilities. The aim was to examine the awareness, attitudes, and perceptions of event attendees at the 2014 Commonwealth Games, a large scale integrated event where parasport events are part of the sporting program and medal tally. Thus, we set out to address the notion that the hosting of sport events can be a way of helping change awareness and understanding of disability and thus enhance opportunities for social inclusion (CPC, 2010).

To measure these ideas, we followed the research design of Sherry et al. (2011) who examined spectator attitudinal change following a sport event in relation to homelessness. As Green (2008) indicated, it is impossible to prove the link between sport and social change, yet it is possible to examine the social structures that can help facilitate a more just society. Thus, we employed a modified version of the highly validated Scale of Attitudes Towards Disabled Persons (SADP; Antonek, 1981; Antonek & Livneh, 1988). Respondents rated each item on a seven-point scale, ranging from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree”. The scale is designed to measure attitudes to disability as a group and at a societal level with a specific set of questions relating to a social change event (in this case the sporting event). Factors related broadly to the conceptual framing of social inclusion focusing on human rights, behavioral misconceptions, and societal perceptions, as well as specific attitude domains classified generally as civil and legal.
rights, equity and equality, and destructive social stereotypes (Antonak & Livneh 1988). The survey also included specific sections about awareness and understanding of parasport as related to the event. Members of the survey team approached event attendees on site around venues during the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games to complete tablet based surveys. A total of 795 surveys were completed. Quantitative data analysis was undertaken with PASW (SPSS 20) using descriptive statistics, and analyses of variances (ANOVA) to measure the relationship between the particular group characteristics (e.g. sport attended, prior experience with parasport). In addition to onsite surveys, the research team undertook onsite in-venue observations of events focusing on the integration of the parasport events, descriptions and discourse, information about parasports, and general accessibility. Each member of the research team independently kept field note observations, which have been used to corroborate and add context to the responses in regards to the subset groups based on the various parasports.

Preliminary results of the survey demonstrate that 70% of the respondents felt that the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games did not change their attitude towards persons with disabilities, or disability related issues. However, the global measures of attitudes indicated already quite favourable perceptions regarding disability issues. There were some significant differences between men and women, where females had more positive attitudes towards disability (5.69) than males (5.42). There were also some significant differences regarding awareness of the event being an integrated Games, where those who identified as having a disability had higher levels of awareness (6.17) compared those who did not (5.58). In relation to some of the observations during the event, the results of the survey also highlighted that there was a variation in spectator attitude and awareness that was related to information, marketing, and representation of parasport at the events, which will be discussed in more depth. Given that the key findings here suggest that spectators of the event were aware of the integrated model and had favourable attitudes already, perhaps the notion of attitude change as addressed by the IPC might not be as relevant an area to be focusing on for this population. In this case, there are certainly some moderating factors such as the hosting of the London 2012 Paralympic Games only two years prior, which received significant positive media attention. However, a central question certainly remains about how and whether these positive attitudes translate into positive behaviours regarding disability and parasport.