Toward a Practitioner-Oriented Framework of Event Legacy: A Case Study of Toronto 2015

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Organizers of sport events often point to the legacies to legitimize large public expenditure on events (Hall, 2006; Preuss, 2007). With a large burden of hosting costs ultimately falling on tax dollars, organizers must offer a rationale for spending public money on the event, rather than on other competing public goods such as healthcare, education, or city development (Chalip, 2004). Legacies are the outcomes and impacts of events that are referenced as the basis of this hosting rationale (Hall, 2006).

Although legacy frameworks exist in academia (Preuss, 2007; Gratton & Preuss, 2008), these are seldom shared with practitioners, which has led sport institutions and organizers to define legacies on their own (Leopkey & Parent, 2012). To fulfil the goal of serving practitioners through research (Weese 1995; Irwin & Ryan, 2013), the gap between the existing research frameworks and practice frameworks used in legacy work must first be bridged. The purpose of the present study is therefore to develop a framework that integrates the practical elements of legacies understood by event organizers into the theoretical elements of legacies identified in the academic literature.

Aristotle (1955) made distinctions between techne (i.e., applied technical knowledge of instrumental or means-end rationality), episteme (i.e., basic knowledge in the pursuit of theoretical or analytical questions), and phronesis (i.e., practical knowledge of how to act prudently and correctly given immediate and ambiguous social or political situation; Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). Building on these distinctions, a central proposition of the current study is that researchers have worked with episteme, whilst practitioners have operated with the techne and phronesis formulations of knowledge. As such, legacies will be understood differently by each group; therefore a conceptual framework of legacies that will benefit practitioners is one that is formulated at least in part by the practitioners’ understandings of the concept.

The academic community has commonly accepted Preuss’ (2007) conceptualization, which defines event legacy as “all planned and unplanned, positive and negative, tangible and intangible structures created for and by a sport event that remain longer than the event itself” (p. 211). Cashman (2005) categorized legacies into six types: sport; economic; infrastructure; information and education; public life, politics and culture; and symbols, memory and history. A similar set of legacies was proposed by Chappelet (2006, 2012) and other authors (e.g., Gratton & Preuss, 2008; Kaplanidou, 2012; Li & McCabe, 2013). Thompson, Schlenker and Schulendorf (2013) reviewed these aforementioned definitions of legacy, concluding that the application and assessment of the existing definitions in an actual sport event context are essential to further advance the conceptualization of legacy. The current research is in response to their call and seeks to propose a conceptual framework that combines both practitioners’ and academics’ understandings of the concept. To this end, the following research question guides the investigation: how do organizers conceptualize event legacy?

A case study, which is on going, is being conducted to address the research question. The case analysed is Toronto Pan Am Games 2015 (TO2015), a large, multi-national, multi-sport event that garnered wide media attention. This two week long event precipitated the development of new sport facilities, transport infrastructure, and new event hosting policies at the municipal and provincial levels (Mitchell et al., 2012). TO2015 organizing documents make reference to legacies, and several employees of the host governments and other affiliated organizations had ‘legacy’ in their titles. The common use of the term legacy indicates that this concept is known to practitioners involved in the hosting and organization of the TO2015.

This case is analysed through a methodology proposed by Eisenhardt (1989) for building theory from case study research. This methodology includes eight stages beginning with defining the research question and identifying a priori constructs. The second and third stages are involved with research design: selecting the case(s) and crafting...
data collection methods. These first three stages are complete, as outlined above. The remaining stages of Eisenhardt's methodology involve collecting and analysing data until theoretical saturation is reached. In the present study, these stages started with an exploratory set of interviews (N = 10) that were conducted with organizers and key stakeholders of TO2015, ex ante in the spring of 2015. The data from the exploratory interviews indicate that the respondents were aware of the term ‘legacy’ and had some knowledge of the concept; however, few had a holistic understanding of the scope of legacy, as it is understood in academia. Notable omissions were the temporal and negative elements. The respondents’ conceptualization of the concept was quite different from that of academics.

The findings of the preliminary interviews will be extended through two subsequent phases of data collection and analysis: 1) a document analysis of the TO2015 Bid Book and legacy-related statements and documents, and 2) follow-up interviews with the same respondents from the exploratory interviews in 2015. The documents to be analyzed were written by members of the organizing committee, the City of Toronto and other governments involved in hosting TO2015; therefore they fit suitably inside the constructivist paradigm within which this study is being conducted. These documents will be analysed to: 1) identify the language used to define legacy, 2) identify the categories of legacies mentioned, and 3) pinpoint the elements of legacy. After the first phase of data collection, and before the second, the author will conduct a within-case analysis of the data using a combination of inductive and deductive coding (Denis, Lamothe, & Langley, 2001). For the latter, themes and codes deduced from the academic literature will be used to compare the understanding of the concept within both academic and practice realms. This process is consistent with Eisenhardt’s (1989, p.533) recommendation of “overlap[ing] data collection and analysis.” The findings of the document analysis will allow the author to shape a new conceptual framework for event legacies as a grounded theory.

In the second phase, the emerging framework will be tested through semi-structured interviews with the same organizers of TO2015 that were initially interviewed, to confirm the extent to which this framework captures how these organizers understand event legacy during the post event period. As these organizers were involved in the planning of the event’s legacies, and have had the opportunity to witness the event and its short-term legacies, their perspectives on the legacy framework is appropriate for data triangulation. The interviews will be complete by January 2017. For both document and interview analysis phases, NVIVO software will be used to analyse the data; initially by the author, and then by an experienced qualitative researcher who specializes in legacy. The results of each round of analysis will then be discussed and compared first to each other, and then to the findings of the interviews.

This research will contribute to the sport management discipline in three constructive ways. First, this research is taking an important step in bridging the practice-research gap in the discipline by acknowledging the value of knowledge developed in techne and phronesis (Aristotle, 1966) and presenting a method through which epistemic knowledge—or academic knowledge—can be developed from these. Second, this research contributes to the on-going discourse of event legacy within academia, by offering an alternative conceptual framework of legacies that encompasses both the academics’ theoretical notions and the practitioners’ applications of the concept. This will ultimately contribute to a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon. Finally, this work will contribute directly to practice in sport event management through the proposal of a conceptual framework for ‘event legacy.’ This framework will easily translate between research and practice, as it is formulated from practitioners themselves, then adopted into academia, rather than the reverse. This new framework will provide practitioners with insight on the implementation and evaluation of legacy from their events.