Governance Structures and Adaptation Strategies of the Winter Sport Industry: A Case Study of the 2022 Olympic Winter Games

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The majority of research regarding mega-sport events has examined their impacts on the tourism industry (Fourie & Santana-Gallego, 2011), their legacies (Preuss, 2007), and leveraging of these events (Chalip, 2017). However, little attention has been paid to the shifts in the governance structure of the sport industry related to hosting of mega-sport events. In this project, we examined the case of the co-host city of the 2022 Olympic Winter Games (OWG), Zhangjiakou, China. Specifically, the purpose of our research was to explore how the successful bid for the OWG contributed to shifts in the winter sport governance structure and how it affected the adoption of adaptation strategies to external forces in the winter sport industry in Zhangjiakou. The following research questions guided our project: (1) How did the winter sport governance structure change due to the successful bid for the OWG? (2) How did the new governance structure affect the adoption of adaptation strategies against the backdrop of the OWG?

Adaptation strategies have been widely used in the winter sport industry to minimize the adverse impacts of external forces, such as unfavorable weather conditions (Hopkins, 2014). Sheehan and Ritchie (2005) illustrated that the adoption of adaptation strategies was a wider issue in which multiple stakeholders interact. Thus, it is important to analyze the role that each type of stakeholder plays in the governance structure (Scott & McBoyle, 2007). The governance literature suggests that stakeholders play various roles, including initiators, facilitators, administrators, and recipients (Fox-Rogers & Murphy, 2016). Depending on different roles of stakeholders and relations between them, different governance structures are formed (Lin et al., 2015). Additionally, new adaptation strategies can be undertaken with the involvement of new stakeholders (Müller, 2011).

Method

Thirteen semi-structured interviews with winter sport resort managers, Olympic facility planners, and government officials, and two focus groups with 12 local residents were conducted. Deductive and inductive coding were employed to identify key themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Dependability and creditability were enhanced by having the first author code the transcripts and the other authors comment on the coding schemes (Creswell, 2012).

Results and Discussion

Since the successful bid for the OWG, the Chinese central government has taken over the role of initiator of the sport governance structure that the local government fulfilled before the bid. More robust adaptation strategies were undertaken, such as water diversion to guarantee the water supply for snowmaking. The primary purpose of these strategies was to ensure the success of the OWG. Residents were excluded from the decision-making process of implementing the adaptation strategies. Thus, adaptation strategies did not take social and ecological sustainability into account. These findings contribute to the literature regarding the relationship between sport governance structure and adaptation strategies and have important implications for leveraging and managing mega-sport events. To maximize benefits of mega-sport events, the initiator not only needs to focus on the success of the events but also needs to consider residents’ interests and the sustainability of the sport industry.