Exploring Conflict among Stakeholders in the Governance of Olympic Legacy

Jinsu Byun, University of Georgia
Becca Leopkey (Advisor), University of Georgia

Student Research Competition Winner
virtual synchronous
25-minute oral presentation
Abstract 2020-350
Session: Student Research Competition Winner

Sport event legacy can be conceptualized as intangible/tangible, positive/negative, planned/unplanned structures that remain over the long term from the hosting of a sport event (Preuss, 2007). Leaving a positive legacy has remained a vital concern for event stakeholders resulting in continued attention paid to the event legacy process. The provision of legacies can be considered a governance issue because of the potential conflicts that could emerge among stakeholders who have different values and interests (Girginov, 2011). As such, an inclusive, transparent and accountable legacy governance system is important for ensuring the steering of stakeholders’ collective action.

While meeting stakeholders’ needs is critical in the provision of a positive Olympic legacy, Scheu, Preuß, and Könecke (2019) noted “there are always conflicts of interests, a positive legacy for one stakeholder can be negative for another one” (p. 5). Conflict, “the process, which begins when one party perceives that another has frustrated, or is about to frustrate, some concern of his” (Thomas, 1992, p. 265), can be an important enabler and constrainer in governance. Research has demonstrated how tensions among stakeholders can develop as a result of different understandings and expectations of legacy programs and policies. However, little is known about the development and management of conflict among stakeholders regarding the provision of event legacy and how the emergent conflict may impact the legacy governance system and relevant stakeholders.

This study examined conflict among stakeholders who are involved in the governance of legacy. Specifically, this study drew on the interorganizational/group conflict literature (e.g., Moore, 2014; Wall & Callister, 1995), which informed the key conflict dimensions examined in this study (i.e., conflict drivers, impacts, and management strategies). The following research questions were addressed: (i) what drivers influence the development of conflict among event legacy stakeholders, (ii) what are the impacts of the emergent conflicts and, (iii) how are the various conflict-related issues managed?

A qualitative single-holistic case study design (Yin, 2014) focusing on stakeholders involved in the Jeongseon Alpine Ski Centre, a venue of the 2018 PyeongChang Olympic Games, was developed. The case was built using multiple sources of data, including archival materials (e.g., policy documents, final reports) and interviews. A total of 13 interviews with representatives from key stakeholder groups (e.g., environmentalists, Korea Ski Association) were conducted. Data were analyzed deductively and inductively through three steps: open, axial, and theoretical coding.

The findings highlighted that disparate values among stakeholders arguing over mutually exclusive venue objectives triggered conflict, and escalated due to various drivers (e.g., lack of communication among stakeholders, unclear regulations, varied interpretations of information) throughout the pre- and post-Games phases. Several conflict management strategies (negotiation, communication, and mediation) were employed in this case. Functional (e.g., decreased environmental impact) and dysfunctional (e.g., distrust among stakeholders) impacts of the conflicts were identified. This study proposes implications regarding stakeholder management for event legacy governance practice and directions for future research in this area.