

A Conceptual Framework of Organizational Issues in Mega Sport Events: The Case of 2016 Rio Olympic Games

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Relevance/Significance of the Topic to Sport Management

The current literature highlights several issues affecting organizers and stakeholders of mega sport events (Burbank et al., 2001; Parent, 2008). For example, operational issues are very common in major events and were highly debated last Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games (Chappelet & Parent, 2015). Also, the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games revealed traffic congestion and air pollution threatening public health (Bovy, 2006), while the 2004 Athens Olympic Games faced problems related to air conditioning and temperature control issues (Athens – Official Report, 2004). Recently, 2016 Rio Olympic Games had the second largest concentration of vehicles, industries and polluting source stations (Rio – Official Report, 2015). Problems associated with mega events often have negative effects on different stakeholders and their organizing committee (Parent, 2008). Thus, it is important to know which organizational issues exist in mega sport events, particularly when considering Agenda 2020 and its implications related to the flexibility of Olympic Games management. Thus, the purpose of this study was to identify and classify different organizational issues in 2016 Rio Olympic Games.

Review of Relevant Literature

Once Howard Chase coined the term issues management in 1976, the term was embraced by the business community and adopted in both the academic and business worlds almost immediately. The issues management theory is often seen as a proactive application of strategic business planning, of getting the house in order by scouting the terrain and by having a strong defense and an even stronger offense (Heath, 2002). According to Zyglidopoulos (2003), an organizational issue can be defined as: (a) a controversial inconsistency based on one or more expectational gaps, (b) involving management perceptions of changing legitimacy, (c) occurring within or between different views, and (d) implying an actual resolution that creates significant, identifiable present or future impact on the organization. It is suggested in the literature that there are a variety of issues faced by organizing committees (Parent, MacDonald, & Goulet, 2014). Common issue categories include power/politics, planning/organizing, financial, sponsorship, ticket sales, human resources, leadership, facilities, cultural events, tourism, weather, media, public support, relationship and/or negotiations, legacy, and local infrastructure (Burbank et al., 2001). Ratnatunga and Muthaly (2000) sought to simplify the long list of issues by proposing three issue categories including logistical, business and infrastructure issues. More recently, Parent (2008) identified 13 issue categories associated to the organizing committee's evolution (what issues are predominant in which mode or phase) and contributions to event's success. In this sense, identifying the various issues in mega sport events and collecting different stakeholders' opinions will allow managers to better understand their tasks, while providing a common foundation for researchers to examine in greater depth specific issues and their interrelations. Therefore, an appropriate issue framework must consider the organizing committee and stakeholders.

Conceptual Framework

The organizational issue models proposed by Burbank et al. (2001), Ratnatunga and Muthaly (2000) and Parent (2008) were important contributions to the sport management literature, but new problems are frequently arising in the new international scene highlighting the need to update former models. As noted by Chappelet and Parent (2015), there is an emerging need to study the sport events hosted by Global South, with focus on the quality and working environment of such events.

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Based on a systematic review on interdisciplinary literature conducted during 10 months, a total of 82 documents were analyzed to create our proposed conceptual framework. In addition, semi-structured interviews, with 4 organizing committee members and 4 volunteers of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, were conducted to further understand the issues raised in the literature and pinpoint other organizational issues linked to this mega sport event. This conceptual framework provides an expanded new list of 12 issue categories comprising 91 specific issues. These categories are: politics (e.g., lobbying, political instability, pressure groups), media and visibility (e.g., media coverage, information management, and destination image), financial issues (e.g., budget, costs control, external support), planning (e.g., structure, operational and divisional plans, making decision, and leadership), operations (e.g., accreditation, food and beverages, transport, medical, security, and logistics), infrastructures (e.g., sport facilities and equipment, accommodation, hospitals, subway and bus network), human resources (e.g., dropouts, management expectations, motivation and responsiveness), negotiation and ethics (e.g., relationship management, negotiation with partners, contracts, codes of conduct, match-fixing), legacy (e.g., employment, business opportunity, knowledge transfer, education, maintenance facilities), marketing (e.g., ticket sale and prices, distribution, secondary market, general advertising, production of materials, sponsorship management, ambush marketing, licensing and media rights), social issues (e.g., involvement, social housing, urban regeneration, social responsibility and inclusion and participation), and environment issues (e.g., pollution, waste management, climate, degradation and deterioration, environmental sustainability).

Through this proposed framework, three new issue categories and 48 specific issues were included in the current conceptual framework that were not mentioned in prior frameworks. These include aspects related to marketing, environmental and social issues that affect the organizing committee hosting the 2016 Rio Olympic Games.

Discussion/Implications/Future Directions

This study employs a mainly descriptive approach to provide organizing committees and stakeholders with greater understanding of organizational issues, while also brings an instrumental aspect by using issues management to classify different issue types. This conceptual framework aims to contribute to a better understanding of the complex nature of the international large-scale sport events such as the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. Through this framework, we confirmed issue categories highlighted in previous studies, and added 3 new issue categories related to marketing, environmental and social issues. The proposed categories represent an initial step toward future empirical studies aiming to find ways for increasing effectiveness and efficiency in the planning and management of mega sport events.

With this proposed framework, we expect to contribute for increasing the IOC and OCOG understanding of the organizational issues linked to the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, and aid at optimizing the management of mega sport events in general. By understanding different types of organizational issues, managers will be in a better position to plan and organize mega sport events. This framework may also contribute for increasing the knowledge of organizing committees on how to strengthen the relationships with different stakeholders. For example, this framework may be important to aid in managing expectations or preventing the occurrence of issues during the events.