Examining Knowledge Transfer of Event Legacies and Leveraging Strategies: The Cases of Vancouver 2010 Olympics and Toronto 2015 Parapan Games

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Prior sport management scholars have examined knowledge transfer in a variety of settings, such as ambush marketing and mega sport events (Ellis, Parent, & Seguin, 2016; Parent, Kristiansen, & Houlihan, 2017). Although the importance of knowledge transfer has been acknowledged in previous Olympic Games’ contracts, scholarly understanding of how to enable and improve knowledge transfer within the context of event legacy and/or leveraging is lacking. To address this gap, the objective of this study is to examine the knowledge transfer of event legacy and leveraging strategies through the cases of the Vancouver 2010 Olympics and the Toronto 2015 Parapan Am Games. This study is built on Nonaka’s (1991) theory of organizational learning to explore how the Vancouver 2010 Olympics and Toronto 2015 Parapan Games Organizing Committees (OCs) learned and transferred knowledge of event leveraging and governance, through processes of socialization, internalization, externalization, and combination.

This study builds on prior knowledge transfer theories to present a model for sustainable organizational forms. Knowledge can be classified as explicit or tacit. Explicit knowledge, referred to as the know what, is transferable through formal, systematic language into documentation, while tactic knowledge, or the know-how, is “highly personal and hard to formalize” (Nonaka, Toyama, & Konno, 2000, p.7), and can sometimes only be learned through practice. Nonaka (1991) offers four distinct types of learning that coincide with tactic and explicit knowledge: 1) socialization, where tacit knowledge is converted to new tacit knowledge; 2) combination, where explicit knowledge is acquired to form new explicit knowledge; 3) externalization, referring to the process of articulating tacit into explicit knowledge; and 4) internalization, where individuals internalize explicit knowledge into their own experience. As both organizations from Vancouver and Toronto have been cited by organizers as the model for event legacies, organizational learning allows for an understanding of knowledge transfer within their respective processes.

Primary data source of this study included archival documents and interviews. Key documents utilized for the cases included media articles, IOC documents and reports, and website information. Thirty-one semi-structured interviews were also conducted with key members of legacy organizations and relevant stakeholders. We used Creswell and Poth’s (2018) data analysis spiral to assist the coding process.

Within this research, knowledge was transferred within previous events, OCs, the IOC and individuals. While external leveraging organizations acquired and conferred information throughout the event process, it was truly the individuals within these organizations that transferred and managed knowledge. Our findings show that socialization was the most prevalent form of learning observed throughout Vancouver and Toronto. The frequent interaction between past and current Games host cities was noted as one of the most valuable forms of knowledge transfer. The opportunity to interact with individuals with similar experiences led to valuable creation of tacit knowledge regarding the challenges and opportunities afforded by hosting an event. The process of internalization was also frequently cited by legacy and leveraging organizers of Vancouver and Toronto Games as a crucial mechanism. Specifically, legacy organizers took explicit knowledge from previous cases and created new tacit knowledge through their experiences.