Information Management and Business Review (ISSN 2220-3796)
Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 1-6, Sep 2024

Strategies For Sustainable Sports Events: Understanding the Stakeholders Challenge for Collaboration

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Abstract: Ensuring sustainability in sports events is a complex challenge wherein stakeholders play a pivotal role. This study synthesizes existing literature to comprehensively explore the multifaceted dynamics of stakeholder collaboration in sustainable sports events. The diverse interests and goals among stakeholders, identified as a primary challenge, underscore the complexity of achieving sustainability. Drawing on insights, this study emphasizes the need for a shared vision to align stakeholders and mitigate conflicts arising from disparate priorities. Communication and coordination issues are critical challenges, necessitating transparent, two-way communication channels to build trust and enhance collaboration. Power dynamics pose another significant challenge, emphasizing the importance of balancing power among stakeholders to ensure fairness and inclusivity. Long-term engagement requires continuous engagement, collaborative decision-making, and ongoing communication to sustain stakeholders' interest throughout the event's lifecycle. Social inclusivity contributes to the legacy of sustainable sports events, fostering social cohesion, cultural exchange, and promoting human rights. This study aims to provide nuanced insights into stakeholder collaboration challenges, offering practical strategies for event organizers and contributing to ongoing discourse on sustainable sports event outcomes.

Keywords: *Stakeholder collaboration, sustainable sports events, communication issues, power dynamics, long-term engagement, social inclusivity.*

1. Introduction and Background

In the realm of sports events, ensuring sustainability poses a significant challenge, with stakeholders being pivotal in this endeavor (Mair & Smith, 2021; Todd et al., 2017) These stakeholders, involved in organizing and supporting events, play a crucial role in making them not only exciting but also environmentally and socially responsible (Todd et al., 2017). This diverse group includes sponsors and local communities, each with their own ideas and goals (Lau et al., 2017). Sponsors may prioritize attention and profits, while local communities focus on the event's impact on their area. Despite differences, there's an opportunity for everyone to find common ground and work towards shared goals (Wondirad et al., 2020). Effective communication is vital when different people collaborate. Achieving a shared understanding can be challenging, emphasizing the need for clear and open communication to build trust, manage expectations, and enhance mutual understanding (Wondirad et al., 2020). Communication acts as a bridge, connecting everyone involved and smoothing collaboration. Power dynamics come into play in collaboration, influencing decisions and resource allocation (Towner, 2018). Imbalances can lead to problems, making it crucial to balance power among stakeholders to ensure fairness and equal participation (Tiew et al., 2015). In this collaborative initiative, inclusion is a key theme, ensuring that everyone, from athletes to marginalized groups, feels part of the event (Nyanjom et al., 2018). Including diverse voices enriches events and fosters a sense of belonging. This study aims to understand challenges in stakeholder collaboration for creating sustainable sports events. By consolidating relevant literature, the study aims to identify practical strategies and suggestions derived from past research, highlighting the inherent complexities and nuances within these collaborations. A comprehensive understanding provides valuable insights into historical challenges, guiding the current landscape and informing strategic interventions for future research endeavors.

2. Literature Review

The literature review delves into the intricate landscape of stakeholder collaboration in sustainable sports events, acknowledging its pivotal role in achieving long-term viability and positive impacts. Addressing the challenges inherent in this collaboration, we explore diverse interests and goals among stakeholders, emphasizing the complexity arising from conflicting priorities. The subsequent discussion on communication and coordination issues underscores their significance in fostering effective collaboration, with an emphasis on transparent, two-way communication channels as essential tools. The exploration of power dynamics sheds light on the potential imbalances that may impact decision-making and overall sustainability goals, necessitating a focus on fairness and inclusivity. Long-term engagement emerges as a crucial consideration, highlighting strategies to sustain stakeholder interest throughout the event's lifecycle. Additionally, the literature review explores the transformative potential of social inclusivity, promoting diversity, and fostering a sense of unity. By synthesizing these key elements, the literature review provides a comprehensive understanding of stakeholder collaboration challenges, paving the way for strategic interventions in sustainable sports events.

Diverse interests and Goals between stakeholders: Leopkey and Parent (2015) has suggested stakeholders in sports events often have diverse interests and goals, which can lead to conflicts. As noted by Leopkey and Parent, (2015), these differences in priorities among stakeholders pose a significant challenge to achieving sustainability in sports events. Sustainable sports events involve a spectrum of stakeholders, including sponsors, local communities, event organizers, and governmental bodies, each driven by diverse interests (Leopkey & Parent, 2015). Sponsors often seek visibility and a return on investment, emphasizing the commercial aspects of the event. In contrast, local communities may prioritize the social and environmental impacts, seeking positive contributions to their well-being and the environment. The coexistence of these varied interests adds layers of complexity to the collaboration dynamics. Achieving sustainability requires a delicate balancing act, as stakeholders' disparate goals may initially seem incompatible (Parent, 2016). For instance, sponsors focusing on branding and financial returns may inadvertently overlook the potential social and environmental repercussions of the event. Conversely, community groups may perceive certain sponsor interests as conflicting with the event's broader sustainability objectives.

One strategic approach to address these divergent interests is to create a shared vision (Parent, 2016). This involves identifying common goals and values that align stakeholders toward a unified purpose. By fostering a shared understanding of the event's sustainability objectives, stakeholders are more likely to transcend their interests and work collaboratively towards a mutually beneficial outcome. Leopkey and Parent, (2015) posit that the process of aligning interests and values is instrumental in bridging gaps between stakeholders. Identifying areas of convergence facilitates the development of a collective vision for sustainability, mitigating potential conflicts arising from divergent priorities. This shared vision becomes a guiding force, promoting a sense of ownership and commitment among stakeholders, which is pivotal for successful collaboration.

Communication and coordination issues among stakeholders: Abdullah et al., (2016) and Towner (2018) has suggested one of the most common challenges is communication and coordination among stakeholders. Miscommunication or lack of coordination can lead to inefficiencies and conflicts among stakeholders. Effective communication is identified as a linchpin for successful collaboration in sustainable sports events (Parent et al., 2015) The multifaceted nature of sports events, involving various stakeholders such as organizers, sponsors, local communities, and governmental bodies, necessitates seamless communication channels. Miscommunication or a lack of coordination can lead to inefficiencies, and conflicts, and, ultimately, compromise the sustainability goals of the event.

Transparent and two-way communication is particularly emphasized as a means to build trust and manage expectations (Parent, 2016). Trust is foundational in collaborative efforts, and transparent communication contributes significantly to its development. Regular and open communication channels foster trust among stakeholders, creating an environment conducive to effective collaboration. It also helps in resolving conflicts promptly, preventing them from escalating and jeopardizing the overall success of the sports event.

Transparent communication not only builds trust but also enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of the

event management process (Parent, 2016). Well-informed stakeholders are more likely to align their actions with the broader sustainability goals. Regular updates on progress, challenges, and successes foster a sense of collective responsibility, contributing to a more coordinated and impactful sports event.

3. Power Dynamic Challenges in Stakeholder Collaboration for Sustainable Sports Events

Navigating power dynamics is a crucial aspect of stakeholder collaboration in sustainable sports events. (Abdullah et al., 2016; Tiew et al., 2015) highlight that imbalances in influence among stakeholders can lead to unequal distribution of benefits and decision-making power, posing challenges to the event's overall sustainability objectives. Power dynamics can result in certain stakeholders exerting more influence over the event, leading to an unequal distribution of benefits (Tiew et al., 2015). This inequality may manifest in terms of financial gains, marketing opportunities, or decision-making authority. For instance, sponsors or major financial contributors may hold significant sway, potentially overshadowing the interests of local communities or environmental groups.

The unequal distribution of power can significantly impact decision-making processes related to sustainability initiatives. Stakeholders with more influence may prioritize aspects that align with their interests, potentially sidelining broader sustainability objectives. For instance, decisions related to environmental conservation efforts, social inclusivity, or economic development may be skewed in favor of powerful stakeholders' preferences. Abdullah et al., (2016) propose that balancing power among stakeholders is crucial for effective collaboration in sustainable sports events. This involves ensuring that all stakeholders, regardless of their influence or financial contributions, have a voice in decision-making processes. Balancing power is not only an ethical imperative but also a practical strategy to prevent the domination of powerful stakeholders, ensuring a more equitable and inclusive event management process. Abdullah et al., (2016) further emphasize the importance of promoting fairness and inclusivity in power dynamics. By actively involving diverse stakeholders in decision-making processes, event organizers can ensure that the benefits of the sports event are distributed equitably. This approach contributes not only to the ethical conduct of the event but also enhances its overall sustainability.

Social Inclusivity in Stakeholder Collaboration for Sustainable Sports Events: Stakeholder collaboration can also promote social inclusivity. By involving diverse stakeholders such as local communities, athletes, fans, and marginalized groups, sports events can become more inclusive and accessible thus producing promising sustainable sports events. This can enhance social cohesion, cultural exchange, and the promotion of human rights (Ziakas, 2012, 2015). Social inclusivity fosters social cohesion by bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds (Cicognani et al., 2020). When local communities, athletes, and fans feel included in the event, it creates a sense of unity and shared experience. This inclusive atmosphere contributes to the overall success of the sports event and enhances the positive impact it can have on society. The involvement of diverse stakeholders in sustainable sports events facilitates cultural exchange (Cicognani et al., 2020; Ranasinghe & Pradeepamali, 2019). Cultural inclusivity allows for the celebration and recognition of different cultural backgrounds and traditions. This promotes mutual understanding and appreciation among stakeholders, contributing to a richer and more meaningful event experience. Social inclusivity in sports events aligns with the promotion of human rights (Misener & Mason, 2006). By actively involving marginalized groups and ensuring equal opportunities for participation, event organizers contribute to a more just and equitable society. This approach emphasizes the importance of fairness and respect for the rights of all individuals involved in or affected by the event.

Long-term engagement among stakeholders in sustainable sports events: Maintaining long-term engagement of stakeholders is another challenge. Stakeholders may lose interest or disengage if they do not see immediate benefits or if their concerns are not addressed (O'Brien & Chalip, 2008, Bazzanella et al., 2019). This can affect the sustainability of the event and its long-term benefits to the community. Thus, engaging stakeholders throughout the event management process can also enhance collaboration (Misener & Mason, 2006. Lau et al., 2017). This includes involving stakeholders in decision-making, problem-solving, and evaluation processes. Stakeholder engagement can increase their commitment and satisfaction and ensure that their interests and concerns are taken into account.

Engaging stakeholders throughout the event management process is identified as a crucial strategy to address the challenge of sustaining interest (Misener & Schulenkorf, 2016; Ranasinghe & Pradeepamali, 2019). This involves involving stakeholders in decision-making, problem-solving, and evaluation processes. Continuous engagement ensures that stakeholders feel actively involved and invested in the event's success. Long-term engagement is facilitated by building a sense of ownership among stakeholders (Misener & Mason, 2006; Sánchez Cañizares et al., 2016). When stakeholders feel that their input and involvement contribute to the event's success, they are more likely to remain engaged over the long term. This sense of ownership can be fostered through collaborative decision-making processes and ongoing communication that highlights the impact of stakeholders' contributions.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The multifaceted nature of stakeholder collaboration in sustainable sports events necessitates a comprehensive understanding of key elements such as dialogue, communication strategies, power dynamics, long-term engagement, and social inclusivity. In this discussion, this study delves into these critical aspects, drawing insights from existing literature to unravel the complexities and provide strategic guidance for event organizers. Recognizing the challenges and opportunities embedded in stakeholder collaboration, our exploration aims to offer a nuanced perspective that not only addresses current concerns but also contributes to the ongoing discourse on achieving sustainable outcomes in the realm of sports events.

Central to managing diverse interests is an ongoing dialogue among stakeholders (Parent, 2016). Continuous and open communication fosters understanding and appreciation of each stakeholder's perspective, laying the groundwork for collaborative problem-solving. Regular dialogues provide a platform for stakeholders to express their concerns, negotiate priorities, and collectively shape the direction of the sustainable sports event. This emphasizes the complexity inherent in collaboration, where creating a shared vision, aligning interests, and fostering ongoing dialogue are pivotal for navigating these complexities and fostering collaboration toward sustainability (Parent, 2016).

The literature suggests several strategies for effective communication in the context of sustainable sports events. Regular stakeholder meetings, newsletters, and dedicated communication platforms can serve as conduits for keeping all parties informed (Towner, 2018). Moreover, the adoption of technology, such as event management software, can streamline communication processes, ensuring that stakeholders have real-time access to relevant information. The coordination between local authorities, event organizers, and security agencies underscores the importance of transparent communication channels in streamlining plans and responsibilities, addressing critical challenges in sustainable sports events Towner (2018). A strategic focus on transparent, two-way communication is pivotal for building trust, managing expectations, and fostering collaboration.

Achieving sustainability in sports events requires a commitment to long-term equitable collaboration. This involves consistently reassessing and adjusting power dynamics, ensuring that the collaborative process evolves to reflect changing circumstances and stakeholder dynamics. A commitment to fairness in power distribution contributes to the overall success and sustainability of sports events. To mitigate power imbalances, sustainable sports events should actively incorporate the input of various stakeholders in the decision-making process (Ranasinghe & Pradeepamali, 2019; Lau et al., 2017). This includes seeking perspectives from local communities, environmental advocates, sponsors, and other relevant entities. By considering a broad range of voices, event organizers can make more informed decisions that align with sustainability goals while minimizing the risk of disproportionately favoring powerful stakeholders. (Misener & Mason, 2006. Lau et al., 2017) suggest that implementing strategies for ongoing engagement is essential for maintaining stakeholders' interest. This could include regular stakeholder meetings, feedback sessions, and mechanisms for continuous communication. By actively seeking and responding to stakeholder input, event organizers demonstrate a commitment to ongoing collaboration. Long-term engagement contributes directly to the sustainability of sports events. Stakeholders who remain engaged are more likely to support and advocate for sustainability initiatives. This ongoing collaboration ensures that the positive impacts of the event extend beyond its conclusion, creating a lasting legacy for the community and the broader environment.

Measuring and evaluating inclusivity is an essential aspect of ensuring its effectiveness in sustainable sports events (Leopkey & Parent, 2015). Event organizers can implement metrics and assessment tools to gauge the level of inclusivity and identify areas for improvement. This ongoing evaluation process allows for adjustments and refinements to better align with inclusivity goals. Social inclusivity contributes to the legacy of sustainable sports events, inspiring future events to prioritize diversity and equal participation. By involving diverse stakeholders, promoting social cohesion, fostering cultural exchange, ensuring human rights, creating accessible environments, engaging stakeholders for inclusivity, and measuring its effectiveness, event organizers can contribute to a more inclusive and impactful sports event with a lasting legacy.

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