

## *Chapter 4*

# **SPONSOR RIGHT PROTECTION AT MEGA-EVENTS: EXAMPLES FROM THE LONDON 2012 OLYMPIC GAMES**

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Most academic literature relating to Olympic sponsorship and sponsor media suggests that while sponsors have a stake in their association with the event itself, it can be more efficient to associate themselves with the host destination (Brown 2000a, 2000b; Chalip 2000b, 2004; O'Brien 2006; O'Reilly, Heslop, and Nadeau 2011). However, sponsors' domination of the Olympic Brand can limit the opportunities of other stakeholders and businesses to capitalise on the event. Unlike smaller-scale sport events, where sponsorship-related marketing activities are less controlled, Olympic sponsorship has over the last few decades witnessed a growing complexity in protecting sponsors' rights and their monopoly of association with the event and its host destination. This chapter explores some of the key issues related to Olympic sponsorship with examples provided from the London 2012 Olympic Games. The first section of this chapter focuses on the

protection of the Olympic brand by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (LOCOG). The second section outlines some examples of strategies used by sponsors to monopolise their use of the Olympic brand and restrict associations made with the event and destination by other stakeholders.

This chapter is part of a broader qualitative empirical research project undertaken at Bournemouth University in the UK. The research explored multi-stakeholders' perspectives of leveraging the London 2012 Olympic Games for long term outcomes and the limitations of such leverage. The study was underpinned by an interpretivist mode of enquiry (Guba and Lincoln 2005) to understand the context of a phenomenon that is still an under-researched area. For this purpose, the authors applied purposeful sampling as a dominant strategy (Flick 2009; Walliman 2011). The lead researcher conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with key informants who represented organisations that were stakeholders in the London 2012 Olympic Games. All informants held managerial or organisational roles related to the 2012 Games. The majority of the findings for this chapter came from 8 of the 20 interviews, with informants from VisitBritain, UK Trade and Investment, London and Partners, Tourism Alliance, the Olympic Research Centre, 2012 Team South-West, the London Business Network, and EDF Energy.

Overall, interviews lasted up to 90 minutes. Once all data were collected, the authors engaged in a thematic analysis process. Data were organised and broken down into manageable units and then synthesised (Spencer, Ritchie, and O'Conner 2003). NVivo 10 was used to assist the steps of analysis in indexing and coding (Walch 2003; Bazeley 2007). For this chapter, stakeholders' perspectives were critically discussed and augmented by previous academic literature with an immersion of both examples discussed with those stakeholder-informants and the reflections of the authors. Two tables are provided as summaries of key issues and examples explored in this chapter.

## **OLYMPIC BRAND PROTECTION BY IOC, LOCOG AND THE SPONSORS**

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) became a multi-billion dollar international corporation after being an amateur-run Olympic Organisation (Séguin and O'Reilly 2008). This transformation was grounded on the partnership between the IOC and Olympic sponsors, where the vital component of this partnership is that the IOC offers every sponsor exclusive category rights (O'Reilly, Heslop, and Nadeau 2011). The IOC instructed local organising committees to support sponsors' rights, which resulted in the foundation of a business-to-business relationship between Olympic sponsors, the rights-holder (IOC), and the local organising committees (O'Reilly, Heslop, and Nadeau 2011). More than operating sports, and in order to protect and maximise the return on investment for its partners, the IOC became obliged to adopt business principles via, for instance, strategic brand management (Bodet 2013). With this in mind, an issue with the London 2012 Olympic Games was that the IOC restricted the use of certain words or phrases to protect sponsors who had paid to associate their products with the Games. It became almost impossible for various stakeholders, small businesses and some suppliers of the event to be involved (see Table 4-1). Keeping this in mind, Farrelly et al. (2006, 344) referred to the IOC as a "property" who agrees to take the "lion's share of responsibility" to protect the use of the Olympic brand by only its sponsors. The IOC provided a guideline on how the Olympic branding should be used within the event media to prevent any ambush marketing.

Although some other organisations had a stake in the hosting of the London 2012 Olympic Games, the brand protection guidelines provided by the IOC made it difficult for those UK stakeholders to showcase what they had to offer. The London 2012 Olympic Games were considered as a catalyst for showcasing the country worldwide for various outcomes including economic, socio-cultural and environmental outcomes (Jakobsen et al. 2013), but the association with the Games was limited to sponsors. Companies that were suppliers of goods or services to the Games, but that were not official sponsors, were limited to only referring to their

involvement with the Games as part of a broad list of projects they were working on and could not explicitly advertise their London 2012 related work (discussed by UK Trade and Investment informant). Official sponsors had protocol agreements with their legal teams to alert competitors if their promotion could be contravening ambush marketing rules (BBC 2008). EDF Energy, for instance, worked with the Organising Committee (LOCOG) to write to competitors of the major supplier partners to warn against ambush marketing and to remind them of their obligations and the relevant rules (EDF informant). In practice, sponsors were proactive and ready to react to anything extreme from a competitor (see Table 4-1). Louw (2012) referred to such methods as tactics in which the law has been abused to protect the private commercial gains of mega-events' sponsors at the expense of the rights of everyone else. Indeed, EDF could defend the right of the company by emphasising the "good job" they were doing for the Games to other major partners and suppliers who might have attempted to use ambush marketing (EDF informant added). However, as the "good job" they did with the use of the London 2012 brand bought the legitimacy as a sponsor, other non-sponsor suppliers, competitors or stakeholders involved with the Games could claim legitimacy by referring to their "good job" as well. Here, three interesting questions could be asked. First, why were non-sponsor stakeholders not allowed to do so, assuming the good job they did for the Games gave them a similar claim to legitimacy? Second, why could only sponsors use the law to protect their commercial gains? Third, are those non-sponsor suppliers, competitors or stakeholders really ambushing what sponsors do?

One example was British Gas, which had sponsored British swimming but not the Olympics (see Table 4-1). As this associated British Gas with an "Olympic" sport, while they were allowed to use this association in the run up to the London 2012 Olympics, they were prevented from doing so during the period of the Olympic Games (discussed by EDF informant). Another example was GDF Suez, which had a contract to build an energy plant on the Olympic Park (GDF Suez 2013). The Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) held a press conference during which GDF's work at the Olympic Park was mentioned. This was observed by EDF as crossing the

line into being ambush marketing as opposed to legitimate promotional activity (argued by EDF informant). In both of these examples, it is notable that the companies involved were direct competitors for EDF in the UK energy market.

**Table 4-1. Protecting Sponsors’ Rights – Example Summary:  
EDF Energy vs Competitors**

Strategy	Tactic	Challenges	Examples	
Protecting Olympic Brand	Brand protection guidelines	Only sponsors could associate themselves with the Games	IOC’s and LOCOG’s restrictions on the use of Olympic branding Companies that won contracts (non-sponsors) to supply the Games could not mention their supply work to the Olympic Games	
			Sponsors’ legal teams	Other companies were warned about ambush marketing, even the suppliers
				<i>British Gas</i> (non-Olympic sponsor: sponsor of British swimming) Association with British swimming that was forced to stop as it is an Olympic sport
				<i>GDF Suez</i> (Supplier but non-sponsor: contractor to build an energy plant for the Olympic Park) GDF’s and ODA’s press conference mentioning the work was considered as ambush marketing by EDF

The business-to-business associations built through the control of IOC, LOCOG and sponsors are where images that customers hold can be transferred through that association which can positively impact the sponsor, the Games organiser and the host city (Gwinner and Eaton 1999; O'Reilly, Heslop, and Nadeau 2011). Previous literature on event leveraging (e.g., Chalip 2000b, 2004; O'Brien 2006, 2007) showed other benefits (e.g., tourism and business) of the association for the host city or destination through sponsors' marketing alliances with destination marketing organisations. Nevertheless, one can argue that examples from the London 2012 Olympic Games may question previous literature in terms of the "marketing alliance". While sponsors are highly protected by the IOC, LOCOG and their legal teams, they create their own marketing agenda. Other salient stakeholders can still claim legitimacy based on the "good job" they did, but struggled to capitalise on the Olympic Games to promote themselves. In the light of this section, the next section discusses how the monopoly of sponsors has had a negative impact on both the tourism and business legacy of the London 2012 Olympics from various stakeholders' perspectives.

### **SPONSORS' MONOPOLY: IMPACTS ON NON-SPONSOR STAKEHOLDERS**

The result of the IOC's and LOCOG's regulations with London 2012 to protect sponsors from ambush marketing was that sponsors monopolised the Olympic brand and logo. Opportunities for other stakeholders became limited to capitalise on the fact that the country was hosting the Olympic Games. Tourism and business stakeholders in particular wanted to showcase the whole of the country for long-term tourism and business benefits. Indeed, some stakeholders such as VisitBritain attempted to adopt an approach of a marketing alliance, as suggested in previous literature (e.g., Brown 2000a, 2000b; Chalip 2000a, 2000b, 2004; O'Brien 2006, 2007), where the impact can be on sponsors, event organisers and the host city and country (see Gwinner and Eaton 1999; O'Reilly, Heslop, and Nadeau 2011).

However, London 2012 sponsors adopted their own advertising and reporting agenda for their own commercial gains forcing their conditions on marketing allies when they overlapped with, or clashed with, other stakeholders' marketing (see Table 4-2). British Airways (a sponsor) and VisitBritain (not a sponsor) had strategic co-branding activities based on a "win-win" situation (example provided by VisitBritain informant). Other stakeholders expressed their concerns about the impact of sponsors' monopolies on showcasing the country for tourism and business. In terms of marketing, the idea that sponsors used the Olympics as an opportunity to exclusively market their own products is a problematic concept because the Olympics were not funded solely by private sponsorship, but also by taxpayers' money (argued by an Olympic Research Centre informant), and the use of public funds in a way that provides private companies with monopolies is very questionable. An additional example was added by an Olympic Research Centre informant: the purchase of tickets to Olympic events could only be made through one payment method (a Visa card, see Table 4-2).

Furthermore, the monopoly of advertising was observed not only in relation with the London 2012 event *per se*, but also during the Torch Relay (see Table 4-2), an example observed by the 2012 Team South-West informant. This observation supports the view that the commercial benefits from advertising were limited to Olympic sponsors. No one could advertise in association with the Torch Relay except for sponsors, once the torch was coming past Stonehenge or other attractions, Coca-Cola started setting up the billboards along the route, saying for instance "Coca-Cola: sponsor of the Torch Relay...or sponsor of the Torch for the Games...or London 2012" (informant quoted). Obviously small businesses along the torch route were not allowed to get involved.

This view that small businesses were not able to associate themselves with the Games and the Torch Relay was echoed by the Tourism Alliance informant; for instance, a pub owner along the way could not mention a Sunday lunch and invite people to watch the torch go past the pub because this means getting a commercial gain (see Table 4-2). All examples provided above raise a serious concern of how small businesses could gain benefit

from being associated with the Games, Torch Relay and/or other aspects related to the Olympic Games without taking away from them as they are actually paying the large amounts of money to put it on in the first place as tax payers. That was one of the issues that the Tourism Alliance had a long series of debates with LOCOG on allowing small businesses to advertise (Tourism Alliance informant added). In this case, stakeholders who aimed to showcase the whole of the country for tourism and business opportunities were prevented from doing so. While the Torch Relay route covered the whole of the country, not allowing small businesses and tourism attraction operators to capitalise on the fact that the torch was passing their doorstep prevented them from showcasing their destination (questioned by both Team South-West and Tourism Alliance informants).

Unsurprisingly, it was not only small businesses who struggled with the restrictions on advertising and marketing, but also major stakeholders such as London and Partners who had to showcase London for tourism and business as part of their role (see Table 4-2). With London being the host city of the Olympic Games, even London and Partners was restricted in what the organisation could do in its marketing. It had no rights to use the Olympic logos or anything else related to the Games. Therefore, as an industry and salient stakeholder that wanted to promote packages to London around the Games, it was impossible to work with hotels, tourist attractions and other stakeholders due to the severely limited ability to promote the destination's attractions and advertise the fact that London was going to host the Games. Only LOCOG could do that with the sponsors (argued by London and Partners informant).

This supports examples discussed above and indicates a lack of coordination between sponsors of London 2012 and destination marketers, as well as the role that LOCOG played in limiting opportunities for stakeholders to collaborate with sponsors. Sponsors associated themselves with the Olympic brand to market their products, while at the same time London and Partners and other stakeholders could not promote the host city/country using the Games. Sponsors such as EDF went further and bought the rights to associate themselves with tourism attractions (see Table 4-2). As a sponsor, they were flexible with respect to the ways in which they



associated themselves with different aspects of the Games and controlled advertising using London's tourism attractions, thus limiting London and Partners' promotion possibilities. In support of the above concern by the London and Partners informant, an example was outlined by the EDF sponsorship informant showing how the sponsor used London's attractions to advertise its products. As a global energy leader, and by associating itself with the Games, this sponsor wanted people to understand that the electricity they produced was low-carbon. The sponsor built a strategy that was based on people who came to London during the Olympic Games, clearly if they had tickets they were attending their events, but while they were in London most tourists would visit one or more of London's attractions, many of which are located on the banks of the River Thames. EDF's outdoor and posters advertising strategy was described in grandiose terms as "owning the river". This strategy involved strategic positioning on the main railway stations that were interchange stations for tourists on the way to the Olympic Park and/or tourism attractions in London. EDF bought in media auctions of the advertising at Waterloo Station, had a very dominant position at Westminster Station and focused particularly on the "EDF Energy London Eye". Furthermore, EDF marketers used a branded EDF boat to conduct river tours and had advertising deals with other attractions on the river and had displays inside and on the exterior glass of City Hall, also right by the river (outlined by EDF informant).

This indicates the control of EDF on London's major tourism attractions. This meant that destination marketers such as London and Partners were under the dominance of sponsors such as EDF. The EDF informant's examples above explain the dominance strategy that was built on the consumers' need for low-cost energy. Therefore, a critical look at the examples above shows that EDF was associating with the sustainability aspect of the Olympic Games as well. EDF targeted UK and international Olympic tourists via the existence of its advertising in the major locations around London. However, whilst this sponsor referred to its strategy as "owning the river", it was also associating itself with the attractions in London by using this marketing technique. EDF did not only use the London 2012 branding, but also used London attractions for private commercial

gains instead of having a marketing alliance with London and Partners. This made it almost impossible for destination marketing stakeholders in London to capitalise on the Olympic Games.

It was not only in London that this occurred. Similar examples were observed in Weymouth and Portland (the host of the sailing events). UKTI as a stakeholder was promoting the UK for businesses. However, for Weymouth and Portland, UKTI organised a Business Pavilion and hospitality programmes to showcase the region for business activities and to encourage future business relationships. As a non-sponsor stakeholder of the Olympic Games, banks such as HSBC or Barclays could not support a business meeting or any hospitality programme because LOCOG was arranging all sponsorship activities through Lloyds Bank as it was one of the London 2012 sponsors (see Table 4-2). Such restriction in this example goes beyond sponsoring the Games and using the Olympic brand. Only Lloyds as the principal banking sponsor of LOCOG could support non-sponsors' and other stakeholders' hospitality programmes; which means in addition to sponsors' private corporate hospitality programmes where they showcase their products, they were using opportunities from non-sponsor stakeholders' hospitality programmes that attempted to showcase the country for businesses for example (outlined by UKTI informant).

Furthermore, sponsorship associations can be made with positive aspects of the Olympic Games that counter negative stories related to a sponsor's businesses. BP's sponsorship, for instance, was discussed by the London Business Network informant. BP had committed to sponsor the London 2012 Games before the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, but then used the sustainability and environmental aspects of the Games to associate its brand and advertising alongside a very green and environmentally friendly focus (see Table 4-2). Deloitte, an accounting and consulting firm, was one of the main sponsors of the Games. Deloitte committed to give exclusive consultancy activities associated with their sponsorship to LOCOG, ODA, and to all the organisations involved in running the event. It was echoed by the London Business Network informant that this was an area where LOCOG and the other organisations had a need

and thus Deloitte stepped into it and provided the service as part of their sponsorship, but also exclusively benefited from the association.

While some of EDF's sponsorship raised the profile of the company by association with tourism attractions along the River Thames, the main strategy they employed was "helping the Games shine brighter" (discussed by the EDF informant). By providing the electricity services for the Games such as the timing equipment and buzzers that are crucial in many sports, as well as lighting and all other electrical equipment, the message that EDF was trying to get across was that their expertise at providing electrical products and supplying electricity was on a par with the elite performance demonstrated by Olympic athletes. As a result, the brand awareness of EDF in the UK dramatically increased between 2008 and 2012. The Games gave EDF an exclusive platform for engaging with key UK stakeholders and customers by demonstrating EDF's capacity to innovate and their high levels of expertise in managing energy consumption. As a mega sport event, EDF's exclusive use of the London 2012 brand helped in broadening potential consumers' understanding and awareness of the scope of EDF's activity beyond France and the UK. EDF now have international bases and activities in China and other European countries for example (added by the informant).

This section has shown that some of the stakeholders in the London 2012 Games raised some concerns over sponsorship of the Games. There were concerns that the joint private and public funding of the Games led to taxpayers' money being spent on activities that provided private companies with monopolies over aspects of the Games' organisation and marketing. There were concerns that the wider economic benefits of hosting the Olympics are constrained because any company that is not an official sponsor is unable to take advantage of marketing opportunities, and therefore that the benefits of the Games cannot be leveraged. There were concerns that sponsors were able to dominate local attraction and tourism branding to the possible detriment of other local attractions; and there were concerns that the sponsors' need to associate themselves with particular aspects of the Games was to the detriment of other wider impacts of the Games.

**Table 4-2. Sponsor Monopoly and Challenges for Non-Sponsor Stakeholders**

Sponsor Control	Tactic	Challenges	Examples
Sponsor monopoly of advertising and marketing	Sponsors' extensive focus on marketing their product to control various aspects related to the Olympic Games	Public investment/ taxpayers' money facilitating the sponsors' monopoly	Monopoly on purchasing of Olympic tickets (Visa): controlling public investment by using taxpayers' money which does not necessarily result in benefiting wider society
		SMEs, salient stakeholders and destination marketers prevented from marketing	Small businesses along the Torch Relay route could not market in relation with it because they would be getting commercial benefits Destination marketing organisations such as London and Partners could not promote packages to London around the Games through their advertisements UKTI could not invite banks other than Lloyds to their hospitality programmes when they are showcasing the UK for business
		Sponsors owned, or branded, tourism attractions	EDF association with London ("own the river" strategy) Exclusive media auctions and dominant promotion positions at railway stations and on local public transport near tourism attractions Giving a name to London Eye (EDF Energy London Eye) EDF branded river cruise along the River Thames Attractions could not use the event in their marketing unless they were sponsored by EDF
		Sponsors' associations with aspects/needs of the Games	BP: association with sustainability and environment aspect to shift negative perceptions of their disaster in the Mexican Gulf Deloitte: association with consultancy needed by ODA and LOCOG EDF: "helping the Games shine brighter"

As a result of the sponsors' domination of various aspects of the Olympic Games, their products, services and brand awareness can shift positively in the domestic and international market. However, the justification for sponsors' involvement was the need of LOCOG to run and improve the Games through their services. Without the sponsors, the Games would need even more public funding, and might be prohibitively expensive. The Games became subject to sponsors' guidance in an "ethopolitics" process (see Bulley and Lisle 2012, 2014). Bulley and Lisle (2012, 2014) discussed McDonalds's similar situations with the London 2012 sponsorship; while the volunteers did a good job in welcoming London 2012 visitors, their training process was functioned through "ethopolitics" because their behaviours and values were influenced and directed by a commercial company that looks for commercial benefits. Indeed, the approaches of sponsorship dominance discussed in this chapter combine the dominant commercial force of sponsors in line with Bulley and Lisle's (2012, 2014) terminology. EDF owned the Games by using strategic locations such as train stations and "owning the river" including London's attractions by "helping the Games shine brighter". BP adopted its London 2012 strategy to counter negative perceptions from an environmental disaster in another part of the world, shifting perceptions by associating with the "green" services the company was providing for the Games.

## **CONCLUSION**

The current chapter has highlighted a number of issues regarding the relationship between the IOC, LOCOG and the London 2012 sponsors to protect sponsorship rights. Perhaps the key issue is that the exclusive business-to-business approach adopted by the IOC and Olympic sponsors changes the nature of the Games and its benefits. From the discussion in this chapter, it is clear that sponsors were building their brand awareness in the UK and international markets. This chapter supports the idea that sponsors became the controller of various aspects of the Olympic Games where their focus is merely on their own private commercial gain. This position refutes

previous literature on leveraging sport events (see Brown 2000a, 2000b; Chalip 2000b, 2004; O'Brien 2006, 2007), where they all suggest forming a marketing alliance with destination marketers to generate mutual benefits. Non-sponsor stakeholders interviewed for this chapter argued that London 2012 sponsors were not considering mutual leverage of benefits with destination marketing organisations and other businesses. The data shows that the sponsors' focus on leveraging their private commercial gain by having a monopoly over all the various aspects around the Olympics left other stakeholders with limited options for their marketing and media campaigns. Overall, non-sponsor stakeholders consider this situation as a "problematic" one, particularly given that the organisation of the Olympic Games involves taxpayers' money which in turn was used to facilitate sponsors' monopoly of the event.

While much of the justification for hosting large, or mega-events is often that while the event organisers may not be able to make a profit from running the event, and need public subsidy, the wider economic benefits from hosting such events tend to greatly outweigh the cost to the event organisers. The IOC's funding model attempts to capture part of the wider economic benefits through sponsorship funding, and hence counter arguments that criticise the public cost of staging such events. The concerns raised by stakeholders in this chapter imply that it is possible to take this funding model too far, and that sponsorship regulations restrict the wider economic benefits that mega-events bring.

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