

Mega sport events and the potential to create a legacy of sustainable sports development: Olympic promise or Olympic dream?

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Abstract

In 2008 the UK government launched its policy document on London 2012 legacy development: *'Our Promise for 2012'* (DCMS 2007). This outlines five key 'promises' including: 'Make the UK a world-leading sport nation' which embraces the ambition to inspire 1 million more people to take part in more sport and 1 million more people to become physically active.

In investigating the capability of the UK to deliver on this 'promise', this paper initially provides an overview of both past and ongoing research to inform a discussion around the often quoted, but seemingly unsubstantiated, claims about the positive sports development potential of hosting a sport mega-event (Coalter 2008, Weed et al 2009, Veal and Frawley 2009). There is however some consensus that to create a legacy there needs to be a wider strategic programme involving a range of stakeholders (Chalip 2006, Coalter 2008, Weed et al 2009). Girginov and Hills (2008) suggest that a host country will therefore probably never be able to fully attribute any legacy of an increase in sustainable sports development, to the staging of an event. They propose that the host country should therefore focus its attention on understanding how the concept of legacy is being constructed, the processes involved and whether this can deliver sustainable sports development.

The paper builds on this recommendation by outlining some detail of my current research and its early findings drawn from working with a number of National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) to investigate and assess their contribution to the delivery of London's 2012 legacy 'promise'. I conduct an overview of my research proposal, which starts at the level of policy makers and works through to those involved in the delivery of programmes. It proposes the use of a realist evaluation framework (Pawson and Tilley 2007) to explore the 'effects, inner workings, connections and operations' (Coalter 2007 p36) of the current delivery plans. In the final phase of the paper, I report on an analysis of some of the available documentation associated with the London 2012 Games legacy 'promise' and briefly reflect on the initial series of interviews with senior management of both NGBs and leading sport development organisations such as Sport England and the Central Council of Physical Recreation.

Keywords: mega-events; legacy; sustainable sports development; National Governing Bodies of Sport; realist evaluation

Introduction

In July 2012, London will play host to the 30th Olympic and the Paralympic Games (London 2012 Games). Through a network of communications, thousands of spectators will be joined by millions more people across the globe taking part in the world's largest sporting event. Past experience indicates that over the period of the four weeks a breath-taking drama of passion, excitement, success and tragedy will unfold leaving a wealth of memories for both participants and the audience.

However, sport mega-events are now expected to deliver much more than a limited period of elite sporting competition. Legacy development (and moreover *positive* legacy) has become a watch word as host cities and international sports organisations look to justify vast sums of public sector investment when there is a whole range of national social issues also demanding financial support (Preuss 2006, Preuss and Solberg 2006). The concept of legacy is not a new one, indeed Cashman (1998) notes, "Almost every Olympic city [mega-event], since the Games were revived in 1896, has some form of legacy" (p.183). What is supposedly new is the planning for legacy.

In 2002, one of the world's leading sport organisations, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) started framing the concept of legacy which has increasingly become a feature of its vocabulary and that of its current President, Jacques Rogge. Rogge's predecessor, Juan Antonio Samaranch entered the Presidency in 1980 following a difficult decade for the Olympic movement, including the USA boycott of the Moscow Games, the crippling debts left to the city of Montreal from the 1976 Winter Olympics, and the terrorist attack at the 1972 Munich Olympics. The Olympic movement was, according to Booth (2003), nearly bankrupt, staging of the Games hampered by political interference, corruption and ethical malaise (Booth 2003) and public interest at an all time low. It required Samaranch to lead a "quiet revolution and unique business turnaround" (Payne 2005 p3) that has resulted in coverage of the Olympics being one of the most coveted and expensive of broadcasting rights and the opportunity to be associated with the 'rings' attracting sponsorship from many leading global brands.

However, the nature of this growth has attracted criticism with the suggestion that the Olympic Games have become the "antithesis of Olympism" (Warmley 2004), and that the IOC has become a "transnational corporation that has increasingly exploited young athletes, labour and aspirations for its own aggrandisement and profit" (Lenskyj 2000 p 195). In the face of such criticism, the IOC has been keen to promote a refocusing on the wider role of the Olympic movement, Olympism, its values and the positive legacies created by the Olympic Games. The IOC Charter was amended in 2007 to include a reference to the creation of positive legacies and sport for all¹. This notion was further developed by Rogge (2008 p5) in his address to the Pierre de Coubertin lecture where he indicates that the selection process for staging the Games takes into account the "passion

of the people and the government of the host city to create a positive legacy’ and that ‘a successful city does its best to articulate and share its vision with the world’.

A legacy of sustainable sport development – a promise or a dream?

Using the early findings of my on going research and personal experience of involvement in the development of sport legacy programmes associated with mega events ², this paper looks at the potential for a sport mega event to leave a legacy of sustainable sports development with a specific reference to the London 2012 Games. A central tenet to the bid was its focus of creating a positive legacy for young people both in the UK and around the world. In addition, the UK government, despite the lack of empirical evidence to support its ambitions, promised to inspire the country’s people to become more active.

To inform this debate, evidence is sought from both studies associated with the Olympics and Paralympics and from those focusing on other sport mega events such as the FIFA World Cup and the Commonwealth Games. An early conclusion is that legacy is not an automatic outcome of mega events and requires the involvement of a range of stakeholders from policy makers to those at the delivery level working with the community. It is noted that the UK is the first host country to purposefully set out to deliver a legacy of increased sport and physical activity participation. A proposal is therefore made that a careful study of both the lead up and aftermath of the London 2012 Games is warranted so that we can learn about the impact of this process with the potential to inform future event organisers.

Weed et al (2009) cite examples from Australia, New Zealand and the USA where politicians have proposed that elite athletic performance has the ability to inspire increased sporting participation. In addition, publicity material and the candidature file for the London 2012 bid promised that staging the Games would increase sports participation for all ages and abilities (BOA 2004, London 2012 2005). However, although it may be felt that sporting mega-events inspire grass roots sports participation, the evidence for a sports development legacy from such events is negligible (Coalter 2004, 2008, Murphy and Baumann 2007, Veal and Frawley 2009). In Australia, host to the 2000 Olympics, figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics demonstrated lower figures for participation in physical activity or sports in 2000 than in 1999 and 1998, and research carried out pre and post the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester also reflected no impact on sports participation (Brown and Massey 2004). This evidence is also supported by a government commissioned report Game Plan (DCMS 2002, p75), which concluded that ‘it would seem that hosting events is not an effective, value for money, or method of achieving [...] a sustained increase in mass participation’. By way of contrast, Sust (1995) found a positive impact on junior sports participation following the Barcelona Games, although it is recognised that the study sample was very small. Wang and Theodoraki (2007) focusing on the Beijing Games, demonstrate a rise in mass sports participation in the Qingdao region. In this case, the authors point to the initial comparatively low levels of mass participation (compared to countries of the western world), and post the decision to bid for the Games, the change in emphasis by the

government to actively promote community sport as well as the focus on elite sporting success.

Coalter (2004), suggests that the assumption that sporting mega-events will lead to general increases in participation is based on flawed theories of media impact, role models and behaviour change. Despite the annual observation of an increase in numbers of people playing tennis during and immediately after the extensive media coverage of Wimbledon, this increase is not sustained. A study in New Zealand of the impact of the publicity surrounding the 1992 winter and summer Olympics showed minimal evidence of any 'trickle down effect' (Hindson et al 1994). Moreover both a Scottish study of the effect of the much publicised curling Olympic gold medal on sports participation (sportsotland 2004) and further analysis of the 26% of people who were reported to be inspired to do more sport by the success of Team GB athletes at Athens in 2004 (Sport England 2004), indicated that the success had most impact on those already engaged in sport and wanting to do more. Hindson et al (1994) also looked at the impact on sports club membership of the general publicity surrounding the 1992 Summer and Winter Olympics and concluded that demonstrations of sporting excellence by elite athletes may dissuade new or would-be participants through fear of incompetence. Hogan and Norton (2000) in a long term study of the relationship between funding and participation in Australia showed that over a twenty year period, elite success in sport increased but so did the number of people who were totally sedentary. This led them to conclude 'Expectation that success of sporting heroes as role models inspires others to participate in sport and physical activity may have run its race. Perhaps it wasn't even a legitimate starter...' (p 216). The relationship between role models and impact on sports participation is shown to be complex. In a wide ranging review of literature, Payne et al (2002) identified a number of factors that determined the relative success of role model programmes in changing attitudes and behaviour. This included duration of the programme, gender of the target group and perceptions of self efficacy. It was also noted that role models are not always positive; they can be seen to promote negative aspects of sport such as drug abuse, abuse of officials and feigning injury. A further suggestion is made that elite participants, as role models, may be too remote to influence behaviour (Weed et al 2009) which supports the finding by Hindson et al (1994), that in clubs which had athletes competing in elite events, the impact on members was more tangible.

Weed et al (2009), in reviewing the evidence base for developing physical activity, sport and health legacies from the London 2012 Games, suggest that different strategies need to be taken with different groups based on their current levels of active participation. Existing or lapsed participants in sport may have their interest rekindled or further stimulated by the *demonstration effect*, in which people are inspired by former or current elite athletes. The caveats to this approach are that it only relates to current or past sports participants, it may result in an overall neutral effect due to activity switching and some people may be put off by the inaccessibility of elite sport. A second group of people are those who have not considered participation and for whom the 2012 Games may be a catalyst to consider some form of physical activity or informal sport for perceived social or community benefits. This *festival effect* relies on the event being promoted and recognised as a celebratory event; a festival that transcends sport and engages with local

communities and their cultures. Smith and Fox (2007) use a case study of the Manchester 2002 NW Social and Economic SRB programme to demonstrate that one way to promote a festival effect is to develop an event-themed legacy programme, as opposed to event-led. This programme involved seven 'games themed' projects such as the Commonwealth Curriculum Pack for schools, Let's Celebrate (a minority ethnic group arts project) and Passport 2K (activities in sport and arts for 11 -18 year olds) all using the *spirit* of the Games as the motivation for engagement rather than being reliant on the event itself.

The most widely reported claims of event related increase in sports participation relate to England's Rugby World Cup victory in 2003. Figures released at the end of 2004, obtained from Rugby Football Union (RFU) member clubs demonstrated an overall 16% rise in participation and 32% in the 7-11 year age group (Barton 2008) However, although the 2003 victory was further publicised through the nationwide Sweet Chariot Tour, it was also preceded by the launch of the RFU's IMPACT strategy and pre the 2007 World Cup it launched 'Go Play Rugby'. This example supports the idea that to use a sports (or any other) mega-event to create legacy, it needs to be part of wider programme to *leverage* opportunities (Chalip 2006, Kornblatt 2006, Coalter 2007, 2008, Weed et al 2009). In the words of Girginov and Hills 'legacies are created not given' (2008 p 2091). There is some consensus that advance planning and additional activities are required to maximise the benefits of mega-events (Hindson et al 1994, Coalter 2004, 2008, Sport and Recreation Victoria 2006, Wang and Theodoraki 2007, Potter 2008, 2009, Weed et 2009), however there are three caveats for this approach.

The first is the need for community involvement in legacy development. Reports of the Manchester 2002 NW SRB social and economic legacy programme demonstrate that activities which lacked evidence of local need or community engagement reflected poor uptake and sustainability (Newby 2003, Potter 2008). However this trend was shown to be reversed in activities linked to the Euro 2005 legacy programme where local communities were involved in both the planning and delivery of activities (Potter 2008). The second is the need for the public to hold positive perceptions about the event if they are to be used as basis to develop further activities. "If the population holds negative perceptions of, or attitudes toward a major sports event, the potential to use an event for the development of physical activity or sport, or the promotion of health (or indeed for any other purpose) is likely to be considerably reduced, if not negated" (Weed et al 2009 p 29). Studies of the social impacts on the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics (Deccio and Baloglu 2002) and the Sydney Olympics (Waitt 2003, 2006) conceptualise this process through the social exchange theory and also suggests that the perceived benefits can be directed to other groups such as the potential for the impacts of sports mega-events to target young people. This notion is of relevance to the development of legacy for London 2012 where emphasis has been placed on the benefits being felt nation-wide and focused on young people (BOA 2004, DCMS 2007, 2008a). The third is the timing of the programme and an understanding that the opportunities to leverage a positive sustainable legacy need to be maximised in the pre event period (Smith and Fox 2007, Potter 2008). Robinson (2006 p26) in discussing the legacy of Salt Lake City in 2002, summarises this well as an event providing a "long sunrise and short sunset" where levels of media and

public interest (and consequently the event's potential impact) decline rapidly after the event's closing ceremony.

A general conclusion from the evidence available is that just hosting an event is not enough to leave a legacy of sustainable sports development (Weed et al 2009) and that there is a need for all stakeholders to engage in the process of leveraging legacy. It is also suggested that to promote a sustainable legacy, activities should be linked to wider strategic development programmes which in turn makes it difficult to quantify the specific event effect. In exploring the link between London 2012 and sports participation, Girginov and Hills (2008) suggest we will probably never know for certain how the games affect sports participation and what we need to understand is how the concept of legacy is being constructed, the processes involved and whether this can deliver sustainable sports development.

The London 2012 Games

The London 2012 Games make an interesting starting point to develop this approach as it is the first time that the host country has purposefully set out to deliver a legacy of increased sport and physical activity (Weed et al 2009). It is also a classic example of the contrast between rhetoric and research.

Publicity material produced in association with the bid claimed that the Games would deliver a step-change in the nation's physical activity and that an already sports-mad nation would get fitter and healthier (Vigor et al 2004, Coalter 2008). This was supported by a DCMS commissioned report which concluded, "By hosting the Olympics in 2012, London expects to achieve a significant sporting and cultural legacy. The sporting legacy would take a number of forms: it would enhance and/or accelerate investment in sporting facilities and it would contribute to increased participation in sport" (PWC 2005 p21).

This ambition has been maintained through the UK government's policy document on London 2012 legacy development: *'Our Promise for 2012'* (DCMS 2007) which outlines five key 'promises' headed by the first: 'Make the UK a world-leading sport nation'. This *'promise'* has three key headline ambitions: Inspiring young people through sport; Getting more people active; and Elite achievement. The delivery of the 'promises' is to be supported by a series of Action Plans, the first launched in 2008: *'Before, during and after; making the most of the London 2012'* (DCMS 2008a), which outlines how the Games are seen as a catalyst to either speed up or make more effective, the delivery of existing national and local strategies. In the case of the ambition, 'Getting more people active', which contains two elements; one million more people playing more sport and one million more people to become physically active, the responsibility for the former lies with Sport England, the country's leading public sector sports development agency who are charged with the task of creating a world leading community sport system (DCMS 2008b).³ Sport England's vision for this system is that it will 'Grow, Sustain and Excel', that is, deliver a growing number of people playing community sport; identify talent at an early age and provide the pathways through to the elite level and; provide everyone who plays sport with the opportunity for a quality experience and to fulfill their

potential (Sport England 2008). The key delivery partners for the vision are 46 National Governing Bodies (NGBs) who as 'recognised experts' are given 'greater autonomy over the investment of public funds within their sport – along with greater responsibility for the delivery of the outcomes' (p2).

At the time of writing, just over two years away from the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Games, the desire to use Games as the catalyst to deliver the vision is almost tangible. In my initial interviews with senior management of NGBs to discuss the Games and the potential to leave a legacy of sustainable sports development, comments such as 'phenomenal opportunity'; 'the biggest single sporting event in our lifetime that could be used to really drive a step change in people's physical activity behaviour'; and 'it's a one off perhaps never to be repeated opportunity to really grow sport', are frequent and delivered with passion.

However, on the ground the tangible evidence for this impact is thin as reflected by the 2008/9 Active People Survey which indicates a rise of only 115,000 participants from the baseline figures set in 2007/8. It is a fair observation that the DCMS Legacy Action Plan, the policy document *'Playing to Win'* (DCMS 2008b) and Sport England's strategy were only launched in 2008 and therefore have had little opportunity to make an impact. However, as reflected by Lord Moynihan (2010) in the Olympic Progress Debate, it is also the case that, the response to the audible concern from the sporting community as to the lack of progress on an Olympic Sports Legacy, was to establish the Olympic Sporting Legacy Board to bring to a total of eleven the number of government boards created to deliver on aspects of legacy. He suggests that "this level of bureaucracy is inevitably overlapping and ineffective in practice and is failing to deliver a comprehensive policy" (c106). Moynihan's call for a comprehensive delivery system is supported by the Central Council of Physical Recreation who propose that to realize a legacy of mass participation a co-ordinated approach is required from community club secretaries to Secretaries of State. It is suggested however, by the CEO of Sport Leaders UK, that this proposed environment of collaboration and partnership is not the current culture of the sport and recreation industry in this country which is one of "competition for resources and profile to take forward the objectives of our own organisations" (Plowright 2009). This culture may not be the optimum environment to encourage the 46 NGBs in receipt of Sport England funding to co-ordinate their delivery plans and work together towards a common aim.

Before we hear that well known cry from the sporting terraces of 'you don't know what you're doing', what needs to be remembered is that, as indicated earlier, this is the first time that a country has set out with a stated intent to deliver a legacy of increased participation in sport and physical activity from the Olympic and Paralympic Games. There is therefore little to help guide the vision; there is not a manual for this legacy. What is available is an opportunity and as stressed by Lord Addington in the Olympic Progress Debate, what is needed is to monitor what works and what does not in order that we might pass on such information to assist in creating a legacy from future events to be held in the UK such as the Commonwealth Games 2014 and the Rugby World Cup 2015.

“But what about having an idea of where we are going after 2012? Once we have sounded out what has worked and what has not, we must look at how we move on to the next series of sporting events. If we lose that, we’ll lose the real one off opportunity of being able to benefit from how to bring the rest of the community together behind our major sporting events” (Lord Addington 2010 c125).

My research aims to build on this recommendation focusing on the work of a number National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) to investigate the strategies and delivery mechanisms they are implementing to use the staging of the London 2012 Games as a catalyst to promote sustainable increased sport and physical activity participation. The NGBs selected to take part in my research cover both Olympic, Paralympic and non Olympic / Paralympic sports to facilitate a comparison of any differences in their planned engagement and the processes employed. As outlined earlier, there is for example the call for an event-themed as opposed to event-led approach to legacy development (Smith and Fox 2007) and the potential differences in approaching those groups of people who might be inspired by the *‘festival’* effect of a mega-event compared to the *‘demonstration’* effect generated by watching elite sports performance (Weed et al 2009).

Starting at the level of the NGB policy makers and working through the delivery system to the programmes, the programme deliverers and the participants, it is planned to use the framework of a realist evaluation (Pawson and Tilley 2007) to address the “effects, inner workings, connections and operations” (Coalter 2007 p36) of the NGB development plans to increase participation in the build up to London 2012. In a realist setting, the outcomes of their work are considered to be “a function of the relationships and interactions between the programme content and processes and the participants’ responses and choices” (Coalter 2007 pp36-37).

Central to a realist evaluation is “to find ways of identifying, articulating, testing and refining conjectured CMO configurations” (Pawson and Tilley 2007 p77). In studying the relative success of the programmes (their capacity to deliver sustainable sports development), the **C**ontext – **M**echanism – **O**utcome configuration looks to demonstrate what it is about the programme delivery that works for whom and in what circumstances. Pawson and Tilley (2007) suggest that it is the development of CMO configurations which facilitates the development of transferable and cumulative lessons from research. The researcher is not looking for representative programmes which work universally but sees the process of CMO configurations and refinements as the “creation of middle range theories which provide analytic frameworks to interpret similarities and differences between families of programs” (Pawson and Tilley 2007 p217). Based on personal experience of the impacts of legacy programmes, it is anticipated that the ‘outcomes’ will not only embrace the contexts and mechanisms of the behavioural change of participants towards sports participation but also associated issues relating to the development of human and social capital, such as skill development, community revitalization and social inclusion.

Conclusion

By way of summary, this research seeks to move on the discussion around the often quoted, but seemingly unsubstantiated, claims about the positive sports development potential of hosting a sport mega - event. In terms of leveraging a sports development legacy from the London 2012 Games, I look to provide a practical response to the original question: is this an Olympic promise or Olympic dream?

My research engages with a number of NGBs to investigate the processes they employ to use the Games as a catalyst for increased sport and physical activity participation. Using a realist evaluation framework, I will investigate and assess the contexts, mechanisms and outcomes to produce initial theories about what works for whom in what circumstances. It is anticipated that this research will both be informative to future sport mega- event organisers and provide a basis for further research in this area.

Notes

1: “Sport For All is a collective term used to describe a range of policies adopted by Governments to promote active participation in the community” (Frawley et al 2009 p3). Since it originates in the Council of Europe during the 1960s, it has been embraced by governments worldwide and the IOC as a policy to promote community health and well being particularly against a background of concerns about the rise in obesity amongst children and young people.

2. Kate Hughes (Potter, Egford) worked as a Senior Development Manager for Sport England managing the sports development ‘Wider Opportunities Programme. She went on to co – manage the Euro 2005 Legacy Programme funded by the FA and Sport England. Kate then went on to be a key player in the development of Podium – the Further and Higher Education Unit for the London 2012 Games.

3. The responsibility for the delivery of the 1 million more people becoming physically active lies primarily with the government Department of Health but also impacts on Sport England’s as outlined in its current 2008 – 11 strategy.

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