

THE CHALLENGE OF CLASS

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Context

Class profoundly influences participation in sport in England. Sport England found members of social categories A/B are almost twice as likely to participate in sport (once a month) as D/E.¹ (This typography is used to mean the most disadvantaged 25% of society, and in this paper is a synonym for working class). The class composition of elite, national squads in most sports surveyed reflects is also heavily weighted in favour of A/Bs.² In most sports club membership is the preserve of the middle class.³ In deprived areas, leisure centre usage is not proportionate to local community demographic profiles.⁴

This paper looks at the sporting sector's attempts to understand and dismantle the barriers to equitable participation by social categories D/E and the development of practical guidance for achieving sports-led social change.

We have a sports system in England that excludes social categories D/E. This is recognised in the Department of Culture Media and Sport's (DCMS) target to increase participation by this group across all cultural sectors, and also in the commitment set out in the *Framework for Sport in England* to achieve an annual, across-the-board participation increase of 1% and simultaneously narrow the class-based gap.

In parallel to these new targets is an increased awareness of the potential of sport and physical activity to community development and other renewal concerns, primarily health and community safety. DCMS/Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's unpublished research shows such interventions tend not to be underpinned by a theory of change that connects investment with the hoped-for outcomes.

Projects and Partners

Over the past few years, there have been many attempts to change these profiles and develop underpinning theories of sport-led change. Here we examine 4 attempts.

Sport Action Zones: SAZs represented a new area-based approach using principles of community development and community engagement established by the Social Exclusion Unit's Policy Action Team 10 on Sports and the Arts. The 12 Zones were intentionally very different in size, scale structure, and format. The 'host' agencies were also intentionally varied, to reflect a desire to move away from a single focus on the traditional sporting structure based around local authority leisure departments. There was no large pot of money behind each Zone.

The common element was that each Zone was located in an area of multiple disadvantage, and its target groups were D/E communities/working class communities. Each SAZ began its five-year life with a Manager and a small revenue resource to drive the work. Central to the early life of each Zone was the development of a detailed Needs Assessment and Action Plan, based on community consultation, an assessment of the local 'sporting capacity', and the need to bring existing ideas to life quickly. Getting a 'partnership structure' established was also a common element. The ranges of partners involved across the twelve Zones is enormous, but typically alongside sporting partners sit health partners, educational establishments, voluntary sector interests, social services and community

¹Office of National Statistics (2004) *General Household Survey 2002* London: ONS

²Sports Council for England (1997) *Development of Talent Study* London: ESC

³ONS (2004) *General Household Survey 2002* London: ONS

⁴Sport England (2005) *Benchmarking Survey of facility use* London: SE

care services, youth organisations and regeneration and economic development partners. For the smaller Zones these are often local point-of-delivery agencies. For the bigger Zones they are key, strategic decision-makers.

StreetGames: The StreetGames brand signifies a commitment to delivering doorstep sport in disadvantaged areas to working class people. The brand (co-funded by the Football Foundation and Neighbourhood Renewal agencies) supports coaches and clubs with the skills and ambition to encourage young people to join in football, basketball, athletics or cricket schemes that take place on a patch of land near their homes. The case study from Southwark Council and London SAZ discusses the success of StreetGames in the south London Borough.

A new framework for understanding sport and community safety: The Youth Justice Board, DCMS, ODPM and Sport England have agreed a new framework for understanding the link between sport and community safety. This will steer the design and evaluation of neighbourhood interventions. Interventions based on this framework will target working class communities.

Leisure Centres: The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit recently commissioned the Leisure Industries Research Centre to examine the participation achievements of public sports centres in deprived neighbourhoods. The research used data from the National Benchmarking Service for swimming pools and sports halls. The research found that even the 'best' access performance for social groups D&E did not represent their numbers in the local population, and that these groups are still consistently under-represented.

For many of its access measures, the National Benchmarking Service uses representative ratios, where a score of 100% indicates facility usage by a group is proportionate to its share of the catchment population. The average facility in deprived areas achieved a score of 32% in respect of social groups D&E. 'Best' access performance in respect of social groups D&E in deprived areas was 47%, whilst centres with lower levels of performance in deprived areas achieved a score of just 27%.

Implications

There are signs that appropriately targeted and designed interventions can reasonably be expected to narrow the gap and contribute to renewal. Our understanding of the issues is also increasing. However, we have made no progress in changing leisure centre user profiles.

The critical questions facing us in the next period are:

- How to replicate at large scale the lessons of the SAZ and StreetGames and other investment streams
- How to ensure equitable access to leisure centres
- How to increase participation of D/E groups in Governing Body talent squads
- How to ensure sport-led interventions achieve renewal aims.

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