

# Olympic training centres as part of sport development and mass participation: A case of Moscow, USSR

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## Aim of paper

Olympic training centres, with multi-sport facilities and comprehensive supporting infrastructures, play an important role in providing for all types of sport participants (Smolianov and Zakus, 2008; 2009). As governments across the globe seek to develop paths to excellence while integrating elite with mass or leisure/recreational sport the question remains for both researchers and practitioners—what specific features make a training facility amenable to both international sporting achievement and sport for all? This paper identifies key features of integrated development of mass and high performance (MHP) sport using a case of a Moscow-based sport activity hub developed in 1970s-80s as part of that city hosting the 1980 Olympic Games.

## Organisational/managerial context

De Bosscher et al. (2006) concluded that sporting success depends on: a) specific high quality equipment and facilities with priority access for elite athletes, b) regional centres of excellence, c) a national training centre, d) accessibility/distance to facilities and support, and e) facilities for all. Platonov (2005) and Smolianov and Zakus (2006) indicated a need for a network of training centres and multi-facility/program hubs by sport type and by geoclimate that maximize all possible resources, activities, and interactions among athletes, parents, coaches, managers, scientists, medical doctors, and other athlete service personnel. Smolianov and Zakus (2006) stressed that these centres should service all ages and levels of participation and subsidize costs for those from lower socio-economic groups. These conditions ensure the establishment of effective systems for progression of each participant, from finding an optimal sport to pursue, to developing an individualized training and lifestyle program.

## Organisational/managerial practice/issues

The following three MHP features of the Moscow-based sport activity hub were identified as contributing to these goals. The first feature involves servicing each level and type of participation in each Olympic sport; that are free or heavily subsidized facilities and programs made all Olympic sports affordable to diverse socio-economic groups. Specialized conditions were provided to each level of athlete development and participation. For example, a water sports facility was equipped with: two “frog” pools for beginners; two 12-meter pools for learners; four 25-meter (including one outdoor) and four 50-meter (including one outdoor) pools; a performance laboratory with such equipment as a multi-speed transparent treadmill pool, indoor and outdoor gyms/fields, saunas, medical facilities; and amenities such as restaurants, conference halls, offices, and hotels. The facility operates year-round from early morning to late night, often scheduling recreational and high performance sessions at the same time in close locations, which inspires mass participation to strive for excellence. The facility served as a national, regional, and local water sports centre providing its athletes opportunity to

invite athletes from around the world and, in exchange, travel to training centres in high altitude, sub-tropical, and rural geoclimates.

The second feature connected different sports, clubs, and schools to create a sport hub. Supported by a nearby sport university and sport research institute, a network of Olympic training centres was developed, each with a philosophy similar to the water sports centre. Clubs created sport classes in the regular schools with two sport practices a day, boarding schools with up to three sport practices per day, along with sport education programs for the high school and university levels (this also allowed for flexible study/exam scheduling and academic tutoring for athletes, special nutritional programs, and shuttle buses between venues). This hub allowed different sports to share resources and exchange best practices. Athletes participated in and learned from various sports, easily finding their most suitable disciplines.

Finally, the third feature integrates sport facilities and programs with city's socio-economic infrastructure. The hub is situated along one of the city's largest urban recreational areas with facilities for entertainment and leisure in the surrounding lakes and forests. Vast commercial, administrative, and residential areas around the hub as well as subway, bus, trolleybus, and tram access make it popular amongst all population segments and an important part of the city's recreation and culture life.

### **Implications for sport and sport management**

The MHP features identified could help sport managers integrate, develop, and deliver mass and elite sport, as well as to help education programs for future sport managers and for creating integrated training centres. Feature 1 requires managerial and scientific knowledge of sport specific facilities, infrastructure, training and competition processes, as well as needs of customers, from high performance athletes, coaches, and their service personnel to recreational users and spectators. To develop features 2 and 3, the ability to lead and partner across various organizations is important as effectiveness of both leisure/recreational and high-performance sport development is achieved.

### **References**

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