

A SPORTING PARTICIPATION LEGACY FROM LONDON 2012: THE IMPACT ON SPORTS POLICIES IN BIRMINGHAM

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Abstract

Introduction

The London bid document for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games stated that 'mounting excitement in the seven years leading up to the games in London will inspire a new generation of youth to greater sporting activity' (LOCOG, 2005, p23). This legacy is intended to be experienced across Britain. Very little research has been conducted on the impact of a bidding city on another city within the same country. It could be argued that one would reasonably expect Birmingham, with the second largest population in Britain, to experience some impact from the Games. As such, Birmingham will be a key focus within this paper.

Academic research investigating sporting legacies from mega-events raises caution in assuming the 'legacy' impact (Coalter 2004, Girginov and Hills 2008, Bloyce and Smith 2010). What is of little doubt, however, is that the build up to the 2012 Games has had significant impact on sport policy at the national level. The aims of this paper are to analyse the extent to which policy in Birmingham reflects the policy objectives for a sports participation legacy from London 2012 set out in official publications by the London Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG), the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) and Sport England. Official documents and reports available online from the DCMS, Department of Health, Sport England, LOCOG, House of Commons, National Audit Office, Legacy Trust UK and West Midlands 2012 that have been published since the awarding of the Games to London that relate to sporting legacy have been subject to documentary analysis. These documents were compared with policies published by the Birmingham Sport and Physical Activity Partnership (BSPAP) in that time. At present, BSPAP are

at the policy formation stage of their 'legacy action plan'. Therefore we will analyse drafts during the formation of this policy which will continue until the document is finalised. Policy documents will be analysed through coding particular themes comparing national and local policies.

Based on initial analysis of national policies it is clear that hosting the forthcoming 2012 Games has already had a significant impact. This has filtered into local policies in Birmingham to some extent. However, one might question the extent to which the impending hosting of the London Games is proving to be a 'focusing event' (Chalip, 1995) in Birmingham. After all, the BSPAP legacy action plan is still only in the formation stage. However, London 2012 has been considered in developing the wider strategy for sport in Birmingham. Analysis of the BSPAP 'Strategy for Sport 2009-13' indicates that the policy was shaped in accordance with several national policies with objectives for London 2012. Preliminary findings from analysing the draft legacy action plan also suggest that BSPAP will be utilising the fact that the American and Jamaican track and field teams are using Birmingham as their base-camp before the Olympics. BSPAP (2011) propose that they will use the American and Jamaican training camps as a key focus for engaging the general public in generating a sporting legacy. BSPAP (2011) also highlight the intention to build on the skills and number of clubs, coaches, and volunteers, which clearly reflects the national policy on volunteer development. This demonstrates the relative level of power of CSPs in delivering a sporting legacy. At some level BSPAP appear enabled by the opportunities that Olympic activities bring. However, they do still remain constrained by the opportunities specifically available within the city as extra funding is limited and new facilities are not an option. We conclude with recognition of the significant impact of London 2012 on national sporting policies. We suggest that the legacy experienced across Britain is, however, determined by those delivering a participation legacy in local areas and the constraints of the infrastructure and opportunities available therein.

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