

## Decision-making processes in bidding for large scale sports events

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### Introduction

An initial foray into the study of decision-making processes for large scale sports events was provided by Roche (1994) in his coverage of the 1991 World Student Games in Sheffield. Here, he acknowledged that in order to research large scale sports events there is a need for researchers to consider two issues. Firstly, a detailed account must be provided concerning the situational rationality of the policy decisions. From a practical perspective, this entails consideration of the mechanics of the policy-making process which means accounting for which decisions were made, when and how they were made and by whom. Roche continued that further research in this area should consider this, but also the mediation between contextual forces and urban policy. The latter approach has already been adopted by some scholars in general works on local sport policy (see for example King, 2009) and to an extent by Horne and Manzenreiter (2006) with regards to large scale events. However, to date, no studies have attempted to use meso-level policy frameworks in order to explain how the mediation of these contextual frameworks results in the situational rationality of policy decisions in the field of large scale sporting events.

Therefore, this paper follows the suggestion given by Roche, which outlined a method for exploring decisions to host, but furthers this through the application of policy models, most notably the multiple streams framework (Kingdon 1984), in order to provide a sophisticated understanding of how policy decisions are made at the local level.

In order to achieve this, three British bids were analysed: Sheffield's bid for the 1991 World Student Games (Universiade), Manchester's failed bid for the 2000 Olympic Games and Glasgow's bid for the 2014 Commonwealth Games. The rationale for the selection of these cases was largely due to their correspondence with significant, 'formative moments' in the context of British sport policy. The expectation upon commencing this study was that these three bids would respectively have been city-led, sport-led and central government-led.

### Theoretical Frameworks

Initial attempts at policy analysis by academics in the 1970s was largely seen as a means by which democratic governance could be facilitated (Houlihan 2005). The field of study emerged as in several areas, including sport, governments were becoming more interventionist. Generally, these initial analyses focussed on the early stages of the policy process: policy identification, agenda setting and policy formulation and they were characterised by a largely quantitative methodology based upon a neo-positivist epistemology (Houlihan 2005).

However, when government investment in areas such as sport failed to produce the intended policy outcomes, there was a refocusing of this approach towards a macro-level, quantitative approach which became broader and relied more heavily on an analysis of the role of the state. Traditional macro-theoretical accounts which attempted to generalise on policy areas were no longer deemed as solely adequate for explaining policy. For instance, with regards to elite sport and hosting, neo-Marxist accounts argue that the attempt to bring mega events to a nation are merely rationalising the entrenched political interests of the state in order for capitalists to legitimise their interests, however this ignores the softer 'ideas' such as Olympism which are not subordinated to the needs of instrumental rationality (Houlihan 2005).

Hence, attention has shifted towards a meso-level approach for policy analysis and several authors (see Richardson 1982, Kingdon 1984, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1988, 1993) have attempted to create frameworks to aid understanding. For the purpose of this study, two such frameworks were selected based upon their respective ability to explain the articulation of power within policy subsystems. Namely, these were policy networks and the multiple streams framework (MSF).

Policy networks, conceptualised by Rhodes (1988) and Marsh (1998), allow for meso level policy theorisation based upon the principle of neo-pluralism or corporatism. According to Adam and Kriesi (2007) policy-making takes place in domain specific subsystems, which operate more or less independently of each other. It follows, then, that analysis of policy in a domain such as sport should focus on the features of that specific subsystem. Within the broad realm of network theory, two alternative models are offered: policy communities and issue networks.

Issue networks were defined by Rhodes (1988) as having large numbers of participants and, which in turn have limited interdependence. In comparison with policy communities, they are less stable and have looser ideological bonds uniting them. Perhaps the key feature of issue networks is the absence of an ideological focal point that ties them together. King (2009) claims that this has meant issue networks have tended not to have a significant impact on the policy-making process, unlike policy communities. However, given the temporary and fragmented nature of bidding committees, particularly during the very early stages of bids for large scale sports events, issue networks were retained as a possible analytical framework through which to explore these decisions.

The multiple streams framework (illustrated in Figure 1 below) is primarily concerned with the process of agenda setting and Kingdon (1984: 175) notes that '[it] is as far away from the sequential model of policy-making as can be imagined.' The premise of this framework is illustrated in Figure 1 below and claims that the success of policy is based upon the ability of individuals within a system to couple three existing streams within a policy subsystem: the problem stream, the politics stream and the policy stream. In order to be successful, the policy entrepreneur must wait until the political 'conditions' are right and exploit the policy launch window

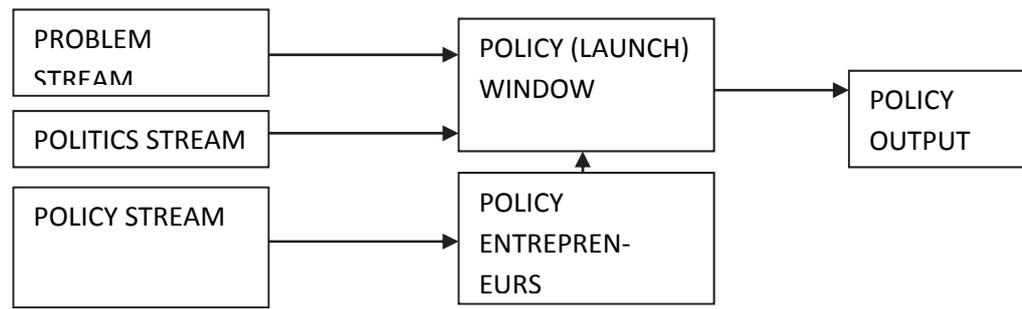


Figure 1. Diagram of the multiple streams framework. Adapted from Zahariadis (2007).

In terms of its relative usefulness for this study, it was felt that the MSF could provide a useful tool for analysing the Sheffield 1991 bid, given the absence of any central policy towards hosting in the UK, and also allow for depicting the development of all bids in their early stages, especially agenda setting.

Early consideration of the meso-level frameworks indicated a somewhat blurred picture, in that each appeared to demonstrate some potential usefulness for charting policy decisions in regards to hosting and all had some perceived value. Indeed, it was considered unlikely that any one theory would provide a perfect 'match' to the findings of this study.

### Method

Essentially, the purpose of this study was to address the following research questions:

- Why and how did the selected cities decide to bid for major/mega event?
- To what extent have these decisions reflected national policy towards 'hosting'?

In order to provide adequate and valid responses to these questions, consideration was given to Grix's (2002) strategy for research in this area. Hence, the research was designed to demonstrate a logical 'flow' from the chosen ontological position to the detailed methods to be employed. The ontological paradigm selected fits most closely with that of anti-foundationalism, which links succinctly to the chosen critical realist epistemology. These lead to the assumptions that reality is considered to be local and specific, often unobservable and those realities which do exist are often shaped by unobservable political and social processes. The purpose of the selected methods was not only to uncover the actions of agents within a policy subsystem, but also the structures which influence and inhibit these actions. This was supported by a qualitative methodology which encompassed extensive triangulation. The specific methods used to collect data were initially documentary research and semi-structured interviews and these contributed to a wider case study approach.

Documentary research was largely archive-based and involved content analysis of a range of official documents held in numerous local authority and sports federation archives and was followed by a series of semi-structured interviews with actors both central to, and excluded, from the decision-making processes in each bid. Interview participants were initially selected following content analysis of the documents and further participants were recruited using snowball sampling. Interviews took place between April 2009 and April 2012 and were fully transcribed and analysed using a combination of open and axial coding.

### Discussion of Results

The findings of the study tentatively suggested that, despite its predominant focus on the agenda setting phase of policy decisions, the MSF is a convincing analytical tool to understand the rise of the all three bids onto the relevant national and local political agendas. There is little doubt that in each case there was significant influence achieved by individuals acting in manners akin to policy entrepreneurs. In addition, there was also some evidence that these actors were able to couple three 'streams.' For instance, in Glasgow's case there existed a clear link between the regeneration already taking place in the city (problem stream) and the quest by the newly devolved Scottish Government for a project through which Scottish identity could be harnessed (politics stream). At the same time as these were occurring, the two key policy entrepreneurs in this bid attended the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester and were inspired to develop a Scottish bid (policy stream). All interviewees referred to this moment as the starting point of the Glasgow bid, with the two protagonists stating the bid commenced 'over breakfast in a hotel in Manchester' (Interview #16, 2011; Interview #23, 2011).

This ad-hoc commencement of the bids was expected in Sheffield, where the concept of the bid was driven in the early stages by one individual's 'lifetime's work to bring the World Student Games to the UK' (Interview #3, 2009). The freedom through which individuals could operate in the 1980s was expected due to the absence of any central hosting policy, but it was not expected in the latter two cases where firstly the GB Sports Council and secondly the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) had taken specific stances on hosting. Yet, the chief policy entrepreneur

in Manchester earmarked the moment 'I was sitting in my car listening to the radio when I thought "wouldn't it be good to bring the [Olympic] Games to Manchester?" So I phoned my friends in the Council and the local newspaper and so it began' (Interview #27, 2011).

Indeed, the manner in which these individuals acted fits Zahariadis' (2007) perceived model of the MSF very closely in terms of policy entrepreneurs and its usefulness here is furthered by Houlihan's (2005) claim that the MSF is particularly useful in explaining agenda setting when there exists potential for opportunism, often created by high levels of organisational fragmentation. Here, this fragmentation was created respectively by the collapse of the steel industry (Sheffield), the decline of manufacturing (Sheffield and Manchester) and a devolved Scottish government which was developing a new national strategy for sport and events. While the MSF seems a highly relevant analytical framework for understanding the actions of the early bid advocates, it remains expectedly limited to illuminating the agenda setting phase of the bid and not the decision-making process, for which other theoretical perspectives are required.

With regards to network theory, the most convincing analytical lens would appear to be that of issue networks. However, similarly to the MSF this model is not wholly sufficient in explaining any aspect of the development of the bids. Referring back to Rhodes' (1988) key indicators of an issue network: large number of participants, the lack of stable relationships and loose ideological bonds, not all of these were evident here. There were certainly a large number of participants in this network, but many members were selected by the entrepreneurs due to their ideological predisposition: one in favour of hosting this type of event. Due to this, and the power that the policy entrepreneurs were able to wield in selecting like-minded people to comprise this network, this theory was more convincing in Sheffield, where the loose ideological bonds between the initial bid team were highly evident.

The success of the policy entrepreneurs in elevating the bid to the political agenda in Glasgow, Manchester and Sheffield was largely due to the effective wielding of power by these individuals, which resulted in the almost total absence of any overt opposition to it in these early stages. However, as Lukes (2005) indicated in his three dimensional view of power, this did not necessarily equate to an absence of opposition. Using Dahl's (1961) pluralist model, at a rudimentary level power can said to have been held by the 'victorious' actors, in this case the Labour-led local administrations in all three cities. That there was limited opposition to each of the bids in the early stages could suggest a general consensus, but Lukes (2005) specifically claimed that this ignored the very nature of power in that it is possible to achieve false consensus through the manipulation of power. The somewhat vocal opposition to the Glasgow and Sheffield bids in particular following their success would provide a strong supporting point to this view, as would the significant efforts made by the policy entrepreneurs to quell any fears before they could become organised into formal opposition groups.

## Conclusion

Overtly, at least, the broad utility of the MSF indicates an unexpected degree of opportunism in more recent bids for large scale sports events. However, while opportunism and 'coincidences' do seem to exist, the opportunism is not universal across local and national contexts. Where it does still appear, the context in which it has operationalized has changed domestically and internationally. In the international context, these changes are changes in the expectations of international sports federations (ISFs), which increasingly expect governments to have strategies for such events. Domestically, these changes refer to both DCMS and UK Sport strategy which offer only 'support' and first require champions to come forward. In essence, the system is set up to encourage 'entrepreneurs'.

This latter point here is key. In Glasgow the MSF most clearly applies, despite the increasing centralisation of hosting. The politics stream is represented by the supportive national mood, the policy stream is putting together the bid and the problem stream is the challenge of demonstrating a new identity of Scotland. There was a clear window of opportunity and a symbol was required. The bid was at the right time to take advantage of this launch window. Similarly, although less convincingly, it also applied in Sheffield and Manchester.

However, the MSF is only useful until the decision is made to bid. Policy communities, particularly issue networks, best explain the next step as the policy entrepreneurs attempt put together a community to deliver the bid and then the event. Essentially this represents a coalition of support, which is then dismantled, often to some resistance.

More broadly, this study alludes to the positive perceived value of sport amongst local decision-makers. This concept has already been explored in the context of sports event tourism in Britain by Smith (2006) and the logical area for further study is the extent to which rational decision-making processes are applied or by-passed in other sports policy settings.

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