

## In from the margins and back again? Reflections on the political salience of youth sport policy in Britain

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### **Abstract keywords**

Policy, Politics, Youth Sport

### **Aim of abstract/paper - research question**

This paper examines some key policy issues associated with the decision, in October 2010, of the Conservative-led Coalition government in Britain to withdraw funding for the national infrastructure of School Sport Partnerships, which had attracted over £2 billion of investment since 2002, and to replace this with approximately £126 million to support the creation of a new School Games initiative.

### **Theoretical background or literature review\***

Drawing on aspects of the figurational sociological approach of Norbert Elias (Elias, 1978), the paper discusses the ways in which the School Games has enabled government to re-prioritise competitive sport as a key policy objective for youth sport, whilst marginalizing other policy goals and interests more explicitly associated with physical education. In doing so, particular attention is drawn to the significance of the unintended outcomes that have emanated from the differential power relations characteristic of youth sport policy figurations.

### **Methodology, research design and data analysis**

The paper draws on publically available pronouncements (e.g. government minutes, media reports, policy documents) to examine the policy decisions taken by the British government in relation to its decision to withdraw funding for School Sport Partnerships and replace it with monies intended to support the launch of the School Games.

### **Results, discussion and implications/conclusions\*\***

Despite the apparent commitment to youth sport as expressed in the inauguration of the School Games and the publication in 2012 of the youth sport strategy, *Creating a Sporting Habit for Life* (DCMS, 2012), there is currently little evidence of strong political commitment to youth sport per se beyond a vague, convenient, and largely symbolic association with the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic games. Instead, it is suggested that the political interest in, and salience of, youth sport has been stimulated largely by non-sport decisions taken by a coalition of actors in broader, generally more powerful, policy sectors such as education. It is tentatively concluded that these developments in youth sport policy can be interpreted as evidence of a gradual trend towards policy-taking from wider agendas, and of the beginnings of policy making processes in which non-sport-specific objectives may increasingly coming to dominate the direction of future sport policy.

### **References – limited to 5**

- Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) (2012). *Creating a sporting habit for life*. London: DCMS.
- Elias, N. (1978). *What is sociology?* London: Hutchinson.