

# POLICY INITIATIVES AND THE USE OF SPORT IN THE REGENERATION OF COMMUNITIES: AN EXPLORATION OF TWO CITIES

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## Context

Sport has become an important tool for cities and regions seeking to enhance their civic and social economies (Hall, 2004). In particular, two strategies have become central to redeveloping and rebranding cities, regions, and even nations: *hosting mega sporting-events, and professional sports franchises*. While sports franchises are viewed as more long-term tools for civic development and branding, sporting mega-events, such as the Olympic Games, provide brief but intense opportunities for cities to appear on the world stage (Magdalinski & Nauright, 2004). The strategy chosen by the city or region as part of a regeneration scheme is uniquely tied to the values and political discourse of the host area (Gratton, Shibli, & Coleman, 2005). The costs associated with both hosting a mega-event and retaining a professional sports franchise are not small. For example, in the United States, San Francisco, Dallas, and the state of Washington successfully lobbied for a combined €1 billion to retain their professional franchises. Further, while the final budget has yet to surface, it is reported that Athens spent over €11 billion on hosting the 2004 Summer Olympic Games. Despite the soaring costs of retaining and hosting sporting events and professional franchises, cities continue to use sport as a means of regeneration. Although there is much literature exploring the economic and social impact of these regeneration efforts, it is not well understood how pursuing mega-event and professional franchise strategies fits into the broader policy strategies of cities. In addition, little is understood about how, if at all, the policy initiatives tied to regeneration justify or support the use of these strategies for civic development. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to explore how the strategic policy initiatives in a city or region influence the choice of strategies used by civic officials as part of regeneration strategies.

Drawing on preliminary data from a larger project studying sporting events and professional sport franchises in cities, this paper will examine how policy strategies in two cities, one North American (Baltimore, USA), and one European (Manchester, UK), influence the development of sporting initiatives tied to regeneration strategies. Manchester is a city that was once a centrepiece of the industrial revolution, but underwent severe economic and social degeneration. In order to counteract some of the negative effects associated with these declines, the city has focussed on using a sporting events strategy, in particular hosting the 2002 Commonwealth Games, as a means of urban regeneration and local civic development. Baltimore suffered numerous economic setbacks over the past century and as a result, Baltimore's inner harbour area became known as one of the most economically and socially depressed areas in the United States in the 1970s. Baltimore has adopted a professional franchise strategy, by using the construction of two stadia as part of a broader urban redevelopment strategy.

## Method

A multiple case study approach was used to explore these two cities. A political economy perspective (Henry & Parimio-Salcines, 1999) was used to develop an understanding of the wider policy initiatives associated with the development of a sporting strategy within the cities. This perspective emphasizes the influence of local coalitions in shaping public policy and determining directions for urban growth. Policy-related documents were analysed to discover how the use of different types/levels/scales of sport for civic development were tied to the broader policy agenda.

## Results

Policy initiatives in both Manchester and Baltimore targeted the economic and social degeneration of certain areas within the city. Particular policy attention was directed towards redeveloping deteriorated areas, but political justification for using sport in these initiatives differed significantly. Manchester sought development efforts specifically tied to cultural activities in the city since the late 1970s. It would appear that sport has always been justified by its broader objectives of 'social integration,

poverty reduction, and decreased social exclusion'. In particular, local interest groups played a key role in the policy agenda. However, there exists a tension regarding access of all community members to sport and sporting events. For example, in *Manchester Community Strategy* (2001), it was acknowledged that "greater emphasis will need to be given to improving residents' access, participation, awareness and choice of cultural and sporting opportunities not only in the heart of the City but also in their own communities." Thus, it appears that policy initiatives justified the use of a sporting event strategy that ensures the wider goals of social and economic regeneration.

Baltimore chose a strategy that emphasised the importance of private enterprises, where local neighbourhood groups were much less empowered. "The near-by Inner Harbor development, which cost a total of [€1.6 billion], covers 275 acres and includes a [€37 million] convention center, and [€24 million] shopping area, and the [€14 million] National Aquarium, as well as hotels and office buildings" (Euchner, 1993: 119). Unlike in Manchester, however, the decision to build two new sports stadia for professional baseball and football teams did not seek widely the input of those groups potentially displaced by the presence of the facilities, or inconvenienced by the resulting traffic and congestion created by spectators. Despite a consistent lack of policy, sporting developments have continued to go forward. Thus, while it appears that the use of professional sporting franchises is being justified as part of the greater development efforts, there is less indication that the overall policy structures have supported the said strategy.

### **Discussion/Implications**

The results of this study indicate that, while it appears that the broader policy agenda in Manchester has supported the use of a sporting events strategy for redevelopment so long as they include the goals and values of social inclusion and community revitalisation, the policy initiatives in Baltimore do not support the use of a professional sports franchise strategy. These results can be explained by exploring the political economy in which these policies have developed. Pelissero, Henschen, & Sidlow (1991) argued there are three types of regimes that govern city sports. It would appear from this analysis that Baltimore represents a *corporate-dominating regime*, while Manchester fits more with a *progressive regime*. The corporate-dominating regime of Baltimore promotes a commercial agenda, usually of downtown development with little regard for the wider local and political structures. On the other hand, the progressive regime of Manchester seems to have a more comprehensive and inclusive agenda, more inclined to consider neighbourhood group interests. This would indicate that Manchester's use of a sporting events strategy seems to fit more into the overall policy initiatives of the city, while Baltimore's use of the professional franchises does not. Given this, is likely that this may help to explain the how different approaches to sport development are related to the outcomes of these activities in different cities. In particular, a greater understanding of how this political economy perspective can help envisage the long-term effects of sporting developments and leveraging of sport in different cities is needed. Future research should explore how this congruence or incongruence of sporting strategies with local community and policy initiatives affects the success of sport in the city.

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