

## State Strategies for Leveraging Sports Mega-Events: unpacking the concept of ‘legacy’

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The spiralling costs of hosting sports mega-events (SMEs) are usually justified by the ‘legacies’ that they produce. Therefore, this article begins by problematizing the notion of SME ‘legacies’ and the benefits they are intended to bring to hosts. The article serves as a general introduction to the papers that follow in this Special Issue. Common to all papers is a concern with the multi-faceted nature of ‘legacy’, its meaning to a variety of stakeholders involved in such events and how this impacts policy. The belief in the causal relationship between hosting major events and the realization of specific legacies – increased sport participation in London’s case, highlighted in this paper – underpinned the UK’s bidding for, and subsequent hosting of, the Olympics. Thus, this paper serves as a discussion of some of the key concepts in, and assumptions about, the use of SMEs to produce a legacy for the hosting state.

**Key Words:** Sports mega-events; legacies; Olympic Games; London 2012; sport participation and mega-events; coalition of beneficiaries

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## **Introduction**

The following serves to introduce this Special Issue on ‘State Strategies for Leveraging Sports Mega-Events’ by discussing one of the generic concepts concerning all contributions: ‘legacy’. It does so by offering a discussion of the London 2012 Olympics and the UK Government’s legacy ambitions. The London case study is a reminder, if one was needed, of the political nature of sport and sports mega-events, with the UK government’s close involvement in its acquisition, financing, hosting and use as a political tool to impact policy. Several factors have come together in the past twenty to thirty years to elevate the political nature of sports mega-events (SMEs) and render their study more relevant than ever. Of the most salient for the discussion that follows are: first, an increasingly wide range of states – beyond the ‘capitalist-communist’ duality of the Cold War – have sought to host these events. Now it would appear that it is not just a case of ‘East’ versus ‘West’ or ‘authoritarian’ versus ‘democratic’, but a wide variety of regime types have entered the SME market place, including all of the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and some outliers such as the autocratic Qatar. A second factor is both the escalating costs and the increasingly substantial sums of taxpayers’ resources that are regularly being sunk into hosting such events. Russia broke all previous records when investing some \$55 billion in the Sochi Winter Olympics – more than all previous Winter Olympics put together. Despite the fact that the majority of this spend was on non-sporting infrastructure, it took Olympic expenditure to new heights (or lows). Third, a justificatory discourse around spending on elite sport events has developed in which certain ‘legacies’ are advanced as the key return on investment. As we shall see, this appears to be contagious, as new ‘emerging’ states seamlessly take on the ‘hoped-for’ legacies that advanced capitalist states propagate. Finally, despite mounting evidence that many of these SME legacies have failed to materialise, the perennial and expensive sports event cycle continues with little policy learning taking place. It is perhaps paradoxical, then, that the continued justification for public spending on hosting sports mega-events appears increasingly ‘rationalised by an appeal to legacy’ (Tomlinson, 2014, 139).

Given the centrality of ‘legacies’ in the justification of bidding for and hosting of the majority of SMEs, it seems pertinent to discuss this concept in a little more depth. As the concept ‘legacy’ is so important in justifying the (usually public) investment in SMEs, it is here where we start by unpacking what key stakeholders understand it to mean. This ranges from academic debates through the media to – what we term - the specific ‘coalition of beneficiaries’ that advocate hosting such events in the first place.<sup>i</sup> After clarifying the use and abuse of ‘legacy’ as a concept, we review the literature to reveal five, broad hoped-for legacies that are usually fore-fronted by governments and sports event advocates in advance of hosting SMEs. We then turn to an analysis of London’s Olympic legacy promise of ‘inspiring a generation’ to take part in sport and physical activity.

### **‘Legacy’ and Sports Mega-Events**

‘Legacy’ as a concept has, within a short space of time, entered the pantheon of abused, maligned misquoted and misunderstood concepts in popular discourse and sports studies alike. This needs to be borne in mind when reviewing policy documents, media articles, private-sector reports and academic works on first- and second-order sports mega-events (Black, 2008). On the broadest level, legacy is commonly defined as ‘a gift of personal property by will’ or as ‘anything handed down from the past, as from an ancestor or predecessor’ (Agha *et al.*, 2012: 131). However, despite the significant attention paid to those legacies that are assumed to emerge from sporting occasions, the precise meaning of sports legacy remains remarkably unclear. Preuss’ (2007: 211) definition is probably one of the most cited today in which he states that legacies are ‘planned and unplanned, positive and negative, tangible and intangible structures created by and for a sport event that remain for a longer time than the event itself.’

The foremost reason for the remaining uncertainty surrounding the meaning of ‘legacy’ is that, in the majority of cases, etymological clarity gives way to SME legacies being understood simply

as a given; something that is self-evident and positive; something that leads to desired, long-term ‘outcomes’ (cf. Cashman, 2006; Preuss, 2007; Girginov, 2011; Leopkey and Parent, 2012). We maintain that such a positive discourse is upheld by a ‘coalition of beneficiaries’, that is, those likely to benefit most from the investment into a SME. While the reasons for hosting may be nuanced slightly, depending on the type of state hosting, overall the rationale for investing in SMEs is strikingly similar across the board (see below).

A significant and ever-growing body of scholarly work has sought to explain why states host SMEs, and, more importantly, what legacy outcomes are envisaged by various national leaders and other stakeholders (see, for example: Horne and Manzenreiter, 2006; Grix, 2012; 2013; 2014; Kidd, 2013; Shipway and Fyall, 2013; Conchas, 2014; Frawley and Adair, 2014; Tomlinson, 2014; Weed, 2014). Interestingly, there does not appear to be a great deal of difference between regime types in terms of hoped-for legacies; thus, advanced capitalist, autocratic and communist states share similar aims through hosting SMEs. The above works have been complemented admirably by those who focus on the main aims set out by specific sports events – which generally equate to hoped-for legacies from the events - the most notable of which, in the context of the Olympic Games, includes: Sydney’s hosting of the 2000 Games (Faulkner et al., 2000; Stewart *et al.*, 2004; Cashman, 2006; Lenskyj, 2012; Veal et al., 2012); the beleaguered 2004 Games in Athens (Tziralis et al., 2006; Hede, 2005; Boukas et al., 2013); the ‘communist-consumerist’ 2008 Games in Beijing (Xu, 2006; Jinxia and Managan., 2008; Manzenreiter, 2010; Zhang and Zhao, 2009; Preuss and Alfs, 2011; Giulianotti, 2015); the London 2012 Games (Girginov and Hills, 2008; 2009; Girginov, 2011; Bloyce and Lovett, 2012; Green, 2012; Weed et al., 2012; Weed, 2014; Devine, 2013); Sochi’s staging of the 2014 Winter Olympics (Alekseyena, 2014; Orttung and Zhemukhov, 2014; Grix and Kramareva, 2015; Muller, 2015; Golubchikov, 2017); and Rio’s organization of the 2016 Games (Almeida et al., 2014; Osorio and Versiani, 2014; Grix *et al.*, 2015; Rocha, 2015; 2017; Bizarro et al., 2016).

One way of gaining traction on the vast literature that has developed around SMEs is to divide them into the types of legacies most often put forward by the ‘coalition of beneficiaries’ (see below), commentators and academics. We derived five often overlapping categories:

1. Economic
2. Urban re-generation
3. National pride/feelgood factor
4. Increased participation in physical activity and sport
5. International prestige and ‘soft power’.

The first legacy of an SME is thought to be an increase in economic revenue for cities and states, generated directly through such things as tickets receipts and increased employment opportunities for the local population; and also indirectly, via increases in short- and long-term foreign direct investments, as well as gains in incoming tourists. The evidence for economic legacies is difficult to find, given the number of variables that need to be considered. Perhaps, of more importance is the fact that ‘despite the enormous cultural penumbra of the World Cup and the Olympics, the events are really quite small quantitatively in relation to the economy of the host country’ (Zimbalist, 2015: 38; cf. Allmers and Maennig, 2009; Maennig and Zimbalist, 2012). Tourism is often negatively effected around such events, as people stay away who would have otherwise travelled to the host country (labelled in some academic work as the ‘displacement effect’) (see: Fourie *et al.*, 2011; cf. Chalip and Costa, 2005). The second category, urban regeneration, describes the opportunities and benefits to society, in particular through the redevelopment of waste land, neighbourhoods and transport systems. There is little doubt that Stratford in East London was ‘regenerated’, but whether - as is the case with most SMEs - it was in the best interests of the local citizenry is another matter (cf. Gold and Gold, 2008; Short, 2008; Alm *et al.*, 2014). A third category in the literature thought to be the result of hosting an SME is an increase in so-called ‘psychic income’, produced by the euphoria and exhilaration that surrounds the event, leading to a heightened sense of ‘communitas’ (Turner, 1979) and a strengthening of national pride (cf. Black and Van Der Westhuizen, 2004; Tomlinson and

Young, 2006; Giulianotti, 2016); this then is said to culminate in a feel-good factor among the nation's population (cf. Kavetsos and Szymanski, 2010). A fourth legacy category is the assumption that through viewing superstar athletes and role models, the excitement felt during the event and the sporting and infrastructural facilities available post-event combine to boost sports participation among the masses in the host country (cf. Grix, 2012; Nicholson *et al.*, 2011; Frawley *et al.*, 2013; Weed, 2014). This, in turn, leads to the prevention of diseases caused by sedentary lifestyles, and thus to significant long-term savings in health costs. This will be dealt with in more detail below, but suffice to say prior to London no SME had attempted to stimulate mass participation so explicitly as London and there is little evidence that an SME has had a direct causal impact on sports participation (Weed *et al.*, 2009). Finally, SMEs are thought to offer valuable promotional opportunities for cities and states who seek to enhance their image globally, especially given their ability to attract unprecedented numbers of international spectators through global media coverage. Such a platform is used to showcase the host nation, reshape dominant attitudes, transcend provincialism and historic insecurities, and/or embrace globality, competitiveness, and excellence. Additionally, states commonly seek to go beyond simple branding by using SMEs a part of a 'package' of 'soft power' with which they seek to strengthen their influence on the global stage (see: Grix and Brannagan, 2016). Interestingly, this is the one 'legacy' that most states appear to believe can work (cf. Black and Van Der Westhuizen, 2004; Chalip and Costa, 2005; Cornelissen, 2010; Van Hilvoorde, *et al.*, 2010; Cornelissen *et al.*, 2011; Brannagan and Rookwood, 2016).

The above touches on the core legacy categories that make up the justifications for hosting SMEs in the first place. There are, naturally, differences of opinion among commentators as to which legacies to prioritise and whether they actually materialise in the manner hosts generally hope. One way of conceiving of the breadth of opinions on SMEs and legacies is to picture a continuum along which one end is positive and the other is negative, bearing in mind that this is

simply an exercise in categorisation to clarify the types of opinions that exist. Stakeholders may hold several and different opinions depending on the event in question. Clearly what we term the ‘coalition of beneficiaries’ - that is, stakeholders who accentuate the positives of hosting SMEs - would be at the ‘positive’ end. This group includes international sports governing bodies, such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), national governing bodies, non-sporting national governments and their subsidiary organizations, and politicians, sports administrators, business leaders and sections of the media. Among this coalition the negative aspects of SMEs are rarely considered. The key contributors to a positive legacy discourse are, unsurprisingly, international sports organisations. In the IOC’s Olympic Legacy Report (2013: 1), for example, former President, Jacques Rogge, unquestionably advocates how the Games create ‘a unique set of environmental, social and economic legacies that can change a community, a region, and a nation forever’; in similar fashion, Hu Jintao, former-President of China, in 2008 echoed his belief that ‘hosting the Beijing Olympic Games will leave us a number of sports venues and infrastructure. We treasure these material legacies very much and will give a full play to their function and roles’ (Jin and Bu, 2010: 255); furthermore, Sochi’s bid for the 2014 Winter Olympics were based on the belief that the Games would ‘modernise the region by creating new infrastructure in rail, road, telecommunications, energy and accommodation and through the construction of sports venues’ (IOC 2014 Evaluation Commission Report, 2007: 10); and finally, Rio de Janeiro’s 2016 Olympic bid was founded on the clear conviction that the Games would ‘strengthen the social and environmental fabric of Rio and of Brazil’ (Rio 2016 Candidature File, 2009: 7).

One step down from the mainly positive endorsements of IGBs lie private-sector organizations who offer national authorities legacy consultancy services, reports, measurements and recommendations. This group of stakeholders look to benefit from the discourse surrounding the promotion of legacy as an achievable outcome, albeit under the assumption that ‘legacy’ is

not a necessarily natural process, but rather something that requires continuous ‘expert’ support and evaluation. Examples include Ernst and Young’s ‘Bang for the Buck’ (2015: 2) report, which recognizes that sport events can be ‘a significant driver of economic and social development’, yet argue that to ‘optimize their impact’, governments should follow their ‘nine channels’ in ensuring a ‘lasting, positive legacy’; in similar fashion, Deloitte’s ‘A Lasting Legacy’ (2010: 1) report, which advocates that ‘major sports events can drive positive change for host communities and economies’, offers ‘practical and proven insights to help cities and countries capture and host a successful event that delivers a legacy of positive and lasting change’; and Amion’s UK Government-funded ‘Regeneration Legacy Evaluation’ report (2015: 5) advocates the staging of the 2012 Olympics will ‘transform the Lower Lea Valley and contribute to the regeneration of East London’ as well as result in ‘a range of wider sub-national and national benefits’, and, in doing so, offers up a set of evaluative findings, which it considers to be ‘important for a number of reasons’.

Next on our continuum - and moving towards a more critical take on SMEs and legacies - is the media. The media are at once part of the coalition of beneficiaries, but also represent a number of journalists and media commentators, who, on occasion, offer a critical perspective of the ability of SMEs to produce their intended legacies. However, this critique is often balanced by the underlying belief that leveraging a positive legacy from an SME is an achievable target. This is demonstrated by an article printed in *The Independent* (18 August, 2008) just days before the closing ceremony marked the end of the 2008 Beijing Games: ‘The best Olympics regenerate neglected districts, inspire children to take up sport and leave a city furnished with world-class venues...the worst are poisoned chalices that leave a nation in debt and a city overrun by white elephants’. This seems to imply a link between the quality of an Olympic Games and legacy benefits a country can reap; that despite dangers of negative impacts, if the Games are good enough, the benefits should follow. In relation to the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, *The*



*Telegraph* (26 February, 2014) adopts a similar standpoint in highlighting ‘positive’ legacies from past Olympics, counter-balanced by casting a critical gaze over those that have not been realised: ‘There have been instances where the Olympic Games gave the host city a new lease of life.....However, many host cities have also been left with former Olympic venues that are scarcely used’; and *The Guardian’s* (29 November, 2011) view that Rio 2016 will present Brazil ‘opportunities abound but [that] the occasion is also riddled with dangers’ likewise echoes similar sentiments. In short, while offering a more critical perspective on the legacies left by SME’s than both the group of IGB’s, NGB’s and political leaders, and that of private sector stakeholders, the media, in many cases, fall short of outright scepticism of legacy as an achievable thing in itself, instead identifying it as conceivable, if often unrealised.

Finally, the next stage of our continuum would be the group of academics who, through their previous and on-going research, argue that intended SME legacies are commonly unachievable and often overstated, leading, in the majority of cases, to negative outcomes for their hosts. For example, although SMEs have been seen to be an effective addition to economic development, academics have reminded us that in numerous cases such events result in a legacy of financial burden to their hosts (cf. Chalkley and Essex, 1999; Searle, 2005); the 1972 Olympic Games left Munich with debts of up to £178 million, for instance, and four years later in Montreal the Games provided debts of up to £692 million (cf. Gratton *et al.*, 2000). Furthermore, beliefs surrounding positive urban regeneration, employment growth, increases in sports participation and tourism gains have all been questioned by academics (cf. Preuss, 2004; Toohey and Veal, 2007; Grix, 2014); the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles and the 2000 Games in Sydney, for example, both witnessed significant decreases in regular tourism numbers during their respective events (cf. Horne & Manzenreiter, 2004; Preuss, 2004); and, in concluding on the majority of scientific findings, Collins (2010: 376; cf. Vigor *et al.*, 2004) suggests that ‘there is no evidence of the short-lived spectacle of the Games ever sustainably promoting greater participation of health

benefits'. Furthermore, although SMEs can promote the existence and/or appeal of a city or state, for those hosts unprepared for the international attention that accompanies these events, there is always the potential for one's global image to be significantly tarnished (leading to what Brannagan and Giulianotti (2014; 2015: 706) term 'soft disempowerment'). The 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi, for example, have long been remembered for their disastrous preparations and subsequent international critique, most particularly in connection to the country's adherence to the use of child labour (see Sengupta's piece in this Special Issue). Thus, from an academic perspective, claims that SMEs bring about achievable outcomes which significantly contribute to the host's long-term socio-economic climate have been, and continue to be, based on a distinct lack of (historical) evidence (cf. Miller, 2002; Horne and Manzenreiter, 2006).

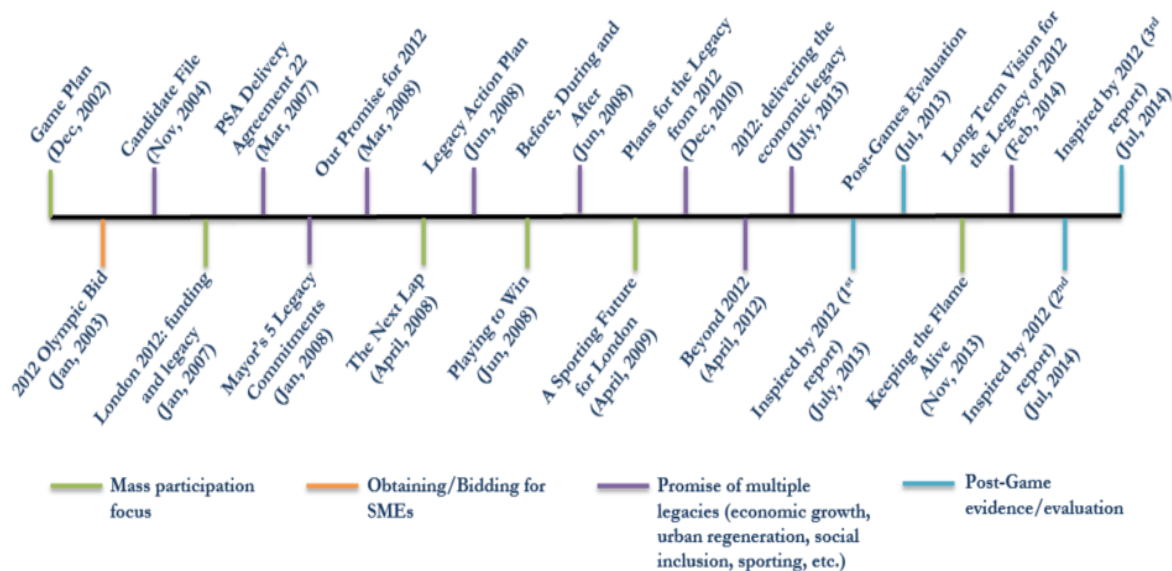
Given such differences in opinion on the efficacy of SMEs and legacies, there remains a significant misalignment between the legacy claims and discourse of the coalition of beneficiaries and the short- and long-term evidence of public benefits arising from such events. To discuss this misalignment still further we take the over-arching London 2012 legacy promise of increasing participation in sport and physical activity and hold it up against the existing evidence. What is interesting in the UK case is the fact that winning the bid to host the Games signals a change in sport policy away from 'sport for all' towards an elite sport policy focus. The interest lies in the fact that the successful Olympic bid in 2005 was based on increasing sport participation - that is, more a 'sport for all' policy - yet led to the increasing importance of elite sport policy.

### **London's Legacy Promise: 'Inspiring a Generation'**

Given the contrasting beliefs around the ability of SMEs to produce the desired outcomes of hosts, it is perhaps surprising that London's staging of the 2012 Olympic Games was the most

ambitious yet in terms of legacy ‘promises’. Indeed, London’s legacy aims were both ambitious and wide ranging, underpinned by the assumption that the Games would leave behind a significant ‘sporting, social and economic legacy’ for the UK (London 2012 Candidate File, 2005: 1; cf. Bloyce and Lovett, 2012; Girginov and Hills, 2008: 2092). This clear belief in the ability of the Games to translate into short- and long-term social and economic gains led to the creation of five key promises (discussed below).

An analysis of the wide range of documents written by a variety of government arm’s length bodies relating to the Olympics and its legacy indicates the clear expectation that the Games were seen as a major intervention to drive up participation. The discussion below not only points to the positive discourse around ‘legacy’ and a number of government definitions of this concept, it also seeks to shed some light on the intended aims of the documents themselves.



**Diagram 1:** London 2012 Legacy Document Timeline

In reviewing the documents depicted in Diagram 1, there are three things we can say on the government's London 2012 legacy discourse. First, the UK government clearly believe in the benefits of hosting SMEs; indeed, appearing early within the UK Government's publication of the *'London 2012 Candidate File'*, the belief existed that, by hosting the Games, long term social, economic, political and sporting legacies would be achieved (ibid.). In the specific case of London, five continuous legacy objectives were believed to be achievable before, during and after the hosting of the Games (see: *Our Promise for 2012*, DCMS, 2008):

1. *'Making the UK a 'world-class sporting nation'* - both in terms of elite performance and high levels of participation amongst the masses;
2. To *'transform the heart of East London'*, and, in doing so, creating new homes, transport facilities and business opportunities;
3. To *'inspire a new generation of young people'* to partake in volunteering and various cultural activities;
4. Ensure the Olympic Park acts as a *blueprint for sustainable living*; and
5. Position the UK as a *'creative, inclusive and welcoming place to live in, visit and for business'*.

The ability of the Games to actually achieve these five legacy promises has been called into question by various media commentators and academics alike (cf. Girginov and Hills, 2008; Gold and Gold, 2009; Weed *et al.*, 2012; Weed, 2014; Green, 2012; Devine, 2013; Grix *et. al.*, 2015). On regeneration, for example, the Athletes' Olympic Village and the Olympic Stadium have appeared to have benefited private investors far more than the average taxpayer, with the Qatar Investment Authority and private-company, Delaney, purchasing the former in 2011, and the latter being taken over by West Ham United Football Club as of late-2016 (*The Guardian*, 12 August, 2011; *The Independent*, 16 September, 2016). The shift of resources from pre-event public funding to post-event private business benefit is one that appears to occur across time, space and types of SMEs (see in particular the submissions by Black and Segupta in this Special Issue).

Furthermore, David Cameron's claim that the 2012 Games would leave a 'lasting economic legacy that will benefit the whole country' has also been doubted, with the government's estimated returns now appearing to be widely exaggerated (cf. *The Independent*, 9 June, 2012; *Financial Times*, 21 July, 2013); on volunteering, in May 2013, research found that the government's ambitions had also been dramatically overstated, with many local-based charities and voluntary organizations witnessing little difference than before the Games were hosted (cf. *The Independent*, 2nd May, 2013; *The Independent*, 16 July, 2013); and finally, although the Games may have gone some way in demonstrating the UK's creativity, the nation's inability to plan prior to the event with regard to such things as security measures and the availability of tickets did little for the UK's image on the international scene (*The Guardian*, 24 July, 2012; *The Guardian*, 24 April, 2013).

The majority of government documents listed above had in common the belief that the Games would lead to an increase in mass sporting participation. The centrality of using the Games for fostering greater levels of mass participation was reflected first in the 2002 publication, '*Game Plan*', and then in five of the UK's legacy documents leading up to and after the Games: '*London 2012: funding and legacy*' (2007); '*The Next Lap*' (2008); '*Playing to Win*' (2008); '*A Sporting Future for London*' (2009); and '*Keeping the Flame Alive*' (2013). Throughout these documents, the belief appears to exist that hosting the Games will 'get more people taking up sport', and this, in turn, will lead to expanding the 'pool of talented English sportsmen and women' (DCMS, *Playing to Win*, 2008: 2). The UK Government's target was to use the hosting of the Games to encourage 'one million more people doing sport by 2012' (Mayor of London, *A Sporting Future for London*, 2009: 13), leading to significant, long-term health benefits, but also to counter the broader social issues of crime, academic underachievement and a lack of community cohesion (ibid.: 9). This target was unceremoniously dropped by the UK Conservative-led coalition government on coming to power in 2010.

## The Power of Elite Sport to Inspire?

The announcement of London as the host of the 2012 Olympic Games in 2005 added impetus to an elite policy focus that had begun to crystalize, first, with the introduction of lottery funding for elite sport in 1997 and, significantly, in the Government's 2002 sport policy treatise, *Game Plan*. The latter document, put together by the incumbent Labour Government, did, however, shed some doubt on the causal link between hosting a major Games and its ability to stimulate physical activity and sport participation among the masses. *Game Plan* claims that international sporting success 'boosts the profile of a sport and increases interest in participation' (DCMS/Strategy Unit 2002, p. 9). However, later in that document, there is a clarification that 'the interactions between participation, international competition and hosting events are unclear' (2002, p. 14). The document goes on to point out that 'international success does not appear to stimulate sustained increases in participation' (DCMS/Strategy Unit 2002). Such an observation chimes with the extant literature looking at participation legacies from sports mega-events (see Weed et. al. 2009, 2014; Coalter, 2007). Winning the Olympic bid in 2005 and introducing the now infamous 'no compromise' approach to elite sport funding by UK Sport in 2006 appears to suggest that the caution from 2002 had given way to the belief in a causal relationship between elite sport success/SME hosting and increased sport and physical activity participation (although these two categories were not always specified; see Weed *et. al.*, 2009).

The roots of an elite sport policy focus can be found - as is often the case in sport - in a spectacularly bad performance of the GB squad in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. The hallowed Olympic medal table has long been viewed as a barometer of a nation's health, bound up as it is with national pride. GB finished 36th in Atlanta in 1996, their worst performance ever. The aim to improve this, the introduction of lottery funding (1997) and the belief that elite sport performance impacts mass participation rates, is behind the UK shifting their focus away from

grassroots and towards elite sport funding. The planning for and winning of the London 2012 bid in 2005 further recalibrated the UK's sport policy focus more towards elite sport and away from grass-roots sport. Thus, poor elite performance and low sports participation rates were addressed by focusing on elite sport policy to improve elite performance and improve participation rates among the masses. An elite sport policy remains in place today despite a change in Government.

The political mood was and still is - across political opinion - united; the UK Labour party's broad elite sport focus, the party in power when the London bid was won, was taken over seamlessly by the Conservative-led coalition in 2010. Just prior to the election, Labour demonstrated the shift in policy by publishing (through the Department of Culture, Media and Sport) its sport policy document, *Playing to Win: A New Era for Sport* (2008), which spelt out clearly the government's elite-driven sport policy to achieve both more mass sports participation through Olympic medal success – effectively outlining the tenets of the 'virtuous cycle' of sport. The 'virtuous cycle' is an attempt to build on the 'trickle-down' or 'pyramid' models of the relationship between elite and mass sport (see Van Bottenburg, 2002: 2; see also Hanstad and Skille, 2010). In a nutshell this model holds that elite success on the international stage and/or the successful staging of sports mega-events (SMEs) leads to increased global prestige for national leaders and nation-states; both also contributes to a collective sense of (national) identity; this, then, boosts a greater mass sport participation, leading to a healthier populace; this, in turn, provides a bigger 'pool' of talent from which to choose the elite stars of the future and ensure continued success. The process then starts over again (Grix and Carmichael, 2012).

One of the more recent UK Government documents on the London Olympics and its legacy boldly articulates the causality of 'mega-event = participation' by stating categorically that the games:

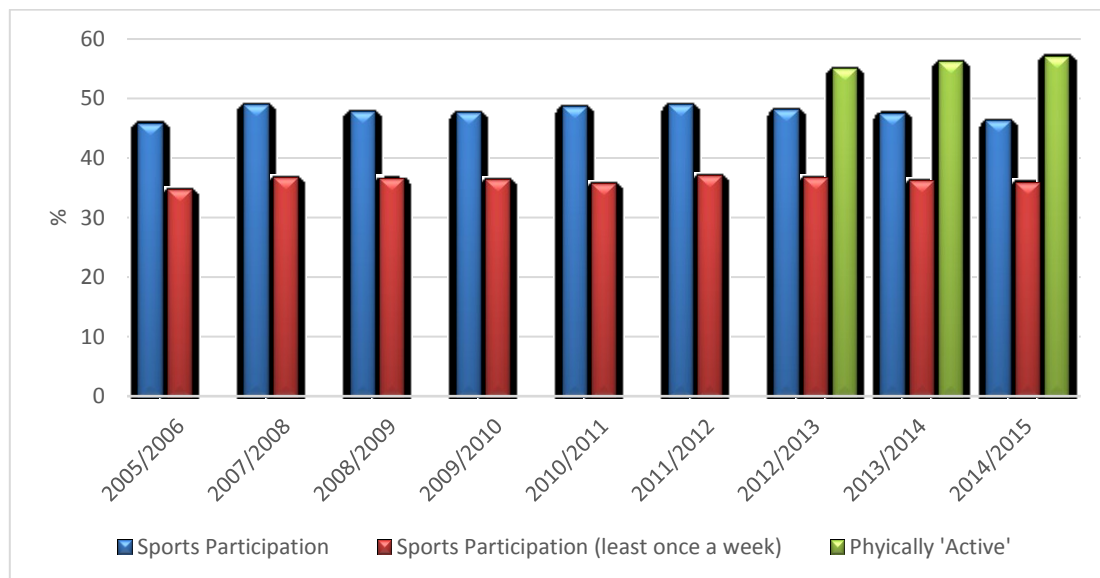
...will help to unlock talent. And the first priority of the Games is to make the UK a world-leading sporting nation. We hope to see people becoming increasingly active, with a goal of seeing two million people more active by 2012 through focused investment in our sporting infrastructure and better support and information for people wanting to be active. The new focus on sporting excellence in England will reinvigorate clubs and coaching, which will attract and bring on young sporting talent. (DCMS 2008: 3)

Nowhere is the belief in elite sport inspiring the masses and the old adage 'build facilities and they will come' more pronounced. Both of these assumptions have been shown - over time and a variety of cases - to be wrong. There is, however, no doubting that the Government's elite sport focus *has* effectively kick-started the UK's rise in elite sport prowess. In the three Olympics since winning the bid (2008, 2012 and 2016), team GB have finished 4<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> respectively. The UK government fully engaged in and supported London's hosting of the 2012 Olympic Games, which was awarded in June 2005. By 2006 an extra £200 million of taxpayer's money was invested into the development of elite sport - on-top of the £100 million lottery funding already in-place - as part of the government's 'no compromise' plan to ensure success in 2012. The Olympic success in 2012 and 2016 in terms of medals won served to underline the 'success' of the government's sport policy approach.

According to UK Government documents the legacies sought from the 2012 Games have largely been successfully accomplished. In the 2014 publication, *Inspired by 2012 (2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Report: 8)*, for example, the claim is made that 'There is much to be proud of in what has already been achieved'; in supporting this claim, the document then lists the investments made in ensuring, in particular, that the UK has benefitted from the hosting of the Games with regard to health and well-being, pointing to investments made in grassroots sports facilities, initiatives and schools; what the report fails to pinpoint, however, is how many more people across the UK have actually been inspired to take up sport, or increase their existing participation. The same can be said for the government's *Inspired by 2012 (3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Report, 2015: 10)*, which, again, largely



provides readers with an overview of investments made in sporting facilities; a notable exception here is the claim that, through the hosting of the Games, by 2014, 400,000 Londoners were ‘participating in grassroots sport and physical activities’. To further examine this claim that the 2012 legacy promise of ‘inspiring a generation’ to participate - particularly, in sport - a good place to start is by looking at the (government-sponsored) participation data. A word of caution is perhaps necessary here - the Active People’s Survey (APS) (which was launched, incidentally, in the same year Great Britain won the Olympic bid in 2005), is not without issues (see Carmichael *et. al.*, 2013). Diagram 2 below shows the sports participation and physical activity rates across England since the UK’s awarding of the 2012 Games.

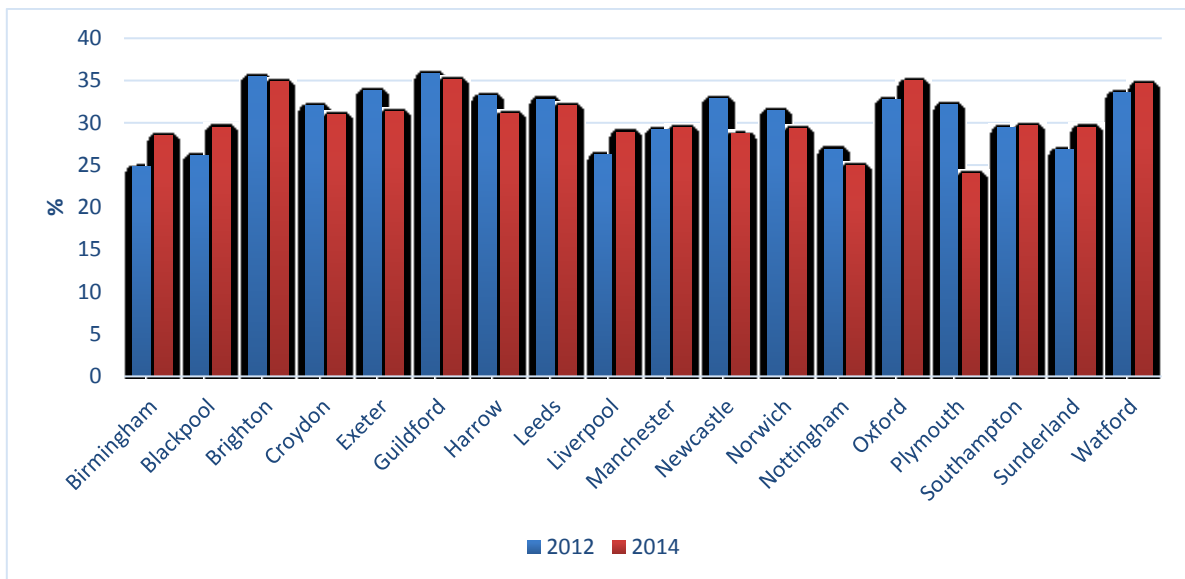


**Diagram 2:** Sports Participation and Physical Activity in England (taken from Active People Survey)

From this, there are three things to note. First, it would appear that short spikes in sports participation overall occurred both immediately after London was awarded the Games as well as leading up to the hosting of the Games themselves, but, nonetheless, have started on a slow decline post-2012 to almost the same levels of participation evident in 2005. Second, the same can arguably be said for participation in sport ‘at least once a week’; again, we see a spike from 2007-2009 and then again in 2012, but these figures too now appear to be entering into a slow

decline. And third, since data from the Active People Survey was collected in 2012, we see that there is a steady increase in those who are considered to be ‘physically active’, although this covers a wide-range of activities from dance, recreational walking and gardening (Sport England).

In seeking to unpick these figures, Diagram 3 details the ‘physically active’ rates across England by location. From this, we can see that over half of the locations chosen have witnessed a decrease in physical activity since London’s staging of the Games in 2012.



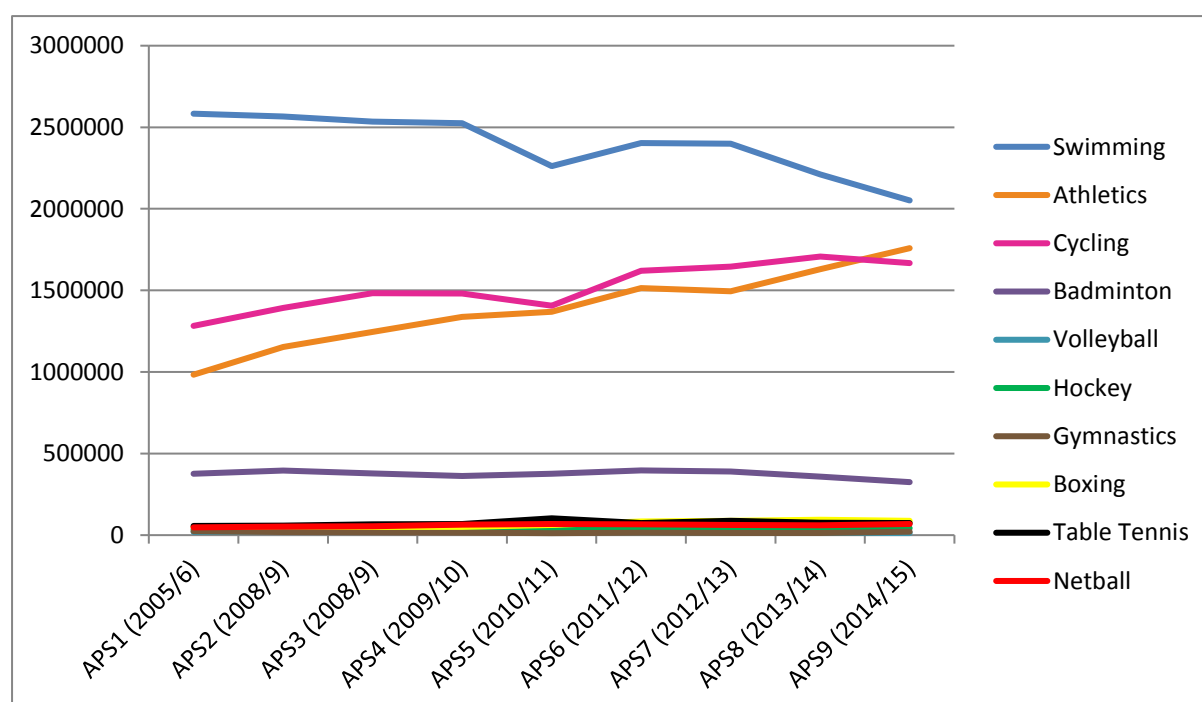
**Diagram 3:** ‘Physically Active’ (150-599 moderate-to-vigorous physical activity) by Location (England) (Active People Survey)

There is some evidence that the situation may be different in the Home Countries where the Home Nation Sports Councils seem to have been better prepared to embrace the increased participation challenge. Gymnastics, Triathlon, Swimming and athletics have all sustained increases. The Western Mail (1 August, 2016) reported, for example:

London 2012 saw Welsh athletes break a number of records on the international stage. We not only capitalised on the great success of the Games but managed to sustain that enthusiasm – bucking a downward trend in participation seen in other home nations a couple of years after the Games. Since the games we’ve seen a record number of people in Wales taking part in physical activity. Our Active Adults survey shows 41% of people are taking

part in some sort of sporting activity three times a week, up from 39% in 2012. The results are even better for children with 48% hooked on sport compared to 40% in 2013. More people are volunteering in Wales than ever before and club membership is at an all-time high.

Nonetheless, in general terms, the England Active People Survey (2013) reported that the number of 16-25 year olds playing sport across the nation had actually decreased since London's hosting of the Games, with the percentage of those with the lowest family incomes participating in sport at its lowest since 2005 (cf. *The Guardian*, 12 December, 2013; *The Guardian*, 5th July, 2015). Furthermore, Diagram 4 shows the sports participation of selected sports over the past 10 years, encompassing both the build up to and the hosting of the Olympics, as well as post-Games participation figures. The ten sports were selected on the basis of being Olympic disciplines, and thus, would be the most likely to see increases in participation as a result of the Games.



**Diagram 4:** England Sports Participation Rates (2005-2015) (Source: Active People Survey)

In addition, the sports selected were those within which winning an Olympic medal is deemed the pinnacle of the sport, thus discounting sports such as football, tennis and golf, within which

this would arguably be surpassed by other achievements such as the FIFA World Cup, Grand Slam and Major title victories. Finally, as cost is such a significant barrier for sports participation among young people (Street Games, 2015), the selected sports were also deemed to be the most accessible of those meeting the first two criteria, due to limited equipment requirements and local club access.

Diagram 4 most notably indicates three phenomena. First it shows a rise in participation in the two sports of athletics and cycling, in which figures rose from 0.98 million in 2005/06 to 1.76 million in 2014/15, and 1.28 million in 2005/06 to 1.67 million in 2014/15, respectively (Table 2). In both cases, the increases are statistically significant; however, in cycling, participation has only risen by around 27, 000 since London 2012 and actually decreased between 2013/14 and 2014/15. Second, the participation figures in swimming decreased significantly from 2.58 million in 2005/06 to 2.05 million in 2014/15, a decline of almost half a million people since London won the right to host the Games, the exact opposite of the promise set out by the Government. Third, as also indicated in table 1, of the remaining 7 sports, badminton, volleyball and hockey all significantly increased their participation from 2005/06 to 2014/15, boxing, table tennis and netball all significantly increased participation over this time frame, whilst there was no significant change within gymnastics.

	<b>APS1 (2005/6)</b>	<b>APS6 (2011/12)</b>	<b>APS9 (2014/15)</b>	<b>Increase/Decrease</b>
<b>Swimming</b>	2,583,300	2,403,700	2,051,500	Decrease
<b>Athletics</b>	983,500	1,514,700	1,758,900	Increase
<b>Cycling</b>	1,282,600	1,620,000	1,666,900	Increase
<b>Badminton</b>	376,300	396,700	325,000	Decrease
<b>Volleyball</b>	18,600	16,400	12,600	Decrease
<b>Hockey</b>	35,400	46,500	42,900	Decrease
<b>Gymnastics</b>	24,200	15,200	21,400	No Change
<b>Boxing</b>	49,900	84,300	87,300	Increase
<b>Table Tennis</b>	56,500	74,700	74,200	Increase
<b>Netball</b>	47,600	65,700	68,200	Increase

**Table 1** - England Sport participation in 2005/06, 2011/12 and 2014/15 (Source: Active People Survey)

Overall, however, it can be clearly seen from diagram 4 that levels of participation have fallen significantly short of the promise to ‘inspire a generation’. Given the Active People Survey data, it is unsurprising that the Conservative-led coalition government abandoned in 2010 the original aim of ‘two million people [being] more active by 2012’ when it became clear that this target was unachievable. In order to meet those targets, the participatory increases seen in cycling and athletics would have to be seen across all sports, which, as diagram 4 indicates, was not the case; rather, it suggests the government over-estimated the impact that hosting the Games would have on sports participation.

London 2012 was the first Olympic or Paralympic Games that formally set out increased participation as a legacy aim, and thus the first to implement leveraging strategies in order for the outcome to be achieved. The Active People Survey data suggests, however, that London 2012 did not lead to increased levels of sports participation. It would appear that the caution and scepticism adopted by many commentators on the ability of SMEs to inspire increased participation is justified. The ‘coalition of beneficiaries’ - made up as it is of IGBs, NGBs, national authorities, political leaders, business and parts of the media - have a tendency to over-exaggerate the impact of a range of legacies from SMEs to ensure they secure the event in the first place (see Bason and Grix, 2017).

### **Concluding remarks**

This article serves as a general introduction to the subject of ‘legacies’ of sports mega-events covered by the international scholars whose contributions make up this SI. The burgeoning literature on this topic offers a number of different views on what ‘legacy’ is, how and whether it can be achieved and the shape it can take. There is clearly a positive ‘discourse’ around SME

legacies that has caught the ear of a wide number of states irrespective of their political leaning, developmental stage, geographical region or cultural heritage. The Middle East is slowly becoming a serial SME host – if mostly for smaller-scale events; East Asia is set to underline its prominence as an SME host with the next three Olympics being held in the region (Pyeongchang, 2018, Winter Olympics; Tokyo, 2020, Summer and Beijing, 2022, Winter); traditional ‘democratic’ states continue to invest in SMEs in the hope of specific legacy benefits (cf. Gold Coast Commonwealth Games, 2018; Tokyo Olympics, 2020), while less democratic states seek to boost their image through hosting (Russia and Qatar, FIFA World Cup, 2018 and 2022 respectively). Unfortunately, for such hosts, legacies may not be the type they had hoped for.

We have considered the wide variety of views on SME legacies and sought to disentangle an often opaque debate. The premise that elite sport success and hosting SMEs inspires the ‘masses’ to participate in sport and physical activity is, as this paper discussed, difficult to evidence in the UK and beyond. Many of the themes touched upon in this paper recur throughout the international case studies in this Special Issue and it is clear that over-exaggerating post-event legacies appears to be one theme that is common to most.

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<sup>1</sup> The 'coalition of beneficiaries' are stakeholders who accentuate the positives of hosting SMEs. The group comprises international sports governing bodies, such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), national governing bodies of sport, non-sporting national governments and their subsidiary organizations, politicians, sports administrators, business leaders and sections of the media.