

Delivering a sports participation legacy from the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games: evidence from sport development workers in Birmingham and their experiences of a double-bind

Abstract: Legacy promises from London 2012 meant that those working in sport in local, non-host areas in Britain were expected to facilitate more sporting opportunities for local citizens. Legacy preparations occurred in the context of many other constraints that stemmed from Government budget cuts and provision of leisure-time sport and other leisure activities. This paper presents new evidence on a significantly under-researched area of leisure studies, namely: the experiences of those delivering leisure-sport opportunities in a non-host city and how they responded to national legacy promises. Using Elias's concept of the double-bind, we explain the 'crisis situation' in which some local sports workers were enmeshed and how their acceptance of 'fantasy-laden beliefs' of expected demonstration effects from mega-events exacerbated their 'crisis' (Elias, 2007). We also draw upon participants' post-Games reflections to consider how future host nations may wish to leverage greater leisure-sporting legacies from a mega-event.

Keywords: Double-bind, Elias, figural sociology, legacy, Olympics, power

Introduction

Policy processes involve complex networks through which those ‘on the ground’ are often constrained to manage tensions between local contexts and national objectives. There are many examples of the promoters of various forms of leisure making evidence-light claims to justify investing in their passions. Investment in high-culture, for example, is often justified through the allocation of low ticket prices to attract a more diverse audience. This is despite evidence that determinants of theatre attendance is more deeply rooted in socioeconomic status and occupational background, with lower pricing unlikely to increase engagement (Grisolía, Willis, Wymer, & Law, 2010). Another example of using evidence-light claims in pursuit of providing attractive leisure activities for the public came from the range of ambitious legacy promises related to the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games that constrained those working in sport (including leisure-sport) to leverage various legacies from the Games. In the build up to London 2012, planning for legacy was a relatively new feature of event planning (Leopkey & Parent, 2012), with ‘legacy’ becoming one of the ‘main interests’ of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) (Gratton & Preuss, 2008, p.1922). The London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) promised a sporting legacy – including a growth in leisure-time sport participation across Britain. However, researchers investigating sports participation legacies from mega-events have been critical of policy-makers’ expectations given the lack of evidence for sustained increases in leisure-sport participation following previous events (Bloyce & Lovett 2012; Bloyce & Smith 2010; Chalip, Green, Taks, & Misener, 2017; Coalter 2004; Girginov & Hills 2008; Lovett & Bloyce, 2017; Taks, Misener, Chalip, & Green, 2013; Weed et al. 2009; Weed et al., 2015).

Since promising a sports participation legacy during the bidding and planning stages of the Games was relatively new at the time of London 2012, the Games provided one of the first opportunities to examine the processes involved in attempting to deliver participation legacies. Various policy documents promised that the expected sport participation legacy from London 2012 would occur throughout the UK (London 2012, 2004), so it might reasonably be expected that this would impact upon those living in non-host areas, including Birmingham, one of the most populated cities in the UK, which provided the setting for our research. The importance of strategic planning for legacies prior to a mega-event is widely recognised (Chalip et al., 2017; Coalter, 2004; Weed et al., 2009; Weed et al., 2015), so it is important to analyse the experiences of those working ‘on the ground’, at the local level, during the planning and delivery stages. This paper presents new evidence on a significantly under-researched area of leisure studies, namely: the experiences of those delivering leisure-sport opportunities in a non-host city and how they responded to national legacy promises. In doing so, it sheds new light on the complex social processes involved in local level sports legacy work by examining how sports workers and volunteers in Birmingham responded to national policy promises regarding legacy using the concept of the ‘double-bind’, as derived from figurational sociology. The ‘double-bind’ is used to make sense of the diminishing control of those working in the sector and the increasing complexity that came from being required to focus upon sporting activity and event celebrations before, and soon after, the London 2012 Games took place. This is because, as Elias (2007) noted, the term ‘double-bind’ refers to a situation that is perceived to be dangerous or spiralling out of the control of the individual that it surrounds; that individual also has a role in reinforcing this ‘dangerous’ situation further. Elias (2007, p.114) described the double-bind as:

a compelling human situation – a situation involving people whose feelings and consciousness, mentality and personality structure are themselves implicated ... A power conflict stands at the centre of any double-bind process. The dangers which it brings for the people involved are difficult for them to overcome precisely because their own mentality comes to bear the mark of the threat, and contributes to its recurring reproduction.

Elias (2007) used the story of two fisherman in a maelstrom as an example of a spiralling situation in which a highly emotional, and ‘involved’, response hindered one fisherman’s ability to plan and control the danger that he faced. He argued that in a perceived crisis, or a dangerous situation to the individuals concerned, human emotions such as fear, hope or fantasy increase the danger further by diminishing the ability of those involved to think clearly and plan an appropriate course of action. However, Elias (2007) also argued that people are able to exert greater control over some elements of the critical situations within which they might find themselves by developing a relatively detached perspective of the circumstances with which they are confronted. The double-bind is thus an attempt to explain a dangerous situation that is compounded by thinking characterised by a higher degree of fantasy and emotion which limits significantly people’s ability to make sense of their circumstances and achieve their desired goals. In enacting sport policy, those working in sports development are constrained by the sheer complexity of the relational networks of which they are a part and the dynamic power differentials which characterise attempts by individuals and groups to act in more-or-less goal-directed ways oriented towards their desired goals (Bloyce & Smith, 2010; Dopson & Waddington, 1996). For reasons explained elsewhere (Bloyce & Smith, 2010; Elias, 1978; Smith, Bloyce & Haycock, 2019), however, the normal result of this purposive human action is the production of unintended outcomes which may, or may not, be regarded as desirable by

the relevant individuals and groups involved and which may come to limit significantly the degree to which the government are able to achieve their desired policy goals. This ‘double bind’, Elias (2007) argued, is further compounded by the increasing complexity of the interdependency ties in which individuals and groups are enmeshed and in which they are less able to control the emerging situations in which they find themselves. As will become clear, although Elias’s concept of the ‘double-bind’ has so far been ignored in discussions of legacy and leisure-sport participation, it is particularly useful in making theoretical sense of how those delivering leisure-sport opportunities responded to national legacy promises.

Literature Review

For a number of decades, hosting cities, countries, governments and sporting organisations, have made claims that numerous additional benefits will emerge from hosting a mega-event like the Olympic Games. For some time claims have been made that mega-events contribute to urban regeneration, develop a related economic legacy and boost to tourism (Roche, 2017). In addition, increasingly governments and host-cities have claimed that hosting the Games would contribute to a leisure-sport participation boost (Weed et al., 2015). These so-called ‘legacies’ from hosting the Games have been subject to increasing academic scrutiny, however, and the claims have often been found wanting. Indeed, there is now a wealth of literature on legacies and mega-events (Preuss, 2019), which has been reviewed in detail elsewhere (e.g. Koenigstorfer, Bocarro, Byers, Edwards, Jones & Preuss, 2019). Given the extensive coverage devoted to the literature on legacy elsewhere, it is only necessary within this paper to focus on those studies that have specifically examined the sports participation legacies associated with the Olympic Games.

It is widely agreed that strategic planning for legacies prior to a mega-event is crucial if any participation legacy is to be achieved (Chalip et al., 2017; Coalter, 2004; Weed et al., 2009; Weed et al., 2015). In this respect, several authors have suggested that any potential participation increase associated with a mega-event is only tenable with the implementation of supplemental activities alongside the mega event (Coalter, 2004; Frawley & Cush, 2011; Hoskyn, Dickson, & Sotiriadou, 2017; Misener, Taks, Chalip, & Green, 2015; Taks et al., 2018; Wang & Theodoraki, 2007; Weed et al., 2009; Weed et al., 2015). Nevertheless, as Chalip, Green, Taks and Misener (2017, p. 258) point out, notwithstanding the claims made by successive governments in the UK regarding the potential for London 2012 to generate a sports and physical activity participation legacy, the available evidence is that such events ‘do not prompt people to participate’.

Weed et al. (2012) stressed the importance of ‘the festival effect’ in promoting leisure-sport among the least active before the Games. This, they argued, would involve the promotion of the Games as a national festival beyond sport with links to local and cultural communities. Indeed, Weed et al. (2009, p.56) suggested that the 2012 Games should be promoted as a four-year festival, rather than a two week sporting competition relying upon a demonstration effect. Mackintosh, Darko, Rutherford and Wilkins (2015) used video diaries and interviews with families living in the East Midlands pre- and post-the London 2012 Games, focusing on their lived experiences of London 2012. Their findings revealed that prior socialisation into sport was important in predicting participation related to the ‘legacy’ of the Games. However, they also found that the traditional challenges for sports development (e.g. accessibility, cost, available family friendly opportunities) constrained significantly families’ participation. Mackintosh et al. (2015) concluded that activities to promote participation might be more effective if they were better targeted at local families, whilst Weed et al. (2015) suggested

targeted activity promotion which matched the preferences of particular groups (especially those who have previously contemplated being more active) were likely to be more effective at enhancing leisure time participation. The provision of more individualised, non-traditional, activities such as yoga and Pilates have also been proposed as more likely to encourage physical activity among the least active following the hosting of mega-events (Mackintosh, Darko & May-Wilkins, 2016).

Pappous and Hayday (2015) analysed participation in judo and fencing by focusing on the experiences of those working within these specific sports. Slight increases in participation were observed during the period analysed up to 2013. However, some of their interviewees noted that those running voluntary sports clubs did not sufficiently engage with the Games to take advantage of the opportunity to promote their club. Hayday, Pappous and Koutrou (2017) similarly explained how sports club capacity constraints prevented clubs from engaging their local communities in leisure-sport, whilst semi-formal and informal clubs have traditionally been less receptive to policy directives and often lack sufficient understanding of national policy enactment (May, Harrison & Collins, 2013). In evaluating targeted interventions associated with the Games, despite observing positive increases in participation in the programmes, Chen and Henry (2019) did not attribute all outputs and outcomes to the hosting of the Olympics.

In summarising the literature, it is possible to identify four main explanations why it has proved so difficult to establish increased sports participation from hosting a mega-event. Firstly, there tends to be a larger increase in funding for elite athletes in the build up to hosting an event, 'in lieu of resources to build mass sport participation' (Chalip et al., 2017, p. 258). Girginov and Hills (2008) found this to be the case in the initial build-up to London 2012 as well. Secondly,

numerous academics argue that as the performances of elite sportspeople often seem beyond the capabilities of the wider population, their performances can make the prospect of participating more daunting (Chalip et al., 2017, Coalter, 2004). Thirdly, as there is more media exposure and opportunities to watch sports during mega-events, people engage in watching sport, as opposed to doing it (Bloyce & Smith, 2010; Chalip et al. 2017). Finally, in terms of planning for leveraging a participation legacy, there tends to be a lack of preparation, given that, for many policy makers, there is an assumed belief in an ‘inherent’ participation legacy (Chalip et al., 2017, Weed et al., 2012). As such, whilst there have been reported, and very brief, ‘spikes’ in participation rates, the ‘lack of available capacity to absorb new participants’ (Chalip et al., 2017, p. 257) means that any such increased interest in participating in sports is short-lived. Indeed, ‘it is only after the event is over that sport organizations recognize that they have missed an opportunity’ (Taks et al., 2018, p. 195-6).

London 2012 policy statements focused upon the need for local level workers and volunteers to manage the delivery of legacy and legacy programmes throughout the UK (Bloyce & Lovett, 2012). It is therefore important to analyse how they reacted to this national constraint since current work on London 2012 – as the first Olympic and Paralympic host nation to officially promise a legacy across the nation – has either focused on specific programmes or interventions, or analysed the experiences of those working in a specific sport. The voices of local level workers in a non-host city are largely absent in the existing literature, so here we draw upon Elias’s (2007) work on the double bind to examine how sports development workers and volunteers in a non-host city (Birmingham) responded to national legacy promises and sought to promote leisure-time sport participation before, and soon after, the Games were held.

Methods

This paper presents data from a case study of the perspective of those working and volunteering in sport in Birmingham, UK, during 2012 and 2013. As a non-host city, Birmingham provided an appropriate case to examine attempts to deliver legacy at the local level in an area that did not experience significant changes to the built sporting infrastructure directly related to the hosting of the Games. Birmingham is one of the most populated cities in the UK with a relatively high youth population. This was important in relation to legacy analysis as much of the national legacy themed work was focused on creating a sporting habit for life in young people. A case study approach is one that has been adopted previously in sport policy research (Girginov & Hills, 2008; Phillpots, Grix & Quarmby, 2010; Wang & Theodoraki, 2007), largely because it can provide a more detailed insight into a complex network of people and their perceptions that influence sport policy and development. A single-case was used to enable in-depth interviews with a range of organisations involved in the delivery of leisure-time sport and physical activity across Birmingham.

The importance of strategic planning prior to a mega-event is widely recognized (Coalter, 2004; Weed et al., 2009). In this respect, it was important to analyse the experiences of those at the local level during both the planning and delivery stages to inform future hosts' preparations for any leveraging attempts from major and mega-events. Semi-structured interviews were conducted before the Games, in 2012 (n=31), and repeated with the same participant group after the Games, in 2013 (n=29), to examine processes of organisational and policy change in local sports development. Interviews enabled us to identify interviewees' 'we-' perspectives and the development of a relatively detached 'they-' perspective from the analysis and interpretation of data (Bloyce, 2004; Maguire, 1988). The interviews also enabled the analysis of interviewees' changing views about legacy before and after the Games. In the UK, the DCMS is the government department responsible for sport with two non-departmental

public bodies, UK Sport and Sport England (and three other respective ‘home nation’ bodies in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) being responsible for elite sport, and grassroots sport and physical activity, respectively. These organisations work with individual national governing bodies of sport (NGBs) and local County Sports Partnerships (CSPs) in England. There are countless other public, private and voluntary sector organisations that work to promote sport and physical activity in the UK, but in our study the interviewees included representatives of Sport England (n=1), the City Council (n=4), the local County Sports Partnership (CSP) (n=7), national governing bodies (NGBs) (n=9), local sports clubs (n=8), and the University of Birmingham (n=2). All interviews lasted between 26 minutes and one hour and 45 minutes. Pre-Games interviews were conducted in quiet spaces convenient for participants, most usually their place of work or sports club venue. Follow-up telephone interviews were conducted with all but two participants after the Games. Pre-Games interviews were used to examine participants’ expectations for legacy and any preparations they were undertaking, or were aware of. In post-Games interviews participants were asked to reflect upon their expectations from before the Games and whether these had begun to be realised as well as considering their experiences and the work that they had been engaged in.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim before data analysis, which included the coding and re-coding of data before themes were identified. Themes were identified with a theoretically informed mind, sensitised to figurational sociology, and based upon whether something meaningful or important could be identified from the data to help to make sense of the phenomena being investigated. Data coded as relating to power and social networks were identified alongside data very specific to this case. This enabled themes to be identified using a central organising concept (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Through coding and identifying themes that capture ‘something important in relation to the research question’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006,

p.82) and with an awareness of the key concepts of figurational sociology, it became clear that the concept of the double-bind helped to make sense of the themes that were identified.

Findings and Discussion

Findings revealed that hosting the London Olympic and Paralympic Games was seen as an important opportunity to generate a series of sport participation legacy impacts, but those involved in the local delivery of sport were constrained to deliver this whilst managing already reduced resources allocated for sport development priorities. The interviewees felt that there were numerous perceived ‘dangers’ regarding the promotion and implementation of legacy which is explained here as a ‘crisis situation’ as conceptualised by Elias. The following discussion is organised using the themes of the double-bind. This begins with the ‘danger’ (in terms of the work towards achieving their goals) of legacy being a missed opportunity which was compounded by various constraints emanating from participants’ lengthening and increasingly complex chains of interdependence which made the promotion of leisure-sport even more complex. This contributed to what Elias would refer to as the ‘spiralling crisis situation’ that sports workers found themselves in. Throughout pre-Games interviews and in most double-bind scenarios, the ‘fantasy’ content of knowledge has a bearing on the way people act in those situations. Many sports workers are convinced by, or, at least, rhetorically articulate the ‘power’ of sport, which contributed to the idea that an automatic legacy would simply emerge from hosting the Games. This fantasy-laden thinking compounded the ways in which they worked. The relational networks, and especially the local work situations, mediated interviewees’ ability to enact Olympic-themed activity and interviewees felt – with the benefit of hindsight and greater detachment during the post-Games period – that there were also various missed opportunities for promoting sport participation in people’s leisure-time.

The ‘danger’ of legacy becoming a missed opportunity

Using the double-bind concept, it was clear how several dangers needed to be negotiated by those working on the ground to deliver legacy. Central among these was the concern that the 2012 Games would become a missed opportunity if those living in the city were not provided with Games-related opportunities to become active in their leisure:

I think one of the things we were really clear ... about the Olympics for Birmingham, was that if we got to the end of this year and people didn't feel like they'd had the opportunity to engage in more sport and if they didn't feel like they'd had the opportunity to participate in some of the Olympic feeling that that would have been an incredibly wasted opportunity ... something that was really negative. (City Council worker, pre Games)

This was echoed by the CSP Director who suggested that ‘there is a bit of a concern that legacy is just a short after effect of the Games rather than the real sustainable legacy that we are looking for’. These expectations about legacy, and the associated constraints experienced by local sports workers to deliver further sporting opportunities, were partly created by those promising legacy at the bidding and national planning stages. Legacy promises from London 2012 created an expectation that the public across the country would increasingly participate in leisure-sport. This is despite the overwhelming evidence seriously questioning whether such a legacy can reasonably be expected to emerge from hosting the Games (Chalip et al., 2017; Coalter, 2004; Frawley & Cush, 2011; Taks, Green, Misener, & Chalip, 2018; Veal, Toohey & Frawley, 2012; Weed et al., 2009). However, preparations for London 2012 were occurring alongside, and were connected to, other local and national level social processes which, as Elias (2007) would have noted, were largely beyond the control of those delivering sport. The crisis

situation is the focus and initial stage of the double-bind. In relation to legacy promises and local level delivery, many of those working in Birmingham were in something of a crisis situation, not least because they so overwhelmingly believed that positive participation legacies would inevitably flow from hosting the Games. The whole *raison d'être* of their job was perceived to be under threat which, for them, resembled a crisis. The considerable concerns interviewees had about local facility provision and diminished financial and human resources stemming from the economic recession and comprehensive spending review (CSR) in 2010 that resulted in significant government budget cuts in Britain (see Widdopp, King, Parnell, Cutts, & Millward, 2018) contributed significantly to the perceived crisis.

‘Crisis situation’: persistent issues with the provision of sport

Our participants suggested that despite expectations that they would contribute to the development of a sporting legacy, they were nevertheless constrained by a perceived lack of good quality sport facilities in the city, and national policy and funding decisions, which characterised the ‘crisis situation’ (Elias, 2007) of the double-bind in which they were enmeshed. Whilst support for facility provision was a feature of the national legacy strategy developed by Sport England, facilities were regarded as problematic by those delivering leisure-time sport in Birmingham. Before the Games, an NGB representative described facilities as ‘old and cold’ and this did not change significantly post-Games. Indeed, post-Games, a CSP participant said: ‘in Birmingham there is probably a lack of iconic facilities or inspiring facilities which would make people want to do it for the long-term’. A swimming club volunteer raised concerns about access to a new swimming pool built ahead of 2012: ‘I mean locally we’ve got on-going issues with pools, pool access. And that is, we’ve had a new pool open in Harborne and have been given very little swimming club access at that, three hours a week, which is shocking really’. Facility constraints were not limited to swimming.

Netball, table tennis, basketball and cycling participants also discussed their disappointment over the lack of available facilities. In some cases, access to facilities was even decreasing, and as has been shown elsewhere, access to facilities is a key factor in sustaining sports participation involvement (Downward & Rasciute, 2015).

The interviewees also discussed what they felt impacted upon sport and legacy planning and delivery following a change in government in 2010, and specifically highlighted the CSR and subsequent financial constraints experienced locally. Despite the lack of notable change in government policy following the election of the Conservative Government to office in 2010, Bloyce and Lovett (2012) noted that there was considerable ‘re-branding’ of some legacy-related policies. Those working on the ground interpreted this, and the substantial impacts of the CSR-related budget cuts, as significant. Wagstaff, Gilmore and Thelwell (2016) highlight the negative impact on worker morale within sports organisations when having to cope with regular organisational change. The regular changes impacting on the participants of this study had a similarly deleterious effect on their ability to manage the situation they found themselves in (see also Bell and Gallimore, 2014). Changing government priorities, for example, were mentioned by the director of the CSP who felt that ‘it’s this constant change that [makes it] difficult [to] plan long-term’. Some level of change in sport policy was also highlighted by a CSP manager (post-Games) who described the need to react to this:

I just think that it was almost on us before we knew it. That came down to, really, we had a change in government and all these things were in place and then you are almost going through a period of change when you are trying to deliver what was previously set.

These were broader unplanned developments (Mackintosh et al., 2016) that happened alongside legacy preparations that contributed to the ‘crisis situation’ described here. As noted earlier, for Elias, a significant aspect of the double-bind is the lack of control the individuals involved have over the unfolding situations which contribute more significantly to unintended outcomes. In this respect, it is important to emphasise the ‘existence of a plurality of processes, all of which interweave with each other, with no causal primacy being given to any one of them’ but which lead to ‘transformations in social relationships’ occurring through a ‘variety of other processes of change’ (Van Krieken, 1998, p.68). Indeed, before the Games, a City Council sports worker stated that the changes to the team in the City Council had ‘nothing to do with the Olympics... And much more to do with the prioritisation [due to budget cuts] that’s had to go on’. Participants from the CSP also explained that some community groups were delivering less sport due to the funding issues. Despite expectations for increased opportunities for sport and physical activity, the reality was that local provision was significantly compromised by unintended outcomes which emerged from national budget cuts. For example, one CSP worker stated:

I’ve definitely seen people that have probably done less sport because of cost. I think there’s also ... a number of [sport-related] charities and community groups that are really, you know, they’ve either folded or they’re really, really finding it tough.

This compounded the perceived crisis that local level sports workers found themselves having to manage. The two objectives – saving money and delivering a legacy – may have undermined those working in sport in Birmingham during the pre-Games period when they were required to manage tensions between the competing objectives of managing budget cuts, perceived changes to policy and poor facility provision with delivering a sporting legacy. A figurational

analysis helps us understand that the outcomes of complex processes involving the interweaving of the actions of large numbers of people cannot be explained simply in terms of the intentions of individuals. The actions of those who pursued these objectives resulted in workers delivering fewer sporting opportunities, an outcome which it is reasonable to suggest was not intended or planned (Elias, 2007).

‘Spiralling crisis’: lengthening interdependency chains

The relative novelty of hosting the Games in an already complex policy environment following the election of a new government and decreasing capacity following the CSR meant that those delivering sport in Birmingham were further limited in their ability to control the delivery of legacy promises. The concerns those delivering sport had regarding facility provision, human and financial resources, compounded the crisis situation further. Exacerbating any feelings of helplessness at the local level, interviewees discussed a range of new organisations and community groups who wanted to engage in Olympic-themed activity which increased further the increasingly complex web of interdependencies in which they were enmeshed (Elias, 1978).

Changes to the sport development networks in Birmingham further increased the complexity of the figuration and diminished control for those attempting to manage legacy preparations. Many participants mentioned ‘the health agenda’ as an important feature of their work and had already begun to develop partnerships with the public health sector not, it should be noted, because of the 2012 Games, but by pressures on budgets and a desire to share resources. The associated constraints that emerged from these increasingly complex relational networks and which characterised sporting and public health partnership bodies resulted in a series of longer-term unplanned processes which, as Elias noted, are the normal result of social life (Dunning & Hughes, 2013). These included the parallel development of private-public partnerships and

increased interest in the Games from community groups. Many interviewees explained they had developed new partnerships with private companies for investment purposes and community groups who were each motivated by a concern to be associated with ‘something Olympic-themed’ (CSP participant, pre-Games). For Elias (1978, p.85), when more and more people become involved in a figuration, individuals experience their situations as ‘increasingly opaque and uncontrollable’ and become increasingly aware of their inability to understand or control these situations. The increased interest in sport brought about by the apparently impending excitement and expectations of hosting the Games widened the network of relations and lengthened the chains of interdependency for those delivering sport locally. Those working within local development were part of an uncontrollable flow of events that characterised their spiralling crisis of the double-bind.

Fantasy beliefs in inherent legacy

A belief in an inherent inspiration was identified as a key theme of national policy documents (Bloyce & Lovett, 2012), and was widely believed among our interviewees. The national discourse and our participants’ beliefs in inherent inspiration contributed significantly to the unintended feeling of having less control over their ability to contribute to a legacy process for sports participation in Birmingham. In the double-bind situation ‘low ability to control dangers and high fantasy-content of knowledge maintain and perhaps escalate each other’ (Elias, 2007, p.116). The fantasy content of their knowledge, which arguably compounded the concern felt by some participants of not being able to create a legacy, was the widely-held belief that members of the public will watch the Games and simply be inspired to participate. Those involved in sport and physical activity, especially those employed to promote it, were true believers in the idea of legacy. Many of the interviewees reconciled their growing fears about the perceived crisis with their inner-felt belief that ‘all would turn out well in the end’. For

example, a City Council worker thought that legacy ‘could be as simple as somebody watching the Olympics on the telly, being inspired by it and choosing to do something themselves afterwards’. Such a view was perhaps understandable since many policy claims involve an ‘amalgam of realistic observation and collective fantasies’ (Elias, 1978, p.13) which, in this case, further compounded the fantasy-laden thoughts and (in)action which characterised the legacy work of our interviewees. The roots of participants’ fantasy-based thoughts could be traceable to their habitus, or embodied social learning (Elias, 1991), in which it had become almost second nature to regard sport in almost universally positive ways – including in relation to the apparent legacy benefits of sporting events such as the Olympics and Paralympics. Having been involved in sport for a long time, and through enjoying sport themselves, those working in sport have often internalised ideas about the benefits of sport and ideological assumptions about the ‘virtuous cycle’ of watching elite performance to increasing grassroots participation (Chalip et al., 2017; Coalter, 2004; Hindson, Gidlow, & Peebles, 1994; Weed et al., 2009).

Assumptions about a demonstration effect were also a feature of the pre-Games interviews that participants expected that ‘there will be an influx of people’ after the Games (NGB worker, pre-Games). Several NGB and CSP participants discussed the need to prepare for an increased demand following the 2012 Games, despite their concerns about budget reductions impacting on their work. Participants expected increased interest in sport, felt that there would be increased demands placed on clubs, and explained what they perceived to be their own role in managing the supply of opportunity in response to the expected increase in demand. One CSP participant described their work with clubs before the Games as follows:

we're working very hard to ensure that there is, you know, a lasting legacy in terms of more sports clubs who are able to accommodate for an increase in interest in sport in general and also ensuring that clubs are equipped and have sufficient capacity to deal with that. But then also to provide a quality experience of sport and quite a varied experience of sport.

In preparing for an influx of participants, one NGB participant from Basketball England described their pre- Games work thus:

the big push at the minute is informal recreation or sports. Can they accommodate them for recreational activities? ... There'll be more need for club development, coach development, and certainly people involved from the volunteer point of view as well ... We don't want people to come in, try it for six weeks and disappear ... The main thing we will be doing is just signposting them to clubs, clubs, clubs all the way.

Notwithstanding this recognition of the popularity of informal offers, Basketball England still wanted to move people into more formal club structures. Both CSP and NGB participants assumed there would be an influx of new participants and that they would want to join the traditional club structure. These assumptions were often based on interviewees' involvement in, and passion for, sport that led them to assume that others would like it simply if they watched it and then were introduced to a club. If flexibility is a key benefit of informal, recreational sport (Green, 2010), then the commitment often associated with club participation would not be an appropriate exit route for many of these participants, something which the current British government have recognised (on paper, at least) (HM Government, 2015). An alternative approach is required, but this would also require a more detached perspective, or alternative

voice, about traditional club structures. The firm belief in demonstration effects seemed to be a shared collective fantasy among our interviewees whose belief in inherent inspiration stemmed from their significant emotional attachment to sport. This ‘fantasy’ prevented a fuller understanding of the situation that they were in and led them to focus on activities that were not especially appropriate for traditional non-participants. After the Games, there was some realisation among interviewees that the expected influx of new participants did not materialise. The following section discusses how interviewees tried to make sense of this. Post-Games reflections enabled them to look back with a greater degree of detachment but there was still no discernible appreciation of the reality that legacy promises, much like many other assumed positive community benefits of grand leisure projects, were overly-ambitious and contrary to past experience and evidence.

Reflections upon the missed opportunities: increasing demand with timely activity

In post-Games interviews, participants were able to understand the situation that they were in more clearly with greater detachment and the benefit of further experience. Dopson and Waddington (1996, p.545) highlighted that ‘within the heat of the immediate struggle it is, of course, not easy to stand back and try to develop such a relatively detached view’. From analysing post-Games data, it was clear that interviewees felt there was a short window in which to provide positive, high quality experiences that might better help to promote and maintain participation. This was difficult to achieve in Birmingham as many clubs were perceived to be at capacity and the facility and coaching infrastructure needed developing further before the Games took place. Participation data for individual sports in Birmingham revealed a slight spike in participation around the times of the Games, but that the expectations of rising participation were not met as participation declined again after 2012 (Sport England, 2016).

Post-Games reflections led interviewees to consider the effectiveness of activities that were provided locally to promote sport. Consistent with the findings of other studies (e.g. Mackintosh et al. 2015; Mackintosh et al., 2016; Weed et al., 2012), our interviewees highlighted the importance of timely activity. Considerations about the timing of activities, or activity promotion, was not a consistent feature of pre-Games interviews. Post-Games, a CSP manager discussed the need to be flexible and prepared to react to spikes in interest in relation to Olympic events:

So it is almost understanding that the Olympic effect will come, it is just making sure that you are ready, almost the timing ... That, I think that just comes down to careful planning erm, but also having the flexible resource ... So if we have Mo Farah, Rutherford and Jessica Ennis on that Saturday, that is a day we should be pushing on various things.

He regarded this as a missed opportunity to promote activity at a time when there was increased interest in the Olympic Games. It seems that those working to promote leisure-sport locally did not consider the scheduling of particular Olympic events before the Games. Another CSP participant felt that there was a spike in interest immediately following the Games and suggested that this was a missed opportunity to leverage participation:

So it is harnessing, I suppose, the immediate afterglow of the Olympics and Paralympics and then being able to capitalise on that and make sure that we are, you know, we are actually being able to do something with it. Because, I think, we have a certain window of opportunity and maybe we didn't act as quick as we could have done.

Greater emphasis was placed after the Games on the perception that there was only likely to be a short window in which to transform 'inspiration' into participation. Much of the academic literature highlights the need to proactively leverage legacy through structured activity embedded into broader SD practice in the lead up to events (Chalip et al., 2017; Hoskyn et al., 2017; Misener et al., 2015; Taks et al., 2013; Weed et al. 2009; Weed et al., 2015). The data presented here support the view that any changes made to the organisational infrastructure to offer sustainable opportunities for participation should take place during the pre-Games period. However, the view that members of the public were more receptive to activity promotion during and immediately after the Games highlights the importance of promoting routes into participation at a time when there is likely to be more of a short-lived spike in public interest. Accessible routes into sport and physical activity, where sustainable opportunities are offered, may be beneficial to those trying to promote participation. This perspective was based upon more detached reasoning and observations of patterns of behaviour once interviewees were less involved and caught up in the double-bind (Elias, 2007). Interestingly, whilst mentioning physical activity, participants did not emphasise the potential for the promotion of broader cultural festivals (Weed et al., 2012) or more individualised, potentially recreationally-oriented, activities (Mackintosh et al., 2016). This demonstrated that while interviewees were able to reflect with a greater degree of detachment, their role in sport and their habitus (Elias, 1991; van Kreiken, 1998) predisposes them to maintain their beliefs about the benefits of traditional, competitive sport, meant that most participants retained some level of involvement in focusing on competitive sport promotion.

Reflections upon constrained sports provision

Elias (1991) explained that human understanding and knowledge sits between fantasy and reality. Situations which are less controllable are often associated with less adequate understanding. This is the case in the double-bind and helps us to make sense of pre-Games expectations and assumptions versus post-Games reflections with a greater degree of detachment. Despite academic scepticism regarding inherent inspiration, some participants felt that there was an increased interest in participation during and immediately after the Games. Before the Games they felt that they needed to prepare for this and that any increased demand would need to be serviced by clubs. In post-Games interviews some participants highlighted that clubs were struggling to cope with an increased demand following the Olympics. This issue was raised by a CSP participant who said:

We are pleased with, erm, the amount of clubs that we have spoken to that are now actually finding that more people are interested in joining. ... What has been disappointing is sometimes those clubs aren't able to service that influx. So they maybe haven't got the right workforce behind it to welcome them. They haven't got the right environment.

Coaching capacity in clubs required to cope with any increased demand was an issue highlighted by several participants. Hayday et al. (2017) also found that there were problems with club engagement for NGBs following the Games. After the Games, an NGB participant said:

There's some programmes, but I think ... the hardest thing is actually being able to train up and qualify enough coaches ... if you really want legacy, longer term, it is often people that make the difference. And coaching is just vital, you know, at any level.

In this respect, as Coalter (2004) has noted, developing organisational structures, including training volunteers, are central to legacy preparations. Pappous and Hayday (2015) provided some further evidence of the assumed importance of volunteers in delivering legacy, however it must be recognised from the present study that it is likely that many voluntary sports clubs did not have the capacity to do this. Indeed, as Hayday, Pappous and Koutrou (2019, p.755) explained, the priorities of voluntary sports clubs are rarely linked to Sport England strategies, creating something of an ‘invisible wall’ between clubs and strategy. This provides a further example of the need for ‘locally-developed plans to address capacity and resource needs so that the clubs are better equipped to meet their aspirations’ (May et al., 2013, p.416). For May et al. (2013), voluntary sports clubs, particularly semi-formal and informal clubs, are likely to be less responsive to policy initiatives as they do not have the resources to deliver increased participation. As Hoskyn et al. (2017, p.209) also found ‘clubs need to ensure they are able to meet demand and offer services to new participants before embarking on initiatives to leverage sport events’.

Conclusion

The dangers of legacy becoming a missed opportunity for citizens of Birmingham were exacerbated by a spiralling crisis situation in which those attempting to deliver leisure-sport were constrained by policy and funding changes. This was compounded by persistent concerns about the quantity and quality of existing local facilities, and changes to the networks of relations in sport that left them unable to understand, let alone control much of the work taking place in the city. Before the Games, those working and volunteering in sport in Birmingham were unable to control the dangers that they faced, which was exacerbated by their seemingly blind faith in the inherent inspiration of legacy. This made a more object-adequate

understanding of the situation they found themselves in incredibly difficult. Their relational constraints made them relatively powerless to do many of the things that they wanted to do in Birmingham and within their respective sports. Our new evidence suggests that there was clearly a double-bind at play. Faced with an increasingly complex policy situation as the Games approached, those charged with developing a sport participation legacy in Birmingham retreated more and more into adopting a largely fantasy-laden perspective about what would work to achieve their legacy goals. As the crisis played out, they had less and less control which further compounded their fantasy-laden ‘solutions’ (Bloyce & Smith, 2010; Elias, 1978; Smith et al., 2019). Future hosts might consider the diversity of community groups interested in event-themed activity and capitalise on this with a more diverse offer of leisure pursuits promoted through events at timely points in event schedules. A more adequate understanding of non-participants is required. In our study those working in sport and enacting policy appeared only able to move further away from their fantasy-laden thinking and engage in more realistic observation after the Games. Only once the event had passed, and the spike in participation been and gone, were many of the participants able to reflect more adequately upon what might have been possible but for different circumstances, and how they might have negotiated their relational constraints more effectively. It seems vital that future major and mega event hosts recognise the need to proactively leverage physical activity and alternative forms for sport and leisure rather than continually ignoring the evidence against the idea of an inherent inspiration. Lowering expectations for automatic event legacies remains a priority.

Using Elias’s (2007) figurational work on the double bind, we have shown for the first time how using the concept helps explain the complex, and sometimes bewildering, constraints that those delivering sport work within and how these come to shape their thoughts and actions when enacting (sport) policy which has implications for how leisure is spent. As well as its

theoretical potential for making sense of legacy-related sports work, developing an adequate understanding of the concept of the double bind (and related figurational ideas, including in relation to the benefits of relatively detached thinking) thus also has important practical relevance for those working to leverage effects from major or mega-events (in Britain and elsewhere) as well as those seeking to understand the realities of enacting local leisure-sports work. This is particularly the case in relation to minimising unwanted unintended outcomes maximising desired outcomes which enable the various groups involved in legacy related work to achieve more of their intended objectives, a feature which it seems reasonable to suppose is an important feature of effective policy enactment (Smith et al., 2019; Dopson & Waddington, 1996). Whether this is something which comes to inform future practice is a moot point, though doing so will improve our ability to identify adequate diagnoses and find workable solutions to the policy problems one faces – whether in sport or other forms of leisure.

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