Case Study

Diverting Sports Funding from Community to Elite Sport

 

**Diverting Sports Funding from Community to Elite Sport: Will more medals equal less of a legacy?**

The success of the London 2012 bid team in winning the right to host the Olympic Games is a source of great national pride. The London 2012 bid was innovative, strong and creative, and was lauded for the legacy that the Games could create for Great Britain – economic regeneration (particularly around the Olympic site) and accompanied social benefits for local communities (such a better sports facilities), financial benefits for the business sector, improvements in the health of the nation, environmental and sustainability goals.

Whilst the credit crisis that originated in 2008 has exerted a limiting effect on some of these goals, it is nevertheless widely believed that the legacy impact of the 2012 Games will still be a positive one, with Olympic and Paralympic champions inspiring the young people of Britain to choose sport and a healthy way of life.

However, as the Games were won, sports funding followed a trend of being redirected from social cohesion initiatives to the support and development of elite sport. Such a move provides us with an interesting debate; will elite sport inspire many of us to choose sport, or will it provide a passing moment of glory that will allow us to bask in a collective sense of national pride – but not a commensurate increase in public sports participation? Or would a sporting legacy be stronger if investment in social sports initiatives was increased, leading to greater social cohesion?

**The Social Benefits of Community Sports Initiatives**

The Select Committee on Culture, Media & Sport have identified clear health and social benefits associated with community sports initiatives. They suggest that the following are specifically valuable:

* ***A Reduction in: Anti Social Behaviour***, Truancy, & Criminal Behaviour.
* ***Increases in*: Community Cohesion**, participation in the education/training, self esteem, motivation and confidence of participants.

Recommendations point to the value of the development of such community sports initiatives in conjunction with other political and social Governmental agendas, specifically, Social Inclusion, Social Justice and Health Agendas.

**Sport and Community Development**

The Select Committee also report findings that the use of sport as a medium of engagement can lead to the training or employment of individuals who would otherwise not have considered it. This is particularly beneficial for the engagement of individuals at risk of social exclusion and NEETs – individuals who are not in education, employment or training. Such training carries benefits for both the individuals and the communities in which they reside. These interventionist strategies (such as the provision of training that leads to sports coaching awards) can provide a meaningful ‘first line of attack’ in a co-ordinated approach to regenerating communities.

Sports programmes and a higher percentage of sports coaches in local communities carry the potential to provide a permanent hub for social activities (aerobics clubs, boxing clubs, etc), but the Select Committee stress the absolute importance of a long-term commitment to these types of programmes. The programmes must have an implementation period longer than 12 months, for example, for social cohesion goals to begin to be realised and for the sport(s) clubs, coaches and programmes to become an established and meaningful part of local communities.

**Spotlight on Social Cohesion**

In the present day, the concept of social cohesion and anti-social behaviour is particularly pertinent within the UK, largely due to two factors: i) the continuing economic and financial difficulties caused by the recessionary, austere economic climate (with associated losses in employment and increases in poverty); and ii) the recent riots that swept across the UK

**The British Riots**The 2011 British riots demonstrated a level of social unrest unseen for decades. The riots, originating in Tottenham, North London, quickly spread across the Capital and across other major British cities such as Birmingham and Manchester. The Prime Minister of the coalition, David Cameron, denied that recent austerity measures had caused the riots, pointing instead to opportunistic looting and the prevalence of gang culture. Community leaders blamed the riots of inequality, cuts to public services caused by the Coalition Government, and widespread youth unemployment.

**Summary**

If community leaders, the Prime Minister and the Select Committee are correct in identifying a need for greater social cohesion, then sport might have an important role to play – particularly if the findings of the Select Committee are accurate.

One might subsequently ask how the social and health-related legacy goals for Britain should be met most efficiently: by continuing to divert funds to elite sport, or by recommitting to the development of long term community sports initiatives, as a means of tackling the social problems and lack of social cohesion that were made clear by the riots.

**Discussion**

* Research government funding grants that have been made available to a) elite sport development, and; b) community sport.
* In terms of achieving a sporting legacy for the country, do you feel this is best served through investments in elite sport (leading to the creation of sports role models that will inspire sports participation), or by the development of community sports initiatives?
* Do you feel that both are achievable?-if yes, how would you propose that both are funded in today’s austeric climate?

**Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport Written Evidence:**

 http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.com/pa/cm200405/cmselect/cmcumeds/507/507we18.htm

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WOMENS PARTICIPATION IN THE OLYMPIC GAMES

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