According to a media release by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), January 1st 2009 represented the first day of a ‘Golden Decade’ of sport in Britain (Burnham, 2009). The stated aim of this decade is to align a succession of large scale sports events with existing priorities in sport policy. According to Burnham (2009) ‘There are three key elements to achieving sporting success. These are getting the grassroots in shape, international elite success and hosting major events.’ This quote, taken from a speech by British Sports Minister Andy Burnham, indicates the current priorities in British sports policy. There is little surprise in the inclusion of ‘elites’ and 'grassroots participation' as these have been over-emphasized in historical government rhetoric and policy. However, the placing of ‘hosting’ alongside these and the absence of community sport appears peculiar, especially since hosting has only been a stated area of government interest since the publication of *Game Plan* in 2002 (DCMS/Strategy Unit, 2002).

The aims of this Ruff Guide are twofold. Firstly, it will suggest that the emergence of this hosting strategy can be attributed to three seemingly independent phenomena: (i) the restructuring and re-alignment of local authorities in the 1980s and broader economic changes during the same period; (ii) the path-dependent expansion of elite sport policy, largely due to the National Lottery and (iii) the ‘pull’ of international sports organisations involved in promoting the attractiveness of their events. Secondly, brief consideration will be given to the role events play within the broader realm of sports development.

**Mega, Major or Large Scale?**

Since research in to these events has been a relatively recent development, extracting a precise definition can be problematic. While some authors (Roche, 1994 & 2000; Horne, 2007; Matheson, 2009; Walters, 2008;) offer a definition, others (Kellett *et al.*, 2008; O’Brien and Gardner, 2006) feel it appropriate to provide discussion on large scale sports events without offering a concise definition. There does appear to be universal agreement that any definition must include the two prominent 'mega' events: the Olympic Games (Summer and Winter) and Soccer World Cups; but the extent to which other competitions can be considered has been
debated in some depth by numerous authors (see Roche, 1994; Matheson, 2009; Kellet et al., 2008; Walters, 2008). An example of academic debate in defining these events is summarised in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roche (1994)</th>
<th>Mega Events</th>
<th>Olympics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walters (2008)</td>
<td>Mega Events</td>
<td>Olympics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football World Cup</td>
<td>Football World Cup</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Commonwealth Games

World Level Competitions

Grands Prix

Major Events

'Mainstream' World Championships (Rugby, Athletics, Cricket

Other World Championships

Ryder Cup

World Cups

World Regional Events

European Championships

Showcase Events
Minority Sport World Championships (Hockey, Squash, Netball).

Pan-Pacific Games

Commonwealth Games

Considering the highly debated distinction between what constitute 'mega' and 'major' events, it is felt that the term 'large scale sporting events' is appropriate to encompass both of these categories, with the following definition:

Large Scale Sporting Events are global, in terms of a combination of media coverage and the participation of teams from several nations; and they are regular, but not annual sporting occurrences that attract significant public sector support and funding and deliver a tangible local or national impact, which can be expressed culturally, financially or politically.

The emergence of a hosting strategy

- Economic change and local authority restructuring.

A major contributing factor to the consolidation of a hosting strategy was the restructuring and
modernisation of local authorities during the 1970s and 1980s. This appears to be attributable to both the response of local authorities to national economic changes and also the intrinsic restructuring of local authorities, particularly the large, industrial municipalities controlled during this period by the Labour Party.

The new economic realism that occurred in response to the decline of manufacturing and industrial production in the 1980s, accelerated by the funding cuts to local authorities, changed the nature of cities and the strategic role played by public leisure services (Henry, 2001). Broadly it can be deemed that cities began to invest in sport not as a right of citizenship, but instead as a tool for economic and social regeneration. Due to this, and motivated by the proactive work of the Arts Council, the Sports Council and local authorities were encouraged to find and promote sport as a contributor to the economy and not just a consumable service. The new sporting strategies, that included sport as an income-generator, empowered local authorities to take a business-like approach to sport policy and also allowed cities to see sport as a means to re-establish their identities, as Sheffield did, through sport and sporting events.

- Elite Sport/Event Policy.

The consolidation of an events strategy has occurred in tandem with the expansion of elite sport policy, suggesting that the two are compatible. Indeed, the rhetoric and rationales for both elite sport and events are similar and presume that success in both areas will result in increased sports participation and international prestige. Despite a few tentative forays into the realm of large scale events in the 1990s, the first manifestation of any central policy was outlined in Game Plan, which had an important impact in terms of elite sport and hosting. For the first time, government stated clear aims for elite sporting success alongside increased participation underpinned by an evidence-based approach to achieving these goals. It also indicated that large scale events could play an important role in encouraging both of these aims, provided careful financial planning was undertaken and, critically, that bids be led by government. The aims put forward by Game Plan were further enhanced by the restructuring of British sport announced in 2005 and carried out from 2006 which saw all elite provision taken away from Sport England and given solely to UK Sport (Green, 2009). In turn, UK Sport set about releasing several documents demonstrating its desire to support large scale events and formalised these with the advent of the World Class Events Programme, a scheme aimed at providing funding for cities and NGBs to bid for the plethora of events available.

While Playing to Win looks to build upon Game Plan in the key strategic areas of participation and elite success, an approach to hosting large scale events in this document is notable by its absence. The evidence would appear to suggest that the period 2002-2005 was the zenith of a British hosting strategy, represented by Game Plan and the bid for London 2012.
- **An International Pull.**

Since the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, there has been a distinct change in the view of the IOC with respect of its formal and informal expectations of host nations. Specifically, this has seen a move away from the view of the Olympics as a 'private sector' Games and towards one which requires formal government support. This said, there is scope to partially explain this development through the changing strategic goals of potential host nations, which has afforded International Sports Federations (ISFs) the opportunity to increase their influence. Globalisation has increased competition within global markets and mega events are sought after commodities due their relative scarcity. Governments have increasingly diverted large sums of money into national sporting programmes aimed at international success. It can be argued that countries with adequate resources can generate a higher global profile through elite international success, but since sporting competition intensified in the late twentieth century 'hosting' became seen as a way to achieve a higher position in the global hierarchy of nations. However, the number of nations capable of the level of spending required to achieve both international success and a successful hosting policy is limited, so many must choose between the two. It would seem that, for a variety of reasons, many nations are now selecting a hosting strategy, hence the increasing demand for mega and major events and thus the more power is given up to ISFs.

**Sports Development and Large Scale Events**

While the evidence outlined Sadd and Jones in their Ruff Guide to Olympic Legacy points to tangible legacy benefits of the Olympic Games in the areas of social impact and regeneration, the evidence supporting a positive correlation between large scale events and sports development is tenuous at best.

Brown and Massey's (2001) study pointed to *indicative* links between events and increased participation, but this was restricted to short-terms 'spikes,' best illustrated by the annual bi-weekly filling of Britain's tennis courts during Wimbledon, rather than a sustainable legacy. They also indicated that international events often influence some increased participation amongst minority ethnic groups.
More recently, Girginov and Hills (2009) have indicated that the lack of evidence of sports development legacies resulting from large scale events emerges from the methods of data collection and the interpretation by the researcher of a 'sports development legacy'. They challenge researchers in this area to adopt a constructivist approach which aims to unpack the intended nature of legacies and the varying levels at which legacies may be perceived.

Conclusions

To summarise, it is clear that a variety of factors have impacted upon the development of a hosting strategy in Britain. However, until UK Sport's recent policy statements and the advent of the World Class Events Programme, the development of this strategy has been almost accidental. The economic changes and the responses to these by local authorities in the 1980s were not aimed at generating a hosting strategy, but the empowerment of local authorities in the area of sport and leisure, encouraging them to think economically about sport and the realisation that sport could play a part in alleviating the effects of de-industrialisation certainly contributed to the process. Additionally, the intensive marketing by ISFs aimed at encouraging cities to compete internationally and the consolidation of elite sporting success as a national government priority have also accelerated the development of the strategy.

There should appear a note of caution to the commitment to a hosting strategy, though, as Green (2009) contends that basing a strategy on the premise that elite success/hosting will inevitably result in increased participation is problematic. There is currently no research that indicates sustained increases on participation and this delivers a stark warning given that the rationale for the elite-focussed policy is that it will result in inspiring new participants and thus achieve social policy goals, particularly those connected to health, and specifically in reducing obesity.

References


Editor's comments - We are grateful to Paul Salisbury; Lecturer in Health and Sport development at UCP Marjon for the provision of this Ruff guide.