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Author post-print (accepted) deposited by Coventry University's Repository

Original citation & hyperlink:

Gerard, S, Brittain, I, Jones, A & Thomas, G 2020, 'The impact of austerity on the London 2012 Summer Olympics participation legacy from a grassroots sports club perspective: an institutional logics approach', *Leisure Studies*, vol. 39, no. 5, pp. 629-643.

<https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2020.1776756>

DOI 10.1080/02614367.2020.1776756

ISSN 0261-4367

ESSN 1466-4496

Publisher: Taylor and Francis

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Leisure Studies* on 08/06/2020, available online:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/02614367.2020.1776756>

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The Impact of Austerity on the London 2012 Summer Olympics Participation Legacy from a Grassroots Sports Club Perspective: An Institutional Logics Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of austerity on the London 2012 Summer Olympics participation legacy from a grassroots sport clubs perspective, utilising institutional theory. The study adopted a mixed methods approach including semi-structured interviews with 11 stakeholders involved in grassroots sport alongside a review of key policy documentation (n= 8) and relevant literature. In keeping with the institutional logics perspective, these data were analysed in order to understand the impact of austerity on the sport participation legacy from the London 2012 Summer Olympics. The main findings of this study evidence mechanisms by which austerity policies, such as cuts in welfare and local government funding, have impacted sport provision at the grassroots sport clubs level. A shift towards a market logic at the society level induced, through the theorisation of austerity and cuts in the resources environment, the development of institutional contradictions at the field level that in turn, impacted operations at the grassroots sport clubs level. This study demonstrates that there is a fundamental contradiction between austerity and securing participation objectives in relation to the hosting of mega events such as the Olympic Games, as mechanisms that support this increase (sport participation programmes, funding etc.) are often reduced or eliminated.

Keywords: London 2012 Summer Olympics, Participation Legacy, Austerity, Grassroots Clubs, Institutional Logics.

Introduction

A key potential benefit of hosting mega-events such as the Olympic Games that has increasingly attracted nations and cities to bid to host them is the potential to inspire people, particularly young people, to engage in sport and physical activity (Girginov & Hills, 2008; Wellings et al., 2011). With the UK government acknowledging a decline in sport participation in the early 2000's (DCMS, 2002), the London 2012 Summer Olympics (hereafter London 2012) held the 'ambitious' aim of being used as a mechanism to increase active participation in sport (DCMS, 2008b) and to "Inspire A Generation" to be more physically active.

The importance of establishing this sports participation legacy cannot be underestimated. For example, Grix (2012) argues that the proposed creation of a sports participation legacy was amongst the most influential factors that helped win the bid for London. Grix (2013) further argued that "of all the promised 'legacies' for London 2012, the participatory legacy (especially among the young) is the one the UK coalition government is convinced will materialise" (p.21). However, Kokolakis, Lera-Lopez and Ramchandani (2018) note that until London 2012 it was unclear as to whether mega events could provide the basis for a participation legacy, although they suggest that there were some benefits in the immediate aftermath of London 2012. Moreover, much anecdotal evidence, such as newspaper commentary by Gibson (2015; 2012a), tended to suggest that a participation legacy did not emerge from London 2012, raising further concerns for exploration.

The impact of austerity on the London 2012 sport participation legacy is a particular area worthy of further discussion. The decision to bid was formally agreed by the UK Government in 2003 during a period of unprecedented economic stability. As a result, concerns surrounding the cost of hosting the event were largely outweighed by the perceived potential benefits accruing to tourism, regeneration, and sport (Davies, 2003). Furthermore, early 2000's, the then Labour government were actively increasing public sector spending on a range

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of programmes (Chote, Crawford, Emmerson, & Tetlow, 2010), and as such the decision to bid for London 2012 was made in a favourable environment for state investment. However, this environment would change dramatically prior to 2012 due to the global financial crisis of 2007/2008. Government interventions designed to alleviate the effects of the crisis caused a significant increase in the UK deficit, which reached £156bn in 2009 (Rogers & Kollwe, 2013). The subsequent election of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in 2010 resulted in a significant change of direction in terms of policy as public expenditure was cut as part of a 'deficit reduction programme' (Penny, 2017). This included an immediate cut of a third in the welfare budget, a rise in VAT, and departmental spending reductions of around 25% in non-protected areas. However, over the longer-term some departments have seen spending cut by around 30%-40% (Williams, Goodwin & Cloke, 2014). These reductions have had significant implications for various sectors of society, including in relation to the sport participation strategy and legacy of London 2012.

The investigation of the impact of austerity echoes recent research in the broader field of leisure. Findlay-King, Nichols, Forbes and Macfayden (2018) investigated the transfer of assets of leisure services from the public to the voluntary sector induced by austerity-led policies. Similarly, Bell and Gallimore (2015) examined how the austerity environment precluded the development of inter-organisational partnerships to leverage the London 2012 Games. In sport management, Parnell, May, Widdop, Cope and Bailey (2018) recently highlighted the impact of austerity on community sports organisations, identifying challenges and possible solutions. Indeed austerity has not only influenced sport participation (Haudenhuyse, 2018; Widdop, King, Parnell, Cutts & Millward, 2018), but also local authority providers (King, 2013; Parnell, Millward. & Spracklen, 2015) and third sector sports organisations, such as sport clubs (Brown & Pappous, 2018; Walker & Hayton 2017).

Whilst most previous research analysed the consequences of austerity in sport, this article attempts to open the “black box” and provides an evidence-based analysis of the mechanisms by which austerity policies influence sport organisations. More specifically, it analyses how austerity impacted the running of grassroots sport clubs in the London, Coventry and Sheffield areas of England, in relation to the achievement of legacy aims surrounding mega-events such as the Olympic Games. In keeping with the literature, grassroots sport clubs are seen as an appropriate level of analysis for this endeavour for two reasons. First, grassroots sport clubs are one of the main suppliers of any intended sport participation legacy (Rogerson, 2016; Weed, 2016). Second, the impact of austerity is best captured at the local level, grassroots sport clubs being the main providers of local sport opportunities (Clayton, Donovan & Merchant, 2016; Williams et al., 2014).

Utilising institutional theory (IT) (Thornton, Ocasio & Lounsbury, 2012), this study, therefore, analysed the concrete mechanisms that delineate 1) how the evolution of the UK economic and political landscape blurred the organising principles in many sectors, including the sport sector and 2) how, in turn, it affected sport policies and provision at the local level, significantly impacting grassroots sport clubs. The paper also explains how these changes entered in contradiction with the development of a sport participation legacy from London 2012.

In doing so, the contributions of this research to the literature on austerity and leisure, in particular in terms of sport participation, are threefold. First it offers a new theoretical understanding of how austerity impacts sport participation utilising IT. While most available studies have used resource-dependence theory (e.g. Parnell et al., 2018; Walker & Hayton, 2017) this study considers that austerity does not happen in a “social vacuum” and aims to capture the power relationships and institutional dynamics at play. Second, many of the existing studies surrounding legacy and participation are based on quantitative insights focused

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on the number of people participating in sport (e.g. Widdop et al., 2018; Kokolakis et al., 2018). In contrast, this study captures first-hand insights from policymakers, clubs and key stakeholders involved in sport. These reflections are required in order to build a more holistic picture of legacy and its impact upon sport participation. Finally, the analytical focus of the study is on grassroots sport clubs, a key set of actors that have been neglected thus far. It is of particular importance to grasp their perceptions given that austerity has many local ramifications (Findlay-King et al., 2018) and that sport clubs are a key element in any strategy to increase sport participation (Rogerson, 2016; Coalter, 2004).

Literature Review

Several studies have investigated the impacts of sport mega events (SME) in raising sport participation and found that there is no apparent inherent effect of hosting a SME on the sport participation level in the host country (Kokolakis et al., 2018; Weed et al. 2015). This led to more research focusing on the leveraging strategies of a SME to foster sport participation (Chalip, 2004; Girginov & Hills, 2008).

While many psychological and structural barriers can prevent an engagement in sport, Weed (2016) emphasized that a supportive context towards sport participation needs to be developed. In this line, research has argued that wider strategies of public engagement (Girginov & Hills, 2008) and investments in the sport system in terms of infrastructures, volunteering and community engagement (Reis et al., 2017) are key leveraging strategies of a SME. Similarly Rogerson (2016) and Coalter (2004) suggested that the availability of sport venues to the wider population is a key consideration that impacts on a SME legacy.

Studies of the impact of austerity policies on sport participation in the UK have recently attracted more interest (Collins & Haudenhuyse, 2015; Parnell et al., 2015; Widdop et al., 2018). Since the financial crisis of 2008, there has been a relative decrease in sport participation

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after the economic recession that followed (Haudenhuyse, 2018; Roberts, 2015). To explain this phenomenon, Collins and Haudenhuyse (2015) argued that growing structural inequalities in the UK affected leisure spending and opportunities. Moreover, they demonstrated that the austerity measures introduced by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, elected in 2010, had a differential impact according to the socio-demographic conditions of the population. These measures more severely affected “people at risk” and in poverty, exacerbated by factors such as disability, gender, age and ethnicity. Similarly, Widdop et al. (2018) found that the London 2012 Olympic legacy effect on sport participation was negated by the austerity measures. Participation levels for the lower income population did not increase during the 2008-2014 period and the engagement of the most economically deprived, the young and the unemployed was the most severely affected. By comparison, sport participation levels of the higher income class were not affected by austerity.

Recent research also investigated how austerity impacted local authorities, sport services and organisations in terms of sport provision (Girginov & Hills, 2008; Parnell et al., 2018). Looking at the public sector, King (2013) argued that “Sport for All” initiatives were in a precarious condition following the reduction in public spending, adding that if programmes aimed at “raising participation” have suffered, the survival of programmes dedicated “to widening participation” were at stake. King’s study also indicated that local authorities have shifted from a welfare to a business model with respect to sporting provision, involving an emphasis on marketing, commercialisation and deficit minimisation. Moreover, some services are “outsourced” to private sector companies. Those findings are confirmed by the study of Parnell et al. (2015) that observed a shift in sport service delivery from the public sector to the private sector following austerity.

Organisations operating in the voluntary sport sector, such as grassroots sport clubs, have also been impacted by austerity policies (c.f. Hoekman, Breedveld, & Kraaykamp 2016).

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Walker and Hayton (2017) analysed how austerity measures impacted a third sector organisation - The Greenbank Project - in its resource dependence towards its environment. Findings demonstrated that the sport club was able to enlarge its portfolio of activities by capitalising on those that generate income to support the more costly ones. Brown and Pappous (2018) identified the strategies developed by National Disability Sport Organisations (NDSOs) to grow in an environment with scarce resources that included formation of alliances, the building up of financial reserves and the generation of knowledge. Kenyon, Mason & Rockwood (2018), studying a community interest company in Liverpool called Target Football, emphasized flexibility and the identification of the most important stakeholders as key strategies to survive alongside austerity measures. Combining resource-dependence theory with network theory, Parnell et al. (2018) highlighted how government-led austerity policies generated new management challenges for non-profit community sport facilities, which in turn, led to the adoption of new managerial principles and strategies, such as a new pricing scheme, network development and income diversification.

Despite these many valuable insights, what is currently missing is an understanding of the mechanisms by which austerity impacted the operations of grassroots sport clubs. Such an analytical approach has the potential to explain the how and why behind most of the austerity-induced management challenges highlighted in previous studies, as well as suggesting new issues. Building upon the literature on austerity and sport participation, the next section introduces IT and the concepts of institutional logics and contradictions, demonstrating how this theoretical approach is suitable for the purpose of this study.

Theoretical Background: Institutional theory and Institutional logic

Recently successfully applied in contexts such as local governance (Greenwood, Diaz, Li & Lorente, 2010) and the social care industry (Bossy, Knutsen, Rogers & Foss, 2016), IT is

an emerging theoretical perspective in leisure studies (Borges et al., 2018). IT offers a framework to understand how the symbolic and material environments impact organisational behaviour by shaping social choices (Friedland & Alford, 1991). Institutions are “composed of cultural-cognitive, normative and regulative elements, that together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life” (Scott, 2014, p. 48). We argue that IT is especially useful to investigate the impact of austerity policies on the London 2012 sport participation legacy at the grassroots level for two main reasons. First, organisational field has been conceptualised as an appropriate level to investigate institutional change (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Nested between the organisational and societal levels, organisational fields “are sets of organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute an area of institutional life” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 148). An organisational field of particular interest for this study is the voluntary sport sector in the UK, that allows us to capture reciprocal relationships of influence between changes at the society (i.e. government policies), field (i.e. sport policies) and organisation levels (i.e. grassroots sport clubs). Second, austerity takes place in a particular institutional context comprised of evolving socio-cultural beliefs, norms, practices and policies. IT has, therefore, the potential to shed new light on austerity as a dynamic institutional process, in contrast to previous studies that have employed ahistorical-theoretical approaches such as resource dependency theory or stakeholder theory.

IT has long been criticised for its inability to explain change (Kraatz & Zajac, 1996). However, new conceptual apparatus has been developed to bring agency, power and change into the institutional lexicon. Building upon Friedland and Alford (1991)’s seminal work, Thornton et al. (2012) described society as an inter-institutional system that is composed of seven societal orders (family, community, religion, state, market, profession and corporations). Each institutional order has a main institutional logic, described as “a set of material practices and symbolic constructions” (Friedland & Alford, 1991, p. 248) that shapes individual and

organisational cognition and actions. Moreover these institutional orders are interdependent yet contradictory, with these contradictions giving leverage to individuals and organisations to manipulate the social order (Benson, 1977; Seo & Creed, 2002). As argued by Friedland and Alford (1991), “institutional contradictions are the bases of the most important political conflicts in our society; it is through these politics that the institutional structure of society is transformed” (p. 256).

In summary, it is argued in this study that the theoretical concept of institutional logics is an appropriate analytical lens to capture the institutional mechanisms by which austerity policies have impacted upon grassroots sport clubs’ operations and have played a key role in preventing them from delivering sustainable London 2012 sport participation legacies.

Methodology

Data Collection and Approach

A qualitative, processual analysis was purposefully developed to capture how austerity impacted sport participation in relation to London 2012. As advocated by users of processual analysis (e.g. Langley, 1999), a mixed methods approach to data collection was performed to trace the temporal evolution of events and activities in relation to austerity and its impact on the London 2012 participation legacy. A rich set of data was collected combining document analysis (i.e. official reports, newspapers etc.) and a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews with individuals involved in grassroots sport, the data being critically analysed in keeping with relevant literature.

It was decided to select only two sports in order to get an in-depth understanding of the impact of austerity on the participation legacies of these sports. Therefore, from a review of the Active People Survey (APS) data on participation, athletics and swimming were selected

for this study as athletics had seen the largest increase and swimming the largest decrease in participation since the London 2012 Games (Sport England, 2017).

Documents

A total of eight documents was reviewed which included government reports into sport participation, policy documents, and programme assessments (See Table 1). These documents were selected because they are viewed by practitioners and policy-makers as key milestones to evaluate government strategy in terms of sport participation. This evidence was particularly important in identifying the key programmes that were designed to influence the sport participation legacy of London 2012, evaluating their performance, whilst also highlighting the government's approach to sport funding and participation.

Table 1. Reviewed Documents

Year	Name of Policy/Initiative
2002	'Game Plan' (DCMS 2002)
2008	'Playing to Win' (DCMS 2008)
2008	Making the Most of London 2012 (DCMS 2008b)
2010	Plans for the Legacy (DCMS 2010)
2010	Spending Review (HM Treasury)
2012	Youth Sport Strategy (DCMS 2012)
2013	2012 Games Meta-Evaluation (DCMS 2013)
2015	Sporting Future (Cabinet Office 2015)

Interviews and Participants

Having reviewed the key documentary evidence, the next phase of the data collection process involved a series of semi structured-interviews with key informants from grassroots athletics and swimming clubs and relevant national governing bodies (NGBs). A list of swimming and athletics clubs in Coventry, Sheffield and London areas was collated. In each club those individuals with managerial responsibilities or an awareness of policy implications were prioritised. As a result, chairpersons, head coaches, captains, and other board members were contacted as participants who could provide the richest details for this study and were

targeted as key respondents. The resulting sample (N=11) had ten respondents from clubs (N=6 for Swimming and N=4 for athletics). There was only one respondent from an NGB (the ASA) despite repeated requests. Participants are summarised in Table 2:

Table 2. Overview of Research Respondents

Type of Sport Club	Location	Committee Member
Athletics Club		Chairperson
Swimming and Water Polo	Coventry area	Chairperson
Swimming Club		Head Coach
Athletics Club		Team Captain
Athletics Club		Team Captain
Swimming Club	London area	Chairperson
Swimming Club		Chairperson
Diving Club		Chairperson
Athletics Club	Sheffield area	Chairperson
Swimming Club		Chairperson
Governing Bodies		
Amateur Swimming Association	Nationwide	Regional Club Development Officer

To assist with the completion of the interviews, an interview guide was created. Key topics were background, legacy planning, the London 2012 legacy, and the impact of austerity on legacy in terms of sport participation. These topics were drawn from a review of existing literature and the documentary evidence. The guide enabled questions to be asked consistently across each of the interviews, which lasted around 45 minutes to 1 hour.

Data Analysis

Driven by IT, the analytical process was composed of several steps. First, the interviews were recorded on audiotape and transcribed in full. The reflexive process began during the transcription process. Second, independently, the authors played the tapes repeatedly and read the interview transcripts and official documents numerous times to become familiar with the data, as recommended by Thomas (2006). Third, authors of the study discussed their

preliminary analysis. In keeping closely with the institutional logics perspective and relevant literature, one product of this familiarisation process was the recognition of emerging mechanisms of institutional change within the data, in the forms of what (i.e. institutional logic, contradictions, theory etc), where (i.e. society, field or organisational levels) and causal relationships. These mechanisms were discussed until a consensus was reached among the authors. This process of segmenting into mechanisms and themes was guided not only by recurrent themes within the data, but also by sets of structural relations that appear to have a bearing on the field of study that cannot be uncovered by the detailed data collected during the interviews alone (Thomas, 2006). This can include issues such as power (political or economic), policy legislation and a range of issues that may impinge upon opportunities for people to participate in sport at the grassroots level. Identifying their existence and how each impacts upon the opportunities for the respondents in this research to grow participation in their own particular club and sport is a key part of gaining a better understanding of the mechanisms that emerged from the data collected.

Findings and Discussion

Shift towards a Market Logic at the Society Level

Friedland and Alford (1991) and Thornton et al. (2012) conceptualised society as comprised of multiple, interdependent institutional orders ruling different areas of life such as family, the community, the state, the market etc. Each institutional order has a core institutional logic, composed of different “elemental categories” which represent the organising principles and repertoire of behaviours particular to that order. However, the institutional orders, and the underlying logics, are historically contingent and can be affected by changes in the broader environment.

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As a reaction to the 2007/2008 economic crisis and the growing public debt, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition elected in 2010 established a new policy platform that, as demonstrated below, gave prominence to a market logic at the society level. The Spending Review (HM Treasury, 2010) published by the government claimed to be “underpinned by a radical programme of public service reform” (p. 8) and confirmed wide-ranging cuts in public expenditure notably targeting local governments. This new policy environment created additional managerial challenges for grassroots sports clubs:

“Things probably have become a bit more difficult recently. I know from my experience that things are pretty difficult for local authorities and it makes it more difficult for us because we rely upon them so much for swimming pools”

Regional Club Development Officer, ASA

“We’re still not really sure whether or not we’re going to have a track long term, but the council don’t seem interested in trying to help us”

Team Captain, Athletics Club, East London Area

Government policies were categorised as aimed at “removing barriers to greater independent provision, and supporting communities, citizens and volunteers to play a bigger role in shaping and providing services” (HM Treasury, 2010: 8). This ideological position translated into the Localism Act (2011) that is essentially a power transfer from the state to local government and community groups in the delivery of public services (Penny, 2017). As highlighted by several of our informants, this changing political environment deeply altered the logic at play amongst grassroots sport clubs and led to the development of more market-based solutions. As the public support retracts, several grassroots sport clubs envisioned to build their own facilities as the only way to sustain their activities:

“We’re at capacity. [...] That’s why we have been looking at building our own pool, that way we know what times the pool is available and we know exactly how many people we can cater for. It’s basically the only way we will be able to expand.”

Chairperson, Swimming Club, Central London area

“We’re quite excited about it really. We have a site identified and it looks like it’s going to go ahead pretty soon. It’s a really good opportunity for the club, if we have our own facilities, they can all be bespoke and fit our purposes perfectly. Probably the best thing about it is we will be able to drop in and use it whenever we want. ...”

Chairperson, Athletics Club, Coventry Area

“We’ve tried to explain to the council how important a 50m pool is to us and to the area, but they don’t seem to understand. Their view is that there are other perfectly good pools for us to use, which is true, but they are not 50m pools, and that is so important to the city...we’ve tried finding a solution, building new pools or upgrading the existing one”.

(Chairperson, Swimming Club, Coventry Area)

Overall our findings indicate that the policy reforms implemented by the government from 2010 onwards, crystallised into the Spending review (HM Treasury, 2010) and the Localism Act (2011), blurred the organising principles and repertoire of behaviours (Thornton et al., 2012) available to grassroots sport clubs that increasingly turned their attention to more private and market-based solutions to run their clubs or expand their activities.

Impact of the market-logic on the voluntary sport sector

Sport Policy and Participation and the Theory of Austerity

The shift towards a market logic at the society level was translated at the field level, i.e in the voluntary sport sector, using the theory of austerity as the main rationale. Society-level logics are not transposed directly at the lower level, but are translated using theories, frames or narratives (Benford & Snow, 2000). Theories “provide general guiding principles and explanations for why and how institutional structure and practice should operate” (Thornton et al., 2012) and can serve as political instruments to foster institutional change (Davis, McAdam, Scott & Zald, 2005). As demonstrated below, the theorisation of austerity influenced key policies targeted at amateur and grassroots sport clubs.

In securing London 2012 a number of programmes were developed which sought to encourage particular target groups to engage in sport (See table 3). The policy framework was complex, with many initiatives designed to encourage children and young people to become more active, essentially as a means to generate societal benefits from involvement in sport over the longer term. However, tensions within the wider political discourse, reflected by the shift in institutional logic at the society level, heavily influenced the success and longevity of these programmes.

Table 3. Key Participation Programmes

Policy	Duration	Purpose
School Sport Partnerships	2002-2011	Increase the quality of P.E. and sport opportunities for children. Included establishing school - sport club links
Free Swimming	2009-2010	Increase participation in swimming by offering free sessions to children <16 and adults >60
Gold Challenge	2010- 2012	Motivate over 100,000 people to get involved with Olympic and Paralympic sports
Sportivate	2011-2017	Provide opportunities for those aged 14-25 to receive

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Inspire	2012	6-8 weeks of sport coaching Link sport, cultural or education events to the 2012 games
School Games	2012 to date	Encourage more competitive sport between schools

(Source: DCMS 2012 Games Meta-Evaluation Report 5 (Post Games Evaluation) Sport Evidence Base)

One of the ‘flagship’ participation policies implemented by the previous Labour government was School Sport Partnerships (SSPs). In this study, four of the eleven respondents expressed positive views towards these policies, and at the same time questioned the rationale for cutting this scheme as highlighted by the following administrators:

“We’ve worked with one of the schools for quite a while now. We approached them about a school partnership about seven years ago, when there was still some funding available for them. We figured it was a good opportunity to get some more people through the club”.

Athletics Team Captain, North London

“Yeah, the school sport partnerships were pretty useful actually. I remember them coming in, and remember Michael Gove (Education Secretary at the time) scrapping them and wondering what the logic was. It (School Sports Partnership) helped us set up our partnership. It was pretty easy as I remember, so yeah, they worked pretty well”.

Team Captain, Athletics Club, East London

Part of the rationale behind removing the SSPs was a desire to save money as they were described by the government in 2010 as being ‘unaffordable’ (Foster, 2015). From a government perspective, removing funding for this scheme supported the broader desire to reduce departmental spending. However Gibson (2012b) points out that the reduction in

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funding for these partnerships negatively impacted the number of relationships between schools and clubs, potentially making it harder to increase participation and thus ‘inspire a generation’.

Another flagship policy that was cancelled due to austerity measures was the free swimming policy, intended to raise participation in swimming for under 16s and over 60s. In scrapping the free swimming programme the then Sport and Olympics Minister, Hugh Robertson, claimed that research had shown that the majority of those receiving free swimming would have swum anyway (Pidd, 2010). Pidd (2010) also cites Robertson as saying "with a crippling deficit to tackle and tough decisions to take, this (free swimming) has become a luxury we can no longer afford." As stated by one of the informants, the abolition of the free swimming policy by the coalition government was clearly felt by the Amateur Swimming Association and in terms of grassroots sport raises further challenges in terms of the support available to grow participation:

“It was great when Labour guaranteed the free swimming, but when that was scrapped there’s no doubt it hits us so hard”.

(Regional Club Development Officer, ASA)

This stands, again, in stark contrast to the ‘Inspire a Generation’ sports participation rhetoric then being espoused by the government with regard to the London 2012 Games.

Local Authorities and Sport Provision – Scarcity in Resource Environments

In the UK, local authorities play a crucial role in the provision of grassroots sport, particularly through providing facilities across a range of activities. However, the ability of local councils to provide these services has been significantly impacted by the reduction in public expenditure since 2010. From an institutional logics perspective, resource environments are culturally constructed, but simultaneously embody material practices (Thornton et al.,

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2012). The rarefaction in the resource environment was a direct impact of the market logic at the society level, as well as the theorisation of austerity by the Conservative Liberal-Democrat government.

For sport, its status as a ‘non-statutory’ obligation for local authorities (Conn, 2015) presents a greater scope for cuts, as other areas such as social care are regarded as ‘statutory’. In 2009/2010 the Local Government Association (LGA) estimated that £1.4bn per-year was spent by councils on sport and leisure provision. By 2014, this had reduced to around £1bn (Conn 2015). The impact of this reduction in expenditure was wide ranging, with job losses, facility closures, reduced opening times, less frequent maintenance, and halted investments:

“we’re not going to be able to expand at all, in fact we are likely to go backwards because we don’t have guaranteed pool time, and any time we lose pool time, our capacity probably drops”.

Chairperson Swimming Club, Central London Area

“I’ve been involved in this for about 20 years, and this is definitely the worst it has been. It’s not only us, the pool is open to the public less, so there is just less time available for anyone to use the pool”.

Chairperson, Swimming Club, Coventry Area

A third of local authorities were forced to reduce their supply of sports facilities, due to austerity measures, between 2010 and 2012 (BBC, 2012). In a more recent analysis of the number of sports facilities in the UK, it is estimated that the number declined from 80,942 in 2012 to 78,270 in 2016 including athletics tracks and swimming pools (Hookham, 2016). This uncertainty in the political environment effected grassroots sport clubs, notably in accessing to affordable and convenient facilities:

“We are not entirely happy with the new pool. It’s nice and clean, but it’s further away for most of our members, and we are not the only club being moved there, so it’s looking like pool time will be at a premium...”

Chairperson, diving Club, East London Area

Development of Institutional Contradictions: Impact at the Grassroots Sport Club

Level

Changes in the interplay between symbolic representations and material practices at the society level can lead to the transformation of the existing institutional environment and the creation of institutional contradictions (Thornton et al., 2012). A dialectical perspective to institutional change as established by Benson (1977) and Seo and Creed (2002) is especially helpful to understand the impact of institutional contradictions on grassroots sport clubs. Institutional contradictions are seen as “the inevitable by-products” of institutions (Seo & Creed 2002, p. 226) that arise from mutually incompatible institutional processes at multiple levels that, in turn, create tensions and conflicts within and among institutional arrangements.

This analysis suggests that the drastic cuts in public funding in sport, associated with the theorisation of austerity as a guiding principle for policy decisions, led to the development of institutional contradictions between austerity policies and the intended sport participation objectives of London 2012. Although funding for London 2012 increased to £9bn, with the Government rejecting the idea of an 'austerity games' (BBC, 2011), support allocated to grassroots sport clubs' activities was significantly reduced. This highlights a clear contradiction in government policy approaches, with this tension at the heart of the sport participation legacy of London 2012. This study particularly highlights how austerity-led policies conflicted with the grassroots sport clubs' operations.

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The quantity and quality of local authority sport provision has always been a long-standing debate, as highlighted by Davies (2008) and the ASA (2009) in relation to swimming pools. One of the key informants also noted how their pool had been ‘neglected’ over an extended period of time:

“Basically for the past 30 years, they have totally neglected this place. I’ll give you an example, there are big filters that were designed so that you could close one while you fix or clean the other. There’s only been one working for years because they have been so poorly maintained. So if the other one fails, the whole pool is gone”.

Chairperson, Swimming Club Coventry Area

With a lack of maintenance and reduction in facilities and available funding, greater pressures are created, which can deter some individuals from playing sport, particularly those of a younger age:

“If there are fewer facilities, things get crowded and when kids turn up to try it for the first time, it’s a bit rubbish so they never come back again. The next gold medallist walks out of the door because we didn’t take the whole legacy thing seriously”.

Minichiello in Hart, 2013

For members of another club the problems had been even greater than availability of space at their usual facility. One respondent stated that their pool was being closed, implying that there was no legacy benefit from the Games:

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“We’re losing our pool, but we keep getting told about an Olympic legacy. Is this the Olympic legacy? I don’t think they really care about a legacy. We’re worse off than we were before 2012, so I don’t really think there has been a legacy”.

Chairperson, Diving Club, East London Area

For many voluntary clubs, increasing cost pressures due to inflated facility present challenges for their ongoing operation :

“Our overheads are going up and up at the moment. The club is really struggling at the moment for money, and we’ve had years where we’ve lost money. Our reserves are pretty low at the moment, so if it keeps going up, we’re probably going to be in trouble”.

Chairperson, Swimming Club, Sheffield Area

In comparison with swimming clubs, there was less negativity from athletics clubs surrounding the effects of the ‘austerity agenda’. A major part of the reason for the increase in popularity of athletics appears to be how the relatively low cost of the sport has made it so accessible to so many. In addition it was claimed that most people involved in athletics did not require a permanent facility, meaning that costs for the organisation were kept low.

“It’s the best thing about running really, isn’t it? It’s so easy and cheap to go for a run, pair of half decent trainers or running shoes and you’re there”.

Chairperson, Athletics Club, Sheffield area

“I think this is why running is so popular at the moment, as people become more and more aware of the cost of things, something cheap like running is ideal”.

Chairperson, Athletics Club, Sheffield Area

These findings reflect the increasing penetration of contradictory institutional prescriptions in the daily operations of grassroots sport clubs, among them the objective to increase sport participation with limited resources and scope of actions. For swimming, evidence in this study suggests that austerity has impacted upon the cost, number, and development of facilities, in addition to the removal of the free swimming programme, all of which appeared to have contributed to a reduction in the number of people aged sixteen and over participating in the sport. In contrast, athletics appears less impacted from austerity due to its lower costs and limited reliance on expensive facilities.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of austerity policies on the sport participation legacy emerging from London 2012 from a grassroots sport club perspective, in particular in swimming and athletics. Our findings broadly support the literature on this topic (Reis et al., 2017; Widdop et al., 2018) which argues that austerity measures have negatively influenced sport participation. Answering calls from the literature (Girginov & Hills, 2008; Rogerson, 2016) this study provides a more detailed understanding in assessing why this has occurred.

Theoretically, to understand the impact of austerity, this paper provides a contribution to the existing literature through the application of institutional logics to the specific context of grassroots sport in the UK in an era of austerity. From the data analysed, complex and contradictory forces have impacted upon grassroots sports clubs since the imposition of austerity. In assessing the institutional environment, at the society level, the UK has shifted towards a market logic principally driven by the reaction to the 2008 financial crisis and the

subsequent election of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition. This shift was enforced by the imposition of austerity measures as well as the government's overarching desire to reduce expenditure for ideological reasons (Parnell et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2014). The impact of these decisions has, at the field level, resulted in the creation of institutional contradictions between the Government-led policies and the participation objectives of London 2012. The evidence from this study suggests that this process was reinforced through the removal of funding for participation programmes such as free swimming and SSPs. This has been allied to cuts in local authority budgets, which have been translated into lower funding for facilities or higher costs for clubs using them (Conn, 2015; Hookham, 2016). Broadly, our findings indicate that funding decisions have been made through an assessment of 'affordability' rather than social or community goals (Foster, 2015).

The findings of this paper confirm that there is an inherent contradiction between austerity and raising participation, as the mechanisms to provide this increase, such as programmes designed to support involvement in sport, are reduced or removed. As noted by Weed (2016), the awareness of sport, interest in sport and available supply of sport are three conditions that need to be reunited to increase sport participation. Our findings clearly indicate that austerity has a negative impact on all three dimensions and reflect a lack of a coherent strategy to foster sport participation in relation to London 2012.

The development of institutional contradictions presents a challenge not only in raising participation, but also for the survival of grassroots clubs. For clubs which are particularly dependent on the state, for example through the provision of facilities, there is a greater risk that they could lose members due to a failure to provide a satisfactory experience for participants. It is an alarming situation considering that Rogerson (2016), in the analysis of the legacy of the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games, underlines the importance of the "local organisational network" (p. 514) and the opening of new sporting venues to build a sport

participation legacy. Similarly, Reis et al. (2017) and Coalters (2004) emphasize the importance of the supply of sporting opportunities in any sport participation legacy project.

Although there has been much debate surrounding the participation legacy emerging from London 2012, much of this work relies on the analysis of quantitative data (e.g Kokolakis et al., 2018; Widdop et al., 2018). However, in securing qualitative insights from grassroots clubs this study addresses a gap in the existing literature covering sport participation legacy and austerity. According to our findings, grassroots sport clubs' administrators viewed austerity as having negatively impacted their activities, recruitment opportunities and access to infrastructure. Moreover, conflicting policies created environmental uncertainty that prevent clubs planning for the future and led sport administrators to look for more market-based solutions to sustain their activities. Finally, most clubs' respondents did not think London 2012 had a positive legacy in terms of sport participation at the grassroots sport club level.

In relation to the existing literature surrounding austerity and sport participation (c.f. Parnell et al., 2018; Widdop et al., 2018; Walker & Hayton, 2017), this study provides a further contribution by specifically addressing the grassroots sport clubs perspective. As noted by Findlay-King et al., (2018), austerity policies developed by the government have many local ramifications with Girginov & Hills (2008) arguing that any long-lasting legacy from London 2012 cannot be developed without considering the local level. By giving voices to local sport clubs administrators, this study captures the many "tensions and contradictions" (Penny, 2017: 1359) faced at the local level and highlights specific challenges those clubs have faced since the implementation of austerity and highlights how fragile and complex their current, and future, situations are.

Limitations and Future Research

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It is clear that there needs to be further research into the implications of austerity on sport participation. As this study only concentrates on two sports there needs to be further consideration of other activities, and this could also lead to the development of further logics or differences at the organisational level. Additionally, this investigation does not refer to non-Olympic sports, so there is a need to understand how grassroots clubs operating in these activities have been affected by austerity.

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