



The role of major cultural and sporting events in celebrating the UK's national identity

Evidence from Spirit of 2012

1. Introduction

Spirit of 2012 welcomes the decision of the DCMS Select Committee to hold an inquiry about the role of cultural and sporting events in celebrating the UK's national identity. This subject is important at a time of societal change caused by individualisation, immigration and globalisation, as well as debates about this country's changing place in the world, and devolution and independence within the UK. This inquiry is also timely with a 2025 City of Culture competition in progress, and a five nation bid for the 2030 World Cup tournament.

Spirit of 2012 is the London 2012 Games legacy funder and was founded with an endowment from the National Lottery Community Fund. It was set up to recreate the pride and positivity that defined the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Spirit of 2012 operates throughout the UK and many of the projects that it funds use the power of events to build lasting social legacies. Examples of work we have funded include:

- **Fourteen** - a project that formed part of our Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games social legacy programme. Some £250,000 was allocated to 14 communities across the UK to deliver sports, arts and volunteering activities with the aim of enhancing social connectedness in those communities and giving people a voice in how these decisions were made.
- **Hull UK City of Culture Legacy Volunteering Programme** – This builds on the achievements of the 2,100 people who volunteered as part of City of Culture. This volunteering programme is working in both Hull and the East Riding of Yorkshire, an area encompassing urban, rural, coastal and market towns geographies.
- **Rio 2016** - £7.5m investment in grassroots physical activity over seven years to support the least physically active in inclusive activity in 33 places across the UK.
- **Breaking Boundaries** – this build on the legacy of 2019 Cricket World Cup, this brought young people from different ethnic and faith groups together around a shared love of cricket. Locations for this project included Bradford, one of the Government's Integration Action Areas.
- **The West Midlands Challenge Fund** – this is working with a number of community organisations to bring young people from different backgrounds together to organisations to choreograph and perform at the opening ceremony of Birmingham

Commonwealth Games 2022. This programme aims to increase participants' skills and confidence, levels of well-being and social connection.

Research studies that have examined the social legacy of the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games, the 2015 Rugby Union World Cup and 2017 Hull City of Culture.

This evidence starts with some reflections on national identities then draws on what we have learned from our grantees work and commissioned research to answer some of the questions posed by this inquiry.

2. The role of cultural and sporting events in forging national identity

Inclusive and shared national identities are a social glue in a post-pandemic world of uncertainty and change. National identity encompass a civic component, associated with shared values and our attachment to institutions such as the monarchy, our democratic institutions and the NHS. Our national identities are also personal and forged by our life experiences, social connections and where we live within the UK. There is much common ground what it means to be British, there are also differences in our ideas about national identity.

Our understanding of what it means to be British (and English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh) is also not static. Devolution has meant that the UK is now more consciously a multi-national polity, with many people feeling strong attachments to the four home nations as well as the UK as a whole. In Scotland, for example, more people now feel exclusively Scottish or more Scottish than British than they did in 1995. Over the last 50 years, too our national identities have become much more inclusive: the numbers who still think that ethnicity is an important factor in being English has halved between 2012 and 2017 with just 12% of people believing that you have to be white to be English, down from 21% seven years ago¹.

People experience national cultural or sporting events four different ways: live as a spectator attending the event, through the media, as volunteers, as participants in community or cultural programmes associated with the event. Cultural and sporting events have role to play in forging shared and inclusive national identities in a number of ways and according as to how people take part:

- National cultural and sporting events bring people of different backgrounds together, as spectators or as participants in opening ceremonies, as volunteers or community events that form part of the programme. It is this direct social contact – particularly with 'out-groups' who we see as being different to ourselves that helps develop shared 'more in common' identities². If national events are to bring us together across the UK they need to encourage social contact across differences.
- Social contact between people of different backgrounds helps people negotiate and accommodate differences, including different views on national identity. We saw this vividly in the Cricket World Cup where young people from Bradford were proud to volunteer as cricketers and were able to negotiate multiple identities which involved debate about which teams to support. Cultural events also have the capacity to bring people together to explore issues such as national identity. For example, *Across and In-Between* and *The Art of Border Living* were programmes that formed part of the 14-18 NOW arts programme for the First

¹ Data from the Centre for English Identity and Politics, Winchester University (2019) and British Future (2012).

² Christ, O., Schmid, K., Lolliot, S., Swart, H., Stolle, D., Tausch, N., Al-Ramiah, A., Wagner, A., Vertovec, S. and Hewstone, M. (2014) 'Contextual effect of positive intergroup contact on out-group prejudice' in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 111(11), 3996-4000. r

World War centenary in Northern Ireland explored how the border frames people's identities, then and today. Both artworks brought together and involved residents from different backgrounds. Our evidence shows that such events are an opportunity to examine and debate what nationhood, shared values and identity mean in the modern world.

- National cultural and sporting events often take place in many different locations, engendering a sense of being part of something bigger that is taking place across the UK among spectators and participants. National events may leave a local imprint when people watch sport together or organise neighbourhood events to watch and celebrate national teams taking part. It is, therefore, important to make sure that events and programming take place in a wide range of locations, not just in the UK's biggest cities.
- National cultural and sporting events are also unifying because they are shared, collective experiences. Media coverage means we see other people - of different backgrounds or from other parts of the UK – supporting Team GB, or taking part in events. Some 51 million viewers watched the television coverage of the Olympic Games, and over 31 million watched the Paralympic Games for 15 minutes or more, making the events the most-watched Games ever on UK television³. This makes a compelling case for major national sporting events to be televised on freeview channels.
- The UK's elite athletes come from many different backgrounds and this symbolises and builds inclusive national identities. Eleven of the 23 players in the 2018 England World Cup squad were from minority ethnic groups. Some 74% of people said that they say that the England squad is a symbol of the country that belongs to people of every race and ethnic background, according to a Survation 2018 poll for the thinktank British Future. There must be continued commitment to making sure that elite sport is representative of the diversity of the UK's population, in reaction to social class, gender, ethnicity and faith, and geography.

3. What does the UK public want from major cultural and sporting events and how is this being reflected in the planning and programming for events in 2022?

There are different expectations of national cultural and sporting events, according to how people take part. Among those who want to attend live events, tickets need to be affordable and allocated fairly. The venues chosen for major sporting and cultural events need to allow people from across the UK to watch as live spectators. We welcome the moves by Festival UK 2022, the women's football Euros and the Rugby League World Cup to stage events in towns, not just large cities. The venues themselves must be accessible to disabled people, including by public transport and family-friendly.

Those who attend sporting events need to feel safe and included. Our national sports teams, for example, Team GB 2012 and 2018 England World Cup team - are symbols of a modern, multi-ethnic nation. But national cultural and sporting events can in some circumstances also be divisive, if people feel that the event is "*not for them*" or they feel unsafe or excluded. In a survey undertaken in 2018⁴, some 35% of people agreed with the statement "*I feel that arts and culture are generally not for people like me.*" Effective publicity, free events in accessible

³ Ofcom (2012) *The London 2012 Olympic Games: media consumption*, London: Ofcom.

⁴ ICM survey of 2,260 GB people aged over 16, undertaken 15-18 February 2019 and published in British Future (2019) *Crossing Divides: how arts and heritage bring us together*, London: British Future.

venues, televised events, a varied programme that appeals to different interests, and the involvement of partner organisations that work in local communities are key factors in reducing perceptions of exclusivity in the arts. The programming of 14-18 NOW, Hull City of Culture and Festival UK 2022 has addressed these issues. It is a huge achievement that evaluations suggest that 90% of people in Hull took part in City of Culture events including many people who attended ticketed cultural events for the first time⁵.

We see considerable value in events that give people an opportunity to be part of something much bigger. Spirit of 2012's Fourteen programme, part of the legacy of Glasgow 2014, was arguably most successful in Northern Ireland, and many of the young people we spoke to felt proud that their programme was part of a national movement connected to the Commonwealth Games.

Although much progress has been made in eradicating racism from sport, it still remains a problem in some places. Over the 2019-2020 season, hate crimes were recorded at 287 of the 2,663 football fixtures played in England and Wales according to Home Office statistics. This deters many fans from minority ethnic communities from attending fixtures. Black and minority ethnic footballers are the targets of high levels of abuse on social media. Taking firm action to eradicate racism in sport (including that expressed on social media) must be prioritised, particularly if there is a five nations UK and Ireland bid for the 2030 World Cup. Social media companies need to be more proactive in removing abusive comments. Programmes to reduce racism in football are not always targeted at those who may perpetrate or give tacit support for such hatred and prejudice, or use effective messages that reach these groups.

4. How should the success of major cultural and sporting events be measured?

It is essential major sporting and cultural events are evaluated, and that the process of evaluation is reflective and encourages delivery teams and artists to understand the reasons for success and failure. Not all evaluations of major cultural events have done this well. There has been a tendency in some evaluations to over-inflate statistics about participation, by double-counting participants and errors due to small sample sizes of surveys⁶. It would be good practice for DCMS statisticians to review

National statistics, can be used to measure the success of large national sporting and cultural events. For example, DCMS's Taking Part Survey included a bespoke unit which look at people's involvement in the First World War commemorations, including 14-18 NOW, the arts programme that was part of these national events. The organisers of large national events may also wish to commission bespoke surveys. Social media engagement and ticketing data can also be used to understand the reach of events and how many people took part. Qualitative data should also be collected in any evaluation.

Surveys on national sporting and cultural events should measure (i) how many people have heard about the event (ii) how many people took part by watching or participating in the event and (iii) the legacies of events. We have set out the social legacies associated with events below and the success of events should also be measured against these legacies. ONS wellbeing questions, as well as questions from the MHCLG Community Life Survey can be used to measure the social legacies. It is essential that these surveys examine the impact

⁵ University of Hull (2018) *Cultural Transformations: the impact of Hull City of Culture 2017*, Hull: Culture, Place and Policy Institute, University of Hull.

⁶ We are able to provide additional evidence on this point.

of social grade, education, income, gender, age, ethnicity and faith, and geography on reach, participation and social legacies. Participation in cultural activities is strongly associated with social grade and levels of education⁷.

There are also softer legacies of memory and association that build the picture of success. We have often considered how long the saliency of our name “Spirit of 2012” will continue, but what we find is that people still want to tell us their stories of that summer, which are to do with communities coming together, pride in local heroes and pride in place – both national and locally.

5. What needs to take place to make sure that national sporting and cultural events leave positive legacies?

Major events leave different types of legacies: artistic or sporting, economic and infrastructural, and social. There have been many evaluations of the legacies of sporting and cultural events⁸ that have highlighted planned and unplanned legacies, both positive and negative.

Social legacies left by national cultural and sporting events include:

- increased public participation in creative activities, including among social groups least likely to take part
- higher levels of physical activity among the public, particularly among people who are the least active
- increased diversity of participation in the events and their associated programmes
- increased individual well-being
- stronger social connections among people that take part in these events, bridging connections across ethnic, faith, age, class and geographic divides.
- stronger civic pride, although it can be challenging to sustain this.
- a stronger sense of local and national belonging
- stronger grassroots cultural and sporting organisations
- a large number of volunteers, many of whom are interested in volunteering again, as events volunteers or in other forms of volunteering.

There are often relationships between these different types of social legacy. For example, volunteering can lead to stronger social connections and has the potential to strengthen grassroots sporting and cultural organisations which often rely on the time commitment of volunteers.

A number of factors determine the nature of the social legacy of events and the extent to which these legacies are positive. We have set out these factors below and it is essential that those planning events in 2022 and beyond take them into account.

- The bidding process for national events should have an explicit aim of securing a broad range of social legacies, as listed above.
- Social legacy planning (as well as economic, artistic and sporting legacy planning) needs to be built into the planning of events from the start, with clear ownership post-

⁷ British Future (2019) *Crossing Divides: how arts and heritage bring us together*, London: British Future.

⁸ See, for example, Thomson A. (2019) ‘Sport event legacy: A systematic quantitative review of literature’ in *Sport Management Review* Vol 22 295-231.

⁹ University of Hull (2018) *Cultural Transformations: the impact of Hull City of Culture 2017*, Hull: Culture, Place and Policy Institute, University of Hull.

event when the organising committee, artists and athletes have left town. This does not always happen.

- Social legacy planning needs to be funded. Having designated legacy funding within the overall funding of events might be an approach that DCMS and devolved administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales may wish to consider.
- National events need sufficient forward planning times to enable partnerships to be secured, research to be undertaken and school and community engagement projects to be developed. This forward planning time needs to be funded.
- Many national cultural and sporting events form legacy boards and these can key to ensuring lasting social legacies. Legacy boards should involve relevant sporting and arts organisations, local and combined authorities, public health, schools and education, and volunteering and community organisations.
- Events that have the ambition to strengthen civic pride and build shared identities need to involve people across the nations of the UK if these are aims of such events. Sports and cultural organisations across the four nations need to have an equal stake in the planning and delivery of these UK-wide events.

Volunteering as a legacy: Major sporting and cultural events can involve hundreds or thousands of volunteers. Some 70,000 people offered their time during the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics and 2,100 people were volunteers during Hull UK City of Culture. Such volunteering programmes are a major means to securing a social legacy of events. They help bring people of different backgrounds together, strengthening civic pride and help develop shared identities.

Event volunteering is often a route to more sustained volunteering in grassroots sports and cultural organisation, as well as in community organisations. In 2020, Hull City of Culture volunteers were contacted to see if they would become NHS First Responder volunteers or support local charities, with many of them taking up this offer. Similarly, Sunderland City Council's Culture and Events directorate developed a pool of volunteers as part of its UK City of Culture bid. Although the bid was unsuccessful, the Events and Active Sunderland team has continued to grow this pool of volunteers who are now involved in Active Sunderland BIG Walk, Bike Ride and Run, the Remembrance Parade, local sports festivals, the Air Show and the Tall Ships Race. Nearly 200 people are now involved as regular volunteers and without them these events would be difficult to stage and would not be as successful as they are. Sunderland Council's pool of events volunteers were also mobilised to help COVID19 relief efforts.

Not all sporting and cultural events have a sustained legacy of volunteers. Organisations who take on the responsibility for legacy volunteering need to be funded to do so; this role should be part of the bidding process. The organisation responsible for legacy volunteering must have a long-term commitment to volunteering. Local authorities or local volunteer centres may often be better placed to run legacy volunteering programmes, rather than cultural or sporting organisations.

Changed attitudes to disabled people as a social legacy: The Paralympics changed public attitudes to disability, and led to more than 300,000 disabled people taking part in regular sport. Many football clubs made their grounds more accessible after the Olympic Park showed what was possible. But there is a need for more action to support the inclusion of disabled people in sports, including national events. In research published in May 2021 by Activity Alliance, it was noted that 72% of people agree that COVID19 has made sport and

physical activity less accessible for disabled people. Activity Alliance is calling for continued funding and commitment to encourage more disabled people to be physically active alongside their non-disabled peers. Community programmes that form part of national sporting events should aim to increase levels of physical activity among disabled people in programmes that bring disabled and non-disabled people together.

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