

**Inspiration is not Enough:
Why sports mega-events always promise but rarely
achieve a legacy of increased participation in sport
(a Class Analysis)**

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Promises, promises...

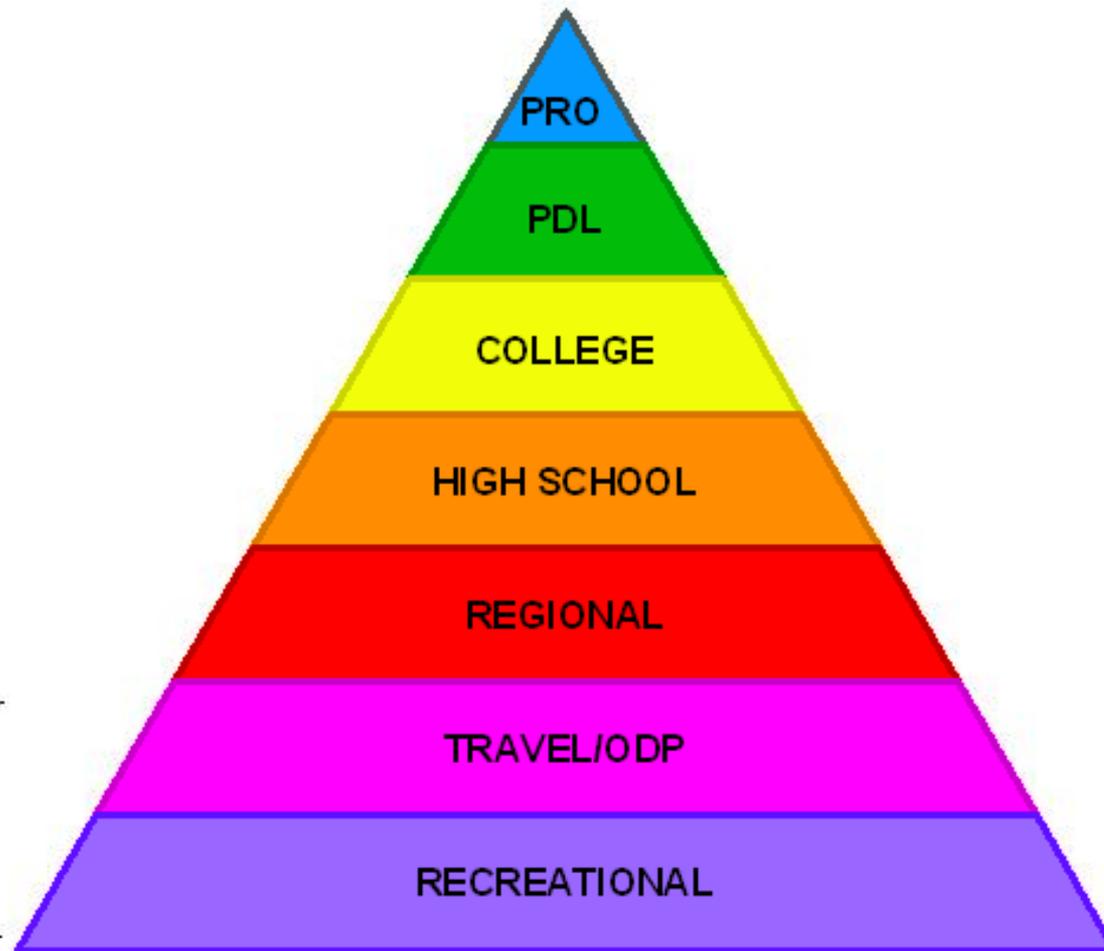
- This paper considers one particular promise made by sports officials and Olympic (and other major sports event) bid committees and organizing committees:
viz: the promise of **increased participation** in sport and physical activity: two forms – medal winners inspire more participation ‘at home’, or ‘in general’ [Werner Pitsch’s analysis of truth telling...! “Did you make promises you knew you could not keep?”]
- where does that particular promise come from?
- why is it made?
- why is it (almost) impossible to realize?

Where does it come from?

- The promise is deeply rooted in Olympic ideology
 - Pierre de Coubertin's assertion that:
“from every 1,000 athletes there are 100 exceptional talents, and one world class athlete”
- Critics will recognize that this is a perfect analogy for an idealized (and unrealizable) meritocratic class system -- conveniently ignoring the inheritance of privilege
- In the 1990s, the IOC went so far as to propose the existence of a ‘double pyramid’ -- elites rising to the top, and a related ‘trickle down’ / inspiration effect

Pyramid power (Welsh-style)





"Team" model
applies to Rec
& Travel only

Premier AC's
club-centric
approach
addresses the
full playing
pyramid



Why the promise is made

- Olympic (and other major sports event) were always expensive, but costs increased so much since the 1970s and -- despite major increases in sponsorship revenue since 1984 and television revenue since 1988 -- the soaring costs of staging a major sports event requires increasing use of public funds [precisely during the neo-liberal era of reduced taxes, smaller government, reduced public services, and ‘individual responsibility’]
- These public expenditures were counted as investments that would produce social benefits in the form of “legacies” [since late 1990s]



Timeliness of the promise

- Growth of obesity and NCDs – public health concerns [at a time of reduced public health expenditures]
- Increasing claims from sport community that sport (and physical activity) could resolve various social problems
- IOC (1994) incorporation of the ‘sport for all’ movement through enshrining the “right to participate in sport” in the Olympic Charter
- Revival of deCoubertin’s ‘pyramid’ by the IOC Sport for All Commission as the ‘double pyramid’ (i.e., the ‘trickle down effect’)

The promise...

-becomes an imperative
-becomes a justification
- How to justify huge public expenditures on sport in a neo-liberal era?:
 - Promise the development of infrastructure (for sport, public transportation, etc.)
 - Promise the resolution of social problems
 - Promise investment in public health through increased participation, and
 - Promise medals

The fetishization of ‘the medal’

- Elite sport morphs very easily from a Cold War ‘pissing contest’ to a neo-liberal ‘pissing contest’ – the currency in both is ‘the medal’
- The usual suspect countries are still involved, with others clamouring to join the medal club
- The high cost of winning medals and championships
- The double cost of hosting a major sports event now: building facilities and services **and** preparing athletes to win ‘medals’
- How much do medals cost.....?

Why the participation promise is (almost) never realized

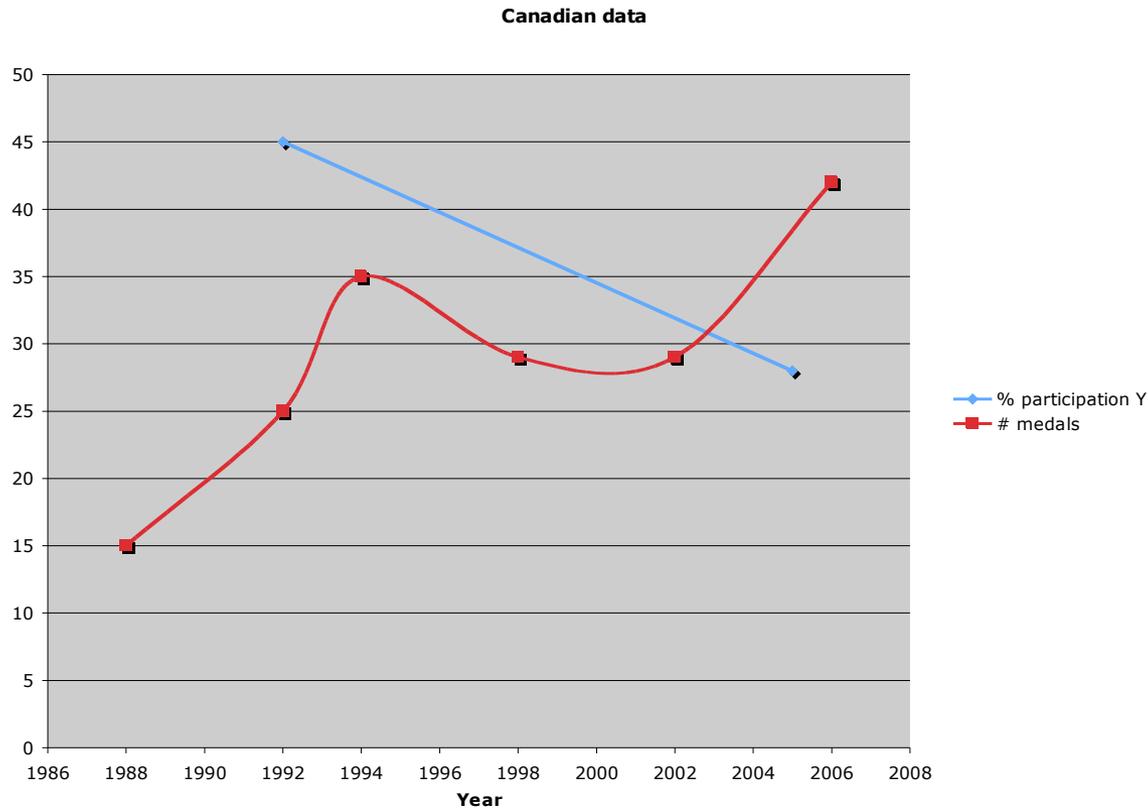
- The data (mainly from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, UK) show, for the most part, no gains in participation following the hosting of a sports mega-event, or following increased success in winning medals / championships, and sometimes a decline in participation (major exception: the 1999 Rugby World Cup in the UK)
- Recent survey of Canadian NSOs [21 of 24 that won Olympic medals -- 1996-2006]: only 2 possible examples of an ‘Olympic bounce’
- Inspiration / trickle down seems to be *a convenient fiction*



Inspiration is not enough... (1)

- How bad can it be?
- What the Canadian data show
- Olympic success vs. participation (graph)

The more medals we win, the fewer Canadians participate in sport!



The conditions of medal production... (1)

- Differentiated sport system
 - Major Games <--> wide range of ‘people’s’ activities
- Early talent identification --> distinct high performance sport development systems
- Olympic athletes in some countries being drawn from smaller and smaller sector of population (early elite development downloaded to parents)
 - estimated that > one third of 2012 UK Olympic team will be drawn from ~7% of British population
 - estimated that >50% of UK medal winners will come from that same ~7% of the population (cf., 58% of gold medal winners in 2004 Athens)

Inspiration is not enough... (2)

- It is apparent that, even if young people are inspired by Olympic performances, more is needed in terms of capacity and opportunity
- Possibility of realizing inspiration is limited: geographically; economically; infrastructurally
- 1999 Rugby World Cup in UK – clubs were prepared; infrastructure was in place and rush of ‘inspired’ young people was accommodated
- 2010 Vancouver Olympics (300 ‘inspired’ speed skaters, 3 places.....)

The conditions of medal production... (2)

- Major Games have distorted sport systems:
 - Team sports / only two medals / reduced funding
[multi-event sports (cycling, swimming, sailing, boxing) preferred]
 - Sliding sports received \$2.87m. in additional funding in Canada (2009-10); annual budget for Basketball Canada -- \$3m.
 - Crawford Report (Australia, 2009) found that more government funding goes to archery than to cricket
- Emphasis on **medals**, combined with a mega-events sport programme based on priorities other than participation, appears to limit the possibility of a participation legacy

Class war in sport: Elite vs. grassroots (or Sport for All vs. sport for the few)

- With the exception of a few countries in N. Europe...
 - elite sport systems consume disproportionate share of the resources available to sport
 - the social and material conditions of medal production ensure that those resources are available to fewer and fewer individuals
 - thus, even if individuals are ‘inspired’ to participate, it is increasingly difficult to achieve access

Class war in sport... (2)

- If participation in sport is important...
 - we are beginning to develop an increased understanding of the ‘social determinant of participation’ or preferably, the social and material conditions of participation
 - at the very least, organizations such as the IOC should oblige organizers of mega-sport events to honour the promises made by bid committees
 - we (CSPS) have developed a 7-point plan to draw a direct line between hosting a sport mega-event and achieving a legacy of increased participation
 - all of the available data suggest that it is far more cost effective to honour the promises and increase participation than it is to live with the alternatives...

It's not rocket science...

- If sport mega-events include large numbers of sports in which hardly any of the world's population participates (or can afford to participate), how can they promise a participation legacy?
- [What would a 'People's Games' look like?]
- If IFs and NSOs continue to ignore any responsibility to make their sports more available to all, how can there be a participation legacy?