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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Uniting sport and heritage: An evaluation of the *Our Sporting Life* exhibition programme

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The year 2012 provided an opportunity to celebrate sporting history during the year when London staged that most historical of international sporting events, the Olympic Games. However, the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport, and the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games (LOCOG) made no reference to sporting history within official documentation, and there was no mention of sport in the Cultural Olympiad programme. This paper aims to understand the role of the Sports Heritage Network in exploring England's sporting heritage, despite being excluded from the official planning of the London 2012 Olympic Games. This affiliation of museums and archives with an interest in England's sporting past recognised the potential of the 2012 Olympic Games and established a community exhibition programme, *Our Sporting Life*, which aligned with LOCOG's aims and objectives. This paper evaluates the outputs and outcomes of *Our Sporting Life* and aims to understand why it was not supported financially or integrated into the official Cultural Olympiad programme. The data collection for *Our Sporting Life* is analysed and critiqued, and the impact of the programme is considered using the Generic Learning Outcomes and the Generic Social Outcomes frameworks. *Our Sporting Life* delivered over a hundred exhibitions and reached over one million people, with outcomes that included increasing knowledge and understanding, and strengthening public life. It provides an off-the-shelf methodology for future major sporting events and, as such, its omission from the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad can be regarded a lost opportunity.

**Keywords:** sport; museums; Olympic Games; Cultural Olympiad; Generic Learning Outcomes; Generic Social Outcomes

## Introduction

In the same year that London was awarded the 2012 Olympic Games, Wood (2005, p. 307) speculated about “how timely and powerful a partnership would be if sport and heritage could be tackled together”, and in the years leading to 2012, an unprecedented number of museums addressed the theme of sport through a range of temporary exhibitions. This appeared to mark a shift in the museum sector which has historically been unsure of the validity of sport as a topic. Sport has traditionally been seen as “low”, rather than “high”, culture (Moore, 1997, pp. 123–124) and it has only been during the last 30 years, with the rise in social history as a discipline for museums (Moore, 1997, p. 4), that there has been an increase in representations of the everyday.

As such, museums have been increasingly positioned as agents for social change on agendas as diverse as education, mental health and community cohesion due to the New Labour

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government's social inclusion policies after 1997. In this context, Moore (1997) demonstrated that popular culture, of which sport is an integral part, was relevant as a subject matter for museums to collect, interpret and display because it has the potential to attract new audiences. However, whilst he demonstrates how sporting objects can be valued and addressed in the same manner as any other artefact (Moore, 1997, pp. 106–107), and wider discussions of the history of sport have asserted the merits of material culture and sport in museums,<sup>1</sup> few other academic publications on museums have included sport exhibitions and programming as part of their research. Questions surrounding the role and value of sport as a genre for museums, its place within wider cultural policy and its impact on audiences have continued to be overlooked (Moore, 2012, p. 93).

This paper aims to address this oversight by evaluating a series of temporary exhibitions, entitled *Our Sporting Life*, in order to understand the potential impact of sporting heritage in museums. *Our Sporting Life* was a national<sup>2</sup> exhibition programme developed by the Sports Heritage Network (SHN), which was held at a number of museums, galleries and public spaces during 2012. Established in 2003 by Paul Mains, Director of the River and Rowing Museum, and Kevin Moore, Director of the National Football Museum, the SHN (2013) aims to increase awareness and understanding of sports heritage in the UK, and “extend its reach to new audiences nationally, inspiring public involvement in sport and its history” (King, 2011, p. 3). The network includes members from sports-specific, national and local authority museums, archive services, sports bodies and community archive groups. It has grown from the unease within the museum sector regarding the relationship between sports heritage and museums and, as such, the SHN was intended to be used as a means of establishing sport as a viable and relevant subject matter for museum activity and programming.

Despite the executive committee of the SHN being primarily from sports-specific museums,<sup>3</sup> their fundamental aim was for sports heritage to be integrated beyond their own institutions and into non-sports-specific organisations. Research conducted in 2006 revealed that whilst a vast amount of sporting heritage material existed in museum collections across the country, museums often failed to fully understand how to use them. In addition, there was a lack of awareness of the wealth of sporting heritage items nationally. This resulted in a lack of public access to diverse sporting heritage items (Hood, 2006), and in light of these findings, *Our Sporting Life* was created to raise the profile of sports heritage, safeguard its future, increase museums understanding of how to deliver sports heritage exhibitions and ensure greater access to collections. An evaluation of the programme is presented below before conclusions are drawn on the limitations of existing evaluation practices within the museum sector.

### ***Our Sporting Life* and the Cultural Olympiad**

The staging of the Olympic Games in London in 2012 provided an opportunity for a greater than ever appreciation of sports heritage in the UK, and the event led to increased exposure and funding opportunities. The relationship between sport and culture has arguably been embedded in the Olympic Games since Pierre de Coubertin outlined his vision of a union of sport and art at the turn of the twentieth century. However, Garcia (2012) outlines a lack of unity between the two and states that it was not until Barcelona 1992 that a four-year integrated Cultural Olympiad was officially launched. In London's bid for the 2012 Olympic Games, the potential for cultural activity in response to the event was clearly outlined, yet whilst a number of cultural projects were conducted, there was no specific reference to sporting heritage.<sup>4</sup> Despite claims that Britain created many of the international sports represented at the Olympics (Holt, 1989), the omission of sports heritage from the language of the Cultural Olympiad signifies the divide between sport and culture, with sport seemingly positioned outside the cultural sphere.

With an unclear vision outlined by the Cultural Olympiad, the museum sector initially viewed London 2012 with scepticism (Department for Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS], 2005), and concerns were raised about whether funding would be diverted from core budgets (DCMS, 2007, p. 7). David Lammy (2005), the Minister for Culture, addressed this concern in his speech to the Museums Association conference in 2005:

The Olympics presents far more of an opportunity than a threat for culture. It will be the greatest possible showcase to present all that is best about Britain. Our museums and galleries must be part of that, and the sector will be fully involved in the planning of the cultural festival and other elements of the Olympic programme.

Furthermore, in the DCMS' Annual Report for 2005, a chapter was dedicated to "Bringing communities together through culture and sport". Whilst some optimism was voiced following these statements of intent (Wood, 2005, p. 311), the strategies for delivery outlined by the DCMS (2005) demonstrated a perpetuation of the schism between the two areas.

The ensuing programme left museums unsure of how to participate in the Cultural Olympiad, and at the Museums Association conference in 2008, delegates were asked to express their feelings about it, with many respondents using the words "confused" and "complex", and one asking "what is it? I've never heard of it" (Museums Association, 2008). The lack of dialogue between the Cultural Olympiad and the museum sector led to a failure to realise the potential of sports heritage to meet community agendas. Wider museum and cultural activity funders such as the ACE and the MLA were only provided with small, ring-fenced pots of money which did not have a specific focus on sport<sup>5</sup> (DCMS, 2006/2007; Museums Association, 2005). Consequently, it was only with the creation of *Our Sporting Life* that there was a sustained and unified programme of sport and its heritage during London 2012.

*Our Sporting Life* maintained a community focus and national reach during 2012, and although it was not originally developed as a reaction to London 2012, it became one of the key mechanisms through which the museum sector could respond to the event. The overarching programme objectives aimed to support wider policy agendas, such as audience development, education and tourism, and it situated sporting heritage as the central theme. These aims were embedded into an off-the-shelf exhibition framework which included text panels and cases that narrated the story of England's sporting past. The pre-written panels, objects and cases were loaned to venues, primarily museums but also leisure centres and airports, across the country and host organisations were encouraged to create a second component of the exhibition in partnership with, and focusing on, their local community (Figure 1).

*Our Sporting Life* was funded by the MLA for a period of 12 months to the value of £100,000, which financed the initial set-up costs and a project manager to oversee the initial delivery. By the beginning of 2012, however, the money ran out and the project manager left just as exhibition activity increased nationally. Consequently, the partnerships and contacts developed by the project manager could no longer be sustained and co-ordination of the project became difficult, with some partners withdrawing, and others hosting exhibitions without notifying the central *Our Sporting Life* team.

### Evaluating *Our Sporting Life*

The formal evaluation of *Our Sporting Life* was driven by its funders, initially the MLA and latterly, ACE. On their funder's request, SHN identified a number of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to enable the measurement of the outcomes of *Our Sporting Life*, but on the disbanding of the MLA, ACE requested a new range of indicators to measure the programme's success (Table 1).<sup>6</sup>



Figure 1. *Our Sporting Life* exhibition cubes, Ironbridge © SHN.

Table 1. KPI indicators and ACE objectives.

Years 1 and 2: MLA KPIs	Year 3: ACE objectives
Number Of sports and clubs engaged	Number of sports clubs and societies engaged
Total visitors	Total visitors
Number of exhibitions mounted	Number of exhibitions mounted
Number of new partnerships created	Number of exhibition days
Number of special events by clubs	Number of events/workshops held
Number of open activity weekends	Number of volunteers involved in the project
Number of open activity event day	Number of volunteer hours
Number of schools engaged (facilitated visits)	Total number of schools engaged
Number of young people under 19 engaged	Number of school visits
Number of young people involved in formal on-site activity	
Number of families participating	
Number of volunteers new to museums	



The use of KPIs to measure *Our Sporting Life*, and the redefinition of these objectives part-way through the project, was problematic. Whilst measuring visitor demographics is a difficult task for museums, particularly when events and activities are delivered as drop-in sessions staffed by people tasked to deliver and not evaluate the programme, the lack of demographic evidence makes it difficult to ascertain whether sporting exhibitions during 2012 encouraged different audiences to visit museums and exhibitions. Furthermore, the change from the initial KPIs to different objectives created confusion, with project teams often being asked to provide data retrospectively. The final evaluation of the project used only the ACE objectives to measure the quantitative outputs, and the data returned were focused more towards numerical objectives than on impact and outcomes.

An evaluation methodology (Table 2) was initially outlined by the SHN and this focused on individual organisation-led evaluation, with project leads requested to conduct questionnaires, focus groups and consultations. However, data capture from project teams was ad hoc, an issue that pervades the museum sector as a whole (Heath and Davies, 2012), and the absence of a project manager to co-ordinate the evaluation process had a significant impact on the final data set.

This approach to evaluation has led to data of questionable validity. When comparing the data from the interim report, at a time when the project manager was still in post, with the data set at the end of the programme, there is a substantial gap left by the conclusion of the funding. This restricts the quantitative picture of the project, but the results from both the interim report and final data set have been compiled here, where possible, with an element of careful conjecture to build a representative picture of *Our Sporting Life*.

The final evaluation recorded responses from 30 project leads. Whilst the total number of *Our Sporting Life* exhibitions delivered in England is difficult to establish, it is known that 37 project teams advertised exhibitions and events directly relating to the programme. As such, there were seven non-respondents to the survey.

**Exhibition numbers and themes**

Using the data from the 30 project leads, each team mounted an average of 2.9 exhibitions. Assuming this average was matched by the seven known non-respondents, the total number of

Table 2. Original programme evaluation methodology (King, 2011).

<i>Our Sporting Life</i> (OSL) evaluation methodology		
What?	When?	How and Who?
Who is engaging with an OSL exhibition or event	During each exhibition or event	Exhibition organiser to carry out facilitated evaluation sessions using the questionnaire provided by OSL team
The quality of the visitor’s engagement with an OSL exhibition	During each exhibition or event	Exhibition organiser to carry out facilitated evaluation sessions using the questionnaire provided by OSL team
The effectiveness of the process of putting on an OSL exhibition	After opening of each OSL exhibition (target is within two weeks)	Lessons learned meeting between OSL team and exhibition organiser Questionnaire supplied by OSL to be completed by each exhibition organiser
Performance against identified measures of success (MLA’s identified KPIs)	Ongoing data capture from start to end of MLA-funded activity	Tabulated data collection template with identified KPIs provided by OSL Specific data are collected by each individual exhibition organiser Data are collated by OSL national team

Table 3. Overall exhibition data.

Year 3: ACE objectives	OSL figures
Number of sports clubs and societies engaged	Unknown
Total number of visitors	931,414
Number of exhibitions mounted	88
Number of exhibition days	3351
Number of volunteers involved in the project	405
Number of volunteer hours	3831
Total number of schools engaged	3692
Number of school visits	689

exhibitions mounted was 108. The average exhibition ran for 38 days, demonstrating that museum services were using *Our Sporting Life* as part of their temporary exhibition programme. This suggests that it was seen as a project to be integrated into broader exhibition programmes, a level of sporting heritage activity that had not previously been seen in England (Table 3).

The exhibitions were thematically linked by categories which represent how sport intersects with wider museum collections and objectives. With education, engagement and widening participation high on cultural policy agendas, exhibitions were used to engage schools, families and community groups, and although several museums chose to focus on the art or science of sport, the vast majority explored sporting heritage within a local context, either through local sporting activities, local heroes or local clubs. In the broader context of London 2012, *Our Sporting Life* demonstrates that local communities could relate to an international event in a remote location through sport and that this local angle was a key factor behind attracting new audiences and engaging with the community (Table 4).

### **Geographical spread**

The geographical impact of *Our Sporting Life* was strongest in museums that were not included in official Cultural Olympiad programming. The project management team for *Our Sporting Life* was based in the South East and, as shown in Figure 2, the majority of activity took place in this region. This can be attributed to the contagion effect from the site of the Olympic Games,<sup>7</sup> and the greater concentration of cultural organisations, funding and existing partnerships between the project manager and local activities. The loss of the project manager post, however, reduced the relationship-building potential of *Our Sporting Life* on a wider geographical scale.

### **Volunteers**

The change from the MLA to ACE shifted the focus onto the role of volunteers, a move that was in line with the government's 'Big Society' agenda.<sup>8</sup> Volunteering was a key aspect of London

Table 4. Themes of *Our Sporting Life*.

	<i>Our Sporting Life</i> themes	
The art of sport	Sport and social history	Sporting heroes
Local sporting events and activity	The science of sport	The history of a sport or sports club

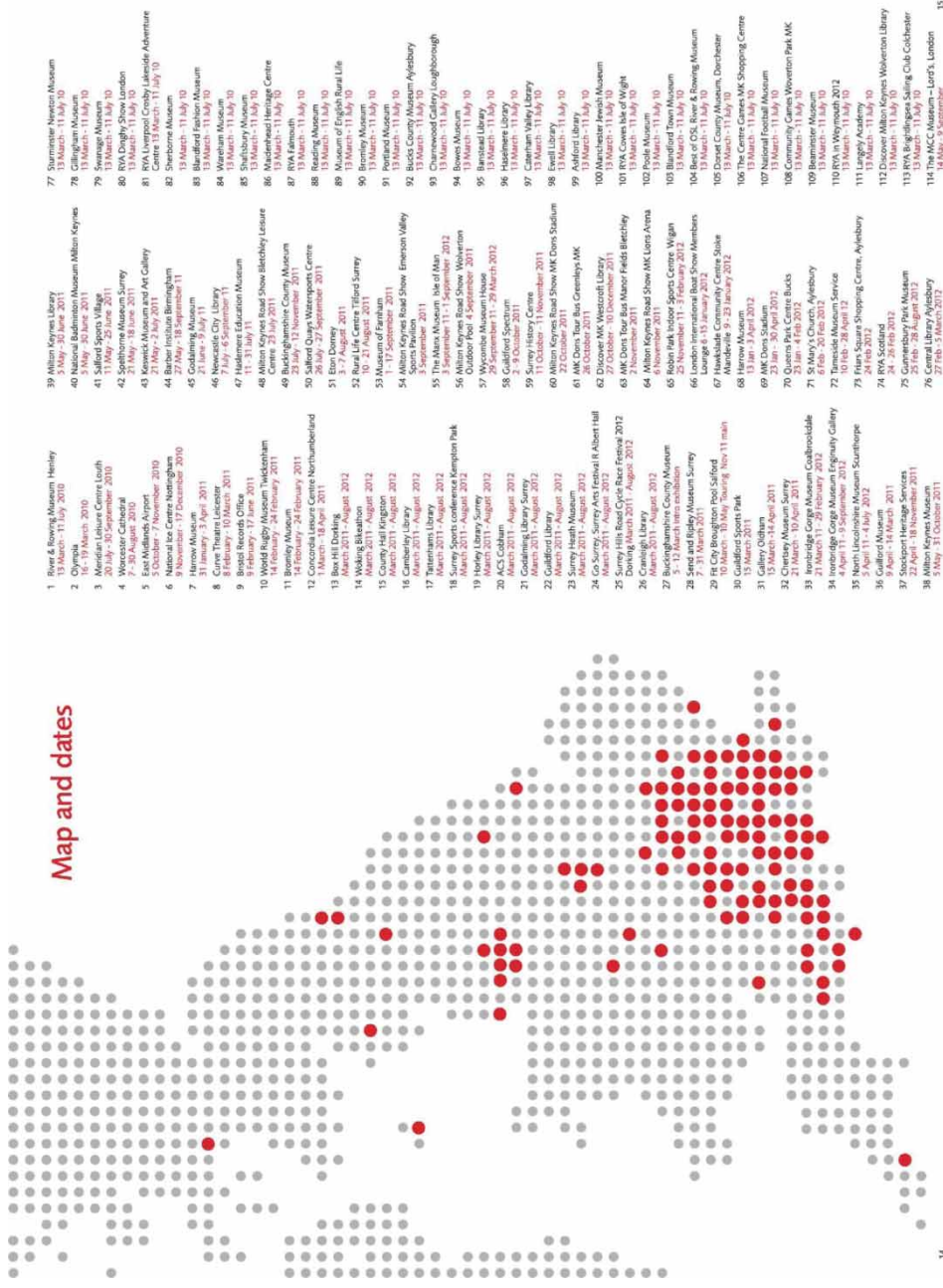


Figure 2. Geographical spread of *Our Sporting Life* exhibitions © SHN (King, 2011).

2012 (DCMS, 2012, pp. 20–21) and was perceived to be a significant success. The data from *Our Sporting Life* demonstrate a similar achievement. On average, there were 13 volunteers per exhibition; however, the data do not show how many of these volunteers already had active roles within the museum, or whether the sports heritage theme appealed to different types of volunteers.



Table 5. Knowledge and understanding – outcomes for organisations.

Indicator	Evidence
Organisations will say they have an increased knowledge and understanding of sporting collections working with communities local stories, figures and history	<p><i>Ironbridge Museum:</i> “We were also able to showcase collection items that had not been displayed before and also to increase our knowledge and interpretation of these objects and archive material. This helped us develop our collections; increase our knowledge and understanding of our collections, local history and local sport”</p> <p><i>Manx Museum:</i> “We were very reliant on the expertise of our new sporting contacts”</p> <p><i>Surrey Heritage:</i> “One of our most interesting stories involved the chance find of an historical document that proved to be of international importance and led to the development of a relationship between Surry Heritage and the UK Youth Baseball Association as well as sporting re-enactments, which inspired young people to take up a non-traditional sport”</p>

### Visitor numbers

Whilst *Our Sporting Life* was frequently used as part of a broader engagement objective, traditional footfall measures were used to ascertain visitor numbers. The overall visitor figures represent an average of 31,047 visitors per exhibition, and if this average was true for the seven non-responders, the total number of visitors can be projected as 1,148,743. As with the data on volunteers, the visitor data lack detail on the demographics of those visitors, or whether they were attending the museum specifically for the exhibition or visited *Our Sporting Life* because they were in the museum. As such, it is only through qualitative research that any assertions can be made about the ability of sport to attract new audiences to museums, although in this case, the qualitative analysis is somewhat inconclusive.

Table 6. Enjoyment, inspiration and creativity – outcomes for individuals.

Indicator	Evidence
Individuals will say, or organisations will be able to demonstrate, how the impact of the exhibition has contributed to people’s enjoyment inspired people to learn more about the topic, sport or take an active role in the museum or community allowed people to be more creative	<p><i>Visitor, Bowes Museum:</i> “Thank you for a fun and inspiring exhibition – with history and colour – to motivate the Olympians of the future!”</p> <p><i>Manx Museum:</i> “Visitors were encouraged to engage in sport, to use the equipment and have fun”</p> <p><i>Visitor, Meridian Leisure Centre, Louth, North East Lincolnshire:</i> “It’s great to celebrate local Olympians, it’s got me and the kids really excited about the 2012 games”</p>

Table 7. Activity, behaviour and progression – outcomes for individuals.

Indicator	Evidence
Individuals will say, or organisations will demonstrate, that the exhibition has directly led people to explore further opportunities, including taking part in community exhibitions taking up new forms of learning; taking up new forms of activities, including sport	<p><i>Visitor, Bowes Museum:</i>            “One of our most enthusiastic partners, George Phelan from the Durham Amateur Football Trust, was particularly enthusiastic about the exhibition; we have given him some of the graphic panels on football, which he will use in his work with DAFT”</p> <p><i>Surrey Heritage:</i>            “The links with sports clubs has encouraged them to deposit archives with heritage organisations”</p>

### The impact of *Our Sporting Life*

The limitations of the quantitative data for *Our Sporting Life* are evident and it is necessary to adopt a broader qualitative approach to establish impact. The qualitative responses of those who held exhibitions have been tested against the Generic Learning Outcomes (GLOs) and Generic Social Outcomes (GSOs),<sup>9</sup> and the evidence is presented below.

#### Learning outcomes

*Our Sporting Life* demonstrated significant learning outcomes for organisations and individuals in the GLO areas of Knowledge and Understanding, Enjoyment and Creativity, and Activity, Behaviour and Progression. Organisations stated a new breadth of knowledge and understanding about their current collections, which has informed their collection policies moving forward, and involvement in the programme has seen organisations change their attitudes towards sporting heritage, particularly in relation to sporting stories from their communities.

Without more comprehensive surveying of audiences, it is impossible to ascertain whether they gained increased knowledge and understanding of local history and the nation’s sporting heritage, but it is in the response to questions on enjoyment, inspiration and creativity that the

Table 8. Activity, behaviour and progression – outcomes for organisations.

Indicator	Evidence
Organisations will say that the exhibition supported them to create new partnerships or new ways of working create or plan other community exhibitions further exhibitions about sport new partnerships	<p><i>Manx Museum:</i>            “The art was moved to our smaller temporary exhibition space, which was a bold move by the organisation as we might have alienated our traditional visitors. In reality the exhibition was so engaging that we had very few complaints ... and most people thought it was exciting”</p> <p><i>Ironbridge Museums:</i>            “The Science of Sport exhibition allowed us to expand our focus in <i>Ingenuity</i> and investigate the science and technology behind sports and sporting equipment”</p>

Table 9. Stronger and safer communities – improving dialogue and understanding.

Second-tier indicator	Evidence
Improving group and inter-group dialogue and understanding. Through exhibitions about specific community groups community focused programming, etc.	<p><i>Dorset Museums Service:</i>            “The stories were not to be just those of the superstars, but the unsung heroes within the clubs and teams across Dorset”            “The partnership of museums across Dorset is stronger as a result of a successful project”</p> <p><i>Surrey Heritage:</i>            “By exhibiting in sports grounds, leisure centres, sporting events we reached new audiences”</p>

greatest impact can be observed. Visitors stated that they felt inspired after attending *Our Sporting Life* exhibitions having enjoyed learning about their community and stories of sporting heroism (Tables 5 and 6).

The final learning outcome reveals a more balanced level of response from both organisations and individuals, with exhibitions being believed to encourage a change in behaviour by attracting different audiences. These audiences shared both objects and memories relating to their community’s sporting past for the benefit of future generations (Tables 7 and 8).

### **Social outcomes**

A similar approach has been undertaken to code *Our Sporting Life* against the GSOs, with the findings demonstrating that the programme impacted on all three GSO areas. *Our Sporting Life* partners stated that the programme encouraged stronger and safer communities by reaching new audiences, working together with museum communities to develop exhibitions and building partnerships with local organisations to tell difficult histories and untold stories of local heroes. Partnerships have been forged to support future projects, and many organisations identified relationships with local communities and individuals as a significant outcome of *Our Sporting Life* (Tables 9 and 10).

Table 10. Stronger and safer communities – supporting cultural diversity and identity.

Second-tier indicator	Evidence
Supporting cultural diversity and identity including audience development programmes recognition of individual memories and stories focus on local issues and stories highlighting different cultures through exhibition programmes	<p><i>Dorset Museums Service:</i>            “Attracted an audience with a more diverse background than other museum exhibitions”</p> <p><i>Manx Museum:</i>            “From 2010–2012 we conducted almost 100 recorded interviews with representatives from the Manx sporting community”            “The exhibition team worked with a broad range of sporting clubs on the Island ... to tell a complete story of sport on and from the Isle of Man”</p> <p><i>Ironbridge Museums:</i>            “Local audiences could share their memories of sport, local heroes and loan items for display”</p>

Table 11. Strengthening public life – local decision-making.

Second-tier indicator	Evidence
Encouraging and supporting awareness and participation in local decision-making and wider civic and political engagement. Including community exhibitions new objects accessioned from community involvement greater public consultation	<p><i>Manx Museum:</i>                      “The bulk of the artefacts on display were items on loan to us from the sporting community”                      “We have developed strong links with our sporting community and have received donations to our social history collections as a result”</p> <p><i>Ironbridge Museum:</i>                      “We are continuing to build links and relationships with the local community through consultation and focus groups for specific projects and events”</p>

Table 12. Strengthening public life – building capacity.

Indicator	Evidence
Building the capacity of community and voluntary groups. Including supporting volunteer-led exhibitions encouraging community involvement in museum exhibitions supporting volunteer skills development	<p><i>Visitor, Bowes Museum:</i>                      “The exhibition would not have happened without volunteer pressure at the outset and their continuing enthusiasm and commitment”</p> <p><i>Surrey Heritage:</i>                      “In some cases the events were largely run by a museum or village cricket team ... These were often entirely volunteer run, local events”</p> <p><i>Manx Museum:</i>                      “We therefore felt that the sporting community volunteered as guest curators throughout this process”</p> <p><i>Dorset Museums Service:</i>                      “The community museums are all run by volunteers so their exhibitions were completely volunteer led”</p>

Table 13. Strengthening public life – community empowerment.

Second-tier indicator	Evidence
Enabling community empowerment through the awareness of rights, benefits and external services. Including the development of focus groups and consultation opportunities with the public	<p><i>Dorset Museums Service:</i>                      “The community responded with time, energy and commitment”                      “Stronger links with the community, the participant’s contributions were clearly evident in the exhibition”</p>

It was also found to provide advice on health and wellbeing, with many exhibitions concentrating on healthy living and supporting local sports clubs and activities as a means of engaging new audiences. Dorset Museums Service stated that their programme on healthy lifestyles with adults with learning disabilities “raised awareness and built confidence of participants”.

Table 14. Strengthening public life – improving responsiveness.

Second-tier indicator	Evidence
Improving the responsiveness of services to the needs of the local community: Including the development of focus groups consultation opportunities with the public providing the public with opportunities to inform museum practice	<p><i>Bowes Museum:</i> “The exhibition was unlike other exhibitions at the Bowes Museum. A community exhibition has not been staged during the life of the current Trust”</p> <p><i>Ironbridge Museum:</i> “We are continuing to build links and relationships with the local community through consultation and focus groups for specific projects and events”</p>

However, the main area of success was in helping children and young people to make a positive contribution to public life, and many projects allowed young people to curate exhibitions and lead decision-making. Ironbridge Museums stated that *Our Sporting Life* “gave us the unique opportunity to engage new and diverse audiences [and] to engage young people in the exhibition process”. Plans to integrate this into future activities have been introduced at some of *Our Sporting Life*’s partners.

Finally, a key impact from *Our Sporting Life* was its role in strengthening public life. It was seen to encourage participation from volunteers in all areas of exhibition development and delivery, and many organisations worked with new volunteers. This approach allowed museums to work in a new way with their communities, opening spaces for community exhibitions which told the story of the locality, and inspired them to feel part of the venue. The development of a sense of ownership has been identified as a way to assert the role of consultation groups and audience forums, a further aspect of the *Our Sporting Life* framework that has been integrated into future practice (Tables 11–14).

## Conclusions

The evaluation shows that, despite the complex relationships between the museum sector and the London 2012 Olympic Games, *Our Sporting Life* contributed significantly to the sporting heritage of England during 2012. As a result of the programme, many museums unearthed new artefacts which were accessioned into their collections and new oral histories were captured from sports players, club staff, fans and people living near sports stadia. Exhibitions focused on local social histories and increased the understanding of the role that sport plays in inter-generational communication, changes to the landscape and changes in attitudes towards sport. Involvement in the project was cited as an opportunity to celebrate the sporting heritage of museum communities and the recreation of old and valued sporting traditions have inspired schools, young people, adult learners and other community members to participate, research, teach and learn about their own history and heritage.

The building of partnerships and the development of innovative engagement practices have shown that *Our Sporting Life* could be developed into a model of best practice for future thematic exhibition programmes, particularly in relation to major sporting events. Having been constructed by museum and archive professionals, it is based upon considerable experience and expertise. The programme has delivered over 100 community-based exhibitions, attracting more than one million visitors, and whilst there are limitations to the subsequent evaluation, certain assertions have been made about the project’s contribution to learning and social outcomes.



However, whilst the programme can be seen as something of a success, it highlights a number of issues with cultural policy, funding and evaluation that need to be addressed. The absence of formal inclusion into the Cultural Olympiad programme, and general disjunction in planning for London 2012, reveals an ongoing lack of integration between the three arms of the DCMS. Whilst culture and media appear to become increasingly intertwined, sport has yet to be fully accepted as a component of Britain's cultural offer. With policy-makers heavily influencing funding objectives, the lack of sports heritage exhibitions in museums shows the scale of the divide, and despite the wide reach of *Our Sporting Life*, it is too early to know whether it has led to greater representation of sports heritage in museums.

The lack of data for *Our Sporting Life* makes it difficult for the SHN to assert its impact across a range of agendas, and it restricts their ability to reflect on lessons learned. Furthermore, the change of funding during the project fundamentally altered the scope of the evaluation, and this lack of investment in evaluation is symptomatic of a deeper problem in the cultural sector. Cultural activities rely on short-term project funding, and evaluation is often conducted as an afterthought, by inexperienced staff with a lack of resources, and focuses on quantitative rather than qualitative measures.

Had the SHN initiated the evaluation framework at the outset of *Our Sporting Life*, integrated the needs of their funders instead of being led by them and received adequate financial support to fund an evaluation, the project would have been better placed to develop a new model of practice. However, just as London 2012 failed to capitalise by engaging with *Our Sporting Life*, the project struggled to present a conclusive case that supports claims that sport in museums can attract different audiences. As such, this ground-breaking cultural engagement project is set to be lost due to a lack of importance placed on evaluation by the museum sector and inadequate provision for evaluation from funders who, conversely, insist upon token evaluation measures to be conducted in order to determine the value of culture in England.

## Notes

1. See Vamplew (1998, 2004, 2012), Johnes and Mason (2003), Brabazon (2006) and Phillips (2010, 2012).
2. The study of *Our Sporting Life* focuses only on England because its funding was derived from the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and Arts Council England (ACE) whose funding remit is geographically limited to England. In Wales, there was a similar project entitled *Following the Flame* (<http://www.wrexham.gov.uk/english/heritage/flame/>), and in Scotland, there was less engagement with the London 2012 Olympic Games, perhaps due to distance from the capital city, and increased interest in the upcoming Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games.
3. The organisations represented on the executive committee of the SHN are the National Football Museum, Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum, MCC Museum at Lord's Cricket Ground, River and Rowing Museum, World Rugby Museum, The National Horse Racing Museum, the British Golf Museum, the British Library and the National Archives.
4. For more information on London 2012 and the Cultural Olympiad, visit <http://www.london2012.com/about-us/cultural-olympiad/>.
5. See, for example, Stories of the World, <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do2/our-priorities-2011-15/london-2012/stories-world/>.
6. In 2010, MLA was disbanded during the "Bonfire of the Quangos", and control for museum activity was handed over to ACE.
7. The DCMS' (2012) *Taking Part Survey* identified that 4.3% of people nationally identified the Olympic Games as having encouraged them to participate in a cultural activity during 2012, whereas in East London, it was 11.3% (p. 19).
8. For more information, see <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/big-society>.
9. For more information, visit the Inspiring Learning for All Framework at [www.inspiringlearningforall.org.uk](http://www.inspiringlearningforall.org.uk).

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