# Sport Participation Legacy and the Olympic Games: The Case of Sydney 2000, London 2012 and Rio 2016

# Abstract

# Sport participation as a legacy of the Olympic Games (OG) has frequently featured as a component of the ‘legacy package’ that government bodies and organizing committees promote to the local communities to gain support for the hosting of these mega-events. However, only recently increased sport participation has been explicitly included as part of a legacy plan in OG candidature files. This paper examines the changes and development of sport legacy planning and implementation from Sydney 2000, London 2012 and Rio 2016. The three case studies confirm that sport participation legacies are only achieved if host governments engage the community, develop long-term strategies, and coordinate efforts between different government portfolios and with a range of relevant stakeholders. So far, there is limited evidence available to demonstrate that relevant government bodies have attempted to strategically leverage the Games with the purpose of developing a sport participation legacy for the wider population.

# Key words: sport participation; mega events; legacy; physical activity;

# Introduction

Pierre de Coubertin had three main objectives when establishing the modern Olympic Games: to foster the goals of competitive sport; to provide facilities to promote further sporting development; and, to improve the profile of sports through better opportunities for practice and competition (Chalkley & Essex, 1999). The Sydney, Athens and Beijing Olympic Games addressed this third objective through general statements about inspiring citizens to participate in sport (Jinxia & Mangan, 2008; Pappous, 2013; Sydney Olympic Games Review Committee, 1990). More recently, the London and Rio Olympic Games have explicitly included increased sport participation as an envisioned legacy of the Games in their bid books (British Olympic Association, 2004; Rio 2016, 2009). However, these intentions were not necessarily translated into actions or successful outcomes. This paper examines the changes and development of sport legacy planning and implementation from Sydney 2000, London 2012 and Rio 2016. The purpose is to assess how sport participation has been encouraged/promoted, strategically or not, by the hosting of the Olympics. By including the only two Olympic Games to specifically include sport participation as an intended event legacy (i.e. London 2012 and Rio 2016), and one that generally suggested that the event would inspire sport participation in the host country (i.e. Sydney 2000), this paper compares different approaches to leveraging the Olympic Games for sport participation and their (potential) outcomes, with the aim of providing a better understanding of sport participation legacy efforts and associated discourses.

**Sport participation legacies**

Research conducted on sport legacy and mega-events has been largely focused around increasing participation (Brown & Massey, 2001; Coalter, 2007b; Frawley & Adair, 2013; Hindson, Gidlow, & Peebles, 1994; Hodgetts & Duncan, 2015; Reis, Sousa-Mast, & Gurgel, 2013; Toohey, 2010; Veal, Toohey, & Frawley, 2012); improving facilities (Cashman & Darcy, 2008; Darcy, 2003; Kidd, 2013; McCloy, 2003; Parent, 2008a; Shipway, 2007; Weed, Coren, & Fiore, 2009); strengthened sport organisations (Cashman, 2006; Coalter & Taylor, 2008; Parent, 2008b; Shipway, 2007); and, improved sport policy (Kidd, 2013; Parent, 2008b). These types of anticipated sport benefits are regularly presented by host governments and organizing committees in order to encourage community support for staging these events (Frawley & Adair, 2013; Hindson et al., 1994; Toohey, 2010; Veal et al., 2012). This in turn can create an unrealistic expectation, as Toohey (2010, p. 2772) explained using the case of Sydney 2000: “the federal government’s investment in the Games ... [meant] there were also expectations that recreational sport would be a beneficiary of the legacy that the Games would provide. One prospect was that the nation’s recreational sport participation would increase”.

There are often expectations by sports officials and the general public that the staging of mega-events will generate sport-related benefits even in situations where there has been no explicit sport development objective or strategy (Toohey, 2010). These expectations have been described as the ‘trickle-down effect’ (Potwarka & Leatherdale, 2016). This effect is said to take place when government investment in staging sport events combined with the successes of elite athletes and the associated media coverage leads to “increasing numbers of people taking up these sports, increased membership of clubs in the respective sports and high performance aspirations on the part of the club members, coaches and administrators” (Hindson et al., 1994, p. 17). Mega-events like the Olympic Games have been considered central to this notion of a trickle-down effect, whereby such events enhance the profile of sport and project successful performances to audiences, which in turn is said to attract interest and encourage participation in sport

(Baade & Dye, 1990; Brown & Massey, 2001; Faber Maunsell, 2004; Gratton, Shibli, & Coleman, 2005; Potwarka, 2015; Potwarka & Leatherdale, 2016; Sotiriadou, Shilbury, & Quick, 2008). The trickle-down effect has been the basis for sport development and physical activity policy in many developed countries such as Australia and the UK since the 1970s (Coalter, 2004; Gratton et al., 2005; Hindson et al., 1994; Hogan & Norton, 2000; Veal et al., 2012).

Increasing sport and physical activity participation is the most frequently identified development legacy in the research literature (Hindson et al., 1994; Veal et al., 2012). When trickle-down effects are discussed in terms of increasing participation in sport, associated concepts such as a demonstration effect and role modelling effect are outlined (Hogan & Norton, 2000; Kidd, 2013; Weed et al., 2009). The demonstration effect refers to the exposure of a sport or athlete to widespread media coverage and the potential impact on future participation (Green, 2007; Stewart, Nicholson, Smith, & Westerbeek, 2004). In a similar way, the role model effect refers to successful athletes inspiring young people to play sport more often and therefore also increasing overall physical activity (Weed et al., 2009). Critics argue, however, that demonstration and role modelling effects are not always positive and, in fact, negative consequences can also emerge (EdComs, 2007); for instance, some people may actually be discouraged from taking up a particular sport due to a perceived gap in competence (Bloomfield, 1973).

A large amount of the literature supporting the trickle-down effect is based purely on anecdotal evidence with very few studies examining population-level data (Brown & Massey, 2001; Murphy & Bauman, 2007; Weed et al., 2009). The quantitative studies that have been completed have provided little evidence of sustained sport participation increases as a result of the trickle-down effect (Hanstad & Skille, 2010; Hodgetts & Duncan, 2015; Murphy & Bauman, 2007; Veal & Frawley, 2009; Weed et al., 2015; Wicker & Sotiriadou, 2013), with few examples of a positive association (Potwarka, 2015; Potwarka & Leatherdale, 2016).

Instead of hoping for a trickle-down effect to occur, there is an increasing call in the literature for sport mega-events to be integrated into broader sport development planning (Coalter, 2004; Frawley & Cush, 2011; Hanstad & Skille, 2010; Sousa-Mast, Reis, & Gurgel, 2013; Veal et al., 2012). Coalter (2004, p. 98), for example, has highlighted the importance of integration and investment in sport systems arguing that the lack of participation increases stem from the ‘supply-side failures’ of associated sport organisations. He argues that sport organisations need to be prepared to benefit from the raised profile their sports gain from the hosting of sport mega-events. Furthermore, to encourage increased demand in participation, investments and developments are required in facilities and venues, volunteer training, community engagement and junior development programs (Frawley & Cush, 2011; Hanstad & Skille, 2010).

# Talking legacy

Although the concept of event legacies emerged in the academic literature in the early 1990s (Getz, 1991), the use of the term is still contested and regarded as elusive by some mega-event researchers (Cashman, 2006; Gratton & Preuss, 2008; Matheson, 2010; Preuss, 2007; Thomson, Schlenker, & Schulenkork, 2013). More specifically, the concept of sport legacy is also often viewed as an ambiguous term (Coalter, 2007a; London East Research Institute, 2007). Coalter (2007b), for instance, argues that there is little conceptual clarity on whether sport legacy refers to “physical activity, recreational sport, competitive sport or elite sport”. The ambiguous treatment of sport legacy is problematic because unclear notions enable governments to claim the achievement of overall legacies based on developments in one area (e.g. construction of facilities and infrastructure, or sport volunteers) while hiding failures in other areas (e.g. sport participation) (Weed et al., 2009).

In addition, MacAloon (2008) suggests that the concept of legacy has remained elusive due to the political interests of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). He argues that the IOC has promoted ‘legacy talk’, that is, a discourse that seeks to promote the legacy concept (p. 2065). Legacy talk is seen to have developed to curb criticism of the Olympic movement and to sustain global support (Veal et al., 2012). MacAloon (2008) argues that this discourse enables governments and event organizers to treat legacy as a vague and simplistic concept, pitched as a desirable outcome for host cities, but attracting very little critique. Such arguments resonate with the work of Roche (1994), who highlighted that conventional, democratic and rational decision-making processes are often ignored in major event projects, leading to the decisions being made by political leadership and urban elite groups. MacAloon (2008) argues that it is therefore improbable that meaningful engagement with notions of legacy by event governing bodies and host governments is likely to occur.

Given the variety of uses of the term ‘sport participation legacy’ in official documents, and in order to account for the different aspects covered by strategies and policies based on such a term, for the purposes of this paper sport participation legacy will be used to denote participation in both organised sport and in physical activity more generally.

# Forward planning / event leveraging

Chalip (2004) offers an alternate perspective to MacAloon’s, suggesting that event impacts and legacies are only as good as the strategic planning implemented to support them. Chalip (2004, p. 245) argues that “it is no longer suitable merely to host an event in the hope that desired outcomes will be achieved; it is necessary to form and implement strategies and tactics that capitalise fully on the opportunities each event affords”. As such, stakeholders should be attempting to leverage events to gain the maximum benefit.

Event leverage is defined as a process of identifying a sport event as an opportunity, and then planning and implementing a series of strategies to ensure the desired outcomes can be achieved (Chalip, 2006; Morse, 2001; O'Brien, 2006; O'Brien & Chalip, 2007). Studies of event leverage also differ somewhat from studies of event legacy and impacts (O'Brien & Chalip, 2007). Event legacy and impact studies typically take an *ex post* focus where researchers measure impacts at the end of an event. In contrast, event leverage studies take an *ex ante* focus and look at the strategies put in place at the beginning of the event planning cycle. O’Brien and Chalip (2007) argue that while the *ex post* focus of impact and legacy studies has been useful for understanding the extent of event impacts, they have provided limited insights into “why or how particular impacts occur or are absent” (p. 322). The authors explain that an event leverage perspective demands a “more strategic approach that looks forward to planning how host communities can derive sustainable benefits from sport events” (p. 319).

Event leverage models are useful in that they set out a schematic process to guide the efforts of event stakeholders to maximise benefits of large-scale sport events. O’Brien and Chalip (2007) acknowledge that the event leverage models are simplistic representations of processes, and that there are more complex influences that warrant further understanding, particularly in the case of leveraging for social outcomes. They highlight that the development and implementation of social leverage strategies has been stunted for reasons including: the political expediency of economic development, which means governments give preference to economic leverage strategies; the limited financial returns of causes promoting social and public good, which therefore fail to encourage stakeholder action; and, government fears that social leverage processes may highlight the deficiencies of their operations and policies.

These reasons are underpinned by Chalip’s (2004) arguments that economic leverage activities have come to be institutionalised in the hosting of mega-events. For instance, relevant government departments and industry bodies now typically have established agencies tied into inter-government and public-private networks that are ready to be mobilised as the opportunity arises to capitalise on the economic opportunities afforded by events (Stokes, 2006). In contrast, social leverage, including leverage for sport participation legacies, have not experienced such institutionalisation and remain largely underdeveloped.

# And how do we know if there is a legacy?

The evaluation of legacy has also come under scrutiny, mainly because it rarely occurs (Cashman, 2006). Evaluations require the establishment of baseline data and access to consistent and comparable data to demonstrate event legacies, and these are often difficult to come by (Dickson, Benson, & Blackman, 2011). Additionally, a long-term perspective is needed to determine if legacies have been sustained after an event (Matheson, 2010). Gratton and Preuss (2008) suggest that a timeframe of 15 to 20 years is needed to determine the true worth of legacies. Such a long timeframe also brings with it issues of attribution or determining causality (Preuss, 2007). Where evaluations of legacy have occurred, they are often celebratory and lacking in critique (Cashman, 2006). The literature has criticised such evaluations for focusing only on planned, positive, tangible legacies of events (Matheson, 2010) and failing to “sufficiently compare outcomes with the stated objectives made to the host city at the time of the bid” (Cashman, 2006, p. 18).

Recently there have been efforts to address these criticisms of legacy evaluation. For example, in the early 2000s, the IOC formalised commitments to sport development legacies by implementing an evaluation framework – the Olympic Games Impact (OGI) project. Olympic bid cities are now obliged to respond to sport development-related questions in the IOC’s Candidature Procedure and Questionnaire, and host cities are obliged to capture data across a number of indicators beginning two years before the election of the host city and continuing until two years after the event (International Olympic Committee, 2004). The indicators cover a range of economic, social, and environmental factors.

While the inclusion of sport development-related legacy questions in the IOC questionnaire is a step forward, Veal et al. (2012) argue that some of the questions are problematic. For example, sport development is not defined in the questionnaire, which means that rather than focusing on sport-for-all (i.e. mass participation) legacies, bid city responses may focus solely on elite sport development and still meet the IOC’s criteria (Veal et al., 2012). Veal et al.’s (2012) appraisal resonates with MacAloon’s (2008) critique of the IOC’s notion of legacy more generally, with doubts about how meaningful the IOC’s engagement with legacy is and the depth of its commitment to securing legacies for host cities. Veal et al. (2012) acknowledge that while the IOC’s legacy developments are not perfect, they do demonstrate an evolution from “rhetorical commitment[s]” to sport-for-all, to a “formal requirement imposed on bidding cities to commit and plan for a sport participation legacy” (p. 176).

Chalip (2004) and Matheson (2010) argue that the increased interrogation and scrutiny of legacies from mega-events offer an opportunity for greater understanding of the complexities and challenges of securing legacies. Chalip (2004) argues that the justification of events through promises of specific outcomes means governments have a moral obligation to deliver the best outcomes possible. Where outcomes are not delivered, then “taxpayers may eventually demand an end to the public subsidies on which events commonly rely” (p. 228). Further, Matheson (2010) points out that governments are under increased pressure to “demonstrat[e] that public expenditure [on events] reaps a suitably positive return on investment” (p. 20).

As the London 2012 Games settles into the distance, we are well positioned to take stock of the longer-term ‘trickle-down’ outcomes from Sydney 2000, the short-term impacts from London 2012, and use insights from these events to take an informed investigation of planning for the sport participation legacies in Rio de Janeiro as the city prepares for 2016.

# Methodology

This paper is based on a collaborative effort to compare and contrast findings from various research projects focusing on sport participation legacies of three editions of the Olympic Games. The rationale behind it, one which guides comparative methodologies (Denters & Mossberger, 2006), was to provide valid and reliable information about what has been achieved in this area to date to, in turn, help inform policy makers about best practices and ways forward. It is argued that comparative studies using different countries/locations as their cases have the advantage of providing an escape from ethnocentrism (Dogan & Pelassy, 1990) and of being able to identify general trends across locations (Denters & Rose (1995). Most importantly, comparative research can facilitate the development and ‘testing’ of theoretical ideas and allow learning from the experiences of others (Denters & Mossberger, 2006, p. 553).

In this section we provide the details of this process. We start by looking at the three selected cases individually, and follow up by describing how they were comparatively analysed.

A member of the research team has been involved in the study of sport participation legacies of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games since 1998, conducting a number of connected projects, using a variety of data, including more than 50 in-depth interviews, participant observation, analysis of internal and official documents and survey data collected by government agencies [*references omitted for peer-review process*]. Senior managers at national and state federations for Olympic sports in Australia were interviewed. They were asked about the impact Sydney 2000 had on participation for their sports. The focus of this research programme has been centred on understanding the changes in Australian sport participation across both children and adult populations as a result of the hosting of Sydney 2000 and other international events staged after these Games [*references omitted for peer-review process*]. For instance, interview questions revolved around the impact Sydney 2000 had on participation for the sports senior managers were involved with. The case study presented in this paper has been generated from the aforementioned research projects and analysis of official documents such as the Official Report for the Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games (Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games, 2002) and the Sydney 2000 Bid Document (Sydney Olympics 2000 Bid Limited, 1993).

Similarly, a member of the research team investigated the 2012 London Olympic Games’ promise of increased sport participation [*reference omitted for peer-review process*]. The primary study consisted of 35 in-depth interviews with senior management and frontline delivery staff from five national governing bodies (NGBs). Three of the NGBs were Olympic sports, and the remaining two were sports with a large participation base. Ten interviews were also conducted with staff from organisations such as Sport England and Regional Development agencies that had responsibility for delivering the mass sport participation legacy. The structure of the questions was based on the five conceptual elements used by Girginov and Hills (2008): NGB involvement in legacy discourse, the influence of London 2012 on NGB strategy, how NGB Whole Sport Plans relate to the London 2012 legacy plans, what sporting and human capital NGBs have invested, and how do the NGBS consider London 2012 will help realise strategy post games. Supporting this was a content analysis of policy documents and archival records published by various governmental and non-governmental agencies, including post-event session reports from the House of Commons and House of Lords [*reference omitted for peer-review process*].

The study of sport and physical activity participation legacies of 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games has been the main focus of investigation of another member of the research team since 2011. A series of inter-related projects have been conducted in the past 5 years, using different data collection tools, including surveys, focus groups, interviews and official documents content analyses [*references omitted for peer-review process*]. The focus has been primarily on the legacies for low-income members of different communities in Rio de Janeiro, with specific projects on women [*reference omitted for peer-review process*] and youth [*reference omitted for peer-review process*], but also with projects on sport and physical activity professionals [*reference omitted for peer-review process*]. Interview and focus group questions were principally focused on individual and collective perception of changes in the provision of sport and physical activity opportunities for the local population, and well as potential and realised legacies. Surveys included also questions about personal levels of physical activity, quality of public spaces and availability of local programs for sport and physical activity participation. The material presented here stems from the knowledge gained through these projects but is informed, in particular, by the analysis of official documents released in Portuguese or English by the different levels of government in Brazil and Rio de Janeiro, as well as by the Brazilian Olympic Committee, the Rio 2016 Organizing Committee and other agencies involved directly with the planning or hosting of the Games. It also includes the first (and so far the only available) OGI report.

As the lead authors became aware of each other’s published work, the similarities between their methodological approaches became evident. For instance, all members of the research team used a combination of interview, focus group and survey data to analyse the sport participation legacies of the Olympic Games in focus. Interview and focus group data were all recorded and transcribed textually and then analysed with the assistance of the software package NVivo using interpretative techniques, where a process of data coding and categorization into themes and sub-themes was undertaken.[[1]](#footnote-1) Encouraged by this, a collaboration was initiated.

An iterative process guided the analysis and on-going discussions about the material took place over several months. Chalip’s (2004) event leverage framework was then used to inform the first stage of comparative analysis: this phase consisted of cases being individually constructed based around three temporal categories – Event Bid and Planning for Sport Participation Legacy, Post-bid, and Post-Games Outcomes. Given that the analysis of Rio 2016 was done before the event took place, the focus for this event was on the first two categories only.

Stage 2 involved a cross-analysis of cases by the research team, who identified the main themes that emerged through the different narratives. Despite the varied context between the different Olympics Games being studied, the findings were found to be strikingly similar, and clear overlapping themes emerged, two of which were chosen to be discussed in this paper given the limitations of space to appropriately deal with all of them.

The final stage consisted of a theoretical analysis of the results, identifying the key concepts that would allow the unpacking of the main findings. These are presented in the Discussion section below.

# Sydney 2000 Olympic Games

## Event bid and planning for sport participation legacy

The two core priorities expressed in the bid plan for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games were to stage a ‘green’ Olympic Games and to organise an event that was clearly focused on the athletes (Sydney Olympics 2000 Bid Limited, 1993). While the environment and the athletes were central to the bid plan, there was no specific reference to the creation of a sport participation legacy as a potential or desired outcome from hosting the Olympics in Sydney. The importance placed on the athletes in the bid plan was aimed at providing the best conditions and facilities for them to perform at the highest possible level (Frawley & Toohey, 2009). The focus, therefore, was not on generating increased community or grassroots sport participation, but rather at the elite end of the sporting spectrum (Toohey, 2010).

At the national level, when the bid was won on the 23rd of September 1993, sport policy became increasingly focused on elite performance and less concerned with community participation. Government funding for Olympic sports and elite performance was increased significantly while funding for community level sport stagnated (Stewart et al., 2004). In 1996, for instance, the Australian Government instituted Active Australia, a framework focused on lifelong participation in sport (Cashman, 2006); however, only 10% of the Australian Government’s sport budget was spent on this program, with the majority of the sport budget spent on elite sport development (Stewart et al., 2004). At the state level, the New South Wales (NSW) government (i.e. the host government and major underwriter of the Games) did very little in prioritising or leveraging the Games from a sport participation perspective outside of developing a range of permanent sport venues (Cashman, 2006).

## Post bid

In the lead up to the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games three reports were published that highlighted to varying degrees that increasing sport participation was not a key concern or focus for main Olympic stakeholders such as the NSW Government, the organising committee or national sport federations (Veal et al., 2012). For instance, a report by accountancy and management consultancy KPMG Peat Marwick (1993) outlined the economic benefits associated with the creation of new sport facilities and infrastructure without examining the positive social and health outcomes potentially associated with increasing sport participation and physical activity from the use of these facilities. Another report, this time by international management consultants Keys Young (1995), concentrated on the value of organising the Olympics and the benefits of conducting a full social impact assessment. This report examined the benefits of building new sport venues and facilities, developing and improving sport management, sport administration, sport science, sport medicine and sport coaching capacity, but only briefly debated the possibility of generating increased grassroots sport participation (Keys Young, 1995). Unfortunately, the suggested social impact study was never conducted. The third report, published in 1990, was compiled by a standing committee within the NSW Parliament.

The reportto the NSW Premier (Sydney 2000 Olympic Games Review Committee,1990) briefly mentions the desire to see an increase in community sport participation as an outcome of staging the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, but without any specific detail on how it could have been achieved. The report stated: “An Olympic Games that is successfully staged and financially managed leaves a positive legacy for the host city in terms of new and upgraded sporting facilities and venues; new and improved infrastructure; enhanced international recognition; increased tourism; new trade, investment and marketing opportunities, and increased participation in sport” (p. 3).

## Post Games outcomes

A number of studies have been completed since Sydney 2000 exploring the sport participation trends and legacy to emerge from the event. The studies are divided into two general categories: studies that explored the short-term impacts and those that explored the medium-term impacts. The studies that examined the short-term impacts are explored first, starting with the work of the Australian Sport Commission (ASC).

The ASC (2001) explored participation data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) between 1998 and 2000 and found that sport participation levels fell over the examined period. The ASC (2001) concluded there was no evidence of a demonstration effect as a result of the staging of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. Another study conducted by ABS researchers, Van den Heuvael and Conolly (2001), based on ABS quarterly data, found that a long-term decline in sport participation was evident between 1998 and the middle of 2000. However, the authors stated also that this decline started to reverse between August and November 2000, suggesting the possibility of a minor demonstration effect. This finding has been contradicted recently by Bauman, Bellew, & Craig (2014). They found that there was no increase in adult physical activity in the immediate period after the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.

The above research into the short-term impacts of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games offers mixed conclusions into the relationship between the staging of sport mega-events and the sport legacy for host communities. The same can be said for the research that explored the medium-term impacts. For instance, Veal et al. (Veal et al., 2012), drawing on data collected over a decade by the ASC and the ABS, showed that there may have been a beneficial impact on overall sport participation for people aged 15 and above; however, this was achieved in non-Olympic sports. For children aged 5-14, Olympic sports witnessed a more positive impact, leading tentative support to the notion that the Olympic Games may have had a demonstration effect on younger Australians. The above conclusions, however, need to be treated with caution due to the changes that took place in the survey design for the ASC adult sport participation survey and the less than ideal data collection timing for the ABS children’s sport survey (for a detailed discussion of the methodological issues that were present in both surveys see Veal et al., 2012).

In addition, national registration data for Olympic sports showed little growth between 1996 and 2004. As outlined by a senior executive from the sport of athletics, the ‘hosting the Sydney Olympics did not have a big impact on registration numbers for the sport’ moreover at the junior level ‘there was no longer-term impact’. For Australia’s most successful sport at Sydney 2000 the impact on registration numbers was actually negative: a senior executive from Swimming Australia when interviewed stated that ‘there was no impact on registrations … there was actually a small decrease of five per cent’. This view was confirmed by another swimming official who stated Sydney 2000 ‘had a negative impact … member registrations went down. We expected them to go the other way’.

# London 2012

## Event bid and planning for sport participation legacy

The bid for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games was the first campaign to explicitly include a plan for legacy, and sport participation legacies in particular (House of Commons: Media and Sport Committee, 2006; Veal et al., 2012). The British Olympic Association (2004) committed to create a lasting legacy to transform sport in the UK and it was expected that an “already sports-mad nation would get fitter and healthier” (Vigor, 2004, p. 93). London 2012’s successful bid was based on four main themes: 1) Delivering the experience of a lifetime for athletes; 2) Leaving a legacy for sport in Britain; 3) Benefiting the community through regeneration; and 4) Supporting the IOC and Olympic Movement (British Olympic Association, 2004, p.17). While the first theme was focused on elite sport, the remaining three supported the notion of broader community engagement and participation in sport. The Candidature File set out that the delivery of programs and facilities would inspire greater youth sport activity; the Olympic Park facilities would provide increased local sport participation, a fitter society and decreased health inequalities; and the profiling of the IOC and the Olympic Movement would inspire an interest in sport (British Olympic Association, 2004). The dominant ‘programme theory’ of how the London 2012 Games would increase mass sport participation was that the success of Team GB athletes would inspire people to change their behaviour (Hughes, 2012).

It is interesting to note that the decision in 2003 to bid for the Olympic Games came less than twelve months after a government paper titled *Game Plan* concluded that mass sport participation was not influenced by hosting or success at mega events (Department for Culture, Media and Sport & Strategy Unit, 2002; Jinxia & Mangan, 2008; Pappous, 2013; Sydney Olympic Games Review Committee, 1990).

## Post bid

After gaining the hosting rights for the 30th Olympiad, the media attributed the victory to Britain’s ability to offer a legacy that would transform London (Keogh & Fraser, 2005) and “change the face of British Sport” (Oliver, 2005, n/p). Following criticism of being slow to publish a plan outlining the strategies for increasing community participation in sport (House of Commons: Media and Sport Committee, 2006; 2007; Veal et al., 2012), the UK Government published *Before, During and After: Making the Most of the London 2012 Games* (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2008a)*.* This plan set a target to encourage two million more people to become physically active (defined as 3x30 minutes of moderate intensity activity per week). The target was further segmented to include one million people participating in organised sport and one million participating in general physical activity (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2008b). A major initiative from this plan was the mass participation scheme ‘Places, People, Play’ where £135m of Lottery funding was committed to be spent on sport facilities, protecting playing fields, volunteering programmes and extending access to Olympic sports over four years (Sport England, 2010). While this amount seems to be a substantial figure, it equates to 1.5% of the £9.3 billion Olympic Games budget for infrastructure – a disproportionate investment considering the prominence of the participation legacy in the bid (Kelso, 2010). A report commissioned by the Cameron government elected in 2010 questioned the feasibility and progress of both legacy targets (Woodhouse, 2010). Subsequently the sport participation targets were omitted from the resulting *Plans for the legacy from the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games* (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2010).

## Post Games outcomes

The UK government received considerable praise for much of its delivery strategy and success of the staging of London 2012 (Norris, Rutter, & Medland, 2013). As is typical of a country hosting an Olympic Games and looking to capitalise on home advantage (Toohey, 2010), Team GB benefited from the unprecedented investment in elite sport programs, resulting in a record medal haul (House of Commons: Committee of Public Accounts, 2013). This was the first (and only) of the four key bid themes that was fulfilled. Elite sport continued to benefit in preparation for Rio 2016, with an 11% increase for the *No Compromise* program (UK Sport, 2012).

In 2013, the government announced a “£150m Olympic legacy boost for primary school sport in England” (Department for Education, 2013, n/p). While this was promoted by the government as a positive, it was essentially a shortfall replacement for the previously successful £162m School Sports Program (Campbell, 2012). In terms of metrics for the ambitious targets for sport and physical activity, the initial target of one million people participating in general physical activity was achieved by decreasing the original physical activity target from 3x30 minutes of physical activity per week to just one 30 minute session (House of Commons: Committee of Public Accounts, 2013). Sport England (2013) makes no mention of this criteria change when reporting that 1.4 million more people were playing sport between 2005 and 2013, and this criteria is well below the recommended physical activity levels of 150 minutes per week (WHO, 2010). A post games meta-evaluation report (Thornton, 2013) shows statistically significant increases in active sport, 3x30 mins and 1x30 mins physical and claimed “more of us are participating in sport because of the Games”. However, causality needs to be interpreted with caution. Fifteen percent of adults were more motivated or more interested in sport in 2012, but how much this contributed to an increase in physical activity over a seven year period is questionable.

Weed et al. (2015) suggest that the targets were not being met because the strategies attempting to meet the goals focussed on supplying infrastructure and capacity, rather than stimulating a demand.

Another issue is that the implementation of legacy strategies was hampered by complex delivery structures, leading to a lack of accountability (Bloyce & Lovett, 2012). This should not have come as a surprise. When a House of Commons Select Committee (House of Commons: Media and Sport Committee, 2007) examined the requirements for a London 2012 participation legacy, it determined that a cross-departmental approach including local authorities, health, education and a wider co-ordination of resources was required. However, the committee also noted that sport did not have the political stature to adopt such an approach (House of Commons: Media and Sport Committee, 2007).

# Rio 2016

## Event bid and planning for sport participation legacy

In contrast to London’s Olympic aspiration of increasing sport and physical activity participation among the population as a means of improving health indicators across the United Kingdom (Coalter, 2004), the sport and physical activity legacy proposed by the Rio de Janeiro bid committee, and fully endorsed by the three levels of government, was based on the idea of social development through sport. In particular, there was a strong focus during Rio’s candidature on a sport participation legacy for marginalised youth (Rio 2016, 2009), taking advantage of the assumed connection between youth, sport and social development (Coalter, 2013), one which is prolifically advocated by the International Olympic Committee through several of its programs (Kidd, 2008).

The main strategy for developing sport/physical activity participation among the (young) population found in the bid document refers to increasing funding towards already existing federal government programs in this field. The main one, the *Programa Segundo Tempo* (English Translation: Second Half Program) was, at the time, the flagship program of the Ministry of Sports for increasing sport participation among children and youth across the country, and has the concept of development-through-sport as its principal foundation (Knijnik & Tavares, 2012; Reis, Sousa-Mast, & Vieira, 2013). In fact, the program is supported by the United Nations, which highlights again its social development focus.

The two other programs cited in the bid document are the *Mais Educação* (English translation: More Education) and the *Jogos Escolares e Universitários* (English translation: School and University Games). The former is an action focused on building sport infrastructure in public schools across the country with the aim of increasing participation in sport and physical activity among school-aged children and youth. The latter is a program organised by the Brazilian Olympic Committee and funded by the federal government in which students from schools and universities of all 26 estates and the federal district come together annually to compete in all Olympic sports. The Games have received an award from the International Olympic Committee (Rio 2016, 2009), which may explain its strategic position in the bid document.

In addition to the increases in funding to these three programs, other programs/potential actions presented during the bidding phase of Rio de Janeiro’s candidature for the 2016 Olympic Games were related to elite sports: the Olympic Training Centre, an elite training facility to be built from the proposed Olympic venues, is the main one of those.

## Post bid

At the time of writing, neither the Organizing Committee nor the 3 different levels of government (federal, state and municipal) have presented a strategic plan to secure a sport and physical activity legacy from the Olympic Games. The Cadernos de Legado Rio 2016 (English translation: Rio 2016 Legacy Handbook), presented immediately after the nomination, stands as the only reference document, and one that was not created in consultation with local stakeholders or the population in general[[2]](#footnote-2) – therefore not taking into account their demands. It has not been revised or revisited ever since.

The lack of legacy planning after the bid was won was further complicated in 2011 by allegations of corruption made against the Minister for Sport, who was responsible for overseeing *Programa Segundo Tempo.* *Programa Segundo Tempo* is the longest uninterrupted national sport program in Brazil’s recent history, and, as noted above, one of the main programs funded to secure a youth sport/physical activity participation legacy from the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. These corruption allegations brought *Programa Segundo Tempo* under scrutiny, with public officials questioning the purpose, the administration and the overall legitimacy of the program (Colon, 2011; Veja, 2011). Subsequently, the large-scale investments in *Programa Segundo Tempo* that the Brazilian government had previously committed during the Olympic bid phase have been severely cut back (Controladoria Geral da União, 2013a; 2013b). No reports for the program have been made available to the public since 2010 and although still promoted as the Ministry of Sport’s leading program for increasing sport participation in the country, the lack of reporting suggests that no monitoring or assessment is in place to ensure its effectiveness in achieving participation goals.

Aside from investments in the existing sports programs, the Brazilian government has embarked on limited changes or innovations in sport policy to secure a sport and physical activity participation legacy (Athayde, Mascarenhas, Matias, & Miranda, 2013). While some new programs have been established by the different levels of government, it is anticipated that the potential effect of these programs may have been cancelled out by the dissolution of other programs. An example of program dissolution at the state government level is the *Projeto Rio 2016* (English translation: Rio 2016 Project)*.* The projectwas established in 2009, soon after Rio’s nomination as a candidate city for the Olympic Games. *Projeto Rio 2016* was developed, implemented and financed by the State Government, and was promoted as Rio’s main sport participation legacy program, providing sport and physical activity opportunities for children and youth from low income communities. However, in September 2013 the program was suddenly halted, with participants left with no explanation as to the reasons why such a sudden finish occurred (Coelho, 2013; Konchinski, 2013).

In the eyes of the main conduits of these public programs, that is, sport and physical activity professionals, there is little hope that any investment in sport participation programs will be sustained in the long term. As a physical education teacher who works in public sport for development programs stated: “We have hope, but if we consider it rationally, in our country, in our reality, I’d say that any of these programs will only last until the Games [in 2016] because unfortunately what reigns here is politics […] As long as it is interesting for the politicians to have a focus on sport, [they will maintain it]. After 2016, we don’t know what’s going to happen. That’s the fear of all who work with sports [in Rio].” There is, however, an expectation of a trickle-down effect to occur, despite the lack of investment, as another sport professional stated: “I believe that these [sport] events can motivate people to practice physical activity because as people have access to these events through media channels, informal conversations, [...] people get exposed to this information, so I believe this can motivate people to engage in physical activity”.

At the elite sport level, the Brazilian government, together with the Rio 2016 Organizing Committee (which is mostly composed of previous members of the Brazilian Olympic Committee), frequently states their aim of placing the country in the top 10 medal winners. However, strategies are not clearly established and investments seem uncoordinated. The main scheme presented so far is the *Plano Brasil Medalhas* (English translation: Brazil Medals Plan), which is to receive an investment of R$ 1 billion between 2013 and 2016. Two-thirds is to go to support technical commissions and athletes, and one-third is to go to developing/creating training facilities. The elaboration of the *Plan* did not involve public consultation/participation and no official documentation about the strategy can be accessed by the general public, apart from a *PowerPoint* presentation with some investment numbers, general statement of objectives, and some attractive images of Brazilian athletes (Ministério do Esporte, 2013). Discussions surrounding the *Plano Brasil Medalhas* are focused solely on the financial investments made for Brazil to reach the top 10 placing (Santos, DaCosta, & Silva, 2012), without much evidence that thought has been put into the more complex factors involved in reaching the impressive results aspired, such as the implementation of development pathways and sustainable sport policies (De Bosscher, Sotiriadou, & van Bottenburg, 2013).

## First assessment

The first report of the Rio 2016 OGI presents some superficial, and contestable, data about pre-Games sport development impacts. The authors start the relevant section of the report presenting a caveat indicating that the only substantial and official data set available for analysis on sport development in the country was last collected in 2006, one year prior to their baseline data. Results from a national survey on physical activity participation for the years 2009, 2010 and 2011 are then presented, but the sharp increase identified from 2010 to 2011 is explained by a change in the methodology used, and is dismissed by the authors as being incomparable. For the comparable data (i.e. between 2009 and 2010), Rio de Janeiro residents presented a slight drop in leisure time physical activity participation, while the Brazilian population results remained stable. Data on sport programs available for the general population is sourced from the Rio 2016 Organising Committee itself and no full reference to the source is provided, making it difficult to verify its accuracy and validity. Official data is only provided for a scholarship program for elite athletes that was implemented in 2005 and is still in operation, with an accumulated investment of almost US$ 9 million until 2012.

# Discussion

Two major themes in sport participation legacy planning and implementation have emerged from the findings of the case studies presented above: 1) the elite/mass divide in sport legacy planning; and 2) the challenges related to implementation of strategies and measuring outcomes. In addition, the case studies also confirm a lesson that previous authors have already emphasised: a legacy will only eventuate if it is focused on the processes that will enable achieving an increased participation in sport and physical activity, instead of focusing on short-term actions and setting unrealistic target outcomes.

## The elite/mass divide in sport legacy

The elusiveness of the term legacy (MacAloon, 2008) and, in particular, of the term sport participation legacy (Coalter, 2007b) may contribute to the current and persistent divide between investment in elite sport and in grassroots participation as a means of achieving a ‘sport participation legacy’. Given that there is no clear directive from the IOC to what type of sport legacy the Olympic Games should foster (International Olympic Committee, 2004), the imperative of ‘succeeding at the world stage’ seems to take prominence and investment in Olympic sports at the elite level seems to receive most of the bonus from the host nation. As pointed out by Kosovic (2011, p. 21), sport is “the domain of the spectacle in which society’s deepest values are being celebrated (competition, winning, success, strength, money)”, making the Olympic Games the perfect symbols for being a major actor in the spectacle.

The Sydney Games provide a fine example of such an imperative. As detailed in the previous section, there were important shortcomings in the research process that attempted to account for the sport legacy to emerge out of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games (Veal et al., 2012). Such shortcomings highlight that sport participation legacy was not viewed as overly important by key stakeholders such as the Australian Government, the NSW Government nor the local organizing committee for the Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games. In addition, there was no detailed before-event planning that investigated the possibility of how a sport participation legacy could be achieved through hosting the Sydney Olympics. This is in direct contrast to the massive investment that has taken place in Australia over the past three decades into elite sport and sport science research. To this day the focus on grassroots sport and community impact in Australia has been exceedingly poor (Frawley et al., 2013).

After the Sydney Olympics there was a view that sport policy would reorient towards community sport and increasing mass participation (Toohey, 2008). Yet, Australian sport policy has continued to be primarily focused on elite performance. This has resulted despite the fact that a substantial Australian Government inquiry into the sport system found that a much greater investment was required into sport at the grassroots level (Crawford, 2009). The inquiry also argued that government funding needed to shift from the elite level directly to the grassroots – conceding that the trickle-down effect that had shaped Australian sport policy for so many years had not worked. The focus, therefore, needed to shift to building from the base (Crawford, 2009). Factors that have shaped the resistance to a change in strategy include the intense lobbying by the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC). The AOC in fact drafted a detailed response to the Crawford Report (Services, 2009) in which it publicly ‘slammed’ Crawford’s recommendations, suggesting that “without elite role models, there would be less kids participating” (Owen, 2009, n/p).

In addition to the public pressure placed by the AOC on federal politicians, another factor that has shaped the continued strong investment in elite sport has been Australia’s willingness to host major events post Sydney 2000. Since the Olympics and Paralympics in 2000, the following major events have been staged in Australia: the 2003 Rugby World Cup; the 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games; the 2015 Cricket World Cup; the 2015 Asian Football Cup; and, the 2015 Netball World Cup. In addition, in 2018 the Gold Coast will host the Commonwealth Games. These events have provided justification for elite sport spending and, as politicians know full well, no matter how well these events are planned and organised the community is likely to view their success purely on the performance of the host nation (Girginov, 2013). As the material presented above clearly indicates, the London 2012 and Rio 2016 experiences reaffirm such an imperative.

Closely related to problems of planning and implementing largely ineffective strategies for achieving elusive outcomes are the challenges presented by measuring effects, or the actual legacies. A key one identified in all three case studies relates to the availability of data, or the consistency in collecting relevant data that can help inform future policy and planning as well as evaluate strategies and actions. As previously highlighted, the OGI study is certainly a step in the right direction, but one that has not taken the full toll of addressing the issue, particularly when it comes to sport participation legacy (Homma & Masumoto, 2013).

What seems clear now is that the numbers’ game reflected in these three case studies will continue and undoubtedly be played in future mega event venues. It is suggested here that, in terms of influencing the potential for future events to create a legacy of mass sport participation, more pertinent is to consider the efficacy of the mechanisms proposed to generate legacy and the contexts in which it is anticipated they will operate (Hughes, 2012). Drawing on the basis of realist evaluation (Pawson & Tilly, 1997), Hughes (2012) demonstrated that, for the London 2012 Games, the contexts in which the proposed mechanisms were set, i.e. national governing bodies delivering programs, volunteer delivery capacity, and facility availability, were not conducive to producing the desired outcome of increased mass sport participation. These mechanisms were found to have been hindered by the identified environmental contexts, which consisted of a dependency on elite success, a flawed understanding of the effectiveness of role models, limited geographical reach beyond London, variable applicability between individuals, and incompatible sporting relevance. In addition, a review of the governance of the London 2012 legacy suggests that localised sport development legacy strategies, rather than the adopted top down approach, could have been more successful in achieving London’s Olympic promises (Girginov, 2011).

The case of Rio 2016 is even more dramatic. At the outset of the Rio bid there was no strategic plan for innovations in sports policy or programming to achieve increases in sport and physical activity participation in the host city of Rio de Janeiro, or the host nation of Brazil (Reis, Sousa-Mast, & Gurgel, 2013). There is evidence that significant financial resources are being directed to sport programs, all under the banner of Olympic Games ‘legacy’. However, so far there have not been concerted efforts to effectively leverage the Games for developing a long-term sport participation legacy for the wider Rio de Janeiro and Brazilian population. Strategies that attempt to democratize access to sport and physical activity have been scattered, *ad hoc*, and inconsistent, when available.

Ouriques (2010, p. 138 [translated by the author]) argues that “sport development, something forgotten and little explored [in Brazil] from a structural and planning point of view, becomes the ideological justification for allowing massive expenditures in the area” without proper public scrutiny. Recent studies in this field have highlighted and confirmed the issues raised above, and point to pessimistic outcomes (Santos et al., 2012; Mascarenhas, 2012; Reis, Sousa-Mast, & Gurgel, 2013).

In general, therefore, what these three case studies indicate is that a loose focus on, or naïve expectations of, potential trickle down or demonstration effects together with investment on elite sports at the expense of mass participation strategies are not conducive to a sustainable and long-term increase in involvement with physical activity and sport by the local population.

# Limitations

As with all research, that are important limitations in this study that need to be acknowledged. First and foremost, limitations of space restrained our discussion to two emergent themes only. More could have certainly been said about policy learning, governance, transparency and strategic alliances, for instance, as well as a more thorough consideration of other influencing factors, such as the particular social, political and economic contexts of these cases, neo-liberal and market forces, as well as power-resource relations and dependancies. However, a decision had to be made in choosing the emergent themes to be reported and discussed within the space limits imposed by a publication such as this. There is certainly scope for future research to further explore these and other themes.

A related limitation is the inclusion of only three Olympic Games in the analysis. As stated earlier, the focus on London 2012 and Rio 2016 was a natural one, as those were the only two Games to effectively include mention of a planned sport participation legacy to arise from hosting the Games. Sydney 2000 was included as a point of differentiation, given no overt strategy for a sport participation legacy was included in its plan, but a case that had sufficient data published on the subject, at least data that was available to the researchers. Given very little research has been published in English on Athens 2004 and Beijing 2008 on this subject, and the language (and political, in the case of Beijing) barrier in accessing official data, these Games had to be omitted from the analysis. However, we do not believe this consists as a weakness of the study, but an untapped opportunity for future research. Nonetheless, this study has been able to overcome the Anglo-centric focus of most Olympic legacy research published in international journals to include Rio 2016.

The fact that no Winter Olympic Games were included may also be identified as a limitation of this study. However, to date, no Winter Olympic Games host has made an overt commitment to plan for a sport participation legacy, and given their size and characteristics are significantly different from the Summer events, the research team felt it was appropriate to not include them. It is, again, an opportunity for future research to compare outcomes, planned or otherwise, between Summer and Winter Games.

Lastly, but arguably most importantly, there are significant limitations in terms of availability of robust, longitudinal, population-level, comparable data to perform a more accurate analysis and comparison of the three cases. In particular, public authorities and the organizing committee for Rio 2016 have yet to provide meaningful data that can be used for analysis of impacts and legacies in the sport participation realm. Conclusions are therefore to be taken with care, as they are based on the limited data available.

# Conclusion

The three case studies presented here re-affirm what recent research into sport participation legacy has consistently found: that to secure sport participation legacies and resultant social outcomes there is a need for host governments to engage the community, develop long-term strategies, and coordinate efforts between different government portfolios and with a range of relevant stakeholders.

The Sydney 2000 case highlighted the mistaken thinking that hosting an event will lead to an automatic trickle-down effect, and therefore the positive realisation of participation outcomes. Increasing participation was not a specific objective of Sydney 2000, and almost a decade and a half of research has demonstrated that without concerted efforts to build a shared vision for a participation legacy through an integrated approach that involves all parts of the prevailing sport system, positive participation outcomes are unlikely to emerge. In line with this understanding, event bid committees have shifted their approach in creating bid documents. Since the successful London 2012 bid (announced in 2005), organising committee objectives focused on increasing sports participation have been more explicitly outlined with both the London 2012 and Rio 2016 bids including participation-based event objectives.

Significantly, however, the London 2012 and Rio 2016 experiences evidence the continued influence that politics has on legacy. In both cases characteristics of what MacAloon’s (2008) describes as ‘legacy talk’ are clear, with organizing committees lacking a determined commitment in planning and resourcing key legacy objectives. Despite the IOC’s recent requirement for host cities to consider sport development legacies in their candidature files, and the implementation of the OGI, the case studies of London 2012 and Rio 2016 do not provide illustrations of thorough policy implementation as promised in the bid documents. While the inclusion of specific participation-based objectives in bid documents may be perceived as a positive development, both London 2012 and Rio 2016 highlight that such objectives need to be supported by adequate plans, resources and policy development, and fully integrated within the existing sport systems, if we are to see positive participation outcomes.

There is often a need for what Coalter (2004) calls the supply-side development in a host nation’s sport system for it to be ready to take advantage of the opportunities presented through hosting the Olympic Games. This means there is a need for adequate planning and preparation time to get the various stakeholders on board with a shared vision for legacy and to ensure that the sport organisations and other relevant bodies have the right resources (e.g. staff, finances, volunteers, facilities, and sporting programs) in place so that real progress can be delivered. In the cases of London 2012 and Rio 2016, the tight timeframes (London), or lack of planning (Rio), present issues for achieving supply-side development. For instance, London’s plans released in 2008 set ambitious goals, and it can be questioned whether the four-year lead up to 2012 was enough to achieve the system-side capacity development required to achieve them. In addition, the shift in the details of the participation target is an indicator that the original targets were set without fully engaging in the context of the sport system and developing an understanding of what was needed from the resourcing side of things to achieve these goals. In the case of Rio 2016, at the time of writing (2016), a few weeks out from the event, we have still seen no plans articulating how the bid promises for sport participation, or development-through-sport, will be achieved. Based on what we have observed in the cases of Sydney 2000 and London 2012, the absence of commitment and planning presents a critical challenge for the attainment of legacy goals.

In addition, and in contrast to the cases of Sydney 2000 and London 2012, Rio 2016 highlights how a lack of legacy planning can be complicated by the governance of legacy, with examples and allegations of political corruption that have had a critical impact on the perceived value of programs and resulted in government funding for these programs being dramatically reduced. Without current investigations of population-level data, we can only make an informed assumption that such drastic cuts in funding will significantly interrupt any legacy momentum that may have been gained so far in the lead up to the 2016 Olympic Games.

Overall, what the three case studies presented indicate is that there is limited evidence available to demonstrate that Organising Committees and relevant government bodies have effectively attempted to strategically leverage the Games with the purpose of developing a sport participation legacy for the wider population, beyond the elite-end of the spectrum, leaving this challenge for the next generation of Olympic host candidates.

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1. There is no room here, nor is it the purpose of this paper, to discuss all these themes and sub-themes, but the awareness and understanding of them by all research team members was fundamental in the initial stages of this project. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Consultation with local stakeholders is so atypical in the Brazilian context that even the first OGI report has ignored this topic (SAGE/COPPE/UFRJ, 2014), even though it is part of the list of expected topics to be covered in this assessment (International Olympic Committee, 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)