

## **Making a Commonwealth Games Legacy Meaningful**

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In less than one week, the Commonwealth Games will commence and Glasgow will endeavour to deliver its largest and most complex event ever – a successful Games that will live on positively in the collective memory. In less than three weeks, the festival will be over. What happens when the banners come down, and people who have come to Glasgow from around the world go home? What will live on in Glasgow?

Many academics have concluded that scant evidence exists from past mega-events to suggest that a significant legacy is likely, while others argue that they are merely “bread and circuses” to mask deep social problems which ruling elites won’t face up to. When the focus shifts at the end of the Games, those who bid for and delivered the Games, at a total cost of over £500 million, will have to answer some hard questions. This process may start on August 3, but it will continue for many years.

Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Government argue that Glasgow 2014 will differ from previous such events because it planned to achieve legacies from the outset. Legacy was prominent in the bid documentation, it helped determine the East End location and was supported by complementary investments like the M74 extension and Clyde Gateway. The intent was to generate a wider social and economic return on the Games’ massive public investment.

The word legacy, almost worn out by overuse, does not have a single agreed meaning. The City Council and the Scottish Government use different words and have different geographies of concern, but both think of legacy as being about economic regeneration and impact, improved health and well-being, direct and indirect benefits to local communities, increased participation in physical activity and “greener” environmental outcomes. Critics point out that evaluations of previous mega-events have not, for instance, delivered long-term measurable health improvements.

In the case of Glasgow 2014, however, we are more likely to know if there really is a legacy. The embedding of legacy planning from the start of the bid process means that the evaluation frameworks for assessing legacy delivery are much more comprehensive, analytical and focused around “benefits-realisation”, than ever before. An example of this is the in-depth long-term research of the legacy impacts on the East End, led by our colleague Ade Kearns. The fact that the organisers are supporting such research is an indication of willingness to learn, even where the legacy impacts turn out to be less than hoped for. In an economy that is significantly dependent on events to attract international tourists, and with some of the largest concentrations of poverty in Western Europe, understanding, in depth, what works, is critical.

Many cities across the world face similar issues and need to learn from each other. Sharing Glasgow’s lessons and testing them against international examples is essential. Sharing knowledge and research findings is what motivates us to take the legacy dimensions of Glasgow to another

level. Alongside colleagues at Glasgow Life and the University of Strathclyde and Glasgow Caledonian University, the University of Glasgow is today launching an International Legacy Network. Our aim is to help ensure that there is a legacy from the Games, by learning from their successes and failures. We propose to bring together city partners from around the world, alongside universities which will undertake legacy research from different disciplines. This is not just about the challenges facing cities which host mega-events: much of this knowledge can be applied to policies and services to improve education, health, housing, employment and governance. Glasgow City Council, for example, explicitly tried to control costs by finding new ways of using its own staff and working in partnership with other bodies to deliver the Games. From an early stage it recognised that these innovations might be lost so it has attempted to transfer these different effective ways of working into its standard operating procedures. One test of legacy, therefore, will be how much the City learns from the Games experience.

Our first global conference is expected to be held in Glasgow in October 2015. For further information: <http://policyscotland.gla.ac.uk>.