

Research Services: A New Approach to Leveraging Sports Legacies: Social Impact, Inclusivity and Pre-legacies

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Professor Mark James is Professor of Sports Law in the Manchester Law School and is a leading academic in the fields of Sports Law and Olympic Law. Mark is an expert on the interaction of the criminal law with sport, and has written extensively on the criminalisation of on-field injuries, the regulation of football disorder, and ticket touting. Most recently, he has been researching the legal framework for hosting the Olympic Games and, in particular, the legality of the restrictions placed on athlete activism. He is the author of the leading textbook, *Sports Law*, and a book on Olympic Law (2023).



ABOUT THE SPORT POLICY UNIT

The Sport Policy Unit (SPU) was founded in 2017 at Manchester Metropolitan University and has grown to 20 full-time staff with an additional 5 full-time associate members from Law. The SPU sits within the Department of Economics, Policy and International Business which is situated within the Business and Law Faculty. The SPU is based in a **triple accredited Business School** and is also part of the Manchester Metropolitan Institute of Sport. The SPU members, led by Professor Jonathan Grix, are all research active across a wide range of topic areas within the sport management and policy field. Specifically, the research conducted by the SPU 'squad' focuses on the following themes:

- Economic, sociocultural, environmental, and health impact of sport
- Sport, human rights, and wellbeing
- National and international sport governance, policy, and politics

Most SPU members have sports-related PhDs and many are international and interdisciplinary, with colleagues from China, India, Italy, France, and Japan working in the disciplines of economics, political science, sociology, and sport management. This group not only represents one of the most research-active in the social science study of sport in the UK, it also has attracted a large cohort of 21 PhD students studying sports topics in the past 5 years and teaches a wide range of innovative sports programmes (two at Undergraduate; two at MSc level). Our undergraduate and postgraduate courses have over 600 students in total. SPU staff have undertaken work for Sport England, UK Sport, UEFA, the RFL, the IOC and many more.



INTRODUCTION

The present report sets out to understand the unique approach to delivering the Rugby League World Cup (RLWC) 2021 adopted by the Rugby League World Cup 2021 team and how they set about leveraging legacies and social impact from this major sports event. The costs of the event are in the region of £40 million to host and put on the tournament with a further £30 million invested in an extensive programme of social impact, including facilities, volunteering, mental health and inclusive sport.

The following report investigates and highlights the significant contribution that the RLWC 2021 team made to communities and the nation off and on the pitch. Such research is timely in a context where the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee has recently produced a report on the social impact of sport (DCMSC, 2019).

Studying the social impact of sport has now become much more widespread and it allows researchers to assess how investment in sport impacts people's perceptions of its benefits. For example, Kim and Walker (2012) developed a scale of the perceived social impact of sports events, which assesses host community residents' perceptions of intangible psychological benefits generated from event hosting (this work builds on Crompton's (2004) conceptualization of the psychic income of professional sport facilities and events). Kim and Walker's findings identified the **perceived social impact of sports events** as an overarching factor consisting of **five** dimensions: (a) community pride arising from enhanced community image, (b) strengthened community attachment, (c) event excitement, (d) a sense of pride resulting from improved infrastructures, and (e) community excitement. It is this scale that was used in this research to assess the perceived social impact of the 2021 RLWC by people who had shown an interest in the sport (see page 17 for details of the survey and findings). The following outlines more clearly the five dimensions of the social impact of sports events as examined in this report:



- **Community pride arising from enhanced community image** entails residents' sense of collective self-esteem, which occurs due to the increased visibility their community enjoy as being a host of major sports events (Kim & Walker, 2013). Waitt (2003) and Zhou and Ap (2009) found that residents' community pride represents the highest psychological benefits for hosting the Olympic Games.
- **Strengthened community attachment** indicates that residents' social interaction and sense of community belonging will be strengthened by hosting a major sport event (Kim & Walker, 2013). Besides sports competitions, a series of social and interactive events form a sports event (Chalip, 2006; Inoue & Havard, 2014; O'Brien, 2007). Such peripheral events provide residents and visitors with opportunities for social interactions, which enhance their attachment to fellow event attendees and the event (Filo et al., 2010; Inoue & Havard, 2014).
- **Event excitement** refers to "residents' emotionally stimulated state from hosting a sports event" (Kim & Walker, 2013, p. 95). Sports events have become a primary setting for entertainment in which residents engage in events, through participation or spectating, for relaxation and excitement (Chalip, 2006). Previous research identified residents' perceptions of event excitement as an important element, in addition to community pride, that boosted event impact (Inoue & Havard, 2014; Waitt, 2003).
- **A sense of pride resulting from improved infrastructures** refers to residents' heightened beliefs about community benefits accruing from investments in city development, including the development in public facilities and services (Kim & Walker, 2013; Rosentraub et al., 1994). According to prior work, although residents may not understand the exact changes major sports events made to their communities, many believe that hosting these events facilitates urban revitalization (Gibson et al., 2014; Horne & Manzenreiter, 2004). The improved community infrastructures can increase host cities' profile and provide opportunities for hosting future events (Rosentraub et al., 1994).
- **Community excitement** represents a sense of satisfaction residents receive from hosting a major sports event. This results from the realisation that event



hosting can transform their community into an attractive social site, which attracts myriad visitors to the community for celebration (Kim & Walker, 2013; Waitt, 2003).

The report is structured as follows. First, the methodology is described. Second, the unique approach adopted to deliver the RLWC 2021 is introduced and discussed vis-à-vis standard approaches to hosting sports events. Then the key themes from the in-depth interviews with experts involved in the delivery of the social impact programme are discussed. The survey results on residents' perceived social impact of the event follows before the conclusion which summarises the key findings.



METHODOLOGY

This research relies on both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative part focuses on both the unique approach taken to leveraging via a study of previous event hosting, including the extant sports mega-events literature. Through several in-depth interviews (n=7) with people directly involved in delivering part of the social impact programme around the event (CEOs, Council Leader, rugby league Chairperson and Secretary from different clubs, and a member of the Community Integrated Care charity) the research team were able to explore a number of important themes. As with all research, this report has focused in on the most important themes that came up in the discussions: the inclusivity approach adopted by the RLWC 2021 team, including the Inclusive Volunteers Programme, and the investment in community rugby league clubs and its impact. All interview transcripts were transcribed professionally and underwent a thematic analysis **to draw out these themes** mentioned above.

The quantitative part of the research aims to assess the perceived social impact of the RLWC 2021 through a survey of host community residents (n=1181). The online survey was sent to individuals included in the customer database managed by the RLWC 2021 team on 16 December 2022 and was open for approximately three weeks. During this period, a total of 3025 individuals (including both residents and visitors) responded to the survey. Of them, this report primarily focuses on the 1181 respondents who (a) were residents of one of the 18 local authority areas hosting the RLWC 2021 tournament, and (b) answered the 15-item scale of the perceived social impact of a sports event (Kim & Walker, 2012) without missing data.



THE UNIQUE APPROACH TO LEVERAGING LEGACIES OF THE RLWC 2021

The new, unique approach undertaken by the RLWC 2021 team needs to be understood against the backdrop of both the extant literature on leveraging legacies from hosting major sports events and the RLWC of 2013. ‘Legacy’ as a concept, within a short space of time, has become one of the misunderstood concepts in popular discourse and sports studies alike. This needs to be borne in mind when reviewing policy documents, media articles, private-sector reports and academic works on major sports events (Black, 2008). On the broadest level, legacy is commonly defined as ‘a gift of personal property by will’ or as ‘anything handed down from the past, as from an ancestor or predecessor’ (Agha *et al.*, 2012: 131). However, despite the significant attention paid to those legacies that are assumed to emerge from sporting occasions, the precise meaning of sports legacy remains remarkably unclear. Preuss’ (2007: 211) definition is probably one of the most cited today in which he states that legacies are ‘planned and unplanned, positive and negative, tangible and intangible structures created by and for a sports event that remain for a longer time than the event itself.’

The foremost reason for the remaining uncertainty surrounding the meaning of ‘legacy’ is that, in the majority of cases, etymological clarity gives way to sports mega-event (SME) legacies being understood simply as a given; something that is self-evident and positive; something that leads to desired, long-term ‘outcomes’ (cf. Cashman, 2006; Preuss, 2007). While the reasons for hosting may be nuanced slightly, depending on the type of state hosting, overall the rationale for investing in major sports events is strikingly similar across the board.

A significant and ever-growing body of scholarly work has sought to explain why states host sports mega-events, and, more importantly, what legacy outcomes are envisaged by various national leaders and other stakeholders (see, for example: Grix, 2012; 2013; 2014; Shipway and Fyall, 2013; Weed, 2014). Interestingly, there does not appear to be a great deal of difference between regime types in terms of hoped-for legacies; thus, advanced capitalist, autocratic and communist states



share similar aims through hosting SMEs. One way of gaining traction on the vast literature that has developed around SMEs is to divide them into the types of legacies most often put forward by the those seeking to win the rights to host them, commentators and academics alike. There are five often overlapping categories:

1. Economic
2. Urban re-generation
3. National pride/feelgood factor
4. Increased participation in physical activity and sport
5. International prestige and 'soft power'.

These categories do, of course, pertain to the literature on sports mega-events, which relate directly to the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup, given their scale and global reach.

Interestingly, there is a trend for hosting smaller sports events, sometimes just regional (cf. the Tour de France stages in Yorkshire and the Basque country), as they appear to be better value for money than large-scale events and they have a greater impact on local communities (see O'Brian, 2007). The RLWC 2021 can be understood as a smaller event to host and this research suggests that the unique approach adopted in delivering the tournament has had a disproportionately positive impact relative to the size of the event.

Unique approach to delivering RLWC 2021

The previously held RLWC in England and Wales in 2013 (with a few games in France and Ireland) was very focused on delivering the men's event only, by a small team with a small budget. In discussions with Government about the possibility of England hosting the event again, a different vision came about, one which would see a tournament where men, women wheelchair athletes and athletes that experience a form of physical disability would play at the same venues and host cities together and there was a major commitment to what happens off the field being as important as what happens on it. From these beginnings, the RLWC 2021 team began an ambitious programme of legacy funding for communities led



by a legacy programme manager, Tracy Power. Interestingly, the team dropped the term 'legacy', which has become problematic for many sports events, including the 2012 London Olympics, in favour of 'social impact' given that "...99.9% of what we're going to deliver will have been delivered by the time the tournament finishes? We aren't actually delivering very much after the tournament." (Interview with Tracy Power, now the Social Impact Director). Some observers interviewed for this research (still using the 'legacy' terminology) praised the new approach: "I think the legacy funding was a new kind of concept this time. I certainly felt that was a really good concept in terms of getting funding into the grassroots of the game, for both men and women. I think that was a significant change from competitions that we'd seen before in the past." (Interview with a Council Leader).

By 2021 the RLWC 2021 delivery team had grown to 39 full-time employees, along with a number of consultants and agencies that supported the tournament delivery and social impact programme.

The subsequent decision to postpone the tournament in 2021 – because of Covid-19 and the fact that both New Zealand and Australia decided they were not participating – actually worked out beneficial for the social investment programme in the end, despite the worsening of economic circumstances in the UK. In the short-term, the team lost a lot of staff and had to re-build post-pandemic in a short space of time. The benefit came in allowing early investments in social impact to grow over time and provide opportunities to tackle inequality and provide badly needed facilities – all prior to the event even taking place.

While the purpose of this report is not to discuss each and every investment made by the RLWC 2021 team, the following offers a few examples of the type of social impact that their investment has created. Paradoxically, perhaps, the outcomes of social impact – when they work – are 'legacies' in so far as they will continue long after the initial investment has been made. Two key themes come out of the interviews (apart from a number of people mentioning the unique approach) and are introduced below:



- Inclusivity as a core plank of RLWC 2021 (including the Inclusive Volunteers Programme)
- The investment in community rugby league clubs and its impact.

Inclusivity as a core plank of RLWC 2021

As has already been mentioned, inclusivity was central to the delivery of the RLWC 2021 on the field, with the focus extending beyond just the men's game to include both women's rugby league and wheelchair rugby league. Off the pitch the inclusive nature of the unique approach adopted for this event continued. Several interviewees highlighted inclusivity as one of the key take-aways from the event, ranging from officials in local clubs up to the Leaders and CEOs of councils. The inclusivity agenda was also responsible for both the level and high number of commercial partners and social impact partners who could align themselves easily with the inclusive nature of the event. Investment in women's and girl's rugby league was accompanied by a number of initiatives for wheelchair rugby league which is a particular success story from the RLWC 2021. Although it is early days, there is already evidence of a growth in interest among girls wishing to play rugby league at local clubs which was bolstered by "just how much the women's sport was televised and how many females were interviewed during the World Cup by the media" (Chairperson of a rugby league club).

The success of wheelchair rugby league was at both the top level and, importantly, at the grassroots level. The very first wheelchair game was played in week three of the tournament and caused a stir on social media prompting people to watch it on TV. This moment, suggested Tracy Power, "made it feel all worth it. I think that, for me, has been one of the highlights, to see how people have taken to the Wheelchair Rugby League and how people have been able to be introduced to what it is." The mainstreaming of elite wheelchair rugby league ensured it much more visibility, gave it much more profile and ultimately, there is likely to be more participation, especially when the grassroots investment strategy is taken into account.



Prior to the elite wheelchair action, the social impact programme of the RLWC 2021 had invested heavily in the grassroots game and worked closely with the RFL . The team set about taking the game, and the Wheelchair Rugby League, out of sports halls and into big arenas. In order to try to ensure a lasting legacy and growth trajectory of the League, the RLWC 2021 provided some “200 wheelchairs, which will go a long way so that the clubs now that have been established, that are growing, have the ability to welcome new people into their clubs”. (Interview with Jon Dutton). Through the small grants programme launched by RLWC 2021 clubs were able to apply for kit and equipment to deliver new activities and there was a key focus on Wheelchair Rugby League. This included supporting teams to be established before the actual World Cup event so that they were ready to be able to have capacity for any interest. Wheelchair Rugby League teams reported a massive uptick in demand, hence the 200 wheelchairs mentioned above. Some 24 new teams or clubs were formed through the small grants with all but four set up before the tournament itself, and four afterwards.

Volunteers

A number of interviewees praised the work of volunteers and the Inclusive Volunteering Programme that ties in with the ‘inclusive’ approach discussed above. Over 700 people were volunteering during the pandemic in Wigan alone, but it was the work undertaken in collaboration with the Community Integrated Care that stands out. Community Integrated Care are one of the UK’s largest health and social care charities and have years of experience of enriching the lives of people with many different care needs in society. The RLWC 2021 team, together with Sport England and Community Integrated Care, came up with an innovative volunteering programme (the Inclusive Volunteering Programme) that involved offering volunteering opportunities to people with support needs. Opportunities were provided in the couple of years before the tournament and then during the tournament itself at both the men’s, women’s and wheelchair rugby league events.

The team adopted a broad approach to the term ‘volunteering’ in order to suit what was right for each individual and ensure they could participate in a way that was



meaningful to them. Volunteers consisted of people with either a learning disability or a long-term health condition, that is, people who have support in their everyday life. The Inclusive Volunteering Programme was a specifically targeted programme to help such individuals develop skills and confidence for them to become volunteers in the first place. Examples included things like gardening, a photography club, media club, arts and crafts and cookery.

The RLWC 2021 provided – through Community Integrated Care staff - training to the participants on the programme in order to “help them develop their confidence, life-skills and independence through volunteering” (Manager of the Inclusive Volunteering Programme, Community Integrated Care). It is through such opportunities that participants develop their skills via meaningful volunteer experiences. The Manager of the programme likens it to a platform or springboard for people with support needs who have a lot of potential that is not often seen by wider society. Volunteering – in particular in sport - offers a key vehicle through which participants can express themselves.

Over 360 volunteers – in the North of England - were involved in the programme, with a range of support needs. Some volunteers were fairly independent whilst other had quite complex needs. Opportunities were adapted to suit the individuals’ interests, needs and dreams, such that during the recruitment process the team try to find out as much as possible about the participants and tailor the programme accordingly. Individual life-changing stories and case studies abound – for example, one participant who was a newcomer to photography was part of a group that visited the teams the day before a game, where the teams train in front of the press but with no spectators. At this event the official professional photographer accompanying the New Zealand team gave the newcomer a masterclass in photography there and then.

This cohort volunteered in a wide range of activities before the tournament, and some 300 of them volunteered at tournament time, as part of the RLWC 2021 wider volunteering team. The outcomes of this programme include participants feeling much more confident within themselves and their ability to achieve things; many



participants report learning new skills, making new social connections and friends; a number of carers, and parents, and their wider family networks report the change in the participants' behaviour and the change in them as a person. Equally, a number of participants on the programme are now doing longer-term volunteering, and a few of these have gone into employment because of some of the skills that they've learnt. The newbie photographer mentioned above, for example, now works for the Community Integrated Care charity.

The investment in community rugby league clubs and its impact

The social impact programme ensured that this event was not just about the elite side of the sport. It was also about the grassroots of the game as well and a number of community rugby league clubs applied, and benefited from, the funding offered by the RLWC 2021. The early availability of funds – in the end, up to and beyond 2 years in some cases – ensured that funds actually went into upgrading pitches (a 4G pitch, for example), upgrading changing rooms, creating changing rooms for women and girls, providing floodlights or even contributing to the building of a new clubhouse. All of these improvements, according to a Council Leader, make a club a much more “attractive proposition for young people in particular to get involved in.” Thus, this World Cup (2021) is noticeably different “from a community point of view” from previous events that had simply relied on a post-event legacy, suggests a Chairperson of a community rugby league club. The RLWC 2021 approach was evident from the start and the “commitment they put into it was really tangible” according to one community Rugby League Chairperson and it “was evident that they really wanted to make sure that they left a lasting legacy.”

Examples of how the early release of strategic funding for local, community team facilities abound and their impact is already tangible just months after the actual tournament itself finished. Two particular cases are of note. First, the completion of the Shevington Community Recreation Centre must rank as one of the best examples of how strategic investment can revitalise local, community facilities that can benefit a wide range of people, moving way beyond sport. The RLWC 2021



funds was part of a package that unlocked further funding from Sport England, the Football Foundation and Wigan Council and additional funding from private and individuals which allowed the complete re-building (new build) of the Shevington Community Recreation Centre. The space on which the facility is built was a farmer's field with little on it and is rented off the parish council. The key to this centre is that it is a multisport facility with shared costs, benefiting the wider community, and bringing in money from outside sport, not just football or rugby league, into the facility which helps make the project sustainable in the long-term. The facility is open and used seven days a week and apart from the two key stakeholders of rugby league and football, it is used for meetings by the parish council, the allotment association, by a local Karate team, and for well-being sessions too.

Adjacent to the clubhouse is one full size football pitch, one full size rugby league pitch and one junior rugby league pitch and one junior football pitch. The wider community get involved in the running of the centre as volunteers, for example, to serve teas and coffees and help develop the facility and the grounds for the benefit of the local community. Equally, hundreds of thousands of pounds were saved in this project by the free services of a local solicitor and surveyor, both of whom are members of the rugby league club.

Another example of an community rugby league club that greatly benefitted from RLWC 2021 funding is the Portico Vine rugby league club. Situated in a deprived area, the club Chairperson discussed with his club committee once the RLWC funds were announced and said "Listen, this is an absolute one-off. We will never, ever get the opportunity to do what this club wants to do....which was always to build a new clubhouse." Apart from the opportunities for the local community and players that the new clubhouse brings, the Chairperson was at pains to express the impact of the World Cup to the St Helens's region as a whole. He suggested:

"I think it was massive for St Helens, this [the World Cup]. It really was. And the fact that there were some of the international teams playing out of the main stadium in St Helens again added another dimension for us because people could literally



go and watch Australia round the corner from their house. And the rugby league players, the professionals, themselves are phenomenal people who really do spend a little bit more time with the fans. And it's one of the few sports, I think, to do that."

Interestingly, this aspect of rugby league was emphasised by most of our interviewees, including, importantly, by the Manager of the Inclusive Volunteering Programme (discussed above). He suggested that participants on the programme experience once-in-a-lifetime chance meetings with the stars of the game (including overseas players), who simply stopped and chatted with the volunteers, something not seen often in other sports.



SOCIAL IMPACT SURVEY RESULTS

From a larger sample – out of which the cohort below derived – the vast majority of the 3025 people surveyed were men (78%) and white (94%) with almost 70% enjoying an annual income of around or above the UK national average annual wage (£27K) up to £80K. In terms of target audiences and fans, there is clear market potential in the future in appealing to more females, people from ethnic minorities and those on the lower socio-economic rung.

In order to supplement the analysis of the unique approach to hosting the RLWC 2021 tournament and its wider impact, the research team undertook an analysis focused on the 1181 respondents who were residents of one of the 18 host authority areas (i.e., host community residents).

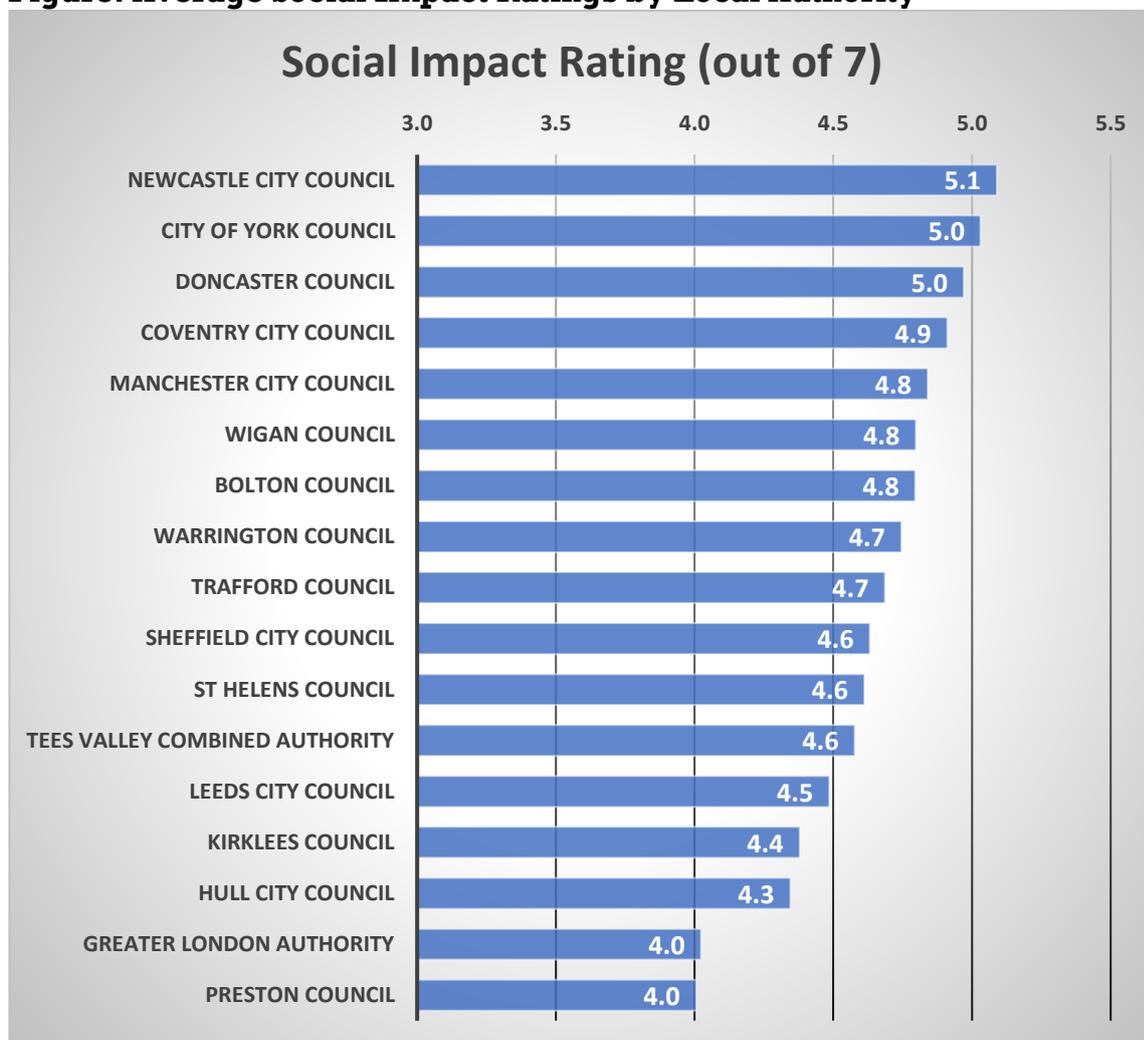
The average social impact rating – as measured by Kim and Walker’s (2012) 15-item scale – among all 1181 residents across all social impact dimensions was **4.6** (out of the maximum 7), indicating '**positive**' **social impact perceptions** as the score was above the midpoint (4) of the scale. The breakdown of the average ratings for the five dimensions of social impact is as follows:

- **5.2** for event excitement (sample item: ‘I was excited by the visitors of the RLWC 2021’)
- **5.0** for community excitement (sample item: ‘The RLWC 2021 provided entertainment to my local community’)
- **4.7** for community pride arising from enhanced community image (sample item: ‘My local community gained positive recognition by hosting the RLWC 2021’)
- **4.2** for strengthened community attachment (sample item: ‘The RLWC 2021 increased my social interactions within my local community’)
- **3.9** for a sense of pride resulting from improved infrastructures (sample item: ‘The RLWC2021 improved the quality of community public services’)



There were some notable differences in the perception of social impact by residents' characteristics. For example, respondents living in certain regions of England (e.g., North East = 4.8, North West = 4.7) reported higher ratings of perceived social impact (as a whole) than those living in other regions (e.g., London = 3.9). Similarly, respondents living in certain local authority areas (e.g., Newcastle = 5.1; York = 5.0; Doncaster = 5.0) reported higher ratings of perceived social impact than those living in other areas (e.g., Hull City = 4.3; Greater London Authority = 4.0; Preston = 4.0). The average social impact ratings by local authority are presented in the below figure (note: London Legacy Development Company was removed from the figure as it had only 4 respondents).

Figure. Average Social Impact Ratings by Local Authority



In terms of socio-demographics, females (4.9) reported higher ratings of social impact than males (4.5) [females made up some 40% of viewers through broadcasting], and ratings of social impact were higher among younger (vs. older) respondents, lower income (vs. higher income) respondents and less educated (vs. highly educated) respondents. In terms of activity-based characteristics, residents' ratings of the perceived social impact of the RLWC 2021 increased as they:

- Attended more men's games during the tournament.
- Attended more women's games during the tournament.
- Attended more wheelchair games during the tournament.
- Participated in more programmes or social events associated with the tournament.
- Read articles/editorials about the tournament more frequently.
- Watched the news about the tournament on TV or online more frequently.
- Posted/commented/shared about the tournament on social media more frequently.

Some of the broad-brush findings of the survey are as follows:

- Nearly 80% of host community residents surveyed at least somewhat agreed with the statement 'The RLWC 2021 brought excitement to my local community.'
- Nearly 80% of host community residents surveyed at least somewhat agreed with the statement 'I was excited by the visitors of the RLWC 2021.'
- Nearly 90 % of host community residents surveyed at least somewhat agreed with the statement 'I will support future major sports events held in my local community.'
- Nearly 85% of the respondents (including residents and visitors) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I was very interested in the RLWC 2021.'
- Over 70% of the respondents (including residents and visitors) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'The RLWC 2021 was a great event for me.'



FUTURE EVENTS

The RLWC 2021 approach to delivering an inclusive sports event with tangible social impact is likely to become a model for future events. It also shows that you do not need to host a sports mega-event to have an impact – in fact, evidence is building that more local, regional and national events can generate more social impact than bombastic one-off multi-billion dollar mega-events. The learnings and reflections from this event will be put down in a full knowledge transfer programme/document for the next hosts, France. The two key points must be the early release of ‘legacy’ funds to create social impact well before the tournament/games/event itself and the inclusive nature of the approach: having all three constituent parts of the RLWC together was clearly an unmitigated success that is likely to deliver an upward trend in both women’s and wheelchair rugby league participation. Last year’s Commonwealth Games in Birmingham also trialled the simultaneous running of the para-athletes events on the same days as the able-bodied events to much acclaim.

As this report has intimated above, one-off, big splash events rarely, if ever, leave a tangible legacy, thus, investment during the off-season, investment in local, community clubs and organisations is clearly the way to go.

The governing body of Rugby League, the RFL, now have a social impact manager in place and a small social impact team so that they can monitor some of the wider benefits of rugby league both on and off the pitch. Equally, the Community Integrated Care, who delivered the successful Inclusive Volunteering Programme - and helped the RLWC 2021 on some of their other inclusion work - are continuing their work with the RFL around how can they deliver or provide more inclusive volunteering opportunities at central RFL events and across rugby league foundations and clubs.



CONCLUSION

This report is unusual in the respect that it was not commissioned and it was more 'open' to what it would find than is usual for a commissioned piece with very specific research questions. The SPU's interest was in the type of approach adopted by the RLWC 2021, in particular the notion of 'pre-legacy' funding early in the cycle of an event and well before the actual tournament. The findings of this research are thus:

- The RLWC 2021 offered a unique 'approach' to social impact and generating legacy
- The new 'inclusiveness' approach to delivering the RLWC clearly showcased both the women's game and wheelchair rugby league
- 'Pre-legacy' investment in social impact had a very positive effect on grassroots rugby league facilities and capacity
- The RLWC 2021 approach to the event is likely to impact hosting bids and hosting strategies of future sports events.

Finally, this report in general offers evidence of the positive contribution the RLWC 2021 had on the sport of Rugby League and the communities within which it invested in terms of its economic impact and importance, as well as social impact. There has not been space to research the myriad initiatives that are non-sport related, but also have a large societal impact, for example, investment in a number of activities through the Inclusive Volunteering Programme. It is imperative that the RFL continues the excellent work on social impact that has been sparked by the investments in grassroots, in particular with regard to the inclusivity agenda around women's and wheelchair rugby league.



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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Please note these are generic questions that were altered according to who the team interviewed.

Civic Leaders/People involved in RLWC 2021

1. What benefit does having a Rugby League WC 2021 bring to the town?
2. What benefit is there to you personally from having had a Rugby League WC 2021 event in the town?
3. What is unique about the event specifically?
4. Did the RLWC 2021 increase your interest in rugby league more generally?
5. Did the RLWC 2021 bring a level of excitement to the local community? How?
6. In what way does your Rugby league Team contribute to the town's identity?
7. Has the RLWC 2021 improved the quality of community public services or infrastructure in any way?
8. Has the RLWC 2021 had any impact on your engagement with the local community?
9. Were the RLWC 2021 events in your town a success? Judged on?
10. What was your overall perception of RWLC 2021?

Interviewees

1. Jon Dutton (CEO RLWC 2021)
2. Tracy Power (Social Impact Director)
3. Council Leader of large Council
4. CEO of a large Council
5. Secretary of Shevington Rugby League club
6. Chairperson of Portico Vine Rugby League club
7. Member of Community Integrated Care

