DECLINING PARTICIPATION

THE TICKING TIME BOMB OF POOR HEALTH

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Short term individual glory vs long term universal health

March 2017
And these children that you spit on,
As they try to change their worlds,
Are immune to your consultations,
They’re quite aware of what they’re going through.

David Bowie - Changes (Hunky Dory) 1971
acknowledgements

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the author

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THE STATE OF THE NATION

Whilst the nation rejoices in Great Britain’s “medal haul” at the London and Rio Olympics, is it time to reflect why the nation has not been inspired to participate in sport in increasing numbers as we were told we would? Why do obesity and diabetes in our wealthy western nation continue to be an issue with such an immense and apparently noble investment in sport? Was not our investment in the sporting elite, sports facilities and major events to be the panacea to all our ills? Or is the much vaunted legacy in truth just the predicted “naegacy”? (1) Government ambition and coaxing have clearly not been sufficient to get the nation moving. But just how relevant is Dressage in Dumbiedykes, the Modern Pentathlon in “the Milton” or Triathlon to the good people of Torry?

Are we are in danger of forgetting how far the bar for sporting activity has fallen from a time when the country was significantly worse off than it is now?

In Education, how can it that a modest Scottish provincial state school 50 years ago could put out 225 boys, nearly half the male school roll, in 15 rugby teams every Saturday, (2) yet a modern state school that puts out any teams now appears a rarity? (3) How did we get to the place where PE classes, once almost mandatory, have become all but optional, where completing Curriculum for Excellence PE paperwork appears to take precedence over breaking a sweat? (4) Where Standard Grade PE passes for a few take precedence over physical literacy for all? Does Education not have a Duty of Care for all of our children’s health that surpasses any interest exam passes in future medals of a tiny elite?

Could it even be that the sporting product and sporting systems are part of the problem? Are we ignoring the obvious signs of market failure where the allocation of goods and services is inefficient to meet the needs of all, where there could be another conceivable outcome where an individual may be better-off without making someone else worse-off?

In considering our sports strategy and the hope for healthy outcomes, do we even bother to benchmark other countries? Has anyone even noticed that the Australians, once a fixtures at the “top of the leader board” are no longer there? And why?

"However, there is an increasing recognition that Australian sport is at a critical junction. While our traditional sporting structures with a central focus on delivering international success, along with our innovative systems and practices, have enabled us to ‘punch above our weight’ in the past, new challenges confronting our nation both on and off the sporting field highlight the need for urgent change. The active lifestyle that has played a significant role in establishing our nation’s identity, culture and international reputation is being challenged. Demographic shifts, sport integrity issues and competition from other activities are challenging the market relevance and value of sport to many Australians, resulting in an increasingly sedentary lifestyle, particularly among our children. It has become clear that in order to reinvigorate engagement in sport among our community and regain our competitive edge in the international sporting arena, there is a need to do things differently."

Australian institute of Sport Strategic plan 2011 – 15 (5)

Is there any evidence of a successful Scottish sports strategy? Could it be that Scottish sports strategy is still driven by those for whom medals are the only currency that matters, particularly for those self-absorbed in nationhood? Sporting medals are a matter of individual and national pride, however the value of these is a matter of personal opinion. Sports participation however is a public health issue that should concern us all. Where should government direct its funding? Medals for few or health for all? National and personal short term glory versus long term universal health? One is a “nice to have” the other is becoming a national crisis.

When is Scotland going to recognise “the need to do things differently” if the nation’s dreadful health matters are to be adequately addressed?

It is time to question the status quo - and to initiate significant change.
Introduction

That activity, and in particular regular sporting activity, has significant health benefits, except perhaps only in extreme cases, is not in dispute.\(^6\) The consequences of poor levels of sports participation and activity can be costly to both the individual and the country.\(^7\)

Obesity, a contributory factor in the epidemic of Type 2 diabetes, is now said also to be the cause thirteen types of cancer.\(^8\)

In Scotland in 2014, 65% of adults are overweight, including 28% who were obese. Two in every three people are overweight or obese.\(^9\)

Astonishingly 15% of the Scottish P1 school intake are overweight or obese.\(^8\) The incidence of obesity and Type 2 diabetes is rising, most notably in younger people and in some minorities.\(^10\)

As identified by Australia, sports have its challenges. Societal trends show communities are becoming more fragmented. American sociologist Robert D Putnam in 2000 in his seminal text “Bowling Alone”\(^11\) has shown that the part sport plays in society has changed and is continuing to change; the demographic of those who participate in sport is changing; the way we play sport is changing; the sports we play are changing.

In particular there is a trend away from the “traditional” sports towards new activities and less regulated sports. In the UK, proof of these trends is evident in the dominance of small-sided football\(^12\) and gymnasium membership, new first choices for activity.\(^13\)

In terms of who is playing sport, in England, where sports participation is measured, there is evidence that where participation is growing it is amongst the older middle class.\(^8\) In Scotland, the Scottish Government’s own Scottish Health Survey confirmed in 2016 that despite significant public investment in recent years there has been little or no change in sports participation or any decline in obesity since 2008.\(^8\)

The Active Healthy Kids Report Card says that amongst Scottish 11 – 15 year olds, only 21% of boys and 15% of girls meet the Scottish, UK and International recommendation of at least 60 minutes of daily physical activity of at least moderate intensity,\(^14\) placing Scotland joint bottom of 38 countries.

In Glasgow, it has been found that only 12% of S1 – S6s in 30 state secondary schools meet the guidelines for physical activity.\(^15\)

If sport is to change mass behaviour, and if participation to increase, an ambition to which the government seems to subscribe and importantly the very raison d’être of the growing “Sport for Change” lobby\(^16\), the obvious “intervention” is to improve the marketing of sporting activity. Marketing is not just promotion and PR but “the science and art of exploring, creating, and delivering value to satisfy the needs of a target market at a profit. Marketing identifies unfulfilled needs and desires. It defines, measures and quantifies the size of the identified market and the profit potential.”\(^17\)

Put simply the right product, in the right place, at the right time, at the right price.

Scottish sports strategy remains firmly based on old product (the medal sports) in old places (private clubs) at the wrong price (high cost).

But the first thing to do is to clarify “who is the customer?”
• **Who is the customer?**

Clearly it should not be the government but experience suggests that government and its national agency for sport, has become the customer. (see below).

If we were sincere in promoting fostering and developing participation for the health of the nation we must start with the customer, the citizen, including the silent majority of the disadvantaged and disengaged.

• **What market are you in?**

Astonishingly in a consultation document (28) sportscotland, the national agency, says it “would not be helpful not to spend a significant time defining sport” yet goes on to define sport “in the context of physical activity and peoples sporting lives”. A very vague and immense canvas.

Consider this. The current lead body in Scotland does not think it is even worth defining that for which it claims responsibility and its very raison d’etre.

And most people do not have “sporting lives”.

• **What is your line of business?**

A positioning statement is “the persuasive reason for engaging with the organisation”.

According to the sportscotland web site, “We give the people of Scotland the support they need to find the right path in their sporting lives”.

This is a massive misrepresentation.

Stewart Harris CEO of sportscotland (29) admitted to the Holyrood Health and Sports Committee that sportscotland has not targeted the disadvantaged areas with its activity. This is utterly damning of a government agency which creates no wealth, only spends taxes and lottery funding, and is certainly NOT helping everyone to “find the right path in their sporting lives”.

This one admission by the CEO alone surely demands immediate corrective action. The CEO’s comment is proof that sportscotland does not fully understand the role of a government agency, which is to intervene when the market fails.

As will be seen below, the sports market, people playing their sport of choice in and out of clubs, is actually quite vital in some sectors. The real market failure is in participation and health in our children, and in particular amongst the disadvantaged – and we now know by their own admission that sportscotland are not sufficiently on the case.

"The true character of society is revealed in how it treats its children.”

Nelson Mandela
• The right Product?

So where should government intervene?

a) Elite sport

Is elite sport even good for health?

It is often assumed that participation in sport will produce only an array of health benefits. The adverse consequences of sport participation, particularly at the elite level, are rarely explored. Evidence continues to accumulate of a variety of unfortunate consequences that may accompany elite sport participation. Sport involvement may exacerbate pre-existing health problems, cause injury or even death. Over training is becoming recognised as a danger to health.

Athletes may sacrifice health, home, education and normal social development in the pursuit of sport "success."

Clearly, at the other end of the continuum, no activity at all is also bad for health, but the case to fund elite sport on grounds of the commonweal and health is very weak.

Should elite sport receive funding?

Helpfully the sportscland web site helpfully adds “All those involved in sport should put its interests before any personal or financial gain”. That would suggest that much of their elite activity is de facto “ultra vires”! And certainly should excludes any investment in professional sport. Recent investments have included money for Scottish Women’s Football and Hockey national teams so the players could be professional. Confusing.

b) Participation.

So what should be the goals of participation?

“Goals indicate what a business unit wants to achieve; strategy is a game plan for getting there. Every business must design a strategy for achieving its goals, consisting of a marketing strategy and a compatible technology strategy and sourcing strategy (17)”

Oddly participation targets have been previously set, but have not been delivered.

Equating consumption with participation, and participation being the “consumption” of sport, if targets are to be set we must look at investing in the marketing of participation.

All marketing strategies are based on segmentation, targeting and positioning. A company discovers different needs and groups in the marketplace, targets those needs and groups that it can satisfy in a superior way, and then positions its offering so that the target market recognises the distinctive offering and image. The process of defining and subdividing a large homogenous market into clearly identifiable segments having similar needs, wants, or demand characteristics.

Its objective is to design a marketing mix that precisely matches the expectations of customers in the targeted segment. As few entities are big enough to supply the needs of an entire market; most must breakdown the total demand into segments and choose those that the company is best equipped to handle. (59)

There is no evidence whatsoever of such an analysis having ever taken place in Scotland with a view to increasing participation and the health of the nation. Until there is, it will take a lot more than obsolete structures, futile hope, false prophets amid a never ending cacophony of entreaties by politicians and their agents to get the majority of people active and healthy.
In terms of demographics most sports are resolutely a middle class activity, with football being the notable exception. Be assured, the mythical prejudice against Alf Tupper lives on.\(^{(31)}\)

In terms of “product”, there are sporting options that have successfully increased participation.

In the paid-for sector, 70% of those who play football play the short sided game. 5-a-side is the football of choice. Private and public gymnasium operators now claim that 1 in 6 now hold membership of a gym.\(^{(13)}\) Dance claims to engage 4.78 million people in participation in the UK.\(^{(33)}\)

In the free access sector, Parkrun, an informal grouping of runners without membership, only registration, claims over 100,000 participants a week in the UK.\(^{(34)}\)

Parkour, or free running, is a growing, albeit niche, free sport.

Skateboarding is now a 2020 Olympic sport!

These sports have all largely happened outside of the dead hand of government interference.

The market tends to correct itself.

Sport is a complex marketplace with differences between those who watch and take part, amateur and professional, private and public providers, the young and the old, those who have and have not. That current government influenced policy ignores this is self-evident.

But does the government invest in sport or health?

- **The right place?**

  a) **Schools**

  Looking at the “where” or the routes to market, in schools, the key route to market, where most experience sport for the first time, where we build core fitness that can last a lifetime, where sport should be free and where a sporting habit can and should be inculcated, the evidence is of declining activity whilst sport has been expensively “professionalised”.

  The ratio of PE teacher to pupil in secondary schools appears to have doubled over 50 years. One measurement of success is the number of Standard Grades PE achieved, in itself meaningless to the majority of pupils, but a metric that Education understands. Why impose academic measures on sport? Why is health not the metric on which schools are charged to deliver? What is being done to inculcate participation habits?

  In primary schools, sport appears almost problematical now even with the intervention of Active Schools, created in 2004 as a short term intervention by politicians. 12 years on Active Schools still cannot deliver. They only facilitate and administer and ludicrously contract third parties to deliver sport in primary schools! What shibboleths are not being challenged here?

  “Activity” figures from Active Schools, figures cannot be verified yet they are used by government to show progress. “Taster sessions” which bolster “Activity” figures may raise awareness but there is no evidence that taster sessions change long term behaviours or introduce healthy habits. Even if there was, two thirds cannot afford after school activity,\(^{(18)}\) which is not always free, although sportscotland curiously says it should be\(^{(19)}\).
It is ever more evident in both primary and secondary schools that the sport offer is variable with the influence of the head teacher has become ever more significant as sport has lost prioritisation in Education. A sports minded head teacher tends to have a school with sporting options. The converse situation applies and is predictably on the increase.

It is very easy to see the embedded inequality of opportunity. A recent much praised, elegantly simple initiative by an Elaine Wylie, a primary head teacher in Stirling, encouraging children to run or walk a mile every day in the school grounds (20) is impossible in every school in Scotland as 1,040 Scottish schools (43%) have no outdoor facilities! (21) Many playgrounds appear to have become parks for teachers’ cars, at a stroke blocking any activity. How did protecting teachers’ SUVs take priority over our kids’ health?

Worse, many school facilities within PFI schools paid for by the public purse, often themselves built on sportsgrounds and sometimes leading to lesser provision than the schools they replace, remain stubbornly closed to their communities outside of school hours, or available at prohibitive cost.

A focus on sports participation with measured health outcomes could be achieved if schools were charged with inculcating the habit of just one sport, in every pupil, in the same way as schools are charged to deliver literacy or targeted to have every child acquiring a foreign language. Sadly, there is no such direction from government. Possibly because sport has insufficient voice or influence on Education policy.

“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”
Frederick Douglass, African-American social reformer, abolitionist, orator, writer, statesman

b) Public Facilities

Having regard to public facilities, our politicians, predictably, promote their personal Xanadus in National Centres such as Oriam and Inverclyde (see below) or Regional Centres such as Toryglen, Ravenscraig, and Aberdeen Sports Village.

[Sportscotland, demonstrating its increased power and incremental scope creep, has even created a “national para sport centre” at its own facility at Inverclyde, awarding the money to itself to do so. Inverclyde is a project with a flawed rational as all sports centres should be para friendly. And why build any national centre in inaccessible Largs? Largs is a project for which there is no demand other than political or self-interest of the owner. Worse, to expedite this project well-maintained facilities of one of the 2014 Games sports were destroyed without prior consultation, showing, if not abusive power, certainly the hollowness of legacy claims.]

The “national game” now demands artificial pitches at c £0.5m apiece, assets repeatedly and incorrectly styled as “no maintenance”. Public funding support is often expected. Yet no one anywhere is making adequate provision for the inevitable replacement of the infill and carpets, a third of the capital cost. Tennis Scotland has recently announced its intentions to create a network of regional indoor courts. The government has perhaps predictably announced funding support for the Tennis plan. Football will not be far behind. The cost for the individual hiring these new regional facilities are always higher than outdoor facilities. Importantly such facilities are by design further away from the users. Over time traditional sports may fail to exist at all outside of Scotland’s major cities.

These vanity projects do not benefit those in greatest need and are not sustainable in the long run. The onerous operating burdens of these gilded palaces are often bequeathed to another public body, a local authority or university, and operating costs and subsidy use up scarce income. Who will pick up the tab for all of these unsustainable assets? And who really benefits from them? There remains no substantive legal obligation on local authorities to provide sport beyond “adequate”.

Participation in sport – the ticking time bomb of poor health
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With ever increasing social costs, diminishing central government funding and quality competition from the private sector, local authorities are forced to increase costs to use their facilities or even to close public facilities, as can be seen by the recent closures proposed by East Ayrshire Council. (22)

With the trend to regional centres and the closure of community facilities, opportunity is actually decreasing as sport is becoming less local and less accessible.

"Success is where preparation and opportunity meet.” – Bobby Unser

**If participation is to grow it needs to be in every community.**

c) Clubs

Scottish national sports strategy remains resolutely predicated on club development of the medal sports. (there is some suggestion of a move to the very vague “clubs and communities”). Yet sports clubs are by definition exclusive structures and a societal grouping, some of which date from the Raj that Putman and others have identified as broken. Far from being inclusive clubs are the very engines of alienation, a concept first introduced by Marx. Alienation being defined as the separation of the individual from important aspects of the external world accompanied by a feeling of powerlessness or lack of control? Control is the key here. To Marx, all major institutional spheres in capitalist society, such as religion, the state, and political economy, were marked by a condition of alienation. Sportscotland is one such institution. It seeks to control sport through their mysterious “system” and further alienates so many in so doing.

The “compliance” demanded by Sportscotland in return for public funding manifests itself mostly in the wasteful replication of statute by the creation and impossible burden of maintaining policies without number, for example on matters of diversity. It serves only to show that government policies are being enforced positing the government as the customer. Yet the economically disadvantaged – 20% of the Scottish population - is not amongst the “protected minorities” of diversity legislation. Can any sport truly say they are delivering sport to the 39.2% of Glaswegian children said to be living in poverty? (23) But then why should they even bother if their funder does not require them to do so?

SGBs are controlled by Sportscotland and their faux “compliance” system, carried out by a third party, but given a “grade” by Sportscotland itself. This gives Sportscotland abusive power over SGBs, and they exercise it. As well as demanding influence on recruitment in these legally independent entities, many SGBs are now populated or led by former Sportscotland administrators.

[Sportscotland has even been known to impose operating software on small SGBs, astonishingly, against professional advice, best practice and without any in-house competencies, even determining the SGBs requirements for them! [This particular project initiated by Sportscotland is said to have cost a figure not un-adjacent to £1m. It failed. Those responsible are astonishingly still in post]]

SGBs are required to produce plans that back into new government initiatives, e.g. sport hubs, but they are NEVER required to produce a marketing plan for their own sport by Sportscotland. What business can expect to survive if it does not attempt to understand its marketplace and look for new opportunities – namely increase participation in its sport?

This “faux” compliance is a waste of resource, effort and time. It adds little or no value, and certainly does not create a customer concentric ethos with a culture of continuous improvement as would be the case if they met standards of ISO 9001:2000 (24) measured by truly independent and objective audits.
Is it any wonder that SGBs are mostly, if not universally, treated with contempt by their own club members, because sportscotland is now seen as the customer of the SGB?

Operationally SGBs are required to be “Strong Partners”, to fund and sustain a bureaucracy driven by the requirements of government and not the marketplace. Over time sports have morphed from amateur groupings of likeminded people run by the “secretary”, sitting in his apocryphal office under the stairs coordinating leagues and events, into professional “sports governing bodies” (SGBs). But this idea of the SGB as a corporate body controlling the sport is largely a myth. SGBs have little control, nor do they try to control their members. Recent events in the areas of doping and child protection serve to prove that “compliance” in sport is in reality weak. Why closed groups with few if any managers or directors from outside of the sport be anything other than poor at regulation of itself should be of no surprise to anyone.

Government funding is the reward for SGBs and individuals that are deemed to be “compliant”. With such leverage, sportscotland, has fashioned SGBs in their own image, a non-entrepreneurial administrative culture of a civil service with costly offices and inefficient structures, said to be in some cases 25 times that of the 1970s. The lunacy of this inefficient and high cost model is encapsulated in exacerbated by government funding. For example, of groups of just 4,000 souls (fee paying members) receiving c. £300,000 per annum (27) government funding equivalent to six or seven times that paid in membership fees to their own SGB! What is the return on investment on that?

Are SGBs, collectives of sustainable clubs worthy of any investment?

Importantly sports clubs, on which sportscotland’s strategy is predicated, represent only a fraction of the total Scottish population.

The Scottish Sports Association’s (25) own submission to central government only claims 900,000 members in sports clubs, representing only 17% of the Scottish population. Ignoring those who hold more than one membership, for example a winter sport and a summer sport, the real figure is probably nearer to 10%. So the government is funding minorities that could probably fund themselves and certainly not those in greatest need. If a club exists it follows that the market has not failed.

The counter intuitiveness of “sports administration” disengages many. The mind set can be - if government want to run sport – let them!

Sportscotland interference in its many guises of Regional Partnerships [un-constituted bodies that distribute public funds!] and Community Hubs controls and embraces those they know but actually alienates others!

This disengagement allows Sportscotland to avoid any serious challenge. They only talk to the people in their tent. In its own consultation for its 2015 - 2019 corporate plan was effectively internal. (28) 126 staff attended 12 workshops with only 71 giving responses (56%), 115 externals attended 10 workshops with 51 responses (44%). Feedback on individual questions was poor typically 20 external and 30 external answered. “Externals” (56) were mostly, if not all, bodies funded by sportscotland.

And not one of these bodies have a responsibility to deliver on health outcomes.
At the right time?

a) Is the “world class sporting system” out of time?

Sport was previously organised by the independent and collegiate Scottish Sports Council. This has over time become what we now know as sportscotland, a “top down” authoritarian government agency, a defensive and secretive body that refers to “our Minister” when under scrutiny by Holyrood’s own Health and Sports Committee. A body that engenders a dependency culture on funded sports, which serves only to deliver and defend government policy, right or wrong, that speaks about sport but has long given up any right to speak for sport. And the voice of the customer or dissonance is stifled.

The repeated claim is that sportscotland is building a “world class system”. Really? A system is defined as:- a set of things working together as parts of a mechanism or an interconnecting network; a complex whole; a set of principles or procedures according to which something is done; an organized scheme or method. “a multiparty system of government”. Yet there is no collective in Scottish sport. Disengagement from and disenchantment with established sport, within and towards Sports Governing Bodies (SGBs) and sportscotland itself is rife.

At the Holyrood Health and Sports Committee of 24th January 2017 Stewart Harris CEO of sportscotland appeared to view the “system” as a work in progress. Everything is “an area to be looked at”. “We have not managed to reach everyone yet”. The use of the present participle “building” – the continuous tense - secures sportscotland for the foreseeable future.

But do we need a “system”?

And why is the system not already built after no change in government and Harris’ tenure of over the last 10 years?

When will it be built?

The everlasting “building” of the system serves to create uncertainty, reduces challenges because no one wants to admit ignorance of the “system”, and increases the power of sportscotland.

The “system” itself perpetuates the alienation of the majority. Contrary to Harris’ claim that a system breaks down barriers, the “system” itself is a significant barrier.

But the allusion of “a system” suits government and especially sportscotland whose objective it is, as the first objective of any company, applicable to sportscotland, is that of survival. The motive of the only people supporting the building of a “world class system” are quite selfish.

The power of the mysterious “system” suits the government, as government has become the customer.

Of note, sportscotland does not subscribe to Sport for All, a worldwide ethos promoted by ISCA the International Sport and Culture Association, which is open to youth, sports and culture associations from all over the world - primarily non-governmental organisations - working within the area of "Sport and Culture for All".
b) What of the system?

“Our business is infested with idiots who try to impress by using pretentious jargon.”
David Ogilvy the founder of Ogilvy and Mather

The “system” has its own language. For example what is a pathway?

You will recall “We give the people of Scotland the support they need to find the right path in their sporting lives” (see earlier). This is an allusion to “sporting pathways”.

Sporting pathways are jargon on which the system depends, that alienates those not in the circle. There is no such thing as a pathway that cannot be described as a sight of the blindingly obvious. Any person with talent will be spotted by a coach or push themselves forward.

Optimisation of skills of a few takes a poor second place to opportunity for all.

Again Harris (29) invites ridicule when he stressed the “system” makes necessary links between participation, skill acquisition and the elite. “Schools, community to elite”, to enable people to get “better”! This is truly “Life imitating Art”! With a Head of Pathways already in place, can the mythical “Director of Better” of the BBC’s satire W1A be very far away? (30)

Participation does not require a pathway. It can be activity for its own sake, and as such is several orders of magnitude greater than all other forms of “traditional” sport.

What connection has the non-handicap golfer playing 9 holes every day with the best on the international golf circuit? What connection does (s)he have or even want with the SGB or his own club handicap secretary? None at all. What connection does the massive number of people who play 5 a side football aspiring to win games have with administrators of Association Football? Are either trying to get better? Of course not. Simply enjoying sport for its own sake. And winning when they can. They are participating. They have no desire or requirement to be organised.

Could it be our focus on a professionalised sport “system” is demeaning or damaging participation? The facts appear to suggest as much.

Such as it is, it is “a system” almost exclusively seen through a sport lens, largely controlled by people whose main “competency” is an enthusiasm for sport. The core competency for running a brewery is never a liking for beer nor, in extremis, to be an alcoholic. If it were the only demand is more access to beer.

And so it is in sport. Interventions and initiatives, often and many, are said to be needed constantly. More pitches, more coaches, more government funding is the call. (In truth, there is seldom an argument for more facilities based on lack of capacity, only lack of access or poor scheduling.)

“Build it they will come” before “let’s find a way to do this better”.

Who is influencing these decisions? The same people who invented the system. Those who see sport as an end in itself and not health professionals.

The market failures of sport will never be addressed by the over management of “the system” but by the re-allocation of goods and services in an efficient way to meet the needs of all of our people and not just a well-heeled elite.
c) Where is the evidence of any real success or return in on investment?

How could you as there is no evidence of SMART objectives apart from “building”?

The only measures are medals (short term achievements) and club membership (a largely meaningless number, which can include non-playing members).

There is no evidence of regular independent assessment of the “system”. Those reports that do exist are written by schools, community hubs and SGBs all recipients of public funding. Perhaps it is not surprising that these unaudited results are said to show growth at odds with other independent figures.

[The author can cite a case when sportscotland published figures to the press claiming increases in a sport for which he was CEO, after sportscotland had been told sportscotland on three occasions that there was no data on which such a claim could be substantiated!]

There is a move by others to create an independent observatory but unsurprisingly this initiative is not as yet supported by sportscotland or the government.

d) And who is making these decisions on our behalf?

Could there even be an issue with those who decide our sporting provision, the so called “blazeratti”? In the context of worldwide dramatic growth in car ownership, TVs and gaming, Scotland is clearly underperforming in inculcating habits of sporting activity in young people. It may even be our young people are not very interested in what now looks like sport’s golden age. 16-34s represent only 10% of the BBC’s Question of Sport audience with over 65s representing 40 %\(^{(32)}\) respectively 26.4% and 16.6% of the population. "Sport without history is sport without a soul",\(^{(26)}\) but could it be in this age of instant gratification that sports’ leadership needs to focus on innovation and succession, on meeting the needs of future generations, as on its splendid traditions and history if participation is to be sustained? As insufficient new young blood enters sport the so called “pyramids” look more akin to obelisks. Pyramids are stable. Obelisks fall over.

There is a misguided expectation and presentation, not least from government and SGBs that SGBs have the capacity to develop or even manage sport. SGBs are only agencies, holders of the brand but not necessarily the assets. SGBs are unlikely to control or own any of the factors of production. SGB members are not employees but customers; SGBs, or even their clubs, are unlikely to own the place of production – facilities; SGBs do not own or control the routes to market – the clubs or the schools. SGBs cannot ensure any rigour in the clubs to the enforcement of the fine policies they create in pursuit of compliance! They are all too often soft regulators of their own regulations, as is becoming ever clearer in matters of enforcing world anti-doping standards and observing best practice in child protection.

SGBs, all too convenient to blame when there is any scrutiny of sports participation, are in truth simply not capable of creating lasting added value on their own.

There is no imperative to stimulate the demand of a sport, to improve market penetration or to have multiple approaches for different market segments, only to build on existing clubs, a failing "route to market". If there was a true marketing ethos, there would be focus on all routes to market, understanding all of the potential customers' habits.

For sports participation to increase the focus must be on the routes to market more than on the closed SGBs, all of the market – not just 10% of it. Instead of trying to fit society to jaded sporting structures, sport structures themselves need to change to suit changing times. They must recognise the need to market sport to all and the important contribution participation can make to the health of the nation.
Who dares to challenge the monopoly that is “the” national agency on which all funding is predicated? A past CEO of hockey before his return to Australia gave a press interview saying that “sportscotland sucked the life out of you”. A Badminton director publicly challenged a funding cut. Their reward was a vindictive four day audit by KPMG. (They found nothing amiss.)

Or indeed how could you complain? Complaints are directed to the CEO of .......sportscotland! Even “within the tent” of sport The “Voice of the Customer” of sport was previously articulated by the independent and collegiate Scottish Sports Association, a union of SGBs. Of late the SSA has become an almost completely emasculated voice tending to the party line on government sports policy as would be expected from a body funded by sportscotland.

Is there adequate, or any, real scrutiny of the national agency?

**e) What if there was no system?**

It is often said of unpopular or inefficient organisations that “if they were not there you would have to invent/create it”.

The fear being we could not exist in any other way.

A myth happily perpetuated by sportscotland’s CEO.

“You cannot take lumps out of the system and expect it to perform” (29)

Why should we continue to invest in a failing “system”, a system created by civil servants for the government; a system that even with the stimulus of the Games has failed to deliver higher levels participation, and an organisation of 5 levels of management that adds little value to those in greatest need?

With funding dropping by 20% we cannot condemn the country to less of the same.
• At the right price

Looking at the affordability of sport, The London School of Economics has said that cost is the biggest barrier to young people participating in sport.\(^{(35)}\)

In Scotland, after housing, nearly one in five (18%) of all Scots are living in poverty. \(^{(36)}\) 220,000 children are living below the poverty level. The figure being 39.2% in Glasgow.\(^{(23)}\)

And there is no one predicting this situation will change for the better anytime soon.

The increased commercialisation of sport with more expensive facilities and sport and “sportswear” dominated by global brands has also increased the cost of sport. What chance of sports participation for the immense numbers of the economically disadvantaged?

In addition there has been an immense investment in coaching qualifications in recent years under the guise of “professionalization”. The investment in the professionalisation of sport has had a negative return. The idea that sport cannot take place without a coach has taken root and increased the perceived cost of sport, serving to further alienate. It has put further barriers in place.

“Professions are a conspiracy against the laity”.  
George Bernard Shaw (1906 Doctors Dilemma)

It could even be argued that sportscotland and its systems and its “partners” are a cartel – a coalition intended to promote a mutual interest, demanding “professional” coaching and other required “standards” that serve to increase the cost of sport – and they have a negative effect for consumers because their very existence results in higher prices and restricted supply.

“The economic miracle that has been the United States was not produced by socialized enterprises, by government-union-industry cartels or by centralized economic planning. It was produced by private enterprises in a profit-and-loss system. And losses were at least as important in weeding out failures as profits in fostering successes. Let government succour failures, and we shall be headed for stagnation and decline.”  
Milton Friedman

As if to prove the importance of cost in the mix, and the move away from “regulated” sport the trend is to lower cost and even free sporting options.

Less people are paying to swim but more people are running for free. \(^{(37)}\)

Parkrun, a free running group now claims 100,000 participants in the UK every weekend. The largest gym operator, a sector almost unknown 40 years ago, is now a low cost budget operator.

**If participation is to grow it needs to be inexpensive.**
So what now?

Sportscotland in its present form is a muddle of politicians and sports enthusiasts who do not think it necessary to even define the business they are in. They add little value but a lot to the cost of sport. It has singularly failed to improve participation.

The government largesse on elite sport, sports facilities and major events has been justified on claims of creating lasting legacy or to inspire others. Such claims have been proven to be false (38) or at best unproven, (39). It was recently debunked again by the BBC’s John Beattie, as the “Medal Myth”, in which it was claimed that 90% of elite Scots athletes are from 'middle class' background (40).

The Scottish Government itself, the former cheerleader of legacy, has now bask peddled if not actually admitting that there is no such thing as events legacy:

ON INFRASTRUCTURE:—“There is no inevitable improvement of grassroots active infrastructure related to hosting major multi-sports events. Some research has found potential tensions between funding the infrastructure required for elite competition sport and investment in community grassroots infrastructure.” (41)

ON PARTICIPATION:—“In summary, the weight of evidence that there is no automatic effect on population levels of sporting participation (let alone wider physical activity) from hosting major sporting events has grown over the last year. Some boost in interest in sport among some groups is plausible and consistent with the theory of a demonstration effect. Thus, the message remains unchanged that increased sports participation and/or physical activity is not an automatic result of hosting a major sporting event, but is instead affected by a multitude of individual level, social and environmental factors.” (41)

ON ELITE:—“Evidence of how hosting a major sporting event impacts on the sporting performance of the host nation is limited. Elite sporting success is influenced by many factors beyond the control of government. There is evidence from the evaluation of the London Olympics 2012 that the performance of Team GB was enhanced as a result of London hosting the event. This was considered to be a result of increased funding, performance development programmes which led to more careful monitoring, improvement in talent identification, greater support for elite athletes, sports and science medicine and elite coaching development.” (41)

Sport has been de facto “nationalised” over time. With the government all but admitting that “legacy” was a chimera and with participation continuing to fall, its policies and “systems” appear to be founded in sand, and very poor value for money.

What of those who promised legacy? Mostly Government and its agents. They have been found by their own funders to have been false prophets or worse still snake oil salesmen! How can they justify their continuing influence over sport?

Would sport not be more responsive to the market and add more value by being independent of government?

Participation in sport IS growing in those sports not under the sportscotland regime.

If participation is to grow, sport needs to genuinely inclusive.

TO MAXIMISE PARTICIPATION, SPORT MUST BE INCLUSIVE, INNOVATIVE, INEXPENSIVE, AND IN EVERY COMMUNITY.
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