SPORING EVENTS, IMAGE, AND IDENTITIES IN CONTEMPORARY WALES

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Abstract
The hosting of major sporting events is increasingly recognised as an important tool in the promotion and (re)presentation of nations across the world. This essay begins by considering the importance of sport in contemporary Wales and then looks at the images and identities of Wales and the Welsh that are portrayed in a range of sporting events. For different reasons, Wales is not that visible in the world’s two biggest sporting events but the nation has been far more prominent in recent editions of events staking a claim to the title of the third biggest sporting event in the world. Some of the problems and challenges in promoting a distinct and identifiable brand are outlined alongside an analysis of the cultural politics of sporting celebrity and the (re)presentation of place. Through case study discussions of some of the most prestigious sporting events in the world, it shows how different narratives of the nation appear and also considers how Welsh identities are also incorporated and/or hidden in larger British or European collectives.

Introduction
This article looks at sport in contemporary Wales. The work is intended as an overview of a substantial area and does perhaps pose more questions than it answers. The aim is to offer a broad brush portrayal of a vast landscape and present some discussion surrounding important and at times highly contentious issues. It begins by outlining the importance of sport in the nation and then focuses on the area of major sporting events to explore the ways in which Wales is (in)visible in an international context. Events such as the Olympic Games and FIFA World Cup, usually described as mega events, garner considerable media attention across the globe but for different reasons Wales is largely invisible here. Yet there are mega events where Wales has had the chance to be more visible and I look at two of these to explore how the nation is (re)presented. In case study discussions of the Ryder Cup and Rugby World Cup, two events that have both claimed the title of the third biggest sporting event in the world, it looks at Wales as the host nation for recent editions of these. Given the massive success of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games it would be remiss not to look briefly at the role Wales played as part of a wider collective ‘national’ team. In considering (re)presentations of place, the work highlights some of the challenges faced in promoting Wales through mega events and then looks at the event industry.

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beyond the ‘megas’ as a means of discussing the ways in which smaller events may offer more sustainable tourism development potential. Here I use the case of the inaugural World Alternative Games (Gemau Byd Arallddewisol) to demonstrate the importance of events at the community level and look at the ways in which alternative images of Wales may be promoted.

**Sport in contemporary Wales**

Sport is an important part of the everyday lives of many people in Wales. Although it is a small country, Wales has punched well above its weight on the international sporting stage (Sport Wales, 2013). In the combat sports, for example, Joe Calzaghe was World Champion for more than a decade and retired as one of the very few boxers to complete a professional boxing career undefeated (Harris, 2011; Johnes, 2008). In the London 2012 Olympic Games, Jade Jones from Flint took the gold medal for Team GB in the taekwondo to become the first ever Briton to win an Olympic title in the sport. There are of course many other Welsh men and women who have achieved considerable success and international fame through their achievements in sport. Ryan Giggs continues to break all sorts of records with Manchester United and Gareth Bale is now regularly discussed in conversations about the very best football players in the world. In the sport of cycling, Nicole Cooke won a gold medal at the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games and Becky James followed this with two gold medals in the 2013 Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) championships in Minsk. Space does not permit a detailed overview of all the sports that athletes from Wales have been successful in although the work of Johnes (2005) provides a cogent overview of the development of sport in Wales and is a useful resource for detailing a concise history of sport in Wales since 1800.

It is rugby though that occupies a special place in the contemporary Welsh sporting landscape (Blandford and McElroy, 2011; Harris, 2007). Given the relationship between Wales and England, a subject I will look at later in this paper, it is interesting that a game developed and codified in the English public schools should emerge as the national sport of Wales. The historian Richard Holt (1989) observed that rugby served an important function in the creation of a Welsh identity in the early industrialisation of the south Wales valleys giving both a way for outsiders to define the Welsh and a way for the Welsh to define themselves. Tuck and Maguire (1999: p.30) have suggested that in more modern times ‘the health of Wales as a nation is perceived as inseparable from the success/failure of the national rugby team’. As outlined in Smith and Williams’ (1980) official history of the Welsh Rugby Union, _Fields of Praise_, the game came to assume an exalted status and became an important part of Welsh life. The success of the Welsh national team in the 1970s, as the game was first televised in colour, ensured that a number of these players became household names and some were known by their first names alone (Barry, Gareth and Gerald) or even just by their initials (JJ and JPR).

Yet these players, despite becoming recognised figures in parts of the world, remained very much ‘local heroes’ and whilst they could be playing in front of tens of thousands of their country-folk on a Saturday, many of the Welsh team would be back working alongside a number of these supporters on the Monday. For almost a hundred years rugby union remained an amateur sport although ‘shamateurism’ was a term often used to describe the ways in which payments were made to players. Although it was a topic to become increasingly contentious from the mid 1980s, the contested nature of
amateurism in rugby union was not a new subject and Wales had been accused of professionalising the game many years before. Between January 1897 and March 1898 Wales played no international fixtures as the country was ostracised by the other home unions over the purchase of a house for the first superstar of Welsh rugby, Arthur ‘Monkey’ Gould. Funded by supporters, a regional newspaper and endorsed by those governing the game, Gould was presented with a house in Newport where he had played for a number of years. Despite the many protests Wales refused to give in to the other home unions and withdrew from the International Board. Despite the inducements afforded to many players to remain in rugby union, some found the financial incentives offered by rugby league clubs hard to refuse and the ever present threat of losing the best players to the professional thirteen-man code had a significant impact on the fortunes of the national team (Williams, 1994).

The open professionalisation of rugby union in 1995 led to a seismic shift in the rugby world and signified a massive change in the power dynamics of the two sports (Harris, 2010). The money now openly available in rugby union, and the sharp rise in media revenues, meant that it was now rugby league that lost a number of their leading players who were tempted by the riches on offer in union. Wales suffered some well-documented ‘teething problems’ during this period as it struggled to adapt to the changes and vast sums of money were spent professionalising the union game. The move to a regional playing structure in Wales caused some anxiety and led to the end of top-level rugby for a number of illustrious clubs. After a turbulent period where much publicised defeats to lower ranked rugby nations at major tournaments were the most visible marker of the perceived decline of Welsh rugby, there is a new found optimism with some strong leadership in the coaching of the national team culminating in three Grand Slam titles in eight years. Yet below this there continues to be much discord and tension. At the time of writing, concern over the financial sustainability of the four Welsh regional teams and the increase in outward player migration to the economic core of world rugby dominates discussions on the future of the Welsh game. In addition to the financial incentives on offer for leading players to leave Wales, some may also be tempted by the celebrity lifestyle offered elsewhere.

Graeme Turner (2004) has noted that the contemporary celebrity will usually have emerged from the sport or entertainment industries and that ‘their private lives will attract greater public interest than their professional lives’ (p.3). The leading rugby players in Wales (like various other athletes), became celebrities as the increased commercialisation and commodification of elite sport afforded them varied opportunities to develop a profile beyond the game. Much of my own research over the past few years has looked at the cultural politics of celebrity within rugby union in Wales (e.g. Harris, 2006, 2012, 2013a, 2013b; Harris and Clayton, 2007). The visibility of Wales in rugby union helps raise awareness of the nation in an international context and projects an image and identity that few other activities are able to provide. Yet is important not to overstate this reach, for the game is still largely played and watched in only a small group of nations and the governance of the sport is firmly controlled by a hegemonic core (Harris, 2010). Later in this paper, in discussing the case of the Rugby World Cup, I address some of the important issues shaping this particular part of the sports world.

In a wider sense, sport can be a particularly powerful tool for (re)presenting the Welsh nation and portraying a particular (at times imagined) identity (Harris, 2007;
Holden, 2011; Johnes, 2005). Famous athletes bear national mythologies in different ways as the sporting body can be both extended to encompass the nation, and compressed to obscure any social divisions that might be seen to threaten national unity (Miller, Lawrence, McKay and Rowe, 2001). In an age of increased globalisation, the role of sport (and major international sporting events in particular), provides a means of putting a place on the map and raising its profile in an international context. This, in part, explains why there is now such competition to host these events. To explore this further I now turn to the role of mega events in contemporary Wales.

Mega events and (re)presentations of place

Large-scale international sporting events, often described as mega-events (Roberts, 2004; Roche, 2000), are now well-established as important drivers of various regeneration and rebranding strategies. Cities and nations across the world compete for the rights to host these events and the bidding process has taken on an extra significance in recent years. Roche (2000) has described these as large-scale cultural events ‘which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance’ (p.1). Such events attract widespread media coverage and may have significant impacts on the host city/region (Weed, 2007). Yet what is not always acknowledged is that these events differ markedly not only from one another, but also with each staging of a particular event. An example to illustrate this is that whilst the 2010 Ryder Cup in Wales was used as a vehicle for a much broader tourism agenda (Harris and Lepp, 2011; Harris, Lepp and Lee, 2012), the 2008 event in Louisville two years earlier had nothing like the same investment or focus to develop the place as a tourist destination.

Roberts (2004) notes how the lines are blurred, and that ‘some megas are bigger than others’ (p.109). For a number of years now the two most ‘mega’ of the mega events, the Olympic Games (Summer) and Football World Cup (Men), have attracted the attention of scholars (e.g. Sugden and Tomlinson, 1998; Weed, 2007). As indicated previously, for different reasons Wales is largely invisible in these two events. In the whole history of the Football World Cup, Wales has only appeared in the finals of the tournament on one occasion. In 1958 they lost to the eventual tournament winners Brazil although it is often overlooked that Wales did not originally qualify for the finals and were given the opportunity to do so by playing against Israel in a special playoff match. There have been qualifying campaigns that have promised much, and briefly enticed Welsh football fans with the prospect of a summer abroad following the national team (e.g. 1994 World Cup, 2004 European Championships), but ultimately these campaigns ended in failure.

The Olympic Games of course represents a different scenario and Welsh men and women have competed in these with distinction for many years. Athletes such as Lynn Davies (Tokyo, 1964) and Jade Jones (London, 2012) have taken gold medals, but this has always been under the British flag. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss the subject in any detail here, it should be noted that the Red Dragon is not represented on the Union Jack flag and this remains a contentious and problematic issue when discussing the representation of Wales in a British context. The Europe of regions seemed to offer much to a country such as Wales that had been marginalized in many spheres. However, it found itself wiped off the map of Europe in 2004 when the front cover of the Eurostat Yearbook had somehow sunk Wales into the Irish Sea. Whilst not appearing on the British flag, the
Welsh flag was included on the base of all golf bags carried by the caddies of Team Europe in 2010 when the Ryder Cup took place in Wales.

As the most prestigious sporting events become increasingly commercialised and commodified, then only the biggest and/or the most affluent nations are in a position to stage them. Of course Wales has neither the population base nor the economy to be a realistic contender to host these two mega events, but it has staged two others that have each presented competing claims for being the third biggest sporting event in the world and the Rugby World Cup and golf’s Ryder Cup both offering interesting sites to explore the positioning of Wales on an international stage. I will now look at these in turn to explore some of the ways in which the nation is visible here and attempt to tease out important issues shaping that domain.

**The Ryder Cup**

As outlined above, large-scale sporting events have the capacity to make a significant impact on the host city and/or the host nation. In discussing the possibilities of staging the Ryder Cup in 2010 and what this could mean at the national level, Ryder Cup Wales (2008) stated that:

The Ryder Cup represents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to put Wales on the map. We are an ambitious nation, eager to raise prosperity and to improve the quality of life of the people of Wales. A key element in this process is to increase international awareness of Wales and what we have to offer.

The Ryder Cup was first contested in 1927, although an unofficial match had taken place a year prior to that. The trophy was named after the English seed merchant Samuel Ryder, a keen golfer who wanted to see an international competition between the best golfers from Great Britain and the USA. Honours were shared in the earliest encounters before the USA began to dominate the competition winning nineteen of the first twenty-two matches. The cup was contested every two years with the tournament alternating between venues in the USA and in England for it was not until 1973, when Scotland were the hosts, that another British country staged the competition.

During the 1960s and 1970s such was the USA’s dominance of the competition that some expressed concern that the Ryder Cup would cease to exist as it was no longer perceived to be a fair and equal competition. Stafford (2006) describes the decision in 1979 to expand the Great Britain & Ireland team to include players from elsewhere in Europe as something that ‘saved a festival of golf that was in grave danger of petering out’ (p.18). The addition of golfers such as Seve Ballesteros from Spain and Bernhard Langer from Germany was the start of the rebirth of the event and the match became competitive once again with Europe now very much in the ascendancy. As the event increased in popularity from the mid 1980s on then more and more European nations saw the benefits that could be accrued from hosting the biennial match. Spain became the first European country outside of Britain to host a Ryder Cup in 1997 and Ireland staged its first match in 2006.

It was the billionaire Sir Terry Matthews, owner of the Celtic Manor resort just outside of Newport, who was the driving force behind the first ever Ryder Cup to be staged in Wales. The Ryder Cup was viewed as an important event in promoting the Welsh nation because, as indicated previously, there is often an element of confusion as to what Wales really is. In North America, Wales has nothing close to the profile or status enjoyed by...
Scotland and Ireland. In their work on selling these Celtic nations to the North American market, Pritchard and Morgan (1996) note how Wales is far less likely to be a chosen destination for visitors from this area than England, Ireland or Scotland.

Two Welsh men captained the Ryder Cup team before 1979 and Ian Woosnam became the first Welshman to captain Team Europe in 2006. This one player had almost single-handedly flown the flag for Welsh golf in the international arena and noted in his autobiography some of the challenges that this brought (Woosnam, 2002). As the Official Ambassador to Welsh Golf, Woosnam reflected upon how ‘people used to ask me what part of England Wales was in’ (Visit Wales, 2007: p.8). In some ways, and evoking the spirit of Raymond Williams (1958, 1960), I saw Woosnam as very much a ‘Welsh European’ in this role and the celebration of his growing up on a farm in the ‘border country’ was one that was visible in a variety of texts.

What the event did demonstrate was the need for the different agencies to work together and emphasised the benefits of a partnership approach. Key stakeholders such as Sport Wales, Newport Unlimited, Newport City Council, and the Celtic Manor Resort ensured that the event was a great success. The Welsh Assembly Government set-up a legacy fund and Ryder Cup Wales 2010 Ltd. was created to maximise the wider benefits of hosting the event and helping to deliver a long term legacy for Wales. The focus on making this an event that would benefit golf across Wales was important and with the different agencies working together we saw a clear improvement in the marketing of the game to a wider audience. A number of golf clubs have benefited from the development of the sport associated with hosting this prestigious event.

From the perspective of generating increased tourism and promoting the brand of Wales, the match was impacted by a deluge of rain that forced the event into a fourth day for the first time in its eighty-three year history. The economic impact of the event has been put at £82.4 million (BBC, 2011) and there has been a significant rise in golf tourism in the country over the past decade. Yet in some ways the event did not really have the impact on the host city of Newport as was first envisaged, and it was disappointing that for the first time in the history of the event the host nation had no players taking part. In a sense this was a missed opportunity as many other Ryder Cup matches staged in Europe had used the ‘local’ as an important identity marker in its portrayal and promotion. As noted above, the promotional material and policy documentation leading up to the event made much use of Ian Woosnam as arguably the only widely recognisable Welsh figure in the sport (Harris and Lepp, 2011). Yet whilst ‘Woosie’ may have often been perceived as the lone standard-bearer for golf in Wales, it is an altogether different story in rugby where numerous men have represented Wales on the international stage and achieved a level of fame and recognition that has promoted the nation to a wider audience. Arguably then, there is no other international event where the Welsh nation is more visible than through the quadrennial Rugby World Cup competition.

**The Rugby World Cup**

Whereas Wales is largely on the periphery of many discussions surrounding sport and event management, it is through rugby union that the nation occupies a central role in the governance of an area of international sport. The dominance of the eight foundation unions, of which Wales is one, is important to note here for the voting process across the years has seen unions encouraged to back a particular bid in exchange for being awarded matches
The first world cup of the openly professional era in 1999 was hosted by Wales but matches also took place in England, France, Ireland and Scotland. The Millennium Stadium had been built at a cost of £114 million to stage the final of this event and resulted in massive debts for the Welsh Rugby Union (WRU) early into the new century. Their counterparts at the Football Association in England, whose difficulties in securing the redevelopment of Wembley Stadium meant that the Millennium Stadium staged FA Cup finals and football league play-off matches for a few years, really helped the WRU as without this additional income the debt could have spiralled out of control.

The construction of the stadium attracted much negative publicity, as is often the case when stadia are constructed for major events, but soon became a much-loved facility and is now visible in tourism promotion as an important symbol of a modern and vibrant nation. This change in the landscape, and the place if the new stadium within wider narratives of the nation is best captured by the following extract from the novel Cardiff Dead:

The old stadium, the Arms Park, was almost invisible from the centre of town. You were only really aware of it when you looked at it from over the river in Riverside. The new stadium dominated the centre and you could see it from almost anywhere in Cardiff. And, like pretty much everyone else, Tyra found it surprisingly inspiring. It suddenly made you aware that Cardiff was changing, that all the bollocks you heard people spit on the TV about being a European capital for the new century was really true.

(Williams, 2000: p.231)

This development also reflected the increasing centrality of Cardiff in various tourism promotions of Wales. As I have argued elsewhere, much of this tends to collapse Wales as a whole into something projected through its capital city (Harris, 2008). This has taken place alongside an increasing investment in the creative industries that has put Cardiff and Wales on the map and increased the brand value of both (Blandford and McElroy, 2011). This of course is a good thing in terms of raising awareness but it is also important that when we extend the discussion on the above in relation to major events we do not over-estimate the impacts that these actually have (see Jones, 2001; Preuss, 2007).

For some time now we have become increasingly aware that many events, particularly the most expensive to stage, are sold on a premise of under-estimated costs and over-estimated benefits. In the 1999 RWC just over a fifth of all matches actually took place in Wales and the two semi-finals were both played in England. Few were even aware that the RWC was going on in Scotland and miserable attendance figures and limited media attention left many feeling that the event had never actually taken place there. Poor scheduling of matches meant that the tournament often seemed to grind to a halt and the overall economic impact was much lower than widely claimed (Jones, 2001). So although officially the designated host nation on one occasion (1999) Wales has actually hosted World Cup matches over two other tournaments (1991, 2007) which means that there has never been a RWC in the northern hemisphere where Wales has not hosted a match. It is the next RWC competition that really offers up some interesting food for thought in looking at the (re)presentation of Wales in an international context.

In 2015 England hosts the eighth RWC and will make use of the numerous excellent football stadia in the country. This of course limits the costs associated with building new
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stadia. For the game in an international context, it is an important event as it needs to generate significant revenues given that the last RWC in New Zealand was not one that was able to do this. The Millennium Stadium will be the only facility outside of England to be used for matches here. In much of North America, the words England and Britain are often used interchangeably with little recognition (or at times understanding) of the differences between the two. Wales has yet to screen Braveheart, or even Brave, so in some contexts remains something of a hidden or forgotten nation and lacks the brand value of Scotland. Indeed, it was recently acknowledged by the Business Minister (Edwina Hart) that the Welsh Government had not got its branding of the country right (BBC, 2012). This perception of Wales as a region of England remains and in relation to major sporting events it could be argued that in a number of spheres it lacks presence as a distinct and identifiable brand (Harris, Lee and Lepp, 2012; Harris and Lepp, 2011). Although it is not a part of England, Wales is of course a part of Great Britain and in 2012 London hosted the biggest event in the world.

The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games

I noted earlier that Wales was somewhat invisible in the two biggest sporting events in the world but it is as a part of Great Britain and Northern Ireland that Welsh athletes compete at the Olympic Games. To be British does not mean that an individual is any less Welsh and it is often stated that the Welsh were the first Britons. It is important not to over-simplify the identities at play here for there are, and always have been, Welsh people who are proud to call themselves British and many are comfortable with this dual identity (Johnes, 2012; Ward, 2004, 2006). The opening ceremony of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games faced not only the challenge of living up to the memorable spectacle of Beijing four years previously, but also had to ensure that all parts of the wider collective of Great Britain and Northern Ireland were represented. Danny Boyle’s celebration of the National Health Service, and a long sequence on the industrial revolution, ensured that Wales featured at the core of these narratives and the Welsh press were generous in their praise for it. Whilst the opening ceremony exceeded most people’s expectations, and was deemed a spectacular success, it should be noted that the Games had actually started two days before the ceremony when the Millennium Stadium had hosted a women’s football match between Great Britain & Northern Ireland and New Zealand.

In the build-up to the Games it was often put forward that this was very much a British bid and that all parts of the country would benefit from the Games. Part of the rationale outlined for this was the projected economic return of staging football matches and hosting Olympic teams. Of course, the actual impacts of the above was much overstated and was never likely to really make much of an impact on places around the periphery. Tickets for women’s football matches had to be given away as there just wasn’t the demand to watch many of these, despite the fact that numerous other events were sold out, and the leading nations all had their training bases in parts of England.

Yet the success of the torch relay, which symbolically took the Games to all corners of the nation, was celebrated across Wales. During the year of Queen Elizabeth II’s diamond jubilee a popular celebration of Britishness permeated at numerous levels. It is widely acknowledged that London 2012 was a great success and offered a temporary ‘feel good’ factor to a nation in the midst of a recession. In an age where traditional notions of community have declined and the search for new and alternative collective identities are
desirable, the Games demonstrated the remarkable capacity of major sporting events to temporarily bring people together and provide a common reference point. For a while they created something of a media vortex whereby all news channels led with stories on the event and sport moved well beyond the usual confines of the sports pages.

Although a vehicle for a celebration of Britishness, various groups were keen to capitalise on the success of particular nations and/or regions within this wider collective as a means of promoting a different agenda. Ahead of a very important year for Scotland in 2014, the First Minister sent out a good luck wish to the ‘Scolympians’ who were part of Team GB. Gold medals for athletes such as Katherine Grainger, Andy Murray and Sir Chris Hoy were used by some as a symbol in the quest for Scottish independence. As the event proceeded others were quick to point out the remarkable success of athletes from Yorkshire and noted that if Yorkshire was a country then it would have finished twelfth on the medal table. Welsh athletes won seven medals at the Olympic Games and fifteen at the Paralympic Games, although as with the two cases referred to above many of these were as part of teams where they competed alongside colleagues from other nations and/or regions. Such discussion also ignores the financial support of many of these athletes through the national lottery fund and the distribution of monies through organisations such as UK Sport. Many of these men and women who took part, in athletics for example, will be proud to wear the colours of Wales at the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow but competing in the Olympics (and therefore representing Team GB) remains the pinnacle of an athletic career.

Sport has long been used as a tool for political gain and major events are often now framed as a panacea to help combat issues such as rising obesity rates, decreasing physical activity levels or wider urban decline. In reality though, fostering a temporary ‘feel good factor’ is the most that many mega events can ever achieve even though a number are sold on the now popular rhetoric of legacy and the predicted impacts that staging events can have on host communities. The language of legacy looms large in the discussion of events of various shapes and sizes although much more work is needed to explore the real impacts that these can really have (Preuss, 2007). Indeed, there is a developing school of thought that suggests there may be more to be gained from hosting smaller-scale events and that these are more likely to deliver tangible benefits to host communities. To briefly explore this subject in relation to Wales I now turn to the case of the World Alternative Games.

The World Alternative Games

Whilst it is the mega events that have occupied the attention of scholars across the globe and continue to be a focus of media attention and widespread discussion, there are numerous other events that take place across the world every year. Just after the Olympic Games had finished in London the inaugural World Alternative Games (Gemau Byd Arallddewisol) took place in Llanwrtyd Wells. Other events in this geographic area such as the Hay Festival, Royal Welsh Show and Brecon Jazz point to the vibrant and ever-developing events industry in Wales. Research suggests that smaller scale events may have the capacity to build a more sustainable image for a host community (Kaplanidou and Vogt, 2010). Whilst more work is needed in this area to explore the subject further and look at a range of different events across various locales, events such as those listed above undoubtedly offer an interesting window through which to look at the events industry in
different parts of Wales and some offer the potential to have a significant impact at the community level.

The idea of a World Alternative Games (WAG) was born after it was announced that London had won the rights to host the 2012 Olympic Games. For if the world’s biggest sporting event could take place in Britain’s biggest city, then why not do something in Britain’s smallest town? It was noted that the contemporary Olympic Games were in numerous ways far removed from the ideologies of Olympism. In evoking the Corinthian spirit, the World Alternative Games was an attempt to emphasise that ‘taking part should be what really counts’ (World Alternative Games, 2012: p.2). With funding from the Welsh Assembly Government evidencing their commitment to the vision outlined in the Major Events Strategy (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008) the event took place from August 17 to September 2, 2012. More than just a celebration of fun and quirky physical activities such as backward running and wife-carrying, the World Alternative Games also encompassed various evening events centred on music and other arts. A wider celebration of cultural festivities included activities of a distinctly Welsh bent, and a ‘twinning day’ celebrated Llanwrtyd’s relationship with Meriel in France and Cesky Krumlov in the Czech Republic, were part of the wider programme. Numerous media coverage focused on the event with a feature on BBC’s Breakfast programme and a segment on Transworld Sport amongst the most high-profile of these.

A team of dedicated volunteers from the local community ensured that the first World Alternative Games were a success. They provided laughter and good outdoor fun for many residents of this small town and its surrounding areas. Of course the two weeks were also a great learning curve for all involved and emphasised the need for more volunteers when the event next takes place in 2014. This is a very topical issue in sport and event management, with the much-lauded appreciation of the Games Makers at London 2012 giving a profile and exposure to volunteering that we have never seen before in a major event context. On the back of this we have already witnessed a massive expressed interest in volunteering for the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. Volunteers play an increasingly important role in the provision of a range of events at all levels and the subject of volunteering is an expanding area of academic research for scholars across the globe.

Concluding remarks
This paper has offered an overview of sport in contemporary Wales and has looked at the ways in which sporting events may promote particular identities and images of Wales. The work has engaged with various representations of Wales although of course it is important to note that there is no singular Wales and that the nation and the experiences people derive from ‘being Welsh’ differs markedly due to a whole host of factors including (for example) age, race, sex, language, geography and social class. It has, admittedly, focused only on particular parts of the sporting events industry and it has not been possible to look at all areas of this vast and fast developing landscape.

There has been no discussion of cricket for example. I have commented elsewhere on the silent W in the England and Wales Cricket Board which has usually been presented as the ECB (Harris, 2006) and where the top players in Britain represent a team called England. The current Glamorgan captain, Mark Wallace, was an England U19 captain and some members of the county side over the past two decades (e.g. Robert Croft, Simon Jones,
Hugh Morris) have gone on to represent the senior England team. In relation to major events the staging of an Ashes test match between England and Australia during 2009 and a one-day international as part of the Cricket World Cup in 1999 both reflected the increasing importance of the city of Cardiff within this sport. The limitations of space, and the particular focus of the paper on sporting events, has also precluded discussion of the rise of two Welsh football teams to the top tier of English football. Having Swansea City and Cardiff City both playing in one of the most popular sports leagues in the world, in the global sport *par excellence*, is undoubtedly exciting for Welsh football but it remains to be seen what impact this will have on Wales and representations of the nation in a wider international context given that this is the English Premier League and in some ways the presence of the two teams may just reinforce the perception that Wales is a part of England.

What this essay has shown is the undoubted importance of sporting events in contemporary Wales and the challenges and possibilities of developing future work in the subjects of sport, tourism and event management. The close relationship of these to the wider creative industries that Steve Blandford (2012) wrote about in a recent issue of this journal, centring on the images and discourse of a modern and vibrant nation, is important to note. Here we see an increased focus on the city region and the rise of the creative classes (Florida, 2008). The great challenge for Wales in this context, when we extend the discussion to incorporate sport and event management, is making sense of and clearly articulating aspects of its relationship with England. This for me this remains one of the most challenging and contentious subjects to be addressed when looking at the portrayal of Wales in various international contexts. Sport is a particularly powerful tool for (re)imaging and (re)imagining place, and offers an international stage that few other areas can. Sporting events offer a nation such as Wales the means to promote and position itself in a way that is not possible in numerous other contexts. Further research is needed to explore the congruence of event and destination image fit within the nation and to consider how we may continue to develop Wales the brand.

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References


