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**Challenges and constraints in developing and implementing sports policy and provision in Antigua and Barbuda: Which way now for a small island state?**

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## **Challenges and constraints in developing and implementing sports policy and provision in Antigua and Barbuda: Which way now for a small island state?**

### *Abstract*

This paper examines the challenges and constraints of sport policy agenda setting and policy development in a small nation context of Antigua and Barbuda. It also aims to understand and explore existing limitations, issues and trajectories in sport policy implementation. The project draws upon a mixed methods approach encompassing documentary analysis, thirty in-depth interviews and visual methodology in the form of photo observations. Through this methodology, the purpose of the paper is to open up sport policy agendas allowing the 'voices' of those local populations, policy makers, coaches and volunteers to be heard within the context of this study and wider sport policy research. Initial findings indicate sport and physical activity as a contested policy priority, barriers in cross-departmental collaboration, elite sport and performance agenda dilemmas and considerable limitations in third sector human infrastructure and physical facilities. Implications from this small nation sport policy context highlight the need for improved public policy problem definition and the need for clarity in agenda setting within tiers of the evolving sport policy community. Finally, the tentative potential positive policy spaces for future implementation and lessons in policy design involving national, regional and local actors and agencies are identified.

**Key words: Caribbean sport, Antigua and Barbuda, small state, policy implementation agenda setting**

## Introduction

There has been a growth of academic interest in the analysis of sport policy as developed by governments in global settings (Bergsgard et al 2007, Houlihan 2005). Equally, there has been a growing range of interest in the various aspects of government machinery and its influence on sports policy including ‘the public value’ of sport (Brookes and Wiggan 2009, Sam 2011), modernization agendas (Houlihan and Green 2009), wider social policy goals linked to sport (Coalter 2007, Palmer 2013) and systems and factors in the development of elite sports talent (De Bosscher *et al.* 2008, Houlihan 2009, Stotlar and Wonders 2006). However, in the context of this paper most of the focus on this literature has been on the larger, ‘western’ or Global North state economies (Palmer 2013). This imbalance is in part addressed through the research undertaken in this paper that considers the challenges and constraints of agenda setting and implementation of sports policy development in the small nation case of Antigua and Barbuda.

Currently studies of sports policy in the Caribbean region are minimal. Exceptions to this include an analysis of new public management (NPM) in Trinidad and Tobago’s sports delivery system (McCree 2009) and the minimal role of sport in economic development policy (McCree 2008). Crucially though Trinidad and Tobago has a *White paper on Sport* dating back as far as 1988 (GOTT 1988), and a first government sport policy rolled out in 2002 (GOTT 2002). A further study considered the potential role for World Cup cricket tourism as a catalyst for economic development in the West Indies (Tyson *et al.* 2006). Whilst these studies set the scene for a field of study in the region, understanding of sports policy development in the region is emergent at best.

Analysis of smaller nation states is not to be confused with states in developing countries or what has increasingly been referred to as sport-for-development, sport-for peace and/or sport-in-development (Coalter 2007, Lindsay and Grattan 2012, Levermore and Beacom 2009). In this sense this paper is not an analysis of whether policy goals have been achieved in a developing economy to pursue wider social policy goals around public health, education and specific fields such as HIV and community medicine. This is not to say that lessons cannot be learnt from the sport-for-development literature in this context. Indeed there are distinct parallels with this context, where there appears to be features of sport-for-

development fields such as top-down policy and programme development (Levermore and Beacom 2009), power imbalances between policy actors (Lindsay and Banda 2011, Lindsay and Gratton 2012) and a need to recognise and reposition local actors within the research process (Kay 2009). In part the case of Antigua and Barbuda in this paper offers an evaluation of a country that is comparatively small in size, ‘emergent’ and aspirational in terms of its sports policy and provides particular insights into the challenges/difficulties of policy development. Whilst past research that has taken a comparative analysis is helpful as a starting point for unpicking central potential themes to address (Henry 2007), the starting point for this project was a dialogue between research team, the National Olympic Committee (NOC) and the Ministry of Sport (MoS). This was underpinned by a strong commitment to the need for knowledge, fresh insights and the establishment of a starting point for sports policy development, and to open dialogue between those involved in its design and implementation. Thus the central aims of this research paper are:

- to explore the challenges of a sport policy agenda setting and policy development in a small nation context;
- to understand and examine existing challenges, issues and constraints in sport policy implementation in Antigua and Barbuda;
- to open up sport policy agendas allowing the ‘voices’ of those local populations, policy makers, coaches and volunteers to be heard within the context of this study and wider sport policy research;
- to identify and evaluate the key policy priorities and tensions present within the emergent sport policy community of Antigua and Barbuda.

Existing robust research data and strategic documentation in this national context was informally noted down in hard copy paper. Therefore, as has been stated in relation to the parallel and related field of education “educational research on the Caribbean focuses upon the larger islands and there is little tradition of ... research in the smaller eastern Caribbean states” (Younger and George 2012, p. 7). However, this potential gap in knowledge, understanding and baseline level of policy evidence and infrastructure has been a core rationale for developing the project and the relationship between the research team and government. A core theme within the academic literature has been the emergence of the need for evidence-based policy making and associated systems (Modernizing Government 1999, Houlihan and Green 2009, Palmer 2012, Piggin *et al.* 2009, Smith and Leech 2010). Such small states with emergent policy structures do

not have sufficient policy and programme maturity that fit such mantras easily. Likewise, Collins (2010) clearly establishes the policy and theoretical dilemmas inherent in aspiring to follow other country's mass participation levels and associated programme development. We are also mindful to align to the research perspective of Palmer (2013) by not imposing western 'Orientalist' perspectives and policy understandings, frameworks and conceptual discourses onto the research project, data and subjectivities. Likewise Kay (2009) and Lindsay and Gratton (2012) argue for a decolonisation of knowledge, research and methodologies in developmental contexts. This assertion applies to our research philosophy given our explicit focus on opening up and prioritising the voices of local actors in this small nation context.

This project was informed by the collaboration and research dialogue between two UK universities research teams, the NOC and MoS for Antigua and Barbuda underpinned by the philosophical position of Lindsey and Gratton (2012). Here, the authors argue for closer relationships led by local agencies as opposed to Global-North imposed agendas. It was not a commissioned piece of work as such but was established as part of a longer term vision to develop better practices and policies by building an on-going research relationship (Darko and Mackintosh 2012). One of the key drivers behind this approach was the need to draw lessons from past experiences from other countries that have had limited infrastructure in developing contexts<sup>1</sup>. Indeed a lack of data on sports participation and programmes from government sources has been identified as a core theme in African developing nations (Andreff 2001, Souchaud 1995), and this scarcity was the starting point for the present study.

Here we have attempted to allow the 'voices' of those local populations, policy makers, coaches and volunteers to be heard within our study as opposed to imposing a westernised, false dichotomy of choices (Shehu and Mokgwathi 2007). But, an ability to open up such research in small, developing nations and allowing them to be 'heard' can be seen in the honest account from a sport policy research blog account by Lindsay (2012):

Whilst undertaking research with organisations from the Global South...[I have felt] seriously conflicted. As someone from the 'richer' Global North, interviewees have ...made many eminently reasonable requests for support from me. Balancing a desire to contribute ...to in-country development against the impossibility of meeting all of the requests for support, of not encouraging dependency and of maintaining the

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<sup>1</sup> This is the first phase of the project and it is intended to be part of a next phase of research, consultation and training between the project partners

neutrality that is often expected of a researcher has frequently been challenging

The research team faced this central dilemma from the outset of the project in this small state.

## **Theoretical considerations**

### *Small nations*

The highly contested domain of theoretically or practically defining what constitutes a small state (Colomer 2007, Hey 2003, Marleku 2013) provides an unhelpful starting point for establishing a clear analytical tool in this study. Hey (2003) goes as far as to suggest that ‘smallness’ itself is a problematic analytical tool. Clearly there are blurred dividing lines between what a small state represents whether defined by demographic, economic or geographic size. In this paper we use the term small state as a starting point for locating our empirical study within a wider discourse of sports policy analysis. Hey (2003, p. 2) identifies the three main conceptualisations of the small state as,

*Microstate* – states with a population less than one million inhabitants such as the former British Colonies in the Caribbean; *small states in the developed world* – especially Austria, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Nederland and Switzerland; and *small states in the so-called third world*, include former colonies in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Precise definition around size of population is problematic and subjective, although countries with less than one million inhabitants are often classified as ‘micro’ states (Colomer 2007). Others have classified micro-states as those countries with less than one million inhabitants (World Bank 2004). Therefore the overall classification system or schema for such states has no established consensus (Hower 2008). Of relevance to this paper we also recognise the approach suggested by Keohane (1969) who highlights the importance of subjectivity and power relations in such conceptualisations, in the sense that small states are defined how they see themselves and how others go about defining them. Certainly it appears Antigua would ‘fit’ with an understanding of the micro-state in this literature, yet at under ninety thousand inhabitants it is far from near the upper limit of 1 million participants suggested by some (Easterly and Kraay 1999, Hey 2003) and even further from the 1.5 million population figure quoted by others (Marleku 2013).

What is clearer is that nearly two thirds of the world's population resides in either small countries or those under the legislative control of small non-state governments (Colomer 2007). Antigua and Barbuda is one such country that sits nearer the micro-state conceptualisation, of which it has been suggested there are around 40 such countries. A specific research focus of this article was to assess the challenges of sport policy development and implementation in such a small nation context. Colomer (2007) identifies that there are three characteristic benefits of small nation democratic government, firstly, that of *deliberation* where citizens have more opportunity to deal directly with political actors and institutions. Secondly, *aggregation* where citizens inhabit a more homogenous community and have a more harmonious values, culture and collectively find it easier to identify priorities for public goods. Finally, *enforcement* meaning citizens are more likely to comply with collective rules and leaders may be more responsive in terms of their own independent decision making. Similarly, Antigua and Barbuda the small nation educational policy research context was identified as having the benefits of high actor interconnectivity, a geographically small scale and strong collaborative synergies within the school zoning system (Younger and George 2012). Whether such considerations apply in this case of sport policy will be considered within this paper.

### ***Antigua and Barbuda***

The twin islands of Antigua and Barbuda lie between the Atlantic Ocean to the east and the Caribbean Sea to the west. It has a population of approximately 89,000 (Indexmundi 2013). In total “91% of the inhabitants are black... 4.4% are mixed, 1.7% White and 2.9% [are classified as] other” (Clancy 2012, p. 6). The majority of Antiguan are of African lineage, descendants of slaves brought to the island to work. The population also consists of Hispanic immigrants, mainly from the Dominican Republic. There are a higher percentage of males than females with the sex ratio for the total population being 0.9 male(s)/female (2011 est, Indexmundi 2012).

The islands are economically undeveloped. Historically, the sugar cane industry has been a central means for supporting the islands' income (O'Loughlin 1961). However, tourism now dominates the economy, accounting for approximately 60% of GDP and 40% of investment (Indexmundi 2013). Sport has never been an integral part of Caribbean economic revenue and development (McCree 2009).

Antigua and Barbuda's governance and culture have largely been influenced by the

British Empire, of which the country was formally part of until 1981. A parliamentary democracy under a federal constitutional monarchy exists, with two levels of government, central and local (Clancy 2012). The bicameral legislature comprises a 17-member House of Representatives (the lower house) elected every five years and a Senate (upper house) of 17 appointed members. Political parties that currently exist include the United Progressive Party (UPP), currently holding the majority of seats, the Antigua Labour Party (ALP) and Barbuda People's Movement (BPM) (NOC 2012).

Whilst sports are part of the culture in Antigua and Barbuda, it is predominantly travel writers (Kras 2008) who have commented on levels of sports participation and physical activity. Our research revealed that sports associations, the NOC and government schools have unofficial figures of sports participation, evident in paper and non-digitised format. However, these statistics are not readily available and their reliability is questionable. There is also limited research that provides a description of sports policy and examines the challenges of its development. The paucity of such data is apparent across many of the developing Caribbean islands (McCree 2009).

#### *Public policy problems, agenda setting and implementation*

In the context of this small state this paper focuses on the theoretical sphere of the sport policy agenda, political priorities, challenges and constraints around implementation. In analytical terms wider questions of whether it is structure or agency dominate (Colebatch 1998, Cairney 2012, Parsons 1995). The balance between institutional structural influences that have shaped and influenced Antiguan and Barbudan sport policy align closely with the interactions that both powerful political, policy and community actors. Indeed, it seems particularly pertinent to consider such issues in this unique political setting of islands of under 89,000 inhabitants. In many cases government committees, departments and policy networks are more likely to rest with the decision making of a small set of individual actors. As a theoretical starting point we have taken the view of policy analysis suggested by Sabatier (2007, p. 4) that 'given the staggering complexity of the policy process, the analyst must find some way of simplifying the situation in order to have any chance of understanding it' Following this call we make no attempt to use an overarching theoretical frame to guide our research. As has been argued in relation to sport-for-development contexts in the Global South, research driven by a particular theoretical framework can reify singular abstract accounts (Long 2001, Moore 1999). Here we draw

a parallel with the work of Lindsay and Gratton (2012) and Kay (2011) in our attempt to protect against western colonising theoretical knowledge in this research setting. However, we do use sensitising theoretical ideas (Sibeon 1997) that can be utilised as resources for developing understanding in this empirical study. In the context of public sport policy analysis in this paper we take the definition of agency as ‘the ability of an actor to act to realise its goals. The implication of this is that this is the intentional action based on an actor’s thought process’ (Cairney 2012, p. 10). Actors are assumed to be entities that can make decisions, formulate views and act upon such decisions. We draw a distinction between *individual* human actors and *social* actors such as committees, micro groups and organisations (Sibeon 1997). Here, we also share the view that ‘organisational policy decisions and organisational actions are sometimes the indeterminate and contingent outcome of conflict and struggle among the individuals, groups or departments that constitute the organisation’ (Clegg 1989, p.197). In following on from this standpoint Cobb and Coughlin (1998) make a useful distinction between two different types of policy actors, the policy agenda ‘expander’ and ‘container’. Here, it is delineated that some policy expanding actors redefine, reshape and represent issues that are not under current consideration. In contrast to this, the policy containing actors are those that seek to prevent issues from reaching an agenda. In the case of Antigua and Barbuda, and that of a specifically small or micro state we have found this a particularly useful conceptual distinction to make. We make the further conceptual clarification that the state is therefore not an actor in itself. In this sense, ‘it is not the state that acts, but state actors within particular parts of the state’ (Smith 1993, p. 50). A detailed discussion of this is beyond the scope of the paper, but it provides clarity of a theoretical standpoint to underpin the research.

Policy analysis is broadly concerned with ‘problems’ and the linked relationships of public policies to these problems, the content of policy and what policy makers do or do not do in delivering against the outcomes of policy (Parsons 1995). Numerous authors have outlined approaches to studying phases, stages and cycles of the policy process that the policy analyst is concerned with (Hill 2005, Hogwood and Gunn 1984, Howlett and Ramesh 2003, Parsons 1995). Although others have argued this is an oversimplification of a complex process (Cairney 2012, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 2003). In contrast other sport policy researchers such as Keat and Sam (2012) have used a three way conceptualisation of the policy process proposed by Rist (1998) in terms of policy problem, policy instrument and policy target to provide a lens on the regional sport policy process in New Zealand. This framework

could provide a neat sensitising conceptual ‘triad’ to unpick the realm of policy analysis in Antigua and Barbuda. However, part of the challenge of the small nation context of this paper is the incomplete policy infrastructure, limited problem definition, often hidden instruments and vague notions of targeting through policy. We are also sensitive to not enact westernised false dichotomy of choices on the study of policy in such settings (Shehu and Mokgwathi 2007). However, this literature provides a wider conceptual context to this research paper as the focus for this study of a small nation is sport policy agenda setting, policy development constraints, challenges and emergent issues in implementation.

Defining and prioritising policy problems in the field of sport and physical activity are highly contested in most government settings (Houlihan 2005, Houlihan and Green 2006). For example, Sam and Jackson (2004) have identified issues around policy coherence and coordination alongside other authors exploring the need for greater ‘evidence-based’ sport policy (Piggin *et al.* 2009). Priorities between the dichotomy of elite sport success and mass sports participation also play out amidst complex sets of actors and institutional historical contexts (Grix and Carmichael 2012). Sport policy development and analysis in Antigua and Barbuda is emergent at best with a considerable lack of current internal research, baseline statistical data and academic material (Darko and Mackintosh 2012). As stated above, the academic and empirical starting point for this project was incomplete data, limited policy baseline information and fragmented knowledge from the local sport policy community. This paper is in part about agenda setting and problem definition which Knill and Tosun (2012) argue is about identifying ‘initial moments’ and a range of policy and ‘problem’ perceptions that usually operate within a highly contested domain. In considering a theoretical starting point for the problem definition in the case of Antigua and Barbuda, we also draw upon Knill and Tosun’s (2012) framework that identifies two core features of problem definition. Firstly, the level of objective data that is available on a problem and secondly, the degree to which this data is acknowledged and utilised. In the case of Antigua and Barbuda there is minimal data on sports policy, provision and participation and even less so any apparent use of this relevant evidence. This suggests actor values can be centrally important, as Knill and Tosun (2012, p.101) propose “the more uncertain the information environment surrounding an issue, the more likely it is that an individual will rely on these established values”.

Resultantly, the lack of attention this policy sub-field has received in terms of the

existing and historical agendas, priorities and initial development of policy instruments provides fertile ground for gaining insight to the sport policy process in a small nation context. Equally, the highly incomplete, information limited and value driven policy actor environment supports our conceptualisation of this specific small island context as one that demands a grounded inductive empirical investigation. We instead acknowledge the complexity of the policy process (Cairney 2012, Houlihan 2005, Sabatier 2003, Sabatier and Jenkins 2003). Following Sabatier's (2007) call for the need to pinpoint a starting point we "recognise how complexity, change and following the consciousness of the actors we are studying, limit our scope for the establishment of generalisations" (Hill 2005, p. 15).

### **Government, Sports Policy Infrastructure and Background**

#### *A brief history of government involvement in sport*

Private and voluntary investment centring on individual activities and their needs has dominated sports provision. The various political parties and individual actors have played a role in supporting provision in sports since the 1940s however changes in government, political conflicts and lack of economic resources have halted sustained practice and successful formulation of provision. There is no existing academic research into the voluntary sector, its resources, challenges and infrastructure.

Whilst the government has assisted in provision, non-governmental organisations, ( such as the Antigua and Barbuda National Olympic Committee) have also assisted. The NOC was established in 1996, after the demise of the West Indies Federation (Mordecai 1968). In accordance with the Olympic Charter the NOC progresses and protects the Olympic Movement in Antigua and Barbuda and liaises with governmental and non-governmental bodies, to accomplish this (IOC 2012). Numerous sports and sporting events are supported by the NOC. They seek to support the development of sport for all programmes and high performance. They also participate in the training of sports administrators and economically facilitate participation in international games, such as The Pan Am Games using the earlier framework proposed by Cobb and Coughlin (1998) the NOC could be seen as a key social actor conceptualised as an issue expander in how it attempted to bring sport policy issues to the fore and prioritized related 'problems' and agendas since 1996.

Within the existing Antigua and Barbuda ministry, The Ministry of Education, Sports, Youth and Gender Affairs (MESYGA) has oversight of the Local Government Department.

Within this, the Local Government Department falls within the Office of the Minister of State with responsibility for Sports, Local Government and Special Projects (OMS SLS). The OMS SLS has responsibility for providing technical support to the Department in the form of a consultant dedicated to conducting a review of the local government system and to making recommendations for its future development.

Following the General Elections of 2009, Dr. Leandro was appointed as the Minister of Education, Youth, Sports and Gender Affairs. Senator, Winston Williams was also appointed to serve in this Ministry as the Minister of State. The Department of Sports & Recreational Management comprises of the Sports & Recreational Events Management Division, Youth Sports & Community Development Unit, National Executive Council on Sports and the National Institute of Sports & Recreation (NISR) and the Sports & Recreational Product Development Division. The NISR was established to provide “education and training for sports administrators, technicians and high performance athletes. [It] ... also serve[s] to provide sports related services to include research and professional development and enrichment courses” (A&B NSRP 2011-4, p. 10).

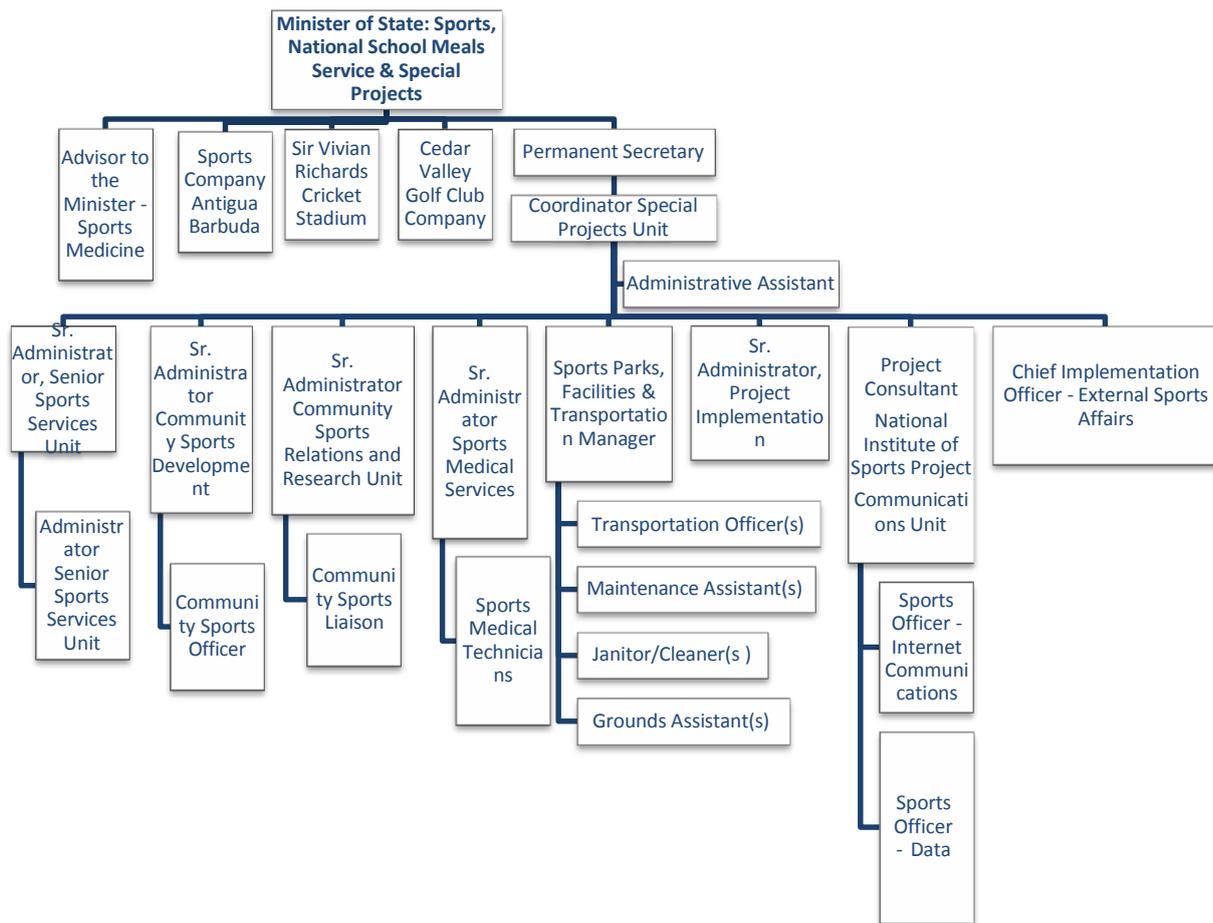
The Ministry of Education also has a designated Sports Unit to develop sports at all levels and the Office of the Minister of State in the Ministry of Education, Sports, Gender & Youth Affairs is responsible for Sports, Boys Training School, Local Government & Special Projects including the National School Meals Service (NSMS)<sup>2</sup>. Please see **Figure 1:1** below for the organisation chart of the Secretariat, Minister of State: Sports, National School Meals Service & Special Projects.

Provision for participation in physical education is apparent at Pre-Primary, (3 – 5), Primary (5 – 12), Secondary (12 – 17) and Tertiary (17 and over) levels within schools. Despite this provision, physical education and *activity* are culturally accorded low academic or intellectual value. Furthermore, physical education in government schools is limited at all levels, unless students take it as a subject for CXC (Caribbean Examinations Council) exams (Antigua.gov.ag 2012). The association between sport and employment is minimal within the Caribbean islands (McCree 2009). The lack of commercialisation of sport and professionalism contributes to these cultural perceptions. These traditions have potentially led to a lack of political and cultural interest in stimulating the economy through sports related

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<sup>2</sup> Senator Winston Williams is responsible for this provision.

activity.



**Figure 1:1** 2013 Organizational Chart: Secretariat, Minister of State: Sports, National School Meals Service & Special Projects. Source Business Plan for 2013 MOSNSMS SUBMISSION TO CABINET 6 11 12, Ministry of Education, Sports, Youth and Gender Affairs: 5.

Due to the low levels of economic development in Caribbean small states, the amount of ministerial funding for sports and recreation is minimal. In the Antigua and Barbuda 2012 Budget Statement published on 5/12/2011 (pg 8), it is stated that an allocation of \$76,337,364 Eastern Caribbean Dollars (approximately US\$ 28.2 million) is made to implement the programmes and activities for the Ministry of Education, Sports, Youth and Gender Affairs. The difficulty this raises for sports provision, development and policy implementation is that financial support is heavily reliant on private funding and voluntary provision.

**Figure 1:2**, outlines the financial allocation and expenditure of the various departments within this Office. It also illustrates the proposed budget for 2013.

DEPTS	APPROVED 2012 ESTIMATES		2012				2013	
	XCD \$	US \$	JAN-AUG EXPENDED		SEPT- DEC		PROPOSED	
			XCD \$	US\$	XCD \$	US\$	XCD \$	US\$
SPORTS PE	4,495,754	1,665,094.07	2,937,210.23	1,087,855.64	1,558,543.77	577,238.43	4,570,034	1,692,605.19
SPORTS ACTIVITIES	505,060	187,059.26	214,991.27	79,626.40	291,268.73	107,877.31	1,349,000	499,629.63
NSMS PE	3,741,480	1,385,733.33	2,394,815.29	886,968.63	1,328,368.27	491,988.25	4,039,290	1,496,033.33
NSMS ACTIVITIES	2,739,282	1,014,548.89	1,012,743.02	375,090.01	878,627.22	325,417.49	2,909,282	1,077,511.85
TOTAL	11,481,576.00	4,252,435.56	6,559,759.81	2,429,540.67	4,054,807.99	1,501,780.74	12,867,606.00	4,765,780.00

**Figure 1:2.** 2013 Business Plan (Including 2012 Financial Report), Budget Forum 2 – Sept 17, 2012, Office of the Minister of State in the Ministry of Education, Sports, Youth and Gender Affairs. Figures are represented in both the local currency Eastern Caribbean Dollars (XCD\$) and US Dollars<sup>3</sup>.

### ***Development of National Sports and Recreation Policy***

Implementation of national sports and recreation policies for Caribbean islands are slowly developing, but they are regularly halted by changes of government, lack of economic resources and the restrictive traditions regarding the low value attached to the activity of sport. Some of the policies that exist, such as those in Grenada, are newly formulated. Subsequently, academic examination of sports policy in Caribbean is an emerging research area (McCree 2009). Over the years attempts have been made to implement a successful National Sports and Recreation Policy for Antigua and Barbuda, however, it was not until 2011 that a national policy materialized.

The Minister of State, responsible for Sports, established a Sports and Recreational Advisory Council (SRAC) to review the previous proposal for a national policy. This council, comprising of key sports and recreational stakeholders, conducted a review of the policy, research in the sports and recreation and developed a document entitled “the National Policy on Sports and Recreation ... [to] be further developed into legislation entitled the National Sports

<sup>3</sup> Figures converted to US dollars on 23/10/13, 1 USD = 2.70000 X

and Recreational Act” (A&B NSRP 2011-4, p. 4).

The second (UPP) administration drafted and enacted a National Sports Policy for Antigua and Barbuda in 2011. In several phases key individual actors have had significant influence on the shape, direction and pace of change. With a focus on putting sports in the core of communities and empowering them, they sought to promote the development of sports and participation. This draft “was presented to the Cabinet for Approval in August 2011, with subsequent submission to the Ministry of Legal Affairs for drafting of a Bill entitled the National Sports and Recreation Bill, ...tabled in the Parliament for its consideration ” (A&B NSRP 2011-14, p. 24).

Under this policy it is envisaged that the National Executive Council for Sports (NECS) is established to facilitate a holistic approach to sports provision. As a social actor or ‘micro group’ (Sibeon 1997) it comprises of representatives from the Ministry of Sports, sporting associations and corporate organisations. Likewise, in principal the NECS is a potential sport policy issue, problem and agenda ‘expander’ (Cobb and Coughlin 1998). The NECS promotes the partnering of key stakeholders in sports, stimulates growth and development in sports through sponsorship of community sporting clubs and provides financing for national sporting events and programmes. It will supervise and administer contributions to sports with the necessary inspections. It is also “responsible for monitoring and reporting on the state of compliance with the policies ... and will have authorisation to recommend, ... appropriate sanctions... as deemed necessary to bring non-compliant parties back into line”(A&B NSRP 2011-14, p. 5).

Aligned with international and Caribbean National Sports policies for Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and St Lucia, the A&B NSRP covers two broad dimensions of contemporary sports, Total Participation in Sports and High Performance Sports. In accordance with international definitions Total Participation in Sports is conceptualised as focusing on sports for all (Bergsgard *et al.* 2007). This policy seeks to encourage activities for all individuals irrespective of age, race, gender, ethnicity, religion and those who are “specially challenged” (A&B NSRP 2011-14, p. 5). High Performance Sport is understood as

focusing on elite athletes, allowing for successful development and international competition. Provision for both elite and mass sport are addressed simultaneously and must be linked to a “developed Physical Education programme from pre-school to primary, secondary and vocational schools to the tertiary education level” (A&B NSRP 2011-14, p. 8). This dichotomy reflects that of nearly every state-run sport system (Shehu and Mokgwathi 2007). Whether this is appropriate in the context of small island states is a significant issue (see below).

The purpose, objectives and concomitant language of the policy are identical to the National Sports and Recreation Policy for Trinidad and Tobago (2002), informed by the Australian National Sport Policy (McCree 2009). For example, the mission statement: “Total Participation, Quality Training and Excellence in Sports, is a slight variation of the Trinidad and Tobago statement: ‘To enrich our lives through Total Participation, Quality Training and Excellence in Sport’ (2002, p. 5). Furthermore, seven of the major related objectives that make provisions for total participation and high performance are identical to the Trinidad and Tobago policy (pg 8) and the eighth is comparable. Interestingly, the A&B NSRP clearly states, on page 6, that it has eight (8) major related objectives, yet nine are listed.

As CARICOM’s sub-committee on sport is instrumental in developing policy guidelines for sport, it is understandable why there is a level of convergence and comparability between the themes and language. Furthermore, with the global movement of policy and the concomitant ideologies, it is unsurprising that there is a level of resemblance (Palmer, 2013). However, implementation of the policy is potentially problematic if differences in economic, social, cultural and political contexts between the small states are not recognised at ministerial level, by the SRAC and emerging NECS (Collins 2010).

### ***Methodology***

This research was initiated by the senior researcher following recent visits to the islands through contacting the acting president of the NOC. The research aims were designed by the research team and facilitation was negotiated primarily with the NOC. The NOC facilitated access to the Ministry. However, this affected the way in which the research was carried out as the two organizations often worked independently with regard to the existence of sports provision. Accommodation expenses and office space were provided for the senior

researcher by the NOC. Additional travel and subsistence expenses were supported by the researcher's university and self-funded. The MoS provided transport for access to ministry facilities and staff. The senior researcher also sought additional transport to access facilities and meet interviewees. Due to the limited level of funds, the research data was collected over an intense three-week period in September 2012.

The study utilized a mixed-method approach guided by the interpretivist policy analysis perspective (Denzin 2001, Wagenaar 2012). The methods included analysis of secondary sources including government and sports policy documents, existing paperwork in the MoS and NOC. Secondary data sources included a limited survey of two hundred people examining sports participation, physical activity levels, participation in physical education and perceptions of provision amongst the local population<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, thirty semi-structured interviews and observation utilizing visual research methods (resulting in one hundred photographs) for facility observation were also employed. Mixed methods research designs have become more established in studies of physical activity and sports, and importantly sports policy evaluation (Gibson 2012). The focus of this study is on the qualitative interview and visual observational data collected to inform the research aims and the central purpose of this paper. Secondary data (due to their limitations) provide contextual policy information considerations for the research team and government, but are not the focus of this paper.

The series of semi-structured interviews was conducted with senior and junior members of the Ministry of Sport, National Olympic Committee and National Sports Association members. Participants were questioned using an interview guide as to whether they were aware of the existing sport policy, their perceptions of it and their role, if any, in its design, development and implementation. Visual research methods (photographic observation) (Pink 2009) were also utilized to document and interpret the provision of sports facilities and implementation of sport policy. The philosophy underpinning this methodology is to access the views and attitudes of key actors and individuals operating within the policy process to support the purpose of the project (Wagenaar 2012). The data collected allowed us to evaluate whether the sports policy had met its intended objectives regarding facility provision and improvement. A reflexive approach was adopted to illustrate *and* interpret the provision

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<sup>4</sup> Secondary data was limited in scope but did provide some useful contextual information on sports participation attitudes, levels of self-reported participation and hours of engagement. Further details of these findings can be found in Darko and Mackintosh (2012).

of sports facilities. Whilst descriptive content alone illustrates the existence and condition of facilities, the idealistic discourse that surrounds the Caribbean islands could potentially cloud audience interpretations and limit representation of sports provision beyond the westernized tourist gaze (Urry 2002).

Our reflexive awareness (Pink 2009) has been important in our collection of photographs to document facilities. However, the level of disrepair unintentionally draws attention to the urgent need for assistance, support and development. It is therefore important to recognize that as western researchers, located in a large nation state in the Global North our cultural understandings of sports provision could impact on the choice of photographs to take and our interpretations (Palmer 2013). Kay (2009) has drawn attention to the challenges that Global North researchers face in understanding the complexity of local context. As western researchers located in an economically developed society with an established sports policy and extensive sports facilities, our interpretations are inherent in our understanding of this. Thus our interpretations and analysis are potentially developed through comparisons to our own social context.

In accordance with the British Sociological Association's Statement of Ethical Practice (2002, 2004), ethical issues and considerations were addressed in the design, facilitation and dissemination of the study. Notably, informed consent was accessed and the anonymity of participants was assured where possible. The project was granted ethical approval by the host organization, Nottingham Trent University Ethical Committee, and agreed with the NoC in association with the MoS.

Utilizing a thematic approach, the interview data were analyzed to identify emerging and relevant key themes. These were labeled and categorized, entailing the use of diagrammatic maps, with colour codes for illustrating interrelated and secondary themes (Butler-Kisber 2011). These were aligned to themes that emerged in the, visual material and secondary data analysis.

## ***FINDINGS***

The findings section of this paper explores the challenges and constraints in sport policy agenda setting and implementation in Antigua and Barbuda presenting the key themes that emerged from this research project. In particular it identifies the specific constraining issues,

implementation tensions and areas of contested priorities around this sphere of policy analysis.

### ***Physical activity and sport as a contested policy priority***

Whilst the NECS and MoS are identified in the policy as playing a role in the agenda setting and implementation of the policy and the design of the key objectives, the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the National Institute of Sports and Recreation (NISR) also play a pivotal role. The synergy between these actors is the central fulcrum of problem defining roles and has influenced how the agenda has been expanded and constrained (Cobb and Coughlin 1998). Our analysis reveals that developments were being made to work with the MoE and develop the institute. However, the low academic value attached to sport and physical activity in schools at ministerial level has been one of the biggest challenges in implementing these strategies. Within the policy, The MoE is allocated seven responsibilities to facilitate in achieving the designated ‘Total Participation’ and ‘High Performance’ agendas. In accordance with the holistic approach to provision, they are required to work with the MoS to ensure “that Physical Education and Sports is part of the curriculum at all levels” (A&B NSRP 2011-14, p.13). They will also work together to provide the “training of teachers in the teaching of Physical Education and Sports” (ibid). For pre-school and secondary education it is stated that the Ministry will be solely responsible for providing support to ensure that physical education programmes, inclusive of catering services, is available “twice a week” (ibid). Furthermore, to address the low values attached to sport and participation amongst the population; the Ministry is also required to “create an environment where participation and achievement in sports shall be encouraged alongside academic achievement” (ibid).

Whilst the policy document states that MoS is responsible for improving provision of PE and sport within curriculum, our data and analysis of secondary sources (Darko and Mackintosh 2012) illustrate that participation in physical *activity* was minimal at primary and secondary levels and the majority of young people want additional physical *activities* within the school day. The secondary data survey of two hundred people identified that the majority of school children and young people (under 18 years of age) felt that there should be more time in the school day for Physical Education, including physical activity. The majority

wanted additional hours of PE in school, an additional 2hrs of PE per day. This was also a central theme that arose in qualitative responses amongst young people. One pupil stated: “I would like to join the VB team but I have a lot of homework after school and I have to study, if there were more hours of PE in the day then I could but there isn’t”.

The secondary data in the government internal survey also revealed that the majority of adult participants expressed similar views regarding the allocation of time in the school day for physical education and activity (Darko and Mackintosh 2012). Due to the tropical climate and high temperatures (Kras 2008), the school day at all levels, is much shorter than in the UK. This potentially limits the opportunity for the MoE to extend the school day for the provision of sport. However, improvement in sport facilities, with provision for covered and shaded courts and pitches is important for assisting in this provision. For example, one of our interviewees, a secondary physical education and qualified football coach stated:

The facilities we have in government schools are poor. In my school there is a field for cricket and football and a cemented uncovered area for basketball and netball. There are no basketball or netball rings... this is a huge problem...this still makes it difficult for me to teach the basic skills. Sometimes I just can’t teach it all.

Furthermore, one ministerial school sport coach stated:

The facilities are minimal and it’s too hot to coach basketball outside. In my area [parish] you might see a ring, but it’s broken and the ground is not good. We also don’t have indoor courts and you just can’t provide the skills sessions.

Rhetoric of the sport policy vision compared against the reality for participants, coaches and the local community delivery partners is a common theme. Likewise, whether the government sport policy agenda and instruments need to be focused on the dualistic elite participation and mass participation goals of western nations is problematic in this context. This indicates a need to more clearly define the ‘policy problem’ (Colebatch 1998, Parsons, 1995) and begin to shape the political and programme agendas around potential instrument design more effectively. Given the incomplete knowledge, limited understanding and emergent nature of sport policy infrastructure on the islands, the identification and formulation of a ‘policy problem’ at all could be questioned or deemed premature. Similarly, the very specific nature of the multiple island nation state make

delivery and implementation potentially geographically disjointed by physical conditions and varied island facilities.

### ***Barriers in cross departmental collaboration in sports policy***

One of the additional issues that the MoS and non-government organizations faced was an apparent the lack of support and collaboration with the MoE. A senior member of the MoS stated: “The education department ... is not going to change at policy level the physical education provision... They are not interested in more sports, simply more education”.

This relates to the earlier conceptual notion of a policy agenda ‘container’ (Cobb and Coughlin 1998) with the MoE seeking to restrain and restrict sport policy problems and issues from reaching the design and implementation agenda. Interviews with members of the sports associations, the NOC and the MoS coaches also revealed these views. The majority felt that that cooperation and collaboration between the MoS, MoE, NOC, associations and public can be established for the improvement in participation. Unfortunately, whilst it was indicated above that the formulation of the policy was developed in consultation with the sports associations and the NOC, all our interviews with these members revealed that they were not involved in these consultations. One senior member of the NOC stated: “A policy document should be developed between the MoS and the MoE where sports are compulsory in all schools from kindergarten to 12th grade”.

One of the sports association members, who held a former senior ministerial post within the MoE stated: “We need to extend school day, but government seem keen to get rid of sport in school and put it on the shoulders of the National Associations, but they do not have the money to fund and support sport”.

Our qualitative data revealed that the majority of members of the association and athletes had no knowledge of the existing policy and strategies regarding provision of sport and physical activity in schools. There were requests from sports coaches, PE teachers and sports association members for inter-policy documents at ministerial level to dictate provision

of PE and improvement in standards. It was indicated by these interviewees that powerful individuals/personalities (such as sports ambassadors and sports role models) should dictate sports policy development but they stated that should also be accompanied by the ministry and its members. They requested non-ministerial members for the first stage of this policy development, because a level of distrust in the ministry existed due to previous failures in policy development and successful and sustained implementation. Whilst some members of the MoS, PE staff and ministerial sports coaches presented a dedicated approach to provision of increased physical activity in school, some school staff members were apathetic and this was not addressed at the institutional level through policy. A senior member of the ministerial school sports department stated:

We need an inter-policy document where we have that extra hour and a half from one thirty until three o' clock in the secondary school, and those times would be allocated to sports, culture and the arts and we can get more production from existing sporting personnel in the school once that is implemented.

Whilst there were these calls for policy development and new agenda setting, our data revealed that provision of Physical Education staff and ministerial sports coaches was minimal<sup>5</sup>. Secondary data revealed findings from a small survey of 200 people that indicated that the majority of young people (under 18) were only taking part in school physical activity once or twice a week (Darko and Mackintosh 2012). Males reported taking part in three hours per week and females in 1.9 hours per week. Furthermore, sedentary behaviour<sup>6</sup> amongst young people is relatively high with current average figure at 5hrs 30mins per day. Highest recorded figures for males were 8.5hrs and 15hrs for females. Improving levels of sedentary behaviour must be a central priority for addressing the health of the Antigua population as research indicates that adult obesity levels in the Caribbean are increasing, with current figures indicating that 18.1% males and 33.3% of females (over the age of twenty Years) are currently overweight (WHO 2012). Furthermore, childhood obesity is also an emerging concern, due to a lack of nutritional education regarding high sugar juice drinks and junk food (Williams and Daniels 2008).

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<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that we were unable to interview staff within the Ministry of Education due to their time constraints.

<sup>6</sup> Sedentary behaviour is defined as a group of behaviours that occur whilst sitting or lying down while awake and typically require very low energy expenditure, characterized by an energy expenditure  $\leq 1.5$  METs (Sedentary Behaviour Research Network 2012)

Pupils also stated that the central reasons for not participating in PE included a lack of PE staff and/or sports coaches to facilitate frequent and consistent sessions, PE classes clashed with other subjects and the school did not provide sports that the pupils were interested in. PE staff also found it difficult to facilitate participation in inter-school competitions because there were few ministerial sports coaches to provide this role. One physical education teacher stated, “there are limited coaches. One is often responsible for three and four schools, so in some cases PE has to take on this role to assist in...competitions but it’s not really their responsibility according to the policy here”.

### ***The elite sport and performance infrastructure dilemma***

Given the limited provision in schools, community facilities and grass roots infrastructure it is an inherent policy dilemma to then consider the high cost, investment priority of elite sporting performance systems. It could even be suggested that the policy debates around elite sport positioned from a western lens (Green 2006, Grix and Carmichael 2012), that are often cited hold little meaning in this context. However, it is apparent that to develop total participation and high performance, the Ministry intends to establish the NISR that shall be responsible primarily for coaching education. This will entail organization, review and renewal of more local training programmes and enhanced international publicity for local coaches. Furthermore, “minimum coaching standards will be established across three major levels” (A&B NSRP 2011-14, p. 12). The focus on high performance is central to the formation of this institute, as it seeks to also provide training and education to high performance athletes. It is stated that it will provide “sports related services to include research and professional development and sports enrichment courses [and] will be fully equipped with the necessary amenities and equipment” (A&B NSRP 2011-14, p. 10).

Interviews with members of the MoS revealed that at the time of the research the NISR was their central priority and deemed the key agenda issue they were keen to expand within government. This contrasts with the voices and standpoints of those participants interviewed and that clearly identify local facility and infrastructure needs as a priority. Recognition had been given to the role of holistic provision and lack of finances, as meetings had been held with the Antigua Medical University (The American University) to facilitate the development

of this institute. According to a senior member of the MoS this institute would include “Pharmacy, Paramedic, Sports Tourism, Sports Management and Sports Medicine courses such as Physiotherapy, and Sport Psychology” (Interviewee: MoS). To develop the academic value of sport, the ministry planned to have “an officer who will introduce to schools, sports medicine services [and to be able] to train athletes in theoretical levels” (ibid). However, at the time of the research, it was unclear what the basis for such a role would be and the rationale for such a limited investment across the whole nation.

This approach does recognise the limited economic funds for building development through its collaboration with the university. However, our interview data and examination of sport building facilities for athlete participation and housing of sports clubs and association revealed limited provision. With a focus on promoting and improving high performance the ministry sought to allow athletes to access this facility and the trained sports medics. It was envisaged that this provision will be heavily subsidised by them. They would provide “sports medical services, diagnostic services for Sports Associations to access and this will be covered (financially) by the government” (Senior MoS staff).

Recognition was given by the Minister and members to the lack of sports medical knowledge and academic expertise within this field within the MoS. To address this they, “employed a person whose background is in public health and pharmacy to facilitate in this” (MoS staff). However, interviews with presidents of two sports associations and medical staff within this field revealed that no consultation process had taken place at this stage with them in the process of facilitating and implementing this. One president, a qualified doctor of sports medicine<sup>7</sup> stated: “What they define as a medical school is problematic. I’ve not been consulted at all. Who will provide sports management, tourism and psychology courses?”

The Antigua University is a medical university and at present it does not offer additional disciplines in Sports Science, Sports Tourism, Management or Psychology. The Ministry may envisage this provision in Sports Science, Sports Tourism, Management or Psychology. The Ministry may also envisage the provision of future development, but it is unclear who will fund the provision of these courses and PE, with little evidence to illustrate that young people will enroll. Equally, if the cultural perception of sport and its academic value is not promoted through school its future viability could be further questioned.

<sup>7</sup> Our research revealed that there were only two qualified doctors of sports medicine currently living on the islands

Our data analysis revealed that both young people and adults wanted to see improvements in the support for athletes and sports participation.

The proposed Antigua Sports Village, due to be built for January 2015, also aims to assist in addressing the lack of suitable facilities. An interview with the project coordinators, and an architect from the design company revealed that this stadium is intended to improve mass participation and high performance. The village will possess two multipurpose stadiums hosting approximately 12,000 people. Provision will be made for international baseball, swimming, athletics, basketball and rowing. A convention centre, sports entertainment centre, sports medicine clinic, and multipurpose gymnasium will also be built. In accordance with the aims of the sports policy, this facility will allow for mass participation as free access would be granted to the population. Furthermore, the provision of elite and international competition facilities will allow for high performance training and participation in events. One of the designers stated: “We want to attract international events... the likes of Usain Bolt. We want to do regional events giving local athletes access the facilities for the training, but also improve a healthy lifestyle amongst the general population”.

Funding for the village is to be raised via government and private investment and through the allocation of naming rights. Whilst this approach recognises the lack of economic resources within the ministry for facility development, skepticism was apparent amongst the population and sports associations. Members of the public felt that the ministry did not have the funds to build this facility independently or contribute to its development due to their previous uncompleted sports development provision. Furthermore, the recent evidence of political corruption and fraud surrounding Sir Alan Stanford's<sup>8</sup> provision of sports facilities had led to uncertainty about the interest from potential investors. Whilst not a focus of this research it is crucial to recognise in terms of agency and individual actor behaviour that the influence of this high profile corruption case had created a significant shift in terms of levels of trust around government sport policy.

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<sup>8</sup> Sir Allen Stanford privately developed the Antigua and Barbuda Airport, bank, newspaper, hospital, Athletic Club, Basketball facility, and the Vivian Richards cricket stadium. He also contributed significantly to the development and existence of professional sport. He was prosecuted of being involved in (7bn) investment fraud. (*The Telegraph*, Friday 19<sup>th</sup> June 2009)

### *Developing a community and third sector infrastructure*

The A&B NSRP (2011) stated the need for a holistic approach to sport policy development with the empowerment of communities at its core. Findings from this study illustrate distinct challenges at the local level in the country in terms of physical provision, facilities, human resources in coaching and opportunities to develop sport from a grassroots base. Whilst the NOC, the associations and members can and are assisting in the facilitation of this policy through after school sports provision, it must be recognised that current sport provision is driven predominantly by voluntary members of the associations.

A further recommendation for the proposed NISR is to address the provision of sports development programmes as a means to promote participation. Secondary survey data illustrated that the majority of young people and adults were unaware of any sports development programmes but also programmes for school leavers (Darko and Mackintosh, 2012). Whilst now slightly dated, further research conducted by CARICOM (2003) supports these findings with limited awareness in local populations of sport development opportunities. CARICOM researchers contacted personnel in the ministerial Department responsible for Youth Affairs and/or Sport in Antigua and Barbuda and discovered that they were aware of the concept of development through sport, but unable to identify such programmes at the country level. Whilst the Ministry were able to identify a number of small development programmes, further measures to implement sports development programmes at grassroots levels to target young people were limited.

Although policy implementation was a focus of this research, once in the field it appeared that the between policy rhetoric and actual instruments of delivery was considerable. This in itself is a crucial finding, but also, one that illustrates the existing agenda 'skew' from the priorities of local infrastructure, coaches and participation opportunities that lie far from the national policy visionary statements. Furthermore, the empirical evidence to illustrate whether the community needs, design, coordination planning and programme implementation achieved their intended impact and objectives was limited. The minimal project/programme design, development, implementation, evaluation and impact was not developed in consultation with relevant sport clubs associations, national and international agencies, academic experts and the most importantly the general public. This also was not facilitated through the use questionnaires, focus groups, interviews and data

analysis. However, as suggested by the national policy, the lack of central skills to undertake such a process that will genuinely empower the communities and voluntary associations is significantly limited.

Due to the lack of economic funds provided by the ministry, private investment and voluntary practice has allowed for existence, planning and organization of sports. At the time of the research, provision had been made by government (MoS) to improve total participation through community and sports association engagement. With focus on management lying with the community clubs, the MoS has begun to implement a programme that offered clubs and associations a lease of existing facilities owned by the ministry. Examination of many of the existing sports facilities revealed that there is a significant level of inadequate provision for safe participation in sport. The majority of facilities visited lacked clean running water and access to any toilets. Many of the surfaces of the courts, pitches and track facilities needed to be significantly improved to allow for safe and participation. Whilst the marking of boundaries and cutting of grass was provided by ministerial grounds-staff and volunteers during the data collection, very few facilities provided shaded or covered areas to participate or spectate. In addition some areas of the facilities were identified as condemned and unsafe. A sample of the photographs is presented in *Figure 1:3*, below.

Interviews with senior members of the ministry revealed that a leasing system at that time was being reviewed and agreed by the legal department. The ministry found that whilst some clubs were interested and had taken up this opportunity, some completely opposed it and viewed it as a ministerial responsibility. One member of the MoS stated: “We have faced opposition; one club does not want the building until it is completed, all improved and finished. They cannot see that they will be given to the building to generate income, but they don’t want it unless we improve it”.

**Figure 1:3.** Photo sample sheet of ministerial sports facilities



In addition to these oppositions, the politics of policy implementation impacted on progression of this strategy. Interviews revealed that ministerial staff possessed traditional ideologies about the value of sport and financial role of the ministry. Whilst the NOC provided opportunities to apply for a contribution to costs and stipends, our data revealed that all of the sports associations rely heavily on voluntary provisions provided by coaching staff and those with knowledge or previous involvement in the sport. This inevitably impacts on the level of funds available for facility development and event organisation. For example a member of the NOC and president of one of the sports associations stated:

Whilst we can raise 3000EC we can never raise enough to generate 50% of the funds. One association applied for 50% of the funds from us which we approved, but they couldn't get the remainder and thus could not go to the ... championships. In such a small country it is difficult to raise that kind of money for facility development- it would take us 3 years even more.

Despite this, traditional views within the ministry halted further assistance and support for

facility provision. One senior member of the MoS stated:

There are people within the ministry who feel that associations have the capacity and money. *BUT* (emphasis added) he is simply pointing out the problems without recognising they are volunteers. You need to work with them, sit down with them not simply advise and not assist them.

During the first week of the data collection the interviews with the MoS revealed that they were planning fund improvement in facilities (sport venues) and all school sports coaches would attend those sites and create after school provision. However, towards the end of the research process this strategy was abandoned, a member of the MoS stated:

The education department (MoE) opposed it. [Furthermore] we also realised that the associations get paid by schools for some of their work. If we implement this process we will be taking the money out of the associations' hands. What has happened is that certain coaches have picked one or two schools, not all, that are reliable (pay). So this strategy might not work. The ... (ministerial staff member) pointed out that this should be driven by leaders in sport- associations-, not the government.

Despite this divergence, our findings show that facility development was a central priority for all of the association members, athletes and sports ambassadors interviewed. Furthermore, as discussed above, the majority of adults and young people felt that there needed be more sport and physical activities and opportunities for people in Antigua to take part, and improvements in facilities were essential to this provision. Furthermore a vice president for one of the sports associations stated

Transport of athletes is a real problem...we need a mini-bus as we all spend time picking athletes up and taking them home. The bus system does not facilitate access to training and parents cannot get here from work, furthermore talented athletes do not have the money to access transport.

Further measures are needed to be taken to address the higher level of sedentary behaviour amongst young girls and their lack of interest. Our interviews with female sports coaches and female sports association members revealed further measures must be taken to address the shortage of females assisting in school and non- school sports provision. One female coach stated:

I'm the only female...coach working with athletes from our association within schools

and in the sport, and. Parents don't see an adequate structure, because there are few female coaches and even toilets for the girls. This discourages girls and parents bringing children to participate.

In light of these findings, further measures need to be adopted to promote female role models, and to provide financial support for the attainment of coaching qualifications amongst women. Whilst the NOC, association and federations such as FIFA, are assisting in this provision for athletics and football, further assistance and promotion is required at ministerial level to support these organisations and generate interest in attaining qualifications as grass roots level.

### ***Limitations of the study***

Whilst this study has made a significant contribution to the lack of research examining Caribbean sports policy and provision the research is not without its limitations. One of the central difficulties faced was the lack of academic material to develop an understanding of the historical, policy and political involvement in sports and recreation. We also found that young people were keen to participate in the research. However, we often provided free coaching, training and supplement advice sessions, to facilitate willingness and to promote a level of trust between ourselves and the participants. We also found that the majority of adults were skeptical about participating. Many initially assumed that the research was being conducted by the ministry and that their input would not facilitate future sports development. This skepticism was due to historical lack of provision and the previous withdrawal of sports programmes/activities by the ministry. However, once participants were informed that the research was being conducted by an independent academic institution and supported primarily through the NOC, participants were more willing. Whilst the ministry played a minor role, they assisted in key aspects of the research, notably providing transportation, assistance in the administration of secondary data questionnaires and the provision of a number of important documents. We also found that whilst a significant amount of data was collected over the three week time frame, members of the ministry of education and the prime minister were difficult to access. Such lack of access to key actors is indicative perhaps of the active process of 'containing' the sport policy agenda (Cobb and Coughlin 1998). Furthermore, planned visits arranged by the ministry to the island of Barbuda had to be rescheduled by the ministry and thus could not be facilitated within the research data collection time.

## ***Discussion and Conclusion***

As stated at the outset of this paper small, or ‘micro’ states with emergent sport policy structures may not have sufficient policy and programme maturity to fit well with many of the typical evidence-based mantras (Piggin *et al.* 2009, Smith and Leech 2010) and western priority agendas in the wider policy literature (Houilhan and Green 2009, Grix and Carmichael 2012). It appears that local actors in the form of ministerial and committee elite individuals through to the relatively small collective of local association activists and volunteers play a significant role in delivery and implementation outcomes. It is our view that this is amplified in the context of the micro state. As Clegg (1979) proposes the decisions of organisations and public policy outcomes are born out of the struggle between committees, individuals and departments. Using the Cobb and Coughlin (1998) sensitising framework of policy actors as ‘expanders’ and ‘containers’, various key social actors and individual actors have been highlighted as central to the policy process. This project has been the first attempt to build insights and understanding into agenda setting, policy development, and policy implementation and inform the future direction of the Antigua and Barbuda Sport and Recreation policy.

Key themes of developing local level infrastructure, improving access to core physical educational, gaining clarity over centralised elite performance sport policy and improving sports development programme development and infrastructure have been identified through this study. A core challenge of undertaking the project has been the lack of robust starting point for the study and the shifting sands of the policy landscape in this small state. Furthermore, robust research with young people at primary, secondary and tertiary levels that examines their views of this provision, participation levels and their interests sport would also assist with further implementation and reformulation of the policy. Jeanes (2011) advocates such engagement and consultation with young people is important to assist in shaping the policy and practice of development in Global South settings. Both Jeanes (2011) and Kay (2009) advocate that partnerships with local NGO staff and academics may be a way of developing appropriate strategies to include young people in research. However, the micro state nature of the Caribbean islands means that resources and skills to develop knowledge in evidence-based policy are highly limited, as is the capacity to undertake such advocacy and partnership working.

An inherent challenge as identified by Lindsay (2013) and Kay (2013) the potential issue facing researchers from the Global North that contributes towards such projects and

then are faced with the position of then moving on from the data collection, delivering recommendations and leaving the 'field'. In the case of this study it is hoped that this project has been the start of a longer term research dialogue and relationship between the NOC, the government and research team that is sustainable and supportive. The limitations of the study have been clearly identified, but, it is also resoundingly clear that shaping the next steps for sport policy and associated programmes and initiatives needs to be taken with great care. The desired outcome of the project, i.e., to open up agenda setting dialogue, has been successful in what is a complex political policy climate. As a small state with limited physical and human infrastructure imposing the values, aspirations and policy trajectory of western states may not be in the interest of the government or the communities it represents. Further research into existing provision and participation to inform government understanding of these complex twin islands and diverse sporting populations is fundamental to shaping a clearer evidence base for shaping a more sustainable and achievable sports policy in the future.

Colomer's (2007) argument that there are three characteristic benefits of small nation democratic government around improvements in deliberation, aggregation and enforcement seems to be challenged in the case of Antigua and Barbuda. Here citizens and local actors appear to have a considerable disconnect from policy makers and those in positions of decision making power. Likewise in the case of sport policy we saw little of harmonization and agreement and considerable tiers of disaggregation between local communities and national policy rhetoric. It seems that the policy problems may have begun to be brought to the fore through this project, however, the complex tasks centred upon policy design, instrument development and clear agenda setting seem very distant at this stage. This also aligns to the central paradox of an evolving elite policy community of actors that sit in stark contrast to the minimal provision, coaching and physical activity development opportunities at the local level. This research has highlighted the lack of skills in place to support the empowerment of the voluntary association network. Philosophically we also have recognised the reflexive challenge in exiting a research setting with limited resources and the inherent limits facing this research team in our attempt to decolonise our methodology (Kay 2009). Voices and perspectives of local actors have been prioritised, agenda have been crystallised, but the resource issues and fragmented implementation remain once the team has left this phase of the research process.

In gaining access to high level ministerial staff, it has also exposed how many possess traditional ideologies about the value of sport, the assumed 'top down' advisory role of policy

makers and the lack of input to the sporting system of those local and regional agencies and volunteers that support it. It is evident that MoE and MoS actor personalities, viewpoints, philosophies and individual standpoints play a very dominant role in shaping agendas, influencing partnership working and making coherent policy priorities. As suggested at the outset, the micro state context, physical interconnectedness and small geographical size of Antigua and Barbuda in particular does open clear possibilities such as already seen in the parallel national policy field of school teacher education programme development in Antigua and Barbuda (Younger and George 2012). It is hoped that local populations will get similar opportunities to shape their own opportunities in dialogue around sport provision, participation and policies in the future. Avoiding the imposition of western visions and dualisms between elite medal winning and mass participation and assumed systems of policy design and instruments will be fundamental in preventing future problematic sport policy.

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