

*Sporting Statues in the City: Honouring Heroes or Civic Branding?*

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The number of sporting heroes commemorated by figurative statues has risen inexorably over the past two decades. Whilst these monuments are typically located adjacent to sports stadia, this paper documents and theorises the growing sporting statuary, now numbering over 20, that has instead been erected in UK city centres. The presence of statues in the nation's urban areas is not a recent phenomenon – the Victorians were avid statue builders – but the selection of sporting subjects is. Through interviews with sculptors, commissioners and fundraisers we examine their genesis, design, funding and the variation in numbers between sports and regions, focusing on the influence of fashions in and funding for public art, urban regeneration projects, city branding and identity, and the changing role and influence of sport and its protagonists in public life.

The UK city centre sporting statuary is found to be dominated by the traditional working class sports of association football and boxing, and typically located in urban areas with higher than average deprivation scores. Statues of footballers are most often instigated by local authorities and funded by public money, though for boxers, other sportsmen and a handful of footballers they are usually organised by committees of fans. The development of an urban sporting statuary since the 1980s is hypothesised as the result of coincident fashions in sculpture, the increase in regeneration funding and its availability for public art projects, the pressure for the wider public's taste to be reflected in public art, the raised status of sportsmen and sportswomen in popular culture and the corresponding decline in public popularity of traditional statue subjects such as the political classes, royalty and churchmen.

Finally we compare the evolution of the UK city centre sporting statuary with that of US baseball players, which are predominantly inspired by community groups, charities or private individuals as opposed to formal civic funding, yet also share similar themes of local pride and identity.