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FROM PITCH
TO PLINTH:
THE SPORTING
STATUES PROJECT



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

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The Sporting Statues Project

- ⚽ Why research sporting statues?
 - ⚽ The first sustained integration of UK sport and sculpture.
 - ⚽ The first sustained integration of UK sport and public art.
 - ⚽ The first sustained proactive projection of sport history displayed in a physical form visible to the wider public beyond the confines of archival material and artefacts.
 - ⚽ A substantial investment of public and private resources.
 - ⚽ A modern phenomenon that has appeared with little warning, fanfare or investigation.





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The Sporting Statues Project

- ❁ **Documenting the UK sporting statuary:** www.sportingstatues.com
- ❁ **Developing theory** around its existence and form:
 - ❁ Why are statues of sportsmen being erected?
 - ❁ Why a dramatic increase since the mid-1990s?
 - ❁ What does the form, appearance and location of this artistic genre say about sport, fan culture and wider society?
 - ❁ Do subject choices reflect history, memory, sympathy, victor's justice or any other motivations?
 - ❁ Comparing the UK statuary with overseas counterparts.
- ❁ **Testing theory and predicting the future:**
 - ❁ Can we model and predict subject selection?



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Sporting Statues in the City

- ⚽ An inventory:
 - ⚽ 123 subject-specific statues of sportsmen (players, managers, coaches, administrators honoured for a sporting contribution) currently in situ in the UK; 22 in situ non-subject specific statues. No sportswomen (yet), only 2 non-white sportsmen.
 - ⚽ Majority sited at professional club or national sports venues.
 - ⚽ However just over a third are sited elsewhere, including 40 (34 subject-specific) in the centres or suburbs of UK towns and cities; another 9 (7 subject-specific) are planned.





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Sporting Statues in the City

 An inventory:

Red: Football

Yellow: Cricket

Green: Rugby (RU/RL)

Blue: Boxing

Mauve: Motorsport

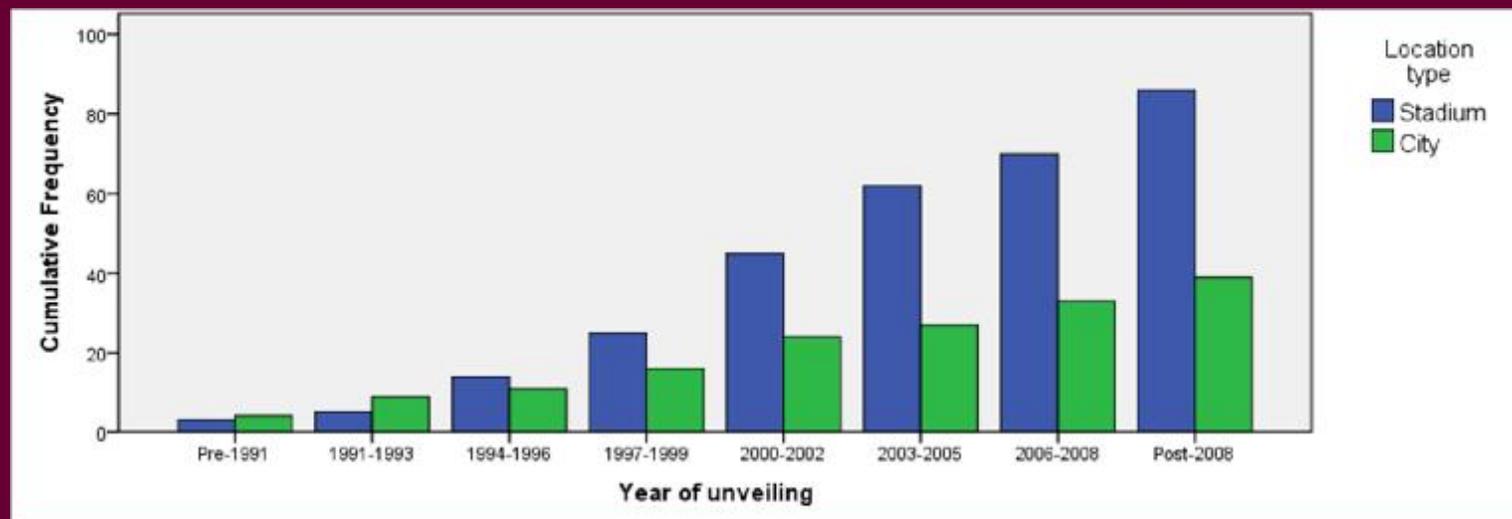
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Sporting Statues in the City

- ⚽ An inventory:
 - ⚽ Cumulative totals: city vs stadium-sited (in situ statues only)





Sporting Statues in the City

⚽ City statues vs Stadia statues

- ⚽ Football subjects most popular at both but dominate the stadia statuary (51%) more so than the city statuary (29%). Boxers, motorcyclists and cricketers next most popular city subjects.
- ⚽ Subject-specific city statues almost all of 'players' (96% of those in situ), whereas stadia statues exist of managers (18%), and founders or executives (10%).





Sporting Statues in the City

City statues vs Stadia statues

- Stadia statues almost always funded by clubs or fans; city statues mostly funded in part or in full by public money, or commercial sponsors.
- City statue plaques or inscriptions twice as likely as those of stadia statues to list: date of unveiling; name of sculptor; a longer description of the subject's life; subject's home town; and names of unveilers.





Sporting Statues in the City

⚽ The rise of public art

- ⚽ Dramatic growth in number of public artworks in the 1990s. For example, in the North East of England (from Usherwood et al, 2000):

- ⚽ Inventory doubled since 1950.
- ⚽ 35 unveiled in the 1980s, 180 in the 1990s.

- ⚽ Driven by both public and commercial sources. Often linked to redevelopment and regeneration:

“This statue was unveiled by Sir Stanley Matthews C.B.E. to commemorate completion of the Hanley Town Centre Pedestrianisation”





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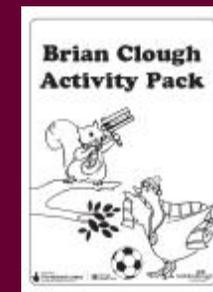
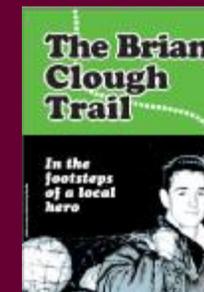


Sporting Statues in the City

⚽ The rise of public art

⚽ Public bodies see public art as beneficial (Selwood, 1995).

- ⚙ Improving the environment, encouraging care and discouraging vandalism.
- ⚙ Providing identity (Manthorpe, 2001).
- ⚙ Attracting investment.
- ⚙ Encouraging cultural tourism.
- ⚙ Educational potential?

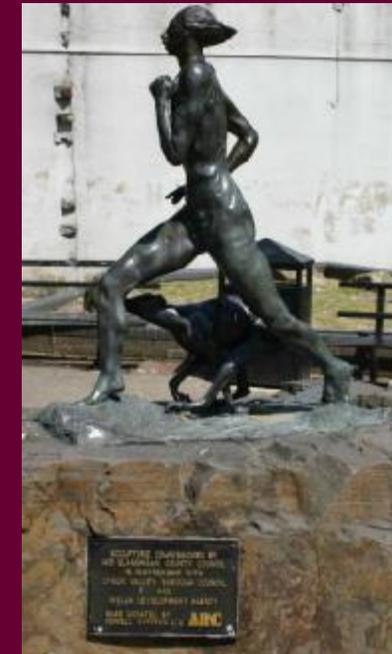




Sporting Statues in the City

⚽ The rise of public art

- ⚽ A quick and hence popular ‘solution’ for politicians when attempting to improve an area:
 - ⚽ Relatively simple to implement compared to alternative remedies.
 - ⚽ Short term project with definitive end point and photo opportunity. No long-term funding commitment required.
 - ⚽ Visual result – shows something ‘is being done’, an area has not been forgotten.





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Sporting Statues in the City

⚽ The rise of public art

⚙️ Facilitated by multiple funding sources:

- ⚙️ General Local Authority budget.
- ⚙️ (Re)development agencies.
- ⚙️ National Lottery/charity funding.
- ⚙️ 'Percentage for Art'; promoted by the Arts Council from 1989, adopted by over 50 councils by 1992 (Pearson, 2006).
- ⚙️ Public appeals.





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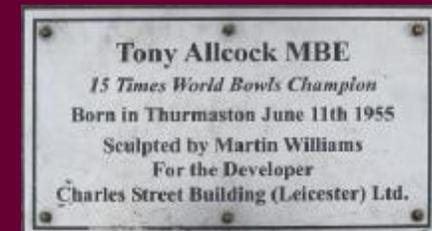


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Sporting Statues in the City

- ⚽ The rise of public art
 - ⚽ Popular with commercial developers, who provide funding not only via 'Percentage for art' but sometimes their own largesse.
 - ⚽ Raises the value of a development, giving a competitive edge (Roberts et al, 1993).
 - ⚽ Provides an environment that is attractive to retailers and customers.
 - ⚽ Creates a brand image.
 - ⚽ Boosts public relations and publicity.





Sporting Statues in the City

- ⚽ The return of figurative art
 - ⚽ Statues of sportsmen are figurative by definition...
 - ⚽ Figurative statues WERE popular in Victorian era but fell out of favour. In 1954 Melville wrote that the public statuary of the time served *"no sacred, commemorative or symbolic purpose"* and had *"no validity as architectural decoration"*.
 - ⚽ Much of the growth in public art consists of non-figurative pieces – but now figurative statues are returning to city centres. Are we seeing a change in fashion towards figurative art...





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Sporting Statues in the City

⚽ The return of figurative art

- ⚽ ...or a change in funding sources and an associated change in the balance of influence towards the general public:

“I think it is changing, I think that the new Arts Council grant system, they are passing stuff they might have moaned about before, they tend to be told they weren’t getting the money out to people”

Steve Field, Arts Officer, Dudley Council.





Sporting Statues in the City

- ⚽ The return of figurative art
 - ⚽ Critics may prefer abstract art but the public prefer figurative art (e.g. Mastandrea et al, 2011; Kettlewell et al, 1990): it is perceived as recognisable, educational, attractive, interpretable.
 - ⚽ Recent UK study of perception of local environments found 66% of respondents in favour of statues compared to 29% for abstract art (Newton & Ormerod, 2007).





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Sporting Statues in the City

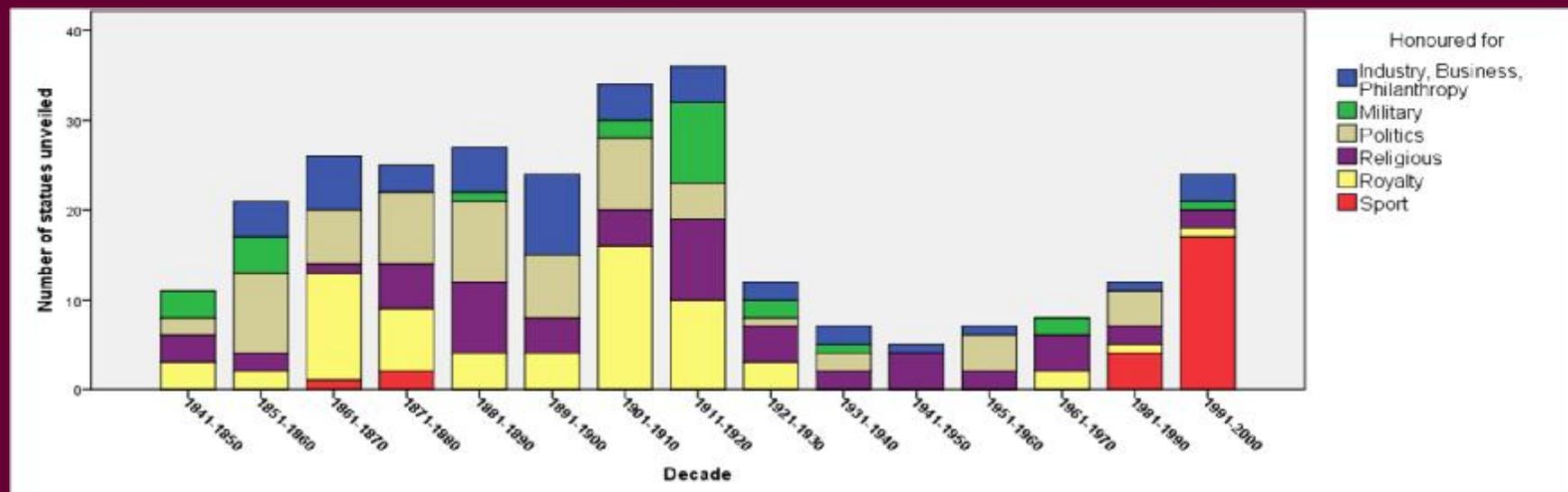
- ⚽ The return of figurative art
 - ⚽ A desire for transparency and public involvement in the use of lottery donations.
 - ⚽ Public consultation and ‘Focus Group Politics’.
 - ⚽ An increase in accessibility of funds – members of the public can propose a project and bid for funding, often backed by local media – is giving the public direct control over the types of public art produced.





Sporting Statues in the City

- ⚽ The return of figurative art... but why sporting art?
- ⚽ Subject-specific figurative statues unveiled in London, Wales, W. Midlands, Manchester, N. East; 1840-2000 (source: PMSA)





Sporting Statues in the City

- ⚽ Why sporting art?
 - ⚽ Public preference – now against previous typical types of subject:
 - ⚽ Churchmen and politicians less popular and respected
 - ⚽ Military leaders may be seen as divisive or controversial by some funders or political bodies?
 - ⚽ Public preference - for sportsmen: English Heritage survey in Manchester showed the public wished to commemorate sporting landmarks and legends regardless of club allegiances (Wood, 2005).





Sporting Statues in the City

⚽ Why sporting art?

⚽ Public preference for sportsmen:

- ⚽ Societal vs Personal (a more selfish society?)
- ⚽ Short-term Pleasure vs Long-term Influence/Benefit?
- ⚽ Escapism vs Reality?

⚽ Sportsmen, as recognisable celebrities, have a populist appeal to the public and hence politicians and commercial funders: to quote Ken Livingstone on statue subjects...

'at least someone who means something to the public'





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Sporting Statues in the City

⚽ Why sporting art?



Branding cities seeking an identity - sport as a subject has contemporary relevance: an alternative to purely looking back.

“There are so many sculptures commemorating the coal industry in the North East - it’s part of our past but we need to move on and promote our future”

Rob Clarke, Councillor, County Durham.





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Sporting Statues in the City

⚽ Why sporting art?

- ⚽ Continuity; teams have represented communities across many generations.
- ⚽ In fact subjects chosen typically from narrow window in the past; not contemporary but within living memory. Only 5 city statue subjects performed in the last 20 years - all but one of these 5 suffered an early death - and only 4 pre-war performers.





Sporting Statues in the City

- ⚽ Why sporting art?
 - ⚽ Hence a single sporting statue holds multiple messages that resonate with different target audiences:
 - ⚽ To potential investors, cities are depicted as having both a successful past and a living history – as opposed to an industrial history that may now be dead or, if a new town or administrative body, a lack of history.





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Sporting Statues in the City

⚽ Why sporting art?

- ⚽ Hence a single sporting statue holds multiple messages that resonate with different target audiences:
- ⚽ To the public, a traditional art form providing a nostalgic reminder of a 'better' past, when sporting heroes (and sport more generally) were 'located' and accessible figures, as opposed to today's transient celebrities.





Sporting Statues in the City

⚽ Why sporting art?

- ⚽ Sport as a new religion?
- ⚽ A small subset of city/town centre sporting statues are memorials to recently deceased sportsmen – taking the graveyard away from the church to the heart of an increasingly secular society.





Sporting Statues in the City

- ⚽ An overseas perspective
 - ⚽ Not a solely British phenomenon – preceded by rise of sporting art in US, also Australia.
 - ⚽ A greater percentage of their sporting art is at stadia. For example, only 10% of the 170+ US baseball statues are in the city away from stadia.





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Sporting Statues in the City

An overseas perspective

 However the new wave of US ballparks have themselves been built in the city centres as a regenerative policy, and these are surrounded by statues of former players with the same era profile as UK sporting statues.



 The facility itself acts as a regeneration tool for an area in need of 'improvement' (Schumacher & Leitner, 1999).





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