



This item was submitted to Loughborough's Institutional Repository (<https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/>) by the author and is made available under the following Creative Commons Licence conditions.



CC creative commons
COMMONS DEED

Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.5

You are free:

- to copy, distribute, display, and perform the work

Under the following conditions:

BY: **Attribution.** You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor.

Noncommercial. You may not use this work for commercial purposes.

No Derivative Works. You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.

- For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work.
- Any of these conditions can be waived if you get permission from the copyright holder.

Your fair use and other rights are in no way affected by the above.

This is a human-readable summary of the [Legal Code \(the full license\)](#).

[Disclaimer](#) 

For the full text of this licence, please go to:
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/>

A pre-evaluation of British public opinion on the London 2012 Olympics based on sport participation types

Guillaume Bodet
Loughborough University, UK
Ashby Road, Loughborough
LE11 3TU, UK
g.s.p.bodet@lboro.ac.uk

Jennifer Coleman
Institution/affiliation
Email address
Phone number

Abstract

Literature review

As recalled by Girginov and Hills (2008), one ambitious aim in staging the London 2010 Olympics concerns sports development and participation legacy. According to them, this objective comes from both the IOC's will to create positive legacies from the Games and the promotion of sports-for-all in the host country, and the bid committee and the UK government's will to "use the games to inspire the country's people to become more physically active" (p.2092). However, as observed by Coalter (2004), the positive impact of major events on sports participation is not automatic and moreover Olympic "legacies are constructed and not given" (Girginov & Hills, 2008, p.2092). The aim of this study is to provide a pre-evaluation of the London Olympics in relation to sport participation patterns in order to first identify the critical issues influencing British people's engagement into the Games and second to create the basis for a longitudinal analysis of their impact.

In order to evaluate people's perceptions of London 2012, we used Social Representation Theory (Moscovici, 1984), as social representations characterise a form of socially elaborated and shared knowledge, with practical consequences which contribute to the construction of a common reality among social groups.

Methodology

Following a critical realist stance and the Social Representation Theory, a questionnaire was designed and comprised a free-word association task using London 2012 Olympic Games as inductor term (i.e., Please give the first ten words or phrases that come to mind when you hear 'London 2012 Olympic Games'), a series of questions regarding people's level and type of sport participation and a series of questions measuring personal characteristics. The population was the British public, people who would potentially be affected by hosting of the Games and by government participation initiatives. The questionnaires were administered both in person and via email to a convenient sample. A snowball strategy, involving participants recruiting other participants, was also used with the questionnaires distributed through email. Overall the sample comprised 157 participants, which was later clustered in three sport participation groups labelled 'non-participants' (n = 50), 'recreational participants' (n = 39) and 'competitive sports participants' (n = 68).

The first step of the analysis consisted in a semantic gathering of the words produced during the free-word association task. For instance, the words 'expensive', 'high cost' and 'tax burden'

were gathered under the term 'money'. The second analysis step aimed to define the field of the social representation which is composed of all the terms cited by at least fifteen percent of the overall sample. Although Bodet, Meurgey and Lacassagne (2009) used a ten percent-threshold, a higher threshold appeared more relevant to us due to the bigger sample size and because the Olympics are highly social objects in comparison with what these authors did. The social representation field for the non-participant group comprised 15 words, 18 words for the recreational participants, and 14 words for the competitive participants. The final step of the analysis aimed to determine the structure of the social representation, which describes the level of proximity between the words composing it. We followed the approach used by Bodet et al. (2009) which relies on an ascendant hierarchical classification applied to a matrix of similarity taking the words' ranks of citation into account.

Results

The non-participants' social representation is dominated by the concepts of *money*, *athletics*, *medals*, *tourism*, *sport* and *apprehension*. The presence of *apprehension*, *crowding* and *security* highlights some concerns about potential negative issues. The recreational participants' social representation appears the least consensual with 18 words, and is dominated by the concepts of *money*, *medals*, *athletics*, *excitement*, *global* and *attendance*. In comparison with the non-participant group, recreational participants seem to show more enthusiasm with a clear recognition of the potential benefits and positive outcomes of the Games. The competitive participants' social representation is the most consensual one (i.e. only 14 words) and dominated by the concepts of *medals*, *money*, *sport*, *athletics* and *performance*. Overall, the social representation seems more focused on the competition and performance issue and positive with only *money* as a potential negative term. The analysis of the structure of the different social representations confirms the first stage of the analysis highlighting a strong association between *apprehension*, *money* and *crowding* for the non participants but also an interesting association between *global* and *excitement*. Overall the non-participants view the multi-cultural, tourist-attraction dimensions of the Olympics as significant as the sporting dimensions. Despite a negative pairing (e.g., *nationalism-crowds*), the structure of the recreational participants' social representation reveals several positive and interesting pairings such as *unity-global*, *tourism-attendance*, and *excitement-employment*. Finally, the competitive participants' social representation structure seems organised in two distinct blocks of words where the sporting and performance elements are closely associated to the Great Britain team and where the non elite sporting legacies appear quite isolated from the rest.

Conclusion

The results demonstrate that the perceptions of the London 2012 Olympics are not homogenous among British people with different sport participation patterns and should encourage organisers, policy-makers and marketers to clearly differentiate their messages to get these different groups engaged with the Games. On a practical side, the study identified the negative issues and the potential communication levers to change people's social representation of London 2012 which could in turn increase both their participation in the event and their sport participation levels after the Games. The pre-Games evaluation also constitutes a relevant basis to track the impact of the Olympic Games on sport participation on a longitudinal perspective.

Bodet, G., Meurgey, B., & Lacassagne, M.-F. (2009). Brand social representations: Strategic perspectives for a fitness club. *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*, 5(4), 369-383.

- Coalter, F. (2004). London 2012: A sustainable legacy? In *After the Gold Rush: A sustainable Olympics for London*, (Eds) A. Vigor and M. Mean. London: ippr and Demos.
- Girginov V. & Hills, L. (2008), A sustainable sports legacy: Creating a link between the London Olympics and sports participation, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 25(14), 2091-2116.
- Moscovici, S. (1984). The Phenomenon of Social Representations. In R. Farr and S. Moscovici (eds), *Social Representations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 3-69, In S. Moscovici and G. Duveen (eds), *Social Representations: Explorations in Social Psychology*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000, pp. 18-77.