

# MEASURING AN OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC EFFECT ON SPORT PARTICIPATION

- › Legacy area: **SPORT**
- › Policy focus: **MEASUREMENT**

## › THE EVIDENCE:

An Olympic and Paralympic effect on sport participation has never been robustly measured

## › THE BIG THREE DEBATES:

1.

Is it possible to find out whether Olympic and Paralympic Games have caused sport participation changes?

2.

Can national surveys tell us if sport participation changes are due to the Games?

3.

Can thinking about what might have happened without the Games help us to find out if there has been a Games effect on participation?

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### › WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE SAY?

One of the regularly repeated claims in the UK media is that “no previous Olympic and Paralympic Games have raised participation levels in sport and physical activity”. However, these claims are not quite as straightforward as they might seem for two reasons. Firstly, no previous Games have deliberately set out to raise sport and physical activity participation, so it is no surprise that there is little evidence of sport and physical activity participation increases. Secondly, until SPEAR’s recent research for the [Department of Health](#) and [Sport England](#), there had never been a systematic attempt to measure whether the Olympic and Paralympic Games have had an effect on sport and physical activity participation. While some studies have tried to look back at national participation data collected around the time of previous Games to see if there is any evidence of an Olympic and Paralympic effect, these studies have faced two problems:

- National surveys of sport participation are not carried out for the purpose of measuring a Games effect on participation.
- National surveys do not show whether changes in sport participation are due to the Games – they might be due to something else.

### › HOW WAS THE EVIDENCE GATHERED?

SPEAR conducted [a worldwide review of evidence about the impact of previous Olympic and Paralympic Games, and of other sport events, on physical activity and sport participation](#). The best 53 studies from around the world since 1990 were analysed with advice from an international expert panel to find out what they collectively said about the potential of the Olympic and Paralympic Games to leave a sport participation legacy. Part of this review focused on what attempts had been made by hosts of previous Games to measure or evaluate sport participation legacies.

Since this review, SPEAR has conducted research for the [Youth Sport Trust](#), [Lloyds TSB](#) and [StreetGames](#) on initiatives that have been designed to use the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games to help increase sport participation. As part of this work, SPEAR has developed a protocol to isolate the effects of the Games from other influences on participation.

### › WHO WAS THE AUDIENCE?

The [Department of Health](#) commissioned SPEAR to conduct the worldwide evidence review on sport participation legacies because it wanted to know if it was possible to find out if the London 2012 Games would have an effect on physical activity and sport participation. After the review was published, the [British Medical Journal](#), which serves doctors and the wider medical and health professions, featured [SPEAR’s analysis of how an Olympic and Paralympic effect on participation should be measured](#).

The [Youth Sport Trust](#), [Lloyds TSB](#) and [StreetGames](#) each commissioned SPEAR to evaluate some of their sport participation initiatives, such as [Change 4 Life School Sport Clubs](#) and [National School Sport Week](#), because they wanted to know if there was any extra impact on participation being caused by the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

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### › THE BIG THREE DEBATES

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The main problem with measuring an Olympic and Paralympic effect on sport participation is that it is very difficult to find out whether any changes in participation are due to the Games, whether they have been caused by something else, or whether they would have happened anyway. SPEAR's work shows that one way to find out whether changes are due to the Games is to think about what would have been most likely to happen if the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games had not been awarded to London. The things that would have been most likely to have happened without the Games are called counterfactual scenarios. Counterfactual scenarios should include a consideration of what money would have been invested in sport without the Games, what themes would have been used to encourage people to take part in sport, and what enthusiasm would have been generated without the Games. The likely effect of counterfactual scenarios can then be compared with any actual changes in participation that have taken place to assess whether there has been an Olympic and Paralympic effect on participation.

#### THE BIG THREE DEBATES ABOUT MEASURING AN OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC EFFECT ON SPORT PARTICIPATION...

- 1 Is it possible to find out whether sport participation changes have happened because of the Olympic and Paralympic Games?
- 2 Can national surveys of sport participation tell us whether the Olympic and Paralympic Games has had an impact on sport participation?
- 3 Can comparisons with what might have happened to sport participation without the Games help us find out whether there has been a Games effect on participation?

### › FURTHER RESOURCES AND READING

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- Weed M, Coren E, Fiore J, et al. (2009) A Systematic Review of the Evidence Base for Developing a Physical Activity and Health Legacy from the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. <http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/Research/Centres/SPEAR/ResearchProjects/OlympicAndParalympic/OlympicPhysicalActivity.aspx>
- Weed M. (2009) The Potential of the Demonstration Effect to Grow and Sustain Participation in Sport. Report to Sport England. [http://www.sportengland.org/about\\_us/sport\\_england\\_conferences/idoc.ashx?docid=b97bc095-eb32-4c20-91d4-5943b85e9462&version=2](http://www.sportengland.org/about_us/sport_england_conferences/idoc.ashx?docid=b97bc095-eb32-4c20-91d4-5943b85e9462&version=2)
- Weed, M. (2010) How will we know if the Olympics and Paralympics benefit health?: <http://www.bmj.com/content/340/bmj.c2202.extract>
- Youth Sport Trust: <http://www.youthsporttrust.org/>
- StreetGames: <http://www.streetgames.org/>
- National School Sport Week: <http://schoolsportweek.org>
- The Department of Health: <http://www.dh.gov.uk/>
- Sport England: <http://www.sportengland.org/>

## CREDITS

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