

# UNDERSTANDING OLYMPIC TOURISM FLOWS

› Legacy area: **MEDIA, CULTURE & TOURISM**

› Policy focus: **MEASUREMENT**

› **THE EVIDENCE:**

The Olympic and Paralympic Games provide few direct tourism benefits outside the host city

› **THE BIG THREE DEBATES:**

1.

How valuable and useful are pre-Games predictions of Olympic tourism impacts that might take place?

2.

Does it matter that the host city gets tourism benefits, but the rest of the host country often loses out?

3.

How can Games hosts be persuaded to measure and account for negative and neutral tourism impacts?

## UNDERSTANDING OLYMPIC TOURISM FLOWS

### › WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE SAY?

When the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games were awarded to London in July 2005, there were [claims that they would bring a £2 billion boost to the UK tourism industry](#). The year before, the [Tourism Society had claimed that over half of the long term net economic benefits of hosting the Games would come from tourism](#). Since the award of the Games, both the Chair of London 2012 and government ministers have claimed that [the rest of the UK would experience an economic and tourism boost as a result of training and preparation camps and from the Olympic football tournament](#).

However, [SPEAR's research on the impact of the 2012 Games outside London](#), funded by the [Economic and Social Research Council](#), showed that the most significant impacts of the Games outside London were likely to be social and cultural rather than economic, whilst the book "[Olympic Tourism](#)", based on research conducted by SPEAR staff, shows that:

- Olympic tourism flows are not always positive, often they can be neutral or even negative.
- The negative or neutral effects of Olympic tourism flows are rarely measured or accounted for.
- Positive effects for the host city may result in negative effects for the rest of the host country.

### › HOW WAS THE EVIDENCE GATHERED?

Working with partners at [Bournemouth University](#) and the [University of Essex](#), SPEAR hosted three 'think tanks' that brought together local, regional and national policy makers with leading academics to examine the evidence for the tourism impacts of the London 2012 Games outside the host city (as well as evidence for social, cultural and health benefits). This evidence was collated and presented to a wider audience at a one day conference, "[Leveraging Social, Cultural and Health Benefits from London 2012](#)."

At around the same time as the SPEAR 'think tanks', "[Olympic Tourism](#)" was published. This analysis examined reports of Olympic tourism flows at all Summer and Winter Games in the 21st century. It found that many claims about the value of Olympic flows were not based on evidence, but on estimates. Furthermore, most claims were predictions of what might happen that had been made before the Games were hosted, rather than being evaluations of what did happen after the Games had taken place. Finally, claims about Olympic tourism flows were often based on studies commissioned by the host city or government to demonstrate that there would be a return on their investment in the Games – there were very few independent studies based on evidence collected after Games' had taken place.

### › WHO WAS THE AUDIENCE?

The [Economic and Social Research Council \(ESRC\)](#) is a government funded research agency that supports social science research. It funds research if it believes it is of high quality and is likely to help shape public policy. Most of all, research funded by the ESRC is independent and impartial. The ESRC funded this research because it thought that it would help inform tourism policy and strategy for the Olympic Games at local, regional and national level.

A key feature of SPEAR's work on Olympic tourism flows has been to emphasise that the same tourism flows can have different effects on different parts of the host city and host country. In this respect, the [media in Wales](#) were interested in insights that showed that the tourism and economic impacts of the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Wales would be no greater than the impact of an average football match held at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff, and that the greatest benefits were likely to be in relation to sport, health and culture.

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### › THE BIG THREE DEBATES

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The Olympic and Paralympic Games undoubtedly have an impact on tourism, and the positive impacts in the host city can be significant. However, SPEAR's research into the measurement of Olympic tourism flows shows that claims about Olympic tourism are usually pre-Games predictions rather than post-Games evaluations. It also shows that negative effects, such as people staying away from the host city because they think the Games will make it too busy and too expensive, or the possibility that the host city will draw tourism flows away from the rest of the host country, are rarely accounted for. Finally, Olympic tourism flows that have no additional impact, such as people deciding to travel to the host city during the Games as a replacement for a trip at another time, are often counted as positive impacts.

#### THE BIG THREE DEBATES ABOUT OLYMPIC TOURISM FLOWS...

- 1 How valuable are the claims made about Olympic and Paralympic tourism impacts that are based on pre-Games predictions of the tourism that might take place?
- 2 Does it matter that most tourism benefits from the Olympic and Paralympic Games are in the host city, and that the rest of the host country might suffer negative impacts?
- 3 How can Olympic and Paralympic hosts be persuaded to measure and account for negative and neutral tourism flows instead of only measuring flows with positive impacts?

### › FURTHER RESOURCES AND READING

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- Weed M. (2008) Olympic Tourism. Oxford: Elsevier. [http://books.google.com/books?id=Rz8z8DTT\\_VgC&printsec=frontcover](http://books.google.com/books?id=Rz8z8DTT_VgC&printsec=frontcover)
- SPEAR (2009) Leveraging London 2012 in the Regions. SPEAR bulletin: <http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/Research/Centres/SPEAR/ResearchProjects/Documents/SPEAR%20Issue%201.pdf>
- Leveraging Social, Cultural and Health Benefits from London 2012: <http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/Research/Centres/SPEAR/ResearchProjects/OlympicAndParalympic/LeveragingSocial.aspx>
- The Economic and Social Research Council: <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/>

## CREDITS

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