

# 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?

## MEASURING AN OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC EFFECT ON SPORT PARTICIPATION

### › 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.

## MEASURING AN OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC EFFECT ON SPORT PARTICIPATION

### › THE BIG THREE DEBATES

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

- 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/ldoc.ashx?docid=b97bc095-eb32-4c20-91d4-5943b85e9462&version=2](http://www.sportengland.org/about_us/sport_england_conferences/ldoc.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

© Canterbury Christ Church University 2011. can:22/07/2011:x0002



This resource was produced by the Centre for Sport, Physical Education and Activity Research (SPEAR) at Canterbury Christ Church University as part of the [2012 Learning Legacies Project](#) managed by the HEA Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Subject Centre at Oxford Brookes University and was released as an Open Educational Resource. The project was funded by HEFCE and part of the JISC/HE Academy UKOER programme. Except where otherwise noted above and below, this work is released under a [Creative Commons Attribution only licence](#).

## EXCEPTIONS TO THE LICENCE



The name of Canterbury Christ Church University and the Canterbury Christ Church University logo are the name and registered marks of Canterbury Christ Church University. To the fullest extent permitted by law Canterbury Christ Church University reserves all its rights in its name and marks, which may not be used except with its written permission.



The JISC logo is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-No Derivative Works 2.0 UK: England & Wales Licence. All reproductions must comply with the terms of that licence.



The Higher Education Academy logo and the HEA Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Subject Centre logo are owned by the Higher Education Academy Limited and may be freely distributed and copied for educational purposes only, provided that appropriate acknowledgement is given to the Higher Education Academy as the copyright holder and original publisher.

## REUSING THIS WORK

To refer to or reuse parts of this work please include the copyright notice above including the serial number. The only exception is if you intend to only reuse a part of the work with its own specific copyright notice, in which case cite that.

If you create a new piece of work based on the original (at least in part), it will help other users to find your work if you modify and reuse this serial number. When you reuse this work, edit the serial number by choosing 3 letters to start (your initials or institutional code are good examples), change the date section (between the colons) to your creation date in ddmmy format and retain the last 5 digits from the original serial number. Make the new serial number your copyright declaration or add it to an existing one, e.g. 'abc:101011:000cs'.

If you create a new piece of work or do not wish to link a new work with any existing materials contained within, a new code should be created. Choose your own 3-letter code, add the creation date and search as below on Google with a plus sign at the start, e.g. '+tom:030504'. If nothing comes back citing this code then add a new 5-letter code of your choice to the end, e.g.; '01lex', and do a final search for the whole code. If the search returns a positive result, make up a new 5-letter code and try again. Add the new code your copyright declaration or add it to an existing one.

# SPEAR

SPEAR is part of  
Canterbury Christ  
Church University

SPORT, PHYSICAL EDUCATION  
& ACTIVITY RESEARCH