

# INSPIRING SPORT PARTICIPATION: THE DEMONSTRATION EFFECT

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

## › THE EVIDENCE:

The Olympic and Paralympic Games can inspire some people to play more sport

## › THE BIG THREE DEBATES:

1.

Are politicians and Games organisers telling the whole story about sport participation legacies?

2.

Is getting people who are already interested in sport to play more a good enough legacy?

3.

Do the Olympic and Paralympic Games put some people off playing sport?

## INSPIRING SPORT PARTICIPATION: THE DEMONSTRATION EFFECT

### › WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE SAY?

For some time claims have been made by politicians and Games organisers that major sporting events such as the Olympic and Paralympic Games can be used to inspire people to start participating in sport. The evidence suggests that elite sport, sports people and sport events can inspire others to play sport, and when this happens it is called a Demonstration Effect. But, the Demonstration Effect doesn't work with everyone, the evidence shows that strategies that use the Demonstration Effect can have three outcomes:

- Those people who already do a little sport can be inspired to do a little more
- Those people who have played sport before can be inspired to play again
- Some people might give up one sport to try another

### › HOW WAS THE EVIDENCE GATHERED?

SPEAR identified evidence for a Demonstration Effect on sport participation from [a worldwide review of evidence about the impact of previous Olympic and Paralympic Games, of other sport events, and of major sport teams such as Manchester United or the New York Yankees \(baseball\)](#). The best 53 studies from around the world since 1990 were analysed, with advice from an international expert panel, to find out what the studies collectively said about the potential of the Olympic and Paralympic Games to leave a sport participation legacy.

After this review, [SPEAR then analysed two national surveys in England](#), the [Active People survey](#) (which surveys 191,000 adults) and the [Satisfaction with the Quality of the Sport Experience survey](#) (which surveyed 45,000 sports participants) to find out if people in England said that the sport events or sport teams they followed affected their own participation in sport. These are very large surveys, and so the data they provide about sport participation preferences and experiences is representative and robust.

### › 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 would be worth investing government resources in initiatives designed to use the Olympic and Paralympic Games to increase sport participation to improve people's physical health and fitness. Once the review had shown that a *Demonstration Effect* could help inspire some people to play more sport, the Department of Health asked SPEAR to produce [an evidence-based guide for local policy-makers](#) to help them design programmes that could use the Games to get more people playing more sport. In August 2009, [Andy Burnham MP, who was the Minister for Health, made a speech](#) telling people about the contribution the Demonstration Effect could make to Olympic and Paralympic sport participation legacies.

[Sport England](#), which is the national organisation responsible for promoting sport, asked SPEAR to look at the evidence in the Active People and Satisfaction with the Quality of the Sport Experience surveys, which are commissioned by Sport England. Sport England wanted to know whether surveys conducted in England agreed with SPEAR's worldwide evidence review that a Demonstration Effect could get people playing more sport or playing sport again. The results showed that people who played sport less than twice a week, and those who had dropped out of sport in the last year, were more likely to be inspired to play more sport more often by the Olympic and Paralympic Games. In December 2010, [the Minister for Sport, Hugh Robertson MP, told Members of Parliament that SPEAR's research provided evidence to support government policy for a sport participation legacy](#).

## INSPIRING SPORT PARTICIPATION: THE DEMONSTRATION EFFECT

### › THE BIG THREE DEBATES

Although the evidence shows that a Demonstration Effect can get more people playing more sport, this effect does not work with everyone. The evidence is clear that a Demonstration Effect focusing on elite sport, sport events and sports people does not inspire people who do not play and never have played sport to start to play. In fact, there is some evidence that suggests that elite sport performances can put some people off playing sport because people who have never played think that they can't do what they see athletes like Sir Steve Redgave and Sir Chris Hoy doing at the Olympic Games. This is called a competence gap.

#### THE BIG THREE DEBATES ABOUT INSPIRING SPORT PARTICIPATION...

- 1 When politicians and people organising the Olympic and Paralympic Games say that the Games can be “inspire a new generation to take up sport”, are they telling the whole story?
- 2 Is using the Olympic and Paralympic Games to get people who are already interested in sport to play a little bit more a good enough legacy outcome?
- 3 Does it matter that elite sport performances at events like the Olympic Games might put some people off playing because it makes them feel that they can't do it?

### › 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/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, Mansfield L & Dowse S. (2009) Active Celebration: Using the London 2012 Games to Get the Nation Moving. <http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/Research/Centres/SPEAR/ResearchProjects/Documents/Active%20Celebrations%20IM.pdf>
- The Active People Survey: [http://www.sportengland.org/research/active\\_people\\_survey.aspx](http://www.sportengland.org/research/active_people_survey.aspx)
- The Satisfaction with the Quality of the Sport Experience Survey: [http://www.sportengland.org/research/sport\\_satisfaction.aspx](http://www.sportengland.org/research/sport_satisfaction.aspx)
- The Department of Health: <http://www.dh.gov.uk/>
- Sport England: <http://www.sportengland.org/>

## CREDITS

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