

# **Using the Olympic Games to Leverage Sport and Physical Activity Participation and Health-Related Behaviours – A Worldwide Systematic Review of the Evidence Base**

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Keywords: Olympics, sport participation, physical activity, health, systematic review

## **Abstract**

### Introduction

It is an often quoted misrepresentation that "no previous Olympic Games has raised participation in sport and physical activity". However, this is not quite true: it is true only that there is no evidence that previous Games have raised participation, furthermore, no previous Games has employed strategies towards raising participation. Therefore, despite being vaunted by commentators as a potential benefit of London 2012, sport, physical activity and, indeed, health-related behaviours [1] have not been part of strategies or evaluations for previous Olympic Games. In seeking to inform the development of such strategies, this paper will present a worldwide review of the evidence base for developing a health and physical activity participation legacy from the 2012 Olympic Games.

### Background

The trend in conducting assessments or evaluations of the Olympic Games and sports events is to move beyond a straightforward focus on impacts to consider opportunities that can be "leveraged" [2,3]. Unlike impact assessments, leverage has a strategic and tactical focus.

The objective is to identify the strategies and tactics that can be implemented prior to and during an event in order to generate particular outcomes. This implies a much more pro-active approach to capitalising on opportunities, which focuses on processes, rather than impacts research which simply measures outcomes. Like much previous research on the Olympic Games and sports events, this debate about the need for a leveraging focus has largely taken place in relation to economic issues.

However, recent work suggests that these processes are transferable [4] and, as such, discussions have been extended to incorporate a social dimension.

The significance of social, cultural and health opportunities related to the Olympic Games is that, unlike the majority of economic opportunities, they are not limited to

the host city. As such, unlike potential economic opportunities, for which there is a clear "stratified geography" [5], social, cultural and health opportunities need not be lessened by distance from the host city if effective leveraging strategies are employed.

## Research Approach

This paper will use the systematic review methodology [6] to examine the evidence base for developing a health and physical activity participation legacy from the 2012 Olympic Games.

However, a straightforward search for evidence relating to the impact of the Olympic Games on sport and physical activity participation and on health-related behaviours is likely to return only limited findings. This is for two reasons: firstly, as noted above, no previous Games has attempted this, and as such the reasons for a lack of evidence are simply likely to be that no strategies have been in place to raise participation and/or change behaviour.

Secondly, Sydney is the only Olympic Games in relation to which any evaluation of sport, physical activity or health (ie, non-economic) impacts has taken place. Similarly, there is likely to be limited evidence from other sports events (eg, Commonwealth Games, World Championships).

Consequently the review extends to the inclusion of sports "franchises" (eg, Major League Baseball teams in the USA, Premier League Football teams in the UK), as some research suggests [7] that such franchises can be highly successful in engaging local communities and interested constituencies. The review also extends to cover 'processes' that have used the Olympic Games, sports events and sports franchises to engage communities and constituencies in a range of behaviours (eg, tourism, volunteering) that recent research suggests are adaptable [8] for the leveraging of other behaviours such as engagement with sport, physical activity and health.

This extension of the review to include an examination of both outcomes and processes is designed to provide the best evidence [9,10] to inform strategy and policy as opposed to a narrower, more traditional review that would focus solely on outcomes.

## Results & Discussion

The results will be discussed in relation to four key areas:

### OUTCOMES:

What evidence exists that the Olympic Games, sports events or sports franchises can impact upon sport and physical activity participation and upon health-related behaviours?

### PROCESSES:

- a) By what processes have sport and physical activity participation and health-related behaviours been leveraged from the Olympic Games, sports events or sports franchises?

- b) What processes that have been used to leverage, inter alia, volunteering, community engagement and tourism from the Olympic Games, sports events and sports franchises might inform leveraging strategies for sport, physical activity and health?

#### EVALUATION:

How has the leveraging of a range of opportunities from Olympic Games, sports events and sports franchises been evaluated?

#### MEDIA:

What promotional and media strategies best facilitate the leveraging of opportunities from Olympic Games, sports events and sports franchises?

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