

A realist approach to policy evaluation for London 2012 Olympic legacies in a non-hosting region: a pilot study – an evaluation of the workplace challenge programme

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Abstract

Hosting the Olympics has been seen as a catalyst that would bring about positive changes in the host city and country. As a result, there has been a burgeoning set of studies that addresses the issues and legacies generated by the Olympics, with a particular focus on the host city. However, in the literature, there is a dearth of materials that specifically tackle the Olympic legacies for non-hosting regions. Furthermore, there has been a growing concern to evaluate the impacts of programmes / initiatives for many aspects of social policy (see e.g. Sallis, Bauman & Pratt, 1998; Rossi, Freeman, & Lipsey, 1999), and this has been more recently reflected in sport policy (such as Cavill, Foster, Oja, & Martin, 2006). The critical question for policy analysis that remains is why an initiative/programme has 'worked' in one particular context but not another. "What works for whom in what circumstances" is the central notion of the Realist Evaluation (RE) developed by Pawson and Tilley (1997). So far, as a promising contribution to the literature on theory-driven evaluation, the RE approach has not yet been widely applied in sport policy.

This study aims to evaluate and monitor the legacies of the London 2012 Games for a non-hosting region, i.e. Leicestershire (located 100 miles north of London). A number of legacy programmes/initiatives have been implemented to deliver the legacy vision across Leicestershire, and evaluated in this research. A piloting case study – an evaluation of the Workplace Challenge Programme (WCP) – had been completed at this early stage. It assessed the impacts of this intervention on regional sport and physical activity (PA) participation. In particular, it also aimed to tease out to what extent outcomes are *additional* to that which would have happened anyway, if the Games had not come to the UK. The WCP is an intervention developed by the LeicesterShire-Rutland County Sport Partnership to increase participation in sport and PA to staff in Leicestershire workplaces. The design and delivery of the WCP in 2011 was largely a product of concern that obesity levels were rising across Leicestershire and that insufficient numbers of population were

participating in the recommended 150 minutes a week of sport and PA.

The first phase of the research analysis was to develop a thorough understanding of the WCP approach and its intended outcomes, by developing an analytic logic model which spelled out the anticipated relationships between inputs, throughputs, outputs and outcomes, and the causal logic which underpins those anticipated relationships. Preliminary discussion with key policy actors about the extent to which the existence of the programme could be directly attributed to the Games has suggested that it was not an Olympics 2012 related initiative. Therefore, the focus of the evaluation in terms of *assessing additionality* of the London 2012 Games had shifted to whether the Games boosted interests and thus the level of outputs. Using a range of techniques, including qualitative semi-structured interviews, a quantitative survey, documentary analysis, and key stakeholder consultation, evidence emergent from the programme-level evaluation was then employed to help to identify the mechanisms producing desired changes in behaviours and related policy outcomes, and thus to assess the additionality.

The evaluation results (will be more fully developed in the presentation) demonstrated that the WCP represented a successful approach to encourage engagement with a regular sport and PA, as there was a significant increase in the percentage of participants achieving the recommended amount of participation in sport and PA from 34% at registration to 47% by those who completed the post survey evaluation. It was also evident from survey studies and reinforced in interviewees' responses that the WCP helped to bring up social and psychological benefits, such as fostering social conversation between colleagues, meeting new people, feeling 'fitter' and 'happier' etc. In terms of the element of *additionality*, the fact that the London Games were coming to the UK had little direct influence on decisions to participate in the programme. Nevertheless, it has been reported that the Games did encourage participants to sustain and try different sports. The conclusions point to some of the lessons learned for future policies, as well as the improvements which might be made to the 2012 WCP, and the implications for outcome-oriented evaluations.

Reference

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