
DID LONDON 2012 INSPIRE A GENERATION?

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Abstract

1. AIM

In the last major strategic review of sport in the UK, Game plan (2002) argued that the UK should adopt a twin-track strategy of hosting and being successful at major sports events, and the encouragement of sports participation because of the significant health benefits and to reduce the growing costs of inactivity. This approach was subsequently endorsed following the change in political leadership of the UK following the election of the coalition government in 2012. This idea consequently became enshrined in one of the legacies for the 2012 Games, to leave behind world-class sports facilities which meet a clearly defined sporting need and become the heart of existing communities, and slogans such as 'inspire a nation'. This paper addresses the research question: Is there any evidence that London 2012 raised sports participation?

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The theoretical argument that exposure to a major sporting event like the London 2012 Olympic Games could stimulate increased sports participation rests in a number of relatively disparate contributions. One argument, following an economic theoretical perspective, is that exposure to major sports events have both direct and indirect impacts through externalities on individuals. Consequently, their well-being is improved either directly from knowledge or experience of the event, or indirectly through stimulating changed behaviour. (Pawlowski et al 2013). The mechanisms for this changed behaviour might vary. For example it could be due to the impact of role models (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000) or imitation and 'bandwagon' effects (Liebenstein, 1950). The implication, nonetheless, is that it has been argued that there is a 'trickle down' effect such that 'mass sports participation is stimulated by public exposure to elite sport' (Frawley et al 2009, p3). This paper examines the extent to which the Games have generated a trickle-down effect.

3. METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

The paper draws upon data from the Taking Part Survey (TPS), commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

The TPS is a continuous (repeated cross-section, but not a panel) national survey of England which was first undertaken in 2005. In this study, data from seven waves (2005/06 – 2011/12) together with pre-release access to wave eight of the data are employed. The rolling monthly survey design is exploited to produce a monthly time series of data running from July 2005 until June 2013. This provides the first opportunity to consider the effects of London 2012 on sports participation. The paper analyses the data by distinguishing the trend and cyclical behaviour of sports participation from seasonal effects, and examines if the period of the games has affected this behaviour. The data is analysed for both male and females separately and for different age groups.

4. RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS

Examples of results suggest that for younger males aged between 16 to 25 there is some evidence of an up turn in minutes of sports participation but less evidence of a change in participation or not in an activity. The opposite is the case for females of the same age. This could reflect that the Olympics boosted typically male participation, but attracted new female participants. However, there is also less evidence that the former results are driven by the Games but could reflect a longer term cyclical change. With older age groups there is evidence of male and female increases in participation. The implication is that the Olympics has reached less standard sports participation.

References

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