

LIMITED OR LASTING LEGACY? THE EFFECT OF NON-MEGA SPORT EVENT ATTENDANCE ON PARTICIPATION

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Aim

Legacy is a term that has become synonymous with major sports events (Cashman, 2005). Hosting such events is now commonly assumed to deliver a wide range of economic, physical, social and sporting outcomes to local communities lasting beyond the duration of the event itself. However, much research focuses on mega-events and the economic dimensions of legacy (e.g. Preuss, 2007). This paper focuses on the effect of non-mega, 'major', sport event attendance on sport participation legacy.

Literature review

There is a wide literature on defining events; nevertheless, there is no universally accepted definition of different types of events. Gratton *et al.* (2000) suggest the following event typology:

- Type A: Irregular, one-off major international spectator events generating significant economic activity and media interest (e.g. the Olympic Games);
- Type B: Major spectator events generating significant economic activity, media interest and part of an annual domestic cycle of sports events (e.g. Wimbledon tennis);
- Type C: Irregular, one off, major international spectator / competitor events generating limited economic activity (e.g. Athletics Grand Prix);
- Type D: Major competitor events generating limited economic activity and part of an annual cycle of events (e.g. national championships in most sports).

For the purpose of this paper, non-mega 'major' events are considered to be Type C and, to a lesser extent, Type B events. They are generally smaller than Type A (mega) events in terms of their size, reach and economic potential. It is often claimed by event promoters that hosting major sports events will inspire people to 'choose' sport and subsequently increase longer term participation, which will create wider societal benefit. Nevertheless, in reviewing relevant literature, Ramchandani and Coleman (2012) note that the evidence of a 'trickle-down' effect of mega-events such as the Olympic Games on mass participation is both limited and mixed. Moreover, the focus of previous research on this subject has been mega, multi-sport, events. There is little (if any) evidence on the impact of single-sport, non-mega, events on sport participation and this paper attempts to address this gap.

Methodology

Spectators (aged 16 and over) were interviewed across nine sports events held in England between 2010 and 2012, to establish the extent to which they were inspired by their event experience to undertake more sport themselves. These included: two team events (women's hockey and women's rugby); a mass participation event (triathlon); an age group event (junior rowing); and, five other individual events of international sporting significance (athletics, badminton, BMX, trampoline and track cycling). Seven of the nine events were funded by UK Sport via its World Class Events Programme.

An aggregate spectator sample of 6,993 was achieved, of whom 58% reported an 'inspiration effect'. Moreover, one in five respondents (21%) also provided contact details for subsequent research. Around 12 months following the events, these individuals were contacted to examine whether and how their participation behaviour had changed post event. Overall, 434 individuals responded to the follow up survey, the main results of which are summarised below.

Results / discussion

The survey revealed that nearly 35% of respondents had either taken up sport or increased their sport participation frequency in the three months following their attendance at an event. Encouragingly, the majority of these respondents (70%) had maintained this participation increase at the time of the follow up survey. Hence, 24% of the sample demonstrated a 'systematic' improvement in sport participation post event (i.e. both initially and 12 months later). Moreover, there was also a 'lagged' increase (i.e. not initially but 12 months later) reported by 11% of the sample. Therefore, 46% of the sample was doing more sport at some point, whether initially or 12 months later. Respondents who had reported being inspired by their experience during an event were more likely than those who were not inspired to have increased their participation levels initially (42% v 24%) and sustained this increase (29% v 17%) in the longer term.

Across all these sub-groups, substantial proportions (between 71% and 90%) said that their event experience had, to some extent, been influential in leading them to undertake more sport. The other most common factors cited by respondents that contributed to any increase in participation were linked to experiencing other sports events - either in person or on television. Accepting the self-report nature of the data, the evidence indicates that certain types of non-mega sports events are capable of stimulating participation increases amongst sections of the audience. However, given the plethora of such events that audiences may consume on a regular basis, it can be problematic to attribute causality to a single event, particularly with the passage of time.

References

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