

# MANAGING BRITISH OLYMPIC SPORTS: THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC FUNDING ON OLYMPIC PERFORMANCE AND MASS PARTICIPATION

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Over the past three decades there has been continuous revision of the UK sport system (Bloyce, et.al 2008). As a result of the changes and the switch between the Conservative and Labour governments, the emphasis on sport has undergone notable modifications (Green and Houlihan, 2004). However, these changes also suggest a level of uncertainty or loss of focus in regards to the purpose and aims of the sport system (Bloyce, et.al 2008). Funding elite sport is often rationalised by its supposed relationship with increases in mass participation and national pride (due to increases in international sporting success). In addition, UK Sport has adopted a 'No compromise' policy under which the UK heavily invests in selected few Olympic sports, considered to have higher potential to win medals (De Bosscher et.al 2006).

De Bosscher et.al (2006), state that overall funding has a significant impact on Olympic success. Does this mean that more money in will bring more medals out? Adding to the work of Garrett (2004) and Sam (2012), 'target' funding is defined by performance and successful performance itself depends on sufficient funding and its utilisation. Effective funding utilisation systems increase winning chances and the potential for achieving international medal targets (Trenberth and Hassan, 2012).

This paper studies the relationship between UK Sport's Olympic sports funding, medal success and participation. The aim is to interpret and critically examine the UK Sport funding distribution for the Olympic Games of Beijing'08 and London'12. While each of the three concepts has been widely studied (Green and Oakley, 2001; Shibli et.al 2012), there is little research suggesting a relation between funding and performance (Green, 2006; De Bosscher, et.al 2006), and none looking at possible relation between all three. It is in the aims of this research to establish whether such relation is present by analysing target funding and its potential impacts on performance and participation numbers in British Olympic sports.

To examine the relationship between funding, performance and mass participation, we constructed a database consisting of historical figures on UK sport funding from Beijing '08 to London '12, participation rates and Olympic medal counts for all Olympic sports which have received funding through UK Sport (27 in total, excluding Football and Tennis as they are self-funded). Using the statistical software SPSS, statistics for the data were produced and a sport by sport analysis of the correlation between funding, participation and medal success was conducted.

Vayens et.al (2009) state that a tendency between countries has emerged in developing systematic approaches to 'support potential talents' in selected Olympic sports with the help of targeted public funds. However, this matter of 'double targeting' (once targeting few Olympic sports, and then selecting athletes within them) raises concerns. The more institutions target, the smaller their talent pool becomes. Furthermore, the return of talent investment is more likely to be seen in the long-term (longer than one Olympic cycle) rather than the short-term (within a single Olympic cycle). This not only reduces chances for the nation's desired success, but it also prevents those athletes with potential who are placed outside the targeted, to develop and determine their winning capability.

Preliminary results indicate that indeed overall more funding brings more medals. UK Sport invested over £235 million towards the Beijing'08 Olympics, and GB won 47 medals. For London 2012 the figure exceeded £264 million, and Britain won 65 medals (63, as 2 of the medals were from Tennis). However a sport by sport analysis does not reveal consistent results with as some of the highest funded sports show poor performance over all Olympic cycles.

In addition, preliminary participation analyses show low and even decreasing numbers in the majority of Olympic sports. This paper will provide detailed figures to support these claims and develop several propositions which require further research and testing to examine the relationship between elite sport success, funding, and mass participation.

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