

Social Return On Investment In Sport: A Model For Measuring The Value Of Participation In England

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Aim of the research/project

Recent evidence suggests that sports participation can create societal benefits in terms of improved health, reduced crime, increased social capital, improved education outcomes and enhanced subjective well-being (Taylor, Davies, Wells, Gilbertson & Tayleur, 2015). However, research which attempts to value the social impact of sport at the population level is limited. The aim of the research presented in this paper is to measure the impact of sports participation in England, using a Social Return on Investment (SROI) framework. It is the first time this methodology has been used to measure the sports sector at the national level.

Theoretical background/literature review

SROI is a framework for understanding, measuring and valuing net outcomes of an activity, organisation or intervention. It has evolved from Cost Benefit Analysis, together with sustainability and financial accounting (Fujiwara, 2014). Nicholls, Lawlor, Neitzert and Goodspeed (2012: p. 8) define SROI as "...a framework for measuring and accounting for [the] broad concept of value; it seeks to reduce inequality and environmental degradation and improve wellbeing by incorporating social, environmental and economic costs and benefits". SROI offers an approach to social impact valuation, which is guided by seven clear principles and a standardised framework. There is a strong emphasis on stakeholder engagement and measuring what matters to people affected by an intervention, organisation or policy (Vardakoulias, 2013).

SROI is increasingly being used by public agencies, private organisations and the Third Sector in the UK, Europe and North America, to measure social value and to justify public investment. However, to date, the application of SROI to sport has been limited. There are some examples of SROI being applied to specific sport interventions but the application of this technique is in its infancy and it has not yet been applied more widely to the sports industry, particularly at the national level, in a way that conventional economic analysis has been (Taylor, Davies, Wells, Gilbertson & Tayleur, 2015).

Methodology, research design, and data analysis

There were a number of stages to developing the SROI analysis for sport in England. These are outlined below:

- Establish scope and identify key stakeholders
- Map outcomes in logic model (Theory of Change)
- Measure and value outcomes
- Establish impact and calculate the SROI ratio
- Report and share findings with stakeholders

The scope of the study was England; children aged 10–15 and adults 16+. The year of evaluation was 2013/14. Stakeholders included in the research were government departments with responsibility for funding sport; local authorities; schools; higher education institutions; commercial sports providers; voluntary clubs; sports participants (consumers) and volunteers.

A Theory of Change was developed to build the SROI model. It detailed how inputs, used to resource and deliver sports activities (measured as outputs), result in outcomes for stakeholders. Inputs were measured using secondary data sources from stakeholder financial accounts. Outputs were measured using the England Active People Survey and the Children Taking Part Survey.

Outcomes were identified through reviewing literature and consulting academic experts in the field. The outcomes included in this research were health, crime, education, social capital and well-being. They were valued using literature, secondary data and financial proxies, sometimes with the help of assumptions.

The SROI value was calculated by expressing the value of the social outcomes created in relation to the cost (inputs) of achieving them.

Results, discussion, and implications/conclusions

The value of social outcomes generated from sports participation in England was £44.8 billion and the total inputs to sport were £23.5 billion, giving a SROI value of 1.91; i.e. for every £1 spent on sport, there was

£1.91 worth of benefit generated. The largest contribution to the social benefit of sport was provided by the values associated with wellbeing derived from participating and volunteering, totalling £30.43 billion.

The research illustrates that it is possible to use a SROI framework to measure sport at the national level and that in 2013/14, the social value of sport in England was positive. The research provides policy makers with robust and evidence-based research upon which to better articulate the case for investment for sport in England. This is particularly relevant to the continued policy discussion on public subsidies to sport, not only in England but in other countries. Even so, there are limitations to the data sources used in the research, which means that the results are likely to underestimate the total value of sport. On this basis, the paper provides suggestions for how the research could be taken forward in the future, including the development of a European wide model for measuring the social value of sport.

References

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