

Centre for Sport, Physical Education & Activity Research

**A Review of the Evidence Base
for Developing a Health and
Physical Activity Participation
Legacy from the 2012 Olympic
Games**

Background to the Review

April 2008

SPORTPHYSICALEDUCATION&ACTIVITYRESEARCHSPORTPHYSICALED
UCATION&ACTIVITYRESEARCHSPORTPHYSICALEDUCATION&ACTIVIT
YRESEARCHSPORTPHYSICALEDUCATION&ACTIVITYRESEARCHSPORT
PHYSICALEDUCATION&ACTIVITYRESEARCHSPORTPHYSICALEDUCATI

a) Introduction

The Centre for Sport, Physical Education & Activity Research at Canterbury Christ Church University has been commissioned by Physical Activity Network West Midlands (on behalf of physical activity leads in the South East, London, East of England, East Midlands and West Midlands) to conduct a review of the evidence base for developing a health and physical activity participation legacy from the 2012 Olympic Games. This brief paper sets out the context and the background to the review.

b) Researching Olympic Legacies

The trend in conducting assessments or evaluations of sports events in general, and the Olympic Games in particular, is to move beyond a straightforward focus on impacts to consider opportunities that can be “leveraged” (Chalip, 2004¹; Chalip & Leyns, 2002²). Unlike impact assessments, the study of leverage has a strategic and tactical focus. The objective is to identify the strategies and tactics that can be implemented prior to and during an event in order to generate particular outcomes. Consequently, a leveraging approach implies a much more pro-active approach to capitalising on opportunities, which focuses on *processes*, rather than impacts research which simply measures *outcomes*. Like much of the previous research on the Olympic Games and other sports events, this debate about the need for a leveraging focus has largely taken place in relation to economic issues. However, recent work has suggested that these processes are transferable (Chalip, 2006³) and, as such, discussions are now being extended to incorporate a social dimension. The importance of this has been recognised by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) who have recently funded a project led by Canterbury Christ Church University to examine the leveraging of social, cultural and health benefits from London 2012⁴.

The significance of social, cultural and health opportunities related to major events such as the Olympic Games is that, unlike the majority of economic opportunities, they are not limited to the host city (although their potential to spread more widely is related to the size of the event). As such, unlike potential economic opportunities, for which there is a clear *stratified geography* (i.e. a differentiation of impact according to geographical region and scale) (Weed, 2008⁵), social, cultural and health opportunities need not be lessened by distance from the host city if effective leveraging strategies are employed.

¹ Chalip, L. (2004) Beyond Impact: A General Model of Sport Event Leverage. In B. Ritchie & D. Adair (eds.) *Sport Tourism: Issues, Interrelationships and Impacts*. Clevedon: Channel View.

² Chalip, L. & Leyns, A. (2002) Local Business Leveraging of a Sport Event: Managing an event for economic benefit. *Journal of Sport Management*, 16: 132-158.

³ Chalip, L. (2006) Towards Social Leverage of Sport Events. *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 11(2): 109-127.

⁴ See www.canterbury.ac.uk/News/newsRelease.asp?newsPk=922

⁵ Weed, M. (2008) *Olympic Tourism*. Oxford: Elsevier

It is an often quoted misrepresentation that “no previous Olympic Games has raised participation levels in sport and physical activity”. This is not quite the case for two reasons: firstly, it is true only that there is *no evidence* that any previous Games has raised participation (this is not the same thing as not having raised participation) and, secondly, no previous Games has employed strategies towards raising sport or physical activity participation. As such, the use of an Olympic Games to raise sport and physical activity participation has not been attempted in any real sense. Furthermore, such comments apply even more clearly to health behaviours, which, despite being vaunted by commentators as a potential benefit of London 2012, have not been part of strategies or evaluations for previous Olympic Games.

There is, however, an “illusion” of a research base in this area. Two Health Impact Assessments, in London (LHC/LDA, 2004⁶) and the North East (NEPHO, 2006⁷), of the health-related potential of London 2012 suggest that there is some relevant evidence. However, each of these reports is largely based on the opinions of health experts at round tables and workshops rather than any empirical evidence base. Consequently their conclusions are prefaced by statements such as “hosting the Games is thought to...” (LHC/LDA, 2004⁸) or the Games “could result in increased interest in sports” and “could have a health benefit for the North East” (NEPHO, 2006⁹). Similarly, Coalter’s (2004¹⁰) contribution to the IPPR/Demos publication, *After the Gold Rush* is a discussion of intents, potential models and possibilities as, again, there is no evidence base. This leads Coalter (2004¹¹) to conclude that potential positive outcomes for sport participation are likely to be the result of “complex and not well understood interactions”. This reinforces the recent conclusions of Murphy and Baumann (2007¹²) that the “health potential of major sporting and physical activity events is often cited, but evidence for public health benefit is lacking”.

c) Reviewing Health and Physical Activity Legacies

Given the background outlined above, it is likely that a straightforward search for evidence relating to the impact of the Olympic Games on sport and physical activity participation and on health-related behaviours will return limited findings. This is for two reasons: firstly, as noted above, no previous Games has attempted this, and as such the reasons for a lack of evidence are simply likely to

⁶ London Health Commission & London Development Agency (2004) Rapid Health Impact Assessment of the Proposed London Olympic Games and Their Legacy. London: LDA.

⁷ North East Public Health Observatory (2006) The Health Impact of the 2012 Games. A Screening Health Impact Assessment of the North East’s draft vision for the London Olympic Games and Paralympic Games 2012. Newcastle: NEPHO.

⁸ London Health Commission & London Development Agency (2004) Op.cit., p.103

⁹ North East Public Health Observatory (2006) Op. cit. p.8 & p.ii.

¹⁰ Coalter, F. (2004) Stuck in the Blocks? A sustainable sporting legacy. In A.Vigor, M.Mean & C.Tims (Eds.) *After the Gold Rush: A sustainable Olympics for London*. London: IPPR/Demos.

¹¹ Coalter, F. (2004) Op. cit., p.108.

¹² Murphy, N. & Bauman, A. (2007) Mass Sporting and Physical Activity Events – Are they “Bread and Circuses” or Public Health Interventions to Increase Population Levels of Physical Activity. *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, 4(2), 193 – 202.

be that no strategies (or even aims or goals) have been in place to raise participation and/or change behaviour. Secondly, Sydney is the only Olympic Games in relation to which any evaluation of sport, physical activity or health (i.e. non-economic) impacts has taken place (and as such there may be some evidence available from Sydney). However, other Games have been either too commercially focussed (e.g. Atlanta), too disorganised (e.g. Athens) or based in a country with an incomparable social and economic system (e.g. Beijing), to yield any usable evidence. Similarly, there is likely to be limited evidence from other sports events (e.g. Commonwealth Games, World Championships and high profile annual events such as the Tour de France). Consequently the review extends to the inclusion of sports "franchises" (e.g. Major League Baseball teams in the USA, Premier League Football teams in the UK), as some research suggests (Sparvero & Chalip, 2007¹³) that such franchises can be highly successful in engaging local communities and interested constituencies¹⁴. As such, and given the general focus on a leveraging approach which assumes that investigating and understanding processes (from which lessons can be learned) can be a much more useful approach than measuring outcomes (which may not provide lessons for future strategy), the review will also cover 'processes' that have used the Olympic Games, sports events and sports franchises to engage communities and constituencies in a range of behaviours (e.g. tourism, volunteering) that recent research suggests are adaptable (O'Brien & Chalip, 2007¹⁵) for the leveraging of other behaviours such as engagement with sport, physical activity and health. This extension of the review to include an examination of *both* outcomes and processes is likely to provide the *best evidence* (Cook, Mulrow & Haynes, 1997¹⁶; Tranfield, Denyer & Smart, 2003¹⁷) to inform strategy and policy as opposed to a narrower, more traditional review that would focus solely on outcomes.

Key to understanding the processes that might be used to engage communities and constituencies, and to ensuring that the right lessons are learned, is an understanding of the way in which such processes have been evaluated. Again, the evaluation of leveraging processes in relation to a range of behaviours (not just sport, physical activity and health) are to be examined to provide the best evidence for developing strategy. Finally, the role of promotional strategies, including those of sponsors, and the ways in which the media are engaged and utilised to support such processes and strategies have proven to be a key issue in the successful leveraging of the Olympic Games, sports events and sports

¹³ Sparvero, E. & Chalip, L. (2007) Professional teams as leverageable assets: Strategic creation of community value. *Sport Management Review*, 10, 1-30.

¹⁴ Here we are using communities to refer to groups in reachable geographical locations, and constituencies to refer to those that might have an interest in the event or franchise and thus that may be reachable regardless of geographical location.

¹⁵ O'Brien, D. & Chalip, L. (2007) Executive Training Exercise in Sport Event Leverage. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 1(4), 296-304.

¹⁶ Cook, D.J., Mulrow, C.D. & Haynes, R.B. (1997). Systematic reviews: synthesis of best evidence for clinical decisions. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 126(5), 376-380

¹⁷ Tranfield, D, Denyer, D. & Smart, P. (2003) Towards a Methodology for Developing Evidence-Informed Management Knowledge by Means of Systematic Review. *British Journal of Management*, 14(3), 207-222.

franchises (Green, 2001¹⁸; Green Costa & Chalip, 2003¹⁹), and the evidence base will also be examined in this respect.

There are therefore four key questions guiding this review:

i) What evidence exists that the Olympic Games, sports events or sports franchises can impact upon sport and physical activity participation and upon health-related behaviours?

The purpose of this question is to assess *outcomes* – specifically, what evidence exists on the impact (positive or negative, short-term or long-term) on sport, physical activity and health behaviours.

ii) By what processes have sport and physical activity participation and health-related behaviours been leveraged from the Olympic Games, sports events or sports franchises?

iib) What processes that have been used to leverage, inter alia, volunteering, community engagement and tourism from the Olympic Games, sports events and sports franchises might inform leveraging strategies for sport, physical activity and health?

These questions relate to *processes*, and are the central questions that can inform strategy. The evidence base of processes employed both in relation to sport, physical activity and health behaviours and in relation to the broader engagement of communities and constituencies will be explored.

iii) How has the leveraging of a range of opportunities from Olympic Games, sports events and sports franchises been evaluated?

In supporting iia) and iib) above, this question will help to examine the quality of the evidence returned and assist in developing an evaluation approach in relation to London 2012.

iv) What promotional and media strategies best facilitate the leveraging of opportunities from Olympic Games, sports events and sports franchises?

This question will examine evidence on the central role of the media in the success or otherwise of leveraging strategies and processes.

The systematic review methodology is to be employed to assess the evidence base in relation to these questions. The systematic review procedure differs from a traditional narrative literature review as it explicitly focuses on an objective, replicable, systematic and comprehensive search of literature and research evidence, and includes a transparent audit trail of methods and processes (Coren & Fisher, 2006²⁰). As such it has been seen by organisations such as NICE

¹⁸ Green, B.C. (2001) Leveraging subculture and identity to promote sport events. *Sport Management Review*, 4(1), 1-19.

¹⁹ Green, B.C., Costa, C. & Chalip, L. (2003) Marketing the Host City: Analysing the Exposure Generated by a Sport Event. *International Journal of Sport Marketing and Sponsorship*, Dec/Jan, 335-353.

²⁰ Coren, E. and M. Fisher (2006). The conduct of systematic research reviews for SCIE knowledge reviews. London: Social Care Institute for Excellence.

(National Institute for Clinical Excellence) and the ESRC as providing a more comprehensive and transparent method for assembling the 'best evidence' to inform policy than traditional reviews of literature.

The results of the review are expected in September 2008.

Mike Weed, Esther Coren & Jo Fiore
SPEAR

Contact: mike.weed@canterbury.ac.uk