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**Title: Can Sport Events “Service” Sport Participation?**

**Abstract**

Many bids for sporting events, large and small, claim that the event will promote active participation in sport, but there is little scientific evidence to support this claim. This chapter examines whether, and to what extent, sporting events of various sizes can influence sport participation and which factors are important to increase the effect of sporting events on participation in sport. We present a model to leverage sport events for participation, as well as an event leveraging framework. We conclude that building capacity in local sport clubs is needed, so that they can include events into their current marketing mix to attract new participants in their sport.

## **1. Introduction**

The economic and social impact of major sporting events such as the Olympic Games and the World Cup has attracted considerable attention from researchers in recent years. After all, this type of mega sporting event is accompanied by large public spending, which means that it is almost self-evident that more and more efforts are being made to find positive and sustainable social effects. So far, however, most of the research has focused on the economic and tourism impact of such events (Preuss 2007). In recent years, more and more attention has been paid to the less tangible consequences of events, including the social impact (Horne 2015; Gibson et al. 2014; Heere et al. 2013; Schlegel, Pfitzner, & Koenigstorfer 2017) or increasing sports participation (Potwarka, Drewery, Snelgrove, Havitz, & Mair 2018; Ramchandani, Coleman, & Bingham 2017; Weed et al. 2015).

As the concept of sport is central to the sporting events, it is not unreasonable to expect a positive effect on the level of sporting participation of the population due to a major sporting event. Policy makers and organizers of sporting events like to emphasize this as a positive outcome from events by highlighting how events can help reducing sedentary lifestyles. This was certainly the case during the 2012 Summer Olympics in the United Kingdom, where the focus of the so-called legacy program was on increasing sport participation among the population. To put it with the words of Sport England, the English Sports Administration:

‘[The Olympic Summer games 2012 are organised]... to create a sustainable legacy and get more children and young people taking part in high quality PE [Physical Education] and sport.’(Brooks & Wiggan 2009: 406)

Lord Sebastian Coe, chairman of the organizing committee of the Olympic Games in London, put this as follows:

‘I’ve always felt the primary purpose of a medal is that it signifies a big British moment – and big British moments in sport have to have a conversion rate. For the Chris Hoy [Olympic cycling Gold medalist at the Beijing Games] of this world, and our rowers and swimmers, the real challenge for our governing bodies and for sport more broadly is, how many people can you get into the sport off the back of that great moment?’ (as cited by Weed et al. 2015, p. 198)

These quotes refer to the "demonstration effect", the "inspiration effect", or sometimes also called the "trickle-down effect." This would mean that top sport successes or other outstanding achievements in sporting events can inspire others to boost their level of sport participation and physical activity (Weed et al. 2015). However, evidence for these effects is very limited and inconclusive (Ramchandani, Davies, Coleman, Shibli, & Bingham 2015). Moreover, such studies mainly focus on so-called sport mega-events (Hindson, Gidlow, & Peebles 1994; Veal, Toohey, & Frawley 2012).

In addition to a shift in research attention from the purely economic to the wider social impact of sporting events, there has also recently been a noticeable shift in the type of events being studied. Supported by the fact that smaller events can create more positive outcomes for the local population than their large counterparts (Taks, Chalip, & Green 2015), there is growing interest in smaller-scale events (e.g., Green, Misener, & Chalip 2014; Hoskyn, Dickson, & Sotiriadou 2018). The types of events referred to here can be considered a “little brother” or a “little sister” from the sport mega-event, meaning that they are “special”, “one-off”, “out of the ordinary” and creating a shock in the local community, despite their smaller scale. These smaller events require fewer

resources (such as people, equipment and financial support), which increases the chance of positive economic effects (Agha & Taks 2015). On a social level, the small-scale nature of these events offers opportunities for greater participation and control of the local population in the organization and the realization of the event. It is generally known that such a bottom-up strategy has more chances of success to generate lasting positive consequences for host communities than a top-down strategy, as is often the case in the organization of mega-sporting events (Misener & Mason 2006; Taks 2013). In this way, sport participation can potentially become a positive outcome of small-scale sporting events for the local population.

Nowadays, almost all bids for sporting events, large and small, claim that the event will promote active participation in sport. However, as stated earlier, there is little scientific evidence to support this claim (Weed et al. 2015). This contribution therefore examines whether, and to what extent, sporting events of various sizes can influence sport participation and / or physical activity and which factors are important to increase the effect of sporting events on participation in sport. Based on a literature review, we first examine "what we know" about the effects of sporting events on sport participation. Examples are cited for both large and smaller events, but the focus is mainly on the possible effects of smaller events. Major sporting events are the Summer Olympics and the Football World Cup (also known as sport mega-events; Müller 2015), but most Commonwealth Games, the Winter Olympic Games or the Football World Cup for Women are also included in this category of large-scale events by most authors. Small sporting events are defined as one-off events that often have an international character, but where participants play an important part in the number of visitors in relation to the viewers and are therefore smaller in scale. Examples of these smaller-scale events are the International Children's Games, the Youth Olympic Games, the European Boxing Championship for Juniors, European Swimming Championships for

Juniors, the Badminton World Cup, etc. (Gratton & Taylor 2000). Next, we reflect on “what needs to be done” so that sport events can “service” sport participation and emphasize the central role of local sport organizations in this context.

## **2. What do we know?**

Sport events occupy an important place in the sports economy, ranging from professional sport and elite sport events at the top, to events at the level of informal sport participation (see Figure 1). The model distinguishes professional sport events and other formal events organized at the international, national, provincial or local level in collaboration with sport governing bodies (e.g., sports federations) and local clubs. The rise of informal events should not be underestimated. Walking and cycling events for people of all ages and abilities readily being organized, blurring the distinction between “sport participation” and “physical activity”. These types of events are increasingly organized by both commercial and non-profit organizations, which pursue various goals, including financial profit or fundraising for a good cause (e.g., cycling against cancer, walking to combat multiple sclerosis, etc.).

### **2. 1. Sport Participation and Large-Scale Sport Events**

The Olympic Games attract the attention of people all over the world, including people who are not interested in sports. With sport as a core product, the Olympic Games are a potentially powerful tool to stimulate sport awareness among the population. However, various researchers have established that the trickle-down effect of the Olympic Games is limited. After the Olympic Games in Sydney in 2000, Toohey (2008) concluded that there was a strong increase in the field of passive sports, in particular watching the Games instead of actively participating in sports. Moreover, Veal and colleagues (2012) found increased levels of sport participation in some non-Olympic sport and a decrease in some Olympic sports.

A study on the trickle-down effect of the 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games found the overall effects to be relatively small (Wicker & Sotiriadou 2013). Only 5.9% of the respondents reported to take up a new activity, and 6.9% reported spending more time participating in sport and physical activity. Various groups who benefitted were younger people, less educated people, females, people of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin, and the locals. Note that “taking up a new activity” is not necessarily “new participation”; people may just have switched. Moreover, the data were collected in 2006, the year of the event, and confirm the general finding of other studies of an “immediate post-event” effect (e.g., Kaplanidou et al. 2012); evidence for sustained increases in sport participation is lacking.

Craig and Bauman (2014) studied the impact of the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver on the level of physical activity of 5- to 19-year-old Canadian youth (n = 19 862). Physical activity was measured with pedometers in this study. The measurements were conducted between August 2007 and July 2011. The researchers found no objectively measurable impact of the event on the physical activity level, nor on the level of sports participation. Similar findings were reflected in a systematic literature study carried out by Mahtani and colleagues (2013) in the run-up to the 2012 London Olympic Games.

Pfister and colleagues studied the impact of the 2011 World Cup for Women in Germany on the participation rate of women in football (Pfister, Klein, & Tiesler 2014). From the start of the bidding process in 2007, the “Deutscher Fussball-Bund” (German Football Federation) launched various initiatives to promote women's football in Germany. Immediately after the event, an increase in the number of girls' memberships was noted. However, the authors reflected that it is not sufficient to look at the number of memberships, but that the number of football teams are a more accurate measure to evaluate football participation. They noted that the number of teams

already began to decline in 2010 (before the event), and continued to decline after the event. The authors concluded that the world championship did not cause an increase in the number of women playing football, but underlined that the quality of women's football improved remarkably as a result of this event. This implies that sporting events can indeed have an impact on the development of the sport in question, thereby generating positive effects for those who are already involved in sport.

Weed and colleagues (2015) performed a systematic review on the relationship between Olympic Games and sport participation. The authors concluded, in the few cases where an increase in sport participation rates was observed, that: (i) those already engaged in sports may start exercising more; (ii) those who participated in the past may decide to start again; and (iii) already active athletes may be inspired to start practicing another sport. In short, if there is an incentive for major sporting events to stimulate participation, it is for those who are or have already been involved in sport. Despite the interest of policymakers to increase the level of participation in sport, there is therefore no scientific evidence that large-scale sporting events can encourage inactive groups to start practicing sports. There is also no evidence for sustainable and long-term sport participation effects. To date, there are no longitudinal follow-up studies that study this impact in the years following the end of an event.

## **2. 2. Sport Participation and Small-Scale Sport Events**

Between 2010 and 2012, Ramchandani and colleagues (2015) collected data from 434 spectators on nine small-scale sporting events in England (including the BMX Supercross World Cup, Trampoline and Tumbling World Championships, Rowing Junior Championships). The spectators were asked about their sport participation behavior both during the event and a few months after the event. The analysis showed that attending these events led to an increase in sports

participation, both among people who were already active during their lifetime and among non-athletes. In summary, the authors identified three effects: immediate, lasting and delayed effects. An immediate effect meant that respondents started to do more sport within the three months following the event; a lasting effect meant that respondents started to exercise more within the three months following the event and also maintained this level during the follow-up study (6 months to 1 year after the event); a delayed effect meant that respondents started to exercise more 6 months to a year after the event. The authors warned, however, that a causal link between attending the event and increased sports participation cannot simply be assumed; after all, behavioral changes cannot simply be attributed to attending a one-off event because many other factors can play a role over time.

Taks and colleagues examined the sport participation effect of small-scale sporting events (Taks, Misener, Chalip, & Green 2013). Two small-scale Canadian sporting events were central to this study, namely the Pan American Junior Athletic Championships (T&F), organized in 2005 in Windsor (Ontario) (Taks, Green, Misener, & Chalip 2014) and the Canadian National Figure Skating Championships (SKA), organized in 2005 in London, Ontario (Misener, Taks, Chalip, & Green 2015). In the first phase, leveraging tactics and outcomes were examined for the two events. Document and media-analysis, as well as retrospective interviews (n=21 and n=14 respectively) with key stakeholders (i.e., local organizing committee, local sport organization, facility managers, athletes) were conducted six years after the events. Key figures were members of the organizing committee, members of local sport organizations, managers of local sport facilities and athletes. The results showed that the key figures expect such events create awareness among the population and that participation in sport will “automatically” be encouraged. However, this does not reflect reality. Similar to previous studies, there was no evidence that participation rates rose, or that non-

athletes were attracted to start participating in sports. However, the events again seem to give a boost to those who were already actively participating in sports. The latter effect was brought about by a number of tangible initiatives, such as (i) the construction of a new stadium (for T&F); (ii) the organization of a coaching seminar (for T&F); (iii) the implementation of an educational school program and targeted demonstrations during breaks (for SKA); and (iv) handing out leaflets (for both events). The construction of a new stadium had a positive effect on sport development. The organization of a coaching seminar, on the other hand, was unsuccessful due to a lack of participants. Note that these initiatives (i.e., a better stadium a coaching clinic) benefit those who are already active in sport. The potential impact of the educational school programs and leaflets (actions iii and iv) are unclear due to insufficient planning and evaluation strategies. The fact that no partnerships were established for the specific purpose of reaching new groups was subsequently experienced as a missed opportunity. It is clear from the cited studies here that, similar to large-scale events, small-scale sporting events are in and of themselves not able to appeal and target the sport-inactive population. To start using sporting events to promote new sport participation, specific strategies and tactics must be developed in advance.

Following the impact assessment in the aforementioned studies by Taks and colleagues (2013), the second phase focused on developing the needed strategies and tactics to leverage sport events for participation (Chalip, Green, Taks, & Misener 2017). A panel of twelve experts was invited to participate in this phase of the study. The group had expertise in areas such as sport governance, event management, sport facilities, coaching, tourism, marketing, education, and community development. The experts had to detect specific factors that could - and / or undermine - leverage the relevant sporting events. The model with possible stimulating and / or inhibiting factors that resulted from this part of the study is shown in Figure 2. Factors that were put forward

by the experts were: (i) the culture, (ii) opinions and attitudes, (iii) systems and structures<sup>1</sup>, (iv) the available resources (including people, knowledge and material), and (v) the sports participation goal itself. All these factors must be considered when integrating sports events into the existing marketing mix of sports organizations. Potential barriers to stimulate sports practice need to be solved, such as the lack of capacity to accommodate new members, the displacement of local sports clubs during the organization of the event, possible negative incentives from top sport performance because they are out of reach for beginners etc.

In the third phase of the study focused on the implantation phase and for which a complete event leveraging framework was developed consisting of a planning phase, and implementation phase and an evaluation phases (see Figure 3; Taks et al. 2018). The 2013 International Children's Games (ICG) was chosen as the event to be leveraged. The ICG is a multi-sport event, consisting of eight sports, for young people between the ages of twelve and fifteen. Athletics (T&F) and gymnastics (GYM) were chosen as sports to increase the participation rates. Through participatory action research (Reason & Bradbury 2006), in which the researchers collaborated with the local sports clubs, strategies and tactics were developed to use the ICG to attract new members in the selected sports. The collaboration with the sports clubs started six months prior to the event. The implementation was then observed during the event, and evaluated six months after the event, and again, one year after the event. It was determined that the clubs had ideas and could develop plans, but proved unable to implement those plans. Here and there some isolated tactics were carried out, such as handing out posters in schools for the event and placing leaflets on windshields of cars during the event (T&F). Problems with implementing the developed strategies and tactics were

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<sup>1</sup> Systems and structures refer to the existence or non-existence of alliances between sports organizations, event organizers and other stakeholders

mainly due to a lack of manpower (T&F) and a lack of cooperation between the various clubs to take joint action (GYM). The latter is not surprising, since these clubs are often competitors of each other. However, cooperation ("cooperation") and "co-opetition" (i.e., the notion that sports clubs compete and cooperate at the same time) (Walley 2007) must get the upper hand over the sense of competition if the level of sport participation in a community is to be increased. During the interviews, one year after the event, some respondents mentioned an inspiration effect for those who were already in sports because of the international nature of the event, which was very attractive and very unique for this age group. However, despite the fact that efforts were made to actively deploy the event through various strategies and tactics, there is again no evidence for increased sports participation in one of the eight sports exposed through the event. As was the case in previous studies (Taks et al. 2014; Misener et al. 2015), representatives of the sports in question admitted that they had missed opportunities to increase participation in their sport.

On the basis of the literature review and the study of the leverage effect of small-scale sporting events, it can be concluded that increasing sport participation through events remains a challenging task. Events cannot "service" sport participation in, and of themselves. Targeted actions by, and collaboration between event organizers and their stakeholders is mandatory. In summary, the following key points apply:

- i. sports events will not automatically bring about an increase in sports participation;
- ii. there are nonetheless opportunities to use events to generate sport participation if the requisite strategies and tactics are put into place;
- iii. board members and volunteers in sports clubs do not necessarily have the required skills and resources to take advantage of a locally hosted event to build participation in their sport;

- iv. sports clubs have a set of standard operating procedures for recruitment and retention, and often settle for a status quo;
- v. An event can catalyze the interest of sport club administrators in the possibilities for a better effort at building their sport.

### **3. What needs to be done so that sport events can “service” sport participation?**

Based on the literature and our own findings, we do know, that in order to maximize desired impacts, outcomes need to be specifically planned and strategically implemented before, during and after the event (e.g., Chalip 2004; 2006; Taks et al. 2018), and that more efforts and planning will have to be focused on the longer-term application and promotion of legacy programs. One of the major question that arises is: “Who should assume responsibility for leveraging events to promote sport participation?”. Where the initial impetus is usually given during the bidding process, it is clear that the organizing committee often does not see the promotion of sport participation as a priority. Their attention is primarily focused on the successful organization of the event itself, which is understandable given the budget and time-constraints of organizing an event. The possibility remains to set up a subcommittee with the specific aim of promoting sport participation in the local community. But that too can cause difficulties in view of the strict start and end date of the event, which makes it difficult to continue to promote sustainable outcomes. Alternative solutions are for a local sports council to take up this task together with local sports clubs and other stakeholders (e.g., physical education teachers, sports officials, etc.).

In addition to assigning responsibilities, it is also important to increase the capacity of local sports clubs so that they themselves are able to integrate events into their marketing mix (see Figure 4). Future research should show how sports clubs can increase their capacity efficiently and effectively. The processes and the results of the leverage strategies applied must also be evaluated,

as well as the extent to which an event can offer added value in the marketing mix of sports clubs to increase sport participation. Furthermore, we must look for ways in which the increased participation in sport can best be measured. This does not necessarily have to be based solely on an increase in the number of members in organized club-sport (Pfister et al. 2014). After all, sporting events can also encourage informal sport participation (Downward et al. 2009). While a more general framework to support leveraging has been proposed (Taks et al. 2018), effective and efficient leverage strategies and tactics must be further developed (Chalip 2014; Chalip et al. 2017).

Finally, the specific context in which an event takes place must also be considered. One must therefore have sufficient knowledge about the available resources of the host city and the prevailing social needs. It also seems appropriate to develop a typology of sporting events in function of their potential social contribution: certain events may contribute more to a stronger sense of community, while other events may lead to more sporting participation. In other words: “Can we identify which types of sporting events have the greatest potential to promote sport participation”?; and if so” “Are this participation or spectator sports events, uni- or multi-sports events, one-day or multi-day events, youth or master events, etc.?”

It is clear that action must be taken if an increase in participation in sport is to be achieved on the basis of sporting events. If increasing sport participation is a desired outcome, it must be explicitly included in policies and objectives for the sport event organization, both for large and small-scale events, and at local, provincial, national and international level. Both the literature and our own research findings suggest that strategies, tactics and measurements should be implemented long before the start date of the event (Chalip 2014). Weed and colleagues (2015) call this prior phase “the pregnancy period” of an event. In order to generate positive effects of sporting events

on sport participation, basic measurements must first be performed (i.e., what is the current state of affairs regarding participation in a particular sport?). Strategies and tactics must then be developed, planned, implemented and evaluated. The various tasks involved in this leveraging process must be clearly assigned to a group that can take on this specific responsibility before, during and after the event. Sustainable sports participation effects can be created if local sports clubs are involved in this process. It is essential, however, that sports clubs have the necessary capacity and know-how to make this happen.

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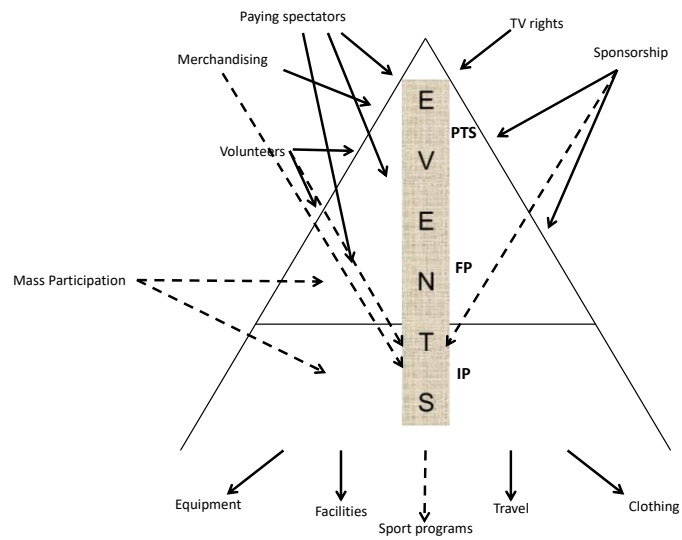
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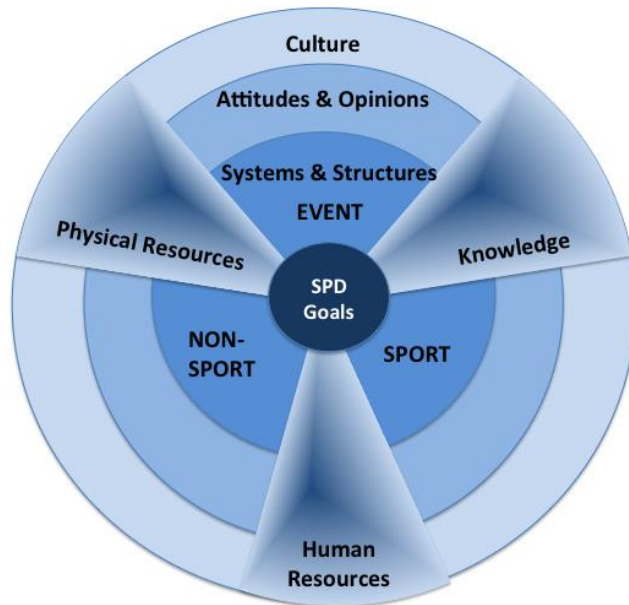
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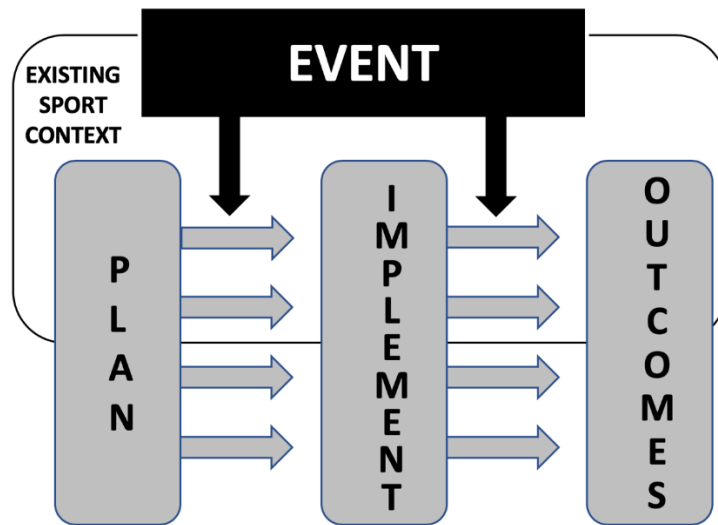


**Figure 1:** The Role of sport events in the economy of sport; source: Taks& Misener 2015, p. 110)

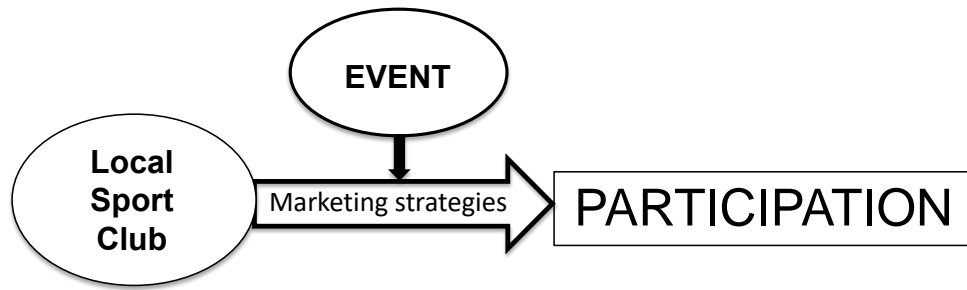
*Note.* Figure adapted from Downward et al. 2009, p. 38; dashes imply adaptations from original model.



**Figure 2:** Model for leveraging sport events for participation (Chalip et al. 2017, p. 261)



**Figure 3:** Event Leverage Framework (Taks et al. 2018, p. 186)



**Figure 4:** Leveraging sport events for sport participation and the service role of local sport organizations