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Educational Olympic Challenge: the Legacy of Public Sport Participation

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Abstract

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One of the Olympic impacts is the educational notion of "sport participation". That notion refers to the idea that public participation in sport or physical activity, will increase as a result of the Olympic Games. Promoting the public sport participation became an Olympic demand for hosting the games. The UK government sport bodies have decided to set out to increase the public sport participation as a result of hosting the 2012 Olympic Games. That decision was based on improving sport facilities and on the concept of "demonstration effect". The assumption is that this educational effect is taking place when people observing elite sport performance will be inspired to join in public sport or physical activity. The aims of this paper were to explore the issue of public sport participation as an Olympic legacy, to describe some theories on the challenge of achieving that legacy, and to present some conclusions about that issue relating to London 2012 games. A qualitative approach was used to achieve the aims of this paper. The literature review includes some strategic and educational theories which lie behind the processes of sport participation and demonstration effect. Finally, some research findings and conclusions were presented relating the implementation of the sport participation legacy in the London 2012 games.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background and rational of the paper

The Olympic Games, being the largest sporting mega events, have some significant impacts on the hosting cities. Those impacts are expressed in three major areas: Environmental, cultural/social, and

economic. The concept of "legacy" reflects the impacts lasting for long time, and was adopted by the Olympic Movement. In 2011, the IOC (International Olympic Committee), which is the supreme authority of the Olympic Movement, has decided to turn that concept of legacy into an important demand for the hosting the Olympic Games (IOC 2011). One type of the Olympic legacy is the educational notion "sport participation". That notion refers to the idea of public participation in physical or sport activity, which will increase as a result of the Olympic Games in the hosting city or even in that nation. Promoting the public sport participation is a major idea of the Olympism and the Olympic Movement, and so that notion has also been declared as one of the Olympic demands for the hosting of the games (Homma and Masumoto 2013).

London 2012 became the first Olympic Games to pro-actively set out to use the games for increasing in sport participation levels to achieve that legacy. In 2008, the UK government announced its policy of achieving the target of a 1% per annum increased sport participation in the adult population (Shipway 2007, Weed et al. 2012). The UK government interest in the promoting of sport participation was based on the assumption, that such increased mass participation in sport leads to improvement in the health of the nation. In order to achieve that target, the government's body DCMS (Department for Culture, Media and Sport) has focused primarily on improving sport facilities. At the same time, it is likely that the DCMS was also relying on a more direct impact derived from the educational concept of demonstration effect (Boardley 2013). The process of demonstration effect is taking place when people are inspired to participate in sport activity through observation of elite sport, sports people or sport events. Although being difficult to verify, the demonstration effect has widespread acceptance (Weed et al. 2015).

The aims of this paper are to explore the issue of public sport participation Olympic legacy, while describing some educational/ behavioral, and strategic theories lying behind the challenge of achieving that legacy, and to present some conclusions about that issue relating to the London 2012 Games.

1.2. Methodology

In order to achieve its purposes, a qualitative approach was used in this paper. The justification for using that method is based on the essence of this work, aimed to explore the knowledge gathered so far on the issue of sport participation as an Olympic impact, examine it and come into conclusions. That method relies primarily on the collection of qualitative data, and examination of that knowledge in a descriptive/commentary way for getting conclusions (Johnston, Christensen, and Turner, 2014). In their discussion on the policy process of sport participation legacy, Girginov and Hills (2009), have recommended that a qualitative approach would be useful in analyzing that policy process.

This paper has concentrated on the issue of the public sport participation impact from hosting the Olympic Games. Data collection and analysis was based on gathering the suitable material from literature on the issue, the different theories and the problems in achieving the Olympic legacy of public sport participation.

2. Literature review

2.1. Sport policy

The achievement of the educational target of public sport participation as an outcome of the Olympic Games, is now an important legacy of the Olympic Movement. Accordingly, the sport policy implemented by the hosting city became more relevant in achieving that target. Some theoretic aspects of the of sport policy process have been considered in the literature. Girginov and Hills (2009) pointed out the two approaches of studying the sport policy: the positive approach which is considered as an outcome-oriented and the constructivist approach which is a process oriented. Girginov and Hills have justified the study of sport policy through the constructivist view, giving more importance to the process. Chalip (2006) presented another view in relation to event process and outcomes. His view called 'event leverage model' is focused on strategy and tactics of the event. In that model the aim is to identify the strategies and tactics to be implemented prior to and during an event, in order to achieve particular outcomes. Homma and Masumoto (2013) introduced the idea that the sport policy has to be related to three factors: people's attitude, social system and people's behavior. They suggested the 'culture complex' model, in which the sport policy is the essential trait that interrelate those three factors. The people's attitude factor reflects individual's motivation or values, the social system refers to education or other social aspect, and the people's behavior refers to participation in sports or change in lifestyle. When looking to the desired development of sport legacy, that relationship between the factors and the sport policy should be examined. According to Homma and Masumoto it is necessary to look at that process at least from the bidding for the Olympic Games to 10 years after the Games. The reason for that long period is the desired target of developing sport legacy, which is by definition a long term demand.

2.2. Demonstration effect and sport participation

The idea that viewing the 2012 games may have a positive impact on the public sport participation was a major assumption of the DCMS being the first Olympics to promise public sport participation. The DCMS assumption was based on the demonstration effect, where people viewing the games on television or through the internet, will change their attitudes on participating in sport/physical activity (Boardley 2013). Former research done on that issue has shown that past Olympic Games have not generated any increasing in sport participation (Girginov and Hills 2009).

In the case of Olympic Games the demonstration effect has some implementation problems, due to the fact that the Olympic media coverage of the games is focused by nature on elite sport. In that context, the self-efficacy theory (Bandura 1997), suggests that watching the elite athletes taking part will cause a negative impact on the self-efficacy beliefs of most viewers. Thus, people viewing elite sport competitions can lose their confidence and their motivation to participate in sport/physical activity. That problem can possibly be solved by adding coverage of none elite sport along with the elite performances shown in the Olympic Games broadcasting (Boardley 2013; Weed et al. 2015).

While summarizing former studies, Weed et al. (2015) presented some conclusions on the processes of demonstration effect. It seems that demonstration effect increased participation frequency among people that were already engaged in physical activity, but had no influence on those with no previous

intention to engage in sport or physical activity. Another important suggestion is that the demonstration effect is more powerful if properly leveraged during the pre- Games period.

3. Conclusions and London 2012 sport policy

This paper presented information on the Olympic challenge of public sport participation. Some major conclusions on that issue are pointed out, which can be connected to London 2012 sport policy. In the demonstration effect people viewing elite sport (shown in the Olympic Games competitions), are expected to participate in sport/physical activity. Research findings (Weed et al. 2015) have shown that demonstration effect will result in increasing the frequency of participation of people who are already engaged in sport/physical activity. Also, the demonstration effect would not bring new participants to start in activity. The evidence also suggests that the demonstration effect has to be leveraged through the pre-games period to bring successful results.

Some conclusions on the sport policy in the London 2012 games can be presented. Those conclusions are based on the theories and research findings on sport participation and process of demonstration effect. Five surveys by the Sport England (a governmental body under the DCMS), took place in examining the effect of London 2012 games on public sport participation. Four surveys were done in the years 2007-2011, and one took place after the games in December 2012. Findings of those surveys have shown that the influence of London 2012 games on public sport participation, mainly based on the demonstration effect, was limited. The only positive result was the increase of frequency in practicing by people who were already engaged in sport/physical activity (Sport England 2007; 2009; 2010; 2011; 2012). Those results are in line with research findings and theories on sport participation and the demonstration effect. The importance of leveraging the process of demonstration effect and sport participation was not implemented by the DCMS, while setting their early goal of significantly increasing the number of people's sport participation due to the hosting of London 2012 games (weed et al. 2015).

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