

Institution: University of Kent
Unit of Assessment: 26 - Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism
Title of case study: Informing Public Debate and Policy Makers on the Olympic Games Legacy
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Research by Dr Sakis Pappous on the legacy of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games in Greece has challenged conventional wisdom that sporting mega-events automatically lead to health benefits for the host population via a supposed increase in grassroots participation in sports and physical activity. These findings were reviewed by the British Medical Journal (BMJ) and mainstream British media (e.g., BBC and The Guardian) to stimulate and inform public debate on the health legacy of London 2012. Pappous's research has also informed the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the House of Commons and the House of Lords about the difficulty in achieving sustained sports participation after the Olympic Games.</p> <p>Internationally, Pappous's research has informed debate in the US media (USA Today) and among sport managers and policy makers in Africa, South America and Europe. International policy makers informed and influenced by Pappous's findings include the Nigerian Minister of Sports and the Vice Director of the Colombian Department for Sport, Physical Activity and Leisure (COLDEPORTES). As a direct consequence of Pappous's findings, they now acknowledge that a broader strategy promoting an active lifestyle must be implemented if any sporting excitement caused by a mega-event is to sustain sports participation.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Background</p> <p>There is significant public debate amongst academics, sport managers and policy-makers on the effects of sporting mega-events (such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup) on sports participation and physical activity amongst the host population. One of the key pledges set out in the City of London's bid to host the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games was to create a legacy of increased sports participation across the UK. However, whilst there is much anecdotal evidence surrounding the legacy of sporting mega-events for a host nation, there is scarce empirical evidence to support it. The quantitative evidence that does exist is inconclusive probably because national surveys of past hosts have been undertaken over different time periods and for different purposes, so that the data are not directly comparable.</p> <p>Description of the underpinning research</p> <p>The research underpinning this case study was carried out by Dr Sakis Pappous as Senior Lecturer at the University of Kent in 2009. With this research he aimed to address the lack of empirical evidence on the long-term influence of sporting mega-events. His study involved a secondary data analysis in order to determine whether there has been any long-term increase in sports participation and physical activity in Greece following the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. The analysis was based on Eurobarometer surveys carried out in Greece over three different periods: before the 2004 Games (2003), just after the 2004 Games (2004), and five years after the 2004 Games (2009). The results of his analysis indicated that, rather than producing a lasting increase, the Olympic Games in Athens lead only to a temporary increase in sports participation and physical activity in Greece. In fact, compared to pre-Olympic levels, Pappous's analysis showed that the proportion of Greek people involved in regular exercise increased from 10% in 2003 to 16% in 2004. However, this increase in participation was not sustained and numbers plummeted to 3% by 2009.</p> <p>Pappous's findings thus refute the conventional wisdom that presumes sporting mega-events lead to health benefits for the host nation via an increase in grassroots participation in sports and physical activity. His findings suggest that, if a broader strategy promoting an active lifestyle is not implemented, sporting mega-events will not sustain sports participation. Instead, the sporting excitement may ultimately lead to a 'rebound effect', where participation drops to levels lower than during the pre-event period.</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

3. References to the research

Author(s) Athanasios Pappous
 Title. Do the Olympic Games lead to a Sustainable Increase in Grassroots Sport Participation? In: Savery, Jill and Gilbert, Keith, eds. Sustainability and Sport. Common Ground, Champaign, Illinois, pp. 81-87.
 Year of publication: 2012
 Type of output: Book chapter (ISBN 978-1-86335-913-9)

This output is publicly available at Kent Academic Repository (<http://kar.kent.ac.uk/31622/>).

Before publication this output was reviewed by two experts in sport sustainability: Jill Savery (Head of Sustainability at America's Cup Event Authority) and Keith Gilbert (Professor and Director of the Centre for Sport, Disability and Health, University of East London). This output was one of the key studies reviewed in a Feature Article published in the BMJ in 2012 and republished as an Editorial in the British Journal of Sports Medicine in 2013 (see sources to corroborate the impact).

4. Details of the impact

By challenging conventional wisdom on the health legacy of sporting mega-events, Pappous's findings have stimulated and informed public debate in the UK and abroad. His research has also had demonstrable impact on key policy makers like the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the House of Commons and the House of Lords, the Nigerian Minister of Sports, and the Vice Director of the Colombian Department for Sport, Physical Activity and Leisure (COLDEPORTES).

Stimulating and informing public debate in the UK and abroad

Pappous's research enabled the British Medical Journal to challenge the conventional wisdom that sporting mega-events automatically lead to health benefits for the host population via a supposed increase in grassroots participation in sports and physical activity. In fact, Pappous's research was one of the key studies reviewed by the Guardian health correspondent Denis Campbell in his Feature Article "[Will London's Olympic public health legacy turn to dust?](#)" published in the BMJ the 21st of June 2012 and republished as an Editorial in the July 2013 issue of the British Journal of Sports Medicine (see sources to corroborate impact). The primary aim of this article was to stimulate public debate by assessing the likelihood of success for the promise made by the British government and London 2012 organizers to increase young people's participation in sport. Pappous's research was reviewed in the article to directly challenge this promise and to suggest that, if a broader strategy promoting an active lifestyle is not implemented, then sporting excitement on its own will not sustain participation (page 2).

To maximise its impact, Pappous has been proactive in working with the media and presenting its findings to sport managers and policy makers worldwide (see our approach to impact in REF3a). He draws from his research when he appeared in documentary produced by the BMJ entitled "[The health legacy of the Olympic Games](#)". In this documentary Pappous informs the public debate on the health legacy of the Olympic Games by discussing his research on the 2004 Olympic Games, the failure to effectively use Olympic facilities for grassroots sport activities in Greece, and the successes of Scandinavian countries in promoting sports and physical activity despite not hosting the Summer Olympic Games.

In addition to the BMJ article and documentary, Pappous was invited to inform public debate on the health legacy of the Olympic Games by discussing his research on the 2004 Olympic Games in a variety of national and international media including the **BBC** ("[London 2012 legacy may be short-lived, research claims](#)" 1/6/2011), **The Guardian** ("[London 2012 sports legacy unlikely to be long-term, research suggests](#)" 29/5/2011) and a Special Article by Traci Watson for **USA Today** ("[Good will, but not good health](#)" 21/6/2012), the newspaper with the highest circulation in the United States ([six million readers daily](#)).

Pappous's research has had impact in Africa and Latin America. In fact, during the REF 2014 period, he attended as an Invited Speaker three meetings of sport managers and policy makers where he informed and stimulated their debate by presenting and discussing his findings on the 2004 Olympic Games in Greece:

- 1) [18th National Sports Festival "Eko 2012"](#): Pappous A "The Sport Legacies of the Olympic Games: Lessons from Athens 2004 and London 2012" 22 November 2012, Lagos, Nigeria.
- 2) [2nd Congress of the Latin American Association of Sport Management](#): Pappous A "Increasing Grassroots participation via sport Mega-Events: A firework effect or a sustainable legacy? The case of Athens 2004" 28-30 March 2011, Monterrey, Mexico.
- 3) [III Congreso de la Asociación Latinoamericana de Gerencia Deportiva \(ALGEDE\)](#): Pappous A "Health Benefits of Hosting Sport Mega Events" 25-27 April 2013, Pereira, Colombia.

Dr Sakis Pappous also informed and stimulated debate by presenting and discussing his research on the 2004 Olympic Games in Greece to a [European audience of sport organisations' elected representatives and managerial staff at the second edition of MESGO](#), the Executive Master in European Sport Governance (17-21 June 2013, Barcelona, Spain). MESGO is a unique programme designed for sports sector professionals wishing to master the complex dimensions and the diversity of international practices related to professional sport on an international level.

Informing and influencing policy makers in the UK and abroad

UNITED KINGDOM

Pappous's findings have informed government's understanding of the long-term legacy of the Olympic Games, generating a debate with a **spokesman of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport**. As the [BMJ article](#) reports at page 2:

Pappous's findings are a direct challenge to Coe's Singapore certainty. When a Department for Culture, Media, and Sport spokesman responded to them, he insisted that ministers and London 2012 organisers remained "completely committed to delivering a lasting sporting legacy from the 2012 Games." But, he added with notable realism: "Increasing participation as a result of hosting the Games is not an easy task and past host cities have not managed to achieve that, but we are not shirking from our ambition."

During the immediate build-up to the London 2012 Olympic Games, Dr Pappous was invited to write an article for [The House Magazine](#) (the weekly publication of the House of Commons and the House of Lords) for a special pre-Olympic edition on the potential legacy of London 2012. The House Magazine wanted to provide **Members of Parliament and Peers** with information about the legacy of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games in order to inform their debate on the potential legacy of the London 2012 Olympic Games. The article entitled "[Lessons from abroad: Hosting the Olympics does not necessarily lead to increased grass roots sports participation](#)" was published in the 19th of July 2012 issue of The House Magazine (see sources to corroborate impact).

NIGERIA

Dr Pappous was invited to deliver a keynote talk in the context of the 18th National Sports Festival "Eko 2012" in Nigeria on the 22nd of November 2012. This one-day event brought together international sports administrators from different African nations including the Chief Executive Officer of the 2010 South Africa FIFA World Cup, Danny Jordaan, the Director of the Department of International Cooperation and Development, International Olympic Committee (IOC), Ganda Sithole, and the Minister of Sports/Chairman of National Sports Commission (NSC) of Nigeria, Bolaji Abdullahi.

The Nigerian Minister of Sports stated that, after listening to Dr Pappous talk, he is "now thinking to establish additional and specific programs to improve the legacy of the National Sports Festival event in Nigeria" (see sources to corroborate impact).

COLOMBIA

In April 2013 Dr Pappous was invited to Colombia to present and discuss the results of his study in a sport managers meeting attended by the Vice-Director of COLDEPORTES Juan Carlos Penia Quintero. COLDEPORTES (Departamento Administrativo del Deporte, la Recreacion la Actividad Fisica y el Aprovechamiento del Tiempo Libre) is the Colombian equivalent of the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport in the UK.

The Vice-Director of COLDEPORTES addressed a letter to Dr Pappous stating that his talk on the legacy of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games “has had an important impact and is currently informing and inspiring our policies on the design of future Sports Events” (see sources to corroborate impact). He added that “Dr Pappous research challenged the assumptions and the high expectations when setting national targets of sport participation legacies after a big event. In the discussions that we had with him after his second invitation to participate in a Forum in Colombia, we realised that behaviour change requires funding and support of different grass root physical activity programs such as the one we are organising weekly in the streets of Bogota called Ciclovía.” He concluded that “COLDEPORTES is interested at strengthening the links with international academic institutions and we are exploring ways to formalize our collaboration with Dr. Pappous by offering a role as an advisor in the planning of Mega Events such as the Ciclovía”.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

The main sources to corroborate the impact of Pappous’s research on the Athens 2004 Olympic Games are:

[Campbell D. Will London's Olympic public health legacy turn to dust? BMJ. 2012 Jun 21; 344:e4207 and related documentary](#)

To provide factual evidence that the BMJ used the research described in this case study to stimulate public debate on the health legacy of the London 2012 Olympic Games.

To provide factual evidence of the debate that the research described in this case study stimulated with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (page 2).

[Pappous A. Lessons from abroad: Hosting the Olympics does not necessarily lead to increased grass roots sports participation. The House Magazine. 19 of July 2012; page 41](#)

To provide factual evidence that Members of Parliament and Peers were informed about the potential legacy of London 2012 by the research described in this case study.

Person who can be contacted: Nigerian Minister of Sports, National Sports Commission

This contact (Nigerian Minister of Sports) can corroborate the impact that the research described in this case study has had on his thinking about specific programs to improve the legacy of National Sports Festival event in Nigeria.

Person who provided statement: Vice Director of COLDEPORTES (Colombian Department of Sport, Physical Activity and Leisure)

This statement from the Vice Director of COLDEPORTES can corroborate the impact that the research described in this case study has had on the work of his department in Colombia.