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INVESTING IN HAPPINESS



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**REPORT**

**3**

# **THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF SPORTING, CULTURAL, COMMEMORATIVE AND COMMUNITY EVENTS**



### ABOUT THIS REPORT AND THE AUTHOR

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This report is an independent submission to the Spirit of 2012 inquiry. The research and analysis was financially enabled by Spirit of 2012 but IPPR maintained full editorial independence, including over the report’s recommendations.

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## SECTION 1

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Over the last 25 years central government and councils have given greater recognition of the power of events to boosting economic growth and promote regeneration, most recently in the Levelling Up white paper. Last year’s Budget and Spending Review saw £41 million allocated to major sporting event bids, while research from the consultancy firm EY suggests that major sporting events could deliver benefits of up to £11 billion to the UK in terms of economic impacts and soft power. There is a clear need to understand the economic impacts of events, to make sure that budgets are spent effectively and positive impacts are realised. This report reviews existing literature on the economic benefits of events.**

Although difficult to monetise, it is also important to consider non-financial costs which may include the privileged use of any existing infrastructure, the contribution of volunteers and negative impacts on local residents. There may also be multiplier costs in local economy, as an event may require additional expenditure by local businesses, for example, hiring hotel and catering staff.

The economic benefits of an event include:

- consumer expenditure generated by the event and the impact of this on jobs, wages and the performance of the local economy. Here it is important to identify what portion of the total consumer expenditure surrounding the event is truly additional, and which portion of it is simply activity that would have happened anyway.
- the value of the services provided by the event.

## Costs and benefits of an event

The direct costs of holding an event include:

- Bidding costs
- Capital costs of specialised facilities for larger events which can be large and are notorious prone to overrun allocated budgets
- General infrastructural costs such as transport and visitor accommodation.
- Operational costs – the cost jobs and services need to run an event, stakeholder and volunteer management, policing and security.
- Costs of delivering legacy and impact commitments

There is a clear need to understand the economic impacts of events, to make sure that budgets are spent effectively and positive impacts are realised.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Policy and practice issues

There is a large body of literature that looks at the economic benefits of running large cultural or sporting events. However, there are such analyses face methodological challenges, as it can be difficult to monetise the less tangible benefits of events such as civic pride or soft power. There are also gaps in knowledge, particularly a lack of independent studies about the long-term impact of events. Indeed, most research about the economic impacts of events are ex-ante studies, commissioned by event organisers which have been criticised for over-estimating the tangible economic benefits of events.

Organisations running events often make commitments about the long-term economic impacts of events, yet these organisations often disband once the event is over. There is also a lack of evidence about the distributional impact of events, looking at which sections of society benefit from events.

Despite these shortcomings studies of the economic benefits of events raise a number of policy and practice issues.

- 1

Central and local government should have greater involvement in delivering long-term legacy plans, working alongside event organisers to do so.
- 2

Where appropriate, central government should play a greater role in co-ordinating the delivery of major events, with these responsibilities explicitly relating to specific events.
- 3

Policy-makers should bear in mind the risk of cost overruns associated with the delivery of large events and should make a realistic assessment of the costs associated with doing so.
- 4

Policy-makers should also bear in mind the potential place-making benefits of small-scale, local, repeated events when deciding how to allocate budgets between small and large events.
- 5

Policy-makers should allocate a portion of core events funding to legacy activities, including for planning and evaluation.
- 6

The legacy planning process should be designed as a long-term process, with impacts potentially not seen until twenty years after the event has taken place.
- 7

Policy-makers and event organisers should bear in mind the importance of targeting specific groups when designing events, and where possible should involve community groups in event planning and organising.
- 8

Event organisers should build on lessons identified on volunteer management, including the need to maintain and utilise volunteers' data, and the benefits of connecting volunteers with sports organisations to support increased participation. Where appropriate, specific funding should be allocated for these activities.

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

**The UK has a successful track record of hosting major sporting events – UK Sport’s ten-year strategic plan features plans for 97 events across 44 different sports (UK Sport 2021a). We are also home to a variety of community, cultural and commemorative events – from the UK City of Culture competition to the 14-18 NOW First World War centenary commemoration programme to the 16,000 street parties making up part of the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee celebrations (Sky News 2022).**

2021’s Budget and Spending Review saw £41 million allocated to major sporting event bids, while research from the consultancy firm EY suggests that major sporting events could deliver benefits of up to £11 billion to the UK in terms of economic impacts and soft power (UK Sport 2021b; UK Sport 2021c). There is a clear need to understand the economic impacts of events – of all types – to ensure that budgets are spent effectively and impacts are realised. Events can bring benefits not just in terms of boosting local economies, but also in terms of factors like health and wellbeing, physical activity levels, and feelings of place and community. And they can help government to realise wider policy goals, such as levelling up – the government’s Levelling Up White Paper specifically committed to ensuring that “access to sporting and cultural excellence is spread more equitably across the UK”, as part of the wider aim of “restoring a sense of community, local pride and belonging” (DLUHC 2022).

This briefing presents a framework for analysing the economic impact of sporting, cultural, commemorative and community events. We summarise literature on the economic and social impact of events, including findings that events tend not to have significant wider effects on local economic performance; that attending and volunteering at events can increase health, wellbeing and sporting participation; that event organisers may face incentives to overstate the benefits of events, and underestimate their costs; and that issues of displacement should be taken into account when evaluating the impact of large-scale events on wider outcomes.

We review seven case studies of events across the UK, from large and national to small and local. We discuss potential issues for policymakers, including issues of event governance, size, funding, planning and evaluation, community involvement, and volunteer infrastructure and management. Finally, we conclude with eight recommendations for events organisers and policymakers, to help maximise the economic and social value of the UK’s events programme in the years ahead.



The Walk, Coventry UK City of Culture 2021



SECTION 2

# FRAMEWORK OF ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Here we present a framework for analysing the economic impact of events, drawing on Treasury Green Book appraisal principles (HM Treasury 2022).<sup>1</sup> This is summarised in Figure 1.

## Costs

When considering the economic impact of events, we must consider the costs as well as the benefits associated. Generally we may focus on the direct monetary costs, which can be substantial and go far beyond just the running of the event itself.

Figure 1 Summary of the costs and benefits of events



There can be substantial administrative staff costs around:

- Fundraising
- Preparing and submitting bids for competitive funding
- Event planning and co-ordination
- Stakeholder management, including liaising with local and central government and ensuring that appropriate regulations are met.

There will then be costs around delivering the event itself, including infrastructure construction, purchasing goods and materials, and staff costs. Infrastructure and input costs often make up the largest portion of event spending, particularly where an event is part of or is driving a larger program of regeneration. Issues relating to cost overrun in these areas for megaprojects in particular are discussed in more detail below. This fact, and this tendency towards cost overrun, means that projects that are able to take advantage of existing physical infrastructure, and/or which regularly take place in the same location, are often particularly cost-effective compared to events which require entirely new infrastructure to be built.

However, there are also important non-financial costs. These may be more difficult to monetise, but should still be considered. Examples include:

- The privileged use of any existing infrastructure, i.e. for which market costs are not paid
- Any unpaid or volunteer labour used to support the event, to the extent that this is experienced as a cost as well as a benefit to volunteers or to workers working additional unpaid hours
- Negative impacts on local residents: such as congestion, noise or litter.

Part of the reason for measuring these costs is because their use carries an opportunity cost – if they had not been used in service of the project in question, they could have been put to a different use instead.

## Benefits

Typically, event economic impact studies will focus on the economic benefits of an event. These include:

- The value of the services provided by the event. This includes not only the experience of attending the event itself for participants, but also potential impacts on factors like health, longer-term wellbeing, and future participation in sporting activity.
- The impact of the event on the wider community. As well as the individual benefits of attending an event, events can also bring wider community benefits such as helping to develop a sense of local or national identity, civic pride, or helping to develop “social capital”<sup>2</sup> by facilitating interactions between local residents which would have otherwise not occurred. Where events involve elements of social purpose, such as preservation of the environment or of culture heritage, this also delivers benefits to the wider community.
- The value of the services provided by any investments surrounding the event, such as infrastructure investment, or building up a group of volunteers who could facilitate further events in future.
- Any additional consumer expenditure generated by the event (for example expenditure on food or accommodation), and the corresponding impact of this on jobs, wages, property prices, and in general the performance of the local economy.
- Any volunteering opportunities provided by the event, and the benefits these can bring to volunteers. This includes enjoyment, satisfaction from helping others, a sense of purpose, social interaction, and opportunities to develop skills and confidence (Wilson 2020).

Infrastructure and input costs often make up the largest portion of event spending, particularly where an event is part of or is driving a larger program of regeneration.

## FRAMEWORK OF ECONOMIC IMPACTS

When considering the impact of an event on consumer expenditure, it is important to identify what portion of the total consumer expenditure surrounding the event is truly additional, and which portion of it is simply activity that would have happened anyway, or has been displaced from elsewhere. As we shall see from the case studies below, estimating the total consumer expenditure surrounding an event is in practice a common way of analysing its economic impact – at least for medium-sized events for which a more comprehensive economic impact assessment is not viable.

Economic impact studies will typically collect survey data on expenditure by visitor type, and then combine this with aggregate data on visitor numbers. However, counting the total consumer expenditure surrounding the event as a benefit of the event overestimates the economic impact of the event – because it typically captures some expenditure which would have happened anyway, in the absence of the event. This can partially be dealt with by restricting ourselves to the expenditure by visitors from outside the local area, or outside of the country, whom we think would not have visited anyway in the absence of the event – this at least gives us a lower-bound estimate for the portion of expenditure which is truly additional at the local, or national, level.

Another consideration is the impact of an event on central government spending. Hosting a large event can ‘pull in’ additional spending from central government, to fund the event itself and on wider regeneration. This does not represent a net economic impact at the national level, but may be considered as part of the net economic impact at the local level.

For a more comprehensive estimate of economic impact, it may also be desirable to consider the “multiplier effects” of all expenditure surrounding an event – both expenditure by the event organisers on costs and consumer expenditure – as these also make up part of the total economic impact. Multiplier effects are the additional expenditure stimulated by any original increase in expenditure – for example, the additional expenditure by local business owners and their employees following their business activity during an event. However, as these are not direct impacts, these are less easy to measure, and thus are less frequently captured in assessments of economic impact – as we shall see below.



Coventry UK City of Culture volunteers, Green Tile Hill.  
Photo by Dylan Parrin

## SECTION 3

# LITERATURE REVIEW

**This section contains a review of literature on the economic and social impact of events, including issues particular to their measurement, and a discussion of the issues facing policymakers and event organisers.**

## Economic impact

The What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth completed a metareview of 36 pieces of literature on the economic impact of sports and cultural events (What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth 2016). The literature they reviewed primarily covered examples located in the UK, Europe and the US, and spanned the period 1996 to 2004. They looked at four categories of variable: employment, wages or incomes, property or land prices, and trade imports and exports.<sup>3</sup> This was driven by the choice of variables in the literature. Unlike most non-academic studies of event economic impact, which look directly at expenditure generated by events (because it is easier to measure), they looked indirectly at the impact of this expenditure on wider economic variables.

They found that “the measurable economic effects on local economies tend not to have been large and are often zero”. On wages and incomes, they found that any effects are “usually small and limited to the immediate locality or particular types of workers”. Given this, they recommend that “time and expense can be saved by forgoing complex multiplier-based appraisal systems in lieu of solid ‘narrow’ evaluations”. In other words, given that wider economic impacts such as those based on multiplier effects are usually not large, it may be preferable – and cheaper – to simply analyse the direct economic impacts.

**Smaller events are inherently less prone to cost overrun; and we discuss evidence below on the qualitative difference holding smaller events can have in terms of wider social impacts.**

Almost all of the examples they looked at were large events. For smaller events, they suggested that “based on what we found for large projects, we can assume that the economic impact of such projects would be even smaller”. There are some reasons this may not be the case – as Flyvbjerg et al (2020) explain, smaller events are inherently less prone to cost overrun; and we discuss evidence below on the qualitative difference holding smaller events can have in terms of wider social impacts. However, in terms of the economic benefits themselves, this analysis seems plausible.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

When looking at the impact of facilities in particular,<sup>4</sup> they find that these “can have a small positive impact on property prices nearby”. For example, evidence they reviewed found that announcement of the successful London 2012 Olympics bid led to a 5 per cent uplift in property prices up to three miles away from the main Olympic stadium (ibid). One study on the effect of cultural districts found that these tended to raise local property values by 10 per cent. They remark that “Policymakers should consider the distributional effects of these property market changes”. “Distributional effects” here refers to the fact that increased property prices accrue as a benefit to property owners, but as a cost to renters and consumers – without a commensurate tax on property value uplifts, public investment in infrastructure acts in effect as a transfer from the latter to the former. This distributional dimension should be taken into account when conducting appraisal of new infrastructure projects, to avoid exacerbating existing inequalities of wealth and ownership further.

Where evaluations found zero or negative impacts of facilities on local property prices, this was in the context of the US local taxation system, which funds the creation of new publicly-funded infrastructure through local tax increases. These past or expected future tax increases are reflected in property prices, offsetting the positive impacts of the facilities themselves.

It is not wholly surprising that such studies have failed to find strong evidence of sustained local economic impacts from events – the bulk of the impact from an event itself will be felt through factors like increased economic activity during the event itself.

In the UK context, because most of our infrastructure is not directly funded via local property taxation, the relationship between event infrastructure and nearby property prices can therefore be assumed to be stronger than across the evidence base as a whole.

On additionality,<sup>5</sup> the researchers also remark that “Far more should be done to assess the extent to which projects lead to net increases in visitor numbers for the area as a whole”. They note that just looking at visitor numbers for an event itself may not give a full picture of the overall impact of the event on net visitor numbers. This is for two reasons – because some of those visitors may have chosen to visit the area anyway, in the absence of the event; and because the event may have drawn some additional visitors to the local area, but not to the event itself. Non-academic economic impact studies typically attempt to capture the former by asking visitors whether an event is their main reason for visiting an area (see Section 4 for some examples). However, it is not clear how these studies, which often report very high rates of additionality, deal with the fact that many attendees typically already reside in the local area – these results should be treated with caution.

In a similar vein, a 2021 submission to a Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Committee inquiry looking at the economic impact of hosting major cultural festivals found “no evidence to support claims of long-term, transformative impacts on local economies” (Nermond et al 2021).

It is not wholly surprising that such studies have failed to find strong evidence of sustained local economic impacts from events – the bulk of the impact from an event itself will be felt through factors like increased economic activity during the event itself. This is what studies of event impact tend to focus on. We *would* expect to see more evidence of sustained economic impact from the wider regeneration programmes that often surround large events, such as the regeneration spending in East London that accompanied the 2012 London Olympics.

However, such analysis likely lay outside the scope of the studies considered in the What Works Centre evidence review, which focussed on the impacts of events themselves, often utilising ‘quasi-experimental techniques’ to do so.<sup>6</sup>

The fact that there is little evidence of sustained local economic impacts from events does not mean that we can conclude with certainty that such effects do not exist. Indeed, the What Works Centre researchers themselves note that “This should not overshadow the other real if difficult-to-measure benefits of hosting sport and cultural activities” (What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth 2016). However, it does mean that we should treat references to such impacts with caution.

## Social impacts

Some of the benefits listed above fall into the category of social impacts. Smith et al (2021) define social impacts to include benefits to individuals – “enhancing quality of life, by providing inspirational experiences and improving wellbeing” – and benefits to communities – “by affecting social cohesion, community capacity and social capital”.

Several authors in the literature we reviewed highlighted the trend in recent years away from a sole focus on the economic impacts of events and towards the inclusion of social impacts alongside these. Smith et al (2021) noted that “over the past ten years, academic research has focused more on the social dimensions of festivals and events”, while Thomson et al (2020) noted that the absolute number of publications on the social legacies of large-scale sport events had grown from just 2 in 2007 to 16 by 2016.<sup>7</sup>



LITERATURE REVIEW

The DCMS inquiry report links this to the failure of physical infrastructure projects to deliver the promised impacts, and “the public’s wariness about white elephants resulting from major events” (DCMS Committee 2021). This is a welcome development – wider social impacts are an important part of the total impact of events, and should be considered by policymakers. This is true in general, but they have particular relevance for sporting, cultural, commemorative and community events, where wider wellbeing and social capital effects are a core component of event impact.

Smith et al (2021) propose a typology for measuring the social value of community events. The typology is divided into six dimensions

At the community level:

- 1. **Pride in place**, civic pride, place attachment and visibility
- 2. **Sense of community**, belonging, identity, cohesion, togetherness, connectivity, social capital, trust and inter-group relations
- 3. **Involvement and participation**, things to do, chance to meet people and capacity building

At the individual level:

- 4. **Wellbeing**, quality of life, standard of living and happiness
- 5. **Opportunities** for learning and nurturing new skills, training, confidence, self-esteem, inspiration and attitude change
- 6. **Disruption** to everyday life, anti-social behaviour and over-stretched resources.

Kennelly et al (2020) contains a more comprehensive inventory of 48 different types of social legacy for large-scale sport events. This goes into more detail about the six categories covered by Smith et al (2021). It also introduces new topics, including equity and inclusion; awareness of human rights issues; cross-cultural exchange; and enhanced diplomatic ties. Not all of these will be relevant for all events, but this is a useful list for evaluators to draw ideas from.

There are also often difficulties in capturing and measuring the social impact of events. The same inquiry report notes uncertainty in the events sector over how to measure social impact, and the lack of a cohesive framework for doing so (DCMS Committee 2022). Wallstam et al (2020) also note the difficulty of evaluating social impact, observing that where evaluation methods do exist, they are typically developed for singular case studies, instead of being applicable to a range of events.

Impacts on health, wellbeing, and sport participation

Studies linking events to health outcomes are normally primarily concerned with sporting events. But evidence from a 2000 randomised control trial study in northern Sweden found a positive association between opportunities to attend cultural events and physical health (in terms of reduced blood pressure and stress-related hormone benefits; Konlaan et al 2000).

A 2019 study on the impact of major sports events looked at their impact on self-reported subjective wellbeing, including life satisfaction, happiness, feeling worthwhile, and levels of anxiety (Ramchandani et al 2019a). They found these indicators were significantly enhanced as a result of attending major sports events. The study covered racket sport events in the UK between 2017 and 2018. These effects were found to be stronger for spectators who attended major sports events more frequently, and who were inspired by events to be more physically active. The authors concluded that these positive wellbeing events came via two channels – the direct effect of attending an event, and the indirect effect on wellbeing stemming from a feeling of inspiration from the event. This inspiration channel – and how it varies between different sports and different demographic groups – is worth exploring further for policymakers who wish to use events to increase wellbeing and sport participation.

Furthermore, a series of studies have investigated the link between attendance at major sporting events and the likelihood of future sporting participation. One study, covering seven single-sport events at the world or European level held in the UK in 2014, found a small net positive change in sport participation behaviour among event spectators, consistent with the participation changes found in other similar studies (Ramchandani et al 2019b). The authors placed spectators along a five-stage continuum of sporting participation behaviour: precontemplation; contemplation; preparation; action; and maintenance. 25 per cent of those studied had progressed to a higher stage of sporting participation behaviour, while 17 per cent had regressed, implying an overall net positive change of eight per cent. A different study considered a similar question – the effectiveness of sporting events in inspiring spectators into future participation in sport (Ramchandani et al 2014). Among other things, they found that spectators who live near an event venue are more likely to be inspired by the event into future sporting participation. They suggest that there is therefore a trade-off between the inspirational impact of an event and its measured economic effect (which is maximised when there are a large number of visitors from outside the local area).

25%

of those studied had progressed to a higher stage of sporting participation behaviour, while 17 per cent had regressed, implying an overall net positive change of eight per cent.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Impact on volunteers

The What Works Wellbeing centre cites findings that “[t]here is high quality evidence that volunteering is positively linked to enhanced wellbeing, including improved life satisfaction, increased happiness and decreases in symptoms of depression” (What Works Centre for Wellbeing 2020). A study by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations found that “77% of volunteers agreed that their volunteering experience improved their mental health and wellbeing in some way, particularly in the 18-24 year olds” (Wilson 2020).

And a literature review by Jump Projects<sup>8</sup> found that “[v]olunteering has a positive impact on an individual’s wellbeing” and that “[i]t is formal volunteering as part of a group that is considerably more significant in improving wellbeing” (Lawton & Watt 2020). Where proportionate (for example, for larger events), evaluations of events involving volunteering should attempt to capture these impacts. Section 4 contains some examples of assessments that have attempted to do this.



Volunteers from Hey! Volunteering at Hull Marina by Leo Francis

### Measurement issues

#### Incentives to misrepresent costs and benefits

Organisations holding events have some incentive to overstate the benefits of the event or events they wish to hold, and understate the costs. This could be to lobby for more favourable policy, justify their own existence, or help to secure funding, particularly in a competitive bidding environment. This dynamic is to some degree inevitable, and not necessarily negative, but it should be taken into account when considering the stated costs and benefits of a given event proposal.

This point is made in the literature on event impact – for example, Nermond et al (2021) draws a comparison between the limited evidence cited above on the economic impact of major cultural festivals and the claims made by host cities, concluding that “there is significant distance between policy rhetoric and academic research findings... Host cities often proclaim that major economic impacts and transformations are likely; academic research suggests otherwise”. And Sadd (2021) stated: “[m]uch was made of all the potential benefits to be gained from hosting London 2012, but the perceived financial benefits and business boosts were very limited in scope and spread”.

“New budgets are typically developed after the Games were awarded, which are often very different to those presented at the bidding stage... These new budgets are then used as new baselines, rendering measurement of cost overrun inconsistent and misleading”

Crompton & McKay (1994) go further, likening studies into the economic impact of events to advocacy documents, and arguing that many “are undertaken not to find the true impact, but rather to legitimize the event’s public support by endowing it with an aura of substantial economic benefit”. They also comment on the role played by external consultants specifically, citing another author who likens the fees paid to such organisations for their work to “a religious tithe paid to a priest to come bless some endeavor”. The authors also point to some common sources of error made in economic impact studies of events, primarily focusing around an inability to isolate those impacts which are truly additional. Of course, the studies they focus on are now several decades old, and primarily based on examples outside of the UK, but some of the same concerns are relevant for contemporary studies, as we shall see in the case studies we review below.

And Flyvbjerg et al (2020) highlight examples of where event organisers have deliberately obscured cost estimates, here in the context of the Olympics: “New budgets are typically developed after the Games were awarded, which are often very different to those presented at the bidding stage... These new budgets are then used as new baselines, rendering measurement of cost overrun inconsistent and misleading”; “For instance, in 2005 London secured the bid for the 2012 Summer Games with a cost estimate that two years later proved inadequate and was revised upwards with around 100 percent. Then, when it turned out that the final outturn costs were slightly below the revised budget, the organizers falsely, but very publicly, claimed that the London Games had come in under budget, and media uncritically reported this, including the BBC”.

All of this points to the desirability of independent evaluation for events, where those performing evaluations will not be subject to the same incentives to overstate benefits and understate costs. This may not be feasible for all events, but should be considered for larger events where ensuring an accurate assessment of costs and benefits is particularly important.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Population movement

In a 2017 London Assembly Regeneration Committee investigation of the impact of the 2012 London Olympics, a range of 22 indicators was constructed, primarily focussed on economic outcomes, education, health, and neighbourhood quality (London Assembly 2017). The study then looked at performance on these indicators in the Olympic host boroughs – Barking and Dagenham, Greenwich, Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets, and Waltham Forest – compared to London as a whole, for the period 2009 to 2017. This was an attempt to establish causality – the performance of London as a whole was used as a counterfactual. This is an imperfect approach – firstly, because the host boroughs are included in the counterfactual, and secondly because the selection of the host boroughs was not random – they were selected in part because levels of deprivation were high, and investment and regeneration was desirable. However, in practice it is difficult to establish causality with total rigour. The approach used here still gives some idea of the impact of the investment made.

In terms of outcomes, progress towards convergence with London as a whole was observed for seven out of the 22 indicators, primarily among those concerned with educational outcomes; while some improvement was observed for a further nine indicators. However, this convergence approach to evaluation has been criticised, including by Kirby Swales, a senior research director at NatCen Social Research, in 2013. Swales suggested that this convergence was “a result of the in-migration of a new, younger, richer population to areas like Hackney and Tower Hamlets, while a more marginalised resident population [had] been gradually pushed to outer east London, to areas such as Barking and Dagenham” (ibid). The investigation confirmed that Barking and Dagenham had indeed been a “net recipient of people from central London”. In other words, some of the progress observed may have been due to changes in the composition of the population within the boroughs studied, rather than simply changes in the living standards of the people living in the boroughs at the beginning of the study.

This highlights the need to take population movement into account in study design, or otherwise to make clear that the impacts observed will capture movement into and out of an area as well as changes experienced by the existing population.

More broadly, the London 2012 Olympics sparked a discussion of gentrification. While the original bid for the Games claimed that “the most enduring legacy of the Olympics will be the regeneration of an entire community for the direct benefit of everyone who lives there” (IOC 2007), hundreds of social housing residents were displaced to make way for the construction associated with the Games (Guardian 2008). A 2013 study into perceptions of the Games by two groups of low-income residents found that neither group of participants felt that the Games and associated regeneration are “primarily occurring, if at all, for their benefit” (Watt 2013). And A 2006 study into the potential impact of the Games on local employment predicted that “given the time sensitivity of the Olympic project” and the “time-consuming process of training”, employment needs in construction were more likely to be met by importing construction labour from outside the local area, or from outside the UK altogether (IPPR 2008). While public perceptions in the run-up to the Games were still broadly very positive (Inside the Games 2009), these issues point to the need for greater involvement of local communities in decision-making and event planning.

A 2013 study into perceptions of the Games by two groups of low-income residents found that neither group of participants felt that the Games and associated regeneration are “primarily occurring, if at all, for their benefit”

## SECTION 4

# CASE STUDIES

**This section looks at seven case studies. Five are sporting events, while two are primarily cultural. They are based around the UK, with two – the Great North Run and the Sunderland Airshow, Illuminations and Festival of Light – based in the North East. Four are regular events, while one is a one-off event that has taken place in the recent past, and two concern one-off events that are due to take place in the next few years.**

We have looked at evidence on the economic impact of these events – both the direct financial impacts and, where available, the impacts on wider social and community indicators. Where possible, we have also reviewed analysis of the lessons learned from the events. These case studies are presented to give an idea of the kinds of economic impacts that we see from contemporary sporting and cultural events in the UK, as well as how they are typically measured in practice.

Because there is little consistency between the different types of impact assessed in these case studies, we have not attempted to produce an overall comparison of the impacts measured.



Canley Street Parade, part of the Spirit of 2012-funded Playing Out project, Birmingham 2022 Festival



CASE STUDIES

Case study: 14-18 NOW

**14-18 NOW was a major cultural programme to mark the centenary of the First World War. Arts and heritage events took place across the UK between 2014 and 2018. New artworks were commissioned from 420 artists and performers.**

The grants budget for the project was initially set at £6 million, but was then increased due to a larger-than-expected number of applications; by mid-2019 the budget stood at £15 million (DCMS Committee 2019). Funding was provided by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The grants budget for the project was initially set at £6 million, but was then increased due to a larger-than-expected number of applications; by mid-2019 the budget stood at £15 million

The legacy evaluation of the programme did not include an in-depth assessment of the economic impact of the programme (Malan et al 2019). However, it did include some statistics relating to the programme, which can give some idea of the magnitude of its impact. For example, the evaluation recorded that 35 million people viewed the artworks created by the project. There were also attempts to capture additionality – for example, survey data found that, of the artists who received support, 47 per cent reported that their projects would not have gone ahead at all; while 38 per cent reported that they would have gone ahead at a different scale or timescale. In terms of volunteering, survey evidence collected from participants found that 16 per cent reported that the events had encouraged them to volunteer for First World War commemoration-related activities. Some evidence on economic impacts was presented for individual projects that made up the programme.

For example, in July 2014, the event “Memories of August 2014” was held in Liverpool, which involved a performance conducted around the city using giant marionette puppets. A review of the economic impact of the event claimed that this event helped to generate additional expenditure of £46 million within the local economy (The Murray Consultancy Ltd. 2014).

This estimate was derived by combining survey data on average total expected expenditure on their trip to Liverpool with visitor numbers, stratified by place of origin and length of trip. Overall, one million visitors are recorded as having attended the event, with an average spend of £46 per visitor. £32 million of this expenditure was associated with visitors based outside the Liverpool City Region, while just £2 million was associated with visitors from outside the UK. All of the visitors surveyed reported the event as their main reason for coming to Liverpool.

Given this, it seems reasonable to treat at least this £32 million expenditure as additional at the Liverpool City Region level, and at least £2 million as additional at the UK level.

Another example are the “Poppies: Wave” and “Poppies: Weeping Window” sculptures, which toured the country, and for which onsite spend of £1.6 million was recorded (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2019).

47%  
reported that their projects would not have gone ahead at all

The legacy evaluation for the 14-18 NOW programme also looked at its impact on remembrance and awareness of the First World War. This would fall under dimension 2 of the Smith et al typology above, due to its role in national identity formation and social cohesion. For example, BBC survey research found that the number of audience members claiming to have some understanding of the First World War more than doubled between 2013 and 2018, from 23 per cent to 45 per cent (Malan et al 2019). Data on awareness of the events programme was also collected and broken down by age and region.

A DCMS Committee report into the lessons from the programme discussed some of the considerations for policymakers from the programme (DCMS Committee 2019).

Its recommendations included: building in a longer lead-in time when planning for future events of a similar scale and significance; incorporating, and including funding for, digital archiving in the initial planning stages; including diversity as an explicit criterion in future commemorations; and building on the success of the “Prime Minister’s Special Representative” role.<sup>9</sup>

A second Committee report used the 14-18 NOW programme as a case study to discuss event governance (DCMS Committee 2022). Again, it noted the success of the “Prime Minister’s Special Representative” role, which was found to have “played a key role in galvanising activity and securing political support” for the programme.



14-18 NOW Poppies: Weeping Window by Paul Cummins and Tom Piper by Amanda Ingham. Licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>



## CASE STUDIES

## Case study: The Great North Run



Crowds on Newcastle Quayside at Great North Run weekend by Glen Bowman is licensed under CC BY 2.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/?ref=openverse>.

**The Great North Run, the largest half marathon in the world, takes place annually in September. Participants run between Newcastle upon Tyne and South Shields. In 2021, the number of participants stood at around 57,000 (BBC 2021a). Alongside the Great North Run, there is also the Great North 5k, and two children's events, the Junior Great North Run and the Mini Great North Run.**

The Great Run Company – the company that delivers the event – commissioned research into the economic impact of the four events in 2019. Taking a similar approach to the study into the economic impact of the “Memories of August 2014” event above, researchers looked at participant numbers and average expenditure levels by place of origin, as well as age and gender (Bluegrass Research 2019).

They found that participants from outside the North East spent an average of £257 in total over the weekend, and estimated a total local economic impact of £31 million.

The same research also looked at the impact of the Run on health and mental wellbeing – over half reported an improvement – and sporting participation – 22 per cent of participants were new to running events. And they looked at the impact of the Run on perceptions of the North East – one way of measuring pride in place – with 67 per cent of participants claiming that their view of the area had been positively changed after taking part in the marathon.

## Case study: Tour de Yorkshire



The Tour De Yorkshire 2015 by Spaggy59 is licensed under CC BY-ND 2.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/2.0/?ref=openverse>.

**The Tour de Yorkshire is a major international cycling race held annually in Yorkshire. The event started as a legacy event following the success of the visit of the 2014 Tour de France to the area. Forty teams took part in the 2018 event, which attracted crowds of 2.6 million, making it the largest spectator event in the UK at the time (Tour de Yorkshire 2018; The Times 2018). The 2019 event had 38 teams and an audience of 1.96 million (Cyclist Magazine 2019; Tour de Yorkshire 2019).**

In terms of the cost of the event, the chief executive of tourism board Welcome to Yorkshire reported that it cost £2 million to hold, with funding coming from a mixture of sponsors and local authorities (Cycling Weekly 2021). The race is organised by Amaury Sport Organisation, an international sporting events organising company that also organises the Tour de France.

A study by Leeds Beckett University looked at the social and community impact of the 2018 event (McCombes 2018). The authors also looked at how best to achieve long-lasting positive effects on physical activity levels among attendees. To assess the former, the study used the New Economics Foundation ‘five drivers of wellbeing’ framework. During the event, they found that 43 per cent of residents reported being encouraged to contribute more to their local community; 32 per cent being inspired to try or rediscover something new; and 40 per cent to become more physically active. Survey data collected after the event, using a different measure of subjective personal wellbeing, found results that were still positive, but more muted.



CASE STUDIES

Post-event survey data was also collected on the impact of the event on civic pride and sense of community spirit. To measure impact on civic pride, residents were asked about their sense of civic pride, attitudes to their local area, sense of belonging and community identity, and any disruption or social costs caused by the event.

To measure community spirit, the authors used questions on social capital indicators including residents’ social networks, feelings about their community, and participation in community activities.

To measure community spirit, the authors used questions on social capital indicators including residents’ social networks, feelings about their community, and participation in community activities. The study found evidence that the event had enhanced feelings of civic pride among residents, in particular in Conisbrough and Hatfield. More mixed evidence was found in terms of the impact of the event on a sense of community spirit, though residents in all six of the communities surveyed reported that the event had helped to foster a “sense of togetherness”.

The study also looked at the specific amount and type of community engagement undertaken by residents. Particularly high levels of community engagement were found among residents based in Hooton Pagnel, though the sample sizes were small. More generally, the study found that “In practice, this higher level of engagement [such as taking the initiative to plan and implement local events] was found amongst key community activists, event organisers and local community development initiatives/projects who act as catalysts for wider, often lower level, participation of their wider communities.”

In response, the authors recommended building community engagement into the existing event cycle of the Tour de Yorkshire, and set out nine interventions throughout the event cycle to achieve this. And they recommended targeting seven groups in particular: “Community event organisers; Older people; Young people/ teenagers; School/pre-school children; Casual event ‘browsers’; Local businesses; and BME groups”.

Regarding physical activity levels, and how best to ensure that these impacts are sustained, the authors adapted an influencer behavioural change framework that allowed them to investigate how “*activating factors combine* to influence behaviour”. They conducted interviews with a sample of experts in the field, to produce a set of potential interventions. This set of interventions was then tested with resident focus groups. This research showed that, while the Tour de Yorkshire was “quite successful in creating a local social “buzz” to be more physically active”, the majority “did not feel that it was having a very significant impact on actually increasing the physical activity levels of local residents”.

88%

of respondents reported that they would return to the area as a direct result of the event.

A second study, also by Leeds Beckett University, looked at the economic impact of the 2019 event (Glyptou et al 2019). Data was collected both from in-person spectators and online. Looking at how the event had influenced perceptions of the area, they found that 88 per cent of respondents reported that they would return to the area as a direct result of the event. As with all self-reported data, there is a question of how much respondents’ expressed preferences line up with their actual behaviour; further work would be needed to investigate this.

The study estimated a total economic impact of £57 million. This falls short of the estimated economic impact of the 2018 event, which was put at £98 million. The authors considered a few potential reasons for this – a measured reduction in spectator numbers; changes in scheduling; wet weather; and changes in the areas covered by the route.

Again, taking a similar approach to the “Memories of August 2014” and Great North Run economic impact assessments above, the authors collected data on visitor numbers and expenditure levels by length of stay and place of origin. Total in-person spectator numbers were estimated at 1.96 million over the four-day course of the event. Data on the average amount of the event watched by spectators was used to infer the number of ‘unique’ spectators, which was estimated at 1.36 million. Data on the area of residence of spectators found that 80 per cent were resident within Yorkshire, while 20 per cent were resident elsewhere in the UK or overseas.

72%

reported being repeat visitors, having also attended the event in a previous year.

Survey data on accommodation and non-accommodation expenditure was then collected. Average accommodation expenditure per person per night was put at £57 for both Yorkshire- and non-Yorkshire-based spectators, while non-accommodation expenditure was further broken up by spectator type. Total accommodation spend was estimated at £17 million, while non-accommodation spend was put at £39 million. To gauge additionality, spectators were asked whether the Tour de Yorkshire was the main reason they had come to the area – 71 per cent reported that it was.

The study also looked briefly at audience experiences of the event, and found that 72 per cent reported being repeat visitors, having also attended the event in a previous year. They also asked respondents to give quotes about their experience of attending the event, and then analysed the results, with the most common words or phrases used being “Great”, followed by “Fun Day Out”. There was also a collation of critical responses, but attention did not seem particularly to focus on disruption to local residents (category 6 in the Smith et al typology); instead, common themes included criticism of the event and one team in particular for “greenwashing”, and comments on how the event and website were managed.



CASE STUDIES

Case study: Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games



**The Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games are an international multi-sport event for members of the Commonwealth group of nations. It will be held in Birmingham between July and August 2022. The event will include 283 events across 20 sports, with teams from 72 countries competing.**

The event is expected to have a total cost of £778 million, according to a 2019 government estimate (DCMS 2019). Around a quarter of this is planned to come from Birmingham City Council and other partners from the West Midlands, with the other three quarters coming from central government. This has been revised upwards from the original estimate of £750 million, made at the time the bid was submitted (2017; BBC 2017).

The event is currently set to be most expensive sporting event in the UK since the London 2012 Olympics, which cost £8.8 billion. However, the real cost of this event will not be known until after its completion (BBC 2019).

The Games organisers have published a detailed Legacy Plan for the event, outlining plans to ensure that the event has a “lasting, positive impact on jobs, skills, education, culture, physical activity and investment across the West Midlands and the UK” (BOCCG 2021).

This includes plans for several “firsts”: “The first carbon-neutral Commonwealth Games; The first time firms bidding for contracts must include a social value requirement; The largest business and tourism programme of any Games to attract international visitors and investment to the region and the UK; [and] The first Games to fully integrate volunteers from all delivery partners into a united volunteer programme”.

The Legacy Plan includes nine programmes, across areas including volunteering, sustainability, and physical activity and wellbeing; and five mission pillars across areas including “improve health and wellbeing” and “help the region to grow and succeed”. Plans for the Games also include provisions for a three-year independent evaluation of the impact of the Games, and the degree to which they will create a lasting impact for Birmingham, the West Midlands and the UK.

To give an idea of the potential economic impact of the 2022 Games, the Legacy Plan also reviewed evidence published by the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) on the economic impact of previous years’ Games (PwC 2019). Among other things, the CGF consider the impact of hosting the Games on local, regional and national GDP and employment. However, in the absence of rigorous post-event evaluation of the economic impact, they instead present figures concerning the expected economic impact of past Games, based on either input-output modelling<sup>10</sup> or computable general equilibrium modelling,<sup>11</sup> and produced for appraisal purposes. These modelling exercises predicted impacts on Gross Value Added (GVA) of between £0.8 billion and £1.2 billion.<sup>12</sup> Care should be taken when presenting these figures, to make clear that they are pre-event forecasts, rather than the result of post-event study; at times, the way these figures are presented is misleading.

The Legacy Plan includes nine programmes, across areas including volunteering, sustainability, and physical activity and wellbeing; and five mission pillars across areas including “improve health and wellbeing” and “help the region to grow and succeed”.

The CGF also report growth in tourism figures in the years after previous years’ Games, and compare this to tourism growth in the years before. No attempt is made to control for other factors that may have an influence over tourism performance, so it would be misleading to present these comparisons as evidence on the impact of the Games; again, at times, the way these figures are presented is misleading.

Moreover, the Games organisers commissioned PwC to produce an analysis of the economic benefits of the Games. This suggested that “there should be an incremental increase to the GVA of the West Midlands of £526m, and [the Games] would support an average of 4,526 workers per year from 2018 to 2022” (BCC 2018).

Finally, in terms of the impact on volunteering, a DCMS Committee report found that the Games received 41,000 applications for 13,000 volunteer roles (DCMS Committee 2022). For comparison, the London Olympics had 70,000 volunteers involved (Koutrou et al 2016). Specific efforts have been made to engage younger volunteers, and the age range among applicants here is more varied than at previous events.



CASE STUDIES

Case study: Sunderland Airshow and Sunderland Illuminations and Festival of Light

**The Sunderland Airshow is an annual summer event and the largest free annual airshow in Europe. It was first held in 1989. The Sunderland Illuminations are a light spectacle along the seafront, while the Sunderland Festival of Light is an annual winter event containing light features and a fairground. These events are smaller-scale and more local than the other case studies we have considered. They take place in the same area every year.**

The 2018 Sunderland Airshow attracted 600,000 visitors for its 30th anniversary, while the Festival of Lights sold 133,000 tickets (Chronicle Live 2019). The cost of the 2016 Sunderland Airshow was £252,000 – nearly double the planned budget of £133,000 (Sunderland Echo 2017).

An economic impact report published by the Sunderland City Council scrutiny committee presented some evidence on the impact of both events. For the Sunderland Airshow, the report found that 37 per cent of visitors were from outside Sunderland, while 14 per cent had travelled from outside the North East. 12 per cent were first-time visitors. Following the approach taken in the impact assessments above, visitors were asked whether the event was their main reason for visiting Sunderland; 89 per cent said that it was. It is unclear how this interacts with the finding that 63 per cent of visitors were Sunderland residents.

37%

of visitors were from outside Sunderland, while 14 per cent had travelled from outside the North East.

Data on expenditure was collected and broken down by visitor category. This was used to construct an estimate of £11.5 million for the direct economic impact, and £5.3 million for the impact on GVA. Visitors were also asked about their experiences – 44 per cent approved highly of the event, giving it a score of 10 on a scale of 1 to 10 in terms of their experience, while 100 per cent said that they would visit the event again and recommend it to family and friends.

A similar approach was taken for the Sunderland Festival of Lights. Here, a higher proportion of visitors – 60 per cent – were from outside Sunderland, while 45 per cent were from outside the North East. 81 per cent gave the event as their main reason for visiting Sunderland. Here, the direct economic impact was estimated at £0.5 million, and the GVA impact at £0.2 million.

These economic benefit evaluations did not include a breakdown of the number of visitors who came from abroad, so it is difficult to draw conclusions about the portion of this impact which is additional at the UK level. However, this is less relevant for local events which do not receive national funding.

Case study: UEFA EURO 2028



Photo by Liam Charmer on Unsplash

**In 2018, England’s Football Association announced that they were considering a UK-wide bid to host the 2030 FIFA Men’s World Cup.**

The UK government expressed interest in the idea of a joint UK and Republic of Ireland bid, and a feasibility study was carried out looking at “the economic impact, the political football landscape and likely costs of hosting major international tournaments”, as well as “budgeting and cost apportionment; how stadium infrastructure measures up to FIFA’s standards; safety and security; corporate governance; the social and economic benefits that might accrue from hosting the event; and “the winnability of the tournament”” (FA 2022; DCMS Committee 2022).

However, following the completion of the feasibility study, the five football associations across the UK and Ireland announced that they would not be proceeding with the 2030 FIFA World Cup bid, and would instead be submitting a bid for the UEFA Euro 2028 competition.

They stated that the latter would “offer a similar return on investment, with the European tournament carrying a far lower delivery cost and the potential of the benefits being realised sooner” (FA 2022). This decision was also made in the context of criticism by the DCMS Committee of the UK’s previous bid to host the 2018 World Cup, which cost £21 million and attracted only two votes (DCMS Committee 2022).

In response, the DCMS Committee noted that “public confidence in football authorities is low”, and recommended that the government implement the main recommendation of the recent independent fan-led review of football governance – the establishment of an independent regulator for English football, before the UK’s campaign to host the 2028 tournament “begins in earnest”.



## CASE STUDIES

## Case study: parkrun



**parkrun is a weekly collection of 5-kilometre walking and running events. Originally founded in the UK in 2004, it now takes place every Saturday morning at over 2,000 locations across 24 countries (BBC 2021b; parkrun 2022).**

Its events are free to take part in and are delivered primarily by volunteers, though some central coordination is provided by the company parkrun Limited. Again, this is a smaller-scale, more regular local event than some of the other examples we have looked at. However, unlike some of our other small-scale examples, parkrun takes place in many locations at once. This (in a sense) larger scale means that there is ample literature on the impacts of parkrun.

Because participation in parkrun is free, evidence on its direct economic impact is limited. However, research has been carried out into the wellbeing benefits of parkrun events for participants and volunteers. One 2021 study surveyed 60,000 parkrun participants in the UK (Quirk et al 2021).

They found that “all respondents, irrespective of demographic characteristics and socioeconomic deprivations status, reported diverse benefits from participation in parkrun as runners/walkers”. Participants who were inactive before starting to take part in parkrun reported a substantial increase in physical activity levels, well in excess of their time spent taking part in parkrun. Of course, there may be a third factor driving both participation in parkrun and higher activity levels in general. Those from the most deprived areas, and those who were least active before taking part in parkrun, reported the largest improvements in their health and wellbeing. The authors also found that those from the most deprived areas and the previously inactive were more motivated by health and lifestyle than other factors like “fitness, competition or training for other events”; they recommended that parkrun and other event organisers might take this into account when starting new community events.

A broader review of literature on the effects of parkrun found that “[p]articipants showed sustained improvements in fitness, physical activity levels, and body mass index”, and that “parkrun reaches groups traditionally underrepresented in other organised sports or physical activity such as women, the insufficiently active and those aged over 35 years” (Grunseit et al 2020).

Another researcher compared parkrun’s design to a set of behavioural economic principles, concluding that parkrun fulfilled the four criteria for achieving behaviour change – easy, attractive, social and timely – and that it was a “wildly successful nudge” (Turocy 2016). The author concluded by recommending against the approach taken by Stoke Gifford Parish Council in 2016, namely of imposing a small (£1) charge for participants.

A fourth study looked at the impact of taking part for parkrun volunteers (Haake et al 2022). For those who volunteer but do not take part as a runner or walker, the study found that a large proportion reported improvements to feeling part of the community (84 per cent), meeting new people (85 per cent) and spending time with friends (45 per cent).

Some in the same group also reported improvements in their mental health (54 per cent) and physical health (29 per cent). The authors suggested that parkrun, because it is “free, regular, local, accessible and optional”, could be a viable option for NHS social prescribing,<sup>13</sup> and “a model for other community events seeking to attract volunteers”.

Finally, a study by State of Life, a company that specialises in measuring social value, applied new “WELLBY” Treasury guidance on measuring and monetising wellbeing benefits to estimate the health and wellbeing impact and social return on investment of parkrun (State of Life 2021).<sup>14</sup> They use two approaches to evaluate these effects – one using generic figures on the benefits of physical activity, and the other using bespoke survey data collected by parkrun. Both approaches are based on the wellbeing-adjusted life-year (WELLBY), a measure of value based on the survey question “All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? – 0 (not at all satisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied)”.

For the former approach, longitudinal survey data on physical activity, volunteering, and self-reported life satisfaction levels were used to derive a rough estimate of the impact of parkrun on wellbeing. This found that moving from doing no physical activity to doing one activity once a week is as a minimum 0.225 points better off on the WELLBY scale. Based on the Treasury’s Wellbeing Supplementary Guidance, this increase in wellbeing is valued at £2,925 per person per year as a central estimate.<sup>15</sup> For volunteering once a week, the equivalent figures are 0.158 points and £2,058. This was then combined with parkrun’s own survey data on participation.

This approach also incorporated an attempt at capturing additionality – how much of the increase in activity can actually be attributed to parkrun, versus how much would have happened anyway. This was captured by asking participants about their physical and volunteering activity levels prior to starting parkrun, and assuming that the difference can be attributed to parkrun.

The additionality rate from this approach is estimated to be 6 per cent for physical activity and 40 per cent for volunteering – 6 per cent of participants reported exercising less than once a week before taking part in parkrun, while slightly above 40 per cent reported having no experience of volunteering in a sport or community context. This approach possibly overstates the impact of parkrun<sup>16</sup> – a third factor such as an increased drive to get involved in activities across the board could have driven both. However, since the estimated additionality rate for physical activity (which drives the majority of the measured impact) is relatively small, this is less of a concern than it otherwise would be.

These estimates were then combined to give an estimated social value of parkrun of £138 million in 2019. When set alongside the financial cost of running parkrun in the same year – £4.5 million – this gives an estimated social return on investment of £30 for every £1 invested. However, this approach does not take into account any costs experienced by volunteers in terms of the time invested in helping to deliver parkrun, as well as any potential costs experienced by local residents. There is therefore further potential here for this estimate to be an overestimate of parkrun’s true cost-benefit ratio.

The second approach uses parkrun’s own survey data on participation levels and self-reported life satisfaction. The study design is different, with a smaller sample size but with the inclusion of longitudinal data, allowing the authors to better control for factors like income that might drive parkrun participation but also outcomes. This approach resulted in a much higher estimate of social return on investment – over £120 in wellbeing benefits for every £1 directly spent on organising parkrun.

CASE STUDIES

Summary

In this section, we have looked at seven case studies, covering a range of event types and locations. We have reviewed how evaluators have tried to capture the economic and wider social impacts of these events.

The most common type of assessment – used for parts of 14-18 NOW, the Great North Run, the Tour de Yorkshire, and the Sunderland Airshow and Festival of Lights – attempts to estimate consumer expenditure in the local area occurring as a result of the event. Evaluators typically combine aggregate data on visitor numbers from events organisers with survey data on expenditure data by length of stay, place of origin, and type of expenditure. These estimates are then combined to give an estimate of the impact of the event on total consumer expenditure in the local area.

Surveys are also typically used to collect data on the reason for their visit – i.e. whether they are visiting the local area as a direct result of the event. This is used to assess the additionality of their expenditure. However, more could be done to assess additionality for attendees already resident in the study area. This was typically not done for the case studies we looked at, and so we can only use these studies to derive lower bound estimates for the true impact of the event in question on local expenditure.

Two of the studies we looked at – the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games and the Sunderland Airshow and Festival of Lights – went beyond this type of analysis to look at the impact of these events on other economic variables, such as GVA and employment. However, none of the studies we looked at made a serious attempt to investigate whether any sustained effect on the local economy was seen after the event took place. This is not surprising – this type of analysis is generally restricted to the largest events, such as the Olympics; and to the academic literature.

Looking at the social impact of events was also common – several of the studies we looked at asked respondents questions on topics such as their enjoyment of the event, its impact on their wellbeing, and its impact on their perceptions of the local area or region. The evaluation of 14-18 NOW looked specifically at its impact on public perceptions and knowledge of the First World War, while studies on the impact of the Tour de Yorkshire and parkrun applied specialised techniques for evaluating the impact of these events on variables including social capital formation, community engagement, wellbeing, and sporting participation. The former study found a mixed picture, though with significant impacts in some areas such as enhanced civic pride. The latter went further and found significant monetised impacts on wellbeing, though some questions remain, on issues such as the opportunity cost of volunteer time and accuracy in isolating the causal effect of parkrun participation.

Overall, across the studies we looked at, the methods used to estimate economic effects were fairly standard, and fell short of giving a rigorous assessment of the true economic impact of the events studied. The studies we looked at on social impact included some examples of more sophisticated methodology, with more effort applied to establish additionality. This reflects both the fact that more effort has been undertaken in recent years to develop our understanding of the social impacts of events, and the fact that fewer “standard” techniques for measuring social impact are available.

In terms of the implications for policymakers, we recommend that for larger events, more effort should be taken to assess economic impacts with rigour and to establish what portion of observed impacts are truly additional.

SECTION 5

POLICY DISCUSSION

Governance

A DCMS Committee review into the UK’s management of major cultural and sporting events noted issues around the longevity of the organising structures for major events. They cited findings that such organising committees “often commit and construct legacy aims, yet disband when the event is over and have limited or no accountability to fulfilling long term legacy” (Postlethwaite et al 2021). There is therefore a clear role for the involvement of central and local government in delivering long-term legacy plans, as they have the longevity and planning horizons required to do so.

The same report also drew attention to the fact that “[t]here is no one in Government with clear ownership for 2022’s programme of events, and few meaningful links between the events themselves”. Coupled with the finding above about the success of the “Prime Minister’s Special Representative” role in the organisation of the 14-18 NOW programme, this points to a greater role for coordination of events within central government itself – for example, via roles relating to specific events, or specific responsibilities for linking contemporary programmes of events together.

Event size

Flyvbjerg et al (2020) contains a detailed discussion of the risks associated with megaprojects, specifically in the context of the Olympics. They note that “[e]very Olympics since 1960 has run over budget, at an average of 172 percent in real terms”, and examine the potential reasons for this. Not all of the factors they identify relate to event size, but many do.

A DCMS Committee review into the UK’s management of major cultural and sporting events noted issues around the longevity of the organising structures for major events.

For example, they identify a “principal-agent problem”<sup>17</sup> in the relationship between the International Olympic Committee and host cities, with the IOC benefitting from increased revenues, but not bearing any of the burden of cost overruns, while accrue entirely to the host city or country. The IOC therefore has an incentive to increase the overall level of activity, potential to suboptimally-high levels.



## POLICY DISCUSSION

They also note that a fixed event deadline makes cost overrun more likely – it reduces the ability for organisers to trade off between time and cost. And they note that long planning time horizons increase the likelihood for unforeseen “black swan” events (such as a terrorist attack, recession or pandemic) to happen and drive up costs further. And finally, they note that the Olympics is often delivered by people and in locations without prior experience of hosting it – a phenomenon which they dub the “Eternal Beginner Syndrome”. In a similar vein, Dawson (2022) recommended that event organisers “[use] existing resources and facilities where possible in order to minimise costs”.

These phenomena are not unique to Olympic-sized events, but they are more likely to occur with larger events. Event organisers should therefore take these factors into account, and make a realistic assessment of the likely costs associated with a large event. Such a decision is illustrated above in the UK’s decision to bid to host UEFA EURO 2028 over the 2030 FIFA World Cup.

Smith et al (2021) also discuss issues relating to event size, in the context of place-making and developing social and community capital. They cite research pointing to the “questionable effects” of the top-down placemaking elicited by larger, mega events”, as well as highlighting the potential benefits of small-scale, local events, such as street parties, in terms of the “specific place-based sense of community that is developed in on-street events held in the familiar spaces outside people’s homes”. In other words, small, local, regular events that facilitate repeated interactions can be more effective at developing a sense of place and community than larger-scale events or megaprojects.

Policymakers should bear these effects in mind when assessing the potential costs and benefits of smaller- and larger- scale events. The findings here of the large risks of cost overrun associated with larger events and the disproportionate contribution of smaller events to social capital formation potentially suggests that existing events spending should be reallocated away from large-scale events and towards smaller, community events.

## Funding

In the DCMS inquiry into major cultural and sporting events, some respondents pointed to funding challenges for the department (DCMS Committee 2022). One respondent – the creative director of Coventry UK City of Culture 2021 – suggested that the department is “under-resourced” and that this comes at the expense of smaller events such as the UK City of Culture competition.<sup>18</sup> In particular, the lack of guaranteed funding for successful City of Culture applicants was highlighted as a problem that “creates unnecessary uncertainty and risks undermining other fundraising efforts”.

However, a department Minister stressed the role of formal bids for additional spending from the Treasury, as well as striking the right balance between government spending and spending from the private sector. He argued that “we should not be spending government money if the private sector can do some of it”, and pointed to plans for the UK and Ireland to co-host the 2030 FIFA World Cup (discussed in more detail above) as an example of “sports entities and other bodies ... also independently apply[ing] “to host major events” without needing to rely on the public purse”.

UK Sport, the government agency for Olympic and Paralympic sport, also argued that there were benefits to “specific and dedicated legacy programmes and initiatives”, funded through “parallel investments... made by Government into legacy programmes”. The Commonwealth Games’ director of legacy also noted that the legacy programme for those Games “is being funded through fundraising and a multi-partnership approach, rather than any allocation from the Games’ core budget”. Policymakers should allocate a portion of core event funding to legacy activities from the outset.

## Planning and evaluation

Inquiry respondents also stressed the importance of properly planning for impact; embedding events into wider ambitions for host locations and longer-term policy goals; and conducting rigorous monitoring and evaluation into event impacts. Sadd (2021) highlighted the importance of planning for long-term impact into securing community buy-in to major events from the outset. As an example of aligning events with longer-term policy goals, she also suggested that the government might choose “to support key events in areas around the country that would benefit most in the long-term”, in order to further their ‘levelling up’ agenda. The inquiry also pointed to the example of Unboxed: Creativity in the UK<sup>19</sup> as a failure in terms of planning, with a “desire for it to seemingly cater to everyone, everywhere”, and a lack of clarity around the aims of the event well into the planning and delivery process.

Thomson et al (2020) argue that “[g]iven that it may take 15–20 years to realise the legacies of hosting a largescale event”, evaluation research design needs to be longitudinal, and capture changes over time, rather than simply comparing outcomes at two disparate points in time. The authors also stress the importance of building feedback loops into legacy planning processes, to ensure that organisers can learn and avoid mistakes as they go along, rather than “static designs that conclude post-event that more pre-event planning would have produced better outcomes”.

In terms of the length of the legacy planning process, Spirit of 2012 said that they would “like to see much greater emphasis placed on the long-term legacy for the people who are involved, the communities and the social impact of events”, while the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences said that organisers should “[look] to continue to monitor the impacts after 12–14 years”, and that this activity “needs to be appropriately resourced with a sufficient lead in time” (DCMS Committee 2022).

In a report on achieving culture-led regeneration, the Local Government Association argued that to achieve significant regeneration impacts, councils may need to engage in long-term planning, and commit to cultural investment over the long term (LGA 2019).

In light of all of this, policymakers and event organisers should ensure that a long-term legacy planning and evaluation process is put in place, and sufficient funding allocated to deliver it. This will not be suitable for all projects, but should be done for larger projects where the additional cost is proportionate to the size of the project.

As discussed above in Section 3, event organisers have incentives to overstate the benefits of events, and understate the costs. Where feasible (i.e. for larger events), independent evaluation by an organisation without a financial stake in the perceived success of the event should be carried out.

And finally, our review of seven case studies in Section 4 found that the most common methods of economic impact assessment used fail to rigorously assess the true impact of an event on the local economy. For larger events, more sophisticated methodologies should be used, that make greater effort to establish additionality and causality, particularly regarding visitors already resident in the local area.



Canley Street Parade, part of the Spirit of 2012-funded Playing Out project, Birmingham 2022 Festival.

Community involvement

Dawson (2022) stressed the importance of “target[ing] specific sports, regions and demographic groups in order to maximise impact”, while the UK Centre for Events Management stated that “organisers should prioritise the needs of specific communities and groups” when designing major events (Albert et al 2021).

A report into the impact of the Tour de Yorkshire (discussed in more detail above) advocated “an approach that provides opportunities for residents to get involved right from the start in the initial planning stages, through to the end where their contribution and participation is more formally recognised” (McCombes et al 2018). Similarly, Smith et al (2021) cite research suggesting that “there is greater scope for social capital creation when the organisation of events is delegated to community groups, particularly if groups who usually operate independently work together to co-produce events”, and that “the social sustainability of an event is more likely to be guaranteed ‘if power is devolved to community members [and they] have a leading role in event development and delivery’”. And the literature on the London 2012 Olympics has highlighted the debate around gentrification and displacement, and in some cases the lack of positive buy-in by low-income local residents (see Section 3 for more details).

Policymakers and event organisers should bear in mind the importance of targeting specific groups, and where possible should involve community groups in event planning and organising.

Volunteer management

DCMS Committee (2022) noted some lessons on volunteer management, particularly from the 2012 London Olympics volunteer programme. These include “the need to maintain and utilise volunteers’ data and build a workforce that reflects the demographics of the city”, “[the] need to maintain engagement with those who expressed an interest in volunteering but either did not complete their application or did not make it through the selection process”, and “the fact that legacy can be delivered by connecting volunteers with sports organisations to support increased participation”. Event organisers should take these lessons on board and build these activities into the event planning process. Those responsible for setting budgets should ensure that funding is allocated for these activities.

Policymakers and event organisers should bear in mind the importance of targeting specific groups, and where possible should involve community groups in event planning and organising.

SECTION 6

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our case studies and policy discussion above, we can make the following policy recommendations:

1.

Central and local government should have greater involvement in delivering long-term legacy plans, working alongside event organisers to do so.

Central and local government can play an important role in legacy planning, as they can plan and carry out work over the long timescales involved, whereas in the absence of a specific body tasked with ensuring legacy, event organising bodies may cease to exist after the event is finished.

2.

Where appropriate, DCMS should play a greater role in co-ordinating the delivery of major events, with these responsibilities explicitly relating to specific events.

The First World War centenary commemoration programme 14-18 NOW saw the creation of a “Prime Minister’s Special Representative” role, to support the programme’s coordination and delivery. This was a success, providing consistency of direction between ministerial changes, and giving the sense that the Prime Minister was “taking a personal interest in the work” (DCMS Committee 2019). For events of particular national significance, and particularly for events delivered across long timeframes, a similar approach should be taken. There is also currently a lack of coordination between different events going on at the same time in different parts of the country – DCMS could play a greater role in linking these together.



RECOMMENDATIONS

3.

For large-scale events, independent evaluation of costs and benefits should be conducted. This should take into account the risk of cost overruns associated with the delivery of very large-scale events.

Events organisers have an incentive to overstate the benefits of a project, and understate the costs. For large-scale events, evaluation should therefore be conducted independently, by an organisation without a financial stake in the success of the project. This could be carried out by an independent governmental body like the National Audit Office; or it could be carried out by an independent contractor, with funding provided from a fixed pot for independent evaluation. In addition, very large events, such as the Olympics, are particularly likely to see significant cost overruns, for reasons including fixed deadlines, long planning horizons, and movement between locations. Flyvbjerg et al (2020) reported that since 1960, the Olympics has run over budget by a real-terms average of 172 per cent. These risks should be taken into account before making the decision to bid to host a large event. This could include a specific optimism bias uplift for major events projects, to supplement existing Treasury guidance on optimism bias.

4.

Policymakers should also bear in mind the potential place-making benefits of small-scale, local, repeated events when deciding how to allocate budgets between small and large events.

Small-scale, local events such as street parties can be particularly effective at building a sense of community and place. For example, analysis of the impact of parkrun, a free weekly volunteer-led running event, showed a high social return on investment, of between £30 and £120 per £1 spent. Policymakers should bear this in mind when making funding and policy decisions – including relating to the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee celebrations, for which 16,000 street parties across the country are being held (Sky News 2022). Specific efforts should be made to capture these impacts in appraisal, or otherwise factor them into spending decisions. Overall, a greater portion of existing events spending should be allocated towards smaller community events.

5.

Policymakers should allocate a portion of core events funding to legacy activities, including for planning and evaluation.

Event bodies and academics have stressed the importance of properly planning for impact, and conducting rigorous monitoring and evaluation in order to ensure that impact is delivered effectively. This includes building a plan for the collection of data into the event planning process. The lack of separate funding for these activities has been highlighted as an issue. Moreover, our review of seven case studies on the economic impacts of events found that common economic impact methodologies fail to give a good picture of the true impact of events. For large events, sufficient funding should be allocated to evaluation to allow assessments of impact to go beyond standard survey techniques and take a more rigorous approach to establishing impact.

6.

The legacy planning process should be designed as a long-term process, with impacts potentially not seen until twenty years after the event has taken place.

As well as the activities preceding an event – submitting a bid, fundraising and preparation – and the event itself, there is also a period after an event over which its legacy impacts may be recognised. This is particularly true for larger events, where impacts may take 15-20 years to be fully realised. The full life cycle of an event should be taken into account when planning and evaluating the legacy of an event.

RECOMMENDATIONS

7.

**Policymakers and event organisers should seek to target specific groups when designing events, and where possible should involve community groups in event planning and organising.**

Experts and events organisers have argued that targeting specific groups may help the impacts of an event be more effectively realised. And involving community groups in planning and delivering events can help to maximise their social impact, and to minimise the risk of a negative community reaction, such as those seen in the backlash to gentrification and displacement in the run-up to the London 2012 Olympics. Events organisers should make clear the scope of an event, and the specific groups they wish to target, in the planning stages of a project.

8.

**Event organisers should build on lessons identified on volunteer management, including the need to maintain and utilise volunteers' data, and the benefits of connecting volunteers with sports organisations to support increased participation. Where appropriate, specific funding should be allocated for these activities.**

The 2012 London Olympics involved 70,000 volunteers, many of whom had never volunteered before. However, opportunities to engage volunteers in future volunteering activities post-Games, and to maintain increases in sporting participation, were not fully realised (Koutrou et al 2016). More attention should be paid to the importance of building infrastructure around volunteer programmes for future large-scale volunteer events.

SECTION 7

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**SPIRIT OF 2012**  
INVESTING IN HAPPINESS

Spirit of 2012 is the London 2012 Games legacy fund. Spirit awards grants for inclusive arts, sports and volunteering activities in communities that bring people together to improve their wellbeing.

The National Lottery Community Fund founded Spirit in 2013 with a £47million endowment to continue and recreate the spirit of pride, positivity and community that inspired people across the UK during the London 2012 Games.

Spirit of 2012's grantholders range from national to small, hyper-local organisations.

[www.spiritof2012.org.uk](http://www.spiritof2012.org.uk)



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