A “Demonstration Effect” is a process by which people are inspired by elite sport, sports people or sports events to participate themselves (Hindson et al, 1994; Hogan & Norton, 2000). A recent report for the Department of Health in the UK (A Systematic Review of the Evidence Base for Developing a Physical Activity and Health Legacy from the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, Weed et al, 2009) showed that there is worldwide evidence for a demonstration effect on sport participation. However, contrary to much popular belief, it was shown that a demonstration effect cannot inspire those who have not previously participated in sport to take up sport, rather it can: (a) encourage those who already participate to participate more; (b) encourage lapsed participants to participate again; (c) lead to switching between sporting activities.

This paper conducts secondary analyses of datasets from Sport England’s Market Segmentation (SEMS) research (Experian, 2007) derived from the Active People survey (n=363,724) and Sport England’s Satisfaction with the Quality of the Sport Experience (SQSE) research (Ipsos MORI, 2009) (n=44,287) to extend the insights in Weed et al (2009) to inform policy for leveraging a demonstration effect, initially from the Olympic Games, but also from elite sport, sports people and sports events more broadly. The specific hypotheses are that a demonstration effect can be harnessed to:

(1) Increase participation frequency among the 28.3% of the population (Active People, 2007/8) who participate in sport at least once a month, but less than three times a week (GROW)

(2) Stimulate a return to sport among lapsed participants (GROW)

(3) Tackle drop-off by refreshing interest in sport, or by encouraging activity switching to SUSTAIN participation that would otherwise have ceased (particularly in the 16-21 age group)

Initial analysis of the datasets shows that circa 25% of the UK sporting population (those who are currently participating, or who have previously participated, in sport) are “highly responsive” to a demonstration effect. This is “process evidence” in which respondents rated the effect of the national team in their sport, or of UK hosted events, as having an influence of 8, 9 or 10 out of 10 on their personal participation, thus clearly attributing participation changes to a demonstration effect. Most previous evidence has been “outcome evidence” in which changes in participation have been measured following performance successes or event hosting (e.g. Hindson et al, 2004; Sport England, 2004).

Using a Typology of Sport Participation Levels, which includes three relatively stable categories of participation across the lifecourse (always participates, sometimes participates and never participates) integrated with four participant groups (regular participants, sub-criterion participants, lapsed participants and non-participants) and the Transtheoretical (stages of change) Model (Prochaska et al, 1992), two target groups for a demonstration effect have been identified:

(I) 32% of sub-criterion participants (participating between 2/month and 2/week) that are not club members are highly responsive to a demonstration effect for outcomes in increasing participation frequency.

(II) 35% of lapsed participants (participating between 1/year and 1/month) are highly responsive to a demonstration effect for outcomes that re-engage former participants.

It has not been possible to identify a specific target group for initiatives aiming to harness the activity switching outcome of the demonstration effect to prevent participation lapses.
Analysis of the SQSE dataset shows that the satisfaction dimensions of Exertion & Fitness and of Release & Diversion were higher for those who recently had, or were planning to, increase their participation a lot. Therefore, these satisfaction dimensions should be emphasised in demonstration effect initiatives seeking to increase participation frequency among target group (I).

In addition, the satisfaction dimensions of Coaching and of Performance were lower in those who recently had, or were planning to, reduce their participation a lot. Therefore, these satisfaction dimensions should be emphasised in demonstration effect initiatives seeking to re-engage participation among target group (II).

Finally, the paper draws on the SPEAR Model (Weed, 2010; forthcoming), which integrates perspectives from the Transtheoretical Model (Prochaska et al, 1992), Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and the “Oxford Model” (Foster et al, 2005), to examine the ways in which motivations and barriers interact in the process of engagement with sport participation via a demonstration effect. These motivations and barriers are matched to the key dimensions of satisfaction identified for each of the target groups from the SQSE research to develop messages for individual segments (identified from the SEMS research) within the two target groups to be used in initiatives seeking to leverage a demonstration effect from the Olympic Games, or from elite sport, sports people and sports events more broadly.

In conclusion, this paper provides both outcome and process evidence for a demonstration effect on sport participation derived from the Olympic Games (or from elite sport, sports people and sports events more broadly), for which target groups and segments can be identified, and for which specific targeted messages to engage target groups and segments can be developed. Therefore, the insights in this paper can make an important contribution to policy development intended to leverage sports participation outcomes from the Olympic Games, or from elite sport, sports people and sports events more broadly.

REFERENCES AVAILABLE ON REQUEST