



Fighting fit?

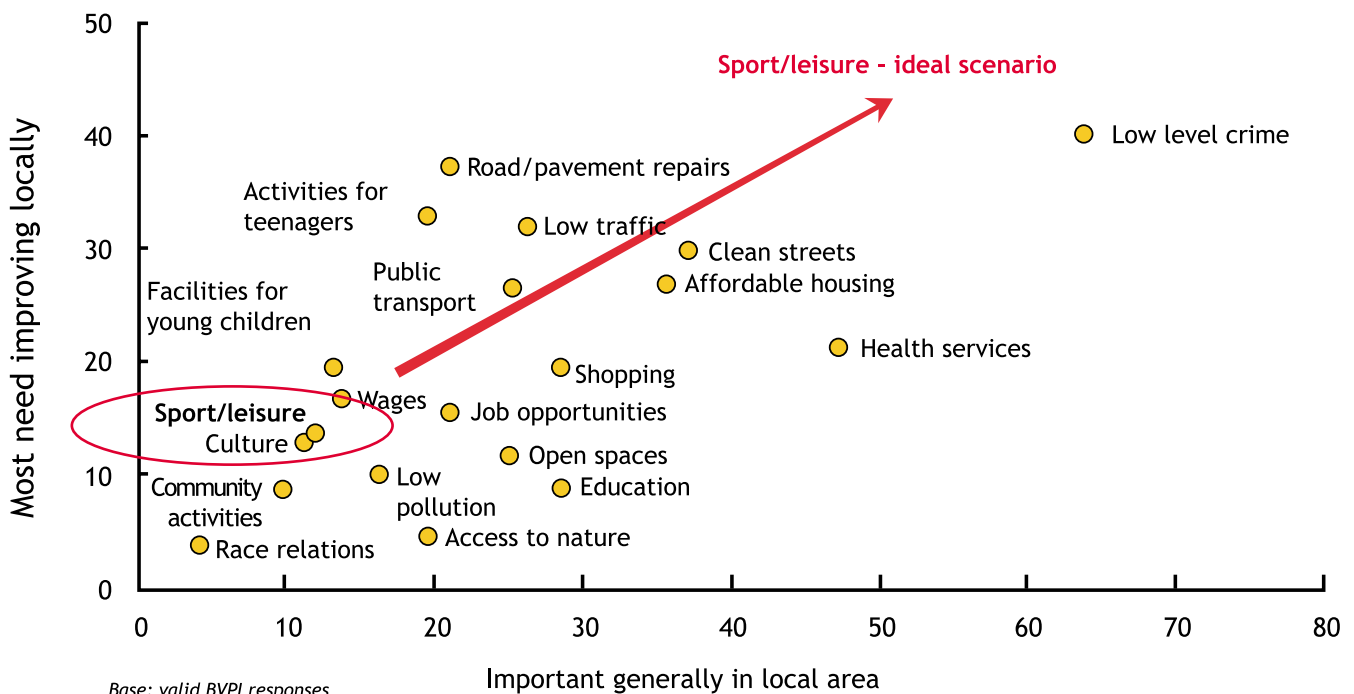
Public interest versus public health

It is an obvious assumption that witnessing Olympic competition in the flesh and on TV helps to boost participation in sport throughout the host country. But as Peter Hasler, Head of Sports Research at Ipsos MORI, reports, this is not necessarily the case. Here, he examines the lack of sporting impact that the 2002 Manchester Commonwealth Games had on the regional population of North West England, and considers the challenge facing the organisers of the London Olympics.

The legacy that London 2012 intends to leave the children of the world, let alone the people of East London, was central to its all-important final presentation to IOC members in Singapore.

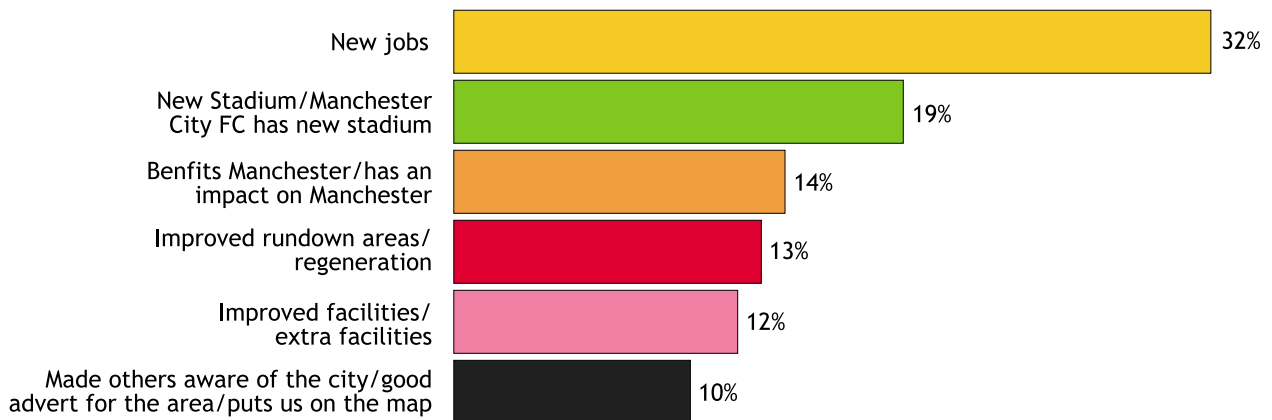
While the economic benefits of Olympic events are often debated at length, the social impacts tend to be ignored. These impacts can be anything from direct improvements to the living environment in and around the location of the Games, to an impact on the lives of those who watch the games – can the Games, for example, encourage people to take part in sport and lead healthier lifestyles?

Quality of Life - Ideal vs Needs Improving



Manchester 2002 - broad areas of impact

Q. Why do you think the Commonwealth Games has already provided benefits to the local area?



Source: UK Sport, 2003.

Base: All who think the Commonwealth Games has provided general benefits to the local area (644)

A low priority?

To assess the impact on the general public we have to start by assessing what is important to them. Ipsos MORI research indicates that sport and leisure facilities are low down the list of people's priorities for quality of life. However, this hides the fact that sport is thought to have an indirect impact on 'more important' social issues, such as helping reduce crime and anti-social behaviour by giving young people something to do, as well as improving people's health.

The following chart is taken from extensive local government research into best value performance indicators, which measures the importance and quality of local services.

Increasing the perceived social importance of sporting activities is exactly what London 2012 will be aiming to achieve at a local level, and to a lesser extent nationally and internationally.



A springboard to improved health?

Research carried out on behalf of UK Sport in the North West of England, before and after the 2002 Commonwealth Games, provides an indication of the type of benefits we might expect to see. Broadly speaking, there were two core findings from this study. The first was that sport is important to the people of the North West, with the overwhelming majority of people supportive of the Commonwealth Games, and the development of sport generally. The public was also very positive about the economic benefits and improved infrastructure that the Games had brought to the local area. The second was that despite this, the Games did not appear to have a significant influence on the propensity of adults in the region to participate in sport. (Even though there was an increase in the proportion of people who said they participated in more sport, the actual rates did not change significantly in Greater Manchester.) On the other hand, the event did seem to have a positive impact on children in this regard.

London 2012 will obviously be a far larger event, involving greater investment and a higher level of public involvement over a longer period of time. However, what the Manchester experience shows is that organisers cannot assume that because people will have the opportunity to watch top athletes perform live, they will automatically want to play more sport. If, however, London 2012 can somehow leverage the Games to stimulate interest in sport through targeted events and activities, there is no doubt that the Olympic Games is an excellent opportunity to help lift stagnating sports participation levels and reduce increasing levels of obesity. The success of the Games is still likely to be measured largely in financial terms and by the number of Gold medals that Team GB wins, but surely helping to make Britain a healthier nation is the greatest challenge of all.

Peter Hasler, Ipsos MORI

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