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To cite this article: Christopher Brown & Athanasios (Sakis) Pappous (2022): Leveraging the London 2012 Paralympic Games to increase sports participation: the role of voluntary sports clubs, *Managing Sport and Leisure*, DOI: [10.1080/23750472.2022.2105253](https://doi.org/10.1080/23750472.2022.2105253)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23750472.2022.2105253>



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# Leveraging the London 2012 Paralympic Games to increase sports participation: the role of voluntary sports clubs

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This study investigates the extent to which English voluntary sports clubs leveraged the London 2012 Paralympic Games, and what impact leveraging had on the sports participation of people with disabilities (PwD) at clubs.

**Research methods:** Realist evaluation was used to frame the research. An online questionnaire was administered to English clubs between 27 January 2018 and 8 April 2018. Four hundred and thirty-three clubs were included in the final analysis.

**Findings:** Most clubs did not leverage the London 2012 Paralympics. Clubs that leveraged were more likely to have increased their PwD membership. Holding taster sessions was the most effective leveraging activity. Principal components analysis revealed two leveraging constraints: knowledge of disability, and resources to leverage. A one-way MANOVA revealed clubs from inclusively funded national governing bodies were more likely to be constrained by their limited knowledge of disability.

**Implications:** This study suggests specific disability provision at clubs was important to the successful leveraging of the 2012 Paralympics for increased sport participation of PwD. The intention and capacity of the club to support leveraging were also important factors.

**Research contribution:** This study produces empirical data on the role and effectiveness of clubs as sites for sport participation for PwD following the Paralympic Games.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 13 January 2022  
Accepted 20 July 2022

## KEYWORDS

Voluntary sport clubs; leveraging; people with disabilities; Paralympic legacy; sport participation

## Introduction

Increasing sport participation of people with disabilities (PwD) was a stated goal of hosting the London 2012 Paralympic Games for the UK government (Office for Disability Issues, 2011). Clubs were viewed as important outlets for increased sport participation to occur (DCMS, 2008). Voluntary sports clubs provide a site for organised

community sport to take place as part of a sport's core offering and are often affiliated with their sport's national governing body (Shibli & Barrett, 2017). It is estimated there are 72,117 affiliated clubs in England (Shibli & Barrett, 2017). The ability of clubs to deliver increased sports participation was questioned, with concerns raised regarding the internal capacity and intentions of clubs to deliver the

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 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed online at <https://doi.org/10.1080/23750472.2022.2105253>.

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legacy strategy (Charlton, 2010; Collins, 2010). Research on clubs have been undertaken in many fields, including policy implementation (e.g. Harris et al., 2009; May et al., 2013), governance (e.g. Adams, 2011), and their role in grassroots sport participation (e.g. Macrae, 2017; Pappous & Hayday, 2016). Research into sport mega events and their sport participation legacies has been plentiful over the last 10–15 years (e.g. Weed et al., 2015), but has predominantly focused on the summer Olympic Games. Despite the heightened interest in sport mega events sport participation legacies, scholars have largely neglected legacies from the summer and winter Paralympic Games (Misener et al., 2013; Pappous & Brown, 2018). Studies focusing on the role of clubs in sport participation legacies from the Paralympic Games are rarer still. This research aims to redress this omission and offer important findings to build understanding in this crucial, but neglected area. The utility of this research is enhanced by its central focus on understanding the circumstances in which clubs leveraged the London 2012 Paralympics to increase sport participation and why this was the case. Leveraging can be thought of as being the operationalisation of planned strategic and tactical approaches to maximising the hosting of a sport mega event, often performed in advance (Chalip, 2006; Chalip et al., 2017). Most scholars agree on the importance of leveraging to achieve sport participation outcomes (Chalip et al., 2017; Misener et al., 2015a; Weed et al., 2015), but empirical data on the ways in which events are leveraged, and the effectiveness of leveraging on sports participation, are under-researched areas (Derom & VanWynsberghe, 2015; Potwarka et al., 2020). Brown and Pappous (2018) argued a lack of leveraging was a prominent reason for the decline in sports participation of PwD in England after the London 2012 Paralympics. This study attempts to investigate this by exploring the London 2012 Paralympic Games leveraging habits of English clubs. While some research suggests clubs may be ineffective

conduits to leveraging sport mega events (Charlton, 2010; Collins, 2010), very few studies have specifically prioritised collection of empirical data on the leveraging capacity and scope of clubs. Therefore, this research provides empirical data to enhance our understanding of both the role of clubs as sites for sport participation for PwD following sport mega events, as well as providing evidence for the effectiveness of leveraging a sport mega event for increased sports participation. Consequently, this study was governed by the following research questions:

- What impact did leveraging the 2012 Paralympics have on the sports participation of PwD at English clubs?
- What were the main constraints to leveraging the 2012 Paralympics and why do they occur?

To situate this research within the wider literature, we review the role clubs play in grassroots sport participation, followed by an overview of the current knowledge of sport mega events sport participation legacies. By grassroots sport, we refer to non-professional sport that is available to the masses and is a voluntary activity.

### **Voluntary sport clubs and their role in sport policy implementation**

In the UK, it is estimated there are 186,650 participating adult club members (Sport and Recreation Alliance, 2018). The ability of UK clubs to successfully implement sport policy has been questioned by some commentators (Harris et al., 2009; May et al., 2013). Research suggests the effectiveness of clubs as policy implementors is constrained by limited knowledge of sport policy goals and resource constraints (Harris et al., 2009; May et al., 2013). Furthermore, clubs may not share the same policy goals as their national governing body, as clubs are often compelled by their own interests rather than a sense of duty to increase the

sport participation of inactive individuals (Adams, 2011; Harris et al., 2017). For clubs to be effective implementers of sport policy, it is important the internal capacity of the club is strengthened and there is improved communication between the national governing body and the club (Macrae, 2017; Pappous & Hayday, 2016). The organisational capacity of a mainstream club, namely the size and brand, influences the potential for disability clubs to be integrated within the mainstream club's structure (Kitchin & Crossin, 2018). Kitchin and Crossin (2018) posit true integration can only be achieved if the values of disability sport clubs are embedded within the mainstream club, something they did not discover during their study.

In the UK, there are significantly less PwD participating in regular sport compared to non-disabled people (Active Lives, 2022). Attempts at increasing sports participation of PwD are stymied by vague policy definitions and implementation of inclusion at sports clubs (2021). Often, inclusion is viewed narrowly to mean PwD participating in non-disabled settings, rather than thinking broadly about inclusiveness in terms of choice of sports clubs (i.e. disabled and non-disabled clubs) (Christiaens & Brittain, 2021). Moreover, the inclusivity of clubs has been questioned, with attempts to integrate PwD into the club perceived to be a result of enthusiastic and passionate individuals, rather than club structures and attitudes (Jeanes et al., 2018, 2019; Kitchin & Crossin, 2018; Storr et al., 2021). Clubs, if they are to be effective conduits for PwD participating in sport, need to have a culture of inclusion embedded throughout the club (Jeanes et al., 2019; Storr et al., 2021). The findings from research into the social integration of PwD among clubs in Europe, however, suggest PwD are fairly well integrated at clubs (Albrecht et al., 2019). Despite Albrecht et al.'s (2019) findings, disability does not seem to be a priority for some clubs. In their study of European football clubs' commitment to fulfilling societal functions, Nowy and

Breuer (2019) found approximately 80% did not demonstrate a meaningful commitment to including PwD. In an Australian context, research suggests some clubs view integration of PwD as too burdensome, and that the difficulties outweigh the potential benefits (Jeanes et al., 2019; Storr et al., 2021).

### **Leveraging sport mega events to increase sport participation**

Leveraging, the strategic and tactical utilisation of an event, is considered the optimum way to increase sport participation following a sport mega event (Chalip et al., 2017; Weed et al., 2015). It is thought three types of organisation – sporting; non-sport; event-specific – need to be united in achieving sport participation outcomes, if an event is to be successfully leveraged (Chalip et al., 2017). Many organisations fail to effectively leverage and instead place faith in the power of the event, by itself, being able to increase sports participation (Misener et al., 2015a; Taks et al., 2018). The importance of leveraging, however, is demonstrated by the findings from Potwarka et al.'s (2020) study, which found a leveraging initiative stimulated increased sports participation after the event, regardless of post-event participation intentions. Rogerson (2016) found leveraging initiatives contributed to increases in the sport participation and physical activity of Glasgow residents following the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games. Furthermore, Dickson (2017) detailed how the 2011 Rugby World Cup organisers were able to successfully leverage the event, mainly due to the prioritisation of strategic partnerships to facilitate leveraging. The external environment and local contextual factors play a vital role in whether leveraging is successful (Bell & Gallimore, 2015; Brittain & Beacom, 2016; Lovett & Bloyce, 2017).

Poor communication between national governing bodies of sport (NGBs) and clubs, lack of NGB resources to support clubs, and a mistrust between NGBs in knowledge sharing, all hampered the leveraging of the 2012 Olympic

Games (Hayday et al., 2017). Macrae (2017) recommended event organisers strengthened and developed the organisational capacity of clubs before the hosting of sport mega events. Hoskyn et al. (2018) found little evidence for the effectiveness of clubs leveraging sport mega events for the purposes of sports participation.

Relatively few leveraging studies have specifically focused on a Paraspport context. Misener et al. (2015b) reviewed the preparations for a sport participation legacy from the 2014 Commonwealth Games, however their study did not include empirical data on the outcomes of leveraging approaches. The effectiveness of the Paralympic Games being able to influence sport participation of PwD has been questioned. Cuts to state benefits, negative media characterisations of PwD, and ableism – the prioritisation of non-disabled perspectives to the detriment of difference (Campbell, 2001) – limited the social potential of the 2012 Paralympics (Brittain & Beacom, 2016; Brown & Pappous, 2018).

The utility of this study is its focus on the circumstances in which clubs were able to successfully leverage the 2012 Paralympics for increased sports participation, and why this occurred. To help achieve this, the realist evaluation method was used as the theoretical framework for this research.

### **Theoretical framework: realist evaluation**

Please refer to (2021) for an explanation and justification for the use of the realist evaluation method for the analysis of Paralympic Games sport participation legacies. Realist evaluation is an evaluation method for social programmes and utilises an underlying programme theory for the foci of the evaluation (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). The focal point of realist evaluation is being able to provide detail as to the circumstances in which the programme works, for whom, and why this is the case (Pawson, 2013; Pawson & Tilley, 2004). Consequently, the realist evaluator aims to produce a series

of context-mechanism-outcome configurations to provide details as to how the programme worked, for whom, and in what circumstances (Pawson & Tilley, 1997, 2004).

Mechanisms and contexts are essential tools in a realist evaluator's toolkit (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Mechanisms are underlying and help to explain why a programme does or does not work. Mechanisms are the product of the participants' cognitive response to the programme resources and the programme resources itself (Astbury & Leeuw, 2010). For the London 2012 Paralympic Games, the inspiration generated by the Games and sporting achievements by the athletes, are some examples of programme resources. The response of participants to these resources helps drive the actions of participants and influence the shape and scope of the mechanisms. Context provides the backdrop for whether mechanisms activate to produce the desired programme response (Pawson & Tilley, 2004). Social programmes do not operate in a social vacuum; programme mechanisms are introduced into a social system with pre-existing context and mechanisms (Pawson & Tilley, 1997).

For this study, the programme theory for the London 2012 Paralympic Games sport participation legacy was defined as the following:

Increased sport participation will be achieved as a result of inspiration derived from the achievements of Great British Paralympians at the London 2012 Paralympic Games. The inspiration generated by the Great British Paralympians will increase the self-efficacy and motivation of PwD to participate in sport, thus prompting participation in sport. (Brown & Pappous, 2021, p. 23 )

### **Method**

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the University of Kent's School of Sport & Exercise Sciences Research Ethics and Advisory Group on 11 October 2017. The questionnaire resource tool, Bristol Online Survey (BOS), was used to design, host, and distribute an online

questionnaire to clubs. In an attempt to boost the response rate, participants were offered the opportunity to enter a random prize draw to win an Amazon voucher totalling a maximum of £25. Only English clubs from the sports featured at the London 2012 Paralympics with publicly accessible contact details in the form of an email address or a contact form were included in the study. To be included in this research, clubs needed to be listed on the website of their NGB.<sup>1</sup> Weightlifting and running clubs were included due to the similarities they share with powerlifting and athletics, respectively. A maximum of one response per club was allowed. Club secretaries were selected to be the spokesperson for the club. If contact information for a club secretary was unavailable, the questionnaire was distributed to the club email address. Where clubs had no publicly available email addresses, contact forms provided on the club's website were used to distribute the questionnaire.

### ***The online questionnaire***

The pilot questionnaire was administered to 1027 Scottish and Welsh clubs from sports featured at the London 2012 Paralympics, resulting in 44 responses. Analysis of the first cohort of pilot data resulted in changes to the questionnaire. Feedback suggested the questionnaire was too long, therefore simplified instructions were included, extraneous questions removed, and answer categories streamlined where possible. For example, asking clubs to indicate the region, rather than county, the club is located. The questionnaire was piloted again to 973 Scottish and Welsh clubs, with 18 completing the second version of the pilot questionnaire. The results from the second pilot test

confirmed the suitability of the questionnaire for the study population. The questionnaire was sent via BOS to English clubs that met the inclusion criteria stated in the previous section. Due to the large number of clubs included in the final study population, the questionnaire was distributed in 3 waves. Clubs were sent the questionnaire via the bulk email function on BOS. Data collection commenced on the 27 January 2018 for the first wave, with the questionnaire closing for the 2nd and 3rd wave participants on 8 April 2018. The questionnaire was live for a maximum of two months per wave. BOS was used to send reminder emails every 2 weeks to clubs that had yet to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire probed background information about the club, the club's perception of the impact of the 2012 Paralympics on sport participation,<sup>2</sup> the club's leveraging activities and any leveraging constraints experienced, and demographic information about the club respondent.

To minimise the potential for misunderstanding and to reduce the time burden on participants, leveraging questions were focused on pre-London 2012 Paralympics activity only. This was because evidence suggests leveraging pre-Games may be the most effective time to realise sport participation benefits (Weed et al., 2015). Content in the "leveraging and constraints to leveraging of the London 2012 Paralympic Games" section were informed by data from Brown and Pappous (2018), Chalip et al. (2017), and Darcy et al. (2017).

### ***The Club Sample***

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the population and sample for this study. Data screening and filtering took place. Clubs that did not

<sup>1</sup>Due to information and resource constraints, this was not possible for equestrian, football, and tennis. The national organisations specifically responsible for equestrian and football, the Riding for the Disabled Association and the Tennis Foundation, respectively, were used as the source for the clubs of these sports. For football, the decision was made to use a directory of disability-specific football clubs (The Disability Football Club Directory, 2017).

<sup>2</sup>Using a 0–10 scale, with 10 being maximum impact and 0 no impact, clubs ranked the impact of the 2012 Paralympics to increase the number of participants at their club, the profile of their club, access to funding, and access to equipment.

**Table 1.** Population and sample size.

Sport	Total no. of clubs	Eligible clubs with contact details	Clubs that completed the questionnaire	Response rate compared to total clubs contacted (%)	Response rate compared to sample (%)	Highest level of Paralympics GB medal performance at London 2012
Archery	830	760	89	11.71	20.55	Gold
Athletics and running	1309	1051	81	7.71	18.71	Gold
Boccia	71	70	6	8.57	1.39	Silver
Cycling	972	597	17	2.85	3.93	Gold
Equestrian	388	336	34	10.12	7.85	Gold
Fencing	251	243	21	8.64	4.85	No medals
Football	231	89	5	5.62	1.15	No medals
Goalball	30	28	3	10.71	0.69	No medals
Judo	583	488	26	5.33	6.00	Silver
Powerlifting	29	28	0	0	0	Bronze
Rowing	289	276	21	7.61	4.85	Gold
Sailing	766	576	29	5.03	6.70	Gold
Shooting	400	309	18	5.83	4.16	Silver
Swimming	727	555	48	8.65	11.09	Gold
Table Tennis	159	153	12	7.84	2.77	Silver
Tennis	162	105	6	5.71	1.39	Silver
Volleyball	122	84	1	1.19	0.23	No medals
Weightlifting	110	110	1	0.91	0.23	Bronze
Wheelchair basketball	105	84	14	16.67	3.23	No medals
Wheelchair rugby	16	16	1	6.25	0.23	No medals
TOTAL	7550	5958	433	7.27	N/A	N/A

know either the age group the club catered for (whether for adults, children, or a mixture) or their membership (specifically for PwD, parallel sessions, both PwD and non-disabled) were excluded from the analysis. This was to enable an unambiguous analysis of the sample. Furthermore, clubs founded after the hosting of the London 2012 Paralympics were excluded from the analysis, due to this study's specific focus on the influence of pre-leveraging activities of clubs. Clubs that indicated their sport as being "Other" from the list of sports included at the 2012 Paralympics were also excluded. This was to ensure only clubs from sports included at the Games were in the final sample. After data screening and filtering were completed, 433 Clubs were included in the final analysis (Table 1).

### Data analysis

To understand whether a certain profile of club may be more likely to leverage, a series of chi-square tests for independence were performed. The type, audience, the funding stream of their NGB,<sup>3</sup> and the region of the club were compared to the number of listed leveraging activities the club engaged with and their intention to leverage. A series of independent *t*-tests were then run to compare the consolidated scores for the clubs' rating of the 2012 Paralympics on sports participation<sup>4</sup> for each leveraging activity, intention to leverage, and whether the club engaged in leveraging.

Principal components analysis (PCA) with oblimin rotation was used to identify common components among the leveraging constraints. Suitability to perform a PCA was confirmed by

<sup>3</sup>Sport England invested £91,477,960 into 42 NGBs in receipt of 2013–2017 whole sport funding for grassroots disability sport participation targets (Brown, 2019). Funding for disability was categorised by Sport England into three investment streams: Paralympic-specific, dedicated disability programmes, and inclusive. Please see Brown (2019) for a breakdown of the investment.

<sup>4</sup>Using a 0–10 scale, with 10 being maximum impact and 0 no impact, clubs rated the impact the London 2012 Paralympics had on increasing the number of young (under 16), adult (16–65), and elderly (66+) PwD at their club. For the analysis, the three items were consolidated into one total score.

assessing the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value (KMO) and by inspecting the correlation matrix for coefficients above .3 but below .9 (Blaikie, 2003; Pallant, 2016). The KMO was .920, above the recommended .7 (Blaikie, 2003), and no coefficients exceeding .9 or below .3 were discovered. Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), further justifying the factorability of the items. A criterion of a minimum factor loading of 0.5 was used (Blaikie, 2003). Applying the factor loading criteria of 0.5 resulted in the removal of eight items and the presence of two components with eigenvalues above one. The scree plot and parallel analysis (13 variables  $\times$  433 respondents  $\times$  100 replications) further supported the use of two components.

A one-way between-groups MANOVA was conducted to explore the influence of the NGB funding stream on the variables contributing to the leveraging constraints identified in the PCA. The independent variable was the club’s NGB approach to grassroots disability sport provision. Findings from Brown and Pappous (2018) suggested some NGBs who claim to be inclusive are in fact neglecting their grassroots disability participation commitments. Thus, three types of funding for grassroots disability work awarded to NGBs by Sport England were investigated to determine whether this plays a role in the leveraging constraints identified in the PCA. Due to a breach of equality of variances, interpretation of significance levels was carried out using Pillai’s Trace (Pallant, 2016; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

## Results

### *The characteristics of the sample clubs*

433 clubs were included in the analysis (Table 2). Representation from each English region was achieved, though the sample is skewed towards southern clubs (44.1%;  $n = 181$ ). The majority of clubs offer inclusive sport in the form of opportunities for PwD and non-disabled people to

participate together (84.8%;  $n = 367$ ), while clubs often provided opportunities for both children and adults (80.4%;  $n = 348$ ). Most clubs had a PwD membership of less than 10% (73.9%;  $n = 320$ ). Indeed, 24% ( $n = 104$ ) of clubs had no PwD members at all. Just 7.9% ( $n = 34$ ) of clubs had a 100% PwD membership. Nearly two-thirds of clubs (62.1%;  $n = 269$ ) are affiliated to NGBs that had been funded by Sport England to deliver their sport inclusively (PwD and non-disabled people participating together in non-disabled settings). The overwhelming majority of clubs were from sports winning at least a bronze medal at the London 2012 Paralympics (89.6%), reflecting the population’s proportion of clubs that were contacted (Table 1).

### *To what extent did clubs leverage the 2012 Paralympic Games for increased sports participation?*

Only 15.3% of clubs intended to use the 2012 Paralympics to increase sports participation, while most clubs did not appear to have a leveraging strategy (91.6%). Just under a quarter of clubs engaged in leveraging activities linked to the Games (22.4%). Holding taster sessions was the most popular leveraging activity (24.9%), followed by working with local schools (22.9%). Approximately half of clubs (49%) did not use any of the listed leveraging activities.

To understand whether a certain profile of club may be more likely to leverage, a series of chi-square tests for independence were performed (Table 3). Only the funding stream of the club’s NGB had a significant association with both the intention to leverage,  $\chi^2 (2, n = 386) = 52.48, p < .001$ , Cramer’s  $V = .37$ , and the number of leveraging activities a club engaged with,  $\chi^2 (4, n = 433) = 47.30, p < .001$ , Cramer’s  $V = .23$ . Clubs from Paralympic-specific NGBs aimed to leverage (66.7%,  $n = 16$ ) and engaged in more leveraging activities<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Clubs were divided into either 0 activities, 1–2 activities, or 3+ activities. The percentage refers to Clubs engaging in at least 3 activities.

**Table 2.** Characteristics of the club sample.

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage of sample
Region	East	47	10.9%
	East Midlands	38	8.8%
	London	29	6.7%
	North East	16	3.7%
	North West	48	11.1%
	South East	116	26.8%
	South West	75	17.3%
	West Midlands	35	8.1%
	Yorkshire	29	6.7%
Type of club	Opportunities for disabled and non-disabled people to take part together	367	84.8%
	Parallel sessions are provided for PwD	23	5.3%
	Specifically for PwD	43	9.9%
Club audience	Both children and adults	348	80.4%
	Specifically for adults (16+) only	63	14.5%
	Specifically for children and young people (under 16)	22	5.1%
Founding of club	Before 2005	389	89.8%
	After 2005 but before the 2012 Paralympics	44	10.2%
Length of time as member of club	Between 1 and 5 years	72	16.6%
	Between 6 and 10 years	127	29.3%
	Between 11 and 15 years	84	19.4%
	16 years or more	150	34.6%
	Percentage of PwD at club	0%	104
Success at the 2012 Paralympics	0.01%–0.99%	30	6.9%
	1%–9.99%	186	43.0%
	10%–49.99%	53	12.2%
	50%–99.9%	26	6.0%
	100%	34	7.9%
NGB Funding stream	Medal-winning sport	388	89.6%
	No medals won	45	10.4%
NGB Funding stream	Inclusive	269	62.1%
	Dedicated disability programmes	140	32.3%
	Paralympic-specific NGBs	24	5.5%

(79.2%,  $n = 19$ ), proportionately, than clubs from NGBs awarded inclusive investment (intention to leverage = 11.1%,  $n = 26$ ; 3+ leveraging activities = 19.7%,  $n = 53$ ). A significant association was also found between the type of club and the number of leveraging activities,  $\chi^2(4, n = 433) = 13.90, p = .008$ , Cramer's  $V = .13$ , but no significant association was found for intention to leverage and club type,  $\chi^2(2, n = 386) = 1.25, p < .536$ , Cramer's  $V = .06$ .

### ***What impact did leveraging have on the sports participation of PwD at clubs?***

Independent  $t$ -tests were conducted to investigate the relationship between leveraging activities and the clubs' perceived impact of the

London 2012 Paralympic Games on increasing the number of PwD at their club. Clubs were able to select all of the leveraging activities they engaged with. To determine the importance of independent leveraging initiatives, each leveraging activity was transformed into a binary variable. Thus, clubs that engaged in a specific leveraging activity were coded as "Yes" and those that did not were coded "No". The interaction between leveraging activities was not able to be measured, but the independent  $t$ -tests enable a tentative insight into potential prominence of specific leveraging activities. All leveraging activities bar "internal marketing communications" were statistically significant at the .05 level (Table 4). This suggests a genuine difference exists between leveraging and non-

**Table 3.** Results of chi-square for independent tests.

Club variable	Leveraging	df	<i>n</i>	<i>p</i>	$\chi^2$	Cramer's V
Audience	Number of leveraging activities	4	433	.204	5.94	.08
	Leveraging intention	2	386	.525	1.29	.06
Type	Number of leveraging activities	4	433	.008	13.90	.13
	Leveraging intention	2	386	.536	1.25	.06
NGB Funding Stream	Number of leveraging activities	4	433	.000	47.30	.23
	Leveraging intention	2	386	.000	52.48	.37
Region	Number of leveraging activities	6	433	.453	5.74	.08
	Leveraging intention	3	386	.297	3.69	.10

**Table 4.** Leveraging activities of clubs versus perceived sport participation impact of Paralympics.

Type of leveraging activity	Engagement with activity	<i>N</i>	Perceived impact ( <i>M</i> )	<i>SD</i>	<i>T</i>	df	<i>p</i>	Mean difference	CI (95%)	Eta Squared
Holding taster sessions	Yes	108	6.56	6.58	6.56	136.19	.000	4.41	3.09–5.75	.091
	No	325	2.15	4.14						
Social media communications	Yes	76	5.71	6.35	3.87	93.99	.000	2.98	1.45–4.52	.034
	No	357	2.73	4.79						
External marketing communications	Yes	32	7.84	7.99	3.46	32.77	.000	4.96	2.05–7.88	.027
	No	401	2.88	4.75						
Internal marketing communications	Yes	26	4	5.31	0.76	431	.450	0.8	–1.28–2.87	.001
	No	407	3.2	5.21						
Working with local schools	Yes	99	6.06	6.76	5.07	122.84	.000	3.64	2.22–5.07	.056
	No	334	2.42	4.34						
Working with local authority	Yes	66	6.05	6.64	3.86	77.41	.000	3.3	1.60–5.00	.033
	No	367	2.75	4.75						
Working with disabled people's organisations	Yes	78	7.37	7.20	5.96	88.67	.000	5.03	3.35–6.71	.076
	No	355	2.34	4.17						
Working with other sports organisations	Yes	71	7.69	7.30	5.95	79.31	.000	5.31	4.08–6.55	.076
	No	362	2.38	4.19						
Working with organisers of 2012 Paralympics	Yes	15	9	8.24	2.78	14.37	.014	5.96	1.38–10.54	.018
	No	418	3.04	4.97						
Involvement in NGB participation programmes	Yes	64	5.89	7.18	3.34	72.47	.000	3.1	1.25–4.95	.025
	No	369	2.79	4.66						
Specific marketing messages depending on the audience	Yes	9	7.33	5.22	2.39	431	.017	4.17	.736–7.61	.013
	No	424	3.16	5.19						
Knowledge sharing with other clubs	Yes	75	5.48	6.06	3.62	95.3	.000	2.7	1.22–4.18	.029
	No	358	2.78	4.90						

leveraging clubs. However, the effect size was often relatively small. Based on the results of the *t*-tests, the most salient leveraging activity for positive perceptions of sports participation was "holding taster sessions". A significant difference in the perceived impact of the 2012 Paralympics on PwD sports participation was apparent for clubs holding taster sessions for PwD ( $M=6.56$ ,  $SD=6.58$ ) and non-leveraging clubs ( $M=2.15$ ,  $SD=4.14$ ;  $t(136.19)=6.56$ ,  $p<.001$ , two-tailed). The difference between the means (means difference = 4.41, 95% CI: 3.09–5.75) was moderate (eta squared = .091). The results from the independent *t*-tests provide

evidence for the positive difference leveraging the London 2012 Paralympics had on perception of sports participation impact.

### **Leveraging constraints for clubs**

The Likert items measuring leveraging constraints were subjected to a PCA in order to understand if any common leveraging constraints existed for the clubs. The PCA confirmed the presence of two components explaining 66.03% (component 1 = 54.95%, component 2 = 11.07%) of the total variance for the leveraging constraints. Both components contained strongly loaded items and all

**Table 5.** PCA of leveraging constraints.

Items	Knowledge of disability	Resources to leverage
We lacked training in how to include PwD in our club's activities	.876	
My club lacked knowledge about disability and how it manifests itself	.858	
We did not know how to effectively promote our club to local PwD	.848	
Our club did not understand how to include PwD into our activities	.845	
We lacked training to improve our understanding of disability	.838	
The pathways for PwD to join our club were not clear	.754	
Our volunteers lacked the skills to understand how to increase the number of disabled participants	.706	
It was unclear what the club's role was in increasing the sports participation of PwD	.684	
Purchasing of specialist equipment for PwD was too expensive for my club		.849
My club did not have sufficient equipment		.794
My club did not have enough administrators to support leveraging		.719
My club did not have enough officials (e.g. referees, umpires, etc.) to support leveraging		.717
My club did not have enough coaches		.664
Cronbach's Alpha	.932	.845
Eigenvalues after rotation	7.14	1.44
Total Variance explained after rotation (%)	54.95	11.07

variables loading strongly on one common component. The Pattern Matrix (Table 5) suggested component 1 measures the club's knowledge of disability, whereas component 2 describes resources central to the club's leveraging capacity. A medium strength relationship exists between the components ( $r = .57$ ). A reliability analysis on each component confirmed strong internal consistency for both components. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for each component comfortably exceeded the recommended minimum of .7 (DeVellis, 2017) (Table 5).

Component 1, "Knowledge of disability", refers to the club's knowledge of disability and how to effectively provide sport participation opportunities for PwD. This component accounts for over half of the total variance (54.95%) and is therefore the most important leveraging constraint. This leveraging constraint had more influence on clubs from mainstream sports compared to clubs from disability-specific sports (Paralympic-specific NGBs:  $M = 15.88$ ,  $SD = 5.26$ ; NGBs with dedicated disability programmes:  $M = 20.62$ ,  $SD = 7.83$ ; NGBs delivering inclusively:  $M = 23.57$ ,  $SD = 6.39$ ).<sup>6</sup>

Component 2, "Resources to leverage", is centred on club resources required for leveraging. This includes the internal capacity of the club to leverage the London 2012 Paralympic Games. This component focuses on the workforce available to the club, along with the availability and cost of equipment required for PwD's sport participation. Resource constraints and the limiting impact this had on the ability of clubs to leverage the London 2012 Paralympic Games were consistent for clubs from mainstream sports (Dedicated disability programmes funding:  $M = 15.01$ ,  $SD = 4.90$ ; Inclusive funding:  $M = 15.44$ ,  $SD = 4.20$ ) and clubs from disability-specific sports ( $M = 15.83$ ,  $SD = 3.25$ ).

## MANOVA

Having identified two common categories of leveraging constraints, a one-way between-groups MANOVA was conducted to understand if a difference existed between club type and the constraints to leveraging they may face. The two leveraging constraints identified by the PCA were the dependent variables: "knowledge of disability" and "resources to leverage".

<sup>6</sup>Likert scale ranged from 1 to 5, with 1 strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree. The maximum constraint scores for "Knowledge of disability" and "Resources to leverage" components were 40 and 25, respectively.

The independent variable was the Sport England funding stream of the NGB. A statistically significant difference existed between funding streams and the combined dependent variables,  $F(4, 860) = 16.08$ ,  $p < .001$ ; Pillai's Trace = .14; partial eta squared = .07. The only leveraging constraint to attain statistical significance, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .025, was "Knowledge of disability",  $F(2, 430) = 19.35$ ,  $p < .001$ . Post-hoc comparisons between the groups using the Bonferroni correction suggested the mean difference between the three groups was significantly different and of moderate strength ( $p < .001$ , partial eta squared = .08): Paralympic-specific NGBs ( $M = 15.88$ ,  $SD = 5.26$ ), NGBs with dedicated disability programmes ( $M = 20.62$ ,  $SD = 7.83$ ), NGBs delivering inclusively ( $M = 23.57$ ,  $SD = 6.39$ ).

Table 6 presents the consolidated context-mechanism-outcome configurations for clubs leveraging the London 2012 Paralympics and its influence on the sports participation of PwD.

## Discussion

### *What impact did leveraging the London 2012 Paralympics have on the sports participation of PwD?*

The findings suggest most clubs, apart from clubs from disability-specific sports, experienced no meaningful positive sport participation impacts from the 2012 Paralympics. For most clubs from mainstream sports, the 2012 Paralympics were largely inconsequential in increasing the number of PwD. Indeed, 84.8% of inclusive clubs did not aim to leverage the 2012 Paralympics to increase sport participation of PwD. Until demand is built within clubs to want to utilise the hosting of the Paralympic Games for increased participation, efforts to use clubs as a key outlet for new participants are likely to be frustrated. The fact 27.2% of clubs from mainstream sports claim to offer opportunities to both PwD and non-disabled people, yet have no PwD members, is troubling.

**Table 6.** Specific context-mechanism-outcome configurations based on study findings.

Context	+	Mechanism	=	Outcome
Clubs leveraging demonstration effect		Demand and excitement for the Paralympics have been built, priming the individual to respond to the stimulus provided by the Paralympics		Increase in disabled membership
Clubs from disability-specific sports		Clubs see the Paralympics as an opportunity to stimulate demand and attract new participants, leading to a desire to leverage the Paralympics.		Increase in disabled membership
NGBs providing dedicated disability programmes		NGBs are "forced" to confront any shortfall in resources and understanding of disability. This results in the development of targeted and tailored participation programmes for PwD.		Experience less constraints to leveraging than NGBs funded to be inclusive
Clubs holding taster sessions before the LPG		PwD gain a tangible insight into the nature of the sport and an opportunity to build confidence in engaging with this sport. The ability to "try before you buy" may help to reduce fear of the unknown and boost an individual's self-efficacy.		Stronger impact on sports participation than from other leveraging activities
Clubs with limited knowledge and understanding of disability		Accessibility of the club and its communications, along with limited understanding of disability, hamper attempts to capitalise on increased demand generated by the Paralympics.		More difficulties leveraging the Paralympics and less impact on sports participation
Clubs with resource constraints		The club workforce is not sufficient in numbers and/or expertise, leading to difficulty in providing regular suitable sport participation opportunities. Specialist sports equipment for PwD is expensive or difficult to procure.		Harder to successfully leverage the Paralympics
Clubs with limited PwD representation		Ableism may manifest within the structures and approaches of the club. Discriminatory practices are less likely to be challenged, resulting in difficulty leveraging the Paralympics effectively due to limited knowledge and understanding of disability.		Negligible to no impact on disabled membership

Is it a lack of interest from PwD to participate in the sport or clubs not being set up for PwD to participate on a regular basis? Our data do not provide a definitive conclusion on this point, but research suggests there is latent demand from some PwD to participate in more sport (Activity Alliance, 2020). This might suggest some clubs can do more to encourage and promote meaningful sports participation of PwD at their club. To help achieve this, we believe clubs need to embed an inclusive culture throughout the club, rather than relying on commitment from passionate individuals (Jeanes et al., 2018; Jeanes et al., 2019; Storr et al., 2021). Brown and Pappous (2018) argued sports organisations need to increase the number of PwD within the organisation to help inform the content of participation programmes. We echo this call in relation to clubs, particularly those promoting their club as being open to everyone. Until PwD are included in the design and delivery of facets of mainstream clubs, it is unlikely the participation of PwD at these clubs will be sustainably increased to any meaningful degree.

The data suggest leveraging clubs perceived a greater impact from the 2012 Paralympics in terms of participant numbers compared to non-leveraging clubs. However, perceived positive impact does not appear to have automatically translated into direct membership change at the clubs. We speculate that as clubs were assessing membership change over the past five years, it is possible any direct impact on membership from the London 2012 Paralympics for these clubs were short-lived. Future studies should carefully examine the direct impact of leveraging on PwD membership at clubs to improve our empirical understanding of the relationship between leveraging and sport participation at clubs. Notwithstanding this, we believe we have provided some tentative empirical evidence for the potential positive impact leveraging the Paralympic Games may have for increasing the number of PwD at clubs. We echo arguments from

commentators who have emphasised the importance of organisations leveraging sport mega events (Chalip et al., 2017; Misener et al., 2015a; Weed et al., 2015). Holding taster sessions was found to be the most effective leveraging initiative for clubs increasing the number of PwD at their club. Taster sessions were also found to be important conduits to participation in Potwarka et al.'s (2020) study, which used a voucher to encourage individuals to try a track cycling session for two hours. Unlike Potwarka et al. (2020), the taster sessions used by the clubs in this study were in reference to activities before the 2012 Paralympics. Taster sessions may therefore have utility as both a pre-event initiative and a post-event initiative, but more data from other studies are needed to confirm if this is the case.

### ***What were the main constraints to leveraging the London 2012 Paralympic Games and why did they occur?***

Similar to other studies (Misener et al., 2015a; Taks et al., 2018), many clubs did not attempt to leverage the 2012 Paralympics for increased participation of PwD. Some clubs may not have leveraged because it was in opposition to the motivations of volunteers at the club (Adams, 2011; Harris et al., 2009). It is recommended future studies should aim to understand in more detail why some clubs do not leverage the Paralympic Games.

The analysis of the data from this study identified two main constraints to leveraging: knowledge and understanding of disability, and resources required for leveraging. Clubs need to be educated and be aware of how their knowledge of disability and communication of opportunities can be enhanced. The Activity Alliance, an English organisation aiming to facilitate increased physical activity and sport participation for PwD, created a number of resources to help organisations and their understanding of disability. Despite this, some clubs struggle to effectively design

and provide participation opportunities for PwD (Brown & Pappous, 2018). Much more work geared towards educating clubs of disability and provision of appropriate sport participation opportunities needs to occur. This leveraging constraint should be addressed at the earliest opportunity for hosts of future Paralympic Games. Lack of resources was considered by clubs to be a bigger impediment to leveraging the London 2012 Paralympics than a lack of knowledge and understanding about disability. The issue of scarce access to resources is consistent with other studies (Harris et al., 2009; May et al., 2013). Macrae (2017) contends the internal capacity of clubs needs to be strengthened in advance of the hosting of a sport mega event, a call we echo. The lack of leveraging evident amongst many clubs is likely to have been an important factor in the lack of participation impact felt by many clubs from the 2012 Paralympics.

We believe it is important the Paralympic Games are viewed as the “cherry on top of the cake” rather than the cake itself. Consistent activity to increase participation of PwD at clubs needs to occur all year round. The feast or famine nature of sports media coverage of disabled sport does not help (Rees et al., 2019), but NGBs and national sports organisations can do more to highlight opportunities for PwD to participate in sport. Clubs are often autonomous organisations (May et al., 2013), and do not necessarily have the same priorities of NGBs that are often influenced by funding pressures and incentives (Bostock et al., 2018). The whole sports ecosystem can do more to consistently highlight the importance of PwD participating in sport, and by offering diversity of choice of how sport is accessed and consumed (Christiaens & Brittain, 2021).

Our findings produce a refined programme theory for using clubs as outlets for sports participation following the Paralympic Games:

The demonstration effect, on its own, does not lead to increased sport participation of PwD at

clubs. Clubs that aim to use the Paralympic Games to increase their PwD membership, and actively engage in leveraging activities associated with the Paralympics, are more likely to see an increase in their PwD membership. Holding taster sessions for PwD is a productive leveraging activity for clubs to use, while working with local disabled people’s organisations and other sports organisation, are also recommended leveraging activities. Clubs from Paralympic-specific-sports, such as boccia, goalball, and wheelchair basketball, gain the most sports participation benefits due to the increased profile provided by hosting the Paralympics. For mainstream sports, clubs are more effective at increasing sport participation if their NGB has been specifically funded to provide dedicated disability sport participation programmes. These NGBs are ‘forced’ to confront any shortfall in resources and understanding of disability, resulting in the development of targeted and tailored participation programmes for PwD. NGBs should encourage clubs to view the Paralympics as an opportunity to increase the number of PwD at their club. To successfully leverage the Paralympics, clubs need to have knowledge of how to include PwD into their sport activities, as well as have capacity within the club to leverage, namely a skilled workforce and access to suitable equipment.

## Limitations

This study produced important insights, but research limitations exist. Regrettably, only 24 clubs from the Paralympic sports of boccia, goalball, wheelchair basketball, and wheelchair rugby completed the questionnaire. While the authors accept this is a small sample size, we feel the findings still hold value. At the time of data collection, only 222 disability-specific clubs were affiliated to their respective national governing body (Table 1). A response rate of 10.8% is modest, but still represents valuable data on disability-specific sports and is a starting point for further research. Another constraint is the potential for misunderstanding from respondents: as the questionnaire was hosted online, it was not possible to determine

whether full comprehension was achieved. To combat this, definitions were provided for key terms and the questionnaire adhered to accessibility guidelines on BOS (W3C, n.d.). The questionnaire included a number of questions, which may have encouraged some respondents to either engage in a “tick-box exercise” or not complete the questionnaire in the first place. The comprehensiveness of the questionnaire was deliberate as a thorough investigation of the sports participation legacy and leveraging of the 2012 Paralympics was central to the design of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was piloted with Scottish and Welsh clubs and achieved face validity from five academics with sport mega event legacy research experience. Finally, this research was conducted five years after the conclusion of the London 2012 Paralympics. It is possible respondents’ recall may not have been entirely accurate or some individuals may not have been at their club prior to the Games. We feel the five-year gap enabled the data to provide a more honest appraisal of the impact of the 2012 Paralympic Games on PwD sports participation at clubs, rather than be swayed by short-term changes. The majority of respondents had been at their club for at least six years (83.4%), with 34.6% having been with their club for 16 years (Table 2). We therefore believe the responses are a good reflection of the experiences of the clubs.

## Conclusions

The data suggest leveraging is important in increasing sport participation of PwD at clubs (Chalip et al., 2017; Misener et al., 2015a; Weed et al., 2015). Clubs engaging in leveraging activities were more likely to perceive a greater participant impact from the London 2012 Paralympic Games. The problem lies in creating enough demand and desire among clubs to strategically leverage sport mega events. Most clubs in our sample did not intend to use the 2012 Paralympics to increase sports

participation. Without a common sports participation objective, the potential benefits from sport mega events may go unrealised (Chalip et al., 2017). Accompanying the will to leverage, the club’s workforce and its organisational capacity to leverage need to be built-up in advance of the event (Macrae, 2017). In addition, adapted or specialised equipment for PwD can be a barrier for some clubs. This can stem from limited knowledge of how to best provide sporting opportunities for PwD, with some clubs perhaps not appreciating what adaptations can be made with existing equipment (Brown & Pappous, 2018), but procurement of suitable equipment remains a separate barrier for clubs to overcome. It is of vital importance clubs understand and have knowledge of disability. NGBs can play an important role in supporting clubs with education and training on best practice disability provision. NGBs and clubs should also consider the expertise of specific disabled organisations, such as disabled people’s organisations and disability sport-specific organisations, as these entities often have lived experiences of disability that are vital to offering gold-standard provision. Knowledge and understanding of disability are a primary concern for “inclusive” clubs. An inclusive culture, rather than a group of committed individuals, is vital to fostering a welcoming and inclusive club (Jeanes et al., 2019; Storr et al., 2021).

Future research should focus on other geographical contexts for clubs leveraging the Paralympic Games to extend this study’s findings. Furthermore, scholars are advised to qualitatively explore leveraging initiatives of clubs in relation to the Paralympic Games, to uncover more detail on how and why leveraging initiatives do or do not work. Potwarka et al.’s (2020) study is a good template for scholars to utilise in a Paralympic context. This research has provided evidence for the circumstances in which leveraging the London 2012 Paralympics was effective, and why this was the case. It is hoped future researchers will use these

findings as a basis for further research into how clubs leverage the Paralympic Games.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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