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SPORT OBSERVATIONS

Briefing Paper | July 2024

PARIS OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES 2024: FACTS, MYTHS AND ISSUES

Grant Jarvie and Yujun Xu¹

- 206 countries will be represented at the Olympics and 184 countries at the Paralympics.
- The Olympic Village, which will accommodate 23,500 athletes and support staff and is designed to transform into a new residential neighbourhood.
- The French government has committed to constructing 5,000 "proximity" sports grounds nationwide in an attempt to make the playing of sports more accessible.
- Paris 2024 is set to become the first Olympic Games to achieve a 50:50 participation split between women and men.
- France's hijabs ban against Muslim women and girl athletes' places France in breach of multiple obligations under international human rights treaties but also in breach of the IOC strategic framework on human rights.
- Between 2023 and 2028 France will host more than 40 major international sporting events.
- At least 146 embassies have joined the "Terre de Jeux 2024" programme, illustrating the value of mobilising a diplomatic network but also sharing the project with the 2.5 million French people living abroad.
- In December 2023 44% of Parisians thought the Games were bad for Paris. 52% were considering leaving Paris for the duration of the Games.



"If their aim is to have the Games where we don't see poverty, then the plan to evict squats is not a good plan - it is stupid, they are evicting people from squats and putting them in the public space".

- The World Athletic Association has announced that a total prize pot of \$2.4m (£1.9m) would be made available, with gold medallists receiving \$50,000 (£39,400).
- Paris 2024 provides a pillar of connectivity for dialogue between communities.

^[1] The Sports Observations Briefing Paper is produced by the University of Edinburgh Academy of Sport (AOS)- Find out [more about the AOS](#). Professor Grant Jarvie is Chair of Sport at the University of Edinburgh and Dr Yujun Xu is with Peking University.

Introduction

1. The Summer Olympic Games run from 26 July to 11 August 2024 with 10,500 athletes competing across 329 events.[2] The Paralympics run from 28 August to 8 September with 4,400 athletes competing across 549 events. 206 countries will be represented at the Olympics and 184 countries at the Paralympics. Athletes from 200 National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and an IOC Refugee Team are involved. The 2024 IOC Refugee Olympic Team consists of 36 athletes, from 11 different countries, including 15 from Iran and 5 from Syria.[3] Paralympic athletes are competing across 22 disciplines.

2. The French Connection with the Olympic Games is longstanding. The modern Olympics were officially relaunched from Paris at the Sorbonne University in 1894, marked by a ceremony 130 years later - June 23 (2024).[4] While the first modern Olympics were held in Greece in 1896 to honour their ancient roots, the second Olympiad in 1900 was hosted in Paris. For years, French was the sole language of the Games. Although English was added decades later French remains a language of the Olympics thus preserving the legacy of its founding.

3. While the question of the relationship between soft power and major events has come under considerable scrutiny, both conceptually and empirically, France has long understood the relationship. A Sports Bureau within the French Foreign Ministry was created in 1920. French sports historian Patrick Clastres has argued that “It was a French tool for sports propaganda to further French interests” with professional bureaucrats recruited to promote national interests through sports.[5] At the 1924 Paris Games, the French government used newspapers, radio and military resources to broadcast the Games, establishing a press centre in the stadium for the first time.

4. The Games take place in the aftermath of the French Parliamentary Elections. The mayor of Paris stated that she had “difficulty understanding” why President Macron chose to call parliamentary elections just weeks before the city hosts the Olympic Games. President Emmanuel Macron called a snap parliamentary election after National Rally comfortably won a European vote. The decision by Macron to call two rounds of elections was seen by rivals and allies as being a gamble that would open the door to political power for the far right.

The French Diplomacy Question?

5. For more than a decade France has recognised sport as a foreign policy tool.[6] Sport is recognised as playing a part in France’s diplomatic and cultural relations-building efforts. Many government services collaborate and co-operate with the French sports movement across businesses and territories. The French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEAE) plays an integral part in attracting, organising and intentionally planning legacies to be built over the long term.[7] The Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic plan and Games will be centre stage during the summer of 2024.

6. It is but one set of major sporting events that have been attracted to France at a time when the hosting of major sporting events, such as the Commonwealth Games, has come under intense scrutiny as local and national organizing committees have questioned the value to the public purse. The Paris 2024 Olympic Games has secured

[2] Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Official Website. [accessed 30 June 2024]

[3] There are more than 36 million refugees according to the UN, and since 2016, an international team made up of refugees has competed in every Olympics.

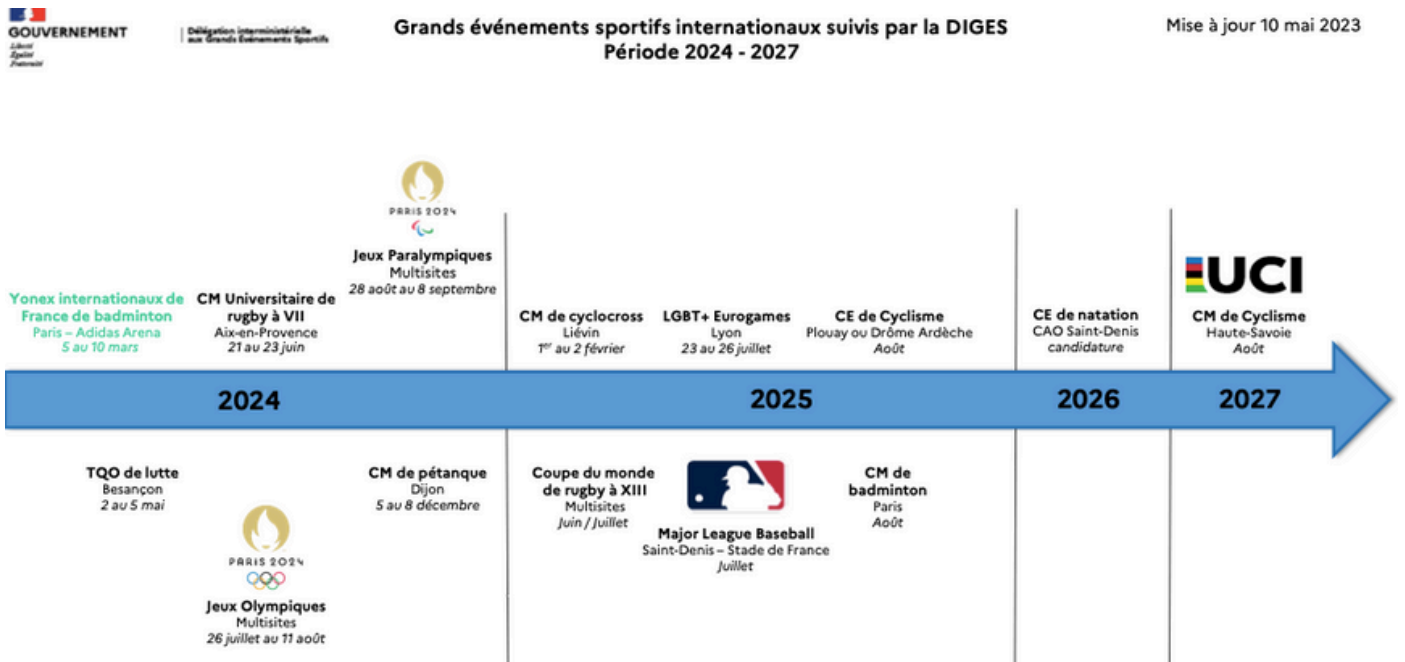
[4] **Adamson, T. (2024)**. Here’s why the Olympics have a French connection – Associated Press June 28, 2024 - <https://apnews.com/article/olympics-2024-paris-french-45f0a1dcd0003a68900742c7e07890e8> [accessed 28 June 2024].

[5] Ibid 2024 [accessed 28 June 2024].

[6] **Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (2023)**. France’s international strategy for sports diplomacy. December 2023- <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/sports-diplomacy/france-s-international-strategy-for-sports-diplomacy/> [accessed 30 June 2024].

[7] Ibid 2023 [accessed 30 June 2023].

significant amounts of private finance and yet the total estimated cost is likely to pass 10 billion euros forcing additional contributions from the government for an Olympic Games that has strongly messaged that “The Games finance the Games”. A reminder perhaps that there is no guarantee that the image left by a major event will be positive. There are plenty of examples of soft disempowerment in the context of major sporting events.



Source: Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (2023). France’s international strategy for sports diplomacy. December 2023- <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/sports-diplomacy/france-s-international-strategy-for-sports-diplomacy/> [accessed 30 June 2024].

7. Between 2023 and 2028 France will host more than 40 major international sporting events. Alongside the Ministry of Sport and the Olympic and Paralympic Games the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEAE) works to enhance France’s economic attractiveness and outreach abroad.[8] The use of sport as a tool to enhance international engagement and co-operation comes in many forms: the hosting of major sporting events, support for French candidacies, indirect and direct French sports aid, support for the international development of French sport companies, the hosting of conferences, the forging of mutual bilateral relationships through sport, the preservation and promotion of the French language, the use of sports ambassadors to formally and informally convey messaging and France’s vision and expertise for accessible, inclusive and sustainable sport to foreign authorities, the world of sport and the general public.

8. In 2018 the French Development Agency (AFD) was mandated to produce a sport for development strategy.[9] Since 2019, 18 projects from a solidarity fund for innovative projects (FSPI) using sport as a lever for development, education and gender equality have been funded by the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEAE). The French diplomatic network has helped implement them.[10]

[8] Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (2023). France’s international strategy for sports diplomacy. December 2023- [accessed 30 June 2024].

[9] Ibid 2023 [accessed 30 June 2024].

[10] Two examples of such programmes would be: (i) Iraq (2022-2024): partnership with the French Football Federation with a view to developing women’s football. The women’s national team has training courses and sessions at Clairefontaine, the aim being for the players to be role models in their country, to encourage young Iraqi girls to play sports. The project also supports educators to structure women’s football in Iraq over the long term. (ii) Senegal (2020-2022): support for structuring a training programme for high-level athletes by developing sports sections in schools, promoting professional sporting careers, and structuring the e-sport industry.

9. More than €112 million (£94 million) have been allocated to cooperation projects. Funding was provided for projects to strengthen women's rugby in Benin, to develop academies bringing together sport and education for young people (in Senegal, Liberia, Morocco, Cameroon, Mali and South Africa), thus enabling efforts to strengthen social cohesion in Africa via the "Sport En Commun" platform. A development which supports, amongst others, high-level French and African athletes in creating associations using sport as development tool. Sport En Commun was launched in September 2020, supported by a coalition of Public Development Banks and partners but with the specific purpose of using sport to deliver social and economic development in Africa.

10. Between 2021 and 2023 decentralized cooperation through sport enabled the financing of 35 cooperation projects between French and foreign local government bodies, with the support of French embassies and consulates, worth a total of €3.2 million (£2.7 million).[11]

11. MEAE plays a major consular role to facilitate the issuing of visas for the tens of thousands of members of the Olympic and Paralympic families.[12] In the protocol sector, it will play host to many Heads of State and Governments who will travel to France for the Games. Over 160 such dignitaries are expected to attend the Olympic Games Opening Ceremony on 26 July 2024.[13] At least 146 embassies have joined the "Terre de Jeux 2024" programme, illustrating in part the scale and value of mobilising a diplomatic network in support of Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games but also sharing the project with the 2.5 million French people living abroad.[14] Some 136 embassies, more than 80% of the French diplomatic network, organised a relay around the world in March 2024 involving 24 hours of uninterrupted sport across the world.

12. Beyond the performance of French athletes, sport helps to showcase French innovation and expertise in many areas of development including economic, social, cultural, and environmental sectors. The diplomatic network actively supports not just the 2024 Paris Games but the French sports movement both within France and across territories, friends of France and the French diaspora. For France and other countries there is both a diaspora that connects to France through sport but also a sports diaspora that has significant international presence in countries and yet is possibly an untapped resource or a fully optimised resource.

13. Finally, to support France's sports diplomacy efforts, which bring together many existing cooperation frameworks, the MEAE, via its agency Expertise France[15] has also used French sports expertise to strengthen sports institutions, including through the deployment to Africa of international technical experts (ITE) specializing in sport.[16] At least 6 French experts have been placed in regional institutions or sports Ministries in Senegal (two experts), Gabon, Rwanda, Tanzania and Cameroon.

The Auld Alliance and Paris 2024

14. Scotland does not have the infrastructure and co-ordination that the French have put in place to use sport as a tool for international engagement and co-operation. It is something that Scotland could develop in partnership with and through the UK Government given that foreign policy remains a UK Government jurisdiction. Sport has yet to be optimised as an asset that could be used by the Culture and Major Events Directorate of the Scottish Government.

[11-14] Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (2024). Sports diplomacy: Olympic and Paralympic Games the run up to Paris 2024. 3 May 2024-
<https://franceintheus.org/spip.php?article11495> [accessed 30 June 2024].

[15] Expertise Francais <https://www.expertisefrance.fr/en/accueil> [accessed 30 June 2024].

[16] Ministry for European and Foreign Affairs (2023). Sports diplomacy: Sport and Development. December 2023
<https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/sports-diplomacy/sport-and-development/> [accessed 30 June 2023].

15. The Auld Alliance between Scotland and France came into being in 1295 as a means of enabling the two countries mutual interests. The original alliance that granted dual citizenship in countries and was eventually revoked by the French government in 1903. Yet there are many opportunities for Scotland, France and the United Kingdom to collaborate through sport as a basis for further enabling cultural relations, trade and business.

16. The example of Eric Liddell, the Scottish athlete born in China in 1902 is used here as but an illustrative example of a sports icon continuing to facilitate co-operation and friendship long after the athlete passed away in 1945.[17]

17. 11 July 2024 marked 100 years since Eric Henry Liddell won the 400 metres gold medal at the Paris Olympic Games in a world record time of 47.6 seconds. On the 22 March 2024, the local press and dignitaries from France, Scotland and the United Kingdom (UK) along with the Eric Liddell 100 Foundation unveiled a plaque which reads:

“Cette plaque est en l’honneur d’Eric Liddell, “Écossais Volant”, et de sa victoire au Stade Yves-du-Manoir lors des Jeux Olympiques de Paris en 1924. Un exemple sportif et humain qui demeure un symbole d’amitié entre la France, l’Écosse et le Royaume-Uni. Une légende. Un héritage. Une source d’inspiration.”[18]

Translated into English, it reads:

“This plaque is in honour of Eric Liddell, the “Flying Scotsman”, and his victory at the Stade Yves-du-Manoir during the Paris Olympic Games in 1924. A sporting and human example which remains a symbol of friendship between France, Scotland and the United Kingdom. A legend. A heritage. A source of inspiration.” [19]

The Scottish Minister for External Affairs added:

“This is a really special way to recognise the immense talent of Eric Liddell and to highlight his Olympic success in this very stadium almost 100 years ago. I’m proud of all the work by the Scottish Government and partners that has gone into making this happen. It’s important that his legacy is remembered, not just as one of Scotland’s great sportspersons, but also as a man who was dedicated to improving the lives of people across the world”.[20]

18. Football and sport in general are something that Scotland has yet to optimise as a tool for enabling international engagement, co-operation, negotiation, representation and communication. Other countries are and have been doing this for a while including the French but also China, Wales and Australia. Scottish sport has untapped co-ordinated scale and reach that could be further enabled at three levels – city to city, region to region and country to country. More specifically Scotland could optimise this at supra national levels with sport connecting Scotland to multilateral international bodies such as UEFA, UN, UNESCO, WHO, national levels between Scotland and the United Kingdom and at a sub-national level i.e. city to city or region to region.

[17] Jarvie, G, Walker, R, Woodgate, A and Fan, H (2023). Eric Henry Liddell. A timeline and a tribute. <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/sport-matters/2023/12/31/sacrifice-compassion-and-an-inspiration-eric-henry-liddell-100-years-a-timeline-and-a-tribute/> [accessed 1 July 2024]. Ibid 2024 [accessed 3 July 2024].

[18-20] Ibid 2024.

The Legacy Question?

19. It is not as if previous French Governments have not been alert to the legacy question. Sport policy in Vichy France was a legacy of the Popular Front's commitment to mass sport, physical education in schools, and state-owned recreational opportunities in the 1930s.[21] Darnell, Field and Kidd argue that such activities came with a political motivation in that Vichy officials viewed sport as a useful tool for diverting the young from politics altogether, since these corps provided great opportunities for youth who simply enjoyed sports and outdoor activities.[22] Such interventions were transferred to Indochina where the French colonial government looked to find ways to build loyalty in the face of Japanese occupation. Sport was used to divert the attention of local youth away from politics and put them in an environment that would foster a friendly relationship with French youth. The idea was that the French gift of sporting opportunities would alleviate the reality of local material hardship at the time. High profile sporting events were part of the political mix aimed at reminding the indigenous population of their shared imperial identity based on feelings of imperial pride.[23]

20. All events are influenced by the wider context in which they take place. The legacy of hosting major sports events needs to be considered on a case-by-case basis. The benefits of hosting major sporting events do not always justify the costs.[24] Economists will tell you with some confidence that the determinants of Olympic medal-winning nations are basic economic variables such as GDP per capita and population size. Legacies need to be planned from the moment the hosting rights have been won.

21. Several recent UK evidence-based studies have attempted to capture the value of major sporting events (MSE'S) to parts of the UK. Between 2010 and 2022 the UK held at least 175 major sporting events. In one year, 2022, 12 events were held across 25 UK cities.[25] 91% of the people surveyed agreed with the statement that it was important to spread public investment across cities and communities. The 2022 Sports Consultancy Report assessed economic, societal, reputational and environmental impact of these MSE'S.

22. A synopsis of the key findings being (i) Excluding the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games an attendance of 1.2m people helped to generate a cumulative direct economic impact of £132m and helped to support 1,600 full-time equivalent jobs; (ii) The economic impact generated resulted in a 6:1 return on this investment; (iii) 83% of respondents to the national survey reported that they were proud of the UK for hosting these events ; (iv) Within the sports industry, the UK was shown to be a trusted, reliable and world class event host; (v) Over 23,000 volunteers helped to deliver the 12 events; (vi) 66% of the events provided UK athletes with the opportunity to earn either direct qualification to the Paris 2024 Olympic or Paralympic Games; (vii) Sustainable event delivery can promote environmental issues; (viii) 365 million people across 195 territories watched the Women's 2022 European Football Championship; (ix) that the UK sells itself as an export through major events in that it sells its intelligence and expertise very well.

23. A second study worth touching upon is the Ernst and Young and Rofe study of soft power, trade and investment impacts from hosting major sporting events in London.[26] The report makes the case for doing more to ensure MSE are linked to trade and wider international goals. The key findings are (i) that MSE's over the next decade have the potential to deliver £4 billion in soft power trade and investment impacts for the UK; (ii) Greater strategic planning and targeting of soft power trade and investment outcomes and improved monitoring could improve this further; (iii) Soft power, trade and investment impacts are broadly understood but routinely under-reported; and (iv) the need to enhance strategic planning, encourage effective collaboration and promote purposeful engagement.

[21] Darnell, A, Field, R and Kidd, B (2019). The history and politics of sport for development: activists, ideologues and reformers. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp68-69.

[22] Ibid 2024: p68.

[23] Ibid 2024: p69.

[24] Jarvie, G, Thornton, J and Mackie, H (2018). Sport culture and society, London: Routledge.

[25] The Sports Consultancy (2022). The impact of major sporting events. London: The Sports Consultancy.

[26] Ernst and Young (2021). The impact of major sporting events: A study of soft power, trade and investment impacts. London: Ernst and Young.

24. Such planning takes many forms, including: an urban legacy, a social and cultural legacy, a human capital legacy, a political and reputational legacy, and a cultural relations legacy, all of which need to be sustained and built on and risk assessed. [27]

25. This means that there will be a certain element of fortune to how any event is perceived, the impact it achieves and the narrative that it creates around the notion of any social, economic, and or environmental legacy. For the Paris Games new facility build has been kept to a minimum. Paris 2024 is the first Olympic Games to fully align with the requirements of the Olympic Agenda 2020, utilising 95 percent of existing venues that have been upgraded and modernised not only for the Games but also to provide long-term sports opportunities for local communities.[28] 95 percent of the Olympic venues are either pre-existing facilities or temporary structures that will be dismantled and reused after the Games.

26. The Olympic Village and the swimming pool are both located technically outside of Paris in a suburban area north of the city. The Olympic Village, which will accommodate 23,500 athletes and support staff during the Olympic and Paralympic Games, is designed to transform into a new residential neighbourhood. A quarter of this being designated as public housing and the rest providing affordable units for low-income workers and students. The first residents are expected to move in by spring 2025.

27. The only purpose-built site in the French capital is the Adidas Arena at Porte de la Chapelle residing amongst the poorest areas in Paris. It is being presented as showcasing the city's readiness and commitment to both the global sporting community and its residents. The venue will host badminton and rhythmic gymnastics events. For the Paralympics, it will also host athletes competing in badminton and weightlifting events. Post Paris 2024 it will become the home of the Paris Basketball Club.

28. The French government has committed to constructing 5,000 "proximity" sports grounds nationwide in an attempt to make the playing of sports more accessible to everyone, closer to their homes.

29. That being said it is not difficult to find reports of Parisians not wanting the Games to come at all and views are particularly strong amongst those on the margins whose way of life or livelihoods are impacted by the Games. In other words, the unspoken legacy. In December 2023 44% of Parisians thought the Games were bad for Paris.[29] 52% were considering leaving Paris for the duration of the Games. There was always a solid corpus of French people who opposed the Games on the grounds that they were a waste of money and served mainly the interests of the multinationals.[30]

30. To them you could add those who believe that the Olympics and Paralympics will also be a monumental inconvenience including some 230 quayside booksellers or bouquinistes - self-proclaimed guardians of historic Paris - who are resisting attempts to dismantle their boxes for the 26 July opening ceremony.

31. What legacy is there for those who are evicted from their shelters to make way for Olympic facilities? Spreading east from the river Seine and home to more than 1.6 million people, Seine-Saint-Denis is the poorest locality/department in France.[31] With asylum seekers and Roma taking shelter there, it has the largest number of squats and informally built slums of any department in France. Squat closures have pushed more vulnerable people into unstable living situations after the government reduced social hotel places used for emergency housing. An old cement factory a stone's throw away from the then Athlete's Village and housing some 400 migrants mostly from Sudan and Chad, was closed by police in April 2023. A Roma camp of 700 people behind the North Paris Arena in Villepinte was also shut down.

[27] Ibid 2018.

[28] May, S. (2024). Paris 2024: A new vision for sustainable cities. 2 July 2024.

[29] Schofield, H. (2023). Paris Olympics: Locals ask if they are worth the trouble? <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-67564177> BBC News 2 December 2023. [accessed 3 July 2024].

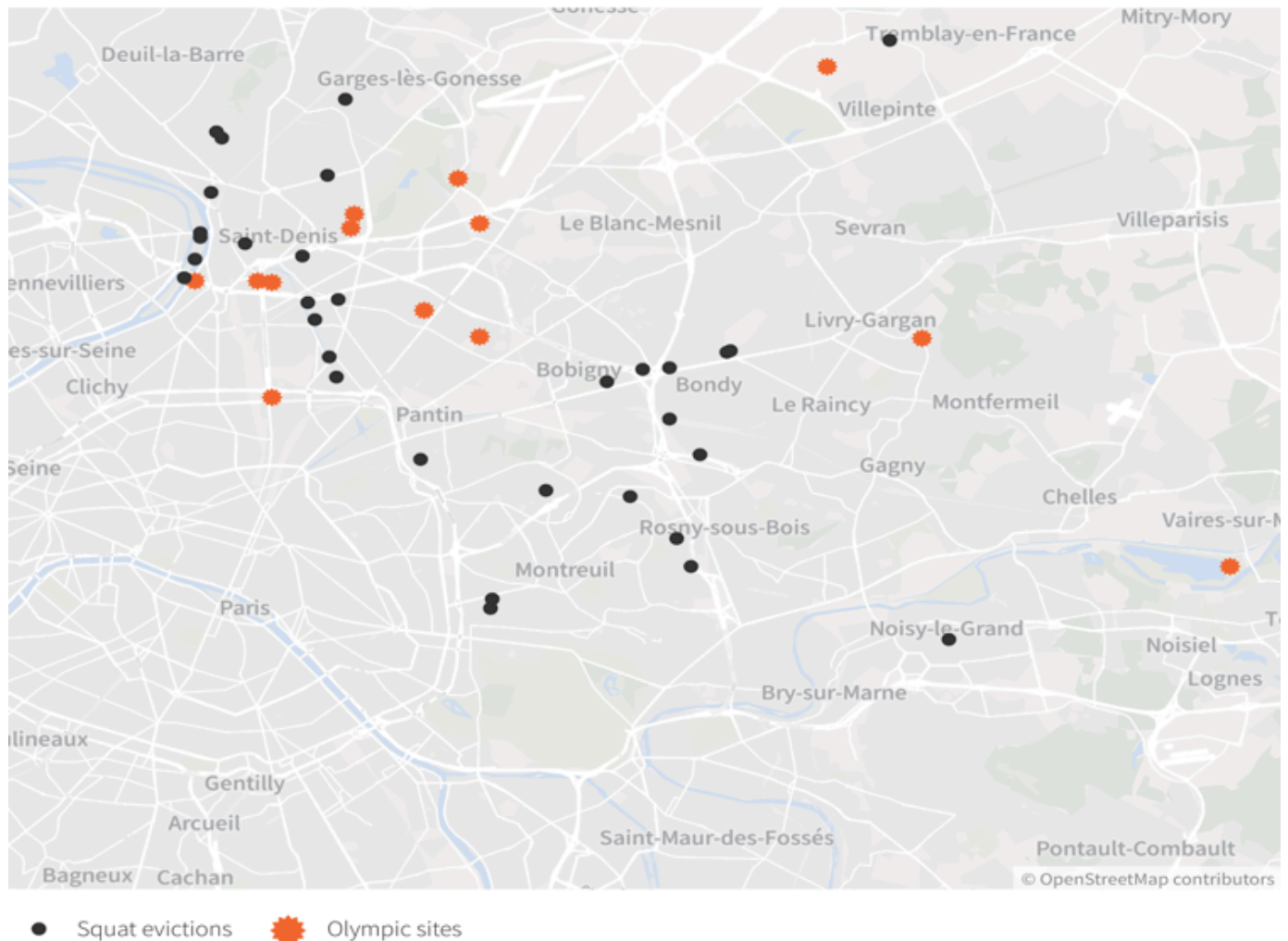
[30] Ibid 2023 [accessed 3 July 2024].

[31] Fouroudi, L. (2023). Migrants, Roma evicted from squats ahead of Paris 2024 Olympics. Reuters. 22 December 2023.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/migrants-roma-evicted-squats-ahead-paris-2024-olympics-2023-12-22/> [accessed 3 July 2024].

32. Nonprofit organizations working with Paris' unhoused population have been warning of an “ongoing social cleansing” as France prepares to kick off the 2024 Summer Olympics with a grand ceremony on the River Seine. Front-row tickets for the ceremony are currently on sale for upward of €2,000. The Olympic spirit seems to be distant just a few blocks from where the stands are set to be installed, as police evacuated a makeshift camp set up by unhoused — and mostly undocumented — people.[32]

Squat evictions around Olympic sites in Seine-Saint-Denis



Source: Layli Fouroudi Reuters 2023.[33]

As well as evictions from squats, data from Paris authorities show that they have been clearing camps set up by homeless people around the city with greater frequency. The Deputy Mayor of Paris, called on the government to requisition empty buildings, including former hospitals and offices, to house the homeless arguing that:

“

“If their aim is to have the Games where we don’t see poverty, then the plan to evict squats is not a good plan - it is stupid, they are evicting people from squats and putting them in the public space” [34]

[32] Global Policy Lab (2024). Living cities: Olympic stumbles in Paris. Global Policy Lab 2 May 2024 <https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/global-policy-lab/living-cities-olympic-stumbles-in-paris/> [accessed 4 July 2024].

[33] Fouroudi, L. (2023). Migrants, Roma evicted from squats ahead of Paris 2024 Olympics. Reuters. 22 December 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/migrants-roma-evicted-squats-ahead-paris-2024-olympics-2023-12-22/> [accessed 3 July 2024].

[34] Ibid 2023 [accessed 3 July 2024].

The Equity and Equality Question?

33. The only sports that are new in the Paris Olympics are breakdancing, having first being introduced at the 2018 Youth Olympics, and kayak cross. It will also be the first time that the athletes in canoe slalom race against each other and not just the clock. Surfing, sport climbing and skateboarding are not new but will appear for the second time in the Olympics having been introduced in Tokyo. 3x3 basketball also remains having been introduced in Tokyo. Other changes to the programme include the first-time men competing in artistic swimming; women competing in a new women's weight class for boxing; two new kite events in sailing; the marathon race walk mixed relay replaces the men's 50km race walk while weightlifting the number of weight classes has been reduced from 14 to 10.

34. Paris 2024 is set to become the first Olympic Games to achieve 50:50 participation split between women and men. It would be wrong to equate this to equality or even Olympic equality. As Michelle Donnelly has pointed out

“Ensuring gender parity — the same number of men and women athletes and men's and women's events — is important for gender equality at the Games, but it does not address the conditions of men's and women's participation”. [35]

Differences exist in terms of apparatus, media coverage, decision makers, lengths of races, payment, height weight and size of specific equipment, age requirements in some events and crucially the normality of using men's sports as the standard.[36]

35. The hijab ban imposed on French Muslim athletes who want to represent their country during the Olympic and Paralympic Games has of June 2024 still to be removed.[37] Hélène Bâ the French basketball player stated that the ban

“is a clear violation of the Olympic charter, values and provisions, but it is also an infringement on our fundamental rights and freedoms. It reinforces gender and racial stereotypes, and it feeds the anti-Muslim hate that already pervades part of French society”. [38]

France's hijabs ban against Muslim women and girl athletes' places France in breach of multiple obligations under international human rights treaties to which it is party but also in breach of the IOC strategic framework on human rights.

36. French citizens are relatively free to express religious customs and symbols, but French law currently stipulates that state and public institutions should be free of them and the Olympics currently falls into this category in France. The IOC has said hijabs will be allowed inside the athletes' village despite hosts France banning their team members from wearing them. French sports minister Amelie Oudea-Castera argued that her country's ban was to help respect principles of secularism.[39]

37. In January 2022, French politicians voted to ban hijabs in sports competitions and in July 2023 a top French court upheld a hijab ban during football competitions. Hijab-wearing French footballers have been fighting for inclusivity on the pitch through a collective called “Les Hilabeuses”. Despite being home to one of Europe's largest Muslim minorities, France is the only country on the continent that excludes hijab-wearing athletes in most domestic sports competitions. Muslim associations and human rights groups have alleged that France has chipped away at democratic protections and left Muslims vulnerable to abuse with such laws.

38. Paris' candidacy to host the Olympics in 2024 included a pledge to make the event the first ever inclusive and socially responsible games. Paris's Deputy Mayor stated in May that

“It would have been a great story to tell that the Olympic and Paralympic Games could be used as an opportunity to develop welfare and solidarity ... “It could have, and still can be, the case — but there's a lack of political will” [40]

[35] Donnelly, M. (2023). Gender inequality will still be an issue at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games despite the games being gender balanced. The Conversation 20 August 2023. <https://theconversation.com/gender-inequality-will-still-be-an-issue-at-the-paris-2024-olympics-despite-the-games-being-gender-balanced-210883> [accessed 29 June 2024].

[36] Ibid 2023 [accessed 29 June 2024].

[37] BBC Sport (2024). IOC urged to help overturn France's hijab ban. 11 June 2024. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/articles/c2xx4dl44v5o> [accessed 29 June 2024].

[38] Sports and Rights Alliance (2024). Hijab bans in Olympic host country - Athletes call on IOC to act. 11 June 2024. <https://sportandrightsalliance.org/hijab-bans-in-olympic-host-country-athletes-call-on-ioc-to-act/> [accessed 29 June 2024].

[39] BBC Sport (2023). Hijabs allowed in athletes village at Paris 2024- IOC. 29 September 2023. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/athletics/66958602> [accessed 29 June 2024].

[40] Global Policy Lab (2024). Living cities: Olympic stumbles in Paris. Global Policy Lab 2 May 2024 <https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/global-policy-lab/living-cities-olympic-stumbles-in-paris/> [accessed 4 July 2024].

Professional Payment of Athletes

39. One of the most controversial changes is the increased professional payment for athletes. In April (2024) The World Athletics Association (WAA) became the first federation to award prize money at the Olympic Games.[41] The WAA announced that a total prize pot of \$2.4m (£1.9m) would be made available with gold medallists receiving \$50,000 (£39,400).[42] Furthermore, this was to be extended to silver and bronze medallists in Los Angeles in 2028. The prize money would not apply at the Paralympics as Para-athletics is governed by World Para Athletics.

40. The WAA President and former UK Government Conservative Peer Lord Coe argued that the organisation wanted to create a stable financial landscape for athletes. Several current and former athletes came out in support of the move including Karsetn Warholm (Norway); Armand Duplantis (Sweden); Denis Lewis and Greg Rutherford (Great Britain) while Jonathan Edwards (Great Britain reported that the decision was “a little bit odd”.[43]

41. The international response to the move has been critical on several fronts. The Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF) said it was “neither informed nor consulted”, despite World Athletics being one of its members.[44] The British Olympic Association (BOA), was also critical, saying the move was not “particularly appropriate or helpful”, and risked creating a two-tier Olympics.[45] Rower and five times Olympic champion Sir Steve Redgrave warned that paying prize money to athletic gold medallists will create an us and them situation between sports.[46] He went on to assert that “all those gold medallists are capable of earning significant money before and certainly after Paris, so you are giving money to people who already have it”.[47]

42. The head of world cycling, UCI President David Lappartient took a cross sport international view arguing that the Olympic spirit was to share revenues and have more athletes compete worldwide. The argument being that a concentration of money on the top athletes would result in a lot of opportunities disappearing for athletes all over the world.

Security, The Seine and Safety

43. France is on high alert. The government has cut spectator numbers for the Olympic opening ceremony. Despite environmental and security fears about the location of the ceremony, as of 2 July, the plan remains that for the first time at an Olympic Summer Games, the Opening Ceremony will not take place in a stadium. The Olympic Ceremony is expected to include parades of athletes in boats on the Seine. If the security risk is deemed too high the ceremony will be in an enclosed stadium. About 20,000 soldiers and 40,000 police officers have been secured to provide security.

44. The risk of terrorism remains a main concern on a number of fronts. Politically motivated protests and environmental activism could disrupt events in Paris.[48] Both pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian demonstrations linked to ongoing developments in the Middle East have taken place in major urban centres across Europe. The polarising nature of various internal and external conflicts suggests that disruption remains a high possibility. IS had encouraged followers to attack high-profile sporting events such as the Champions League knockout fixtures. Airspace within a 150 km (90 mile) radius of Paris will be closed during the opening ceremony.

[41] The International Olympic Committee (IOC) does not award prize money but distributes funding through international federations (IF) and national Olympic committees (NOC). Some national Olympic committees offer financial rewards to their medallists. The British Olympic Association does not.

[42] **BBC Sport (2024)**. Paris 2024: World athletics to become first federation to award prize money at the Olympic Games. 10 April 2024. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/athletics/68778225> [accessed 29 June 2024].

[43] Ibid 2024 [accessed 29 June 2024].

[44] **BBC Sport (2024)**. 2024 Olympic Games: Federations critical of World Athletic prize money. 19 April 2024. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/athletics/68857933> [accessed 29 June 2024].

[45] Ibid 2024 [accessed 29 June 2024].

[46] **BBC Sport (2024)**. Olympic prize money will divide athletes. 1 May 2024. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/articles/c4n10mgj911o> [accessed 29 June 2024]

[47] Ibid 2024. [accessed 29 June 2024].

[48] **Towndrow, J. (2024)**. Security challenges for the Paris Olympic Games 2024. Helix. 15 May 2024 <https://healix.com/insights/blog/paris-olympics-2024-security-considerations> [accessed 2 July 2024]

45. Key law enforcement officials involved in securing the Olympics' said people were "completely exhausted" and "really preoccupied" just three months before the Games are due to begin on July 26.[49] Fears are growing that the government has neglected warnings and advice in recent months, with one French defence industry representatives saying that "now it is too late".[50]

46. The final costs of Paris 2024 will not be known until after the event. Drones cheaper than ever to own and operate pose an increasing threat to the integrity and security of major sporting events. The price tag of security including the 1,900-euro Olympic bonuses for police officers and other promised public bonuses means that the final security costs are unknown. For Paris, the responsibility for spending the money is divided between the Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (Cojo), which is running the competition, and the Olympic Delivery Company (Solideo) which built the facilities. Both have had issues compounded by higher-than-anticipated inflation. The French Court of Audit has already commented that Cojo had committed the traditional Olympic error of underestimating its initial budget.[51]

47. Yet these are not the only safety concerns and here we touch upon two issues (i) safeguarding children in sport and (ii) athlete and spectator safety in the light of a high risk of water pollution. Every member of the United Nations, including France, has pledged to uphold the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child. Canadian researchers have consistently argued that the autonomy of sport and the lack of state intervention increases the risk of child exploitation given the lack of protection for child athletes in comparison to other areas of society.[52] A 2016 study shows that children are the vast majority of participants in sport in most countries. [53] That being said the machinery and laws exist to further protect child athletes and the advent of Paris 2024 provides the opportunity to call out issues of child safety in high performance sport. Several countries have moved on issues through exercising powers that are independent of sports organisations. The Canadian research calls for children in athletic work to be allocated the status of a protected class, something that would be a significant move in advancing children's rights in sport.[54]

48. Swimming in the Seine has largely been banned since 1923, but Paris Olympics organizers vowed to clean the water and bring it to safe swimming standards. On 28 June 2024, less than 4 weeks before the beginning of the games The Paris Mayors Office released results showing that the levels of E.coli in the river remained higher than the safety limits imposed by most sports federations.[55] About 1.4bn euro (£1.2bn) has been spent on the Seine making the Seine safe to swim in.[56]The Seine is set to host the marathon swimming and the swimming stretch of The Triathlon. On 18 June, the level of E. coli was 10 times the acceptable level. A level that was not below safety levels set by sports bodies. For example, the limit was not below the upper limit of 1,000 colony-forming units per 100 millilitres (cfu/ml) used by the World Triathlon Federation.[57]

49. On 2 July 2024 the rehearsals for the opening ceremony were cancelled due to dangerous water in the Seine. The way in which the world of sport, including the Olympics, reacts to the climate change is one of the crucial challenges moving forward. On the one hand it is self-evident that many people going to Paris will fly into Paris and on the other hand climate change actions in the sport sector can have ripple effects in other industries. The suggestions made by leading sport ecologists such as Madeline Orr should get more traction within and beyond the Olympics.

Medals and Sports Participation Rates

50. Data experts Nielsen Gracenote's Virtual Medal Table have forecast that the United States will win the most medals overall at Paris 2024. If Team USA meets this expectation, it would mark their eighth successive placement at the top of the final Summer Games medal table.[58] Furthermore, it is predicted that Team GB would finish third and beat their London 2012 medal haul with a predicted 66 medals, including 13 golds.

[49] **Politico (2024)**. Macron's Olympic terror nightmare. 24 April 2024 <https://www.politico.eu/article/france-paris-olympics-emmanuel-macron-terror-security/> [accessed 4 July 2024].

[50] Ibid 2024.

[51] **France 24 (2024)**. Will France's multibillion-euro gamble on Olympic gold pay off? France 24. 28 June 2024 <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20240628-france-makes-multibillion-euro-gamble-on-olympic-gold> [accessed 3 July 2024].

[52] **Donnelly, P and Mazzucco, M. (2024)**. With Olympics approaching, it's time to recognize children as a protected class in sport. *The Conversation*. 20 May 2024. <https://theconversation.com/with-olympics-approaching-its-time-to-recognize-children-as-a-protected-class-in-sport-229268> [accessed 5 July].

[53] **Eime, R.M., Harvey, J.T., Charity, M.J. et al. (2006)** Age profiles of sport participants. *BMC Sports Sci Med Rehabil* 8, 6. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13102-016-0031-3> [accessed 5 July 2024].

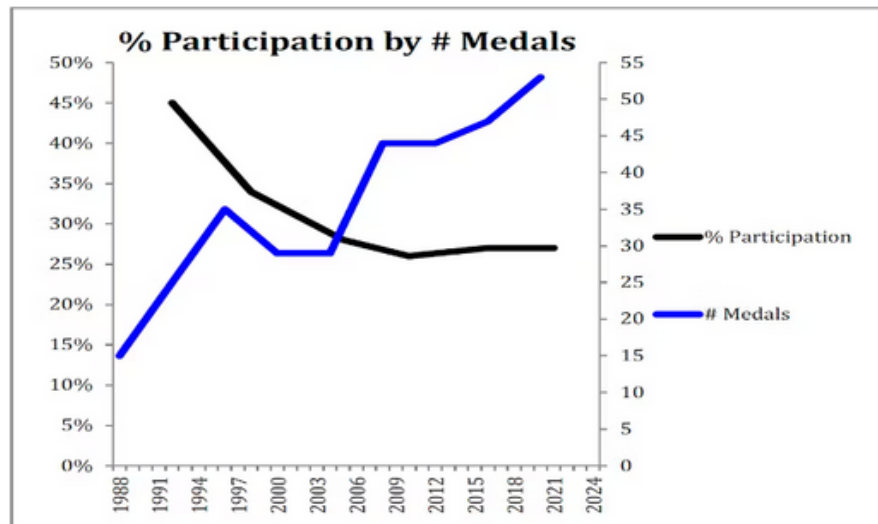
[54] **Donnelly, P and Mazzucco, M. (2024)**. With Olympics approaching, it's time to recognize children as a protected class in sport. *The Conversation*. 20 May 2024. <https://theconversation.com/with-olympics-approaching-its-time-to-recognize-children-as-a-protected-class-in-sport-229268> [accessed 5 July].

[55] **BBC Sport (2024)**. Paris 2024 Chief confident River Seine will be used. 28 June 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/sport/articles/cn09dl1z7r8o> [accessed 2 July 2024].

[56-57] Ibid 2024.

[58] **BBC Sport (2024)**. Olympics 2024: A guide to the Paris Games with 100 days to go including dates, venues, and prize money. 17 April 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/sport/olympics/68091759> [accessed 30 June 2024].

51. Research from the Toronto based Centre for Sports Policy Studies, which has collected data on the link between high performance sport and sports participation rates for more than 20 years, clearly brings in to question the reality of any trickle down or inspirational effect between medal performance and sports participation.[59] Yes, there is a link between funding levels and medal performance and Yes athlete performances can be inspiring but to link the two to increased sports participation rates is a best problematic and at worst a myth. The data for Canada shows that the more medals that Canadians athletes win the fewer Canadians participate in organised sport.



Source: Donnelly, P and Kidd, B. (2024). The more medals Canadian athletes win the fewer Canadians participate in sport. Centre for Sport Policy Studies Research Report. Toronto: Centre for Sport Policy Studies, Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education, University of Toronto.

52. Two clear trends were identified. First, the more money that the Canadian government spends on high performance sport the more medals Canadian athletes win. The same holds true for other countries. However, the second trend identified was that the more money the government spends, and the more medals Canadian athletes win, the fewer Canadians participate in organised sport.

53. The authors argue for a rights-based approach to grassroots participation and notably assert that

“It is lamentable that the Canadian sports system makes no concrete or intentional effort to enable increased grassroots participation. It is hypocritical to say inspiration will lead to sport participation without first providing young people with the means and opportunity to realize their ‘inspiration’”.[60]

Russia, Belarus, Israel and Afghanistan

54. The Olympic Truce uses the profile of sport as a tool to promote peace, dialogue, and reconciliation in areas of conflict during the period of any Olympic and Paralympic Games.

55. Russia and Belarus athletes will compete as neutral athletes. They will not take part in the opening ceremony and will not have their national anthems played, or their national flags raised, if they win medals. Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov criticised the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for not barring Israel because of its military operation in Gaza. IOC President Thomas Bach has confirmed Israel’s involvement in the XXXIII Olympiad. Russia has announced that it will host a World Friendship Games in Moscow in September. [61]

[59] Donnelly, P and Kidd, B. (2024). The more medals Canadian athletes win the fewer Canadians participate in sport. Centre for Sport Policy Studies Research Report. Toronto: Centre for Sport Policy Studies, Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education, University of Toronto.

[60] Donnelly, P and Kidd, B. (2024). The more medals Canadian athletes win the fewer Canadians participate in sport. The Conversation 25 June 2024: 52. [accessed 30 June 2024].

[61] The Soviet Union held a similar event in 1984, after boycotting the summer Olympics in Los Angeles.

56. The Ukrainian Olympic Committee has urged its athletes not to have any contact with Russian and Belarusian athletes and to report any violations of the neutrality requirements of athletes from Russia and Belarus.

57. The IOC has confirmed that Afghanistan will send a gender balanced team of three men and three women. [62] The women will compete in athletics and cycling, while the men will compete in athletics, swimming and judo. Afghanistan will also have five competitors in the Olympic refugee team. No Taliban officials will be allowed to attend the games. All women's sport has been suspended in Afghanistan since the Taliban came to power in August 2021. Afghan athletes will compete under the black, red and green flag and anthem of the former Western-backed republic, which was overthrown by the Taliban in August 2021. The IOC had previously suspended Afghanistan's NOC between 1999 and 2003 on grounds that the Taliban was barring women from competing in sports.

58. Spaaij et al's study of women playing for the former Afghanistan women's football team, many of whom are now in Australia, gives voice to some of the hundreds of Afghan athletes, including several Olympians, who fled the country rather than give up their sports and see their rights curtailed.[63] Among them were several members of Afghanistan's women's national soccer (football) team who continue to play in exile. In adopting a strengths-based approach the study is a remarkable insight into the resilience, agency and creativity exercised by Afghan women in and through sport.

Conclusion

59. Paris 2024 must be viewed in the context and situation that is a fluid, fast changing contemporary state of affairs.

60. The Olympics may seem trivial in times of tragedy but a growing critical mass of studies, when viewed collectively, provide a sense that sport and the Olympic movement, perhaps more than the Olympic Games, can when used in a nuanced culturally informed way be a tool that can enable cultural and political outcomes. The Olympics alone will not solve the world's challenges, but it is a proven pillar of connectivity that has a part to play. The contemporary world needs spaces that can hold a plurality of politics. Spaces which engage with ordinary people and cultures with all their varied histories and disagreements.

61. The question posed is whether the world can afford to ignore any avenue or asset that can mitigate risk, enable influence, and contribute to mutual understanding.

62. Sport, including the Olympic movement, adds scale to the cultural offering. At its worst, the Olympics can be seen to be missing in action but at its best sport, the Olympic movement and the common good may best be understood as a project of ongoing political construction that can and does respond to contemporary calls for sport to serve humanity.

63. We can choose to help a world defined not by conflict but by peace and opportunity. We can choose to use sport as a platform for good. We can choose as the Paris Olympics and Paralympics demonstrate that sport can provide moments of joy and despair but also be a resource of hope. If anything, Paris 2024 provides a pillar of connectivity for dialogue between communities and how we decide to use it is also a choice

[62] France 24 (2024). Who will represent Afghanistan at the Paris Olympics and how? 18 June 2024- <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20240618-who-will-represent-afghanistan-at-the-paris-olympics-and-how> [accessed 4 July 2024].

[63] Spaaij, R et al (2024) "Our Right to Play": How Afghan women navigate constraints, agency, and aspirations on and off the soccer field. *American Behavioural Scientist*, pp1-19. Doi 10.1177/00027642241261242.

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