

# Examining the Relationship between Pre-sport Mega-event Programming and Physical Activity Participation



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## Introduction

Sports mega-events like the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games have become integral tools for fostering social and economic development. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of their role in addressing public health concerns, particularly through promoting physical activity. Qatar, a country committed to diversifying its socio-economic landscape, leveraged its hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup to design pre-event programs that encouraged community participation in physical activities. This study investigated whether interest in the World Cup and planned engagement in pre-event programs positively influenced physical activity levels among Qatar residents, both in the short and long term.

## Background and Objectives



Engagement Theory formed the foundation of the study, highlighting that meaningful participation stems from a blend of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive involvement. This framework allowed us to analyze how engagement in structured activities influences physical activity. The study was conducted eight months before the World Cup to examine if interest in the 2022 World Cup and planned engagement in the pre-Qatar World Cup programming influenced current and future informal and formal physical activity.

## Key Findings

### Engagement vs. Interest

While interest in the World Cup was widespread among participants, it did not translate into significant increases in physical activity. This indicated that interest alone was not enough to drive behavioral change; rather, participation in pre-event programs played a crucial role. Programs like Qatar's National Sports Day and



the 365 Days Active initiative provided structured opportunities for residents to engage in physical activities, fulfilling their intrinsic needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness.

### Distinction Between Formal and Informal Activities

Engagement in pre-event programs showed a stronger correlation with formal physical activities. This indicated that structured initiatives, such as community sports events, are more effective in encouraging sustained participation. Informal activities, while beneficial, may require different engagement strategies to achieve similar levels of impact.

### Long-Term Implications

Participants who actively engaged in pre-event programs were more likely to express intentions to continue physical activities in the future. This finding underscored the potential for such programs to create enduring health benefits, contributing to Qatar's broader vision of a healthier, more active society.

### Practical Implications

#### For Policymakers and Event Organizers

The findings highlight the need for strategic pre-event planning that extends beyond the event itself. Key recommendations include:

- **Targeted Engagement:** Programs should be designed to accommodate diverse demographic groups, providing activities that are both inclusive and culturally meaningful.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Investments in sports facilities, such as the Aspire Zone, create lasting opportunities for community engagement.
- **Multi-Sector Collaboration:** Collaborations across health, sports, education, and urban planning sectors can amplify the impact of these initiatives.

### For Public Health

By promoting physical activity, pre-event programs can reduce healthcare costs and improve social well-being. For instance, Qatar's Sports for All program demonstrated how inclusive initiatives could enhance public health outcomes while fostering social cohesion.

### Challenges and Limitations

The study acknowledged certain limitations. First, it focused exclusively on residents in Qatar, limiting its generalizability to other host countries or events. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the potential for bias. Future

research should consider longitudinal approaches to assess both pre- and post-event impacts more comprehensively.

### Conclusion

Qatar's strategic use of pre-event programming for the 2022 FIFA World Cup offers valuable lessons for future hosts of sports mega-events. By shifting the focus from mere spectatorship to active participation, such initiatives can leave a lasting legacy of improved public health and social cohesion. This study highlighted the critical role of engagement in driving these outcomes, reinforcing the importance of well-planned, community-centered programs.

For policymakers, event organizers, and researchers, the findings underscore a central tenet: *The true success of a sports mega-event lies not only in its immediate economic gains but also in its ability to inspire long-term, positive change within its host community.*

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