

(SP) DEVELOPMENT OF A MODEL FOR INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON OF ELITE SPORTS POLICIES

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Introduction

Governmental authorities worldwide spend large sums of money in the quest for superior sport performance, although relatively little is known of the reason why some nations excel in specific sporting events. Only a few studies have focused on the organisational context of different countries (e.g. Digel et al., 2003& 2004; Oakley & Green, 2001; Green & Houlihan, 2005). There is no model for comparing and increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of elite sport investments and management systems. The main purpose of this study is to develop a model with operational criteria for comparing (elite) sports systems and policies of nations. The key question to answer is:

What are the key sports and elite sports policy variables that may lead to increased performances during international sporting events and how should elite sports policies function so that elite athletes can train and perform in optimal circumstances at each stage of their careers, with access to good facilities, surrounded by high quality coaches and medical and paramedical support?

In order to answer this question an international comparative study was set up in 6 nations: the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Flanders² formed a consortium group which coordinated the project; the four other nations involved were Wallonia, Norway, Canada and Italy. This paper will present the methodology of our research project and the results of one part of our analysis.

Methods

I. Development of a conceptual framework: (1) an in-depth analysis of existing literature, (2) secondary resources on sporting systems of different countries, (3) literature on prerequisites for success and (4) surveys of athletes' perceptions regarding factors that have influenced their success, led to the identification of nine policy areas or 'pillars' that are important for international sporting success. These pillars are:

1. financial support	5. athletic and post career support
2. integrated approach to policy development	6. training facilities
3. participation in sport	7. coaching provision and coach development
4. talent identification and development system	8. international competition
	9. scientific research

Based on this extended literature search, each pillar was operationalised into a list of concrete criteria for the international comparison of elite sport systems.

II. Data collection:

² Flanders is the Northern, Dutch speaking part of Belgium; Walloon Provinces are the Southern, French speaking part. As sports policies are split up in Belgium, both states are analysed separately in this study.

1. Researchers in each nation completed an extensive semi-structured questionnaire with 84 open and closed questions on elite sport systems for each of the nine pillars. This questionnaire produced more than 30 pages of information per nation.
2. In total 1090 elite athletes, 887 elite coaches and 69 performance directors from the National Governing bodies, who can be seen as the main stakeholders in elite sport, completed a written questionnaire on the 'elite sports climate' in their country. However, due to limited resources, the sample sizes and response rates are very different for each country.

III. Development of a measurement tool: analysis of the data led to the identification of norms for evaluation of each nation on the specific criteria in order to give a score on a five point scale. Based on an international competitive analysis, criteria were refined resulting in a measurement tool for comparison of elite sports policies.

Results

The table below gives an example of preliminary results of one pillar (pillar 2). For each criterion a score on a five point scale is presented and a percentage is calculated, taking into account the 'non available' (NA) answers. It is our aim to present how the scores for evaluation of elite sports policies have been developed.

	FI	NI	UK	NOR	CAN	IT	WALL
There is a ministry and/or minister of sport	5	4	4	2	2	2	5
There is an organisation at national level with specific responsibilities for elite sport (as a core task)	3	3	5	5	3	3	3
Coordination of expenditures and activities at national level (horizontal)	3	5	5	5	3	5	1
Coordination of expenditures and activities at regional level (vertical)	5	5	3	5	1	5	5
Public sector efficiency (European Central Bank, 2003)	2	2	4	4	3	1	2
provision of information to national sport federations to develop their management capability	3	5	5	5	1	1	1
athletes commission in federations	1	2	na	2	4	na	na
information received from governing bodies acc. to athletes	3	4	5	4	4	na	na
information received from governing bodies acc. to coaches	3	4	5	na	na	3	3
total score for pillar 2	64,6	80,0	90,0	86,7	48,3	61,8	54,5

A major point of note in this pillar is that there is considerable variation in the scores achieved by the sample nations. In terms of outliers, Wallonia and Canada are rated moderate. The greatest emphasis in this pillar was put on the coordination of the elite sports policies and expenditures. In this respect the UK and Belgium have particularly complex political structures that can create difficulties in coordinating policy. However, the well above standard rating for the UK indicates that at micro level it is possible for policy to be well-coordinated. In Canada sports policies and partly elite sports policies are to a large extent decentralized at the provincial/territory level. Although this may be a solution for large nations, there is need for national coordination and monitoring of these regional developments. Likewise Norway may have an advantage as a smaller country. The establishment of a steering group in Flanders (in 2003) explains the better scores compared to Wallonia. Apart from this analysis, each pillar also contained an assessment on several criteria by the respondent groups. In this respect respondents in Flanders and Italy were less satisfied with the information they received from their NGBs and their involvement in policy.

Discussion

The research project was carried out with limited resources and was highly dependent on the cooperation of sports authorities. This resulted in practical difficulties in assessing all target groups and in reaching the anticipated response rate. It was, therefore, often hard to make similar comparisons. However, using over 100 criteria that have been defined and measured, a careful attempt has been made to develop a measurement system for evaluating elite sports systems in six nations (seven regions). Furthermore, this benchmark study has allowed us to complete the list of measurable criteria and define 'norms'. It is the aim of this international comparative research to broaden the number of participating nations in the future.

References

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