

# A RESOURCE BASED APPROACH OF COMPETITIVENESS IN ELITE ATHLETICS

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## Abstract

### BACKGROUND

In the economic and sport management literature, there is no clear conceptualisation of the term competitiveness. In elite sport studies, competitiveness is used to describe personal characteristics of athletes (Corrado, Basso & Schiavon et al., 2005), the dominant position of teams in national or international competition (Bar-Eli, Galily & Israeli, 2008) or the growing internationalisation of international competitions (De Bosscher, Du Bois & Heyndels, accepted; Digel, 2002; Du Bois & Heyndels, 2008). Referring to elite sporting success itself, competitiveness is related to the output of the process, a perspective that encompasses the throughput or production process of elite success. The increase in medal-winning capability of countries in international competition is explained by an increasing number of nations taking a more strategic approach to the development of medal-winning elites (De Bosscher, 2007; Green & Oakley, 2001; Houlihan & Green, 2008; Oakley & Green, 2001). What's more, despite the extensive scientific focus on elite development systems, there is a lack of studies on elite sport development at sport specific level (Sotiriadou & Shillbury, 2009) that describe and measure specific practices at organisational level. Within economic research, the resource-based-view conceptualises competitiveness starting from the relationship between internal resources of an industry and its performances (an inside-out perspective). Precisely these internal resources and more especially, the policy dimensions in elite athletics and their contribution to nation's competitiveness in athletics are the focal point of attention in this paper.

### OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research project is to develop a conceptual model to evaluate sport policy factors in athletics. Based on a resource-based perspective, this paper attempts to explore the key ingredients or factors from a sport specific perspective leading to a competitive advantage or competitive position in elite athletics. After a

literature review on the effectiveness of national governing bodies, the specific determinants contributing to the effectiveness (professionalization, governmentality, new managerialism, etc.) and elite athletics development, 21 national high performance directors for athletics were interviewed and 13 high performance directors participated in a survey to explore on successful and crucial domestic policies in the elite athletics development process. Inductive-deductive analysis (Patton, 2002) contributed to the development of different policy dimensions grouped in 11 policy areas of elite sport development. These groups or pillars of sport policy are conceptualised in a model based on the SPLISS model (De Bosscher, 2007) and the value system (Porter, 1985), which reflects all activities that bring a product from its initial to final stages of production (Sagheer & Yadav, 2009). Böhle & Robinson (2009) modulated the different key factors in elite sport, conceptualised by De Bosscher et al. (2006; 2008) and Houlihan & Green (2009) in a value system approach of Michael Porter (1985), which reflects all producing activities in the development of a competitive advantage in industries' competition.

### RESULTS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Qualitative research and inductive/deductive clustering lead towards the development of a sport specific conceptual model to measure the competitiveness of nations in athletics. Specific practices and policies representing the production process in elite athletics were grouped in 11 pillars or groups of elite athletics development (financial support for sport and athletics, structure and organisation of athletics policies, youth participation in athletics, talent detection and identification, talent selection and development, athletes career support, athletics training and competition facilities, coach education and provisions, (inter)national competition opportunities, scientific support and the elite sport culture). Activities in the value system of elite athletics development are divided into athlete development processes and supporting activities for the athlete development. The major contribution of this sport specific inventory of policy factors leading to success is its organisational scope: specific practices for national governing bodies in the elite development process are described and grouped in a functionalistic model for elite development. Further empirical research is necessary to validate the value system for elite athletics development in an empirical environment and to improve theory development on domestic sport policy factors at sport specific level. A large scale study to evaluate nation's competitiveness in athletics based on this conceptual model and the allocation of specific weighting values to crucial dimensions will increase the validity of the model.

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