

Is it Turkey's turn to host the Olympic Games?

Assessment of recent sport development policy in Turkey

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Aim of abstract

The objectives of this study include: To obtain a perception of Turkish welfare policy, to understand the aims of the Turkish sport development policy, to identify the pathway of the state to international success in sports, to identify the practices used to increase sport participation and elite sport success in Turkey, to articulate the reasons for hosting international sport events from the states' perspective.

Theoretical background

For decades, sport has been a measure of supremacy between the countries. Olympic medals are tallied as indicators of political and social prowess. Elite sport has evolved into a complex structure beyond competition between athletes, and states are playing a more dominant role in managing sport. There is evidence within the literature that sport as a policy concern has gained a greater salience within government priorities (King, 2009). Examples of state roles in sport can be found in government promotion of sport to increase sport participation, managing sport with a goal of establishing a regulation mechanism on sport bodies, and/or with a goal of producing top athletes (Hoye et al., 2006). Increased levels of state resources for sport in United Kingdom, Australia and Canada have led to improved performance by their elite athletes this decade (Green, 2007).

Turkey is considered by global economists to be the "rising star" of the Middle East (The Wall Street Journal, 2011). After the financial crisis in 1999, the Turkish government has enacted several precautions on the country's financial system. Inflation was controlled and gross domestic product has outpaced other countries in the EU. Sport has been one of the investment priorities of the Turkish government since 2002. The state has focused not only on the development of elite athletes but also organizing global sport events and building facilities to host them. Examples of sport events organized in Turkey during the last decade include the Istanbul Grand Prix Formula 1 (2005 – 2011), Universiade Summer Games 2005, UEFA Champions League Final 2005, UEFA Cup Final 2009, FIBA World Championships 2010, Universiade Winter Games 2011, European Youth Olympic Festival 2011, WTA Championships 2011. Other events including the IAAF World Indoor Championship 2012, Euroleague Final Four 2012, WTA Championships

2012-2013, Mediterranean Games 2013, and FIBA World Championship for Women 2014 are scheduled for the near future. Key premises for these investments include increasing the sport participation numbers of Turkish youth, improvement of Turkish elite athletes performance and consolidation of the sport image of Turkey. However, sport participation has made little progress the past decade, and Turkish athletes won only 8 medals in total at the Beijing 2008 Summer Olympic Games, ranking 37th among competing countries (Hurriyet Spor, 2008).

Methodology, research design and data analysis

In this research semi-structured in-depth interviews will be conducted with former Turkish sport ministers who were the highest decision-making authorities in sport for the Turkish government. Each interview will be recorded and later transcribed. Data generated from the interviews will be content analyzed, and results examined in comparison with the findings of the existing literature on Canadian and Australian cases, which provide concrete examples of successful policies in increasing participation and improving athlete's performance before they hosted Olympic Games. The research universe spans the timeline 1999 to 2012. From 1999 until 2002 there was coalition of three different parties (DSP, MHP, ANAP) in the power. After 2002 until today the same party "AKP" is the ruling party of Turkey. The ideologies of these parties vary. Between 1999 and 2011, Turkey has had six different sport ministers. The four ministers who were in charge for more than one year will be interviewed in April and May 2012. An additional interview will be made with Turkish National Olympic Committee Chairman, Ugur Erdener, who is also a member of IOC. They will be questioned about Turkish sport policy, sport participation, elite sport, sport events and promotion of sports in Turkey.

Results, discussion and implications/conclusions

This is a work-in-progress study and therefore the results and discussions are as yet to be determined. Data acquisition and analyses are on-going. Nevertheless this will be the first academic study with data provided by the highest sport authorities in Turkey. Contributions of the study will be the determination of internal and external goals of Turkish sport policy, the desired targets and possible effects of organizing international sport events, and possible reasons for the limited success in raising more top Turkish athletes.

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