

AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON OF THE ELITE SPORT CLIMATE AND ELITE SPORT POLICIES IN SEVEN COUNTRIES (SPLISS)

Veerle de Bosscher, Paul de Knop and Bas Rijnen, Free University of Brussels, Belgium
Jerry Bingham, UK Sport, London, **Chris Gratton and Simon Shibli**, Sheffield Hallam University, UK, & **Marten van Bottenberg**, Mulier Institute, Netherlands

Introduction

Since high performance sport has become part of the global status competition between nations, the policy of sports organisations and governmental sports institutions in more and more nation states is aimed at producing medal-winning elite athletes. This has resulted in a situation where countries are searching for the optimum policy for delivering international sporting success. Governmental authorities spend large sums of money to compete against other countries for superior sport performances. But, it is not known precisely how sports policies can influence these achievements. This is probably due to the difficulty in measuring these effects. It is impossible to set up an experiment trying to explain a causal correlation of one factor leading to success while other factors are excluded. There are many factors which cannot be quantified and data is often not available.

Only a few studies have focused on the organisational factors leading to international success (see Digel, 2004; Oakley & Green, 2001). A range of studies tried to explain differences in Olympic success of countries by using socio-economic determinants (macro-level) such as GDP, population, area, politics, religion.¹ Furthermore, there is much literature to be found explaining the personal achievements of athletes (micro-level)². However, all these factors are out of control of sports policies. There are only few references to the efficiency and effectiveness of sports policies and sport investments (meso-level). Of all the factors determining success, those on the meso-level are the only ones that can actively be influenced (De Bosscher, De Knop & Heyndels, 2003). This makes it particularly interesting to examine the effects of elite sports policies.

In 2003 a consortium group of researchers from three countries (United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Flanders³) set up a study to compare countries' elite sports systems and their outcomes. The study is called: Sport Policy Factors Leading to International Sporting Success (SPLISS). There are three main stages for this international comparison:

- 1) the overall sports policies and elite sports climate (2004)
- 2) a sport-specific analysis of elite sports policies (2005)
- 3) an analysis of elite sporting success, both at the overall and sport specific level (2004 & 2005).

This paper focuses on the first stage. Four other countries have participated in this international comparison: Norway, Canada, Italy and Walloon Provinces.

Purpose

The main purposes of this study are threefold:

1. Getting insights into the key sports policy variables at each level of the sports development pyramid that determine international success;
2. Looking for the reasons for variations in international sporting success of different countries;
3. Understanding what the countries involved can learn from this to improve their own chances in major international sporting competition in the future, and devising an effective and efficient management system of elite sports excellence (at both national and sports specific levels).

¹ see among others: Bernard & Busse, 2000; De Bosscher, De Knop & Heyndels, 2004; den Butter & van der Tak, 1995; Johnson & Ali, 2002; Levine, 1974; Novikov & Maximenko, 1972; Kiviahio & Mäkelä, 1978; Tcha and Perchin, 2003; van Bottenburg, 2000

² Duffy, Lyons, Moran, et al., 2001; Greenleaf, Gould & Diefen, 2001; Nys, De Knop & De Bosscher, 2002; Unierzyski, Wielinski & Zhanel 2003; van Bottenburg, 2000

³ 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.

Millennium Stadium has had a negative impact on the value of retail property in Cardiff, largely as a result of displacement of shoppers on event days.

Discussion

With progressively more cities developing sporting infrastructures for regeneration purposes, there is increasingly a need for further research on the impact of sports stadia. At present, the related literature is limited, and as discussed, primarily focuses on certain areas of economic impact. However, to maximise the regeneration potential of stadia developments, there is a need for policy makers to consider the broader economic impacts of stadia on the urban environment. This paper has considered one of those broader impacts that have been significantly under-researched, and while it has provided empirical evidence on stadia and prices in the property market, the research presented is nevertheless small-scale, and a more detailed investigation is required to support the findings. This is particularly important, given the negative impact in the commercial retail sector that was identified in the Cardiff case study. Wembley stadium is nearing completion and there are likely to be other stadia developments in the UK and elsewhere in Europe in the near future. If public money is to continue to contribute to these projects, as it has in the case of Wembley and the two case studies examined in this paper, then a more comprehensive understanding of the role of stadia in the regeneration process is required to justify future investment.

References

- Baade, R. A. (1996) Professional sports as catalysts for metropolitan economic development *Journal of Urban Affairs* 18(1) 1-17
- Gray, D. & Bagley, L. (2003) Regeneration – A stadium for Milton Keynes' pp 42-50 in Ladd, J. and Davis, L. (eds) *BURA guide to best practice in Sport and Regeneration* London: British Urban Regeneration Association
- Henneberry, J. (1996) *A Delphi study of expert opinion on the property market impacts of transport investments in Sheffield* Supertram Impact Series No. SIS 34 Centre for Regional Economic & Social Research Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University
- Jones, C. (2001) A level playing field? Sports stadium infrastructure and urban development in the United Kingdom *Environment and Planning A* 33 845-61
- Jones, C. (2002) Public cost for private gain? – Recent and proposed “national” stadium developments in the UK, and commonalities with North America *Area* 34 160-70
- Noll, R. G. and Zimbalist, A. (eds, 1997) *Sports, Jobs and Taxes: The economic impact of sports teams and stadiums* Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press
- Rosentraub, M. S. (1997) *Major League Losers: The real cost of sports and who's paying for it* New York, NY: Basic Books
- Thornley, A. (2002) Guest editorial: Urban regeneration and sports stadia *European Planning Studies* 10, 7 813-18
- Tu, C. (2003): *How do new sports stadiums affect real estate values? The case of Fedex Field* Unpublished conference paper to American Real Estate Society, 19th Annual Meeting, April 2-5

Contact: L.E.Davies@shu.ac.uk

Methods

The comparative analysis at the overall sports policy level consisted of two parts. The first focused on the elite sports climate in both countries. This study was done first in the Netherlands by van Bottenburg (2000). The 'elite sports climate' of a country can be defined as "the current, general condition of the social and sport organizational environment in which sportsmen can develop to elite sportsmen and thus continue to deliver international sport performances" (van Bottenburg, 2000). To gather the data in all seven countries, a representative questionnaire was spread among elite athletes and their coaches and among performance directors from the national sports organizations. In a second analysis the processes (input and throughput) of national sports policies were compared in terms of general structures and organisation of (elite) sports, finance, services to federations (national sports organisations), sports participation, coaching and guidance of individual athletes, career development of coaches and elite sports infrastructures.

An analytical framework was created, starting from eight pillars leading to international sporting success. This model was based on an extended analysis of literature and a test with athletes, coaches and federations in Flanders (see 8-pillar model in the Appendix, Figure 3).

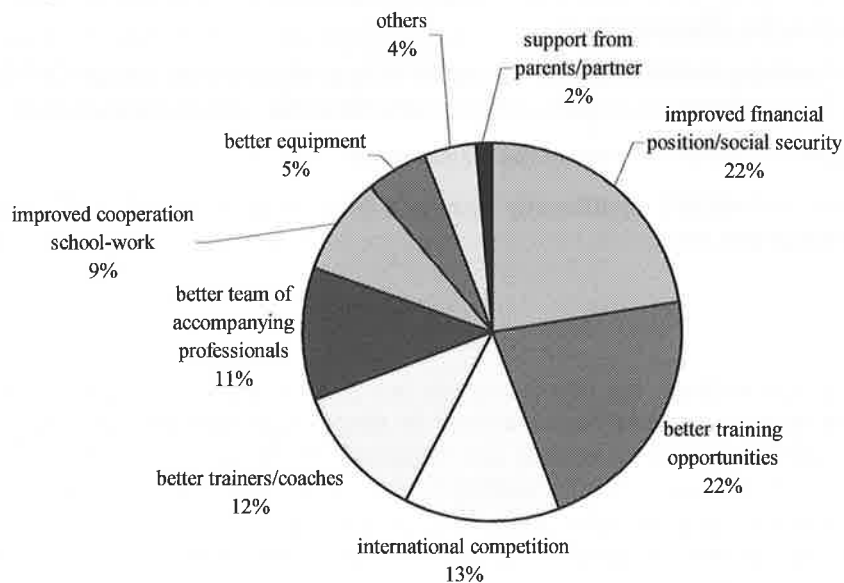
Results

This paper only allows us to focus on one chapter, where main priorities in elite sports policies in the seven participating countries were brought into view by asking two general questions.

Factors leading to international success

The respondents (athletes, coaches and federations in 7 countries) were asked to point out in a list of 9 items, the three aspects that have according to their opinion the greatest influence on improving their position in the world rankings (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Factors with the greatest influence on improving the position of athletes on the world rankings according to athletes, coaches performance directors of national sports federations in 7 countries

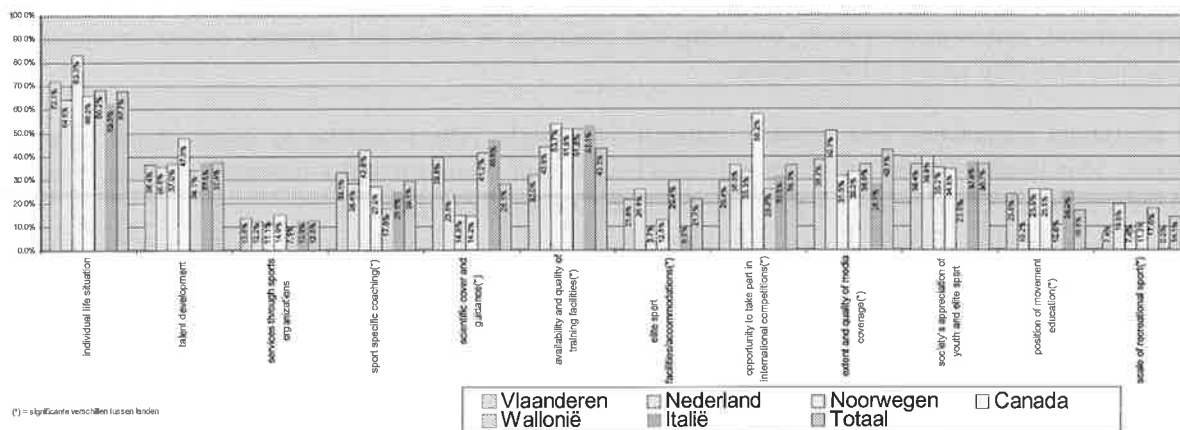


From this figure we learn that an improved financial position and social security for elite athletes, followed by better training opportunities are the most important factors. This was the case in all countries, except for Norway where international competition and better accompanying of professionals were ranked higher than training opportunities. Furthermore international competition and better trainers/ coaches and accompanying professionals were seen as other key variables in elite sports policies. There were only slight differences between countries.

Priorities in elite sports policies

Subsequently, respondents were asked to point out 4 of the 12 options with regard to the elite sports climate that are the most eligible for improvement (see Figure 2), which gives an overview of all three respondents together (athletes, coaches, federations) for each country. We can point out large differences in the factors that need to be most improved in each country.

Figure 2: Which factors are the most eligible for improvement in your country according to athletes, coaches and federations?



Note: this question was not asked in the UK

In all countries, the individual life situation of elite athletes was the item that needs to be improved the most. Norway gets the highest percentage (83% of respondents). Some remarkable differences in the opinions between countries were:

- opportunities to take part in international competitions should be significantly improved more in Canada than in the other countries
- availability of training facilities should be improved in most countries, except for Flanders; on the other hand, respondents were quite positive about the elite sport accommodation
- Media coverage was ranked second in the Netherlands
- Scientific cover was marked significantly more as a factor to be improved in Flanders Walloon provinces and Italy.

Conclusion

The results covered in this abstract, are based only on two general questions regarding priorities in each country. Each of these topics has been analysed in detail, following the eight pillar model of factors leading to international sporting success (De Bosscher, De Knop, & Van Bottenburg, 2004). We concluded in this study that some factors leading to success in one country may not be important in others. This is due to the fact that sport is a reflection of the cultural system in which people live (Lüschen, 1970). We may expect that certain factors can explain differences in sports success in a set of countries. Furthermore, factors leading to international success may differ between sports. The next stage of our SPLISS study will therefore focus on specific sports, starting with swimming and tennis. The aim is to compare at least eight sports in five countries.

References

De Bosscher, V., De Knop, P., & Heyndels, B. (2003) Comparing relative sporting success among countries: create equal opportunities in sport *Journal for Comparative Physical Education and Sport* 3, 3 109-20

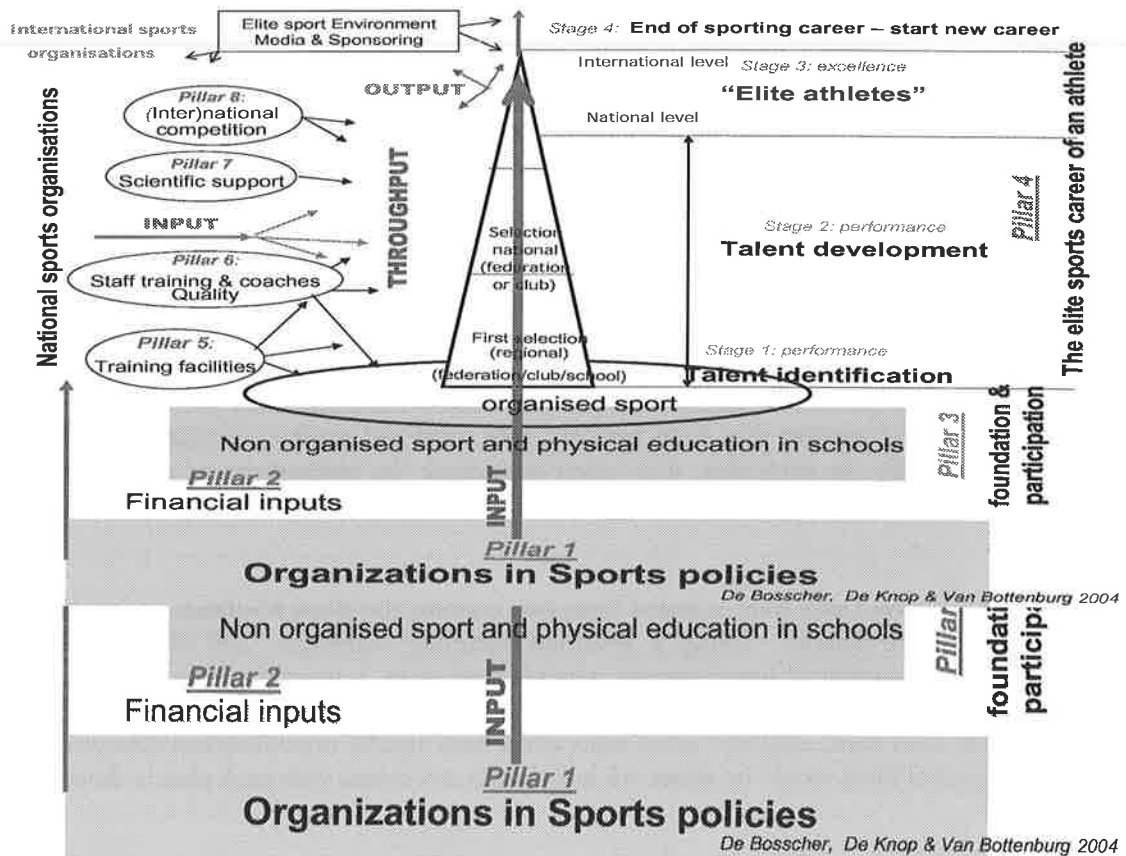
De Bosscher, V., De Knop, P. & van Bottenburg, M. (2004). Why the Netherlands are successful and Belgium is not? A comparison of the elite sports climate paper to 12th Congress of the European Association for Sport Management Ghent 25.Oct

Digel, H (2004) *Hochleistungssport in eight countries. Research proposal* Tübingen: Tübingen University
 Oakley B., & Green, M. (2001) The production of Olympic champions: international perspectives on elite sport development system *European Journal for Sport Management* 8 83 – 105
 van Bottenburg, M. (2000). *Het topsportklimaat in Nederland [The elite sports climate in the Netherlands]* 's Hertogenbosch: Diopler-Janssens en van Bottenburg bv.

Contact: vdboss@vub.ac.be

APPENDIX

Figure 3: Eight pillars of sports policy factors influencing international sporting success



SPO159

RTS VOLUNTEERS PERCEPTIONS OF SUPPORT - A CASE STUDY OF ACTIVE SPORTS

John Deane, University of Gloucestershire & **Andrew Adams**, Southampton Institute, UK

Context

Support for sport volunteers is seen as fundamental to the well being of sport in the UK and given that there are approximately 110,000 amateur sport clubs run by 1.5 million volunteers, it is not surprising that the Strategy Unit/DCMS' document *Game Plan* stated "it is therefore crucial that the role of volunteers in sport is fully supported, with an emphasis on better capacity building"(Cabinet Office, 2002:166).

Volunteers are fundamental to the success of both regular and non-regular sport activities, participation and events and serve in many positions as coaches, administrators, fund-raisers, and committee members within sports clubs (Shibli et al, 1999, Nichols et al, 1998). In marked contrast to formal sports volunteering which is linked to the instrumental deployment of individuals, the informal variation tends to be characterised by its location, which is often within a mutual aid organisation with a distinct tendency for autonomy which necessitates an avoidance for being 'managed' or controlled (Nichols & Garrett, 2001). These organisations (community sports clubs) usually recruit their volunteers from 'within' and often they are either former active participants (players) or parents of current young active participants (players). Thus for informal sports volunteers they are likely to desire a support network (if any) that is loose, *ad hoc* and not process-driven, so they can remain in control, with ownership of the activity in question.

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the types of volunteers in community sports clubs and identify whether the nature of support they both perceive they need and receive, correlates to that provided locally and nationally. In particular, it is about evaluating the perceptions of volunteers from the Active Sports(AS) programme.

Methods

The community sports clubs were selected from two regions, the West Midlands and Hampshire and from the ten Active Sports. Using a stratified sampling technique, 200 clubs were surveyed employing a semi-structured questionnaire administered over 3 months. Individual subjects were volunteers actively engaged in non-performance roles, i.e. acting in committee type roles in the clubs. Postulating that most local, amateur, grass roots clubs have similar organisational structures, we were able to estimate that there would be about 4-6 individuals associated with each club in those roles.

Results

The results were analysed using SPSS, and indicated that:

1. Each of the 10 sports differed in the level of support volunteers received
2. Sports with modernised infrastructures proved able to offer more support to volunteers
3. Sports volunteers from Governing Bodies with a strong regional/county structure perceived they received more support from their sports
4. The overwhelming majority of sports volunteers felt that local authorities should play a pivotal role in providing them with generic support such as training in recruiting, retaining and recognising volunteers
5. Community sports club volunteers (CSCVs) were from the older age groups and of a white, middle class background
6. The same volunteers were carrying out the same role year in, year out
7. Most volunteers were not aware of the opportunities for support that existed
8. The majority of CSCVs matched the 'informal profile' and were members of 'dense' social and support networks
9. CSCVs under-represented young people and minority ethnic groups