

SPLISS as an instrument for the evaluation of elite sport policy The case of Portugal

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Aim of the paper

The aim of this paper is to broadly describe, interpret and assess the political national impact of an international Project – SPLISS – in Portugal. We consider that anytime we get to involve governmental administrative bodies so they are available to participate in a research project we will achieve better results; the reason of this is viewed as innovation in common work practices and transmit a new self esteem component for a huge amount of people that work with several governments and different political orientation.

Literature

We broadly follow the literature for the initial SPLISS (Sport Policy Factors Leading to International Sporting Success) proposal [De Bosscher, V. et al., 2008; Green & Houlihan, 2005]. The complementary literatures is mostly Portuguese, in order to cover past works and attempts to contribute for national sport policies. This is the case of a website where we got two notes on the subject (Forum Olimpico de Portugal); one is the Castejon (1973) concept of "sport level" – ratio between elite athletes and the total number of athletes. This is also a concept used in SPLISS for the overall report comparing countries' performance in the sample. We already knew there were no published sport data but for number of clubs, the number of organised federations athletes and the local authority expenses in sports (Carvalho and Nunes, 2012).

Methodology – database

In fact sport numbers (data) are not abundant in the country, meaning the policy is conducted by instinct or feelings of the officials in charge, changing each time the government changes. Good sportive results happen most of the times in individual sports (athletics) or professional collective (soccer). International comparisons are very important and we had to discover an efficient process to get good indicators.

The recent elected government announced they were committed to reorganize data and national government sport bodies. We thought this was an excellent opportunity to ask for a meeting and start an experimental intervenient approach for research. SPLISS project was critical in order to book that meeting; when we presented the SPLISS team as our research background this pulled politicians to understand

the importance of being within this international Project. We got the involvement of the Secretary of State for Youth and Sports and all the process was implemented in all the other important administrative bodies such as the National Institute for Sports and the Olympic Committee with their intense collaboration.

Results – discussion

Although we individually started the data collection in October 2011, writing and calling to the public mail and phone numbers, only with a personal involvement and staying in Lisbon we could reach all the 9 pillars queries completed by the national staff in charge. We got 150 out of 500 athletes questionnaires; 23 out of 48 coaches and 12 out of 30 Olympic National Government Bodies. The information was considered by the administrative staff very interesting, mostly:

1. to inform policy makers and researchers about international policy developments in an increasingly competitive environment; and to allow participating nations to benchmark themselves against other competitive rivals. (SPLISS goal)
2. to develop an instrument that can be used by policy makers to evaluate the effectiveness of elite sport policies; to refine a theoretical model of the sport policy factors leading to international sporting success; and to improve the methodological approach for making international comparisons. (SPLISS goal).

In this sense we consider we achieve an important goal of mobilization of administrative staff. However, we feel this impact will be very fragile and quickly lost because the whole "administrative machine" is not prepared to internalize this work culture and will let data to be out of date in a year. This raises the need to involve the government in next times so it becomes accountable for the future and be able to establish innovative practices. Universities, Army, Police and National guards have no special contribute for sports policy in general. We intend to develop a methodology to follow-up this starting point in the next days, discussing a lot of unfilled fields in the questionnaires and finding out a way to sustain the monitoring process.

SPLISS final results will be presented at EASM Conference; data collection and discussion will take till the end of April 2012.

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