

A RESOURCE-BASED COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN ATHLETICS

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Keywords

Resource-based View, Competitive Advantage, Athletics, Competitiveness

Aim of abstract/paper - research question

Looking at high-performance development studies, there is a need on sport specific and organisational-level research that improves understanding of the reasons for success and a corresponding competitive position in international competition. Even though several authors have signalled the need for more in depth research at a sport specific level (De Bosscher 2007, Oakley and Green 2001, Sport Industry Research Centre 2002), little is known about the organisational development of countries in specific sports and the allocation of resources to elite development. Therefore, the purpose of this PhD study was to evaluate countries' resource-based competitive advantage in athletics.

Theoretical background or literature review*

A resource-based theory examines the relationship between an organisation's internal characteristics and performance. While resources and capabilities are the main strategic sources of a competitive advantage, the 'integration' of resources and capabilities in line with an organisation's strategic goals is in itself the key to developing higher-order dynamic capabilities. The competitive advantage of an organisation arises from the strategy that the organisation follows in order to take advantage of the opportunities and risks within its external environment (Robinson & Minikin, 2012). Competitive advantage is based on using specific capabilities sooner, more absolutely, or more fortuitously than the competition to create resource configurations that have that advantage (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000, p.1117).

Methodology, research design and data analysis

First, 118 organisational resources and first-order capabilities in athletics were identified and grouped according to dominant categories or dimensions of elite sport policy as suggested by SPLISS (Sport Policy factors Leading to International Sporting Success). This list was based on interviews with 34 national high performance directors in athletics and a literature review. Besides the nine policy pillars (financial support, structure and organisation of elite sport policies, sport participation, talent identification and development, athlete career support, training facilities, coach education and development, (inter)national competition & scientific support), the elite sport environment was included as an important category of resources to improve countries' competitive position. In a second stage, resources were operationalised into a policy inventory that enabled a qualitative and quantitative evaluation of four countries' organisational development in athletics (Belgium [Flanders and Wallonia], Canada, Finland and the Netherlands). Based on the evaluation of organisational resources, composite indicators for each dimension of the model were developed.

Results, discussion and implications/conclusions**

First, index scores indicate that countries' organisational capacity shifts between different areas of elite sport development. Even though Finland has the best financial resources for the development of elite athletics, other countries were able to develop more organisational resources. For example, Flanders outperforms other countries for talent identification and development. Through talent tests, centralised training sessions and a federation-based system for training and education, Flanders is able to develop more organisational resources to develop talents. Additionally, a qualitative analysis provides an understanding on how countries structure and combine specific resources in higher-order organisational capabilities. The countries in our analysis represent divergent configuration of organisational resources and consequently different capabilities. The organisational disparities between these countries represent strategic differences on the management of organisational resources in athletics.

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