

DOES MORE MONEY IN EQUAL MORE MEDALS OUT? AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON IN 15 COUNTRIES, RESULTS OF THE SPLISS 2.0 STUDY

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Keywords

elite sport policy – Olympic Games – input/output

Aim

The aim of this study is to analyze the relationship between (public) funding and international success in summer and winter sports.

Introduction

International competition in elite sport has increased in such way that more nations invest strategically in the development and planning of elite sporting success. In the beginning of the 21st century Hogan and Norton (2000) found a linear relationship between public money spent and total medals won by Australia since the 1980s. The past decade however is characterized by an escalating global sporting arms race, with increased public funding and a diminishing return of investment (ROI) in terms of medals won at the Olympics (De Bosscher et al., 2008).

Methods

Using the SPLISS (Sports Policy factors Leading to International Sporting Success) framework, researchers in 15 countries, who took part in a large-scale study named SPLISS 2.0, collected data on the national public funding for sport and elite sport, overall (since 2000) and sport by sport (2010). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations. To measure outputs, or international success the market share (Shibli, De Bosscher, Van Bottenburg & Westerbeek, 2013) of top three and top eight rankings of nations at Olympic Games and World Championships from 2009-2012 were calculated for summer and winter sports separately, using the infostrada⁹ database.⁹ Infostrada is a provider of comprehensive sports statistics and information.

Results

The results revealed that funding is highly correlated ($r > 0.9$) with success both in winter and summer sports. Three countries in summer sports (Australia, the Netherlands and France) and in winter sports (Switzerland, Canada, Flanders) performed above the average: they won relatively more medals (2009-2012) than what they invested, compared to the other sample countries. However, despite increasing expenditures in all nations except from Spain and Switzerland, success in the sample nations did not increase to the same

extent: it even decreased for summer sports in Australia, Portugal, Belgium and for winter sports in France, Australia, Belgium and Estonia. Increased success (along with increasing investments) was noticed especially in Japan, the Netherlands and Brazil.

Discussion

While the best predictor of output appears to be the absolute amount of funding allocated to elite sport, the results show evidence of an escalating global sporting arms race. Nations have to invest more, simply to keep ahead of the competition and standing still means going backwards. In elite sport the rules of the game are dictated by what rival nations are doing, not on the basis of what an individual nation is doing now compared with what it did in the past. However, although a minimum amount of funding seems necessary for success, elite sport success is the result of the way the resources are invested in a blend of factors.

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