

# Elite Sport, What Is It Good For? Developing A Scale To Measure The Public's Perception Of The Positive And Negative Societal Outcomes Of Elite Sport

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## Theoretical background

As nations are increasingly investing amounts of public money in elite sport development, elite sport policy makers are asked to justify their choices (De Bosscher, Shibli, Westerbeek, & van Bottenburg, 2015). Subsequently, policy makers often claim that elite sport will not only lead to more medals, but it will also trigger a wide range of outcomes that benefit the population (Grix & Carmichael, 2012). Notwithstanding the claims, empirical studies that explore the outcomes of elite sport to society are limited (McCartney et al., 2010). In addition, a model to evaluate the potential positive and negative outcomes of elite sport to society, with regard to the public perception in particular, has not been developed (Funahashi, De Bosscher, & Mano, 2015). Therefore, this study aims to develop, test and validate a quantitative scale for measuring the public's perceived positive and negative outcomes of elite sport for society.

## Methodology

Scale development started by phrasing a preliminary pool of items. The items were based on a total of 84 societal outcomes of elite sport that were detected during a systematic review of the available empirical evidence. The items were extensively reviewed and the scale was tested and validated by conducting a nationwide population-based cross-sectional survey in Belgium. After conducting a pilot study (n = 100), a representative sample from the Belgian population (n = 980) was surveyed and randomly divided into a test sample (n = 486) and validation sample (n = 494). Using the test sample, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to assess the scale's adequacy. Six indices were used to test the fitness of the model (Arai, Ko, & Kaplanidou, 2013). Finally, after testing the replicability of the factor structure using CFA, regression analysis was employed to examine the role of antecedents within the validation sample. Five variables that one would expect to significantly influence the perception of the societal impact of elite sport: 1. Being fan of at least one elite athlete; 2. Frequency of watching the Olympic Games; 3. Having an elite athlete as a role model; 4. Participating in sport; 5. Being highly involved in elite sport.

## Results

First, after a process of item exclusion, a 32-item model remained from which the six goodness-of-fit indices were excellent:  $\chi^2/df = 1.91$  ( $\chi^2 = 801.16$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $df = 419$ ), NNFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.96, CFI = 0.97, SRMR = 0.04, RMSEA = 0.04 (90% CI: 0.04–0.05,  $p$  close = 0.99) AIC = 1083.16. Furthermore, by analysing discriminant and convergent validity, it was confirmed that the newly developed scale is a reliable and valid instrument to measure the perceived societal outcomes of elite sport. The results from the validation sample indicate that the Belgian population generally perceived that elite sport creates more positive than negative societal outcomes, as the mean score on the scale was 7.2/10. Overall, there was a positive significant difference in the scores on the scale for those who are fan of an elite athlete, have an elite athlete as a role model, frequently watched the 2016 Olympic Games, are highly involved in elite sport. In contrast, no significant difference was found between those who regularly participate in sport or not.

## Discussion and conclusion

Today's leading academics argue that complex strategies and tactics are required to enable elite sport to generate positive outcomes for society (Grix & Carmichael, 2012). Nonetheless, the Belgian populations' overall positive judgement regarding the outcomes of elite sport can contribute to the legitimization of governmental elite sport investments. The public perception's measurement scale is a useful tool for researchers seeking to measure the advantages and disadvantages from elite sport to society using a standardised instrument. Further exploration in other contexts and across other countries is needed, as well as qualitative approaches that aim to reveal how contexts and certain conditions trickle the (both positive and negative) outcomes of elite sport for society.

## References

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