

Socio-Cultural Perspectives On Successful Talent Development Environments In Sports.

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Aim of the research project

The aim of this project was to describe and analyse the characteristics of sporting environments, i.e. sport club, academies etc., that continually produce top-level athletes to national and international level. The project studied the dynamic process and interaction between athletes, coaches and other significant persons through a holistic and comprehensive coverage of successful Swedish talent environments. Underlying research questions: How can the successful environments empirically be described from an ecological talent development perspective? Which similarities and differences can be identified in these environments? What implications do these data provide for the design of sporting development environments?

Theoretical background

Talent development research has mainly focused on individual development, coach-athlete interactions, training programs contents, number of training hours, age of specialisation etc. While contextual factors such as interaction with family, friends, training groups, school etc. very often have been neglected (Storm, 2015). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bio-ecological model of human development focused on the context and it's micro-system, meso-system, and macro-system. Transferred to a sport context Bronfenbrenner's model offers a wider understanding of the development process and the significance of the environment for talent development. Through the ATDE model, "The Athletic Talent Development Environment model", Henriksen (2011) has designed a model for the understanding of successful talent environments. According to Alfermann & Stambulova (2007) successful talent development environments in sport are defined as *teams or clubs that manage to continually produce top-level athletes on the basis of their junior athletes, and provides them with resources for coping with future transitions*. These total resources are, according to Alfermann & Stambulova (2007), significant for the transition to senior elite level and facilitate the step into professional sports. Further Henriksen (2010) introduced the Environment Success Factors model (ESF) with the purpose to capture the interactions, activities, resources, etc. within the environment. The ATDE model has served as a theoretical perspective for the project in developing of the questionnaire as well as in analysing of the results.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

The Swedish Sport Confederation (RF) is an umbrella organisation consisting of 71 member organizations. Together with representatives from RF twelve Sport Federations were selected for the study. The selection covered different criteria such as team-individual sports, number of members, gender relations, traditional or younger sports etc. The project was carried out in two steps: (1) Interviews made with representatives from 12 Swedish sport federations to identify successful talent developing environments, i.e. academies or sport clubs. (2) Interviews with coaches, talent directors, regional development managers etc. within 6 Swedish sport federations: Athletics, Basketball, Football (Soccer) Ice Hockey, Swimming and Tennis.

Results, discussion, and implications/conclusions

The study identified several common factors of significance for developing of successful elite athletes. The factors were structured into five main groups: (1) A culture characterised by a clear structure, (2) A holistic view to the athlete, (3) Good training facilities, (4) The composition of and interaction in the training groups and (5) High competence in the group of coaches.

From these factors three main themes were developed: (1) Social factors, (2) Organisation, culture and material resources and (3) The sport and pedagogical competences of the coaches.

The analyses show the significant importance of competence among coaches and managers. Their competence and approach influence culture, organisation, use of available resources, the composition and interaction of the training groups. The long-term success of the sport environment is depending, not only on the competence of the coaches, but on the recruitment and development of the coach team. Finally a developed ecological model is presented to describe the affectable factors of the development environment.

References

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