

# **The Effect of Contextual Factors on an Elite Sporting System**

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## **Aim**

The aim of this study will be to explore and compare contextual factors regarding the possible influences these factors could have on an elite sporting system between specific European developed countries and a developing country namely, South Africa. The research question guiding this aim is: What does the elite sporting environment of a developing country look like when compared to specific developed nations?

## **Theoretical Background and Literature Review**

Elite sport policies in most countries with success in Olympic sports have shifted towards becoming more systematic and scientific in their approach (Bergsgard et al., 2007; De Bosscher et al., 2015). This shift has encouraged an institutionalist design regarding the organization of elite sport in its entirety. In recent years, there has been a growing interest from both researchers and policy makers alike, in determining international sporting success due to this evident change in elite sport organisation worldwide (Andersen et al., 2015; Bergsgard et al., 2007; De Bosscher et al., 2015). However, researchers have specified that elite sport operates in an open system, herewith asserting that an elite sport structure is significantly influenced by social, cultural and economic conditions of a country (Chelladurai, 2009). Furthermore, these aforementioned aspects may be perceived as confounding factors, disjointedly influencing each nation's chances at achieving international sporting accomplishments (Digel et al., 2006). In the literature, an elite sport system is often a description of established practices with little regard for its operations, relationships and context within its specific environment. A wide variety of studies on developed countries has been investigated, wherein numerous aspects regarding what is required to be successful on international platforms has been identified (De Bosscher et al., 2015). Acknowledged as one of the gaps in current literature in elite sport policies, is that the specific context of a country needs to be examined, and in particularly comparisons with developing countries. On an international level, countries compete against one another on an equal footing, irrespective of the exposure to their specific contextual backgrounds. Developing countries are handicapped at the onset of international competitions by their environment, which includes the exposure to the environmental factors. With the exception of isolated instances where information about sport in developing countries is discussed there is a lack of empirical studies examining elite sport policies and systems of countries with Developing Sport Systems (DSS) (Houlihan & Green, 2007). Financial aid in isolation has historically proven to be far from a panacea to the world's ills, let alone the success of elite sport. A truer reflection can only be attained if one were to consider critically the influence that environmental factors impose on developing nations and how they further impact elite sport policy implementation and furthermore, sporting success.

## Research Design and Data Analysis

To explore the phenomena presented a qualitative approach was executed by means of a phenomenology design to collect the data. A purposive sampling method was used including sport management academics with a socio-economic-political background, and HP sport managers (n=11). In phase one, a literature analysis was implemented and highlighted the following contextual factors of enquiry, which will be examined in phase two qualitatively, namely: Culture, history, politics, social issues, socio economic problems, social inequality and education systems. The interviews took place face to face both locally and internationally, or by means of skype. A Dictaphone (Phillips, DVT2510) and recording device on a MacBook was simultaneously used to ensure that the data captured was clear and comprehensible. An interview protocol was followed with the use of a semi-structured format in order to explore the area of examination. During all interviews memos were recorded which will form part of the analysis. Codes will be demarcated and derived from the data to identify and elaborate on the themes identified in the literature analysis, and any new themes that might have emerged. This thematic analysis will be executed in order to structure the various findings by using a coding system with the Nvivo.11 qualitative software.

## Discussion and Implications

This study intends to address all the aforementioned factors in order to identify how these aspects may or may not influence an elite sporting system. Results from the study should provide critical information as to how these factors may shape sport policy and the implementation process in a DSS, as well as advise Global sporting organisations on the enormous variances which co exists between countries prior to participating at mega events which future studies may further build on (Digel et al., 2006). In conclusion, the data attained from this study will work towards nationally contributing to the review of the sport policies of SA in 2019 to inform policy makers on the environment of elite sport in the country. On an international scale the study plans to build on previous research by providing exploratory findings to the Global-sporting world on the vast contextual differences which exist between developed and developing countries and the unique challenge this presents.

## References

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