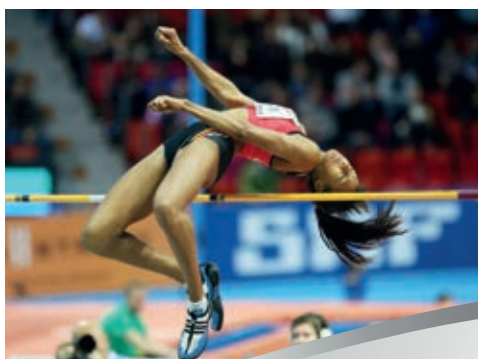


SUCCESSFUL ELITE SPORT POLICIES

An international comparison of the Sports Policy factors Leading to International Sporting Success (SPLISS 2.0) in 15 nations



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We acknowledge the contribution of the partners involved in the SPLISS-2.0 study, among others (in addition to the authors): Camilla Brockett (Aus), Stephanie De Croock & Jasper Truyens (Be, Fla), Mathieu Winand & Thierry Zintz (Be, Wal), Maria Tereza Silveira Bohme & team (Bra), David Legg & team (Can), Henrik Brandt, Rasmus K. Storm & Lau Tofft (Den), Eerik Hanni (Est), Patrick Mignon & Emanuel Lelore (Fra), Jari Lämsä & Jarmo Mäkinen (Fin), Bake Dijck (Neth), Yoshiyuki Mano & Hiroaki Funahashi & team (Jap), Paul Donnelly (NI), Pedro Guedes De Carvalho & Rui Canelas (Por), Eunha Koh (S-Kor), Anna Vilanova, Eduard Inglés & team (Spa), Hippolyt Kempf, Marco Stopper & Andreas, Christophe Weber (Swi).

Successful elite sport policies

This book was anonymously peer-reviewed by authors of *International Journal of Physical Education*.

The authors thank the reviewers for their contribution!

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Veerle De Bosscher, Simon Shibli,
Hans Westerbeek & Maarten van Bottenburg

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Meyer & Meyer Sports

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Successful elite sport policies

Maidenhead: Meyer & Meyer Sport (UK) Ltd., 2015

ISBN: 978-1-78255-076-1

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Member of the World Sport Publishers' Association (WSPA)

ISBN: 978-1-78255-076-1 ; 3- : 3

E-Mail: info@m-m-sports.com

www.m-m-sports.com

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Preface

THANK YOU!

Twelve years ago we were at the European Association for Sport Management conference in Stockholm and discovered that we had common research interests in elite sport policy. We agreed to collaborate and from this modest beginning the SPLISS project was formed. Since then, SPLISS-related papers have been published in Europe, America and Australasia and in 2008 we celebrated the publication of our first book *The Global Sporting Arms Race*.

It is hard to believe that a research project that started off as a small-scale pilot study at the heart of a PhD thesis would somehow develop into having its own international conference and be a key research strand at sport management conferences. Today we have 15 nations (regions) from four continents taking part in SPLISS 2.0. We get regular requests for new countries to join the project, there is a demand for a Paralympic version of SPLISS, and there is probably a lifetime's work for somebody to roll out the SPLISS methodology on a sport-by-sport basis.

In this book we present the key findings from the SPLISS 2.0 project and have the opportunity to discuss the 'state of the art' that is international elite sport policy. This book presents the results of an international comparative study on elite sport policies of 15 nations worldwide: Australia, Belgium (separated into Flanders and Wallonia), Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, France, Finland, Japan, South Korea, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland (as part of the United Kingdom), Portugal, Spain and Switzerland. The focus is on the relationship between policies and international sporting success and, accordingly, insights into the factors that shape elite sport policies and the pathways to success in different nations. 3,142 elite athletes, 1,376 elite coaches and 241 high performance directors have provided their views about elite sport policies in their nation.

None of this would have been possible without the hard work and commitment of the contributing partner researchers from the different nations. Many have worked tirelessly and with limited resources to undertake the vast amount of work involved in compiling the various inventories and surveys that make up the raw data. In Brussels we have also worked diligently to pull the data together to make a coherent whole. The level of dedication shown by those involved in the project mirrors that of elite athletes in their pursuit of sporting excellence.

Thanks to all these people!

Furthermore we would like to thank numerous people and organisations:

- The elite athletes, coaches and performance directors who completed lengthy questionnaires and the different policy organisations and NOCs, who freely gave their time and provided valuable insights into their policies and programmes
- The sport organisations and governments in different nations that provided funding to carry out this project
- The researchers from the different partner nations that have freely offered their help to contribute in the data analysis (see list further in this book)
- External experts who have been willing to comment and make suggestions on the research instruments; their critical thoughts have been really useful (see list further in this book)
- Infostrada Sports who provided access to their awesome Podium Performance database which was so helpful in deriving our success measures
- The city of Antwerp, which—as a European Sports capital 2013—indirectly supported this project by funding the conference ‘elite sport success: society boost or not?’ as an outcome of this project
- Our sponsors, who provided us with some helpful co-ordination funding: the Flemish (Belgium) government (Topsport Vlaanderen/Ministry of Culture, Youth, Sport, Media); the Dutch Sport agency NOC*NSF and the ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport; and, Ernst & Young (Belgium)
- The Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) for its ongoing support financially and in the co-ordination of the SPLISS project since inception

SPLISS has been a great project in which to be involved. In addition to the papers and the book there has been the opportunity to present the findings at conferences all over the globe. Researchers involved in the project have gone on to achieve doctorates and professorships whereas others have been elected to prestigious national level sports committees in their countries. In addition we have all formed productive research collaborations and made many new friends along the way. These outcomes are the essence of successful international research projects—long may they continue.

The SPLISS consortium group

Veerle De Bosscher, Simon Shibli, Hans Westerbeek and Maarten van Bottenburg



1 Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Rationale

The research presented in this book is built on the premise that nation states and their leadership deem elite sport (increasingly) important, and success in elite sport, in particular, is an important objective to achieve on behalf of the nation. It will be shown in this book that most nations in our sample continue to increase their national spending on elite sport, which can be taken as a direct sign that elite sport success is considered a worthy cause in which to invest taxpayers' funds. Ironically, with more nations investing in elite sport—a phenomenon we called the 'global sporting arms race' in SPLISS 1.0—comes the need to invest more, simply to stay in the game, because other nations are investing more and raising the stakes.

In recognition of this scenario the first SPLISS project has been well timed, as it served as the launching pad for the current project (SPLISS 2.0) of which the results are presented and discussed in this book. Obviously, and logically, we build on the conceptual model that was developed in the first project and enhance it on the basis of our subsequent learning. Where we naively started the SPLISS 1.0 project thinking that we could identify a uniform best practice pathway towards building a perfect elite sport development system, we now know that it is not so much the whole of a system structure, but much more the unique combination of system pieces that result in a variety of different approaches that deliver elite sport success.

In this project, we have started the process of further and deeper investigation of the different components that make up an elite sport policy development and implementation system (called *Pillars* in this book). We acknowledge that our model is still complex and that our research instruments are demanding and not yet sufficiently lean to deal with a bigger sample of countries. However, by collecting data from more countries, with further developed research instruments and with a bigger team of highly skilled and passionate researchers, we feel that we have significantly advanced our knowledge about the composition of what are the critical success factors that drive success in elite sport. We have also advanced our knowledge about the interplay between different success factors and between the nine different Pillars of the SPLISS model. Some are indeed sequential and depend on each other; others can be developed in isolation, or in parallel to other Pillars. Some Pillars are highly developed in some nations, and not at all in others. That, in essence, leads to the purpose of SPLISS 2.0, to identify what policy works, when and in which national context.

During the past 10 years, the first SPLISS project has also sparked a wide range of related research that has fed into the development of our own model, and we have gratefully sourced the research as input into our own theoretical advancement. When the SPLISS project began in 2003 elite sport policy research was largely uncharted territory and very much a niche area for a small group of researchers. In 12 years the SPLISS project:

- has grown into a global collaboration between 15 nations, 58 researches and 33 policymakers;
- has at least in part inspired other researchers to do similar research in other nations;
- has become a key strand in most sport management related conferences; and
- has staged its own international conferences in Antwerp 2013 and Melbourne 2015.

These achievements and the continued interest of policymakers, sports administrators and academics is clear evidence of the importance of the systematic study of elite sport policy in the third millennium.

1.2 Background to SPLISS

SPLISS (Sports Policy factors Leading to International Sporting Success) is an international network of research co-operation that aims to co-ordinate, develop and share expertise in innovative high performance sport policy research in co-operation with policymakers, National Olympic Committees (NOCs), international (sport) organisations, and researchers worldwide.

The first SPLISS project (SPLISS 1.0), delivered in 2008 by an international consortium of researchers, was a study comparing elite sport policies in six nations (Belgium [Flanders & Wallonia], Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom). Based on the development of a theoretical model a pilot study in six nations to test the model resulted in a published PhD study and a book:



De Bosscher, V., Bingham, J., Shibli, S., van Bottenburg, M., De Knop, P. (2008). The global Sporting Arms Race. An international comparative study on sports policy factors leading to international sporting success. Aachen: Meyer & Meyer. ISBN: 978-1-84126-228-4. (173p)



De Bosscher, V. (2007). Sports Policy Factors Leading to International Sporting Success. Published doctoral thesis, supervised by De Knop, P., van Bottenburg, M. Brussel: VUBPRESS. ISBN-978-905487-421-8 (347p)

This project was the first joint initiative of the 'SPLISS' group, led by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel in collaboration with Utrecht University, Sheffield Hallam University and UKSport. A summary of the SPLISS 1.0 study is freely available from the website: www.SPLISS.net/publications and several scientific papers have been published over the past years (see website for an overview).

The SPLISS 1.0 study was characterised by three elements:

1. The development of a theoretical model of sport policy factors leading to international sporting success, consisting of nine Pillars, with the identification of more than 100 critical success factors (CSF).
2. The use of mixed methods research, including development of a scoring system to measure the competitive position of nations in elite sport. This was presented as a 'traffic light' to indicate the relative performance of each nation for each Pillar measured.
3. The involvement of the main stakeholders in elite sport as part of the research methodology: 1,090 athletes, 273 coaches and 71 performance directors in the six nations were asked to express and rate their views about the elite sport system in their nation. The SPLISS research takes existing inputs (e.g., money) and outputs (e.g., medals) calculations and takes the 'black box' of throughput or processes of elite sport policies into consideration as the critical link between resources put into the system and results that are delivered.

The SPLISS project, in that regard, moves beyond other studies on elite sport policies, for example by Andersen and Ronglan (2012); Bergsgard, Houlihan, Mangset, Nordland and Rommetveldt (2007); Digel, Burk and Fahrner (2006); Green and Houlihan (2005) and Houlihan and Green (2008). These studies, all with their own approaches and foci, compare and describe elite sport policy of nations with the purpose of analysing the policy formulation process and the context in which elite sport operates. The SPLISS research seeks to complement to this and considers the continuum of resources, process, and sporting results more holistically.

1.3 From SPLISS 1.0 to 2.0

Despite advancing our knowledge about theory, methodology and policies, the SPLISS 1.0 study also delivered numerous new research challenges. Irrespective of anecdotal evidence about the relationship between policy actions and elite sport success, SPLISS 1.0 did not fully provide conclusive evidence. In policy research it is hard to conduct an experiment where the impact of a single or series of policy factor(s) on output measures is determined in a controlled environment. It also became clear that various research paradigms deliver multiple (causal) models that may explain the production of elite sporting success. Country specific context based on, for example, history or culture may provide nations with various options to design and implement successful elite sport systems. In this respect, Houlihan and Green (2008) state that 'one crucial indicator of convergence of sport systems is the extent to which a broad range of countries with different political, socio-economic and cultural profiles adopt similar policy goals' (p. 20). This is confirmed by Svein Andersen and Lars Tore Ronglan (2012) in their book *Nordic Elite Sport: Same Ambitions, Different Tracks*. The SPLISS methodology has largely focused on countries where policy systems were increasingly institutionalised by government. This has led to a research focus on government-funded, mainly Olympic, sports and to a lesser extent to commercialised sports. The SPLISS model and its CSFs may be less applicable to countries where elite sport policy is (also) the remit of Non-governmental organisations or private organisations. SPLISS has therefore been typified as a functionalistic approach to elite sport (Bogerd, 2010).

To address these issues the SPLISS methodology has developed further to take in more nations and delve deeper into the different CSFs and their relationship with success reflected in the name SPLISS 2.0. This large-scale project, of which this book is the outcome, includes 15 nations, as shown in Figure 1: ten European nations, two countries in Asia, and two in America and Australia (Oceania). For specific reasons, explained later in the book, these nations actually represent 16 systems for elite sport development because Flanders and Wallonia have politically independent sport policy structures, and Great Britain did not participate in the project, but Northern Ireland as one of the home nations did. In the remainder of this study we consider Flanders, Wallonia and Northern Ireland as independent national sporting systems.

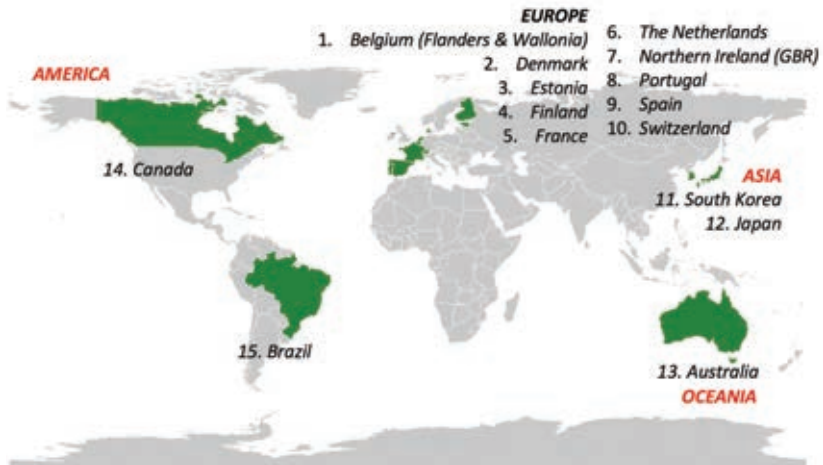


Figure 1: Countries involved in SPLISS 2.0¹

SPLISS 1.0 also delivered further evidence that policy factors leading to elite sport success may differ by sport. As it was stated by Porter (1990), commenting on the competitive advantage of nations,

'No nation can be competitive in everything. ...A high level of competitiveness in all areas is very unlikely in the economy and therefore nations may specialise in one domain' (p. 8).

Sport-by-sport comparisons may reveal that certain Pillars are more conditional to success than others. Clusters of policy success models may be found, for example, for early versus late (talent) specialisation sports, or for team sports versus individual sports. Accordingly, to address these issues, several SPLISS-related studies look into sport specific comparisons and from different viewpoints, for example:

- Athletics: a resource-based perspective on countries' competitive advantage in elite athletics (Jasper Truyens, PhD, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium).
- Tennis: the examination of the tennis policy factors that influence the tennis performance of a country (Jessie Brouwers, PhD, Griffith University (AUS) in collaboration with Vrije Universiteit Brussel).
- Judo, high performance judo: organisational determinants for international sporting success (Leandro Mazzei, PhD, University of Sao Paulo (BRA) in collaboration with Vrije Universiteit Brussel).

¹ 13 full nations and three regions: Flanders and Wallonia (Belgium) and Northern Ireland

- Snow sports: a market-based view of nations on the medal market of the Winter Olympic Games (Andreas Christophe Weber, PhD, Swiss Federal Institute of Sport Magglingen SFISM/Vrije Universiteit Brussel, SUI).

Smaller (Masters) studies are also conducted, such as horse riding: key success determinants in sports policies (Clara Van Laer, Masters thesis at Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 2012); commercial speed skating teams: key figures in skating about the consequences of the development of branding teams for the elite sport climate and talent development, in particular, a case study in the Netherlands (Renneke Bogerd, Masters thesis at Utrecht University, 2011); swimming: comparing elite sport policy factors leading to international sporting success in Flanders and the Netherlands (Sepp Meyers, Masters thesis at Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 2009); and canoe: elite sport culture and policy interrelationships: the case of sprint canoe in Australia (Sotiriadou, Gowthorp & De Bosscher, 2013).

Other sport policy-specific projects are being developed as well such as:

- Pillar 2, a network approach to elite sport policies (Susana Rodrigues, PhD, Lisbon University (POR) in collaboration with Vrije Universiteit Brussel);
- analysis of the policies and the climate/environment for elite sport on the different organisational levels of Brazil: governmental and non-governmental—with emphasis on the relations of school sport and participative sport with sports talents identification and development programmes (led by Maria Thereza Ter Böhme, Universidade de Sao Paulo); and
- elite sport and cities, a comparison between five Dutch cities and three Belgian cities (Fenke van Rossum, Masters thesis at Vrije Universiteit Brussel).
- PARA-SPLISS: Sport policy factors influencing success in paralympic sports (Aurélié Pankowiak, Victoria University (AUS) in collaboration with Vrije Universiteit Brussel (BE) and Jacqueline Patatas, Vrije Universiteit Brussel (BE)).

Projects regarding elite sport policies in developing countries and in regard to military sport are also under consideration. These projects contribute to further developing, adapting and validating the SPLISS model and methods in different settings and contexts.

1.4 SPLISS 2.0 objective

The objective of the SPLISS 2.0 project is to better understand which (and how) sport policies lead to international sporting success and to obtain a better insight into the effectiveness and efficiency of elite sport policies of nations at an overall sports level. To triangulate our findings we use the insights of athletes, coaches and performance directors in the 15 'participating nations.

The sub-objectives of this research project are threefold:

1. From a practitioner's view, we aim to use our newfound theoretical and methodological knowledge to inform policymakers about the keys to effective elite sport policies and international policy developments in an increasingly competitive environment. This should also allow (participating) nations to identify critical success factors that apply most to their specific context and stage of development, allowing for accelerated development of sport system components.
2. From a scientific view, we want to improve and refine the theoretical model—following from SPLISS 1.0—that helps explain how sport policy factors lead to international sporting success, and to further enhance and validate the methodological approach allowing for better and valid international comparisons.
3. Ultimately we aim to develop an instrument that can be used by policymakers and academics alike to evaluate the effectiveness of elite sport policies.

The SPLISS 2.0 study builds on the model and methodologies developed in SPLISS 1.0. We take this project beyond SPLISS 1.0 by collecting more information about certain Pillars, sampling more nations and questioning more respondents. The project involved 15 nations and responses from more than 3,000 elite athletes, over 1,300 coaches and 241 performance directors that provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of elite sport policies. This allowed us to develop a more comprehensive scoring methodology and to obtain deeper insights into the relationship between elite sport policies and sporting success of nations. In this study we maintain a focus at the national sport policy level. We do not go into sport-by-sport comparisons, nor do we consider the policy systems that drive the development of commercial sport success.

1.5 Organisation of SPLISS 2.0: Research team and partners

In every nation individual researchers and teams in research institutes were the drivers of the SPLISS 2.0 project. They collected the data and co-ordinated the research project in their own country; they sourced local research funding; and they ensured that the objectives of their funders, policymakers, NOCs, and national governing bodies were achieved. Table 1 provides a detailed overview of the SPLISS 2.0 team and policymakers. The project resulted in collaboration between 58 researchers and 33 policymakers from the 15 nations.

Research team

The SPLISS project was set up by Veerle De Bosscher and her team and is based at and managed by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Belgium). They took the lead in reviewing the relevant literature, the research design, theory development and methodological design, and the development and distribution of research instruments, guiding and mentoring participating researchers; and overseeing the comparative analysis and reporting of data. The project is a collaboration of a consortium of researchers at Sheffield Hallam University (England) (Simon Shibli), Utrecht University (Netherlands) (Maarten van Bottenburg) and Victoria University (Australia) (Hans Westerbeek). Furthermore a team of researchers from the consortium partners and other countries has made substantial contributions to the data inputs and analysis. These colleagues are:

- Anna Vilanova (National Institute of Physical Education of Catalonia (INEFC), ESP, Pillar 5, athletic career and post-career support)
- Bake Dijk (Utrecht University, NED, Pillar 3, sports participation and SPLISS website)
- Ben Corbett (Griffith University, AUS, Pillar 7, coach provisions and development)
- Camilla Brockett (Victoria University, AUS, Pillar 4, talent identification and development and Pillar 6, training facilities)
- David Barrett (Sheffield Hallam University, UK, Pillar 8, (inter)national competition)
- Geert De Wael (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, BEL, elite sport climate survey)
- Jari Lämsä (KIHU/Research institute for Olympic Sports, FIN, Pillar 9, scientific research and innovation)
- Jasper Truyens (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, BEL, Pillar 2, governance, structure and organisation of elite sport policies and general methodology)
- Mikko Kärmeniemi (Research institute for Olympic Sports, FIN, Pillar 3, sports participation)
- Popi Sotiriadou (Griffith University, AUS, Pillar 7, coach provisions and development)
- Stephanie De Croock (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, BEL, Pillar 1, financial support)
- Sophie Noyens (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, BEL, elite sport climate survey)

Expert team



We also are thankful to the expert team that was involved in providing feedback during the development of the research instruments:

- Adrian Bürgi (Federal Office of Sport FOSPO, SUI)
- Ariane Caplin (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, BE)
- Anke Reints (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, BE)
- Barrie Houlihan (Loughborough University, UK)
- Jonas Schafer (University of Fribourg, SUI)
- Kristel Taelman ((Vrije Universiteit Brussel/Bloso, BE)
- Michael Doms (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, BE)
- Rasmus K. Storm (Danish Institute for Sports Studies, DEN)
- Rüdüsüli Ralph (Federal Office of Sport FOSPO, SUI)

Table 1: SPLISS partners

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Mount Royal University, Department of Physical Education and Recreation St 	Sport Canada	—

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Research institutes	Local funding partners	Policymakers
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<p>National Audit Office of Estonia</p>  <p>riigikontroll National Audit Office of Estonia</p>	<p>—</p>	<p>Estonian Olympic Committee, Estonian Ministry of Culture</p>
<p>Institut National du Sport et de l'Éducation Physique (INSEP)</p>  <p>INSEP Institut National du Sport et de l'Éducation Physique</p>	<p>INSEP</p>	<p>—</p>
<p>KIHU-Research Institute for Olympic Sports</p>  <p>KIHU</p>	<p>Ministry of Culture and Education, Finland</p>	<p>Finnish Olympic Committee</p>
<p>Waseda University</p> 	<p>Japan Society for the Promotion of Science</p>	<p>Department of Information & International Relations at Japan Sport Council (ex-Department of Sports Information at Japan Institute of Sports Sciences)</p>
<p>Utrecht University School of Governance</p>  <p>Universiteit Utrecht</p>	<p>Ministry van VWS, NOC*NSF</p>	<p>Mulier Institute</p>

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