

MAPPING THE POTENTIAL SOCIETAL IMPACTS TRIGGERED BY ELITE SPORT: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



Jens De Rycke Veerle De Bosscher

ABSTRACT

Research question: When nations face the challenge of justifying their elite sport development policies, they tend to state that a wide range of societal benefits will ‘trickle down’. This argument, however, is being criticised by academics who claim that there is a lack of empirical evidence for the way elite sport influences society. In light of the uncertain/unproven positive and negative societal impacts, this study developed an encompassing conceptual framework that integrates the empirically supported potential societal impacts assumed to result from elite sport.

Research methods: An extensive mapping literature review regarding the potential positive and negative societal impacts of elite sport was conducted. Three electronic databases (SPORTDiscus, Web of Knowledge and Google Scholar) were used to identify the variety of research topics under empirical investigation. A total of 362 sources were included in the review and the development of the conceptual framework (see Figure 1). The process of framework development involved interpreting, labelling, clustering and validating of the literature. The resulting framework incorporates ten categories representing 79 sub-categories.

Results and findings: All 79 positive and negative societal impacts that emerged from the literature review were clustered into ten categories: 1. Social equality and inclusion; 2. Collective identity and pride; 3. Ethics and fair play; 4. Feel good and passion; 5. Fans and (media) attraction; 6. International prestige and image; 7. Athletes’ ability and quality of life; 8. Sport participation and health; 9. Sponsors and commercial activity; and 10. Local consumption and living conditions. **Figure 1** provides a summary of the end result of the labelling and clustering

This is a summary of a published paper, that should be referred as follows:

Jens De Rycke & Veerle De Bosscher (2019) Mapping the potential societal impacts triggered by elite sport: a conceptual framework, *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 11:3, 485-502, DOI: 10.1080/19406940.2019.1581649

More information – download more research papers

© www.SPLISS.net

STUDY HIGHLIGHTS

- The systematic mapping of empirical research regarding the societal impacts of elite sport presented in this paper progress the field as, until now, no literature review that captures the full scope of this top-down relationship had been conducted;
- This paper detected and clustered into a conceptual framework 79 societal impacts assumed to be triggered by elite sports by highlighting ten specific categories;
- It emerged from the available evidence that the delivery of societal impact does not appear spontaneously in most cases, but that it entails putting in place complex governance mechanisms and programmes to steer collective actions.

Quality of evidence

- Since the last two decades, a more detailed body of evidence on the potential of the association between elite sport and social, economic and political spheres has been developed.
- Nonetheless, the overall level of evidence is rather weak across the categories of the MESSI framework. Figure 2 provides a visual summary of the findings for research designs used in extant elite sport impact research.
- The current evidence base fails in developing robust research designs (e.g. shortage of mixed methods studies) that are sensitive enough to detect and isolate certain complex societal impacts. Significant variations in research designs used across the different categories of the MESSI framework are noticeable.

process—the so-called Mapping Elite Sports’ potential Societal Impact (MESSI) model. It was found that, since the turn of the century, a growing number of empirical studies has increased the realisation that elite sport does not automatically initiate positive societal impacts. Moreover, the various ‘dark sides’ of elite sport seem to be underestimated. Thus, it could be argued that a positive framing of elite sport and path dependency informs elite sport policy decisions more than the available empirical evidence.

Implications: The framework and overall empirical picture of the potential societal impacts of elite sport presented in this paper contribute to progress the field as, until now, no mapping review that captures the full scope of this top-down relationship has been conducted. This paper hopes to make a contribution to the understanding of elite sport as a societal phenomenon. It could be argued that the potential societal impacts assumed to be sparked by elite sport have been identified but are still little understood.

Figure 1: Mapping Elite Sports’ potential Societal Impact (MESSI) framework.

activators	© De Rycke & De Bosscher, 2019									
	Events		Athletes & teams			Successes		Stakeholders		
	worldcups - Olympic Games - championships		athletes - footballplayers - sportsteams			winning medals - games - records		coaches - sportorganisations - sponsors		
themes	1. Social equality & inclusion	2. Collective identity & pride	3. Ethics & fair play	4. Feel good & passion	5. Fans & (media) attraction	6. Prestige & image	7. Athletes ability & quality of life	8. Sport participation & health	9. Sponsors & commercial activity	10. Local consumption & living conditions
Potential positive impacts	Integration Social equality Inclusion Social justice Socio-economic equality	Community identity Community pride Socializing opportunities	Ethics Symbolism/rituals Fair play Social debate	Pleasure Special experiences Well-being Passion	Beauty of sport Fandom Celebrities Media consumption Sport knowledge	Globalization International prestige Political power Peace building Country/city marketing	Fame Role model function Quality of life Life skills	Identification Sport participation Volunteering Adoption qualities Health awareness	Economic boost Sponsorships Media rights Sport industry assets Commercial activity Innovation Fundraising	Consumption Employment Tourism (sport) infrastructure Greening
Potential negative impacts	Sexism Exclusion Exploitation Discrimination	Opposition & rivalry Chauvinism Shame	Corruption & fraud Hooliganism Deviant examples	Disappointment Failure	Gambling (addiction) Repulsion Drop sports' image	Soft power Bad international image War propaganda	Pressure Injuries Safeguarding issues Post-career depression Doping	Discouragement effect Unhealthy lifestyle Distorted body image	Association with scandals Financial hangover	Legacy costs Environmental impact Declined living conditions Excessive investments

Figure 2: Hierarchy of evidence of the included studies (n=391). Overview based on the 10 categories of the MESSI framework.

