PhD research project: the relationship between elite sport and sport for all

1 PROJECT PROPOSAL

Governments tend to justify large investments in elite sport using the argument that elite athlete success and hosting international sporting events generate numerous positive outcomes. These benefits include improved national identity, pride, international prestige and diplomatic recognition, individual development of talented athletes and the capacity to inspire increased mass participation in sport. But despite these high expectations, the cumulative evidence base for elite sport’s personal and societal impact remains very weak. Because such outcomes of elite sport are assumed to be self-evident, no further evidence appears to be required for governments to justify their high investments in the pursuit of medal winning capability. These policy concerns have led to an increased discussion on the legacy of elite sport investments within the sport policy literature.

This research project is concerned with the question of why nations should care about winning medals, and therefore why they should invest in elite sport. Elite sport’s societal impact is described, among other things, in terms of (a) its inspirational value (e.g., for increased youth participation), (b) its identification value (positive role modeling, empowerment and national pride or identity) and (c) its economic value (related to mega-events, sponsorship, media). Much of the work of SASO (the research unit Sport & Society at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel) is intended to better understand the underlying mechanisms and outcomes of (elite)sporting practices.

The particular interest of this proposal is related to complex relationship between elite sport and mass participation. The unproven relationship between elite success and mass participation leads increasingly to tensions between opposing the political priorities of investing in elite sport for a small group of athletes, and developing a wide range of organisations and facilities for mass participation users. The researcher in this project can further develop the research direction to his/her own interest and competencies. Possible research directions are related to (a) the organization of elite sport versus mass sports in sports federations; (b) the inspirational function of elite performances (international prestige, international recognition, pride, happiness), (c) the inspirational function of elite athletes (sport stars as personalities), (d) the inspirational function and legacy of elite events or (e) social corporate responsibilities of elite sport organisations and elite athletes.

This project requires a full-time researcher, preparing a PhD, during a period of 4 years. The subject is to some extent flexible within the background and interest of the applicant. This includes a systematic literature review, development of the research design, choice of methods, data analysis and reporting. The PhD is delivered as published papers for international peer reviewed journals (min. 3, according to the faculty regulations).
2 COORDINATION

- Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Marc Theeboom
- Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Veerle De Bosscher
- Co-supervisor: Prof. Dr. Inge Derom

3 REQUIREMENTS

He or she should have obtained (at least) a Master degree

4 PROFILE

- Dutch speaking or English speaking
- Understand research methods: knowledge of quantitative / qualitative research methodologies
- Understand elite sport policy research
- Speak and write fluently/solid English (but should not be perfect)
- Good research and writing skills
- Be engaged and passionate, be eager to make a PhD
- Within your PhD, you will be required to do a systematic review, carry out data collection and analyze data. You will have to write a PhD thesis, consisting of papers written for international scientific journals and to present the results on international scientific conferences

The following elements are an advantage
- statistical knowledge; have used SPSS (with regard to your involvement in SPLISS 2.0)
- proof of good master thesis evaluation

5 INFORMATION AND APPLICATION

For further details and/or application, please contact:
Prof. Dr. Veerle De Bosscher: vdebossc@vub.be

Applications should be sent no later than May 15th, preferably by e-mail.

The application should be accompanied by:
- a detailed Curriculum Vitae
- a motivation letter – interest and expectations from a PhD (what do you expect from making a Phd)
- information – if available - about:
  - competences and skills on writing
  - competences with regard to statistics and research skills (e.g. master thesis; statics course during masters or others)
  - competences regarding the English language (speaking and writing)
  - eventual competences and skills related to sport
6 REFERENCES – READING (IF NOT AVAILABLE, CAN BE DELIVERED ON REQUEST)


