

HOW DOES BRAZIL STACK UP?

A COMPARISON OF ELITE SPORT POLICIES IN 15 COUNTRIES (SPLISS)

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INTRODUCTION

This newsletter is concerned with the evaluation of elite sport policies of Brazil (Rio 2016) and Japan (Tokyo 2020) in the SPLISS 2.0 project (Sports Policy factors Leading to International Sporting Success). This largescale benchmark aimed to obtain a better insight into the effectiveness and efficiency of national elite sport policies of nations based on a comparison in 15 countries, including Australia, Brazil, Japan, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, France, Finland, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland (UK), Portugal, South Korea, Spain, Estonia and Flanders and Wallonia (Belgium). A total of 58 researchers and 33 policy organisations collaborated in the project.

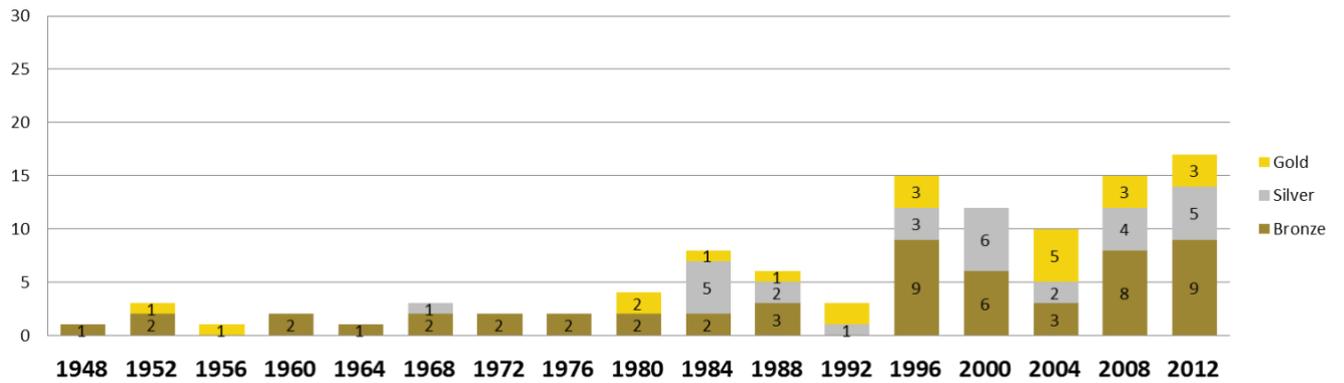
The study used the model of nine pillars that determine the effectiveness and efficiency of elite sport policies. These are: (1) financial support, (2) structure and governance in elite sport, (3) sports participation, (4) talent identification and development, (5) (post) athletic career support, (6) training facilities, (7) coach education and support, (8) (inter)national competition and (9) scientific research and innovation. These nine Pillars are measured by 96 Critical Success factors and 750 subfactors. Its uniqueness lies in the involvement of the key stakeholders in elite sport, and the mix of 'measurement' and qualitative evaluation.

Data were collected by a researcher from each country, by interviews and secondary data. In addition, to triangulate our findings we use the insights of 3142 elite athletes, 1376 elite coaches and 243 high performance that took part in a survey. The full results are published in a book (see below, De Bosscher et al., 2015).

1) Brazilian medals won at the Olympic Games

It is a well-documented that countries hosting the Olympic Games have a home advantage and tend to win more medals. Nations like Australia (Sydney 2000), Greece (Athens 2004), China (Beijing 2008) and the United Kingdom (London 2012) all performed better during their home Games and in the edition before. They also had increased investments and a more strategic national policy approach to elite sport development. This pre-hosting effect has been quantified as being worth 2 gold medals and 8 medals in total. While Brazil's medal tally increased since Atlanta 1996, it won only a few medals more, and never won more than 3 medals (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: medals of Brazil at the Olympic Games 1948-2012 (SPLISS, 2015)



2) Policy evaluation of Brazil: a predictor of it's success?

Overall, the project showed evidence that “success is developable”, meaning that medals can be influenced by policy impact. As such, better performing countries, also tend to have higher scores on the nine Pillars of the SPLISS model. Most Pillars correlate positively with success, either in summer or winter sports, with the exception of the policy areas of sports participation (Pillar 3), talent identification and –development (Pillar 4).

Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the Pillar scores of the two successive Olympic Games organisers: Brazil (Rio 016) and Japan (Tokyo 2020).

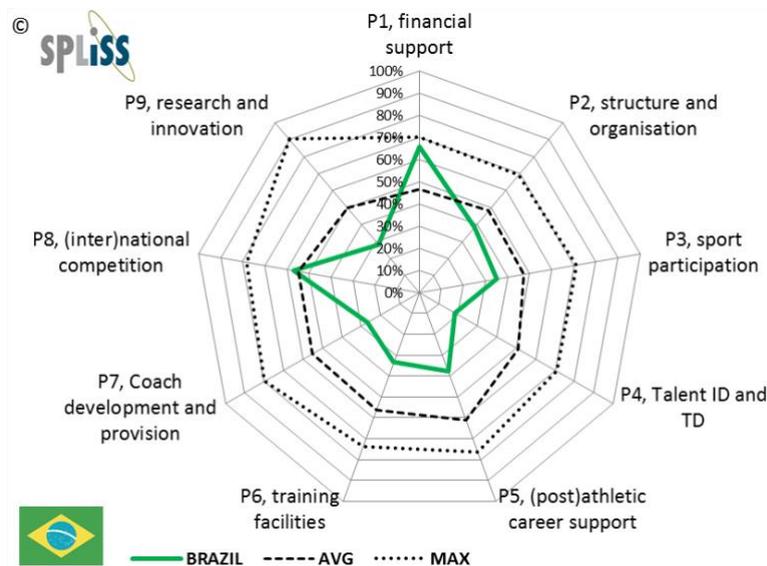


Figure 2: radar graph scores for Brazil against the sample averages and maximum scores (De Bosscher et al., 2015 ©)

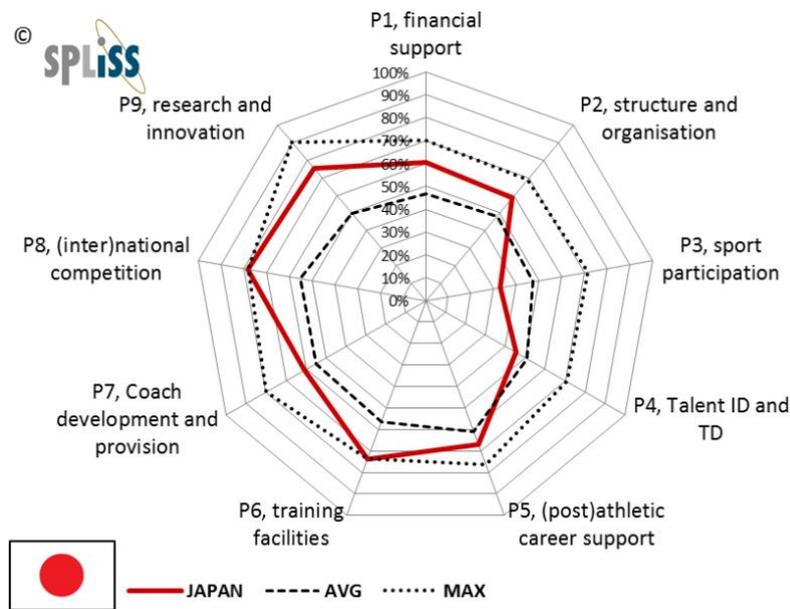


Figure 3: radar graph scores for Japan against the sample averages and maximum scores (De Bosscher et al., 2015 ©)

When we look at the evaluation of Brazil on the nine Pillars (Figure 2), and how elite athletes, coaches and performance directors have evaluated them, there is a strong belief that with an increasing national strategic approach to elite sport policy development, Brazil may do better in the medal tally. Figure 2 illustrates the scores of Brazil, compared to the average and maximum score of the 15 nations. In the run up to the London Games, National government, lotteries and the Olympic Committee in Brazil all-together invested around 150 million euros on a yearly basis in elite sport, and another estimated 70 million euros was invested by the state companies. With an annual elite sport expenditure of around 220 million euros, Brazil is among the three highest investors of the 15 nations (after Japan and South Korea and comparable to France/Australia), although it is less clear if and how this funding is genuinely nationally coordinated and allocated. Brazil is a typical example showing that it takes time to turn investments in elite sport into success. Money alone cannot guarantee success; the crucial question is how the money is spent.

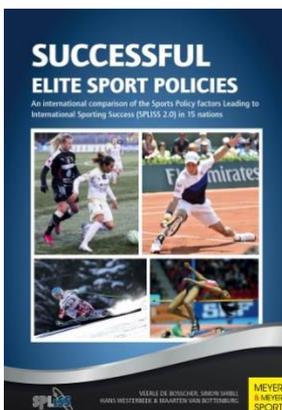
The main weakness in Brazil, covering all Pillars, is that there is no clear overall plan, leadership and coordination to be successful in elite sport in the short time. This is shown in Brazil's score on Pillar 2 (organization and governance) in Figure 2. Setting up elaborate, complex and integrated systems for coordination, organization and governance (Pillar 2) takes time and experience and cannot be considered a quick fix for achieving sporting success.

As can further be seen in Figure 2, the only pillar (except from Pillar 1, funding) where Brazil has a score above the average of the other 15 countries is Pillar 8: International competition. This is concerned with the organisation of international events and the participation of athletes in national and international competitions. The magnitude of the gaps between the scores for Brazil and the sample average are the greatest in Pillars 7 (coaches), 4 (talents) and 6 (facilities). If Brazil aspires to narrow the gap between itself and the other sample nations, the priority for investment should start with the three policy areas with the greatest gap. The fourth area, sport participation is a long-term development that also needs to be prioritised.

Despite the potential that the country has, -in terms of policy development- it seems that 2016 will be too early for Brazil to perform well and in line with previous host nations. The Olympic Games may possibly give the country a boost towards longer term success, perhaps for Tokyo 2020, if it's high elite sport investments would be used efficiently over the nine Pillars.

Let's compare these Pillar results with Japan in Figure 3. Japan and Brazil were the only countries of the sample that increased their total change in success (i.e. proportion of gold, silver, bronze medals won) after increasing investments made by 2012.

Japan performs far better than Brazil on all of the nine Pillars, except for sports participation (Pillar 3), where both countries perform below average. The total elite sport budget (208 million euros) is among the highest, but contrary to Brazil, it goes along with high national coordination. It has a relative strength in research and innovation (Pillar 9), training facilities (Pillar 6) -mainly related to the national training centre in Tokyo, which since 2008 has provided cutting edge facilities and technologies, and in addition the 22 sport specific trainings centres-, and (international) competition (Pillar 8). The only Pillars where Japan under performs, are Pillar 3: sports participation and Pillar 4: talent identification and -development systems. Our research design delivers no evidence of a direct link between policy actions that are intended to drive sports participation or talent development and the level of success in elite sport that countries achieve. It seems that Pillars 3 and 4 are not priority Pillars for short-term (quick fix) success in sport, but in the longer term may provide a foundation for temporary competitive advantage by delivering more talented athletes for selection into elite sport. If Japan takes a long-term view towards athletic development, by investing in quality sports participation and talent development, the country can expect to perform well when it hosts the Olympic Games in 2020.



More information:

De Bosscher, V., Shibli, S., Westerbeek, H. & van Bottenburg, M. (2015). Successful elite sport policies. An international comparison of the Sports Policy factors Leading to International Sporting Success (SPLISS 2.0) in 15 nations. Aachen: Meyer & Meyer.

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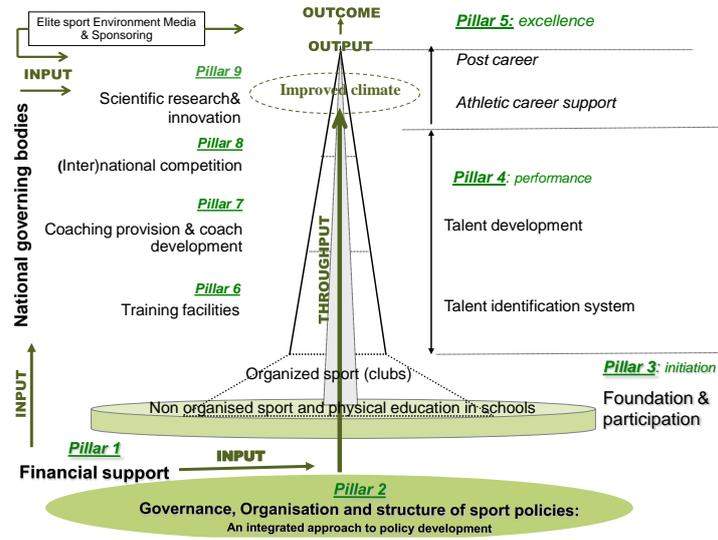
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APPENDIX

Figure 1: the SPLISS model: Theoretical model of 9 pillars of sports policy factors influencing international success (De Bosscher et al., 2006)



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