

**The Organisation of Sports in Belgium
Between Public, Economic and Social Profit**

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Introduction

Belgium is a country in Western Europe with a stable, cautiously progressive, liberal democracy under a constitutional monarchy. It is one of the founding members of the European Union of which the origins date back to the beginning of the post-World War II era. With Brussels being the capital city of the European Commission and also hosting the headquarters of the NATO, Belgium can be considered to be at the crossroads of European and international politics. The country has a population of 10,7 million and covers an area of 30,528 square kilometres. Its political and cultural organisation is rather complex due to the linguistic diversity and conflicts. Belgium is divided into two large regions, Flanders and Wallonia, which have considerable independence. So far, however, the dividing nature of Belgium has not led to a major use of violence as is the case in many other divided nations. Flanders is the Dutch-speaking part in the north of Belgium, with 59 percent of the population. Wallonia, inhabited by 31 percent of the total population, is the French-speaking southern region of Belgium. The Brussels-Capital Region, officially bilingual, is a mostly French-speaking enclave within the Flemish Region. It comprises 10 percent of the Belgian population. The German-speaking Community is a small group of over 73,000 inhabitants, located in eastern Wallonia. Belgium consists of ten provinces and 589 communes: 308 communes in Flanders, 262 in Wallonia and 19 in the Brussels-Capital Region.

During the last decades, Belgium transformed from a unitary state into a federal state.¹ In 1962, according to the principle of territoriality, a Flemish-French language border was officially demarcated in Belgium and, as a result, language areas and language facilities were outlined. It appears that the language border coincides with the borderline between Germanic and Romanic culture. The division into four language areas (Dutch, French, German and bilingual Brussels-Capital language area) was included in the Belgian Constitution in 1970. Based on these language areas, revisions of the Belgian Constitution in 1970, 1980, 1988 and 1993 established a unique federal state whose political power and institutions are segregated into three levels: (i) a federal government, (ii) three community governments (Flemish Community, French Community and German-speaking Community), and (iii) three regional

¹ As opposed to a unitary state where a single authority with a single constitution is in charge of all affairs related to a national community inside the borders of one territory, a federal state can be defined as a 'pluri-legislative' state comprising a number of partially self-governing states or regional units incorporated on some constitutionally entrenched basis by a central government (Delpérée, 2000; King, 2004; Rivero in Uyttendaele, 2001).

governments (Flemish Region, Walloon Region and Brussels-Capital Region). In Flanders, however, it was decided in 1980 to merge the institutions of the Flemish Community and the Flemish Region in order to exercise all their power and competencies by means of unified institutions. With the Lambermont and the Lombard Accords of 2001, a fifth state reform took place. The ongoing process of the federalisation of the Belgian state towards constitutional and legal solutions can be defined as a political compromise that has been designed in order to minimise linguistic, cultural, economic and social tensions.

In this chapter, we will focus on the governmental as well as non-governmental organisation of sports, and sports policy in particular, in Belgium. First, we describe the development of sports organisations in the unitary Belgian state (1830-1969). Afterwards, the present organisation of sports in Belgium is discussed referring to the period of federalisation and its impact with respect to sports policy (1969-2009). In the framework of this book, however, it is not possible to present an in-depth analysis. Therefore, the present contribution should be rather considered as an overview of the most important features regarding the development and organisation of the sports system in Belgium instead of being a detailed historical, political and socio-economic study.

1. The organisation of sports in the unitary Belgian state (1830-1969)

1.1. A rich tradition

Belgium has an exceptionally rich and variegated sporting past, certainly when sports are defined as a broad Wittgensteinian concept that is related to virtually all possible forms of 'movement culture'. Thus, the archers' association *Koninklijke Sint-Sebastiaan Ieper* (Royal Saint Sebastian, Ypres) founded in 1302 and the fencers' association *Koninklijke en Ridderlijke Hoofdgilde van Sint-Michiel* (Royal and Chivalrous Ancient Guild of Saint Michael, Ghent) founded in 1613 belong to the oldest existing sports associations in the world. The first international sports federation also had Belgian roots: the *Fédération Européenne de Gymnastique* (now *Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique*) was established in 1881 by Nicolaas Jan Cupérus from Antwerp. During the Belle Époque Belgium, indeed, was a leading nation in gymnastics and created in 1908 the first university institute in the world where students could obtain doctoral degrees in physical education (Delheye, 2005). Many Belgians became chairman of international sports federations and Belgium is also the only country in the world that has provided two chairmen of the International Olympic Committee: Henry de Baillet-Latour and Jacques Rogge. The Olympic Games of Antwerp in 1920, which were organised by de Baillet-Latour, were also the first in which the Olympic flag was raised and in which the Olympic oath was pronounced (Renson, 1996). The organisation of these Games, so shortly after the First World War, was, of itself, already a remarkable diplomatic act (Delheye & Renson, 2004).

1.2. Governmental initiatives after the Antwerp Olympic Games

Although the Belgian government subsidised the participation of Belgian athletes at Olympic Games from the very beginning of the foundation of the Belgian Olympic Committee in 1906,

the first steps toward developing a national sports policy were taken only after the Antwerp Olympic Games in 1920. On 16 July 1925, the National Committee for Physical Education and Belgian Olympic Committee (NC/BOC) was established under the chairmanship of Henry de Baillet-Latour, chairman of the BOC and the IOC. This umbrella organisation united all the major players in sports and physical education and thus was intended to be able to lay more weight on the scale in order to obtain financial support from the government for general physical education and pre-Olympic preparation of the athletes (Delheye & Renson, 2004; Renson et al., 2006).

The Minister of Public Education, Maurice Lippens (liberal and himself a sportsman), wanted to take still more measures. He launched the High Council for Physical Education and Sports (HCPES) in 1934 and the Belgian Sports Front in 1935. The Belgian Sports Front was intended to generate funds – which the Belgian state did not itself have or did not have for it – in order to bring sports up to the level of that of the other countries. Spectators at sports competitions would henceforth have to pay 0.10 Belgian francs as a tax to feed this fund. Although the HCPES produced few concrete results, the foundations were laid for a well thought-out and democratic sports policy. The HCPES made proposals for more physical education in schools, medical assistance for athletes, medical examinations in schools, better physical preparedness of the youth, the formation of trainers for sports associations, the construction of open-air playgrounds, a prize for sporting merit, et cetera (Renson et al., 2006).

1.3. Federalists versus unitarians during the Second World War

Already in the 1930s, several Flemish ‘rebellious’ sports promoters and sportsmen broke off from the national (unitary) sports federations out of dissatisfaction with the one-sided French-language leadership and set up dissident Flemish federations (such as the *Vlaamsche Tennisbond*, the *Vlaamsche Voetbalbond*, and the *Vlaamsche Wielerbond*). The national institutions ignored the fact that these dissident federations were a symptom of the linguistic discrimination that the Flemings experienced in the Belgian sports system (Renson, 1999). During the Occupation, the Flemish sports federations initially flourished. On 14 August 1940, they united to form the *Algemeen Vlaams Sportverbond* (AVS: General Flemish Sports Federation) and were honoured by the friendly (collaborating) press with epithets like ‘new’, ‘dynamic’, ‘idealistic’, ‘Flemish’, and ‘Aryan’, while the unitary sports federations were labelled ‘old’, ‘rigid’, ‘materialistic’, ‘Belgian’, and ‘Jewish’ (Renson & Delheye, 2000; 2002).

In the Spring of 1941, the collaborating press launched, with success, a campaign for the establishment of a General Commissariat for Physical Education and Sports (GCPES). Although the NC/BOC and the HCPES had not succeeded in establishing this long-planned ‘umbrella’ during the thirties, it was now suddenly set up by the New Order. The NC/BOC resolutely launched a counterattack since the GCPES did everything it could to undermine the authority and hegemony of the NC/BOC. Out of fear of civil disorder, the GCPES was reined in, and the NC/BOC emerged as the moral victor from the conflict. The German occupiers

themselves played a kind of double game. On the one hand, the top German authorities were good friends with the NC/BOC which represented the Belgian sports nobility. On the other hand, the *Propaganda Abteilung* did everything it could to gain the favour of the collaborators. The latter allowed themselves to be charmed but ultimately returned with empty hands. While the Belgian unitary sports federations emerged triumphantly from the conflict as good patriots, the Flemish sports federations were vilified after the war as unpatriotic traitors. The Flemish federations disappeared from the sports scene, but the dissident clubs were recuperated by the unitary sports federations, which would gradually evolve into more or less bilingual institutions (Renson & Delheye, 2000; 2002).

1.4. The National Institute for Physical Education and Sports: from foundation to division

The Service for Physical Education, which had been set up in 1936 under the Ministry of Public Health, emerged as the Administration for Physical Education and Sports in 1945. One year later, the name was changed into the Fourth General Directorate of the Ministry of Public Health and the Family. Also in 1946, a Commission for Medical Sports Examinations was set up by the re-established (and partially renamed) High Council for Physical Education, Sports and Outdoor Activities with a view to an annual examination of everyone who exerted great physical effort in sports, sporting games, and physical education in the most general sense. This then led to the creation of a Medical Service in the Fourth General Directorate of the Ministry of Public Health in 1947 and to the Regent's Decree of 5 March 1948, which obliged subsidised clubs to organise medical examinations for their members. This decree fixed the general criteria for subsidies and specified that public subsidies would be granted only to 'national organisations' (Renson et al., 2006; Thibaut, 2000).

Furthermore, initiatives were launched to create a full-fledged national institute to foster physical education and sports more efficiently. The advocates of such a central institute were thrilled about the fact that the authorities could play a more powerful role in the propagation of sports, while the adversaries feared that the independence of the sports federations would be restricted (Renson et al., 2006; Thibaut, 2000). Eventually, the National Institute for Physical Education and Sports (NIPES) was established by the Law of 15 March 1956, which also regulated the sports prognostications. The NIPES developed an entire range of activities, such as the organising of lectures and the showing of sports films, the subsidisation of sports federations and public playgrounds, the hiring of national trainers, the development of a medical sports laboratory and a documentation service, the lending of sports equipment, et cetera. The NIPES was also a driving force in the professionalisation of elite sports. By the foundation of the Mixed BOC-NIPES Commission in 1961, resources were combined in order to assure the presence of Belgium on the international and the Olympic scenes (Renson et al., 2006).

In 1963, the NIPES came under the authority of the state administration of National Education and Dutch and Francophone Culture (*Nationale Opvoeding en Nederlandse Cultuur/Education Nationale et Culture Francophone*). Two years later, Minister Renaat Van Elslande gave the impetus for cultural autonomy to the Flemish Community and the French

Community. The unitary sports administration was separated into two administrations: the *Administration de l'Education Physique, du Sport et de la Vie en Plein Air*, ADEPS, for the French Community, and the *Bestuur voor Lichamelijke Ontwikkeling, de Sport en het Openluchtlevens*, BLOSO, for the Flemish Community. ADEPS and BLOSO would each go their own way after 1969 (Delheye & Renson, 2004; Renson et al., 2006; Scheerder, 2004; Zintz, 2004). Remarkably, the unitary sports administration split one year before the first constitutional revision of 1970.

2. The organisation of sports in the federal state of Belgium (1969–2009)

2.1. Governmental structure of sports

The organisation of sports in Belgium is strongly influenced by the structure of the Belgian state (Scheerder et al., 2006; Vanreusel et al., 1999; Zintz & Camy, 2005). The 1970 constitutional revision laid the foundations for the establishment of a cultural and economic autonomy at the level of the communities and regions respectively. As a consequence, the political institutions of the communities and regions (parliament, government and public administration), represent a significant amount of legislative and executive power as regards the policy matters prescribed by the Belgian Constitution. All other forms of power rest with the federal or even European layer. The federal level's authority includes domains such as justice, defence, foreign affairs, social security, monetary and fiscal policy, etc. On the other hand, communities and regions have exclusive power in the fields related to personal and territorial matters respectively. Communities have authority in fields such as culture, education, health, social welfare, etc. Regions exercise competences connected to, among others, the economy, employment, environment, housing, public works, water policy, etc. The regions also supervise the provinces, the municipalities and intercommunal utility companies. As a part of the cultural sphere, governmental competences with regard to sports are the separate responsibility of the communities. As a consequence, after 1970 no national sports governmental system exists in Belgium any more. However, this does not mean that there are no national, non-governmental organisations for sport (cf. infra).

Like most of the policy domains, also governing bodies relevant to sports policy can be distinguished according to three main governmental functions: (i) political representation, (ii) public administration, and (iii) policy advice conferral. In Tables 1a to 1c the different (sports) actors in Belgium with respect to these functions are listed. The legislative power and the executive power are distinguishing features within the political representation, whereas the public administration can be characterised by development and evaluation agencies on the one hand and implementation and inspection agencies on the other. All of these governmental functions are institutionalised at the levels of the communities, provinces and municipalities, but not at the national level due to the political structure of Belgium. Thus, every language area has its own political representation institution, public administration and advisory body as regards sports matters, except the bilingual Brussels-Capital language area. In the Brussels-Capital language area two commissions, viz. the Flemish Community Commission and the

French Community Commission, represent the Flemish Government and the Government of the French Community respectively. As a consequence, there are three ministers of sports in Belgium. All of them have their own sports administration and sports advisory body.

Insert Tables 1a, 1b and 1c about here.

Thus, the Flemish Community, the French Community and the German-speaking Community each have the opportunity to work out their own policy in the field of sports. As the process of federalisation has been gradually implemented from the 1970s onwards, sports policies to a large extent differ between the three communities. At present, each of the three communities in Belgium has its own policy structures and legal instruments, e.g. decrees, to rule sports matters. Consequently, the communities regulate, among others, the recognition and subsidising of community sports federations, the qualification of persons responsible for managing sport and the co-ordination of elite sports through the community ministry in charge of sports competences. They also ensure that sports are carried out in a healthy way and monitor the issue of drugs in sport through the community ministry in charge of sports (Flanders) and the community ministry in charge of health (Wallonia) (Scheerder, 2004; Zintz, 2004).

Due to the segregated sports policy by the communities, the national sports federations need to have autonomous wings within their organisation in order to qualify for state subventions. Belgian sports federations, however, still exist but usually they merely function as a national umbrella to represent the country in international sports organisations and competitions. To date, more than 70 sports federations in Belgium did not change their unitary structure,² for instance the field hockey and soccer federations (Van Vlaenderen et al., 2007).³ Consequently, these organisations are not subsidised by the government for their functioning.

A key element in the governmental organisation of sports policy in Belgium is the principle of subsidiarity, as is the case for most of the (Western) European countries (Scheerder & Vermeersch, 2007). Subsidiarity is one of the main features of federalism. It is an organising principle laying down that matters ought to be handled by the lowest possible political and administrative level, and as close to the citizens as possible. In fact, centralised authorities receive their legitimacy by means of their service rendering towards local authorities and other competent, less centralised organisations. This implies that the role communities in Belgium play with regard to sports policy is mainly of a subsidiary nature (Scheerder, 2004; Steinbach & Rathmes, 2004; Zintz & Camy, 2005). Therefore, apart from the general promotion of active sports participation at the community level, the (financial) support of local and/or private sports initiatives and organisations can be considered to be one of the

² Many of these sports federations, however, are not recognised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) or the General Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF).

³ In 2008 the *Royal Belgian Football Association* (KBVB/URBSFA) decided to found a Flemish wing as regards the third and following divisions. The first and second divisions keep their national structures.

most important tasks of the communities with regard to their sports policy. After all, non-governmental organisations (sports federations and sports clubs) as well as local authorities (municipal sports services) are in the best position to offer the most optimal conditions and to perform effectively towards their members/citizens.

Between 2001 and 2003, the Flemish Government together with the representatives of the provincial and local authorities in Flanders held a debate on which key tasks should be allocated to what governmental level. Based on the subsidiarity principle, it was decided that the centralised authorities will only focus on those tasks which cannot be performed effectively at a more immediate and/or local level. With respect to the sports competences, this implied that, among others, large-scale sports promotion campaigns, the organisation of training programmes for sports-technical and executive staff, and the co-ordination of elite sports are community based policy matters, whereas the specific interpretation and implementation of Sport for All initiatives should be mainly related to the local authorities. The co-ordination and the promotion of sports for disabled people, on the other hand, is a key task for the provincial governments.

In 2003, the Government of the French Community decided to recognise and to subsidise communal and intercommunal sports centres. By means of this action, the goal of the legislator was to ensure the possibility for all citizens to participate in Sport for All activities. In order to get the subventions, at least two conditions need to be fulfilled: (i) the establishment of a yearly operational and promotion plan, and (ii) the recruitment of qualified managers and sports instructors. Nowadays, 44 local sports centres ensure the implementation of Sport for All initiatives and co-ordinate the activities of local sports clubs in the French Community.

In fact, the previously described public tasks regarding sports largely reflect the basic principles originally defined in the European Charter of Sport for All. This charter of the European Council was signed in Brussels during the 1975 Conference of the European ministers responsible for sports (Council of Europe, 1975; 1980). Key concepts in the Sport for All Charter included, among others, (i) the right to participate in sports, (ii) appropriate support made available out of public funds, (iii) co-operation between public authorities and voluntary organisations, (iv) the establishment of a national machinery for the development and co-ordination of Sport for All, (v) the overall planning of sports facilities, and (vi) the need for qualified personnel at all levels of administrative and technical management, leadership and coaching. At the end of the 1960s, Flanders was one of the pioneering regions in Europe to launch large-scale Sport for All campaigns (Vanreusel et al., 2002).

In 2009, the sports budget of the Flemish Government will amount to 125 million EUR in total (Anciaux, 2008). Of this budget, 52 percent is spent on Sport for All, including subventions for sports federations and local sports services. Fifteen percent of these financial resources is expended on elite sports and five percent on the innovation and renovation of sports infrastructure. A quarter of the Flemish sports budget is donated towards BLOSO, which is the largest sports administration in Flanders. The total amount of money spent on

sports by the Flemish municipalities, however, is about three times as much as the total sports budget of the Flemish Government (Késenne et al., 2007; Scheerder & Vos, 2009).

The sports budget of the Government of the French Community, from its side, will amount to 50 million EUR in total in 2009, including 521,000 EUR from the Ministry of Health dedicated to the fight against drug abuse in sports. Almost one third of this budget (31%) is spent on mass sports. In this share, the subsidising of sports federations as well as local sports services is included. Elite sports receives eighteen percent of these financial resources and sports infrastructure fourteen percent (Parliament of the French Community, 2009)

2.2. Sports between state, market and civil society

So far, we focused on the governmental organisation of sports in Belgium. In analyses of the organisation of society and sports in particular, however, distinctions are often made between the public, the commercial and the civic sector⁴. In Figure 1, these three major sectors are respectively described as the state, the market and civil society. Each of these sectors has its own rationale and legitimacy. In short, the public sector deals with the provision of goods and services by and for the government, whether national, regional and/or local (cf. supra). By contrast, the commercial and civic sector are characterised by non-governmental activities and organisations. The commercial sector concerns that part of our society which is run for economic profit, whereas the civic or voluntary sector is the sphere of social activity in which social profit prevails. As we mentioned before, one of the basic instruments of the public sector include the subsidising of voluntary associations in order to enhance the public interest (public capital). Financial trade (economic capital) is characteristic for the commercial sector and the main feature of the civic sector is volunteerism (social capital).

Insert Figure 1 about here.

In Belgian society, as in many other European countries, voluntary organisation activity has been the foundation for sports practices (Taks et al., 1999). In the voluntary sports sector, sports clubs hold a dominant position. In Flanders there are about 23,900 sports clubs, of which almost seven out of ten belong to a sports federation that is recognised or subsidised by the Flemish Government (Scheerder, 2007; Van Lierde & Willems, 2006; see Table 2). The total number of sports federations in Flanders is 182 (Van Vlaenderen, 2007). According to the decree of 2001 concerning the recognition and subventioning of the Flemish sports federations almost four in ten sports federations in Flanders are subsidised by the Flemish Government. According to the decree of 2006 concerning the recognition and subventioning of the French-speaking sports federations, 58 of them are recognised by the Government of

⁴ In their studies, Ibsen and Jørgensen (2002; 2004) also identify the informal sector. This sector includes sports participation activities in small informal groups or practising sports on his own. In our model informal involvement in sports belongs to the voluntary sector, whereas independent sporting activities can be defined as activities performed by non-organised citizens.

the French Community. These recognised sports federations include 6,300 clubs. Compared to European standards, Flanders and Wallonia have a dense network of sports clubs: for every 100,000 inhabitants there are 319 clubs in Flanders (Scheerder, 2004) and 190 clubs in Wallonia (Zintz & Bodson, 2007). For the Netherlands and Germany this number equals 206 and 103 respectively. The number of sports clubs per 100,000 inhabitants regarding the EU-25 accounts for 166 (Scheerder & Vermeersch, 2007).

Beside the sports federations and their clubs, in Flanders and Wallonia there also exist separated umbrella organisations for (i) sports federations, (ii) municipal sports services, and (iii) extracurricular sports in schools (see Tables 3a and 3b). The umbrella sports federation in Flanders is the *Vlaamse Sportfederatie*, abbreviated as VSF (Flemish Sports Confederation). In the French Community the co-ordinating organisation is the *Association Interfédérale du Sport francophone* (AISF) or Sports Confederation of the French Community. For the German-speaking Community the umbrella organisation is represented by the *Sportrat der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft* (Sports Council of the German-speaking Community) (Steinbach & Rathmes, 2004). In total, the VSF and AISF have around 140 member federations. There are also umbrella organisations with regard to the municipal sports services and the extracurricular sports in schools, except for the German-speaking Community where no specific co-ordinating organisation exist for the municipal sports services (see Table 3b).

Insert Tables 2, 3a and 3b about here.

So far, no national sports organisations have been discussed. With this regard, a special role is granted to the Belgian Olympic and Interfederal Committee (BOIC), being a prominent national sports organisation within the structure of the Belgian federal state. Moreover, the BOIC can be considered to be the only co-ordinating sports organisation at the national level in Belgium. It is in charge of the athletes for the selection and the sending to Olympic Summer and Winter Games. In accordance with the sports ministers of the Flemish, French and German-speaking Communities, the BOIC is also in charge of the selection and the sending of athletes to the World Games, the European Youth Summer and Winter Olympic Festivals and, as from 2010 and 2012, for the Youth Summer and Winter Olympic Games. At present, the BOIC incorporates 81 sports federations, of which 34 are Olympic and 47 are non-Olympic federations. In order to fulfil the previous missions in the Belgian federal state where the communities have the responsibilities for elite sports as well as for Sport for All, an ABCD Commission [A (ADEPS), B (BLOSO), C (COIB⁵), D (Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft)] exists. The aim of the ABCD Commission is to ensure the subsidiarity between the respective partners in order to avoid that contradictory decisions with regard to elite sports would be taken.

Apart from the traditional sports clubs, sports federations and co-ordinating sports structures, however, a new form of voluntary sports organisation is growing in popularity. As opposed to

⁵ Comité Olympique et Interfédéral Belge / Belgisch Olympisch en Interfederaal Comité

Coser's greedy institutions (1974) so-called 'light sporting communities' arise in sports such as cycling, running and walking (Scheerder et al., 2007; Van Bottenburg, 2006). This kind of voluntary sports associations offer people a flexible, contemporary sports programme and rather weak but multiple social contacts without the need for a long-term or rigid membership. In the future, sports federations and their clubs will have to deal with these upcoming counterparts. The popularity of the light sporting communities can be mainly attributed to the switch from product marketing into consumer marketing services. In fact, sports clubs can also be more successful by giving priority to the segmentation of their target groups, and thus the differentiation according to the wants and needs of their (future) members.

Although civil society with its sports clubs and sports communities still plays an important role in Belgium as regards the organisation of sports practices, it is also clear that its function is increasingly challenged by the growing impact of the market. Commercial settings like fitness clubs, but also bowling centres, dancing studios, indoor kart racing clubs, riding schools, squash courts and private swimming pools, have been rapidly taking their place next to the traditional agents in the civic and public sector, i.e. sports federations and their clubs on the one hand and municipal sports services on the other. There are about 778 fitness clubs in Belgium (cf. Table 2). Most of them are located in the neighbourhood of cities.

2.3. Active participation in sports

Sports participation data for the whole of Belgium are scarce. It seems that there is a lack of representative and empirical studies that focus on sports practices performed by the Belgian people. Due to the divided sports policy system in Belgium, research into sports involvement is also separated between the Dutch-speaking and French-speaking parts of the country. In Flanders, however, there is a strong research tradition since 1969 and every ten years since that date in investigating the active participation in leisure-time sports among school-aged children and their parents (Scheerder et al., 2002; 2005). This time trend analysis indicates that more and more people in Flanders partake in active sports practices (Figure 2). At the end of the 1960s only 22 percent of the population in Flanders was actively engaged in sports. Almost four decades later, this percentage amounts to 67 percent. The most spectacular increase in the level of sports participation can be situated during the 1970s. As we described before, at that time ambitious Sport for All campaigns were launched in order to stimulate the population to participate in leisure-time sports. It is remarkable that during the last decade, participation in club-organised sports came to a standstill, whereas recreational sports significantly increased over the years. Moreover, the number of competitive sports participants slightly dwindled since the mid 1980s. Soccer is the most popular sports activity among youngsters, with a growing share of female players. Among adults, most of the sports participants are involved in recreational cycling (Scheerder & Vanreusel, 2009).

Insert Figure 2 about here.

A recent study carried out by Zintz and Bodson (2007) for the French Community shows a small positive trend in the sports practices of young Walloons between 6 and 18 years of age when comparing data collected in 1991 with those collected in 2006. In 2006, 69.8 percent (66.5% in 1991) of the school-aged children in Wallonia participated in sports activities, while 17 percent (idem in 1991) of them declared they abandoned. The good news is that there is a small diminution in the number of those who never practiced sports (from 16.4% in 1991 to 12.7% in 2006).

In their cross-national analyses of sports participation among EU-citizens, Scheerder and Van Tuyckom (2006; 2007) included some sports participation figures with regard to the population of Belgium, Flanders and Wallonia. Accounting on these studies, the percentage of Belgians aged 15 years and older participating in active sports numbers 63 percent. Almost seven out of ten among the Flemings and more than five out of ten among the Walloons actively participate in leisure-time sports. This somewhat different sports participation pattern between Flanders and Wallonia reflects Europe's situation: when going from north to south, participation levels in sports decline (Van Tuyckom & Scheerder, 2009).

Conclusion

The organisation of the Belgian sports system is broadly structured around its ties with the political system. Sports and sports policy in Belgium are as divided as their embedding governmental structure. In spite of, or maybe thanks to, the divided nature of sports in Belgium, a viable network of sports federations and sports clubs exists along with the different governmental sports organisations at the level of the communities, provinces and municipalities. Nevertheless, these rather traditional sports structures are more and more faced with new forms of organisations and providers. Following the market mechanisms of demand and supply, commercial sports organisations such as fitness centres are rapidly growing in popularity. So-called light communities also entered the sports scene, giving people the opportunity to perform their favourite sport without the need of a 'strong' club membership. As a consequence, the sports system in Belgium nowadays is characterised by a diversity of organisations as well as participants. In this varied landscape, initiatives from the civil society, public authorities and the market play an active role. The development of partnerships between these different sectors becomes more important.

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Figures

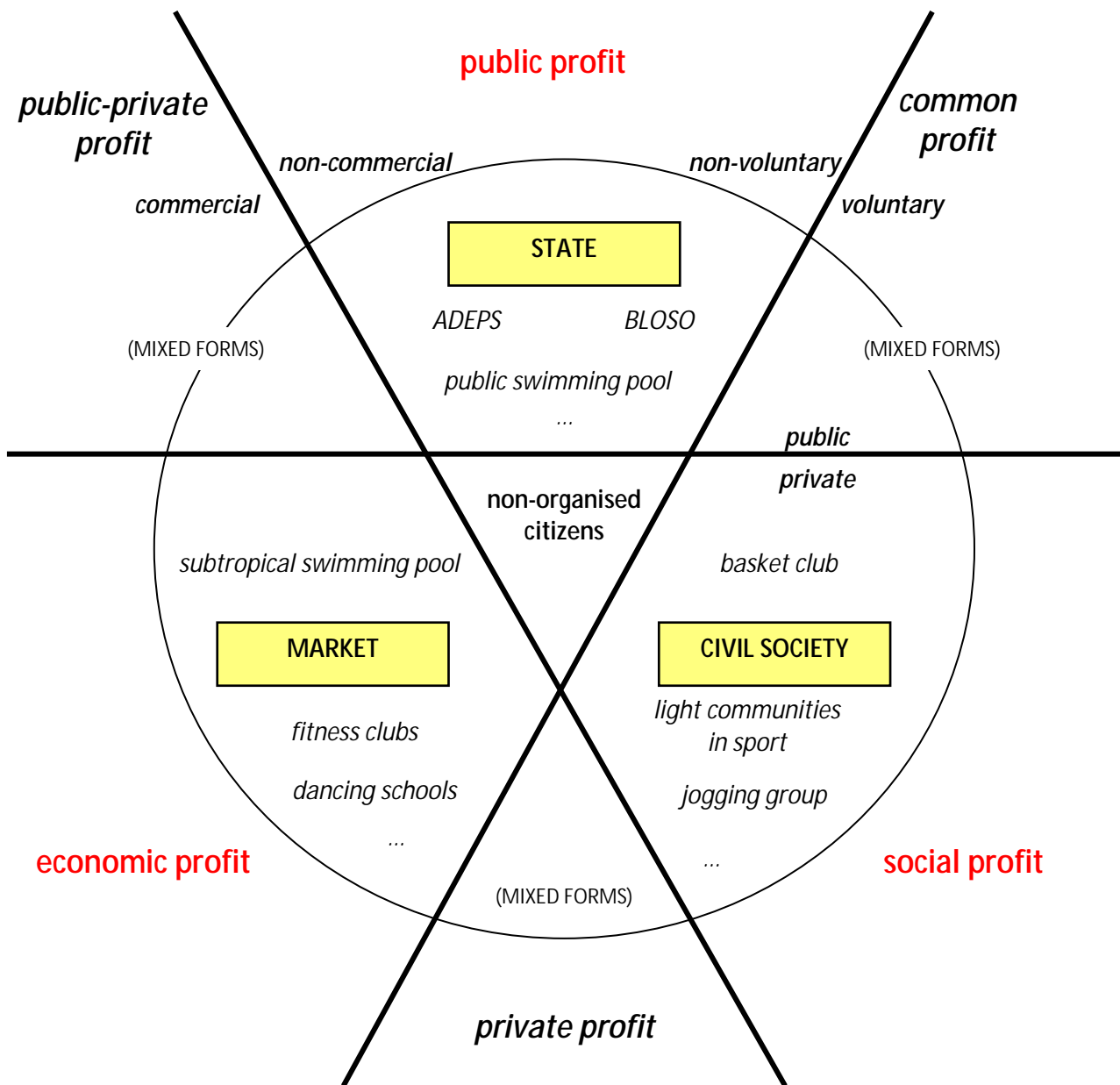


Figure 1: Structural model for the major players in sports (Scheerder, 2007: 19)

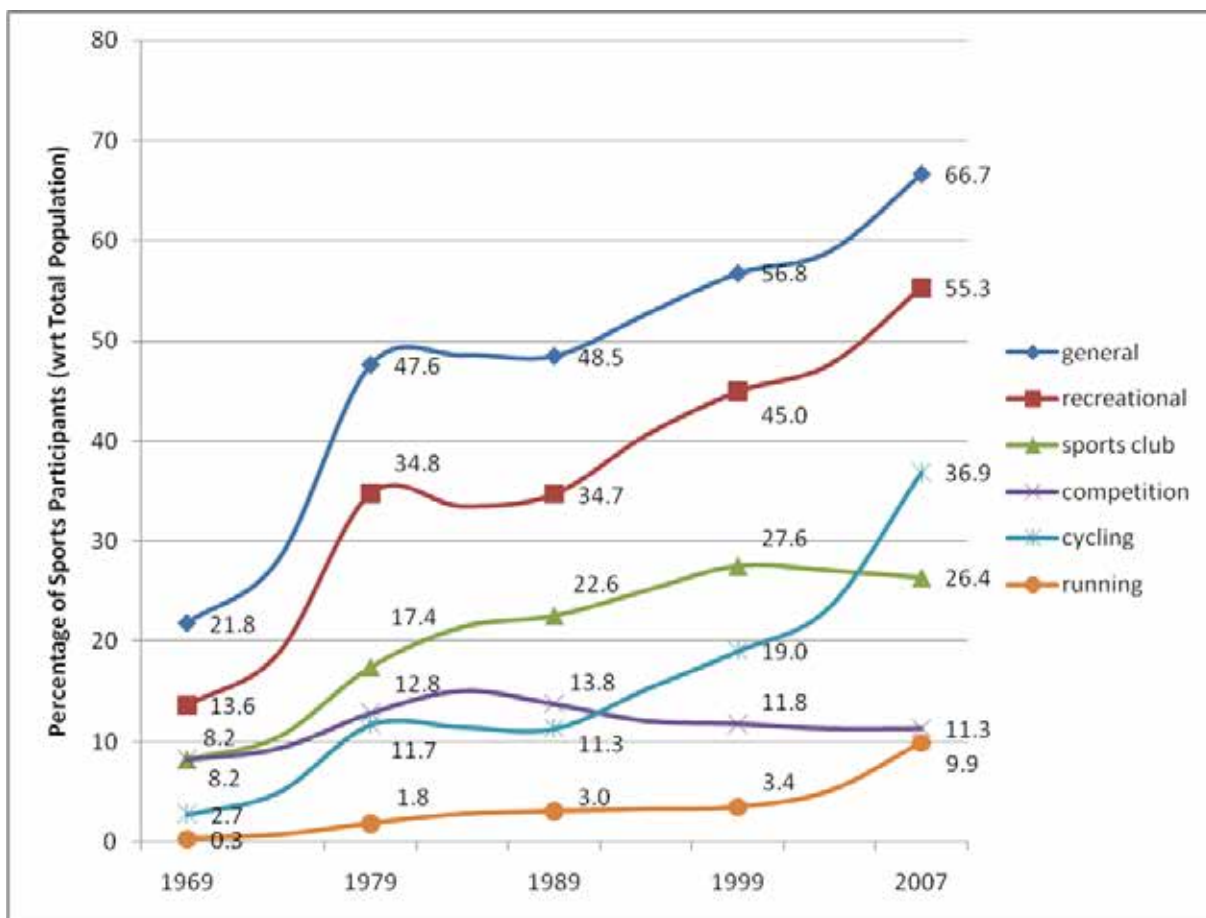


Figure 2: Time trend analysis of active sports participation among 12 to 75 year old people in Flanders, 1969-2007 (Scheerder, 2008: 7)

Tables

Level	Political Representation	
	<i>Legislature</i>	<i>Executive</i>
Community	Fl: Vlaams Parlement ⁶ Fr: Parlement de la Communauté française ⁷ Wa: Parlement wallon ⁸ Ge: Rat der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft ⁹	Fl: Vlaamse Regering ¹⁰ /Minister of Sports Fr: Gouvernement de la Communauté française ¹¹ /Minister of Sports ¹² Wa: Gouvernement de la Région wallonne ¹³ /Minister of Budget, Finances and Equipment ¹⁴ Ge: Regierung der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft ¹⁵ /Minister of Sports
Province	Provincial Council	Deputation/Delegate for Sports
Municipality	Municipal Council	Bench of Aldermen/Alderman for Sports

Table 1a: Governmental sports structures in Belgium with respect to the function of political representation

Fl = Flemish Community; Fr = French Community; Wa = Walloon Region; Ge = German-speaking Community

⁶ Flemish Parliament

⁷ Parliament of the French Community

⁸ Walloon Parliament

⁹ Parliament of the German-speaking Community

¹⁰ Flemish Government

¹¹ Government of the French Community

¹² The Minister of Sports of the Government of the French Community is in charge of the promotion of sports practice.

¹³ Government of the Walloon Region

¹⁴ The Minister of Budget, Finances and Equipment of the Government of the Walloon Region is in charge of the construction of sports facilities.

¹⁵ Government of the German-speaking Community

Level	Public Administration	
	<i>Development & Evaluation</i>	<i>Implementation & Inspection</i>
Community	Fl: Departement Cultuur, Jeugd, Sport en Media ¹⁶ Fr: Ministère de la Communauté française, Administration générale de l'Aide à la Jeunesse, de la Santé et du Sport ¹⁷ Wa: Ministère de la Région wallonne, Département des Infrastructures subsidiées ¹⁸ Ge: Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft, Abteilung Kulturelle Angelegenheiten ¹⁹	Fl: BLOSO ²⁰ Fr: ADEPS ²¹ Wa: INFRASPORT Ge: Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft, Abteilung Kulturelle Angelegenheiten ²²
Province	Provincial Sports Administration	Provincial Sports Administration
Municipality	Municipal Sports Service	Municipal Sports Service

Table 1b: Governmental sports structures in Belgium with respect to the function of public administration

Fl = Flemish Community; Fr = French Community; Wa = Walloon Region; Ge = German-speaking Community

Level	Advisory Body
Community	Fl: Vlaamse Sportraad ²³ Fr: Conseil Supérieur du Sport en Communauté française ²⁴ Ge: Sportrat der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft ²⁵
Province	Provincial Sports Council
Municipality	Municipal Sports Council

Table 1c: Governmental sports structures in Belgium with respect to function of policy advice conferral

Fl = Flemish Community; Fr = French Community; Ge = German-speaking Community

¹⁶ Department of Culture, Youth, Sport and Media

¹⁷ Ministry of the French Community, General Administration for Youth, Health and Sports

¹⁸ Ministry of the Walloon Region, Department of Subsidised Facilities

¹⁹ Ministry of the German-speaking Community, Administration of Cultural Matters

²⁰ Agentschap voor de Bevordering van de Lichamelijke Ontwikkeling, de Sport en het Openluchtlevens (Public Administration for the Promotion of Physical Development, Sports and Outdoor Recreation)

²¹ Administration de l'Éducation Physique, du Sport et de la Vie en Plein Air (Public Administration for Physical Education, Sports and Outdoor Recreation)

²² Ministry of the German-speaking Community, Administration of Cultural Matters

²³ Flemish Sports Council

²⁴ High Council of Sports in the French Community

²⁵ Sports Council of the German-speaking Community

Number of	Flanders	Wallonia	Brussels-Capital Region
Provincial Sports Administrations	5	5	-
Municipal of Local Sports Services	309	44	19
Sports Federations	182	NA	-
Subsidised Sports Federations	69	58	-
Sports Associations	23,861	NA	NA
Sports Clubs	20,147	6,300	1,562
Socio-cultural Associations with Sports Programme	3,714	NA	NA
Fitness Clubs	453	249	76

Table 2: Number of sports organisations in the public, civic and commercial sector

NA = not available

Level	Sports Federations and Sports Clubs	Umbrella Organisations for Sports Federations
National	National Sports Federations	Belgisch Olympisch en Interfederaal Comité (BOIC) / Comité Olympique et Interfédéral Belge (COIB) / Belgisches Olympisches und Interföderales Komitee (BOIK) ²⁶
Community	Fl: Flemish Sports Federations Fr: French Sports Federations Ge: German-speaking Sports Federations	Fl: Vlaamse Sportfederatie (VSF) ²⁷ Fr: Association Interfédérale du Sport Francophone (AISF) ²⁸ Ge: Sportrat der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft ²⁹
Province	Provincial Sports Federations	-
Municipality	Local Sports Clubs	-

Table 3a: Non-governmental sports structures in Belgium – sports federations and sports clubs

Fl = Flemish Community; Fr = French Community; Ge = German-speaking Community

²⁶ Belgian Olympic and Interfederal Committee

²⁷ Flemish Sports Confederation

²⁸ Sports Confederation of the French Community

²⁹ Sports Council of the German-speaking Community

Level	Umbrella Organisations for Organised Sports in Municipal Sports Services	Umbrella Organisations for Organised Extracurricular Sports in Schools
National	-	-
Community	Fl: Vlaams Instituut voor Sportbeleid en Recreatiebeheer (ISB) ³⁰ Fr: Association des Etablissements Sportifs (AES) ³¹ Ge: -	Fl: Stichting Vlaamse Schoolsport (SVS) ³² Fr: Association des Fédérations Francophone du Sport Scolaire (AFFSS) ³³ Ge: Sportdienst der Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft ³⁴
Province	Fl: Provincial Boards of ISB Fr: - Ge: -	Fl: Provincial Boards of SVS Fr: Provincial Boards of AFFSS Ge: -
Municipality	-	-

Table 3b: Non-governmental sports structures in Belgium – municipal sports and school sports
Fl = Flemish Community; Fr = French Community; Ge = German-speaking Community

³⁰ Flemish Institute for Local Sport Policy and Recreation Management

³¹ French Association of Sports Facilities

³² Flemish Foundation for Extracurricular School Sport

³³ French Foundation for Extracurricular School Sport

³⁴ Sports Administration of the Ministry of the German-speaking Community, in charge of Extracurricular School Sport