



## OPERATIONAL QUALITY WITHIN YOUTH SPORT CLUBS: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL AND MULTIPERSPECTIVE APPROACH

### MARGOT RICOUR

PUBLIC PHD DEFENCE FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR IN MOVEMENT AND SPORT SCIENCES

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 29TH 2024 AT 17:00**  
**PROMOTIEZAAL D2.01, CAMPUS ETTERBEEK**

#### SUPERVISORS

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#### EXAM COMMISSION

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## ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH

Acknowledging the various benefits that sport club participation can trigger for youth members (physical, psychological, social, and intellectual), it is of utmost importance to counter dropout and foster lifelong sport participation by providing fun experiences. Moreover, sport participation will not automatically generate healthy outcomes and fun experiences for youth members but should be of high-quality to reach these goals. The aim of this PhD was to explore, understand, and conceptualize operational quality within youth sport clubs, using a multidimensional and multiperspective approach.

This PhD consists of five distinct studies and uses an explorative sequential mixed-method approach to target multiple research objectives. Study 1 explored which initiatives Flemish federations undertake under the current youth sport policy focus, to achieve the stated objectives: increase participation rates and improve quality within youth sport. The main result of this article consisted of the federations' need for guidance in understanding and improving operational quality. To understand and explore the concept of operational quality within youth sport clubs, a scoping review was conducted in Study 2. This resulted in the development of a preliminary conceptual model of operational quality within youth sport clubs. The aim of Study 3 and 4 was to quantitatively validate the preliminary model from the perspective of key stakeholders, namely (i) youth members and parents (Study 3) and (ii) youth coaches, sport club administrators, and youth sport coordinators (Study 4). Finally, Study 5 aimed to assess the satisfaction of young adolescents about operational quality within their sport clubs.

This PhD provides substantial contribution to the existing literature through the development of a conceptual model of operational quality within youth sport clubs (OQYS), incorporating the perspectives of outsiders (experts and literature) and insiders (young adolescents, parents, sport club administrators, youth coaches, and youth sport coordinators). Operational quality denotes a youth-centered approach when implementing youth sport, ensuring that on-field activities maximize health benefits and optimize fun experiences for youth members. The model consists of four dimensions, all contributing to the overall operational quality within youth sport clubs: (1) improving sport skills; (2) positive coaching; (3) cohesion, integrity, and atmosphere within the team and the club; and (4) involvement of youth members and parents in the club. To facilitate the implementation of our research findings, this PhD provides valuable recommendations and tools for policymakers, sport federations, and clubs, including the logic map, the operational quality model, and the importance-performance graph.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

Margot Ricour (29/05/1995) obtained a master business engineering at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KU Leuven) in 2018. A year after graduating, she started as doctoral researcher at the research unit Sports Policy Factors leading to International Sporting Success (SPLISS) of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). She was an active member of the Research Platform Sport (Onderzoeksplatform Sport - OPS) from Sport Vlaanderen. The ultimate objective of this project was to evaluate the effectiveness of the current sport policy in Flanders and in particular the effectiveness of the policy focus youth sport. More specific, she investigated whether and how the current youth sport policy focus led to the intended outcome: a qualitative youth sport offer that increases youth sport participation.

