

You are kindly invited to the public defense to obtain the degree of

**DOCTOR OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES**

of **drs. Mariela Lucía Carvajal Sanjinés**

Which will take place on

**April 3, 2025** at **6 PM** CET

**Auditorium [I.0.03](#) (building I)** – [VUB Main Campus Brussels](#)

Pleinlaan 2 – 1050 Brussel

Or if you wish to attend online, click [here to join the meeting](#)

**EXPLORING SCHOOL-BASED PROJECTS THROUGH  
SPORT-PHYSICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES FOR  
COMMUNITIES IN BOLIVIA**

**JURY**

**INTERN:**

**Prof. Dr. Koen Lombaerts (Chair)**  
(Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

**Prof. Dr. Hebe Schailée**  
(Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

**Prof. Dr. Sarah Dury**  
(Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

**EXTERN:**

**Prof. Dr. Alejandra Martínez**  
(Universidad Católica Boliviana San Pablo)

**Prof. Dr. Selçuk Açıkgöz**  
(Ege Üniversitesi)

**PROMOTOR**

**Prof. Dr. Marc Theeboom**  
(Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

Coming by car? Please [register your licence plate](#) in advance to have access to the campus.

You are also invited to the reception afterwards.

Please confirm your attendance by noon on Monday, March 31 [by filling out this form](#)

## SUMMARY

Sports and physical education are recognised as fundamental human rights and essential tools for social change and development. This is highlighted in key international frameworks from such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, UNESCO's International Charter of Physical Education and Sport, and the Sport for Development field. Governments play a key role in incorporating sport into national policies, yet research often overlooks how these benefits can be effectively integrated into school curricula. While many studies focus on the advantages of physical education and school sports for students, they tend to neglect their broader impact on communities. In Latin America, particularly in Bolivia, grassroots initiatives and government-led programmes remain underexplored, despite the region's unique social and political context, which calls for locally tailored research.

Bolivia's educational policy acknowledges the social role of sport and integrates it into educational strategies through the Avelino Siñani-Elizardo Pérez Law, which adopts a socio-community model. This model requires schools to align their practices with community needs, problems, and opportunities through socio-productive projects. In this context, sport-physical education is seen as a tool to address community priorities.

This research examines the feasibility of implementing Bolivia's national education policy concerning sport-physical education practices within community-focused school projects. Four studies were conducted: a historical documentary analysis of Bolivia's education, an exploratory meta-analysis of existing literature on sport and community, and two studies on the practical implementation of this policy in primary public and secondary private schools. A qualitative multi-method approach was used, combining document analysis, interviews, fieldnotes, participatory observations, and group discussions.

The research reveals a complex relationship between national policy and its implementation at the school level. Significant gaps were identified, with socio-political factors, the role of teachers, curriculum integration, and gaps in monitoring and evaluation contributing to these discrepancies. However, the findings also indicate that, despite these challenges, sport-physical education activities are positively impacting both schools and communities, as reported by participants. These activities foster social cohesion, reflection and learning, community engagement, and support broader school-community initiatives.

The study highlights a significant gap between the intentions of educational policies and their real-world implementation. Good intentions alone are not enough—effective implementation requires careful planning, clear strategies, and strong institutional support. Furthermore, entrenched inequalities and the lack of strong institutional frameworks continue to hinder educational progress and contribute to social disparities. Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed to address the identified challenges.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

**Mariela Lucía Carvajal Sanjinés** embarked on a voluntary programme from the Society of Jesus in Bolivia's Moxos region after completing secondary school, working with children and young people in a boarding school. This experience inspired her to pursue a degree in Psychology, which she obtained from Universidad Católica Boliviana San Pablo in 2013.

She continued her studies in Belgium at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, earning a Master in Educational Sciences in 2016. In 2017, she began her doctoral trajectory in the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences at Vrije Universiteit Brussel and joined the Sport and Society research group (SASO) within the Faculty of Physical Education and Physiotherapy. Her research focuses on school-community projects and the social role of sport-physical education within the Bolivian educational policy. Her research has been presented at academic conferences.

She has also contributed to various social projects, including working with young people with street connection and preventing child sexual abuse in La Paz, Bolivia; addressing migration issues with Roma families and young people from North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as refugees in Granada, Spain; and supporting an asylum seekers' centre in Brussels, Belgium.