

Sport Governance and Policy

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Introduction

The past few months have witnessed the publication of several interesting and useful papers on the topic of sport policy and governance. Those familiar with the selection criteria of the Sport Management Digester will know that, preferably, empirical research papers that significantly enhance our understanding of policy and governance are chosen. This is rather than papers that merely apply a particular policy or governance theoretical concept/framework, as is the case with this issue. However, it is worth noting that three comprehensive reviews have been published in the past half-year or so. Readers may wish to pursue these titles further and enjoy their own reading.

- Ashley Thompson, Erik L. Lachance, Milena M. Parent & Russell Hoye (2023). A systematic review of governance principles in sport, *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 23:6, 1863-1888, DOI: 10.1080/16184742.2022.2077795
- Ralph Ramos, Veerle De Bosscher, Aurélie Pankowiak & Christian Wisdom Valleser (2023) Contexts shaping the development and success of elite sport systems: a scoping review, *Sport Management Review*, 26:5, 649-676, DOI: 10.1080/14413523.2023.2171276
- Erfan Moradi, Sajad Gholampour & Behzad Gholampour (2023) Past, present and future of sport policy: a bibliometric analysis of International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics (2010–2022), *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 15:4, 577-602, DOI: 10.1080/19406940.2023.2228829

In this current issue, five studies from top journals in our discipline are highlighted below. Three of the studies were conducted by British research teams, one from Canada, and one from the US. These studies typically employed document analysis approaches, with or without the supplementation of qualitative interview data. They cover the following topics: an analysis of Canadian sport policy over the past decade, Chinese football policy reform, an analysis of community sport and health policy and programmes in the UK, policy regarding transgender athletes in the US,

and a conceptual paper on the understanding of good governance in sport. Key theoretical frameworks/concepts employed include Kingdom's Multiple Streams Approach for policy analysis, policy implementation, figural sociology, and the multiple governance framework.

The following discussion provides a concise overview of these selected five papers.

Detailed Review

The study conducted by Duffell, Haycock, and Smith in 2023 examines the link between community sport and health policy in England, centring on the "Get Healthy Get Active" initiative spearheaded by Sport England. Utilising a qualitative methodology, the research includes interviews with policymakers, representatives from a professional football charity (Everton in the Community), and individuals participating in the GHGA-funded programme, Active Blues. This approach facilitates an in-depth analysis of how the initiative was developed, and implemented, and its impact as seen through the eyes of various stakeholders. The focus of this study is a detailed look at how the figural sociology framework helps us understand the complicated ways in which community sport and health policy sectors interact and influence each other. The authors discuss Sport England's attempts to bring community sport activities in line with public health goals, showing how these efforts are shaped by wider policy changes and a growing emphasis on making decisions based on evidence. This issue becomes even more pressing in times of financial cutbacks, which have led to changes in how community sport projects are funded and prioritised. The study's main discoveries point out the difficult and often strained relationships between those working in community sport and health policy. It shows how differences in power and reliance affect the development and implementation of sport programmes aimed at improving health. The authors note the hurdles Sport England faces in dealing with these issues and highlight creative ways it has tried to get more people, especially men, interested in physical activity through the use of professional football's widespread appeal.

The study by Peng and colleagues critically explores the hurdles encountered in executing youth football policies in China. This comes in the wake of the ambitious 2015 national football reform, which aimed at making China a global football powerhouse. The research employs a detailed case study approach, grounded in a

critical realist view, and uses semi-structured interviews with key figures in youth football to deeply understand these implementation challenges. The findings point to significant policy clashes, mainly stemming from poor coordination and unclear roles among educational bodies, football associations, and professional clubs. This misalignment leads to confusion and inefficiencies in the system. Through the lens of the Policy Conflict Framework, the paper carefully dissects the cognitive and behavioural aspects of these policy clashes, bringing to light the differing values, beliefs, and goals of the involved stakeholders. This article makes a substantial contribution to policy execution, especially in scenarios where sport development goals overlap with educational and societal values.

In his discussion article "The Numbers Game: Quantifying Good Governance in Sport," Girginov presents a conceptual paper that delves into the intricate process of developing, implementing, and evaluating three international and two national governance codes. Through his analysis, Girginov uncovers that, despite the good intentions behind these governance codes—aimed at fostering transparency, accountability, and efficiency—their actual application tends to increase the complexity of organisations and poses threats to the independence of sports bodies. He critiques the move towards a meta-governance model that applies uniform standards and measures across the board, which may overlook the distinct needs and circumstances of various sport organisations. Girginov points out the substantial effort and resources needed to comply with these codes, questioning whether this investment genuinely leads to better or more independent governance structures. His article adds to the conversation on sport governance by challenging the effectiveness of using metrics as a tool for ensuring good governance. He calls for a more tailored, sport-specific approach that respects the variety among sport organisations and their governance requirements. This piece is especially insightful for those involved in policymaking, administration, and research within sport governance, as it sheds light on the shortcomings of current approaches to quantification and proposes new avenues for research and policy-making.

Harris and colleagues' study delves into how different US states handle the issue of transgender athletes competing in school sports. They use Kingdon's multiple streams approach to sort state actions into four categories: states that have passed restrictive laws, those currently considering such laws, states that have not

acted, and one state that has adopted supportive laws for transgender athletes. The study points out that national groups have been actively trying to shape state policies by drawing attention to high-profile events in sports, courts, and politics related to transgender athletes. The research uncovers a clear political split, with states led by Republicans often pushing laws that exclude transgender athletes, claiming to protect the fairness and safety of cisgender female athletes. This move contrasts with states that promote inclusive policies or have not pursued any legislation, highlighting the tension between politics, societal values, and sport policy. Harris and colleagues' research adds an important perspective to discussions on sport policy and governance, by pointing out the shortcomings of exclusionary policies and advocating for sport bodies to lead the way in creating fair and inclusive policies. This study stresses the importance of finding a balance that respects the rights and dignity of all athletes, including those who are transgender.

In their recent article, Parent and Jurbala share insights from their experience with the challenges of putting the Canadian Sport Policy 2012 into action. Their study, based on a detailed look at how sport policies are managed at different levels and sectors, uncovers the complex issues involved in rolling out a national sport policy. They discuss the obstacles created by unclear policies, disagreements among different groups involved, and the struggle to balance encouraging sport participation with the pursuit of excellence. The article questions the effectiveness of trying to reach wide agreement on policies in systems where power is spread across different levels, pointing out that grand plans often fall short when it comes to actual results. One of the main points they make is that while vague policies might help get various stakeholders on board, they make it harder to carry out these policies effectively and hold people accountable. This often leads to a situation where there's more talk than action. Parent and Jurbala argue that for policies to work, they need to have clear, practical goals and enough resources and money behind them. They also stress the value of looking closely at the entire policy process, including the personal experiences of those involved, to get a better grasp of the challenges and conflicts in implementing policies. Their findings highlight the need for a thoughtful review of how sport policies are made and call for a unified effort to make sure these policies achieve their intended goals.

Conclusion

The collection of reviews we've explored provides a deep dive into the evolving landscape of sport policy and governance, uncovering a series of important trends and challenges across different contexts. One key takeaway is the growing intertwining of sport and health policies in the UK, a trend that is likely mirrored in programme deliveries. The "Get Healthy Get Active" initiative stands as a prime example of how sport initiatives are increasingly being seen through the lens of public health, signalling a shift towards policies that bridge multiple societal goals. This convergence points to the necessity for policies that are holistic and integrated, though it also highlights the complexity of aligning various stakeholders and agendas towards unified outcomes.

Another significant point is the persistent challenges in policy implementation across different governance levels, as evidenced by the studies on Chinese football reform and the Canadian Sport Policy. These challenges are multifaceted, involving logistical hurdles as well as deeper issues related to stakeholder values, goals, and power dynamics. Such complexities underscore the need for nuanced approaches to policy execution that account for the diverse interests and perspectives involved.

The concept of good governance in sport has progressed rapidly, yet there's a clear call for more thoughtful theoretical development. Girginov's critique of governance codes and further review reveals the tension between noble intentions and their practical implications. This suggests a moment for reflection and refinement in governance practices to ensure they are genuinely effective and tailored to the unique needs of sport organisations.

In sum, these studies shed light on the dynamic nature of sport policy and governance, highlighting achievements and ongoing obstacles. Moving forward, embracing a balanced, informed approach that acknowledges the complexity of stakeholder relationships and the specificities of different sporting contexts will be key to crafting impactful and sustainable policies and governance structures.

Annotated Bibliography

Duffell, T., Haycock, D., & Smith, A. (2023). Exploring the increasing interdependence of community sport and health policy in England. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 15(4), 603-618. DOI: 10.1080/19406940.2023.2228800.

This article provides novel insights into the evolving synergy between community sports and health policies within the English context, particularly through the lens of Sport England's Get Healthy Get Active (GHGA) initiative. It underscores the intricate power dynamics and partnerships at both local and national levels, highlighting how Sport England, despite its leadership role in coordinating community sport, relies significantly on external health organisations to achieve its objectives. The study, based on interviews with strategic policymakers, a professional football charity, and participants of the GHGA-funded Active Blues programme, reveals the challenges and dependencies that emerge from the intersection of sport and public health sectors. The findings suggest a nuanced understanding of community sport's contribution to public health, emphasising the need for evidence-based approaches to support the efficacy of sport as a tool for health promotion amidst austerity and shifting policy landscapes.

Girginov, V. (2023). The numbers game: quantifying good governance in sport. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 23(6), 1889-1905. DOI: 10.1080/16184742.2022.2078851.

This article provides an in-depth analysis of the increasing trend towards quantifying good governance in sport organisations. Girginov examines the production, governance, and study of quantification processes in sport governance, utilising a conceptual and position paper approach to scrutinise three international and two national governance codes. The paper sheds light on the significant amount of work required for the development of these codes, their impact on compliance and organisational behaviour, and the complexities involved in their implementation. It critically evaluates the effectiveness of quantification as a tool for governance, arguing that it may not promote self-governance but rather induces meta-governance, raising questions about the autonomy of sport organisations. The study calls for a critical reassessment of the uncritical acceptance of governance codes, advocating for a sport-focused model that respects the unique value systems, local traditions, and institutional frameworks of sport organisations.

Harris, S., Jedlicka, S., Pielke Jr, R., & Ryan, H. (2023). The politics of exclusion: Analysing U.S. state responses to interscholastic transgender athletes. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 15(4), 757-778. DOI: 10.1080/19406940.2023.2242878.

This paper examines the legislative actions against transgender athletes' participation in U.S. interscholastic sports, using Kingdon's multiple streams approach for analysis. The study categorises states into four groups based on

their legislative actions: states with enacted legislation preventing transgender participation, states with introduced legislation, states with no action, and one state with progressive legislation. It highlights the influence of national-level interest groups in policy diffusion and the role of sporting, judicial, and political focusing events in highlighting the perceived problem of transgender inclusion in sports. The findings suggest that these dynamics lead to symbolic politics, driven more by partisan contestation than by addressing the actual issue, calling for alternative solutions to outright exclusion.

Parent, M. M., & Jurbala, P. R. (2023). The process of implementing a multi-level and multi-sectoral national sport policy: cautionary lessons from the inside. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 15(4), 635-653. DOI: 10.1080/19406940.2023.2228824.

This paper provides a critical reflection on the implementation and monitoring of the Canadian Sport Policy (CSP) from 2012 to 2022, through an insider perspective. It discusses the challenges encountered in implementing a national sport policy within a complex governance context, emphasising the role of policy ambiguity, stakeholder conflicts, and the juxtaposition of participation and performance objectives. The authors utilise a multi-governance framework to explore these issues, offering insights into the practical difficulties of implementing broad, consensus-driven policies in federated systems. The study underscores the importance of aligning policy development, implementation, and evaluation, and suggests that resources and dedicated funding are crucial for policy success. It contributes to the understanding of sport policy implementation in multi-level governance systems, highlighting the need for clarity, accountability, and effective stakeholder engagement in policy processes.

Peng, Q., Chen, Z., Li, J., Houlihan, B., & Scelles, N. (2023). The new hope of Chinese football? Youth football reforms and policy conflicts in the implementation process. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 23(6), 1928-1950. DOI: 10.1080/16184742.2022.2083649.

This article investigates the implementation of youth football policies in China post the 2015 national football reform, exploring the extent to which contextual and organisational factors have facilitated or constrained the effective policy implementation. Employing 23 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, the study identifies significant policy conflicts arising from the ambiguous roles and responsibilities across different youth football pathways (i.e., education system, football associations, and professional clubs). The findings highlight the challenges of aligning multiple stakeholders' interests and objectives, suggesting a need for clearer governance structures and collaborative efforts to enhance youth football development. This research contributes to understanding the complexities of sport policy implementation in a rapidly changing socio-political context, offering insights into the interplay between education, sport governance, and policy conflicts.