Sport Governance and Policy

Shushu Chen

Introduction

Sport policy and governance-related articles published in the nine major journals relevant to the discipline in the second half of 2021 were reviewed for this second issue of the Sport Management Digest. The Sport Governance and Policy section features five articles produced by a group of scholars from North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia.

These articles are selected for the second issue because of their relatively strong theoretical contribution to, or the conceptual advances made for, the development of policy and/or governance disciplines, compared to other sport policy/governance-related studies published in the nine journals. Research, addressing policy/governance concerns in passing, is not included in this review. In addition, articles related to several topics (e.g., governance and leadership) are not highlighted here but presented in another section to avoid duplications.

The reviewed articles covered timely and novel topics, including the analysis of transgender athletes-related policies, the assessment of a policy intervention adopted by English Football Leagues for enhancing ethnic minority coaches recruitment, the analysis of trust within the boards of sport national governing bodies, the identification of policy development (as a legacy aspect) as a result of hosting the Olympics, and the investigation of the reasons for opposition to implementing gender balance in sports national and international governing bodies.

All the showcased articles conducted theoretically grounded investigations, and four out of the five papers collected empirical data. Single-method research design and qualitative approaches (semi-structured interviews) were commonly used

in studies relevant to sport governance and policy. A broad range of theories was used to guide the research investigation and to interpret the results including critical race theory, power, capital, habitus and field, trust, legacy identification, and policy implementation tools.

A term that appears most frequently in the reviewed articles in this issue is diversity. Diversity is reflected in the areas of gender diversity, ethnic diversity and special identity inclusion. Researchers analysed relevant policies and practices that were in place to support and promote diversity in different settings They conducted in-depth interviews to further assess the effectiveness of these policies/interventions, identify associated issues, barriers and challenges, as well as to make suggestions for future improvements.

The following section highlights the key messages of each reviewed paper in turn.

Papers in this section review

Relevant to the topic of policy, Stewart et al.'s (2021) study examined the policies and procedures that Australian national sport organisations implemented to support trans athletes' participation in sport. Trans athletes is a fairly new topic that we know little about, concerning the management and inclusion of trans athletes at both elite and non-elite levels globally. Stewart et al. (2021) examined the nine selected sport organisations and reported that only two out of the nine national sport organisations have set up specific policies to support trans athlete's participation. A general sense shared by the interviewees was that the underfunded and under resources situation has caused the slow progress being made to support trans athletes. In addition, a lack of understanding of trans athletes' engagement in sport amongst both their

employees and the public was another reported challenge to effective policymaking. These created barriers and reduced opportunities for trans athletes to engage in sport. Drawing on policy enactment theory, the research team echoed that local and national contexts were influential in shaping policy, and acknowledged the values of the administrators within those organisations (who were tasked with the creation of the policies), whereby, as policy actors, they have played a key role in the policy formation on trans inclusion; but not many policy actors were found from the those interviewed organisations.

To enhance racial diversity, the English Football League recently introduced a Voluntary Recruitment Code (VRC) that was designed to establish inclusive practices of coach recruitment and increase the representation of minoritized coaches in first-team coaching operations at men's professional football clubs in England. Bradbury and Conricode (2021) examined this racial equality measure and reported the limited effectiveness of the VRC at English football clubs. They suggest that, from a critical race theory perspective (Hylton, 2009), to gain effectively change, adopted measures should be interventionist and transformative enough, to challenge and disrupt policy intentions and the normativity of whiteness in professional football coaching contexts.

In relation to gender diversity, Knoppers, Spaaij and Claringbould (2021) expanded our understanding of the development of gender equity in the context of sport. Focusing on the implications of sport governance, they explored how sport governing bodies (including national Olympic committees, national and international sport federations) valued diversity and address gender balance. Informed by Foucault's (1972) conceptualisation of discourse and techniques of power, as well as Bourdieu's (1984) notions of capital, field and habitus, the authors suggest that

resistance to having more women on boards has roots in the sport as a field. Such resistance might be linked to challenges to organisational habitus, particularly in the field of sport (where the masculine identity of men might be perceived as more closely aligned with sport, compared to women), and often comes from those who are in governance positions and endorse the status quo.

Chen et al. (2021) carried out a policy documents analysis, intending to explore whether there was a *policy* legacy – in addition to other commonly known legacy aspects (e.g., economic, social, environmental legacies) – associated with the staging of the Olympics. They argued that China was an interesting case, in the sense that China was the first country to host all versions of the Olympics within a 15-year period (Beijing 2008 Summer Games, Nanjing 2014 Youth Olympics, and Beijing-Zhangjiakou Winter Olympics). This unique feature provided one wave after another of Olympic impetus for policy change. They examined changes in policy patterns occurring between the two Olympic Games events; importantly, they teased out *Olympic-led* policy changes and confirmed the existence of policy legacies of the Olympics, reporting that policy learning occurred as a result of hosting the two Olympic Games; the two Games enhanced the state and sporting governing bodies' policy making capability in the overall planning of the event hosting and legacy leveraging (by integrating the Games with other state priorities, rather than treating the event hosting as a stand-alone mission).

In the context of sport governance, previous research has identified trust as a critical mechanism for cooperation in board governance (Hoye & Cuskelly, 2003), yet a more coherent and conceptual understanding of trust in the governance of non-profit sport organisations was lacking. The key contribution of Fahrner and Harris' (2021) work, with German national sport governing bodies, has its theoretical and

empirical value for analysing trust in a sport govenance context. Whilst confirming the relationships between trust and the boards' structural features and individual characteristics of the board members, this work validated the 21-item measure of trust developed by Costa and Anderson (2011). The authors call for more empirical studies to be done at the international level and to explore the processes and mechanisms that can influence trust within the sport context.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this range of articles helped broaden our understanding of policy and governance as contemporary paradigms for sport management research. Particularly, concerning policy/intervention effectiveness, a consensus view is that creating changes by merely amending policy/intervention in the operational process, without challenging or changing the underpinned structure and operational culture, bears little fundamental influence. Collectively, these papers seem to call for a higher level of change (i.e. the third-order change, Bartunek & Moch, 1987) to the means used to deal with various diversity issues in the field, rather than implementing first or/and second-order change.

Moreover, it is critical to acknowledge that individual behaviours/actions can have an impact on the effectiveness of policies/practices. Whilst we appreciate that (1) the dynamic social context, (2) existing organisational resources, and (3) the knowledge and skills of stakeholders who respond and implement policies/practices can influence and shape policy at a micro level, a key noteworthy point is that there is a clear distinction, in terms of individual behaviours, between *rational* actions (reply on prior knowledge and belief), *intentional* actions (characterised by moral and ethical principles), and *no*-actions (for example, as Knoppers, Spaaij and Claringbould (2021) revealed that being silent about implementing diversity has

discursive power). From the perspective of middle-range theory (Merton, 1968), this awareness helps to identify mechanism-based explanations.

Annotated bibliography

Stewart, L., O'Halloran, P., Oates, J., Sherry, E., & Storr, R. (2021). Developing trans-athlete policy in Australian National Sport Organizations. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, *13*(4), 565-585. **https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2021.1955727**
The authors, researchers at La Trobe Univesity and Swinburne University, use interviews to explore why Australian national sport organisations create, develop and implement their policies relevant to trans-athletes. Representatives of nine national sport organisations, serving as senior-level employees, are interviewed. Guided by Ball's (2003) policy implementation framework, data were subject to thematic analysis. The findings reveal that only two out of the interviewed nine national sport organisations have had specific policies that assist trans athletes to participate in sport. Trans athlete policy-making and procedures are managed differently in different sport organisations because their related community and elite level of sport are associated with different policy issues. Restricted by the underfunded and under-resourced situation, slow and little progress is made for trans athletes inclusion. In addition, it is noted that the context and nature of community-level sport are different from that of elite level sport in Australia and therefore different policies should be adopted to support trans athletes inclusion.

Bradbury, S., & Conricode, D. (2021). Meaningful change or 'more of the same': the voluntary recruitment code in men's professional football coaching in England. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, *13*(4), 661-678. **https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2021.1915849**
The authors, researchers at Loughborough University, examine stakeholders perceptions and reflections on the implementation and effectiveness of the Voluntary Recruitment Code (VRC), adopted by the English Football League, on stimulating the conditions through which equality of opportunities, experiences and outcomes for minoritised coaches might be realised. Informed by critical race theory, the research team conduct 45 semi-structured interviews with chief executive officers at clubs, football stakeholder representatives, and minorities coaches. They reveal that there is a clear resistance towards the implementation of the VRC at clubs and some key principles and guidance of the VRC (such as operating a full recruitment process and shortlisting candidates from minoritized backgrounds) are not engaged or implemented. To improve, a more consultative process of policy formation, which requires a mandatory formalised obligation for all English Football League clubs to adhere to the key principles of VRC, is recommended.

Knoppers, A., Spaaij, R., & Claringbould, I. (2021). Discursive resistance to gender diversity in sport governance: sport as a unique field? *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, *13*(3), 517-529. **https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2021.1915848**
The authors, researchers at Utrecht University of School of Governance, Victoria University, and the University of Amsterdam, use semi-structured interviews with 60 board members drawn from national Olympic committees, national and international sport federations from Australia and Netherlands, to identify practices that may prevent or limit the implementation of measures to increase gender balance in sport governance and to explore the reasons for discursive opposition to implementing gender balance. The research reveals that board members use excuses such as meritocracy and neoliberalism to maintain male privilege and resist gender balance.

Chen, S., Preuss, H., Hu, X., Kenyon, J., & Liang, X. (2021). Sport Policy Development in China: Legacies of Beijing's 2008 Summer Olympic Games and 2022 Winter Olympic Games. *Journal of Global Sport Management*, *6*(3), 234-263. **https://doi.org/10.1080/24704067.2019.1566756**
The authors, researchers at the University of Birmingham, the Johannes Gutenberg-University, Tsinghua University and Loughborough University, analyse sport policy changes that occurred as a result of the hosting of the 2008 and 2022 Olympic Games in China. Guided by Preuss's (2015) event legacy identification framework, they analyse policy documents (sourcing from 115 policy and strategical documents published between 2001 and 2016 and performing an in-depth analysis of the 35 documents in the final review) and report that China's two bidding experiences help to streamline the legacy planning processes for sporting mega-events. Policy improvements are evidenced in (1) designing legacy-focused, rather than impact-focused, policies and strategies; (2) strategically linking the hosting mission with other state priorities; and (3) using the Games to drive and influence a wide range of economic and social development that is beyond sport. The authors suggest that the findings might be useful for future host countries such as Italy which have Olympic hosting missions that are close to each other (such as Turin 2006 and Milano/Cortina 2026). The paper ends with a discussion of the implications associated with strategic policy planning for future Olympics hosts.

Fahrner, M., & Harris, S. (2021). Trust within sport NGB boards: association with board structure and board member characteristics. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, *21*(4), 524-543. **https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2020.1757735**
The authors, researchers at the University of Tűbingen and the University of Colorado, examine the association of trust and structural features within national governing bodies' boards, and put forward a conceptual framework for understanding trust in the governance of sport organisations drawing from previous work (Mayer et al., 1995; McKnight et al., 1998; Luhmann, 2000;

Costa & Anderson, 2011; De Jong et al., 2016). They collect online surveys completed by 242 boards members from 65 German national governing bodies. Results from performing probit models confirm that trust is associated with the board structural features (e.g.board size and type) and individual characteristics of the board members (e.g., board members' skill differentiation).

Reference

Ball, S.J., (2003). *Politics and policymaking in education: explorations in policy sociology*. London: Routledge.

Bartunek, J. M., & Moch, M. K. (1987). First-Order, Second-Order, and Third-Order Change and Organization Development Interventions: A Cognitive Approach. *The journal of applied behavioral science*, *23*(4), 483-500. https://doi.org/10.1177/002188638702300404

Bourdieu, P., (1984). *Distinction*. London: Routledge.

Costa, A. C., & Anderson, N. (2011). Measuring trust in teams: Development and validation of a multifaceted measure of formative and reflective indicators of team trust. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, *20*(1), 119–154. https://doi.org/10.1080/13594320903272083

Foucault, M., (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language*. London: Routledge.

Hoye, R., & Cuskelly, G. (2003). Board-executive relationships within voluntary sport organisations. *Sport Management Review*, *6*(1), 53–74. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1441-3523(03)70053-9

Hylton, K., (2009). *Race and sport: critical race theory*. London: Routledge.

Mayer, R. C., Davis, J. H., & Schoorman, F. D. (1995). An integrative model of organizational trust. *The Academy of Management Review*, *20*(3), 709–734. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1995.9508080335

Merton, R. K. (1968). *Social Theory and Social Structure*. The Free Press.

McKnight, D. H., Cummings, L. L., & Chervany, N. L. (1998). Initial trust formation in new organizational relationships. *The Academy of Management Review*, *23*(3), 473–490. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1998.926622

Luhmann, N. (2000). Familiarity, confidence, trust: Problems and alternatives. In D. Gambetta (Ed.), *Trust: Making and breaking cooperative relations* (pp. 94–107). Department of Sociology, University of Oxford. http://www.sociology.ox.ac.uk/papers/luhmann94-107.pdf

Costa, A. C., & Anderson, N. (2011). Measuring trust in teams: Development and validation of a multifaceted measure of formative and reflective indicators of team trust. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, *20*(1), 119–154. https://doi.org/10.1080/13594320903272083

De Jong, B. A., Dirks, K. T., & Gillespie, N. (2016). Trust and team performance: A meta-analysis of main effects, moderators, and covariates. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *101*(8), 1134-1150. https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000110