

Sport Governance and Policy

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Introduction

This section offers a review of a selection of articles relevant to the topics of sport policy and sport governance published in the major sports journals in the second half of 2022. A total of six articles (all sport policy-focused), produced by scholars from Europe and North America, are highlighted here. The study topics include: LGBT+ policies, policy impact on the development of sport and physical activity participation, the influence of macro-environment on the field of sport policy and management, sport policy analysis framework, and sport policy initiatives evaluations.

This collection of articles featured one systematic review, two policy documents reviews, one commendatory piece, and two empirical studies. A wide range of theories was used to guide the research investigation and/or to support the interpretation of the findings. These included Foucault's analysis of ideas, ideology, knowledge and power; Eisenstadt's multiple modernities; Henry's account of sports/cultural policy orientations; policy analysis and implementation frameworks; and a theory-based evaluation model.

These articles were selected because, compared to other sport policy-related studies published in the major sports journals, they made a relatively strong theoretical contribution to, or conceptual advances for, the development of policy and/or governance disciplines. This review does not include research that touches on policy/governance issues in passing, or where only the findings of the studies were relevant to sport policy in terms of practical implications. In addition, in order to avoid duplication of presentation, some articles may not have been highlighted here, but discussed in another section (e.g., leadership).

The key messages from each of the papers reviewed are highlighted in turn in the following section.

Advances in sport governance and policy research

A research topic that has garnered increasing interest and has been a recurring theme in recent issues of SMD concerns the LGBT+. Spurdens and Bloyce's work adds to the literature by providing a discourse analysis of the equality, diversity and inclusion policies across a range of English National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and other sports organisations. Drawing on the work of Foucault, Spurdens and Bloyce examined the ways in which power and knowledge shaped policy development and implementation. They highlighted that 'equality-proofing' was a common exercise adopted by many English NGBs, whereby NGBs claimed to be LGBT+ inclusive, but provided little evidence to support this via setting up specific policy targets. It became clear that the dominant discourse that NGBs were perpetuating was 'we are doing something', 'we have ticked the box'. Spurdens and Bloyce concluded that most NGBs have developed little policy to support structural transformation for the LGBT community from a social justice approach. Their work is important as it highlights the need for greater attention to be paid to the policies and practices of NGBs in promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion for the LGBT+ community. It also underscores the importance of taking a critical policy analysis approach to understand the ways in which power and knowledge shape policy development and implementation in sport.

A systematic mixed studies review of the impact of sport policies on physical activity (PA) and sport participation was carried out recently by a group of European researchers from Ireland, the Netherlands and Poland (Volf, Kelly, Bengoechea, Casey, Gelius, Messing, Forberger, Lakerveld, Braver, Zukowska, & Woods, 2022). By identifying seven policy actions (such as financial support, and initiatives providing free access to certain target demographic) that can impact sport and PA participation, the authors concluded that, while sport policies can have a positive impact on physical activity and sport participation, evidence was not consistent across all interventions.

They highlighted that certain policy actions may even lead to displacement impact. The study emphasised the need for clear policy objectives, well-designed interventions, and advocated for the use of robust evaluation frameworks (such as realist evaluation) to determine the effectiveness of policy interventions.

Henry's observation and summary of the evolution of sport policy and management within the changing macro-environment over the last 40 years are thought-provoking. By highlighting the shifts in international relations, modernization processes, political ideologies, and the production of truth, Henry's analysis adds depth and nuance to the understanding of the field. With an intention to help sport policy and management professionals understand and adapt to the complex and diverse global environment in which they operate, Henry identified four themes: (a) there is a shift in international relations from a bi-polar to a multi-polar model; (b) teleological assumptions concerning the development of western models of modernization, and their replacement with accounts of multiple modernities have caused challenges in practice; (c) the emergence of Populism and the changing nature of political ideology and sport policy, coupled with (d) the undermining of notions of truth in public discourse, meant that sport managers/policy-makers need to understand and resist the use of sport in promoting negative, non-inclusionary ideological messages.

Jedlicka, Harris and Houlihan's critiques and synthesis of several policy analysis frameworks used in sport management are useful. By applying the interpretive policy analysis framework, the Multiple Streams Framework, Punctuated Equilibrium Theory, and the Advocacy Coalition Framework to analyse the policy process relating to the passing of the SafeSport Act in the United States, the authors pointed out that overly reliant on rationalist approaches to policy analysis could limit the usefulness in understanding the complex and contested nature of sport policy issues. They suggested

possible revisions to include for example a greater emphasis on critical policy analysis and a more nuanced understanding of power and politics in sport policy.

Focusing on policy implementation, Lachance and Parent explored the Canadian Official Languages Act's implementation and impact on collaboration between national sports organisations and Quebec provincial/territorial-level sports organisations in the Canadian sport system. Guided by Van Meter and Van Horn's policy implementation model, via document analysis and interviews with stakeholders, Lachance and Parent concluded that, although some enforcement activities related to the Act were problematic, the implementation of the Act in the Canadian sport system seemed to bring successful results. They also highlighted the importance of bilingualism in leadership and staff of national sports organisations.

Relevant to policy evaluation, Ricour, De Bosscher and Shibli adopted a case study approach (focusing on the location of Flanders (Belgium)) to evaluate the initiatives taken by Flemish national governing bodies to optimise organised youth sport and promote participation. Using documentation and focus group interview data, the authors interrogated the underlying mechanisms and strategies behind these initiatives. They shed light on the challenges and limitations of these initiatives, such as the lack of a sound strategic basis and short-sighted focus. The authors reiterated the existing demand for the utilisation of a theory-based evaluation methodology.

Conclusion

By highlighting (1) the need for more effective policy implementation, (2) theory-based evaluation of policy impact, (3) offering lip-serving inclusive policies, and (4) more collaborative and evidence-based approaches to policymaking, this collection of studies has important implications for policymakers and sport organisations. They provided valuable insights and frameworks for understanding the complex and contested nature

of sport policy issues and offered important recommendations for future policy development and implementation.

Coincidentally, the above-selected articles cover different stages of policy-making cycle, ranging from policy/intervention design, and policy implementation, to policy evaluation/analysis. It also reminds us that not only the effectiveness of policy can be affected by various points of policy formulation, but also the entry points for policy research can be diverse and the examination of individual stages can provide valuable insights into policy process. As an academic professional, I urge the academic community to direct more attention towards policy evaluation – an area that has been relatively overlooked. It is crucial to recognise that policy effectiveness is not solely a matter of concern for the government and governing bodies, but rather requires active participation and support from the academic field. Academics have a vital role to play in providing unbiased and independent perspectives on the impacts of policies, thereby informing decision-making processes.

Annotated bibliography

Spurdens, B., & Bloyce, D. (2022). Beyond the rainbow: a discourse analysis of English sports organisations LGBT+ equality diversity and inclusion policies, International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics, 14(3), 507-527, DOI: 10.1080/19406940.2022.2080245

This study analyses the effectiveness of current LGBT+ equality policies in English sports organizations. The authors, researchers at the University of Chester, UK, review 188 National Governing Body policies and 67 policies from other relevant organizations and carry out a Foucauldian discourse analysis to identify the dominant narratives within the policies. The authors suggest that while organizations gesture towards change, there is a partial stasis where organizations fail to implement concrete changes in their policies. The authors describe this process as 'equality-proofing'. The paper contributes to the field of

sport policy governance by highlighting the need for organizations to go beyond superficial gestures towards equality and implement concrete changes to support LGBT+ inclusion.

Volf, K., Kelly, L., Bengoechea, E., Casey, B., Gelius, P., Messing, S., Forberger, S., Lakerveld, J., Braver, N., Zukowska, J., & Woods, C., (2022). Evidence of the impact of sport policies on physical activity and sport participation: a systematic mixed studies review, International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics, 14(4), 697-712, DOI: 10.1080/19406940.2022.2127835

This study carries out a systematic mixed studies review of the impact of sport policies on physical activity and sport participation. The authors, researchers from the University of Limerick (Ireland), Sport Ireland, Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, Leibniz Institute for Prevention Research and Epidemiology (Germany), Amsterdam Public Health Research Institute, de Boelelaan 1089a (the Netherlands), and Gdansk University of Technology (Poland), review 93 articles and report that sport policies can positively impact physical activity and sport participation, especially when they are well-implemented and supported by effective strategies. However, evidence of reaching hard-to-reach groups is limited.

Henry, I., (2022). Processes of political, cultural, and social fragmentation: changes in the macro-environment of sport policy and management: c.1980–c.2022, European Sport Management Quarterly, 22(5), 705-725, DOI: 10.1080/16184742.2022.2046122

This paper examines changes in the macro-environment of sport policy and management from 1980 to 2022. The author, a researcher from Loughborough University (UK), highlights the key changes in the past four decades and how the political, cultural, and social fragmentation have influenced the field of sport policy and management. The author calls for policy and management to adapt to the new realities and recommends that managers continue to make decisions based on evidence and based on publicly accepted standards of truth.

Jedlicka, S., Harris, S., & Houlihan, B., (2022). Policy Analysis in Sport Management Revisited: A Critique and Discussion, Journal of Sport Management, 36, 521-533. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2021-0193>

This paper provides a critical analysis and discussion of policy analysis frameworks in sport management. The authors, researchers from the Washington State University (USA), University of Colorado (USA), Loughborough University (UK), and Norwegian School of Sport Sciences (Norway), highlight the limitations and challenges of traditional policy analysis frameworks in the context of sport management and suggest alternative approaches should be used that are more in line with the specific characteristics of sport organisations and their stakeholders. The paper contributes to the field of sport policy governance by calling for a more context-specific approach to policy analysis in sport management.

Lachance, E., & Parent, M., (2023). Policy implementation and collaboration in a federated sport system: the case of the official languages act, International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics, 15(1), 63-79, DOI: 10.1080/19406940.2023.2166564

This paper examines policy implementation and collaboration in the context of a federated sport system using the example of the Official Languages Act in Canada. The authors, researchers from Brock University and the University of Ottawa, Canada, summarise the importance of bilingualism and cultural awareness in leadership and staff of national sports organisations, and the need for a more purposeful monitoring and evaluation process by the enforcing agency to aid policy implementation activities.

Ricour, M., De Bosscher, V., & Shibli, S., (2023). The logic behind the initiatives of national governing bodies in Flanders to improve organised youth sport: A theory-based evaluation approach, International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics, 15(1), 81-108, DOI: 10.1080/19406940.2022.2161595

This paper uses a theory-based evaluation approach to examine the initiatives of national governing bodies in Flanders to increase sport and PA participation rates and improve the quality of youth sport in their affiliated sport clubs. The authors, researchers from Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Belgium) and Sheffield Hallam University (UK), point out both implementation failure (such as lack of practical quality guidance) and theory failure (such as the focus on achieving short-term performance, rather than long-term development). This study provides

valuable insights into the strategies and mechanisms used by national governing bodies to optimise youth sport provision in clubs.