

## Sport governance and policy

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# **Sport Management Digest (2021-22, Issue One)**

## **A Section Review of the Topic of Sport Governance and Policy**

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### **Introduction**

Across the nine Journals reviewed, the number of selected articles relevant to the topic of sport governance and policy is relatively high, in comparison with other topic sections in the Digest. There are in total nine articles showcased here that are produced by twenty scholars from North America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia.

The nine articles are selected for the Digest because of their relatively strong theoretical contribution to, or the conceptual advances made for, the development of policy and/or governance disciplines, comparing to other sport policy/governance-related studies published in the nine journals reviewed. Studies merely mentioning their implications to policy learning without any further theoretical elaborations, or only addressing policy/governance concerns in passing, were not included for the Digest.

### **Papers in this section review**

The nine studies on change, impact or issues pertinent to policy and governance have devoted their attention to the areas of inter-organisational relationships between governmental stakeholders, sport soft power strategies and tactics, stadium development, gender-related issues (e.g., the recruitment and selection process for board members in sports federations, and policy design for girls' practice of sport), football policy (implementation and integration), boards roles in football clubs, leadership innovation, and national level governance convergence.

Although this range of topics is not new, the focused contexts are somewhat different, or researchers have examined their cases through different theoretical lenses, and hence they

facilitate a contextual and robust understanding of the examined issues and phenomena and help broaden research in terms of taking consideration into other values and ideologies. For example, the application of Western policy and politics concepts and principles in a non-Western context (Kang & Houlihan, 2021) highlights how soft power operates in a different geopolitical environment and demonstrates its value in understanding international relations. Together, these papers have underscored the importance of examining policy/governance functions and effects in a particular context, and linked issues and concerns examined in the context of sport to its implication at broad social, economic and/or cultural levels.

Within those studies that have indicated their philosophical perspectives, the majority rest on the philosophical position of critical realism, and only one study positions itself within the interpretative paradigm. Policy/governance studies are largely defined by formulaic approaches, with little innovation in research design. Case studies, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, are amongst the research approaches commonly used. There is one study that adopts a mixed-methods approach for investigation.

There are five empirical papers that use qualitative approaches, two adopt historical analyses for policy changes and development, one performs documents (policy, media and literature) analysis, and one study proposes a theoretical framework for examining governance convergence in sport.

The level of theoretical engagement across the nine selected papers is high. A broad range of theories has been used to guide the research investigation and interpret the results, including resource-dependency theory, stewardship theory, dynamic capabilities, soft power, inter-organisational theory, institutional theory, inequality regimes, urban governance, and the multiple streams framework. Collectively, this range of articles has helped broaden our

understanding of policy and governance as contemporary paradigms for sport management research.

Relevant to the topic of sport policy, Attali and Bazoge's (2021) historical analysis of French public policies relevant to girls' access to sport published since 1945 is a useful piece, demonstrating that policy has evolved to adapt to social changes and economic needs, and is influenced by the change of political ideology in decision making.

Thus, this attention to the policy making process and the awareness of some potential broader influential factors that might have an impact on the issues examined are valuable points to highlight. For example, Friedman and Beissel (2020) place the topic of sport facility development into the context of the broader assumption of how sports have been used for achieving particular public goals, advocating the use of a holistic approach to facilitate the understanding of urban development and governance.

In relation to the topic of soft power, theoretical advancement, and its relevance to the field of sport, have been made in previous studies. The key contribution of Kang and Houlihan's (2021) work is its empirical value of detailing the operationalisation of soft power strategy over a medium and long period. They review policy development over the past 40 years of the case of South Korea and conclude that sport is a prominent element in soft power strategy that the South Korean government deploys as part of the diplomatic resources. The authors call for more empirical studies on measuring the impacts and effectiveness of sport soft power strategies.

Previous research has predominately focused on the measurement of governance. McLeod, Shilbury and Zeimers' (2021) study expands our understanding of governance by delineating the process of governance in terms of how governance convergence occurs in the context of sport. They adapt Jamali and Neville's (2011) institutional framework and add a

new element - governance convergence – to examine the drivers and barriers of the adoption of good governance principles in Indian sport.

Another study led by McLeod and his colleagues (2021) articulate the roles of board directors of Scottish football clubs. Although the roles of sports boards have been a focused research area in early sport governance research, few empirical studies examine ‘for-profit’ or professional sports organisations. McLeod, Shibury and Ferkins (2021) extend the literature and look into Scottish professional football clubs. They suggest adopting a multi-theoretical (stewardship theory and resource dependency theory) approach to unpack the complex dynamics of governance research.

Also guided by resource dependency theory, Jacob, De Bosscher and Venter (2021) explore inter-organisational relationships between governmental stakeholders in South African elite sport. They highlight the advantage of using resource dependency theory in explaining the complexities associated with power differences and dynamics between different levels of stakeholders.

Departing from organisation literature, Harris and his colleagues (2021) argue that governance is a useful category to be added into the existing three major organisational approaches (i.e., organisation theory, organisation behaviour, and strategic management) for studying sport management. When assessing the performance of the U.S. Olympic National Governing Bodies (NGBs), Harris Metzger and Duening (2021) suggest embracing dynamic capabilities analysis to understand how NGBs perform and maintain competitive advantage through innovation.

Gender and equality are also the focused topics in sports governance. Whether acknowledged or ignored, gender power imbalance exists in society and organisations. When examining the recruitment and selection process to boards in Polish sports federations,

Organista (2021) reveals that gender skewness in the governance of sports federation is perceived by female employees on the one hand, and on the other hand, the male respondents, seem not to understand the importance of gender in male-dominated Polish sports federations.

Focusing on another male-dominated sporting context – football, Valenti, Peng and Rocha (2021) investigate three countries' implementation of a policy initiative that aims to raise women's football profile and visibility. They conclude that various factors relevant to inequality, the policy and the political streams play a role in formulating and developing such a policy initiative, but obliging men's clubs to invest in women's football might not be a long-term sustainability approach to address the inequality issues.

To conclude, governance and policy continue to be important fields of enquiry for sport. This group of the reviewed papers, which have engaged with a process of theoretically informed empirical analysis, contribute to evidence-based policy learning and understanding of the organising and control of sport. Future research areas encouraged include process-based understanding of governance and policy, and the intertwined relationship between policy and governance (e.g., examining the impact of a government policy on the governance of sports organisations).

## **Annotated bibliography**

**Attali, M., & Bazoge, N. (2021). Accessing sport through education. Policy frameworks for girls' practice of sport in France from 1945 to today. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 13(2), 225-240.**

**<https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2020.1832135>**

The authors, researchers at University Rennes and University Grenoble Alpes, use a historical approach to analyse French public policies relevant to girls' access to sport published since 1945, focusing on the education context. The content of over 300 official documents is subject to critical analysis. Attention is placed on analysing the publications' text, structure and context, and policy choices made and operations procedures for the configuration of girls' PE are systematically examined. The findings suggest that points on naturalist representations, biological and cultural

attitudes towards girls constitute key explanations to a gendered division of sporting practices in France. Forms of education (through sport) were exercised to address social structural issues such as the domination of masculinity. There was a defined set of restrictions and prohibitions in physical education for girls in France before the 1980s, and official instructions for PE teaching separated boys from girls. Changes were made later in educational policies to ensure girls and boys can access equal opportunities. In the early 2000s, political actions were taken to address sexist stereotypes by integrating the process of gender socialisation. Gender concept related discourse was reduced by the end of the 2000s and moved towards the promotion of equality culture in general.

**Friedman, M. T., & Beissel, A. S. (2021). Beyond “who pays?”: stadium development and urban governance. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, 22(1), 107-125. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSMS-04-2020-0053>**

The authors, researchers at the University of Maryland and Miami University, examine sports facility development and the public use of sports facilities from 1990 to 2020, focusing specifically on stadium and area subsidisation policies relevant to the US baseball stadiums. Through an integrated approach that combines public purpose with urban governance frameworks, they conclude that the nature of stadium construction has changed and influenced by the change of the public governance nature, and note that the assessment of stadium development needs to be placed within a political context and broader policy environment in order to shed the light on the efficacy and impacts of subsidization policies.

**Jacobs, S., De Bosscher, V., & Venter, R. (2021). Inter-organisational Relationships between Governmental Stakeholders in South African elite sport: Resource dependency and inter-organisational theoretical perspectives. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 13(1), 123-142. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2021.1877171>**

The authors, researchers at Stellenbosch University and Vrije Universiteit Brussel, examine inter-organisational relationships between provincial and national governmental elite sport stakeholders in South African, drawing from the theoretical framework of resource dependency and inter-organisational relationship theory. They conduct semi-structured interviews with ten provincial and national governmental stakeholders in elite sport, and conclude that there is a lack of clarity on the roles and responsibilities of governmental sport stakeholders; too many entities involved in sport has led to power struggles and non-cooperation, and a high dependency on government occurs because of lack of funding.

**Harris, S. J., Metzger, M. L., & Duening, T. N. (2021). Innovation in national governing bodies of sport: investigating dynamic capabilities that drive growth. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 21(1), 94-115. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2020.1725090>**

The authors, researchers at the University of Colorado, use semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders of four national governing bodies of sport in the US to examine the effect of dynamic capabilities on the performance of the 3 M outcomes (i.e., members, medals and money) of the four selected bodies. The findings suggest that

whilst the examined high performing NGBs demonstrate various capability-routines (which are largely aligned with the 3M goals), low performing NGBs' lack adoption of some basic routines of dynamic capabilities. Such differences are influenced by the historical structural context. Consequently, it leads to a difficulty in effective adaptation for low performing NGBs in response to the continually changing competitive landscape.

**Kang, Y., & Houlihan, B. (2021). Sport as a diplomatic resource: the case of South Korea, 1970-2017. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 13(1), 45-63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2021.1877169>**

The authors, researchers at Loughborough University, use semi-structured interviews with key officials from the various government Ministries and official government documents to reveal how the South Korean government has used sport as part of soft power assets for diplomatic purposes, intertwined with domestic political objectives, during the period of 2070 to 2017. They find that sport soft power resources have been deployed in four main areas: maximising elite sport success, hosting sports mega-events, achieving prominence in international sports organisations and supporting sports development and peace initiatives. Sport soft power initiatives are used for gaining international exchange, international support and international cooperation as well as national prestige. Such sophisticated planning and the deployment of a range of soft power instruments over the past 40 years is strongly influenced by the complex regional geopolitical environment that South Korea situates.

**McLeod, J., Shilbury, D., & Zeimers, G. (2021). An Institutional Framework for Governance Convergence in Sport: The Case of India. *Journal of Sport Management*, 35(2), 144. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2020-0035>**

The authors, researchers at Deakin University, propose a theoretical framework for governance convergence in sport, drawing primarily on institutional theory. They carry out 32 semi-interviews with key stakeholders operated in the sector of sport to test the framework empirically, examining the drivers and barriers of the adoption of the 'good governance' principles (transparency, democratic processes, internal accountability and control, and social responsibility) in Indian sport. The findings confirm the effectiveness of the framework as a tool for understanding the process of how governance convergence occurs in sport and revealed how isomorphism works in the sport context. There is a complex interplay of drivers (e.g., coercive pressures, normative pressure, and national institutional pressures) and barriers (e.g., rent-seeking actions and cultural norms) deriving from three different institutional levels (i.e., the historically grown national institutional framework; organisational field, and organisational actors).

**McLeod, J., Shilbury, D., & Ferkins, L. (2021). Board roles in Scottish football: an integrative stewardship-resource dependency theory. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 21(1), 39-57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2019.1699141>**



The authors, researchers at Deakin University and Auckland University of Technology, examine the roles of sport boards, guided by an integrated framework drawn from stewardship theory and resource dependency theory. They carry out 24 interviews with directors from six Scottish football clubs. The findings conclude five board roles – control, service, operations, resource co-optation and strategy, and further reveal that different to conventional businesses, club owners are reported to have non-financial motivations but mainly interest in on-field performance (which aligns with club managers’ interests), and the variation in size and structure of the clubs has implications on the perceptions of board roles.

**Organista, N. (2021). Gendering of recruitment and selection processes to boards in Polish sports federations. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 13(2), 259-280. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2020.1859587>**

The author, at the Józef Piłsudski University of Physical Education, examines the recruitment and selection policies of Polish sports federations and identifies gender inequality factors that penetrate into the recruitment and selection process, through the theoretical concepts of organisational logic and inequality regimes. The researcher undertakes interviews with 24 staff members who hold leadership positions at boards of 18 Polish Olympic sports federations, or management positions in the sports federations. The findings suggest that whilst the selection policy is in principle democratic, the main barriers to creating gender-balanced boards are reported differently between women and men: the female interviewees suggest that there is a lack of trust in women in sport and the old boys’ network plays a role in limiting women’s chance; whereas the male interviewees suggest there is lack of willingness and commitment from women to take up leadership roles.

**Valenti, M., Peng, Q., & Rocha, C. (2021). Integration between women’s and men’s football clubs: a comparison between Brazil, China and Italy. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 13(2), 321-339. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2021.1903967>**

The authors, researchers at Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Stirling, examine the timing and the context under which national football associations from the countries of Brazil, China and Italy implement the FIFA’s global strategy for women football development, specifically relevant to the policy demanding men’s football clubs to integrate a women’s team within their structure. Using the multiple streams framework, the authors conduct secondary data analysis of the official policy documents, media reports and past related literature respectively for the three cases focused. They conclude that whilst the development of policies can be gradual, changes made in policies for the development of women’s football occur in face of external pressures from neighbouring and rival football countries and increased societal need for promoting gender equality. National associations are urged to find solutions to address the declining performances of women’s national teams and the relatively low grassroots participation rate.