

Introduction

The need for critical reflection on good governance in sport

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Few observers of sport governance will be surprised to see the publication of an edited volume on good governance in sport. ‘Good governance’ has indeed assumed the status of a mantra in the world of sport, even if it only recently made its way into critical debates about sport governance. In 2008, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) did much to promote the concept in sport when it introduced the ‘Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance of the Olympic and Sports Movement’ (IOC 2008). However, at that time, the quality of the governance of sport, and of sport governing bodies in particular, had already been under serious scrutiny for at least a decade. At the end of the 1990s, sport governing bodies’ lack of serious commitment to the fight against doping in sport as well as the Salt Lake City corruption scandal involving IOC officials undermined trust in sport leaders and increased calls for transparency, democracy and accountability as well as more ethical conduct (Geeraert & Drieskens 2021). A series of governance failures and corruption scandals have since galvanised these demands (Henry & Lee 2004). The most significant ones have been the highly mediatised ethical scandals enveloping *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* (FIFA) and International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF, now ‘World Athletics’) in 2015 (Chappelet & Mrkonjic 2019).

Governmental actors and the sport world have labelled this broad agenda in terms of ‘good governance’.¹ At the international level, for instance, the European Union institutions, the Council of Europe and UNESCO have all called upon sport bodies to implement principles of good governance (e.g. Council of Europe 2016; European Parliament 2015; Parliamentary Assembly Council of Europe 2018; UNESCO 2015). The sport movement has responded to this external pressure. The IOC introduced the aforementioned Principles of Good Governance in response to increased regulatory threats by the European Union (Chappelet 2016). In 2016, following the FIFA and IAAF corruption scandals, the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF), an association of the 28 international sport federations that are part of the Summer Olympic Programme, introduced the ‘Key Governance Principles and Basic Indicators’ (ASOIF 2016). This attention for good governance at the international level has trickled down to

the national and local levels. Good governance policies in sport at these levels are also inspired by similar, long-standing initiatives relating to the business, culture and volunteering sectors. In sum, good governance is now firmly on the agenda of an increasing number of public and sport authorities at all levels. They are introducing codifications of principles of good governance in sport organisations as well as specific policies to induce implementation (ASOIF 2016; Chappelet & Mrkonjic 2019; EU Expert Group Good Governance 2013; Geeraert 2019; IOC 2008; Walters & Tacon 2018).

Despite its salience in sport policies and governance discourse, good governance in sport remains a somewhat underexplored research topic (Parent & Hoye 2018). This book engages in critical reflection on good governance in sport in two ways. First, it seeks to outline and critically reflect on key theoretical perspectives that lead to different conceptualisations and prescriptions of governance. Second, it aims to question and challenge different practical strategies that have been employed to achieve the implementation of good governance principles in sport organisations. In doing so, it aims to take a first step towards filling important gaps in the sport governance literature.

Identifying the knowledge gaps

There is, of course, nothing inherently wrong with the recent trend towards improving the quality of governance in sport. Introducing good governance policies in a sector that is traditionally rooted in amateurism and autonomy can help ensure private governance for the common good (Chappelet 2010; Geeraert 2020). For instance, scholars argue that the governance structures of international sport organisations have important deficits, which prevent these private bodies from dealing effectively with public issues like corruption, environmental sustainability, match-fixing and doping (Forster 2016; Geeraert & Gauthier 2018; Henry & Lee 2004; Katwala 2000; Pieth 2014). In addition, their lack of democratic structures has been a major source of conflict, as stakeholders have increasingly been seeking legal redress to ensure their rights. Recent academic reports demonstrate empirically that a significant number of sport organisations operating at both the international and national levels have serious deficiencies indeed, in terms of transparency, democracy and internal accountability (Chappelet & Mrkonjic 2013; Geeraert 2015, 2018a, 2018b).

However, preliminary evidence indicates that good governance initiatives in sport may produce sub-optimal or downright negative outcomes such as cosmetic reforms without substantial change, organisational disruption, excessive administrative burdens, flawed knowledge systems, misguided enforcement policies and misinformed shaming or legitimating of governance practices (e.g. Chappelet 2017; Geeraert 2018a, 2019; Parent & Hoye 2018; Pieth 2014). At the heart of this problem lie three knowledge gaps relating to conceptual vagueness, unclear implementation rationale and unclear impact of good governance strategies.

Conceptual vagueness

First, significant uncertainty follows from the conceptual vagueness of ‘governance’ and ‘good governance’. A review of governance conceptualisations proves a kaleidoscopic experience, as they provide for “an endless number of contextual interpretations” (Ansell & Torfing 2016, p. 4). In a broad, descriptive sense, governance can be understood as any pattern of ordered rule (Meuleman 2008). More specifically, governance encompasses politics (i.e. power relations and actor constellations), polity (i.e. the institutional setting) as well as policies (i.e. the modes and substance of political steering) (Treib, Bähr & Falkner 2007). It thus comprises structures, processes as well as policy content. ‘Good’ governance, then, refers to a normative framework that allows for judging structures, processes and/or policy content and outcomes. The qualifying prefix ‘good’ indeed implies that good governance frameworks are both employed as a benchmark for evaluating governance and as a prescriptive standard for governance. Yet because governance can refer to many different elements of ordered rule, so can good governance.

Conceptualisations and codifications of good governance in fact emerge from different academic traditions and societal sectors. Though normative thinking about governance dates back several centuries, contemporary codifications emerged under the rubric of ‘corporate governance’ in the corporate sector, where, in the wake of corporate failures, insights from micro-economics informed institutional designs that were initially aimed at protecting shareholder investment (Cobbaut & Lenoble 2003). In the sphere of public governance, scholarly interest in institutional design coincided with a growing awareness that solid (public) institutions—referred to as good governance—are a precondition for (economic) development (Gisselquist 2012). The term good governance gained further steam when, at the end of the Cold War, it became more acceptable to promote the implementation of democratic principles in societies across the world (Woods 1999). Standards of good governance have since been developed for a wide range of polities and organisations that operate at the international, national and local levels, and in different sectors (Aguilera & Cuervo-Cazurra 2009; Gisselquist 2014). They are commonly rooted in abstract principles such as accountability, transparency, effectiveness, efficiency and ethical behaviour. Particularly within the context of public governance and member-based organisations, they include principles of democratic governance such as participation, deliberation, open and competitive elections and equity and diversity.

Codifications and indicators of good governance in sport draw on this diverse landscape (Chappelet & Mrkonjic 2019; Geeraert 2018b). As they are often introduced to prevent (financial) wrongdoings and increase effectiveness, they are particularly inspired by corporate governance principles (Chappelet & Mrkonjic 2019). Nevertheless, because sport bodies also exercise state-like (i.e. executive, legislative and judicial) functions, are member-based and benefit from public funding, they additionally face pressure to implement principles of good governance that apply to the public and voluntary sectors. The diverse and broad range of good governance

principles that apply to sport organisations breeds considerable confusion. Adding to this confusion, the specific elements of governance that are associated with these principles not only pertain to institutional input, processes and output, they can also subsume structural, cultural and personal factors. Consequently, though some form of consensus has emerged around the importance of transparency and democracy, there is no single accepted framework for good governance in sport. Different scholars and authorities propose different key principles and advance different criteria for implementation and measurement (Chappelet & Mrkonjic 2019).

Unclear implementation rationale

A second, and related, knowledge gap concerns the uncertainty about the rationale for implementing particular principles of good governance. Sport federations, their stakeholders and sport authorities, as well as public authorities are not only unsure about what constitutes good governance, they are often even unaware of what it can achieve and, thus, why sport federations should implement it in the first place. Chappelet and Mrkonjic (2019, p. 11) lament that most existing frameworks of good governance in sport “do not explain why they chose certain principles and not others, where these principles came from, and why they are set out in the way they are”. In other words, it is unclear when and why governance principles qualify as ‘good’.

A useful distinction can be made between instrumental and moral rationales for implementing specific governance principles. The instrumental rationale sees good governance as a means towards achieving a desired end, such as enhancing effectiveness or resistance to corruption. This appears to be the dominant approach, for instance, with regard to international sport federations, where implementing good governance is primarily encouraged to reduce the risk of corruption and mismanagement (ASOIF 2016; Council of Europe 2016; European Parliament 2015). However, the linearity of the relationship between particular elements of good governance and their impact on sport organisations is often unclear. Parent and Hoye (2018) indeed find that very little research has been conducted on the actual impact of principles of good governance in sport organisations. Thus, on one hand, public and sport authorities at different levels increasingly regard good governance as some kind of panacea to deal with sport’s multiple and diverse failures of governance (Henry & Lee 2004). On the other hand, the proliferation of good governance codifications and policies can better be understood as a tendency to prescribe medicines without a clear diagnosis and without knowledge about possible side effects. Misunderstanding the relationship between means and ends can result in both, resistance to implement particular principles and unanticipated (negative) effects (Geeraert 2019; Parent & Hoye 2018).

Focusing on means rather than ends, instrumentalist approaches to good governance do not provide insights in the moral desirability of good governance principles. The moral rationale, in contrast, regards implementing good governance as an end in itself because it is ‘the right thing to do’ when related principles reflect applicable moral values. But what values should principles of

good governance reflect? The classic juxtaposition between the cosmopolitanist/universalist and communitarianist/contextualist approaches to moral values serves as a useful heuristic. Cosmopolitanists argue that existing universally valid norms should apply to all human beings, regardless of context (Fukuyama 1991; Rawls 1971). This implies that where principles of good governance reflect universal values, they should be implemented regardless of the particular cultural context. Stressing the importance of tradition and social context for establishing values and norms, however, communitarianists/contextualists argue that our moral judgement should be shaped by and negotiated in specific communities (MacIntyre 1984; Walzer 1983). According to this approach, principles of good governance should therefore reflect the moral consensus that exists in the cultural context in which they are implemented. The fact that most principles associated with good governance (in sport) emerge from a Western-Liberal context is therefore seen as problematical (Hyden, Court & Mease 2004).

Ultimately, the (implicit) choice between the cosmopolitan and communitarian approach has important policy consequences. It is, however, not a neutral one as it is informed by political ideology. The sport governance literature falls short of providing insight into the moral grounds for promoting particular principles of good governance and the consequences thereof. There is nonetheless a tendency towards universalism with regard to good governance in sport. The IOC refers to ‘universal’ principles of good governance (Ghadami & Henry 2015), and the International Partnership against Corruption in Sport (IPACS), a cooperation between governmental actors and sport bodies, recently issued 50 recommendations to serve as a common standard of governance in sport (IPACS 2020). It is unclear what universal values these principles reflect and, thus, why they are morally appropriate. Moreover, echoing a communitarianist argumentation, Ghadami and Henry (2015, p. 991) even question the universality of the IOC’s ‘universal’ principles and stress the importance of “allowing the expression or realization of local political and cultural priorities”. This raises new questions about the formation of local values and how they would translate into principles of good governance in sport.

Unclear impact

A third and final gap in our knowledge about good governance in sport pertains to the governance effects of different reform strategies. Put simply, just as there is ambiguity about the meaning, justification and implications of principles of good governance, there is uncertainty about the effects of means and methods employed by public and private actors to achieve the implementation of principles of good governance in sport. A distinction can be made between external and internal practices. Regarding the former, NGOs, academics, public authorities and sport organisations aim to induce and guide the implementation of good governance by sport organisations through a range of specific actions. These can be summed up by the generic concepts of external monitoring and assessment, self-regulation, education, enforcement and consultancy. Scholars have only recently started to

question some of these strategies, including compliance strategies (Geeraert 2019) and codifications of good governance (Chappelet & Mrkonjic 2019). With regard to internal practices, sport organisations are increasingly engaging in organisational practices associated with principles of good governance. They establish specialised bodies and functions and implement specific processes, procedures and codes of conduct (e.g. De Waegeneer, Devisch & Willem 2017). Yet, given both their relatively recent introduction and the idiosyncrasies of the sport sector, much is still unknown about the challenges and dilemmas as well as the undesired consequences that are inherent to all these undertakings (Parent & Hoye 2018).

Scope and content of the book

Two broad yet fundamental questions emerge from the above. First, what constitutes good governance in sport and what are the instrumental and moral justifications for implementing it? Second, what are the challenges, dilemmas and risks associated with both inducing and guiding the implementation of good governance in sport and implementing specific practices in sport organisations? Aiming to take the first steps to address these questions in a systematic manner, this book brings together practitioners and academics to outline and critically reflect on theoretical perspectives on good governance in sport as well as current good governance policies. It thus presents itself in two parts.

Part I is theory-driven. It offers critical reflections on different **theoretical perspectives on good governance**. In doing so, it aims to shed light on the complexity and nuances of good governance. It thereby takes the first step to fill knowledge gaps in the meanings and justifications of good governance in sport.

In **Chapter 2**, Arnout Geeraert argues that the majority of the principles of good governance in sport implicitly build on the core assumption of the rational choice approach to social theory, which argues that instrumental rationality drives individual behaviour. His critical examination of the approach and its implications for good governance in sport reveals that it holds significant benefits in terms of clarity and simplification. This makes the approach attractive for those who implement good governance with the aim of achieving specific organisational outcomes. At the same time, however, the rational bias in codifications of good governance in sport may lead to over-confidence in rules and structures to prevent wrongdoing, to over-regulation and distrust, and to neglect of moral, ideational and personal aspects of governance.

In **Chapter 3**, Maarten van Bottenburg shifts the angle of vision away from internal characteristics of organisations and organisations in isolation. Drawing on figurational sociology, his systemic perspective emphasises that interdependencies and power relations between organisations within the transnational sport governance system are co-determining as well as a condition for good governance. This implies that governance failures in sport are not merely caused by individuals or individual organisations who do not follow the principles of governance. Instead, more attention should be paid to the way sport is organised and governed as a system.

In [Chapter 4](#), Frank van Eekeren examines the relationship between good governance and public values. His analysis discerns three perspectives on good governance in sport. The first sees good governance as a means to create public value through organisational and partnership processes. The second regards good governance as public value and, thus, an end in itself. The third and final perspective considers good governance a process of managing tensions between (public) values. What the three perspectives have in common is a communitarian/contextualist understanding of (public) values as a relative, evolving and culturally defined aspiration. In other words, what constitutes good governance depends on cultural context and is more about processes than formal rules and procedures.

In [Chapter 5](#), Inge Claringbould, Annelies Knoppers and Ramon Spaaij also challenge cosmopolitanist/universalist perspectives on good governance in sport. Employing two particular feminist approaches, they both call into question the neutrality of knowledge and science and present an alternative to exclusionary notions of 'good governance'. On one hand, they emphasise dialogical relations as essential for gaining insight into the heterogeneity of knowledge through critical self-reflection on personal positionality and understanding multiple points of view. On the other hand, they propose 'ethics of care' as an underlying 'value of doing' in governance practices. This implies that, instead of focusing on self-interest and strategy, those involved in 'doing' governance should base their action on the care for others in a broad sense.

In [Chapter 6](#), Leonie Heres examines the underexplored role of leadership, and especially *ethical* leadership in good governance in sport. Focusing on ideational as well as personal aspects of governance, she makes the case that codifications of good governance must be accompanied by ethical leadership, if they are to effectively and sustainably safeguard the moral values and norms of sports, both on and off the field. Effective ethical leadership in sports requires visible role modelling, two-way communication about ethics, and consistent and just reinforcement of norms and values.

In [Chapter 7](#), Vassil Girginov makes the case that organisational culture is a key yet neglected aspect of governance of sport organisations. He interrogates the relationship between good governance and organisational culture, questions the current culture of codification of governance and explores how organisational culture is employed as a means for achieving effectiveness. His reflection challenges the cosmopolitanist/universalist approach to good governance, since it fails to recognise that organisations constitute mini societies that are grounded in their own ideologies, beliefs and values. Dialogue is therefore necessary to ensure that abstract principles of good governance are operationalised in accordance with different (organisational) cultures.

Part II is practice-driven. Focusing on questioning and challenging **policies and practices**, this section aims to clarify the limits and opportunities of different practices for both inducing and implementing good governance. Consequently, this part takes the first step towards enhancing knowledge and understanding of good governance policies and practices in sport. It presents itself in two sections.

Chapters 8–10 are written by insiders who have been involved in good governance reforms in sport federations. They have been asked to write their reflections in narrative style. Chapters 11–18 provide academic reflections on good governance policies.

In Chapter 8, Kate Corkery and Geoff Schoenberg engage in a critical reflection on the approaches and methods Sport Australia has implemented to guide and induce good governance in sport federations. Drawing on their experiences and observations as senior staff members, they provide a unique practitioner perspective on the successes and failures of Sport Australia's relatively long-standing good governance policies. In particular, they identify a number of lessons. These include the importance of the change process, centring compliance on outcomes and development, complementing policy with support and education and ensuring that any policy is consistent and easily accessible. This shows that designing and implementing good governance policy should be a joint process that requires constant interaction and adjustment.

In Chapter 9, Rowland Jack draws on his 17 years of professional experience to question and challenge the role of consultants in achieving good governance in sport bodies. He argues that the traditional consultancy model can be a highly effective reform strategy. Yet, a combination of external pressure on the organisation and internal will for change can further increase the likelihood of significant reform. Consultants also face a number of risks. They can be assigned a scope of work that allows limited opportunity for improving governance or go too far to accommodate a client's wishes in the conclusions reached. Jack argues that these risks can be reduced when consultants are commissioned not by the sport body itself but by an external organisation to which it is accountable.

In Chapter 10, Miguel Maduro and Joseph H.H. Weiler critically reflect on the 2016 FIFA governance reforms. Drawing on their experience as Chair and Member of the Governance Committee, they narrate some episodes that demonstrate that the dominant culture at FIFA was stronger than the formal institutional safeguards put in place by the governance reforms. Their contribution alerts us to the limits of both self-regulation and a rule-based approach to good governance. It also seriously questions FIFA's ability to reform itself.

In Chapter 11, Michel van Slobbe confronts one assumption that underpins indicators and codes of good governance in sport: that enhancing diversity will by itself increase the performance of boards. Drawing on the concept of the 'established and outsiders' advanced by Norbert Elias and John Scotson, he analyses the power dynamics related to the enforced transition towards an ethnically mixed club board. This in-depth case study paradoxically reveals how enforced diversity may ultimately not lead to an ethnically mixed board, when the formerly 'established' board members no longer feel at home and all key positions end up in the hands of the former 'outsiders'. While these findings do not question diversity as a principle of good governance as such, they demonstrate that intervening in the social composition of sport governance can have the unintended effect of triggering us–them divisions as well as deteriorating social relations.

In [Chapter 12](#), Arnout Geeraert explores the opportunities and limits of assessing good governance through indicators. Employing the concepts of validity and reliability, he demonstrates that the methodological dilemmas and tensions inherent to the construction of governance indicators also apply to indicators of good governance in sport. His brief case study of the National Sports Governance Observer indicators reveals that even when deliberate attention is paid to validity and reliability, necessary trade-offs with functionality and inescapable subjectivity render governance indicators inherently flawed. These inherent shortcomings of governance indicators should inspire a critical attitude towards the use of governance indicators and the interpretation of governance indices. Though measuring good governance can be meaningful, openness about contingent methodological choices is required to provide insight into the meaning and implications of indicator and index scores.

In [Chapter 13](#), Lisa Kihl challenges the effectiveness of good governance strategies in sport for their piecemeal and lack of holistic approach. Instead, she proposes an alternative, systemic approach to safeguarding integrity within national sport governing bodies. Promoting integrity, tackling integrity violations and minimising integrity risks require a sport integrity system comprised of actors, internal components (integrity management) and external accountability components (regulatory and social environments). It furthermore requires coordination, capacity building and ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of the system as a whole as well as its individual components. This approach opens a range of opportunities for research into integrity systems, including mapping different systemic configurations, assessing the performance of specific systems and exploring the instruments that make up an effective integrity management infrastructure.

In [Chapter 14](#), Milena Parent, Russell Hoye, Marijke Taks, Michael L. Naraine and Benoît Séguin challenge the tendency to present a one-size-fits-all approach in good governance codifications, arguing that there is no one ideal type of good governance for all sport organisations. Through a case study of Canadian national sport organisations, they build the case for an empirical approach to determine key governance guidelines/indicators that build on ideal types of sport organisations. It consists of using a cluster approach that allows deriving good governance principles from real data rather than theory. This allows for considering the scale and context of the specific sport organisations of interest.

In [Chapter 15](#), Ian Henry presents a critical reflection on the transferability of Western principles and values in the governance of sport. Emphasising that modernity is not a homogeneous phenomenon, he questions the inevitability of the emulation by the non-west of 'progress' achieved and enjoyed within sport governance in the West. Because local features persist in aspects of governance that have undergone 'modernisation', subtle formal differences exist in different local contexts, which are modern but not uniform. The author contends that, rather than imposing definitive sport governance principles per se, there is therefore greater promise in promoting agreement concerning the processes through which such principles should be decided.

In [Chapter 16](#), Bram Constandt and Annick Willem critically examine the adoption of codes of ethics by sport organisations. This practice constitutes a core principle in most frameworks for good governance in sport and, as such, is increasingly adopted by sport organisations of all kinds to prevent and counteract unethical behaviour. Building on an extensive literature study, they outline the do's (i.e. points of attention) and don'ts (i.e. pitfalls) of creating, implementing and enforcing codes of ethics in sport organisations. Through a case study of FIFA, they demonstrate how ethical leadership and external controls and pressures are required to fully translate the policies of a code of ethics into the actual practices of a sport organisation.

In [Chapter 17](#), Richard Tacon and Geoff Walters focus on the current trend towards codification of governance in sport by examining what happens when national sport federations formally adopt codes of governance. They find that code adoption constitutes 'external legitimacy work', in that board of sport federations initially decide to adopt codes of governance as a means of demonstrating credibility to external stakeholders. The risk is, then, that a focus on formal adoption and compliance will prevail over a substantive approach that seeks to embed principles. Moreover, by seeking legitimacy from funders and commercial sponsors by appearing more 'business-like' in their governance arrangements, sport federations risk alienating many of their (grassroots) members. The authors conclude that a 'tricky balance' must be struck between obtaining external legitimacy by adopting a code of good governance and avoiding divisions within the existing structures of sports, which can ultimately harm organisational effectiveness.

In [Chapter 18](#), Michael Mrkonjic draws attention to the emergence of multiple newly associated functions within the sports system as a result of the implementation of good governance principles. He demonstrates that they can be executive or managerial and strategic or operational and can be integrated into different organisational units. Effectively performing these functions requires specific and general, technical or social competencies. By outlining types of governance structures and functions as well as the associated management competencies, the author takes the first step towards developing a skills-based approach to good governance in sport that benefits scholars as well as practitioners.

Finally, in the closing chapter of this volume, Frank van Eekeren reflects on ten years of research into good governance in sport. Systematically exploring the ontological–epistemological positions that underpin the contributions in this book, he lays out the path for the research field to move from puberty into adulthood by means of five concrete recommendations.

Note

1. Following Chappelet (2011) and Chappelet and Mrkonjic (2013), some sport governance scholars refer to 'better governance' because no organisation is governed perfectly. We are sympathetic to these arguments yet stick to the term good governance since it has universal appeal and is recognisable to both the wider academic community and lay audiences.

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