

# Highlights in sports management, marketing and business: 2021/22

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# Highlights in sports management, marketing and business: 2021/22

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# Editorial: Highlights in sports management, marketing and business

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## KEYWORDS

sport marketing, sport management, sport business, governance, major events

## Editorial on the Research Topic

### Highlights in sports management, marketing and business

In this research topic we aim to provide an insight into the wide range of topics that are of interest in the context of the business of sport. Whilst specifying sport management and sport marketing in the title of the research topic, the unifying context really is the “business of sport”. This ranges from what traditionally has been perceived as sport business – professional sport and all that comes with fan engagement, including spectating and social media for elite sport, through to the grassroots of community sport participation, which is a different form of “sport business”.

The collection of articles in this topic showcase this varied, international and diverse range of sport business insights that can be delivered through innovative and cutting-edge research. Several of the studies focus on the Olympic Games as well as other international events and sporting organisations, which may be an indication that elite sports (events) remain an attractive target of sport business research. We will briefly introduce each of these projects in the next section.

**Philippou and Hines** focus on what are the best practice policies in Anti-Bribery and Corruption (ABC) policies. Undertaking a critical review of the diverse ABC governance policies in 22 of the largest International Sports Governing Bodies (ISGBs) through content analysis on governance documents publicly available. They report that, although ISGBs are improving, there remains an absence of (industry wide) adequate policies in regard to managing the risk of bribery. They recommend sharing best practices and for an external enforcement organisation to provide guidance on ABC policies for ISGBs.

**Gallant and Belanger**, in a scoping review, explored what empirical evidence is there that supports sport participation and physical activity-based models along the journey of an individual's participation in sport. They reviewed 17 different sport participation models. They concluded that most supporting evidence came from models that focused on elite level athletes but in order to provide evidence-based input into sport programs, policies and practices, more population-based research was required.

**Wang, Gao and Wang** provide a perspective on a commercial dilemma of fitness clubs – how the construct of “commercial friendship”, mediates the intent to repurchase. Commercial friendship refers to a level of trust and friendship between the service provider and customer. They report that leisure involvement had a positive impact on repurchase intention and satisfaction and that there was a mediating effect of commercial friendship in the relationship between leisure involvement, repurchase intention, and satisfaction.

Rocha and Xiao conducted a systematic review on the displacement of host community residents when sport mega events were hosted. It was reported that displacement of residents has been studied exclusively in the context of the Olympic Games, since Seoul 1988. The size and scope of the event explains why the Olympics has been frequently associated with resident displacement. The authors reported that residents suffered either direct, forced evictions or indirect displacements. An important finding is that the narratives produced by sport mega-events guardians that argue an alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Goals (SDG) contradict the actual practice in relation to ensuring human rights within host cities of such events.

Looking at similar issues in regard to human rights and mega events, O'Rourke and Theodoraki focus on the Qatar World Cup and its sustainability strategy from the perspective of three key network stakeholders – FIFA, the Federation of International Football Associations, Qatar's Supreme Council (SC), and the Local Organising Committee (Q22). A Qualitative Content Analysis of documents delivered a range of insights that led the authors to conclude that the tripartite policy network of actors (FIFA, SC and Q22) in their governance approach delivered some cohesive policy formulation, had varied resources at their disposal, that there were inconsistencies in accountability measures and that the lead network role was dependent on specific actor initiatives and commitments.

In another scoping review, Bodin, Teare and Taks acted on the expressed need to broaden the scope of research in sport management, in this case, to include critical social science.

They found that since 2005, there is a noticeable increase in critical research published in sport management journals but that there remains a relatively low number of critical social science insights published in sport management journals. They also argue that researchers could better articulate their research approaches in scholarly outputs.

Grabmüllerová explored whether social media content produced by National Olympic Committees (NOCs) during the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games had any influence on the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) gender equality ambitions. She reported that media personnel in particular, have great influence on the framing of gender identities and stereotypes in their communication channels. Grabmüllerová argues that in contrast to news media, the NOCs knew the framing they were applying, and they did it in alignment with the Olympic values which led to more equal representation of male and female athletes.

Also, in context of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games, Dittmore and Kim found that nations and media outlets use various approaches to creating and interpreting the medal tables of the Olympics. The often created a narrative that presented the best Nationalistic picture. American media in particular often presented an overview that would place the USA on top of the table, even when China had won more gold medals. In non-American media, this approach was often criticized.

In a scoping review conducted by Durden-Myers and Swaites, they investigated whether or not free access to opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity devalued participation.

Their focus was on children and young adults. They found that subsidies to participate or free offers could improve participation generally and also be effective in attracting those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. A major challenge is presented by the fact that this effect disappears with increasing deprivation of the target population. Hence groups with the highest levels of deprivation will have wider complexities to deal with that are affecting their participation. Competing priorities and potentially unrealistic expectations of stakeholders were also identified as issues.

In regard to the dominance of sport governance models and practices by the "Global North" countries, García and Meier explore the extent that Global South countries have a sense of autonomy when it comes to developing their sport governance structures. In particular, the research sought to identify the extent to which the International Olympic Committee is successful in implementing the norms and regulations on sports autonomy as a governance transplant, at the national level in countries from the Global South that are part of the Olympic Movement. National structures and legacies have an impact on the way in which the autonomy of sport is translated in Global South countries but that translational and cultural tensions lead to tensions between stakeholders at the level of government and sport.

Finally, Ruwuya, Juma and Woolf provide a perspective on the challenges that come with implementing anti-doping policy and programs in Africa. They contextualise this perspective by explaining that Africa's views and systems were not specifically considered during the creation of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), which relegated African states to a passive role in global anti-doping monitoring, but subject to the strict compliance requirements for WADA's global policy. Human capacity development and a legacy of colonialism present further contextual challenges to establishing anti-doping support structures and implementing the universal policy.

## Author contributions

All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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# Anti-bribery and Corruption Policies in International Sports Governing Bodies

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International Sports Governing Bodies ("ISGBs") are diverse in their aims but share a need to maintain a reputation of accountability in the eyes of their stakeholders. While some literature analyses the general governance concerns faced by these organizations, there is limited focus on anti-bribery and corruption ("ABC") within this sphere. This paper's research aim is an exploratory evaluation of the ABC best practice policies that exist within ISGBs, asking how they can be assessed and what best practice policies currently exist within this framework. This paper undertakes a critical review of the diverse ABC governance policies in the largest ISGBs through content analysis on governance documents publically available on the sample ISGB websites. This review was undertaken twice on the same ISGBs, in 2017 and 2020, and the changes reviewed. The research highlights best practice policies for recommendation to all ISGBs, and illuminates the absence of adequate policies with regards to the risk of bribery in ISGBs. The findings show there was no area within the framework that ISGBs performed well at as a collective, and there was no single ISGB whose anti-bribery policies were strong in all areas. However, the comparison between 2017 and 2020 shows an improvement in ABC policies in some ISGBs over the timeframe analyzed. The implications are a need for sharing best practice in this area of governance, and providing global guidance on ABC policies for ISGBs to ensure integrity in the sector.

**Keywords:** bribery, corruption, governance, sport, internal controls

## INTRODUCTION

Bribery in sport is not an uncommon phenomenon. From boxer Eupolos bribing fellow Olympic Games competitors in 388 BC (Spivey, 2012), to bookmakers bribing stable-boys to dope horses in the 1960s (Reid, 2014), to FIFA Executive Committee members being bribed to secure their votes (Blake and Calvert, 2015; Conn, 2018), sport is awash with examples of this form of corruption.

Bribery and corruption in international sport are rife, systemic, widespread, and linked to stakeholders from athletes to sponsors, although the governance side of the game has gained most attention. For example, FIFA's 2015 governance corruption scandal led to most of their Executive Committee indicted in the US or sanctioned internally (Conn, 2018).

Bribery damages the integrity and image of sport (Gorse and Chadwick, 2010; Kihl et al., 2017) and undermines efficiency and growth within the industry (Azfar et al., 2001). Despite continuing vulnerability to this form of corruption, there is limited literature on how International Sports Governing Bodies ("ISGBs") tackle bribery through the use of anti-bribery and corruption ("ABC") corporate governance and ethics policies.

There are also no global, functional best practice guidelines available for implementation by sport organizations (Michie and Oughton, 2005), although some countries have created their own, linked to public funding availability (Australian Sports Commission, 2015, 2020; Sport England UK Sport, 2016). The UN (2017) has also issued guidance on ABC measures for countries tackling corruption in sport. ABC policies are required to ensure that ISGBs can be held to account, and clear policies allow for sanctions against breaches. Absence of adequate policies therefore affects propensity for corruption, although benchmarking of individual ISGB's ABC governance is outside the scope of this paper.

Challenges faced by the sport industry in designing and implementing ABC policies include different structures and hierarchies within ISGBs (Chappelet and Mrkonjic, 2013; Pielke, 2016; Gardiner et al., 2017), lack of awareness of governance problems leading to conflict of interest and fraud (Brooks et al., 2013; Kirkeby, 2016), and ability to indulge in regulatory arbitrage for country of incorporation (Geeraert et al., 2014; Pielke, 2016). For example, the 2015 FIFA scandal was linked to problems with structure of both ISGB and member federations (Tighe and Rowan, 2020), conflicts of interest (Blake and Calvert, 2015), and the protection that Swiss company law previously afforded ISGBs (Associated Press, 2014).

As ISGBs are the regulators of their sport, an evaluation of their ABC policies is required to understand the problem, and provide best policy recommendations to other ISGBs. This paper's research aim is an exploratory qualitative evaluation of ABC policies of ISGBs with regards to policy content and language. This is done against the anti-bribery framework developed by Philippou (2019) for assessing ABC policies based on interdisciplinary corruption research. The intention is to highlight best practice policies (and those missing) within this framework currently adopted by some ISGBs, and outline issues raised on the risk of bribery in ISGBs as a group.

This paper's contribution to knowledge is a critical review of the diverse current ISGB anti-corruption governance policies for the prevention of bribery.

The next section of this paper argues that corporate governance policies are applicable to ISGBs, then provides an overview of ABC literature, followed by a section that outlines the framework used and method employed in the assessment of ABC policies, and a discussion of the results by framework element.

## CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND SPORT

The European Sports Charter states that "voluntary sports organizations have the right to establish autonomous decision-making processes within the law" (Council of Europe, 2001, Article 3.3). While autonomy has led to self-regulation (Forster and Pope, 2004; Forster, 2006; Chappelet, 2016), some researchers have argued that ISGBs are indeed corporations despite this status (Szymanski and Kuypers, 2000; Barker, 2013). Smith and Stewart (2010) noted that the unique features of the sport industry have diminished since the 1990s from ten (Stewart and Smith, 1999) to four, including

having legally allowable monopolistic and/or oligopolistic structures, supporting corporate governance policy applicability to sports organizations.

Governance provides solutions to issues identified by agency theory (Jensen and Meckling, 1976) as applied to sport. Agency problems can be caused by separation (Berle and Means, 1930) between principals (resource allocators and stakeholders such as fans and athletes) and agents (managers of these resources, such as ISGBs).

ISGBs have developed into large revenue-takers and increased their visibility (PWC, 2011, 2016; Gardiner et al., 2017).

Corporate governance of ISGBs is thus increasingly important to governments and policy-makers. Political bodies such as the Council of Europe now regard sport governance as a key issue; they approved the 2013 Berlin Declaration calling for the sport industry's engagement with corporate governance issues (Geeraert, 2016; Gardiner et al., 2017) and adopted the Good Football Governance Resolution (Council of Europe, 2018).

Given the autonomy principle, with sport given special dispensation under law (Council of Europe, 2001), it should be unsurprising that ISGBs are different in their governance and board structure when compared to other corporate organizations, particularly with regards to lack of accountability. This is especially so when those charged with governance are uninterested, unaware, and/or unable to recognize corruption (Brooks et al., 2013; Kirkeby, 2016).

Proposed solutions to corporate governance problems (and links to corruption) faced by ISGBs put forward by researchers and policy-makers include:

- benchmarking (Geeraert, 2016) and reporting on corporate governance measures (Chappelet and Mrkonjic, 2013);
- accountability for members' actions, including controls over receipt and use of funds (Ionescu, 2015; Pielke, 2016);
- improving transparency, including disclosure of senior management salaries, and procurement methods (Geeraert et al., 2013; Maennig, 2016; Menary, 2016; Transparency International, 2016); and
- providing examples of good governance for other sports governing bodies to follow (Pedersen, 2016) through a best practice code (Michie and Oughton, 2005; Pielke, 2016).

Researchers have attempted to develop benchmarking tools for assessing the strength of corporate governance structures in sport organizations (not necessarily ISGBs). However, if autonomy and self-regulation are indeed part of the reason for poor governance across the sporting industry, then comparisons with peer organizations would be of limited value as an ABC tool. The *Action for Good Governance in International Sport's* ("AGGIS") benchmarking tool targeted the areas of transparency, and checks and balances. Both transparency and accountability linked to checks and balances are frequently used controls in the ABC sphere (Solomon, 2013, pp. 151–190) and are covered later in this paper.

Chappelet and Mrkonjic (2013) composed a set of indicators for measuring corruption in sports governing bodies, including organizational and reporting transparency, control mechanisms,



and sport integrity, which overlap with the ABC framework (Philippou, 2019) used in this paper. Other benchmarking that has been applied to sport governance includes Play The Game's National Sports Governance Observer (Geeraert, 2018; Alm, 2019). There was, however, no explicit coverage of anti-bribery measures within the benchmarking assessments, and this is a suggested area for further research.

Limited research exists on ABC elements within sport governance. One example includes Pielke (2016), who assessed the conflict of interest and other ABC measures at FIFA against a framework of accountability mechanisms (including legal, market, peer, and public reputational accountability), but not stakeholder accountability. Over the same period, FIFA did well in the AGGIS benchmarking, coming second in the list of 35 Olympic sports federations (Geeraert, 2015).

The methods noted above have been rarely adopted with an emphasis on ABC, although attempts to increase transparency across a number of organizations has taken place over time, and there is limited research into ABC corporate governance applications for ISGBs. This paper aims to begin the process of addressing this paucity of knowledge by analyzing best practice as a first step toward an ABC best practice code in line with Michie and Oughton (2005) and Pielke (2016).

## BRIBERY

Like corruption (Ashforth and Anand, 2003; Den Nieuwenboer and Kaptein, 2008; Gorse and Chadwick, 2010; Rose, 2017), bribery encompasses an array of definitional issues and is affected by public sector literature bias. This may be in part due to the sense in which sport is a public good even if the bodies running it are not.

ISGBs are, usually, privately incorporated associations, in which corruption is often internal to organizations (vote-rigging, fraud, match-fixing), although senior executives have held public office alongside their ISGB roles. One notable exception is the hosting, by countries, of major sporting events such as the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup. For these events, government-provided infrastructure and entertaining of ISGB members by public officials is often required, and external bribes and procurement fraud may occur (Dorsey, 2015).

Bribery can be defined as the “offering, promising, giving, accepting or soliciting of an advantage as an inducement for an action which is illegal, unethical or a breach of trust” (Transparency International, 2017b). This definition is broader than public-sector definitions (such as that of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (Sarbanes-Oxley, 2002) in the US), despite raising perspective issues through not defining the terms “ethics” and “breach of trust,” and is therefore the one used in this paper.

There are limited empirical studies on bribery. Hanousek and Kochanova (2016) found “local bribery environments” affected firm performance in European countries, although the focus was on public-sector officials. Rodrigues-Neto (2014) modeled different forms of bribery to show that where monetary bribes are paid, bargaining power of bribe-payers is relatively small. Other works focus on detection or bribery within the framework of corruption (see, for example, Ryvkin et al., 2017) or on problems associated with bribery from a business perspective (Bray, 2007;

Transparency International, 2011). These latter studies are based on perception, measuring beliefs rather than quantity (Sampford, 2006; Brooks et al., 2013). This paper analyses ABC policies rather than quality or quantity of bribery incidences, although perception does play a part in reputational damage suffered by companies as a result of corruption.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There is a limited range of theoretical frameworks available for critical evaluation of ABC policies. One such example is De Waegeneer et al. (2016), who created a classification framework for content analysis of ISGBs' ethical codes' effectiveness. This included thematic and procedural classifications of content, both of which are relevant to general governance policies, but not explicitly concerned with ISGBs. Another is the TASP sport corruption typology of Masters (2015), which can be applied explicitly to instances of corruption in sport or framing specific scandals within ISGBs.

Svensson (2005) describes corruption as an outcome ‘of a country's legal, economic, cultural and political institutions’. Bribery, in turn, is an outcome of a number of similar variables, both thematic and procedural, which need to be addressed in an ABC policy.

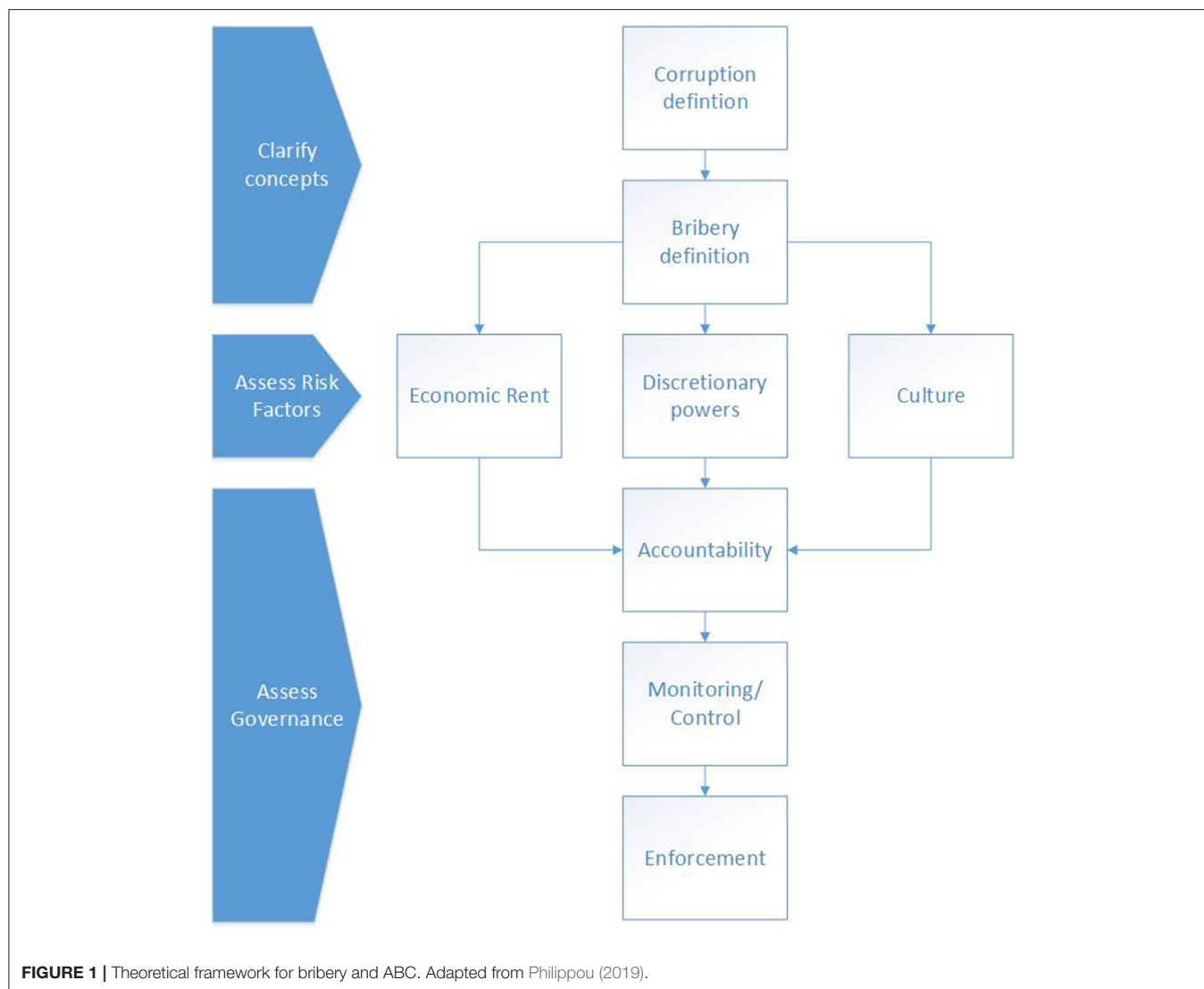
Philippou (2019) sets out a theoretical framework for bribery in sport governance. The framework (**Figure 1**) is split into three parts: clarifying concepts (such as definitions of corruption and bribery employed), assessing risk factors (economic rent, discretionary powers, and culture), and assessing governance (accountability, monitoring/control systems, and enforcement). As this framework is explicitly concerned with ABC in sport governance, and its production based on an amalgamation of interdisciplinary ABC research, this is the framework used in this paper. Its elements and the relevant literature are discussed below.

## CLARIFYING CONCEPTS: DEFINITIONS

The global scope and activities of ISGBs makes them subject to varied ABC legislation and regulations, which internal policies and codes need to comply with. The ISGBs' ability to take advantage of regulatory arbitrage (such as the ICC's move from the UK to Dubai in 2005) affects the policies and procedures required and therefore enacted.

The US FCPA's (1977, §78dd-3) definition of bribery requires involvement of a public official (UK Government, 2010). The UK Bribery Act 2010 has a much broader definition of bribery, covering private sector bribery (and therefore ISGB officials), passive as well as active bribery (both giving and receiving a bribe), and facilitating payments. Facilitating payments are inducements given to officials to perform routine business transactions in their (legal) job. Facilitating payments are allowable under the FCPA (Baughn et al., 2010), although enforcement has tightened up in recent years.

ISGBs could potentially be affected by public-sector facilitating payment definitions during sport event management and related procurement activities, or during broadcast rights



negotiations. ISGBs could also be affected by private-sector bribery in, for example, requesting support in the form of votes in exchange for allocating funds to specific development programs.

Given the reputational risk from being embroiled in a bribery scandal (Gorse and Chadwick, 2010), ISGBs should also include unactioned (agreed but not acted upon) bribery in their definitions. This is because mere agreement to conduct bribery could still damage the ISGB's reputation, as is the case with the unproven allegations of match-fixing in tennis (Mitchell, 2016; see, for example, Blake, 2016). By extension, when these practices become endemic to the culture, it's woven into the fabric of the sport, as was the case with the cultural problems experienced by the Australian cricket team (Lemon, 2018).

## ASSESSING RISK FACTORS

### Economic Rent

Policy-driven corruption theory is steeped in the tradition of Klitgaard's (1988) formula and Rose-Ackerman's (1999) framework, both of which attempt to understand (and reverse)

the causes of corruption. Both are limited to public-sector corruption [although Klitgaard (1988, 1998b) does acknowledge the existence of private-sector bribery]. As bribery is a subset of corruption, both include economic rent in their respective theoretical frameworks affecting ABC.

Economic rent is the concept of monopoly profit; it is an unsustainable pricing level in the presence of competition (Ricardo, 1821; Krueger, 1974). Alberto Ades and Rafael Di Tella (1999) found that countries whose firms benefit from higher levels of economic rent are more prone to corruption. Clarke and Xu's (2004) regression analysis of bribery in the utility sector in transition economies also found economic rents to be a corrupting factor, and bribery more likely in areas with lower levels of competition and higher profitability.

ISGBs, by their very nature as global organizations, have monopoly power over their sport or (in the case of the IOC) event (Morgan, 2002). An exception to this is the oligopolistic structure of professional [as opposed to amateur and professional, which was governed by the AIBA (2018), despite their authority over Olympic events being rescinded by the IOC (IOC, 2019; Morgan,

2020)] boxing governance, which includes four main ISGBs (the World Boxing Association, World Boxing Council, IBF/USBA, and the World Boxing Organization). However, this is still sufficiently limited to allow the ISGBs to extract economic rents from fans and other stakeholders of the sport.

## Discretionary Powers

Discretionary powers of governance officials affect levels of corruption (Klitgaard, 1988; Rose-Ackerman, 1999; Jain, 2001). Autonomy enjoyed by sport governing bodies under law (Geeraert et al., 2014, 2015; Chappelet, 2016) increase the levels of discretionary powers that governance officials have over their sport.

## Culture

Clearly defining bribery affects behavior (Steidlmeier, 1999; Transparency International, 2013a, Article 5.6.1). Cultural attitudes to bribes affect tendency to both pay (Pitt and Abratt, 1986) and receive (Lambsdorff and Frank, 2010) bribes. Thus, care must be taken where “there are deep-rooted customs regarding gifts and hospitality” (Transparency International, 2017a, Article 6.7), as well as other risk areas, as a result of the global coverage of ISGBs.

Gifts and entertainment (or hospitality) is an important area of ABC (Transparency International, 2013a, 2017a), and forms part of cultural control. The need for gifts and entertainment in ISGBs should be assessed as part of risk. There is also a need to provide guidance on appropriate (sometimes zero) levels above which receipts or donations could be construed as bribery. For example, the UK Bribery Act 2010 [in contrast to the US FCPA (1977)] makes no exemption for business promotion, so marketing and entertainment (if the intention is corrupt) fall within the scope of the Act regardless of value.

## ASSESSING GOVERNANCE

### Accountability

The increase in the role of the media (especially through investigative journalism) has fuelled strong public demand for ISGB accountability to stakeholders, including fans and taxpayers (Ionescu, 2015). Conversely, it has been argued that the media has facilitated corruption through biased positive reporting of unethical sporting behavior (Whannel, 2002, pp. 290–292; Numerato, 2009), such as hailing cheats as national heroes if a country has won a major sporting event despite corrupt behavior.

Transparency as a concept is broader than accountability (defined below), and relates to clarity over the structure, funding, spending, and conduct of an organization through reporting “rules, plans, processes and actions” (Transparency International, 2017c), although disclosure is an important aspect of transparency, such as that found in the likes of the UK Corporate Governance Code (FRC, 2016). Care, however, must be taken to avoid an “accountability-by-audit approach” (where transparency in process is merely a means to allow audit) (Henne, 2015), where generalist rules are not necessarily suitable for the industry.

Klitgaard (1988) and Rose-Ackerman (1999) correlate greater levels of administrator accountability to lower levels of corruption and, therefore, bribery. In the case of (mainly private company) ISGBs, it follows that, where there are no effective mechanisms to hold senior officers accountable for their actions, there are likely to be higher levels of bribery.

Accountability has been defined as holding organizations “responsible for reporting their activities and executing their powers properly” (Transparency International, 2017b), or having actors hold others to a set of standards with sanctions available if these are breached (Stiglitz, 2003; Grant and Keohane, 2005). This includes clear lines of reporting for members, employees, and other stakeholders being available, usually defined in policies and procedures. Non controls (mainly policy) definitions of accountability focus on actions over liability, although there is confusion over the definition (Mcgrath and Whitty, 2018). Accountability was defined in the controls sense in this paper, as having a set of standards such as reporting on specific tasks, having named senior officers responsible for clearly identified specific tasks, and/or the organization or senior officers being explicitly responsible for particular functions or actions within an organization.

Transparency and accountability contribute to ABC as scrutiny of governance leads to lower levels of bribery. For example, Duggan and Levit (Duggan and Levitt, 2002) found that increased media attention decreased match-fixing in sumo wrestling.

### Monitoring/Control

Monitoring is a form of resource control (Lipicer and Lajh, 2013) and can include the use of compliance functions or ethics audits (Mcnamee and Fleming, 2007).

### Whistleblowing

One of the key methods of monitoring and control center around whistleblowing. Whistleblowing policies allow members to raise concerns about breaches of ethics, laws, and business standards, and enable monitoring and control. For example, the ACFE (2016) noted that “tips” was the most likely form of detection but that “organizations with reporting hotlines were much more likely to detect fraud through tips” than those without. The importance of whistleblowing is also recognized in Transparency International’s (Transparency International, 2013a, Article 6.5; 2017a, Article 9.2) ABC guidance, and increasingly by policy (see Sport Whistle, 2018) and sports organizations (Cottrell and Erickson, 2018).

The confidentiality and safety of whistleblowing hotlines is important for encouraging witnesses to come forward with information (Soon and Manning, 2017). This is recognized in various statutes worldwide, although cultural differences pervade. Transparency International’s (Transparency International, 2013b, p. 8) review of the whistleblowing laws in the EU found only four countries (Luxembourg, Romania, Slovenia, and the UK) had advanced provisions in their laws for “whistleblowers in the public and/or private sectors,” while seven had none or very limited provisions. The EU stance on whistleblower protection has since been enhanced

with the advent of the Directive on the protection of persons reporting on breaches of Union law (European Parliament Council of the European Union, 2019). The Sarbanes-Oxley Act (Congress.Gov, 2002, §1514A) in the US also penalizes retaliation against whistleblowers.

## Enforcement

Even if whistleblowing policies exist, enforcement of witness protection and confidentiality rules and regulations increase the tendency for whistleblowers to come forward with information (ACFE, 2016). This enforcement ability also applies to all aspects of governance policy and procedure, as enforcement is, to a degree, positively correlated with adherence by individuals subject to it (Croall, 2004).

Investigatory and enforcement powers are linked to accountability, as ability to enforce decisions independently signals that those in breach of policies and procedures will be held accountable for doing so. (Geeraert et al., 2014) assessed the corporate governance quality in 35 Olympic sport governing bodies, including enforcement powers of the Ethics/Integrity Committees of their sample ISGBs. Only one (UCI) had the ability to initiate proceedings independently at the time.

From an economics perspective, Becker's (1968) rational choice theory was adapted to model public corruption utility choices in South Korea and Hong Kong (Jin-Wook, 2009). This approach was criticized for its simplicity, and was consequently updated by Nichols (2012) to include the ability to use the bribe in secret, perceived (rather than actual) risks of detection, and emotional and psychological costs of acting corruptly. It therefore helps explain why penalties (both criminal and social) form an important part of ABC strategy, as enforcement powers are needed to impose sanctions.

## METHOD

The anti-bribery framework developed by Philippou (2019) was used to critically evaluate the publically available ABC policies and procedures of 22 ISGBs (listed in **Table 1**). Assessing the ABC methods employed requires substantive disclosure evidence from the ISGBs on their internal organizational structures and policies employed. This is not always available, and differs from ISGB to ISGB.

In line with the concept of economic rent influencing corruption (Klitgaard, 1988), the sample of ISGBs used in this research were the largest. This conforms with findings by Maennig (2005), where only sports able to generate high income (and economic rents) were affected by corruption, although these findings may have been affected by selection bias in classifying "major documented cases" (p. 190). This approach is also consistent with the sample selection by Geeraert et al. (2014), and Gorse and Chadwick (2011) in their analyses of governance issues and corruption in sport respectively.

Arriving at a sample of the ISGBs with the largest revenues was hindered by some ISGBs not publishing their financial statements (covered in the transparency and accountability section below). Therefore, the list of profitability by sport is an incomplete one. The researchers proxied size to

**TABLE 1** | Sampled sports and ISGBs.

Sport	Governing body/bodies	Abbreviation
Athletics	International Association of Athletics Federations/World Athletics	IAAF
American Football	International Federation of American Football	IFAF
Baseball	World Baseball Softball Confederation	WBSC
Basketball	International Basketball Federation	FIBA
Boxing (professional)	World Boxing Association	WBA
	World Boxing Council	WBC
	International Boxing Federation/USBA	IBF/USBA
	World Boxing Organization	WBO
Cricket	International Cricket Council	ICC
Cycling	Union Cycliste Internationale	UCI
Football	Fédération Internationale de Football Association	FIFA
Formula 1	International Automobile Federation	FIA
Golf	International Golf Federation	IGF
Hockey and ice hockey	International Ice-Hockey Federation	IIHF
	International Hockey Federation	FIH
Horse-racing	International Racing Bureau	IRB
Rugby	World Rugby [Rugby Union]	-
	Rugby League International Federation	RLIF
Skiing/snowboarding	International Ski Federation	FIS
Tennis	International Tennis Federation	ITF
Volleyball	International Volleyball Federation	FIVB
Olympics	International Olympic Committee	IOC

popularity, as defined by their visibility in the media and on terrestrial broadcasting in the largest sports markets (Chadwick, 2013, p. 515; Geeraert et al., 2014, 2015; PWC, 2016). **Table 1** lists the sports sampled and their associated ISGBs. Note that the IOC was included (and referred to as an ISGB) in this paper because compliance with the IOC's regulations are the explicitly stated basis for many other ISGBs' policies.

All available documents on structure, governance, financial controls, integrity, and anti-corruption were downloaded from the sample ISGB websites in May 2017 and December 2020 and content analysis performed thereon. The analysis was performed on two dates to also assess ISGB progress with regards ABC policies.

Of the 22 ISGBs reviewed, one (IRB, 2017, 2020) had no relevant documents available on their website (during either timeframe).

The diversity of information available, and the relevant conclusions drawn from this, is discussed in the section on transparency and accountability.

Thematic analysis was undertaken on the ISGB documents available following the approach set out by Braun and Clarke



(2006, 2016), followed by the thematic [based on the Philippou (2019) ABC framework] evaluation of the qualitative results (Stemler, 2001; Robson and McCartan, 2016; p. 349). These 95 (in 2017) and additional 82 (in 2020) documents were reviewed and analyzed by the researchers, using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. The first stage of coding involved reviewing the policies within the documents. Themes were generated from an initial coding run to identify any themes related to anti-bribery and corruption. A second stage of coding was then conducted on the content identified, amalgamating any related codes (such as cash and monetary payments) and splitting any codes that required it (such as ABC). The codes were then compared to the framework and a final analysis was performed on the data to ensure both the themes arising from the data and framework concepts were covered in the analysis. The process was then repeated in 2020 with the additional/updated documents downloaded in December 2020.

## RESULTS

Of the 22 ISGBs reviewed, 14 had an ABC policy of some description in place in 2017, while a third had none publicly available. In 2020, this was increased to 17 so that the absence of ABC policies was less common across the group. Eight ISGBs in 2017 and nine in 2020 had specific ABC policies, while others had included them within other documentation such as a Code of Conduct, Code of Ethics, or Constitution. This has implications for all elements of the assessing governance section of the anti-bribery framework, as lack of easy-to-find, clear-cut policies might limit the strength of the internal control system. It also supports the argument for increased need for staff training on the topic.

Another issue was the inconsistency within ISGBs' policies. An example of poor practice in the 2017 batch was the ITF's (a private registered UK company subject to the UK Bribery Act 2010) policy, which noted that "payment of facilitation payments by or on the behalf of the ITF is therefore only permitted if the following conditions are met ..." (ITF, 2012). This implied that facilitation payments are acceptable under certain circumstances, although it then contradicts this in the same document by (correctly, for a company registered in the UK) defining facilitation payments as an example of non-permissible bribery (ITF, 2012). In the 2020 sample for coding, the Anti-Bribery and Corruption Code of Conduct had been replaced by two anti-corruption program documents (ITF, 2020a,b), neither of which specifically referenced bribery. Bribery was instead referenced in the general anti-bribery and corruption clause in the ITF Code of Ethics (ITF, 2019).

## CLARIFYING CONCEPTS—DEFINITIONS

References coded to bribery and corruption themes included:

- Specific details on who is subject to the policy/procedure
- Specific anti match-fixing policy

- Definitions of bribery and corruption
- Examples of bribery and corruption

Who was subject to the policies differed across ISGBs sampled. All applied to officials (see, for example, IFAF, 2012; IIHF, 2014a; World Rugby, 2017; Wbcs, n.d.) and/or athletes and their representatives (IIHF, 2014a; WBC, 2015b). Some had a very broad stakeholder scope, including "the cities and countries wishing to organize" competitions' (FIBA, 2014a), or 'Representatives of sponsors, partners, suppliers, ski industry and media dealing with FIS and/or have an involvement in FIS activities' (FIS, 2016b). These present best practice solutions for corporate governance issues as put forward by Michie and Oughton (2005) and Pielke (2016). Some ISGBs specifically referred to stakeholders as a "family" (FIFA, 2012a; IAAF, 2015), re-enforcing the idea of self-governing autonomy (Forster and Pope, 2004; Forster, 2006), but also potentially contrary to the independence ideals embedded in a culture of accountability and transparency (Geeraert, 2016; Maennig, 2016).

The ITF and FIA were the only two from the 2017 sample of ISGBs that defined the term bribery as "the offering, promising, giving, accepting or soliciting of an advantage (whether financial or otherwise) as an inducement for an action which is illegal or a breach of trust" (ITF, 2012), or the more specific "improperly influenc[ing] anyone, or ... reward[ing] anyone for the performance of any function or activity, in order to secure or gain any commercial, contractual, regulatory or personal advantage" (FIA, 2017b). In the 2020 sample, FIFA defined bribery as an "offer of anything valuable with the intent to gain an improper business advantage" (FIFA, 2020e) and the IRL as "an inducement or reward offered or promised in order to gain any commercial or other advantage" (IRL, 2020a). These are in line with the general definitions discussed previously (2002; Transparency International, 2017b). The FIA further illustrate best practice by providing examples, including "the giving of aid or donations, the use of voting rights, designed to exert improper influence" (FIA, 2017b).

Where references existed to bribery, the second round of coding for each batch determined if non-financial bribery was included (which is definitional-dependent). Non-financial bribery is defined in this paper as the exchange of something other than money in the course of the bribe, such as votes, personal or political favors, or role allocation within an organization. Non-financial bribery was defined in one of three ways in the sample, with some ISGBs incorporating more than one definition:

- "benefit or service of any nature" (see, for example, FIBA, 2014a; IIHF, 2014a; IGF, 2016b; FIA, 2017b)
- pecuniary/ monetary or other benefit/advantage (FIFA, 2012b; ITF, 2012; IAAF, 2015; FIS, 2016b)
- "concealed benefit" (see, for example, FIH, 2012, n.d.; IOC, 2015a; UCI, n.d.)

Non-financial bribery aligns with the "breach of trust" element of the Transparency International (2017b) definition of bribery, and aligns with corruption seen in the 2015 FIFA scandal, where favors were allegedly swapped for votes (Conn, 2018).

The importance of reputational risk to ISGBs was noted, including references to “illegal, immoral and unethical behavior” (FIFA, 2012b), “foster[ing] public confidence in ... governance and administration” (ICC, 2014a), “refrain[ing] from unethical behavior that may bring disgrace to many people involved in the sport” (WBC, 2015a), and “not act[ing] in a manner likely to tarnish the reputation of the Olympic Movement” (IOC, 2020a). IFAF summarizes this as “Public confidence in the authenticity and integrity of the sporting contest and in the uncertainty of its outcome is vital. If that confidence is undermined, the very essence of the sport is compromised” (IFAF, 2017a). These results support the narrative that integrity of sport is important to ISGBs.

It follows that ISGBs should therefore value ABC, given bribery’s damaging nature to integrity (Gorse and Chadwick, 2010). In line with this, unactioned bribery should be covered in best practice ABC policies, and it was indeed covered by some ISGBs. For example, reference was made to breaches occurring “irrespective of whether such benefit is in fact given or received” (IGF, 2016a). However, it could be argued that unactioned bribery is covered by the term “bringing the sport into disrepute” (see, for example, IFAF, 2017b). The issue, from an enforcement perspective, is the breadth of the latter term may make it harder for investigators to prove compared to breaches of specifically referenced bribery, and thus best practice should include specifics.

## ASSESSING RISK FACTORS

### Culture

#### Gifts and Entertainment

Documents were coded to the “gift and entertainment” theme if they provided guidance for accepting and/or providing gifts and entertainment to other parties.

Part of the difficulties faced by ISGBs is having to balance international compliance requirements against cultural problems (Pitt and Abratt, 1986) that may ensue in, for example, countries where it is considered rude to decline a host’s gift or entertainment offers (Steidlmeier, 1999). This has led to some ISGBs providing generalist policies in their ABC efforts, such as “The hospitality shown to the members and staff ... and the persons accompanying them shall not exceed the standards prevailing in the host country” (FIBA, 2014a). This “reasonableness test,” whereby an assessment by members is required, suffers from the same self-regulation enforcement problems that ISGBs are facing with regards general governance (Geeraert et al., 2015; Chappelet, 2016). The FIA was the only ISGB in the sample to explicitly state that “the intention behind the gift should always be considered” (FIA, 2017b).

In line with Transparency International’s (Transparency International, 2013a) ABC Principles, perception appears to matter to ISGBs. The ICC (2014a) explicitly forbid gifts that “influence or appear to influence the recipient in the discharge of his official duties,” as do FIBA (2015) “in circumstances that the Participant might reasonably have expected could bring him or the sport into disrepute.” The FIA acknowledges the importance of transparency, in line with Nichols (2012), stating that a condition required of gifts is that they are “given openly,

not secretly” (FIA, 2017b), while FIFA (in the 2020 sample) “uses a standard process to register gifts and hospitality and expects every FIFA team member to follow it” (FIFA, 2020d).

Other best practice approaches were adopted by ISGBs. ISGBs referenced gifts of a nominal, trivial, and/or symbolic value only as being acceptable (see, for example, FIH, 2012; IIHF, 2014a; FIFA, 2020f; UCI, n.d.), although arguably this also requires a degree of reasonableness to be applied. Some ISGBs explicitly prohibited the giving/receipt of “cash and cash equivalents” (FIFA, 2012b; ITF, 2012; ICC, 2014a; IAAF, 2015; FIA, 2017b; IFAF, 2017b) or “cash in any amount or form” (FIFA, 2020f). Few ISGBs specified amounts above which gifts and entertainment were considered unacceptable (ICC, 2014a,b; IFAF, 2017b). Aside from providing the basis for ABC financial controls, these policies also provide increased accountability for members’ actions (Ionescu, 2015; Pielke, 2016).

Specific circumstances are also considered when forming a gifts and entertainment anti-bribery policy. For example, bribery linked to vote-rigging is explicitly considered in relation to IOC presidential elections: “Candidates may in no case and under no pretext give presents, offer donations or gifts or grant advantages of whatever nature” (IOC, 2015a). IFAF considers procurement in its policy noting that “Particular care must be taken in relation to gifts offered by suppliers, other commercial partners and interested parties to influence decisions relating to the awarding of commercial contracts with IFAF, particularly for media rights, events and sponsorship” (IFAF, 2017b).

Finally, consideration of what to do with gifts that have already been accepted is outlined. For example, the IOC policy that gifts ineligible for acceptance “must be passed on to the organization of which the beneficiary is a member” (IOC, 2015a, 2020a) is also found in other ISGBs (FIBA, 2014a; IGF, 2016c; FIA, 2017b). While setting out parameters for accountability (Geeraert et al., 2013; Maennig, 2016; Menary, 2016), this still presents a problem of what should be done subsequent to this. For example, following the Brazilian Football Association’s distribution of Parmigiani watches to FIFA officials, the investigatory chamber decided against formal ethics proceedings “should all watches be returned to it. The watches will then be donated to an independent non-profit organization or organizations committed to corporate social responsibility projects in Brazil” (FIFA, 2017a).

## ASSESSING GOVERNANCE FACTORS

### Accountability

#### Governance Aims

Although forming part of the sport industry typology, differences in the ISGBs’ aims may explain the lack of consistency in policies and procedures. For example, most ISGBs in the sample included both promoting/developing and setting the laws of their sport in their mission statements or equivalents. All ISGBs in the sample were hierarchical (Morgan, 2002) in their governance, and the ISGBs did indeed present a different approach to corporate governance compared to other charitable or corporate organizations, with a clear industry-specific focus. For example, the Olympic Charter (the statutes of the IOC), that a large



number of ISGBs are signatories of, includes “preserv[ing] the autonomy of sport” (IOC, 2015b, 2020b) in its mission.

In other areas, however, this commonality in aims diverges, with some ISGBs having non-standard aims. The ISGB aims not explicitly shared across the sample include “deliver[ing] commercial value” (RLIF, 2017), providing “editorial services to ... publications” (IRB, 2017), and “upholding the interests of its members in ... tourism” (FIA, 2017c).

Aims are also likely to be influenced by their income sources. For example, the majority of FIFA’s 2016 income came from licensing rights to third parties (FIFA, 2017b) compared to World Rugby (2016) from merchandising (directly from fans). This has implications for both conflict of interest (Brooks, 2016; Kirkeby, 2016) and regulatory arbitrage (Pielke, 2016). Both these ISGBs then saw the majority of their income come from broadcasting in 2019 (FIFA, 2020a; World Rugby, 2020b), a change that also has similar implications.

Some ISGBs govern over leagues with sufficient (usually economic) power to provide them with a voice in their own governance. For example, Formula 1 (FIA, 2017c, 2020b) and the NBA (FIBA, 2014b, 2019) have representation on decision-making committees in their relevant sport, as manifested in their statutes which may affect implementation of best practice (either positively or negatively).

In a similar way, the power of certain countries are also manifested in statutes of relevant ISGBs. For example, World Rugby representatives on the Council have a vote specifically allocated to “Unions ... who play in ... the Six Nations or SANZAR Rugby Championships” (World Rugby, 2017).

Despite this diversity, most ISGBs note the importance of integrity and reputation, supporting Gorse and Chadwick (2010). For example, FIFA and the UCI both aim “to promote integrity, ethics and fair play with a view to preventing all methods or practices, such as corruption, ... which might jeopardize the integrity of” the sport (FIFA, 2016; UCI, 2016) and the WBC (2015a) to promote “Clean, Fair, and Equitable Competition.” Thus, this makes the existence of ABC policies both advisable and desirable within their own stated aims.

## Transparency and Accountability

Transparency is proxied as public availability of information. One of the ISGBs reviewed had no relevant documents available on their website, although they did have some very limited information relating to aims and contacts (IRB, 2017), and so were included in the analysis.

References demonstrating best practice accountability and transparency are set out in **Table 2**.

Overall, the levels of ISGB accountability were inconsistent both within and across ISGBs, as was the type of accountability demonstrated. For example, the RLIF (2017) did not include any of the above points in the 2017 sample, but did note the need for “communicating openly and transparently.” In the 2020 sample, they noted that “An up-to-date register of interests will be maintained by the IRL” (IRL, 2020b), although the document did not specify individual roles accountable for this maintenance or review of potential conflicts. No single ISGB included information on all the points in **Table 2**. These findings

**TABLE 2 |** Examples of best practice accountability and transparency policies.

Best practice accountability and transparency policy demonstrated	Example(s)
To whom ethics or other policy breaches should be reported	“the FIFA Compliance Division” (FIFA, 2020d)
Who appoints the Ethics Committee or Ethics/Integrity Officer	“ICC’s Board of Directors” (ICC, 2014a, 2017)
Who the Ethics Committee members and/or Ethics/Integrity Officer(s) are	World Athletics (2020)
Who and/or what department holds information regarding conflicts of interest and/or policy breaches	“the 6 members of the Ethics Committee and the 2 members of the Secretariat of the Ethics Committee only” (FIA, 2017a)
Who the signatories are for high-value expenditure	“the General Secretary or the Deputy General Secretary” (IIHF, 2014b)
What meeting minutes are kept	“the transcript of the debates of the General Assembly and World Councils, which are recorded on tape” (FIA, 2017d, 2019), although the feasibility of access is unclear
Who and/or what department retains meeting minutes	“The Secretary General is responsible for the minutes of the Congress” (FIS, 2016c, 2018) “Minutes shall be taken of every Congress” (UCI, 2016, 2019)
What Committees and/or Commissions exist and what their responsibilities are	World Athletics (2020)
How officers are nominated	“Nominations Committee” FIA (2017d)
Whether accounts are audited and, if so, who appoints the auditor	FIH (2012)
What activity reports are available, to whom, and how copies can be obtained	FIS (2016c, 2018)

are consistent with previous studies on ISGB accountability (Chappelet and Mrkonjic, 2013; Geeraert et al., 2013; Geeraert, 2016) and demonstrate the continued need for accountability in best practice ABC.

Some of the ISGBs published the names of the various committee members, often on their websites, or noted that they ‘shall be published’ (FIS, 2016b), but were not available on the website in the 2017 or 2020 reviews. ISGBs also noted specific responsibilities attached to roles, such as “the Chief Administrative Officer shall ... see that FIA accounts are kept up to date” (FIA, 2017d, 2019). Some ISGBs also noted specific powers attached to roles, such as “the Central Board has the powers ... to exercise overall control over the financial management” of FIBA (2014b; 2019). The latter finding showcases the officers’ discretionary powers in a transparent way,

which is a positive step toward minimizing corruption (Klitgaard, 1998a; Rose-Ackerman, 1999; Jain, 2001).

Some ISGBs made particular reference to accountability and transparency in their documents. Examples include the “basic universal principles of good governance of the Olympic and sports movement, in particular transparency, responsibility and accountability, must be respected” (FIH, 2012), that “all bodies, whether elected or appointed, shall be accountable to the members of the organization and, in certain cases, to their stakeholders” (IOC, 2015a, 2020a), and to “seek transparency and strive to maintain a good compliance culture with checks and balances” (FIFA, 2012a). In the 2020 sample, it was noted that “One of the fundamental pillars of FIFA 2.0 is the transparency of the organization, its governance and the decision-making process” (FIFA, 2019).

## Monitoring/Control Whistleblowing

References to whistleblowing in the sample were scarce in the 2017 sample. The ITF (2012) noted that a policy exists, but as this was only internally available from the “HR department or in [the] HR shared files,” its contents could not be reviewed by the researchers. The WBSC made reference to whistleblowing in case of actual or “probable cause to believe” (Wbcs, n.d.) a breach has occurred, but no system to do so was set out in their documents.

Direct references to reporting hotlines in ISGB documents, something highly important for monitoring (Transparency International, 2013a, 2017a; ACFE, 2016), was also scarce in the 2017 sample. Some referenced their own (IOC, 2015a; IGF, 2016a, 2017a; FIFA, 2017a,c; UCI, 2017), and one asked their members to use the IOC’s Integrity and Compliance hotline (FIS, 2016a). Of those with their own hotlines, one related solely to doping (UCI, 2017) and therefore cannot be considered as part of general ABC policy. Only the IOC had a clear and easy-to-find hotline if one followed the documented references. The IGF hotline was unavailable from the link listed in their Anti-betting and Corruption Policy (IGF, 2016a) when the researchers attempted to access the link in both March and December 2017, but was available from a different URL (IGF, 2017b) after a brief search on the IGF website. Difficulties were also experienced with the FIFA hotline. While FIFA documents made reference to a hotline being set up (FIFA, 2017a) and monitored (FIFA, 2017c), the researchers were unable to find a direct link to this from the FIFA website as at both March and December 2017, although they found the link to FIFA’s hotline clearly referenced on, and accessible from, the IOC’s website (2017). These findings are in line with the whistleblowing shortcomings discussed by Cottrell and Erickson (2018), and the alleged treatment of whistleblowers by FIFA in the 2015 scandal (Conn, 2018).

The 2020 sample shows that there has been some improvement across ISGBs on this front, with integrity hotlines available across a number of ISGBs (ICC, 2020; TIU, 2020; World Rugby, 2020a; see, for example, FIS, 2020). IFAF has a whistleblower policy document available on their corporate documents webpage (IFAF, 2017c), although there was no other reference to this. The IGF has a dedicated hotline section (IGF, 2020a), although the link to their Anti-betting and Corruption

Policy (IGF, 2020c) did not work as at December 2020 and there was potential for conflict of interest as “The Head of the IGF Integrity Unit is ... the person in charge of the IGF Integrity Hotline and is skilled at providing impartial and confidential support to the person reporting” (IGF, 2020b). FIFA resolved their issue for the 2020 sample and had multiple references to their confidential reporting system (FIFA, 2020b), although their Code of Conduct had nine references to report or contact the FIFA Compliance Division but no links to this or how to do this in the document (FIFA, 2020d). World Athletics now has the independent Athletics Integrity Unit’s reporting system available (Athletics Integrity Unit, 2020).

There were also limited references to best practice protection of whistleblowers’ and/or witnesses’ identity in policy breach proceedings to encourage the practice (Soon and Manning, 2017). The IOC (2015a) noted that “A complainant may request that his/her identity not be revealed and that all precautions be taken so that his/her identity is protected,” while the UCI (n.d.) noted that they “shall take all required measures in order to safeguard the interests and personal rights of witnesses and, if necessary, ensure they remain unidentified.” However, the most detailed policy around the anonymity of witnesses was that of FIFA: “When a person’s testimony ... could endanger his life or put him or his family or close friends in physical danger, the chairman of the competent chamber or his deputy have powers to maintain confidentiality” (FIFA, 2012b).

The ITF (2012) specifically mentioned culture, wishing to “encourage ... individuals [to] feel able to raise concerns” and “strictly prohibits the taking of retaliatory action” and in the 2020 sample had set up a new integrity body (TIU, 2020). Other ISGBs with explicit policies on retaliation against whistleblowers (like those stipulated by laws such as Sarbanes-Oxley in the US and the EU Whistleblowing Directive) included the IGF (2017a, 2020d), which “provide protection against any unjustified treatment in the form of providing confidential advice to whistle-blowers... If physical protection is needed, the case is referred to the police” and FIFA (2012b, 2020f).

## Enforcement

This paper’s review of enforcement powers of the Ethics/Integrity Committees found that both samples showed very low levels of ISGB Ethics/Integrity Committees with investigatory and disciplinary powers. While most had the power to request information from individuals subject to the ISGB rules and regulations, a small minority had the power to instigate their own investigations. One that did was the IAAF Ethics Commission in the 2017 sample which could work on matters that it “of its own initiative considers to be appropriate for it to undertake” (IAAF, 2015). The 2020 sample showed that a number of the ISGBs had set up independent integrity units (Athletics Integrity Unit, 2020; TIU, 2020).

Even fewer ISGBs had the power to sanction, an important element of ABC to encourage compliance (Croall, 2004). For example, the ICC (2014a) “Ethics Officer ... submit[ing] his written report to the ... Board for its ultimate determination on what action, if any, should be taken in respect of the alleged

violation” takes the power away from the investigator and puts it into the hands of non-independent officers. This was replaced in the 2020 sample with “the Ethics Officer will refer the matter to the Ethics Disciplinary Committee, which shall normally be comprised of the Chief Executive, the ICC Chairman and the Chair of the Audit Committee” unless it “decides that a greater sanction than a warning and/or reprimand is warranted,” in which case it “shall refer the matter to the Ethics Tribunal” (ICC, 2017). Similarly, the FIBA Ethics Council should “submit to the FIBA Central Board a report ... noting any breaches of its rules ... [and] will propose ... sanctions which might be taken against those responsible” (FIBA, 2014a), but not impose those sanctions itself.

Committees’ independence (to enable accountability and limit abuse of powers) was also low. However, definitions of independence were not clarified which, given the extent of conflict of interest issues found in sport as highlighted in this paper, should be treated with caution. Sometimes independence is implied but not explicit, such as for “The FIS Ethics Commission [which] is composed of five persons appointed by the FIS Council; three/four external to FIS and one/two members of the FIS Council” (FIS, 2016b). This also links in with the idea of discretionary powers (Klitgaard, 1988).

Enforcement powers for decisions were rare. Instead, many of the ISGB Ethics Committees had the remit to investigate but not sanction, such as in the case of the FIA (2017b, 2020a), where the Ethics Committee “shall submit a report to the President ... who may decide to take further action.” Inability to sanction limits the value of the policies (Croall, 2004).

Sometimes there was no clear enforcer defined, which is also problematic from an accountability viewpoint. For example, FIFA (2012b) Code of Ethics notes that commissions “are forbidden ... unless the applicable body has expressly permitted them to do so”. The applicable body in question is not defined in this case, nor is an individual or official role named as the decision-maker. This restricts decision-making ability (and therefore accountability), but also arguably provides officials within FIFA and member associations with discretionary powers, something also linked to increased bribery (Klitgaard, 1988).

Some ISGBs publically list violations or decisions. For example, FIBA (2015) “maintains a list of violations and sanctions which is made available on the FIBA website,” while FIFA (2017a, 2020c) publishes Ethics Committee matters and sanctions. This is a positive step toward transparency (Maennig, 2005; Geeraert et al., 2013).

## PROGRESS

There was evident progress in the amount and quality of ABC material provided by ISGBs between the two sample periods (see **Table 3**), FIFA and the ITF in particular. Aside from illustrating some ISGBs’ growing commitment to transparency and accountability, this also supports Ionescu (2015) research on the role of the media in increasing accountability, as

**TABLE 3 |** Key policy improvements 2017–2020.

Framework element	Key best practice policy improvements 2020
Clarifying concepts	More ISGB examples of clear definitions of bribery (FIFA, 2020e; IRL, 2020a)
Culture	Gift registers (FIFA, 2020d)
Accountability	Register of interests (IRL, 2020b) Transparency as a fundamental aim (FIFA, 2019)
Whistleblowing	Improved availability of integrity hotlines (FIS, 2020; ICC, 2020; TIU, 2020) More references across ISGBs to confidential hotlines (Athletics Integrity Unit, 2020; FIFA, 2020d)
Enforcement	Independent integrity units (Athletics Integrity Unit, 2020; TIU, 2020) Sanctioning decisions published (FIFA, 2020c)

these changes were likely brought in as a result of media scrutiny (Ingle, 2017).

## CONCLUSION

This paper critically reviewed governance policies for the prevention of bribery in a sample of 22 ISGBs using the anti-bribery framework developed by Philippou (2019). The diversity of both the quantity and quality of information on corporate governance and/or ABC policies is part of the problem that needs to be addressed by future guidance. It is difficult for members and stakeholders to know where to look for ABC information, as this is distributed among statutes, codes of ethics, codes of conduct, or other documents. Future quantitative research can be undertaken to assess policy frequency and distribution.

Qualitative examples of both good and poor practice currently followed by some ISGBs were highlighted across both periods and are summarized in **Table 4**. There was no single area of the framework that ISGBs performed well at as a collective, and there was no single ISGB whose ABC policies were strong across all areas. A recommended subject for further research is whether particular characteristics of ISGBs positively affect particular aspects of their governance and ABC procedures.

There are limitations of using publically available information for this study, as the information may be incomplete. However, this also reflects the lack of transparency and accountability of the ISGBs in question, and arguably contributes to the likelihood of bribery by those charged with governance (Klitgaard, 1988) of sport.

In terms of clarifying concepts (Philippou, 2019), clear ABC policies on their websites, defining bribery, or including unactioned bribery (which would affect reputation), were few, and there were a number of inconsistencies within ISGBs’ own policies. Thus,

**TABLE 4 |** Examples of good practice.

Framework aspect	Examples of good practice
Definitions	<p>Bribery and corruption clearly defined (FIA; FIFA; IRL; ITF)</p> <p>Non-financial bribery covered in discussions of ABC (FIBA; FIFA; FIH; FIS; IGF; IIHF; IOC; ITF; UCI)</p> <p>Bribery and corruption examples provided (FIA)</p>
Gifts and entertainment	<p>Clear gift policy with references to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influencing actions (ICC; FIBA)</li> <li>• Transparency (FIA)</li> <li>• Registers (FIFA)</li> <li>• Nominal/symbolic/trivial value (FIFA; FIH; IIHF; UCI)</li> <li>• Specific maximum currency value (ICC; IFAF)</li> </ul> <p>Cash or cash equivalents prohibited (FIA; FIFA; IAAF; IOC; IFAF; ITF)</p>
Transparency and accountability	<p>Internal reporting—breaches and responsible individuals (FIA; FIBA; FIFA)</p> <p>Ethics Committee or Ethics/Integrity appointments and members (ICC, World Athletics)</p> <p>Information gatekeepers (FIA)</p> <p>Signatories are for high-value expenditure (IIHF)</p> <p>Meeting minutes – keepers and responsible parties (FIA; FIS; UCI)</p>
Whistleblowing	<p>Accessible ABC reporting hotline (FIFA; FIS; ICC; ITF; UCI; World Rugby)</p> <p>Confidentiality (FIFA; IOC; UCI)</p> <p>Open culture (IGF; ITF; World Athletics)</p>
Enforcement	<p>Independent integrity units (ITF; World Athletics)</p> <p>Transparent enforcement decisions (FIBA; FIFA)</p>

ISGBs should focus on clarity and consistency when strengthening their ABC policies, starting with defining what it is that they expect their members and stakeholders to avoid.

Governance structures found supported the applicability of corporate governance ABC policies to ISGBs, in line with Smith and Stewart (2010) paper on the sport industry's declining uniqueness. Governance aims of the sample ISGBs converged with regards the importance of integrity, supporting research on risks arising from a lack of integrity (Gorse and Chadwick, 2010). This shows the importance of industry reform in line with other industries, as opposed to an introverted outlook often adopted by sport organizations.

Accountability was deemed important by ISGBs in their documents, but no single ISGB included full information on

roles, conflicts, personnel responsible, and so on, while one ISGB had no documents available at all. This paucity in transparency was in line with findings by Geeraert et al. (2014) and is another focus for IGBS looking to undertake reform of their governance and ABC policies and procedures.

Clear gifts and entertainment policies existed, but only one specified a maximum acceptable level of spend. Given the number of reputation-afflicting scandals linked to gifts and entertainment, and the cultural shift away from these as a method of doing business, focus on these policies would enhance the current ABC provisions in ISGBs.

The majority of monitoring and control (Philippou, 2019) references related to whistleblowing. These were, on the whole, scarce, with some ISGBs making reference to reporting hotlines, which can help identify breaches (ACFE, 2016), and a minority to protection of whistleblowers, which help more come forward (Soon and Manning, 2017).

Enforcement powers were low, thus limiting their effectiveness (Croall, 2004), without committees having the power to sanction, while a lack of independence in ISGBs sampled increases discretionary powers of governing officials and therefore the likelihood of bribery (Klitgaard, 1988).

There are, of course, limitations to generalizing the results of this study to all ISGBs. Each ISGB, as shown in this paper, caters to different stakeholders, has different aims, with different governance structures, and very diverse revenue streams and levels. However, this study also highlights why best practice needs to be tailored to the sport industry as a whole, and why ISGBs should share and act on good practice (such as the examples provided by Interpol (2020) on their bi-weekly bulletins, or ESSA (2017).

Most importantly in terms of the practical application of this research for best practice, the existence of robust ABC policies and procedures still requires adherence to and enforcement of these principles. For example, FIFA came under criticism in 2017 for not renewing the independent Ethics Committee's terms, thereby damaging ongoing internal investigations into corruption (Conn, 2017a,b).

The need therefore remains for sharing best practice, and providing guidance on, ABC policies for ISGBs, via the IOC or external enforcement organizations such as UNODC (2018) or stakeholder pressure groups such as SIGA (2017). Future research should engage with stakeholders and ABC practitioners to create a practical and realistic blueprint for best practice in the sport industry and beyond (Michie and Oughton, 2005; Pedersen, 2016; Pielke, 2016). This could be done through interviews or focus groups with ABC professionals, sport governance officers, legal personnel, and stakeholders to analyze perceptions of corruption and ABC in ISGBs against the Philippou (2019) and/or the Masters (2015) frameworks. This can be complimented with research ranking ISGBs by expanding Geeraert's (2018) system to include ABC, and to benchmark the ISGBs sampled.



There is a need to fill the research gaps that exist in relation to both the incidence of bribery, and the fight to prevent it, including research around policy issues and requirements for robust ABC policies, in order to allow for “sport played and governed under the highest integrity standards, free from any form of unethical, illicit and criminal activity” (Siga, 2017).

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

CP compiled the dataset and conducted the analysis of the data. CP was the senior author of the paper. TH is the second author. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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# Empirical Support for the Tenets of Sport Participation and Physical Activity-Based Models: A Scoping Review

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Notwithstanding their wide-spread use, it is unclear what level of empirical evidence exists to support sport participation and physical activity-based models. Sport participation and physical activity-based models characterize different stages of sport involvement based on sport activities (organized and unorganized) individuals take part in throughout their lifespan. The objectives of this scoping review was to explore the nature of empirical support for tenets of sport participation and physical activity-based models describing the evolution of an individuals' sport participation. Seventeen different sport participation models were identified through an iterative literature review, using a snowball search strategy and expert ( $n = 8$ ) consultation. Of the identified models, three described the evolution of an individual's sport participation based on their participation in different activities at various stages of sport involvement and were retained for the review. A second literature review identified peer-reviewed publications supporting at least one tenet of these three models. Many tenets of retained models received some empirical support from some of the 38 publications identified, but some tenets were not tested. Most of the evidence supporting tenets originated from studies among elite-level athletes. Whereas some evidence exists to support current sport participation and physical activity models, more research is warranted, particularly among the general population of non-elite athletes, for the models to be used in full confidence to guide sport policies, programs, and practices.

**Keywords:** athlete development models, scoping review, sport participation, tenet evaluation, sport participation and physical activity-based model

## INTRODUCTION

Several authors have expressed that sport participation research is held back by insufficient details on the characterization of sport involvement of participants (Agans and Geldhof, 2012; Coalter, 2015; Evans et al., 2017; Robertson et al., 2019; Mosher et al., 2020). Generally speaking, studies often dichotomize sport involvement as participant/non-participant (Coalter, 2015; Robertson et al., 2019), which oversimplifies sport participation which could also account for type of sport, competitive level, length of involvement, role on the team, etc. (Robertson et al., 2019). Given the importance of sport participation for improved physical (Hebert et al., 2015, 2016) and mental health (Eime et al., 2013; Evans et al., 2017), there is a need to

improve the characterization of sport involvement in the general population. This could increase understanding of the development of sport participation by providing insight into patterns associated with long-term involvement in sport and physical activity. Such improvements in understanding of sport participation development may be important for effective policy and planning around sport participation and delivery, especially when describing sport participation in a large number of individuals.

Multiple frameworks for understanding sport involvement have been suggested (e.g., sport participation models). Since national sport organizations across the globe are known to use sport participation models to guide their practices (Bailey and Morley, 2006; Holt et al., 2018), a better understanding of the empirical support for sport participation models emerges as a top research priority to address (Holt et al., 2018). Some sport participation and physical activity-based models could also be useful in understanding sport involvement in the general population. Sport participation and physical activity-based models characterize different stages of sport involvement based on sport activities (organized and unorganized) individuals take part in at different age markers (Côté et al., 2007; Balyi et al., 2013). These models also help explain how an individual's sport participation can take shape over time by suggesting different pathways of sport participation. For example, these models suggest that during childhood, youth can either play multiple sports (e.g., sport sampling) or participate intensively in only one sport (e.g., sport specialization). Then, around adolescence, youth can either specialize into a single sport (e.g., elite participation) or maintain recreational involvement in physical activity (Côté et al., 2007; Balyi et al., 2013). Given estimates that nearly one third of youth drop out of sport annually during adolescence (Delorme et al., 2011; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2016), evidence-based sport participation and physical activity-based models can represent powerful tools for planning successful age-appropriate interventions to promote sport and physical activity participation. Sport participation and physical activity-based models contrast models aimed at explaining various factors associated with sport career or talent identification. Whereas sport participation and physical activity-based models attempt to describe patterns of sport or physical activity participation throughout various stages of life, other models seek to describe how various specific factors (e.g., psychological characteristics Abbott and Collins, 2004, participation environment Henriksen et al., 2010a, career transition Stambulova et al., 2009, motor skill acquisition Starkes et al., 2004) may facilitate or hinder talent development or identification, typically among elite athletes.

Although some reviews of the sport participation model literature have been undertaken, no review sought to investigate whether or not current models of sport participation are applicable to describe sport involvement in the general population. Past reviews have identified the historical development of athlete development models (Bruner et al., 2009), detailed interconnections among various sport participation models (Bruner et al., 2010), highlighted gaps in the literature to justify the development of a new model (Gulbin et al., 2013), and described the empirical support for a specific sport participation model (Côté and Vierimaa, 2014). Despite these efforts, criticism

surrounding the empirical basis for the development of certain sport participation models exists (Bailey et al., 2010; Ford et al., 2011; Collins and Bailey, 2013) and some researchers have argued that underlying tenets of sport participation models are too restrictive to adequately represent the sport experience of most participants (Güllich, 2014, 2017; Güllich and Emrich, 2014; Cupples et al., 2018). For example, one model suggests that around age 16, sport participants have developed the physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and motor skills needed to invest their effort into highly specialized training in one sport (Côté et al., 2007). However, research among elite athletes suggests that identification of a specific age for specialization might not be appropriate since there are multiple pathways that can lead toward elite (e.g., national/world-level) success (Güllich, 2014; Huxley et al., 2017; Cupples et al., 2018). Further, it is unknown whether or not this is applicable to the general population where sport performance might not necessarily be a goal of sport participation. Therefore, it is unclear if sport participation and physical activity-based models can be applied to describe patterns of sport participation in the general population.

Uncertainty therefore remains regarding the empirical evidence of the foundational principles contained in participation and physical activity-based models (Holt et al., 2018). Identifying the breadth and depth of research surrounding these tenets is a tenable way of assessing the quantity and quality of the existing literature (Levac et al., 2010). Doing so will also provide direction for future research (Levac et al., 2010). To fill this gap, the current scoping review sought to map sport participation models and to investigate empirical support for the principles of sport participation and physical activity-based models aimed at describing the evolution of sport participation among individuals in the general population. Given the aims of the review were exploratory in nature (e.g., to inform on the current state of evidence and to provide direction for future research), a scoping review approach was selected as it lends itself to the objective of providing a broad, yet preliminary overview of the subject (Lockwood and Tricco, 2020).

## METHODS

### Design

This scoping review is informed by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (Tricco et al., 2018) and the methodology outlined by Levac et al. (2010) for conducting scoping reviews. Two overarching phases were used: First, we identified models that relate to sport participation in the literature and retained those that described the evolution of an individual's sport participation over time (i.e., sport participation and physical activity-based model). Second, we identified the extent and nature of the evidence for the various tenets of the models identified.

### Phase 1: Identifying Sport Participation Models

#### Sport Participation and Physical Activity-Based Model Identification

Using the study selection approach suggested by Levac et al. (2010), a snowball methodology was employed to identify models



that relate to sport participation. First, two published, peer-reviewed articles were used as a starting point for identifying sport participation models because they provided important insight into the historical development of sport participation models. We believed that these two articles would provide a practical initial list of sport participation models. The first article traced the origins of athlete development models in sport (Bruner et al., 2009) and identified five different models of sport participation. The second article consisted of a citation network analysis (Bruner et al., 2010) built upon the first article and added two additional models of sport participation. These seven sport participation models were used as a starting point for identifying additional models. Specifically, in the articles that first described each of these seven different models of sport participation, we searched the references for cited literature, book chapters, and peer-reviewed papers that described models of sport participation that were not initially identified. If additional models were cited, then these were read to identify if they described sport participation.

### **Sport Participation and Physical Activity-Based Model Classification**

Literature describing each identified model was read so that they could first be classified according to the context in which the model is used. For this, models were categorized as (i) describing activities relating to sport participation (i.e., sport participation characteristics, skill development, sport environment characteristics, etc.), or (ii) applicable to, but not specific to sport development (i.e., models for education or general skills development). Second, the models were also classified based on their primary aims. Specifically, the models were classified as either describing talent development, talent identification or career transition. Talent development models refer to the process through which talent is developed to lead to elite performance or the processes that lead to recreational sport participation (Simonton, 1999; Gagné, 2004). Talent identification models aim to define the characteristics of individuals with potential to succeed in senior elite sport (Vaeyens et al., 2009; Johnston et al., 2018). Career transition models describe the strategies required to advance to a further development level (Stambulova et al., 2009).

### **Content Validation of Sport Participation and Physical Activity-Based Models**

Levac et al. (2010) advocate for expert consultation, adding that “preliminary findings can be used as a foundation to inform the consultation.” To determine if the list of models identified in the first phase of the review was exhaustive, a two-step content validation process was used. First, the authors each read literature on each of the models identified and worked collaboratively to classify them. Second, we validated that the list was exhaustive with international experts in sport participation. Experts were first authors of the identified models or other authors commonly publishing on sport participation development. Each expert was e-mailed a two-page description of the background and aims of the review with a figure presenting models as classified using the logic described above. Experts were asked to comment

on whether the list of models was exhaustive and to suggest modifications or additions. The experts were contacted by up to three e-mails each. We then reviewed any supplementary material recommended by the experts.

### **Selection and Description of the Sport Participation and Physical Activity-Based Models**

Because of our interest in characterizing sport participation across the lifespan, we were specifically interested in models that can characterize the evolution of sport participation for a given individual. Therefore, talent development models were considered given their broad aim. Explanatory models were excluded since these models are aimed at explaining how specific factors [e.g., psychological characteristics (Abbott and Collins, 2004), participation environment (Henriksen et al., 2010a), career transition (Stambulova et al., 2009), motor skill acquisition (Starkes et al., 2004)] may facilitate or hinder talent development or identification, and do not necessarily encompass the entire lifespan. We excluded talent identification models since these are mostly concerned with identifying which athletes make the transition into elite levels of competition (Vaeyens et al., 2009; Johnston et al., 2018), and thus fail to describe the evolution of a participant throughout his/her lifespan. We also excluded career transition models since they focused on elite athletes transitioning out of sport, and therefore only encompass a small proportion of an athlete's life. Next, we excluded models that did not describe participation development within a general sport context since models developed in “other contexts” may not be readily applicable to sport. Models specific to one sport were also excluded since they focus on specific development elements in a given sport and they might not be applicable to other sports or general sport participation. Additionally, since many sport federations have their own model, we excluded models specific to a single sport for feasibility reasons. Finally, the tenets (underlying principles) of models retained were extracted and then used to provide a description of the sport participation models.

## **Phase 2: Identifying Evidence for Sport Participation and Physical Activity-Based Models**

### **Search Strategy and Data Sources**

Based on the premise that scientific articles testing tenets of sport participation models will have cited manuscripts detailing the model of interest, we searched for manuscripts that cited the original articles presenting each of the models retained through Phase 1 of this study. Specifically, we identified literature specific to the sport participation models through the Scopus online database cited-by tool. This allowed to retrieve articles that cited one of the original articles presenting the models retained in phase 1. As of January 2020, the Scopus online database was comprised of five independent indices providing access to over 23,000 peer-reviewed journals, including 1.7 billion cited references since 1970 (Scopus, 2020). After identification in the Scopus online database, we used our institutional online library to collect articles. No publication date restrictions were used

and the literature search was conducted between July 2019 and August 2020.

### Eligibility Criteria

Original research articles investigating one or more of the tenets underlying the models met the inclusion criteria of the current review. Studies published in peer-reviewed journals in French or English were included for review.

### Study Selection and Data Collection Process

After removal of duplicates, all titles and abstracts were scanned for the eligibility criteria. Full texts were then read to determine the tenet that was investigated. In cases where a study did not explicitly cite a tenet of the model under review, but tested something similar to a tenet, the article was read by the other co-author to determine if that specific study should be included or not in the current analysis. Any disagreement was resolved by discussion between co-authors.

Data from all included studies were recorded in one main data extraction sheet (**Appendix**). Extracted data included: (a) study characteristics (e.g., author names, year, and country of origin); (b) major focus of the study; (c) study design and measures; (d) sport(s) investigated and level of competition; (e) sample description; (f) main results; (g) tenets investigated.

## RESULTS

### Identification of Sport Participation and Physical Activity-Based Models Content Validation

The snowball strategy described above led to the identification of 16 models that relate to sport participation. A total of 16 experts were then identified and invited to validate the content of this list. Four e-mails were invalid. Of the 12 experts remaining, three did not answer and one responded that they did not consider themselves an expert on the topic and was thus excluded from the expert count, for a response proportion of 72% (8/11). Most experts confirmed that the list of identified models was exhaustive, but others suggested additional readings on supplementary models, including books, chapters, and selected articles. This resulted in the inclusion of one additional model for consideration in the review (total of 17 models). The other recommended models did not fit the criteria for the current review; some documents described models that are specific to a single sport, while others did not fit into the scope of the current study (i.e., positive youth development).

### Model Selection

Of the 17 models considered, 11 offered a description of individuals' development in a sport context specifically, whereas six could be applied to other contexts. Among the 11 models specific to the sport context, six described talent development, two described talent identification and three described career transitions as their primary aims (**Figure 1**).

Of the six models that describe talent development in sport, three models can be considered sport participation and physical activity-based. They characterize sport participation throughout

the lifespan by describing sport and activity involvement and were retained for this review: the Developmental Model of Sport Participation (Côté, 1999; Côté et al., 2007) (DMSP), the Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) Model (Balyi et al., 2013), and the Integrated Foundations, Talent, Elite, Mastery (FTEM) framework (Gulbin et al., 2013). The three models not retained provide important additions to the literature, but focus on specific aspects of sport participation and do not necessarily describe the activities participants take part in of across the lifespan. Specifically, the Life-span Model of the Acquisition & Retention of Perceptual-Motor Expertise was excluded since it explains how individuals acquire and retain motor skills, but does not characterize sport participation (Starkes et al., 2004). Similarly, the Grounded Theory of Talent Development and Social Support model explains the importance of social support in the development of highly successful collegiate athletes, but does not characterize sport participation (Morgan and Giacobbi, 2006). Finally, the Athletic Talent Development Environmental Model describes the environmental characteristics that might favor successful transitions from junior elite status to senior elite status (Henriksen et al., 2010a). It was excluded since it is interested in environmental characteristics and not activities that characterize sport involvement.

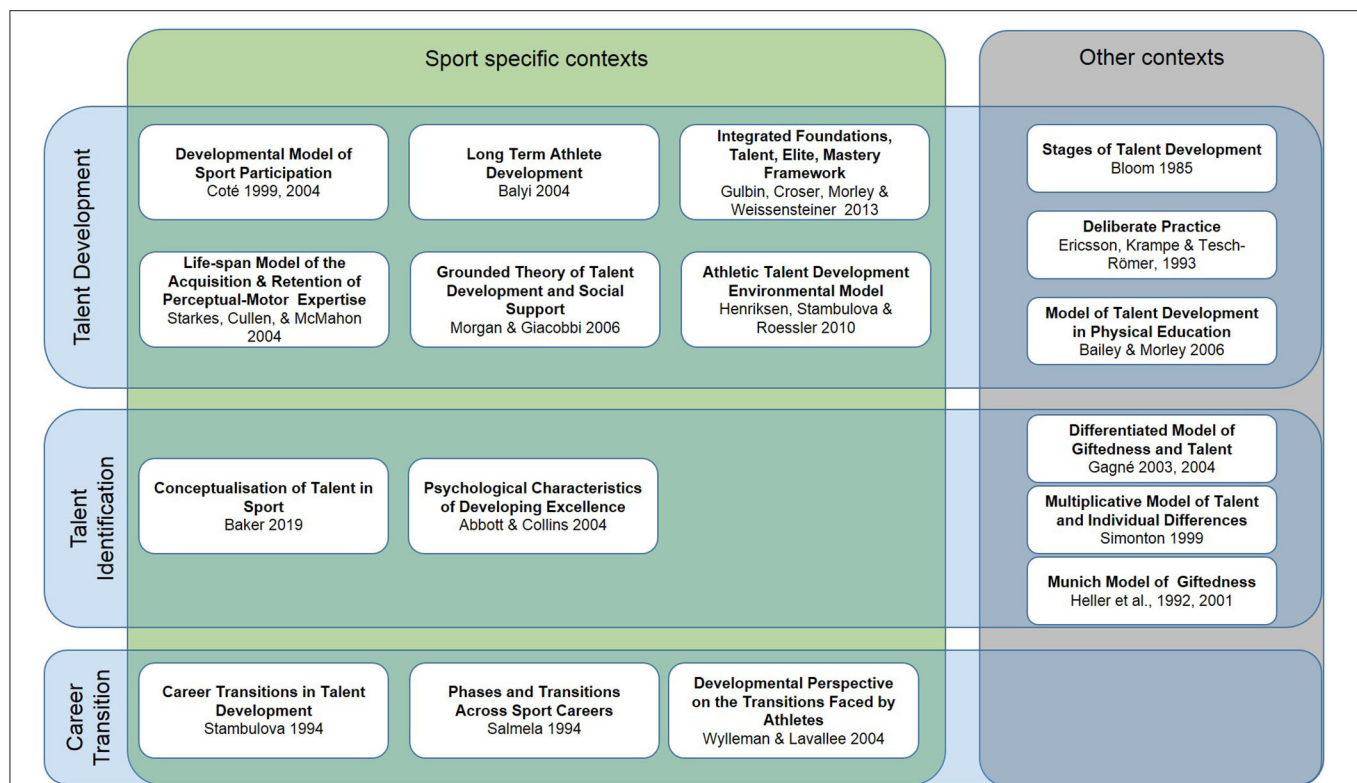
The three models retained are stage-based, meaning that they describe development of sport participation as going through successive stages. All models suggest appropriate sport activities for their various stages, but differ in their definition of boundaries. For example, stages in the DMSP are based on participants' age, while stages in the LTAD are based on participants' age and biological development. The FTEM framework stages are delimited by sport competency or level of competition and allows for non-linear movement between stages.

All three models advocate for participation in multiple sports during childhood, but also recognize that some participants and/or some sports require early specialization. In general, tenets of the three models address youth sport participation practices (i.e., sport sampling vs. early sport specialization) and long-term physical activity involvement, describe the adequate type of sport involvement at a given stage (i.e., deliberate practice, deliberate play, development of physical literacy), or psychological characteristics required to successfully navigate through the various stages of each model. A detailed description of each tenet of the three sport participation and physical activity-based models is available in **Table 1**.

### Empirical Evidence for Sport Participation and Activity-Based Models Study Characteristics

After removal of duplicates, a total of 876 articles were identified as citing one of the three models. Based on titles and abstracts suggesting assessment of a tenet, 119 articles were retained and screened. Of these, 38 articles were considered to test one or more of the tenets of either the DMSP, the LTAD or the FTEM and were included in the review (**Figure 2**). The most common reason for excluding articles was that they only mentioned a model, but did not test tenets of a model. Other common





**FIGURE 1 |** Sport participation development models in sport specific and other contexts.

reasons for excluding manuscripts were that the objectives were related to talent identification (e.g., describe the skills and/or physiological/psychological characteristics of selected/unselected athletes) or career transition, or that they were review articles. We extracted data from these articles which allow to summarize the model under study, methodologies undertaken, variables assessed and sample sizes included (Table 2).

Of all the models considered for the review, the DMSP received the most support ( $n = 33/38$ ), the LTAD received support from five articles, while the FTEM framework did not receive any support. Support for the models came from 13 different countries, with most publications from Canada ( $n = 11$ ), Germany ( $n = 9$ ), and the United Kingdom ( $n = 7$ ). Seventy-one percent ( $n = 27/38$ ) of the studies used a cross-sectional design. Twenty-one studies had sample sizes  $\leq 100$ , nine studies had sample sizes between 101 and 250 participants, and eight studies had sample sizes  $\geq 500$ .

### Support for the Sport Participation and Physical Activity-Based Models

The empirical support identified for each individual tenet of the sport participation and physical activity-based models is summarized in Table 1. Nearly all studies investigated differences in career development (i.e., hours of training, age of attaining milestones, level of performance) between elite and non-elite athletes and employed a retrospective interview protocol as a primary measure ( $n = 34/38$ ). While there were differences

between studies for their interview protocols, most used retrospective questions for information regarding demographics, early activities (i.e., timeline of involvement in all structured leisure activities throughout development, including number and time spent in each), developmental milestones (i.e., age at which the athlete reached key sport-related milestones), and sport-specific activities (i.e., time spent in specific training activities at each stage of development). The remainder of the studies investigated differences between elites and non-elites regarding performance on physical tests or psychological characteristics. Only one study prospectively investigated a sample in the general population that was classified into different profiles of sport participation based on their longitudinal self-reported level of involvement in organized and unorganized physical activity during adolescence (Gallant et al., 2017).

### Support for the DMSP

Tenet #1 of the DMSP suggests that sampling many sports early in the sporting career does not hinder elite sport participation in sports where peak performance is reached after maturation. This was the most commonly assessed tenet identified in this review. In this context, all studies used a retrospective questionnaire to compare developmental differences between elite (i.e., senior international competition or professional contracts) and non-elite (i.e., junior international level or below) developmental pathways of athletes (Baker et al., 2003; Barreiros et al., 2013; Coutinho et al., 2014, 2016; Güllich and Emrich, 2014; Güllich,

**TABLE 1 |** Tenets of the sport participation and physical activity-based models retained and references supporting them.

Tenets of the Developmental Model of Sport Participation (DMSP)	References
<b>Tenet #1:</b> early diversification (sampling) does not hinder elite sport participation in sports where peak performance is reached after maturation.	Baker et al., 2003; Barreiros et al., 2013; Coutinho et al., 2014, 2016; Güllich and Emrich, 2014; Güllich, 2017; Huxley et al., 2017; Cupples et al., 2018
<b>Tenet #2:</b> early diversification (sampling) is linked to a longer sport career and has positive implications for long-term sport involvement.	Baker et al., 2005; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; Bridge and Toms, 2013; Coutinho et al., 2014, 2016; Gallant et al., 2017
<b>Tenet #3:</b> early diversification (sampling) allows participation in a range of contexts that most favorably affects positive youth development.	
<b>Tenet #4:</b> high amounts of deliberate play during the sampling years build a solid foundation of intrinsic motivation through involvement in activities that are enjoyable and promote intrinsic regulation.	Hendry et al., 2014, 2019a; Vink et al., 2015; Forsman et al., 2016; Thomas and Güllich, 2019
<b>Tenet #5:</b> a high amount of deliberate play during the sampling years establishes a range of motor and cognitive experiences that children can ultimately bring to their principal sport of interest.	Baker et al., 2012; Haugaasen et al., 2014; Bridge, 2017, 2018; Sieghartsleitner et al., 2018
<b>Tenet #6:</b> around the end of primary school (about age 13), children should have the opportunity to either choose to specialize in their favorite sport or to continue in sport at a recreational level.	Soberlak et al., 2003; Hayman et al., 2011; Coutinho et al., 2014, 2016; McFadden et al., 2016
<b>Tenet #7:</b> late adolescents (around age 16) have developed the physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and motor skills needed to invest their effort into highly specialized training in one sport.	Moesch et al., 2011; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Güllich, 2014; Güllich and Emrich, 2014; Hornig et al., 2016; Huxley et al., 2017, 2018; Mendes et al., 2018; Hendry et al., 2019b
Tenets of the Long-term Athlete Development Model	References
<b>Physical Literacy:</b> Physical literacy is the development of a range of basic human movements, fundamental movement skills, and foundational sport skills that give people the tools to engage in health-enhancing physical activity for life—to be active for life. Required for movement through the sport excellence stages.	
<b>Specialization:</b> When children try a number of sports and choose to specialize later, they increase their chances of excelling (movement patterns, decision making). Some sports require early involvement. Some sports require early specialization.	Arede et al., 2019; Yustres et al., 2019
<b>Age</b> (Chronological, skeletal, relative, developmental, general training, sport-specific training): Chronological age is not a good predictor of developmental age. Monitoring relative age is essential, because those born early in the active year have initial advantages and those born late have initial disadvantages. Identifying early, average, and late maturers during puberty is essential for providing developmentally appropriate training, competition, and recovery programs.	McCunn et al., 2017
<b>Trainability:</b> Windows of opportunity exist for accelerated development of the 5S's (Strength, Speed, Skills, Stamina, Suppleness) around puberty based on specific biomarkers (e.g., PHV).	Moran et al., 2018
<b>Intellectual, emotional, moral development:</b> When we consider athletes' readiness, we take into account physical, intellectual, emotional, and moral development. Athletes develop in these areas at varying speeds, which can affect their capacity to deal with the overall sport experience. Their level of capacity determines when to move from one stage to the next. Because of this, athlete development should be individualized.	
<b>Excellence takes time:</b> To achieve expertise in an activity, people require thousands of hours of practice over the span of approximately a decade (depending on activity, coaching, natural ability). Unstructured and free play in other activities are beneficial. By developing a variety of skills over a range of sports and activities, athletes are often better equipped to excel in a single sport later on. Premature selection deprives some youth of the chance to pursue the thousands of hours they need to achieve excellence. Requires appropriate support (environment).	
<b>Periodization:</b> Training must be planned appropriately.	
<b>Competition:</b> Many facets of competition must be considered and modified if children are to develop properly and want to remain in the game. As competition should be modified to suit children and youth, care must also be taken to avoid overcompetition.	
<b>System alignment and integration:</b> LTAD cannot be fully achieved without the health, recreation, sport, and education sectors working in tandem. System alignment leads to increased quality in sport and physical activity, which encourages more participation, which in turn creates more sustainable activity.	Kristiansen et al., 2018
<b>Continuous improvement:</b> Coaches need to worry less about strategizing with young players and more about the overall development of each athlete. Rules encouraging less-result-oriented approaches should be incorporated.	

(Continued)

TABLE 1 | Continued

Tenets of the Foundations, Talent, Elite, Mastery (FTEM) framework	References
<b>(F1) Learning and acquisition of basic movement foundations:</b> Participant's early exposure to a variety of movement experiences that afford them a broad range of essential movement foundations.	
<b>(F2) Extension and refinement of movement foundations:</b> Advance and refine F1 movement experiences through continued broad exposure to formal and informal play, practice and games, in both sport specific and non-sport specific ways (i.e., sport sampling).	
<b>(F3) Sports specific commitment and/or competition:</b> Increase in the commitment to training, sport specific skill development, and/or formal engagement in competition. Can also include the pursuit of personal improvement or self-competition, through either a competitive or non-competitive environment.	
<b>(T1) Demonstration of high performance potential:</b> Athletes typically exhibit demonstrable and measurable gifts or talents in one or more of the physical, physiological, psychological, and skill domains, which indicate future potential in high performance sport.	
<b>(T2) Talent verification:</b> Evidence based observations (T1) should be supplemented by the subjective judgements and intuition of experienced coaches.	
<b>(T3) Practicing and achieving:</b> Having gained interest from talent scouts, coaches or national sporting organizations, athletes are committed to higher levels of sport specific practice and striving for continual performance improvements that are focused on a benchmark outcome.	
<b>(T4) Breakthrough and reward:</b> Gaining professional support for continued development (athletic scholarship at University or institute or academy of sport, or are drafted into a professional team or elite training squad.	
<b>(E1) Senior elite representation:</b> Olympic/World: national team selection; Professional: playing at highest level of professional competition.	
<b>(E2) Senior elite success:</b> Olympic/World: podium finish; Professional: professionally successful (established metrics/accolades in their sport).	
<b>(M) Mastery:</b> Olympic/World: podium in two games (8 years); Professional: success over several seasons/period/era.	

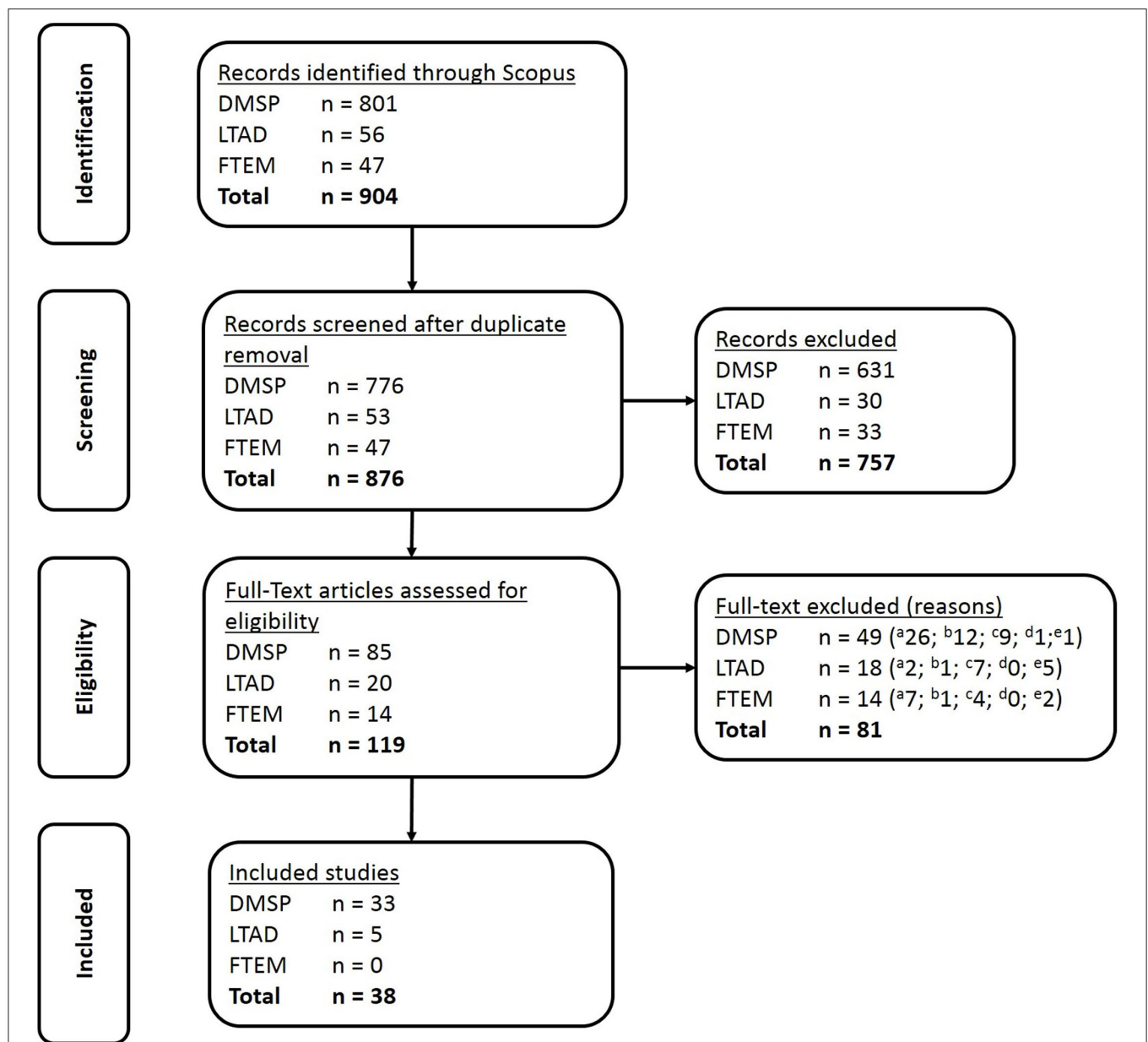
TABLE 2 | Summary of study characteristics providing assessment of sport participation and physical activity-based models' tenets.

Model (n studies)	Country (n studies)	Design (n studies)	Main outcome measures (n studies)	Sample size (n studies)
Developmental Model of Sport Participation (33)	Canada (9)	Cross-sectional (24)	Structured retrospective	≤ 20 (3)
	Germany (8)	Prospective/cohort (4)	Interviews (32)	21–50 (8)
	UK (4)	Comparative (2)	Sport Motivation Scale (2)	51–100 (7)
	Portugal (3)	Qualitative (1)	Behavioral Regulation in Sport	101–250 (9)
	Australia (3)	Matched-pairs design (1)	Questionnaire (2)	251–500 (3)
	Finland	Mixed-methods (1)	Psychological Skills Inventory	> 500 (3)
	USA		for Sports (1)	
	Brazil		DMSP-based categorizations	
	Denmark		based on self-reported	
	Switzerland		organized and unorganized	
Long-Term Athlete Development model (5)	Estonia		physical activity (1)	
	Portugal	Retrospective (3)	Test performance (2)	21–50 (1)
	Norway	Quasi-experimental (1)	Still participating in sport (1)	51–100 (2)
	Germany	Repeated cross-sectional (1)	Selection to team (1)	251–500 (1)
	UK		Sport performance (1)	> 500 (1)
	Spain			

2017; Huxley et al., 2017; Cupples et al., 2018). All studies supported the notion that taking part in many sports during the developmental years does not prevent against becoming an elite athlete. For example, in a sample of professional rugby players, the number of other sports athletes took part in during their developmental years was undistinguishable between athletes who played on an elite-level team early (U-16 or U-18 level) or later (U-20 level) (Cupples et al., 2018). Similar results were observed in studies comparing elite and non-elite

volleyball players (Coutinho et al., 2014, 2016), and triathletes (Baker et al., 2005).

Tenet #2 of the DMSP suggests that early sampling is linked to longer sport involvement. Of the studies supporting this tenet, five are cross-sectional (Baker et al., 2005; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; Bridge and Toms, 2013; Coutinho et al., 2014, 2016) and one is prospective (Gallant et al., 2017). For example, in a cross-sectional study among 18 year old non-elite swimmers, participants who dropped out more often had an early sport



**FIGURE 2 |** PRISMA flow diagram of study selection process. DMSP, Developmental Model of Sport Participation; LTAD, Long Term Athlete Development Model; FTEM, Foundation, Talent, Elite, Mastery Framework Reasons for full-text exclusion. <sup>a</sup>only mentions model/no testing of tenet; <sup>b</sup>objective of paper is talent identification or career transition; <sup>c</sup>review paper; <sup>d</sup>does not talk about sport; <sup>e</sup>focused on coaching/sport governance rather than sport participation development.

participation profile characterized by early specialization (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008). One study investigating the natural history of youth participation also demonstrated that sampling many sports at the end of childhood was positively associated with an increased probability of still participating in sport at 15 years old, while specializing in one sport at the end of childhood did not protect against dropout (Gallant et al., 2017). Similarly, another study found that compared to taking part in one sport, individuals taking part in at least three sports at 11, 13, and 15 years had a higher likelihood of playing at a higher competitive

level at 16 and 18 years (Bridge and Toms, 2013). Finally, while the age range of studies supporting this tenet is limited, it does support that participating in multiple activities during childhood helps maintain sport involvement, in some cases, until at least 30 years.

Tenet #3 of the DMSP states that early sport sampling favorably affects positive youth development. Positive youth development is a framework aimed at developing competence, confidence, connection, character, and compassion/caring among youth (Shek et al., 2019). The methodology used

to retrieve articles that cited and tested tenets of the sport participation and physical activity-based models in this review did not lead to identification of articles assessing this tenet.

Tenet #4 of the DMSP suggests that deliberate play during the sampling years helps build intrinsic motivation toward the practiced sport. While no study investigated deliberate play on intrinsic motivation specifically, four studies investigated the relationship of both play and practice with motivation (Hendry et al., 2014, 2019a; Vink et al., 2015; Thomas and Güllich, 2019) and one investigated the link between practice only and motivation (Forsman et al., 2016). Supporting this tenet, a study of Finnish athletes found a positive relationship between total accumulated sport-specific play and practice and motivation (Forsman et al., 2016). Similarly, one longitudinal study demonstrated that taking part in more deliberate practice among U-15 elite athletes was associated with higher intrinsic motivation 12 months later (Vink et al., 2015). In contrast, another study found a negative relationship between among of practices during childhood and autonomous motivation among teenaged soccer players (Hendry et al., 2019a). Two other cross-sectional studies found no statistically significant association between the amount of play and intrinsic motivation (Hendry et al., 2014; Thomas and Güllich, 2019). The results from these studies are therefore mixed and do not clearly demonstrate that deliberate play is positively associated with intrinsic motivation.

Tenet #5 of the DMSP suggests that deliberate play during the sampling years exposes youth to motor and cognitive experiences that can positively influence a transfer of skills to the principal sport of interest. While no studies have demonstrated that only deliberate play positively influences skill transfer, the studies that tested this tenet investigated sport involvement in general (i.e., play and practice) and speculated that sampling many sports early positively influenced later sport performance (Baker et al., 2012; Hugaasen et al., 2014; Güllich et al., 2017; Güllich, 2018; Sieghartsleitner et al., 2018). In one longitudinal study of elite U-12 soccer players, participating in more non-organized soccer play and practice/training in other sports was positively associated with greater improvements in soccer match play two-years after baseline (Güllich et al., 2017). In one study of track and field athletes comparing participants on their level of improvement in performance over time, participants who showed greater improvements reported taking part in more sports over more years, compared to those who did not improve as much before specializing in athletics (Güllich, 2018). These results suggest that exposure to many sport experiences through sampling during youth helps future sport performance; specifically, a combination of play and practice might be necessary to facilitate transfer of skill between sports.

Although not as frequently assessed as tenet #1, tenets #6 and #7 were the subject of a relatively large number of scientific articles. Tenet #6 suggests that around age 13, children should have the opportunity to either specialize in their favorite sport or continue participating in sport at a recreational level, whereas tenet #7 of the DMSP suggests that athletes should only dedicate themselves to a single sport from around the age of 16. These

tenets are in line with many studies supporting tenets #1 (elite participation following sampling) (Baker et al., 2003; Barreiros et al., 2013; Güllich, 2017) and #2 (sampling leads to long-term involvement in sport) (Baker et al., 2005; Coutinho et al., 2014, 2016) regarding typical sampling-specializing-investment transitions to achieve elite status. However, multiple studies investigating appropriate timing for specialization inconsistently provide specific ages for professional (Hayman et al., 2011; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Hornig et al., 2016; Cupples et al., 2018; Güllich, 2019), and world or Olympic caliber athletes (Moesch et al., 2011; Huxley et al., 2018; Mendes et al., 2018). While some studies demonstrate timing in concordance with the suggested age ranges (Soberlak et al., 2003; Hayman et al., 2011; Coutinho et al., 2014, 2016; McFadden et al., 2016), most studies demonstrate that many successful athletes only specialized after 16 years (Moesch et al., 2011; Güllich, 2014; Güllich and Emrich, 2014; Huxley et al., 2017, 2018; Hendry et al., 2019b). Given the state of the current literature, typical sampling-specializing-investment transitions seem to be beneficial for attainment of elite-level sport participation, but specific age ranges have yet to be consistently demonstrated.

### *Support for the LTAD Model*

Four of the ten tenets of the LTAD were supported by five articles. Two studies supported the specialization tenet (Arede et al., 2019; Yustres et al., 2019), which states that sampling many sports early increases the chances of excelling in sport and that different sports require different degrees and timing of specialization (Balyi et al., 2013). One study found that, compared to more specialized athletes, less-specialized athletes at the U-13 level had greater physical skills and had a greater chance of getting selected at the U-14 level (Arede et al., 2019). The other study conducted a secondary analysis of junior and senior world championship swimming performance and found a positive association between participation at the junior world championship and ranking at the senior world championship level (Yustres et al., 2019). The authors conclude that early specialization in swimming helps achieve senior success, but athlete training histories were not recorded and the junior world championships include a wide age range (between 13 and 18 years).

The tenet regarding age, suggesting that maturation rates should be consistently monitored to ensure developmentally appropriate training (Balyi et al., 2013), received support from one study. Specifically, a repeated cross-sectional study identified that when comparing elite youth soccer players born within the same calendar year, the relatively older players in the U-14 and U-15 age groups were more physically mature than same-age peers born later in the year and thus had greater sprint speed (McCunn et al., 2017). This finding supports the tenet in that those born early in the active year might have initial advantages than those born later, indicating a need for continuous monitoring of the developmental age of athletes.

One study was found to assess the tenet of trainability, which states that windows of opportunity exist for accelerated development of certain abilities (i.e., speed) (Balyi et al., 2013). This study demonstrated that athletes who were developmentally younger based on age at peak height velocity, a marker of pubertal



development, responded better to sprint training than athletes who were in their growth spurt (Moran et al., 2018). This finding suggests that physiological responses to training might differ according to individual developmental patterns.

Finally, the tenet stating that the LTAD cannot be fully achieved without alignment of various sectors (i.e., health, recreation, sport, education) (Balyi et al., 2013) was also tested in one study. Specifically, using an internet-based survey of 58 athletes who participated in the Youth Olympic Games, 29% had dropped out of sport thereafter. One of the most frequently reported reasons of drop out among these young athletes whom had had success on the world stage related to the difficulties managing education and training (Kristiansen et al., 2018). These results support the tenet of alignment, whereby multiple sectors must interact to successfully support an athlete throughout development.

## DISCUSSION

This review summarized the current state of evidence in support of sport participation and physical activity-based models aimed at characterizing the evolution of sport participation by describing sport activity involvement over time. In the wider sport model literature, a total of 17 models were identified and classified according to their context of use and their main aim. A total of three models offered a description of the activities participants take part in throughout their lifespan (Côté et al., 2007; Balyi et al., 2013; Gulbin et al., 2013). Empirical support for these three models varied. Consistent with past research (Bruner et al., 2010; Côté and Vierimaa, 2014), the DMSP is the most empirically supported sport participation and physical activity-based model, while the LTAD received some support and the FTEM framework received no support. Further, some tenets of the models were assessed and supported, while some were not tested or received no support. Overall, cross-sectional studies of elite athletes that used retrospective data collection methods was the most popular type of study used to assess tenets of the sport participation and physical activity-based models.

### Long-Term Sport Participation

The three models describing the evolution of sport participation suggest a life-long sport participation pathway (i.e., for non-elite athletes/general population) (Côté et al., 2007; Balyi et al., 2013; Gulbin et al., 2013). All three models also advocate for sport sampling as an effective way of increasing the chance of sport participation over the lifespan. However, the current review found limited support for associations between sampling and long-term sport participation in the general population. For example, only one study in the current review investigated longitudinal associations between sport sampling and sport specialization in the general population. In the study, sport sampling at age 10 protected against sport dropout in the following five years, but early sport specialization did not (Gallant et al., 2017). While this study provides some support for the benefits of sport sampling during childhood, the narrow age range of participants does not inform on sport participation development beyond adolescence. Nevertheless,

other longitudinal studies conducted in the general population corroborate the benefits of playing multiple sports. Russell and Limle (2013) demonstrated that physically active college students were more likely to have played more sports during their teens than physically inactive college students. Likewise, participating in different types of sports during adolescence was positively associated with the physical activity levels of Finnish adults, but the number of sports played during adolescence was only positively associated with physical activity levels of Finnish women (Mäkelä et al., 2017). Recognizing that individuals participate in sport differently, an update to the LTAD model has seen the inclusion of “competitive for life” and “active for life” pathways (Higgs et al., 2019) (such pathways are already identified in the FTEM Gulbin et al., 2013). Given the importance of sport and physical activity participation throughout the lifespan (Warburton et al., 2006; Nelson et al., 2007; Janssen et al., 2010), more studies need to investigate the natural development of sport participation among the general population and to identify predictors and outcomes of sport participation across the lifespan. This information will be crucial to improve our understanding of general patterns of sport participation and will help refine recreational sport participation pathways described in sport participation and physical activity-based models currently used.

### Non-linearity of Sport Participation

All three reviewed models are stage-based (i.e., sport participants must demonstrate certain abilities or characteristics before transferring from one stage to the next). While the DMSP and the LTAD both describe participation development as linear pathways, the FTEM framework does not refer to linear transitions between stages (Gulbin et al., 2013). Some research included in this review suggests that the linearity of transitions described by the DMSP and LTAD might not reflect actual sport participation pathways of most participants. For example, several different trajectories were found to be associated with eventual professional rugby (Cupples et al., 2018) or golf (Hayman et al., 2011) contracts, Olympic appearances in track and field (Huxley et al., 2017), and other elite athletic achievements (Storm et al., 2012). Longitudinal studies spanning childhood to early adulthood have also demonstrated that several different trajectories of sport participation exist in the general population (Rodriguez and Audrain-McGovern, 2004; Findlay et al., 2009; Kwon et al., 2015; Howie et al., 2016). Therefore, more longitudinal research identifying the various paths sport participation may take are needed to perfect sport participation pathways described in models.

Sport participation and activity-based models should give increased attention to dropout in sport, since most participants will discontinue sport participation at some point (Butcher et al., 2002; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2016). For example, a study conducted among 1,300 tenth graders identified that 94% of participants had dropped out of at least one sport since grade 1, but that more than half of the participants who dropped out in grade 7 or 8 had taken up a new sport thereafter (Butcher et al., 2002). Further, the study identified that dropout can be activity-specific (discontinuing a specific



activity) or domain-general (withdrawal from all sport activities) (Butcher et al., 2002; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2016). These findings highlight that sport participation during youth is especially volatile and that over-and-above simply identifying dropout as a possible outcome of sport participation, an increased discussion and awareness around sport dropout and uptake could improve sport participation models. Given that different activities have different dropout rates over time (Butcher et al., 2002; Bélanger et al., 2009), and that activity-specific dropout is central to sport participation profiles (i.e., sport sampling; sport specialization), not considering the difference between activity-specific or domain-general dropout could further confuse our understanding of how youth sport participation evolves over time.

## Need to Improve Terms and Concepts

The models included herein each contained specific underlying tenets describing sport development. Several tenets were nevertheless similar across models. Yet, tenets from different models are difficult to compare since their terms and concepts are generally defined ambiguously (Güllich, personal communication, 2019). For example, in the absence of a standardized definition of “sport specialization,” at least five different definitions of this term can be found in the literature (DiSanti and Erickson, 2019). Similarly, there is no accepted operationalization of “sport sampling” or multi-sport participation. This ambiguity hampers empirical testing and model comparison, though some authors have made attempts at objectively operationalizing these concepts (Jayanthi et al., 2015; Gallant et al., 2017; Desroches et al., 2019). Further, consistent with past research (Swann et al., 2015) the current review found no cohesion among studies regarding the definition of “elite,” as some articles used “elite” to describe athletes who represent their country in international senior competitions (i.e., Olympics or World Championships) (Moesch et al., 2011; Güllich and Emrich, 2014; Güllich, 2017; Huxley et al., 2018), whereas others, used the term in reference to youth affiliated with a professional sport school (Güllich et al., 2017; Sieghartsleitner et al., 2018; Hendry et al., 2019a).

Notwithstanding the ambiguity among the terms and concepts, the homogeneity of research methodologies in the included articles is also noteworthy. The vast majority of included studies used cross-sectional research designs and investigated developmental histories of athletes using retrospective methods, echoing findings of a recent scoping review on sport specialization (DiSanti and Erickson, 2019). This suggests that the body of evidence is faced with the potential of important recall biases and threats to external validity. While retrospective interview protocols have demonstrated certain reliability parameters (Baker et al., 2003, 2005; Güllich, 2014; Güllich and Emrich, 2014), some athletes were asked to describe their training histories of at least two decades prior (Baker et al., 2003, 2005; Güllich, 2014). The longitudinal description of pathways is one strength of the models (Strachan et al., 2009), but methodologies undertaken to assess these fail to fully characterize participant development (DiSanti and Erickson, 2019). Further, cross-sectional research is limited in its ability to assess causality.

Since sport participation and physical activity-based models suggest that sampling may lead to elite sport participation, more advanced methods are needed to answer the fundamental question of whether elite athletes attained their status because they played multiple sports, or if they played multiple sports because they excelled in them (or had an affinity for sport in general).

## Limitations and Future Directions

Some limitations should be considered when reading the current review, including the possibility that it is not comprehensive since the databases used may not include all important peer-reviewed journals in the sport sciences field. Further, only articles that cited a model or specifically tested a tenet were retained for the current review. This ignores articles that have investigated associations supporting tenets of the sport participation models, but did not aim to do so for a model specifically. For example, our search strategy did not retrieve any articles aiming to test tenet #3 of the DMSP, which states that early sport sampling favorably affects positive youth development. However, there is consistent evidence that playing multiple sports is associated with better competence, confidence, and caring (i.e., markers of positive youth development) (Denault and Poulin, 2009; Agans and Geldhof, 2012; Agans et al., 2017). It is also important to acknowledge that models included herein were developed using existing evidence (Côté et al., 2007; Balyi et al., 2013; Gulbin et al., 2013), suggesting that from their inception they were already, at least partly, evidence-based. Whereas the goal of this review was to provide an overview of sport participation and physical activity-based models, including identification, classification and documentation of their empirical support, further reviews could assess detailed evidence for each of the tenets individually. Also, other models of sport development were identified but were not included in this review because they did not fit into the primary aim of the review, which was to investigate support for models that describe potential patterns of sport and physical activity participation throughout the lifespan (e.g., sport participation and physical activity-based models). For example, the Athletic Talent Development Environment model provides an important conceptualization of how the environment shapes elite athletes (Henriksen et al., 2010a,b), but does not describe the evolution of the participant throughout the lifespan. Similarly, the Abbott and Collins (2004) model provides an insightful discussion on the importance of considering psychological characteristics in talent development and identification programs, but is more focused on talent identification than talent development (Abbott and Collins, 2004). Although models describing the sport participation pyramid (Green, 2005; Bailey and Collins, 2013) were not included in this review since they were considered too broad to be able to characterize patterns of sport and physical activity participation, discussions surrounding access and opportunity for sport participation typically accompanying these models are worthwhile and should be considered when aiming to improve sport participation and physical activity-based models. Finally, in addition, models specific to any sport federations were not included for feasibility reasons as there are nearly as many models as there are sport federations.

The review has identified gaps in the current sport participation literature, which could be addressed in future work. In particular, this research has highlighted that there is little longitudinal research performed to support, or refute, tenets of sport participation and activity-based models. Therefore, future longitudinal investigations should aim to characterize a variety of patterns of sport participation in youth from the general population across multiple time points. In addition, given the paucity of identified research citing sport participation and physical activity-based models using samples of non-elite athletes (e.g., general population), it may be possible that not all sport and physical activity researchers know such models exist. Although knowledge users have identified athlete development models as a research priority (Holt et al., 2018), the extent to which researchers in broader physical activity and sport research are familiar with sport participation and physical activity-based models is unknown. Finally, efforts to standardize and operationalize terms and concepts included in sport participation and activity-based models could aid in providing evidence for all tenets proposed by such models.

## CONCLUSION

Although models identified herein are partly evidence-based, not all aspects of the models are empirically supported. Evidence for the tenets assessed generally originated from studies including considerable limitations and some tenets still need to be tested. Further, while models reviewed include a pathway for non-elite sport participation development, the research providing empirical support for models have largely focused on elite athlete development. More research and better description of non-elite sport participation pathways are therefore needed as they represent the trajectory of an important portion of

sport participants. Efforts to clarify and describe terms and concepts used by the models are also needed to facilitate their conceptualization and to enable comparison across studies. Overall, the research reviewed in the current article suggests that some evidence support current sport participation and physical activity-based models, but that more research is required for them to be used in full confidence to guide sports policies, programs and practices, especially in the general population.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

FG conceived the current study, performed the literature search, and drafted the initial manuscript. Both authors interpreted the data, revised the work critically for important intellectual content, and approved the final version to be published.

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## SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

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# Sport Mega-Events and Displacement of Host Community Residents: A Systematic Review

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The aim of this study was to conduct a systematic literature review to understand how empirical data have informed the knowledge about the relationship between hosting sport mega-events and displacement of host community residents. Following the PRISMA protocol, we conducted a search of academic and gray literature in sport, social sciences, and humanities databases. We excluded conceptual papers, conference abstracts, and works that discuss urban transformation or displacement but are not related to sport events. We also excluded works that associate sport mega-events with urban transformations but are not related to resident displacement. From the initial 2,372 works reviewed, 22 met the inclusion criteria. In empirical studies, displacement of residents has been studied exclusively in the context of the Olympic Games, since Seoul 1988, but with a higher frequency in most recent Games (Beijing, London, and Rio). The gigantism and the sense of urgency created by the Olympic Games may explain why this event has been frequently associated with resident displacement. Findings showed that residents suffered either direct, forced evictions or indirect displacements. The selected studies show a contradiction between the discourse of sport mega-events guardians for supporting the United Nations Sustainable Goals (SDG) and the practice of human rights within host cities of such events.

**Keywords:** sustainable development goals, sport mega-events, evictions, removals, Olympic Games, gentrification

## INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the relationship between the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the United Nations (UN) can be dated back in the 1920s, when there were some discussions between Pierre de Coubertin and the League of the Nations ("La Société des Nations"), a forerunner of the UN (Grosset and Attali, 2008). After the foundation of the UN in 1945, discussions progressed mainly through the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In 1952, UNECO's executive board authorized the organization to be represented at the Olympic Games in Helsinki (Meier, 2017). Since then, the organizations have gotten closer. In 2009, the IOC became a Permanent Observer of the UN, an honor usually reserved for non-member states, but very rarely granted to non-governmental organizations (Van Luijk, 2018). In 2017, the UN and the IOC agreed on a direct partnership. According to the IOC, this direct partnership "will help sport to fulfill its role as "an important enabler of sustainable development", as outlined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals" (IOC, 2017). Controversially, this direct partnership led to the closure of the UN Office on Sport for Development and Peace (Burnett, 2017). The "Fédération

Internationale de Football Association" (FIFA) has also been considered a partner of the UN. In 1999, FIFA and the UN signed a strategic alliance to promote education through football (Sadecky, 2006). In 2021, the UN Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed said that, "The United Nations welcomes the collaboration with FIFA, particularly football's potential in supporting the SDGs" (FIFA, 2021).

Despite formal and informal partnerships between the UN and the guardians of sport mega-events, such events have been associated with abuses of human rights, especially related to displacement of host community residents (Boykoff, 2014; Lenskyj, 2016; Williamson, 2017; Horne, 2018). The 2015 Human Rights Watch annual report identified the five most critical human rights abuses associated with sport mega-events and listed evictions and displacements of citizens as the number one violation (Horne, 2018). There is an estimation that more than two million people were removed from their houses by the Olympic gentrification between Seoul 1988 and London 2012 Games (COHRE, 2007; Monks, 2016). Reports and conceptual papers have described that forced evictions or displacements of residents have happened in all host cities of sport mega-events in the last 30 years (Vale and Gray, 2013; Boykoff, 2014; Williamson, 2017). This fact seems to indicate the lack of commitment that the guardians of sport mega-events have had with the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11—Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

In this research, we use Grier and Grier's (1978, p. 8) definition of displacement, where a displacement occurs when "household are forced to move from its residence by conditions that affect the dwelling or its immediate surroundings, and that: (a) are beyond the household's reasonable ability to control or prevent, (b) occur despite the household's having met all previously imposed conditions of occupancy, and (c) make continued occupancy by that household impossible, hazardous, or unaffordable" (Grier and Grier, 1978). Marcuse (1985) notes that this definition encompasses all forms of displacements, including direct and indirect displacement. Eviction is a term that is commonly used to denote forced, direct, and/or involuntary displacement (Easton et al., 2020). In our systematic search, we consider both terms—displacement and eviction—to prevent missing important works. In the context of sport mega-events, displacement has been described as a consequence of gentrification (Watt, 2013; Richmond and Garmany, 2016; Easton et al., 2020). Pearman (2018, p. 127) defines gentrification as "a type of physical, economic, and cultural transition in low-income urban neighborhoods in which disinvested, oftentimes minority neighborhoods subsequently experience an influx of wealthier households and increases in real property values". We also looked for academic works that associate gentrification with sport mega-events to approach not only direct, but also indirect displacement.

For the current study, we use Müller's (2015, p. 638) definition of mega-events, which are defined as "one-off events of a fixed duration that attract a large number of visitors, have a large mediated reach, come with large costs, and have large social and environmental impacts". Muller builds upon previous definitions of mega-events (Roche, 1994; Hiller, 1999; Horne, 2007; Gold and

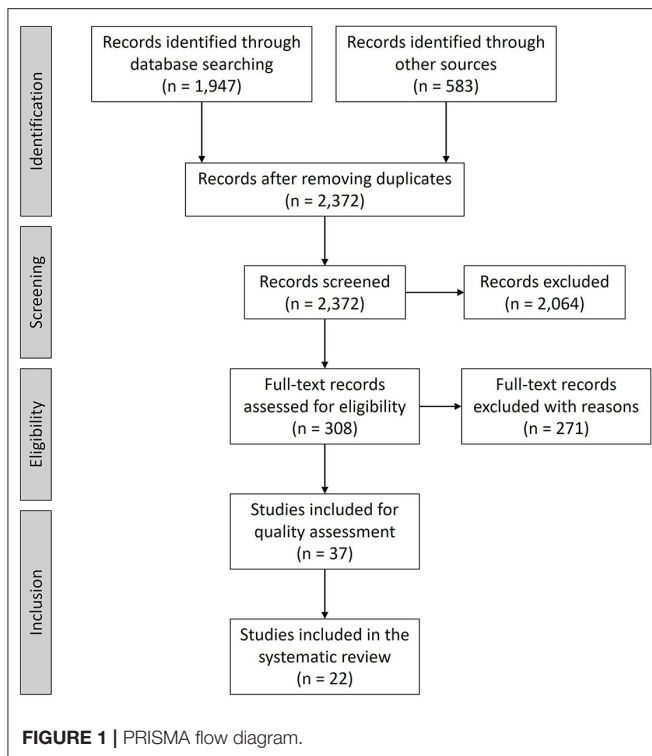
Gold, 2016) to identify four key factors that separate mega-events from other events: tourist attraction, media reach, costs, and host place transformation. The literature has placed an emphasis on the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup as examples of sport mega-events. However, other sporting events can also be considered mega-events, depending on their characteristics related to the key factors (Müller, 2015).

In the literature, we have a mix of books, book chapters, conceptual papers, and opinion articles about the association between sport mega-events and displacement of residents (Lenskyj and Wagg, 2012; Boykoff, 2014; Horne, 2018). In gray literature, we have media reports describing the size of the problem (Kelso, 2004; Comitê\_Popular\_do\_Rio, 2013; Assadourian, 2014). Knowledge about the topic has grown a lot in the last decade. However, that remains a fragmented knowledge, which creates difficulties for researchers and policy makers to know the state-of-the-art of the field. The literature review as a research methodology is acknowledged as an important tool to tackle this problem (Snyder, 2019). For a literature review to work effectively as a research methodology it has to be accurate, precise, and trustworthy (Snyder, 2019). Scholars have described systematic literature reviews as an effective research methodology because this type of review seeks to systematically search for, appraise and synthesize previous works (Grant and Booth, 2009; Moher et al., 2015). Systematic literature review has been suggested over other types of literature reviews in areas where research is fragmented and interdisciplinary and when researchers look to inform policy and practice (Snyder, 2019). Therefore, take into consideration the characteristics of research about sport mega-events and displacement and the aim of this study, we opted for conducting a systematic literature review.

We are unaware of any other published systematic literature review on sport mega-events and displacement of residents in local communities. We do not know how much of the knowledge produced so far has been produced after empirical studies and what information such studies can collectively bring to the field. The lack of a systematic review limits our knowledge about the current state-of-the-art of the topic. This knowledge is fundamental to inform both the need of future empirical studies on the topic and the action of decision makers. It can also inform about theoretical frameworks and methodologies that have been used to investigate the problem and the ones that are missing. Therefore, the aim of this study was to conduct a systematic literature review to understand how empirical data have informed the knowledge about the relationship between hosting sport mega-events and displacement of host community residents.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This systematic review was conducted following the PRISMA protocol, following Moher et al.'s (2015) guidelines. **Figure 1** provides the PRISMA flow chart. First, as a research team, we discussed and listed all terms that are associated with impacts of hosting sport mega-events on local resident displacement. Then, we searched for the terms in sport and broader social



and humanities academic data bases (WebScience, Scopus, Sport Discus, Proquest, SocIndex, Public Affairs Index, and Political Science Complete) and gray literature and theses [Google Scholar, Open Access Theses and Dissertations (OATD) and Open Gray]. Next, we downloaded all references from the initial search results and imported them into Mendeley, which allowed us to identify and remove all duplicates.

## Search Strategy

To ensure the broadest capture of publications possible, we used the following search terms, in different locations of the files, such as TI = title, AB = abstract, KW = keyword, and SU = subject. Below, we list the terms and locations.

[TI (displacement\* OR eviction\* OR gentrification OR urban renewal OR neighbo#rhoo# change OR demolition\* OR urban regeneration OR urban transformation) OR AB (displacement\* OR eviction\* OR gentrification OR urban renewal OR neighbo#rhoo# change OR demolition\* OR urban regeneration OR urban transformation) OR KW (displacement\* OR eviction\* OR gentrification OR urban renewal OR neighbo#rhoo# change OR demolition\* OR urban regeneration OR urban transformation) OR SU (displacement\* OR eviction\* OR gentrification OR urban renewal OR neighbo#rhoo# change OR demolition\* OR urban regeneration OR urban transformation)]  
AND

[TI (sport\* event\* OR sport\* mega event\* OR sport\* major event\* OR Olympic\* OR World Cup) OR AB (sport\* event\* OR sport\* mega event\* OR sport\* major event\* OR Olympic\* OR World Cup) OR KW (sport\* event\* OR sport\* mega event\* OR sport\* major event\* OR Olympic\* OR World Cup) OR SU

(sport\* event\* OR sport\* mega event\* OR sport\* major event\* OR Olympic\* OR World Cup)]

## Study Selection

In the search, we found 2,530 records (1,947 records from database searching and 583 from other sources—see **Figure 1**). We uploaded the list into Mendeley and removed the duplicates. After eliminating duplicates, 2,372 records were found. The next steps were conducted independently by both authors. After each step, we met to discuss and resolve divergences. To screen the records, we started by checking the title and the abstract of the records. A set of pre-selected inclusion and exclusion criteria were used throughout the screening process that was designed to capture as many outlets as possible. The inclusion criteria were Journal articles, academic books, academic book chapters, theses, gray literature, and empirical studies written in English. They should have included the search terms in title, keywords, abstract, or subject. The exclusion criteria were: Conceptual papers, conference abstracts, works that discuss urban transformation, gentrification or displacement but are not related to sport events, and works that associate sport mega-events with urban transformation or gentrification but are not related to resident displacement.

After the screening step, we excluded 2,064 records and finished with 308 full-text records to be assessed for eligibility. After reading the full text and applying the exclusion criteria, we eliminated 271 records with reasons and kept 37 records for quality assessment.

## Quality Assessment

To assess the quality of the 37 remaining records for final inclusion, analysis, and synthesis, we followed previous systematic reviews in sport management (Parent and Hoyer, 2018) and used the American Psychology Association's guidelines (Mallinckrodt, 2011). The quality assessment resulted in 15 records being excluded due to problems with the application of methods, lack of scientific contribution to the problem of displacement of local community residents, or lack of focus on displacement of residents. The final collection of the systematic review included 22 empirical papers.

## Data Extraction and Analysis

For each of the 22 records included in the final collection of the systematic review, we extracted the following information: source (journal, university or institution), authors and date, event (location and year), research aim, theoretical framework, method, main findings, and main limitations. Each author extracted the information individually and, later, met to resolve divergences. We focused on identifying strengths, similarities, and differences among the final records. The extracted data allowed us to discuss four main points: (1) the type of events (including location and year) that have been associated with resident displacement, (2) the theoretical frameworks used to study the topic, (3) the research methods, and (4) the main findings (existence or not of displacement in the context of sport mega-events, type of displacement, strategies used to displace, and type of population affected).



## RESULTS

**Table 1** summarizes the 22 studies included in the systematic review. Sixteen studies were articles published in peer-reviewed journals, while four were theses and two, reports. The studies were published between 2006 and 2020, with 18 of them (82%) being published between 2012 and 2020. Only four studies were conducted before 2012.

Regarding the type of event, all studies that made the final collection were conducted in the context of the Olympic Games. Most of the studies approached the association between the Summer Games and displacement. Only three studies had the Winter Games as the context (Kennelly and Watt, 2011; Pentifallo, 2015; Yoon, 2020). Eleven studies were conducted to investigate the case of London 2012, while four were about the case of Beijing 2008, two were about the case of Rio 2016 and other two, about Vancouver 2010. Almost all works investigated a single Olympic event. There is only one exception (Kennelly and Watt, 2011) where a comparison between London 2012 and Vancouver 2010 was conducted. Beyond the studies that are part of the final collection of this systematic review, there are some reports that compared hosts, such as the COHRE report (COHRE, 2007).

The studies have drawn upon a variety of theoretical frameworks. While there is no dominance of a specific theory, theories related to the use of urban space—the right to city framework (Lefebvre, 1996), theory of spatiality (Lefebvre, 1991), and neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005)—were discussed in some articles (Rock, 2012; Cotton, 2018; Watt, 2018; Bernstock, 2020). An important finding is that 50% of the studies have not drawn upon any theory or theoretical framework. These are studies that have a descriptive nature, aiming to investigate whether displacements in host cities of sport mega-events have happened and discussing some possible causes and consequences. Three studies developed econometric models, representing a group of articles with similar aims of estimating the impact of hosting sport mega-events on housing factors (e.g., construction, rent, and house prices), which have been impacting displacement of residents (Kavetsos, 2012; Zheng and Kahn, 2013; Wang et al., 2015).

Most of the studies apply the single case study approach, using qualitative strategies to analyse data extracted from either interviews (10 studies) or documents (nine studies) or observations (seven studies). Among studies that used qualitative data analysis, six applied more than one source of information, combining interviews with observations and/or document analysis. In contrast, only two studies relied on survey questionnaires to collect data, using quantitative strategies to analyse data (Wang et al., 2015; Suzuki et al., 2018). One of these two studies used both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques, with a quite small sample size for survey questionnaires. The other one collected data from a large sample and used quantitative data analysis techniques (Wang et al., 2015). An additional study collected data using questionnaires, but analyzed the data qualitatively (Rock, 2012).

Regarding the main findings, studies that are included in the systematic review have an overall message that preparing to

host sport mega-events, more specifically the Olympic Games, has led to displacement of host community residents. In all 22 studies, findings showed that residents suffered either direct or indirect displacement or both. Direct displacement has included eviction of marginalized residents as consequence of preparing to host events such as Seoul 1988, Barcelona 1992, Beijing 2008, Vancouver 2010, London 2012, Rio 2016, and PyeongChang 2018 Olympic Games (Watt, 2013; Zheng and Kahn, 2013; Pentifallo, 2015; Talbot and Carter, 2018). Most of the studies found that indirect displacement of marginalized groups happens due to gentrification, revalorization of land, and negative impact on housing affordability. Marginalized groups include the poor, low-income earners, social housing residents, elderly, homeless people, youth, and ethnic minorities (Mahon, 2007; Kennelly and Watt, 2011; Gillespie et al., 2018; Yoon, 2020). In general, studies investigated eviction and displacement of marginalized residents from houses. Few studies approached the displacement of special populations such as homeless people of host cities (Kennelly and Watt, 2011; Pentifallo, 2015; Suzuki et al., 2018).

## DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to conduct a systematic literature review to understand how empirical data have informed the knowledge about the relationship between hosting sport mega-events and displacement of host community residents. There is an agreement among the studies that preparing to host sport mega-events has led to displacement of marginalized groups of residents. Strategies to displace residents have varied between forced evictions and indirect displacements. Government of host cities have used different tactics to apply such strategies in different ways and proportions. An analysis of the sport mega-events that appear in the final collection of the systematic review reveals some similarities and differences in the use of displacement tactics.

The context of all studies is the Olympic Games, mainly the Summer Games. Findings show that displacement of residents has been an issue at least since Seoul 1988. Analyzing document data, Davis (2011) found that around 48,000 buildings were removed between 1983 and 1988, displacing 720,000 residents in densely populated, low income districts of Seoul (Davis, 2011). Davis asserted that official documents support a causal link between forced evictions and preparations for the 1988 Games. Davis (2011) affirmed that the Seoul city hall openly used the 1988 Games (and the 1986 Asian Games) to promote a “city beautification,” which necessarily included demolition of old buildings and removal of poor communities. The study reveals that both forced evictions and city beautification led to a massive displacement of poor residents of Seoul in preparation for the Games. The numbers make the Seoul 1988 the sport mega-event that led to second largest catalyst of resident evictions, only behind to Beijing 2008 (Vale and Gray, 2013).

In a different context from Seoul, Barcelona 1992 led to some evictions, but it was essentially about indirect displacement of residents. Sanchez et al. (2007) investigated how urban development initiated by preparing the city for the Games

**TABLE 1** | Summary of extracted data from studies included in the systematic review.

Source	References	Event	Research aim	Theoretical framework	Method	Findings	Limitations
Planning Perspectives	Bernstock, 2020	Olympic Games–London 2012	To interrogate four key policy assumptions that underpinned the strategy for delivering affordable housing in the context of London 2012 Games.	The Growth dependent Planning Paradigm. Neoliberalism.	Document analysis.	Hosting London 2012 the revalorization of land stimulated private sector investment. Despite a rhetoric of inclusion, a neoliberal model was applied coupled with planning gain. This is a relatively weak instrument for redistributing value/benefits to disadvantaged communities. New housing developments are aimed at more affluent populations, contributing to gentrification and displacement of poor residents.	Use of document analysis is the only source of information. Single case study.
Bournemouth University	Cotton, 2018	Olympic Games–London 2012	To understand how the urban regeneration caused by London 2012 Olympic Games affected the daily lives of residents in the host area.	Neoliberalism.	Walking ethnography (observation), photovoice methodology (using Instagram), and semi-structured interviews ( $n = 4$ )	Within post-Olympic East London, the findings reveal the ubiquitous processes of neoliberal urbanization and gentrification which has contributed to the marginalization of poor residents, in opposition to new middle-class incomers. Poor residents have been displaced to peripheral hinterlands.	Single case study. Limited number of participants. All male participants. Association between findings and theory with room for improvement.
International Journal of Urban and Regional Research	Davis, 2011	Olympic Games–Seoul 1988	To assess the effect of hosting the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games on the city's housing situation, evictions record, and social movement groups.	No theoretical framework. Descriptive research.	Document analysis.	There was a marked increase in housing demolitions, eviction, dislocation, and new units of housing built in the period of Olympic Games preparations. The practice of eviction did become more frequent and more violent as a direct result of Olympic Games preparations. There were traces of an emerging housing rights movement which gains influence after the Olympic Game.	Use of document analysis is the only source of information. Single case study.
Urban Geography	Gaffney, 2016	Olympic Games–Rio 2016	To examine different cases in the context of pre-Rio 2016 Olympic Games to determine whether gentrification is occurring and, if so, by what processes.	No theoretical framework. Descriptive research.	Document analysis.	In Rio, sport mega-events have catalyzed and consolidated stages of urban change with particularly acute reflections in the real estate sector. In 2016, a multiplicity of gentrifications were happening. Gentrification has involved the displacement of poor residents by a wealthier group that exhibits different cultural patterns.	Limited use of documents. Lack of theoretical framework.

(Continued)

TABLE 1 | Continued

Source	References	Event	Research aim	Theoretical framework	Method	Findings	Limitations
Environment and Planning D: Society and Space	Gillespie et al., 2018	Olympic Games–London 2012	To reflect on the austerity urbanism imposed by the London 2012 Olympic Games on single mothers after the destruction of social housing in post-Olympics East London.	Austerity urbanism framework. Marxist feminism.	Participant observation. Semi-structured interviews ( $n = 12$ ).	The Carpenter's Estate occupation demonstrates the gendered nature of the urban commons and the leadership of women in defending them from enclosure. The process of commoning provided the basis for the forging of enduring relationships, the strengthening of existing networks and the circulation of ideas, creating an Olympic "counter-legacy" that exists in opposition to the legacy of the 2012 Games.	Single case study.
Housing, Theory and Society	Humphry, 2020	Olympic Games–London 2012	To explore how social tenants' lived experiences in post-London 2012 Olympic East Village are shaped by new forms of neoliberalism embedded into housing provision.	Individualization theory.	Semi-structured interviews ( $n = 32$ ). Participant observation.	After London 2012, in the East Village, there has been a shift from patterns of residualization to individualization, as self-reliant tenants are sought above those most in housing need. Social housing discourse seems to be shifting from notions of need to concerns with affordability.	Single case study. Unique context.
Urban Studies	Kavetsos, 2012	Olympic Games–London 2012	To estimate the impact of the London 2012 Olympics announcement on property prices.	No theoretical framework. Econometric model.	Secondary data from MousePrice and from the Land Registry (the official recording authority for property transactions in the UK). Hedonic model of the selling price of housing in host areas tested via regression analysis.	It is estimated that properties in host boroughs are sold between 2.1 and 3.3 per cent higher and properties up to three miles away from the main Olympic stadium are sold for 5 per cent higher. It is likely that inflationary pressures on the price of land and property will displace the poorest individuals currently residing in East London.	Lack of theoretical framework. Data driven investigation. Lack of further discussion about social impacts.
Sociology	Kennelly and Watt, 2011	Winter Olympic Games–Vancouver 2010; Olympic Games–London 2012	To assess the experiences of homeless youth in light of claims made by Vancouver 2010 and London 2012 organizers that the Games would benefit young people in host cities.	Spatial Dimensions of Global Spectacles (Lefebvrian spatial analysis along with Debord's concept of spectacle).	Interviews and focus groups in Vancouver ( $n = 27$ ) and London ( $n = 10$ ).	Disproportionate policing to "clean the streets" was a major issue experienced by homeless youth in Vancouver. There are indications that the same was happening in London. The Olympic Games are not equivalent to other gentrification and urban cleansing efforts. Their status as "mega-events" contribute to unexpected spatial results for homeless youth.	Exploratory nature of interviews in London.

(Continued)

TABLE 1 | Continued

Source	References	Event	Research aim	Theoretical framework	Method	Findings	Limitations
Visual Studies	Kennelly and Watt, 2012	Olympic Games–London 2012	To examine the impact of the London 2012 Olympics on low-income and marginally housed young people living in the London borough of Newham (host area of the Games).	No theoretical framework. Descriptive research.	Photo elicitation interviews ( $n = 13$ ).	The Stratford area of Newham (near to the Olympic Park) has visibly changed and increasingly threatened to exclude marginalized youth. Indirect displacement of youth happened in the area of Newham as a consequence of Olympic gentrification.	Lack of theoretical framework. Data driven investigation. Single case study.
COHRE	Mahon, 2007	Olympic Games–London 2012	To explore the preparations underway to host the 2012 Olympic Games and report the impacts on housing rights that were already becoming evident in the East London host area.	No theoretical framework. Descriptive research.	Document analysis.	Five years before the Games, over 1,000 people faced the threat of displacement from their homes, and housing prices were escalating. These effects were being disproportionately felt by marginalized groups: the poor, low-income earners, residents of public housing, and ethnic minorities such as Romani Gypsies and Irish travelers.	Exploratory in nature. Lack of theoretical framework. Single case study.
University of British Columbia	Pentifallo, 2015	Winter Olympic Games–Vancouver 2010	To critically examine the City of Vancouver's urban policies during the lead up to the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games.	Critical Urban Theory.	Document analysis. Critical policy analysis.	The 2010 Games brought an intense wave of punitive urban measures that functioned to criminalize homelessness and validate the removal of Vancouver's homeless population. Additionally, the number of social housing units made available shrunk, eventually dwindling to a minimal number of units actually constituting social housing.	Use of secondary data only. Document analysis is the only source of information.
Pennsylvania State University	Rock, 2012	Olympic Games–Beijing 2008	To investigate how low-income and marginalized center city residents navigate the new political, economic and socio-cultural terrain to resist urban dispossession and dislocation, pre- and post-Olympics in Beijing.	Neoliberalism.	Participant observation. Survey questionnaires ( $n = 86$ ). Document analysis.	The displacement and relocation of Beijing's hutong residents exemplifies a different kind of negotiated sacrifice and burden. There is no residential choice that can prevent the demolition of their hutong homes. People were displaced from "hutong" neighborhoods to high-rise formations, cleared of the previous history. Former hutong residents living in public housing received little, if any, compensation for being removed from their homes.	Use of "informal" interviews. Small sample size for questionnaires.

(Continued)



**TABLE 1 |** Continued

Source	References	Event	Research aim	Theoretical framework	Method	Findings	Limitations
Bournemouth University	Sadd, 2012	Olympic Games–London 2012	To develop a framework of urban regeneration legacy associated with the hosting of mega-events. To critically analyse Olympic social legacy with particular reference to the long-term positive, soft benefits.	Stakeholder theory	Semi-structured interviews (n = 22).	In the context of the Olympic Games, planned urban regeneration can easily become an example of urban gentrification if no protection is given to the local “working class” population. The local community to the site of the Games, whether they are residents, businesses, societies, clubs or communities, must be identified and consulted to achieve any form of long-term sustainable positive social legacy outcomes.	Problems of trying to repeat the same individuals in each case study (cases are far apart in time).
COHRE	Sanchez et al., 2007	Olympic Games–Barcelona 1992	To assess the possible relationship between the preparations for the Barcelona 1992 Olympic Games and the practice of forced evictions. To investigate the impact of the event on the enjoyment of the right to adequate housing in the city.	No theoretical framework. Descriptive research.	Document analysis. Interviews.	The urban development that started with the Olympic Games had negative consequences such as degradation of traditional neighborhood and displacement of residents. The construction of the Olympic village removed 147 families, mainly elderly widows and low-income families. Hosting the Games had a negative impact on housing affordability in the city, illustrated by strong increases in the prices of housing for rent (+145%) and for sale (+139%).	Exploratory in nature. Lack of theoretical framework. Single case study.
Environment & Urbanization	Shin and Li, 2013	Olympic Games–Beijing 2008	To critically examine the experience of migrant tenants, local tenants, and landlords in villages in the city (Cheongzhong-cun) in regard to their experiences on the preparations for the 2008 Olympic Games.	No theoretical framework. Descriptive research.	Semi-structured interviews (n = 48)	Immediately after Beijing 2008, migrants suffered eviction and displacement after demolitions. They receive neither cash nor in-kind compensation, which is available only for local permanent residents. Migrants faced exclusionary experiences of the Olympic Games, although they were main workforce for the Olympic city construction.	Exploratory in nature. Lack of theoretical framework. Single case study.
Leisure Studies	Suzuki et al., 2018	Olympic Games–Tokyo 2020	To address and explain forced evictions that have taken place due to the reconstruction of the National Stadium in Tokyo to host the 2020 Olympic Games.	No theoretical framework. Descriptive research.	Semi-structured interviews (n = 15). Survey questionnaire (n = 43)	The reconstruction of the National Stadium for the 2020 Olympics induced displacement of two groups of vulnerable people: homeless people and tenants of a public housing estate.	Lack of theoretical framework. Data driven investigation. Exploratory in nature. Small sample size for questionnaires.

(Continued)

TABLE 1 | Continued

Source	References	Event	Research aim	Theoretical framework	Method	Findings	Limitations
Leisure Studies	Talbot and Carter, 2018	Olympic Games–Rio 2016	To examine activists' use of human rights as a discourse to contest the impacts of the Rio 2016 Olympic Games.	No theoretical framework. Descriptive research.	Participant observation. Ethnographic research.	Activists fighting against forced evictions explicitly used the language of human rights in their activism. The media accounts tended not to discuss these issues using this lexicon. The issue of police violence was considered an abuse of human rights much more regularly than that of eviction, suggesting that there exists a hierarchy of rights, with some more respected than others.	Lack of theoretical framework. Data driven investigation. Exploratory in nature.
Habitat International	Wang et al., 2015	Olympic Games–Beijing 2008	To analyse the relationship between mega-event regeneration and expected residential relocation outcomes.	Gentrification and displacement framework. Econometric model.	Survey questionnaire ( $n = 880$ ).	State-sponsored regeneration leads to landscape improvement and social upgrade yet is often accompanied by residential displacement and social marginalization. Residents who lived in the area affected by the Olympics and have a lower level of education and/or income are more likely to face displacement caused by the Olympic Games.	The causal link between expectation and decision in the context of housing was not tested. Lack of discussion on measures to alleviate or eliminate displacement of poor residents in the context of Olympic gentrification.
City	Watt, 2013	Olympic Games–London 2012	To examine the 2012 Olympic Games legacy in relation to the displacement experiences of lower-income East Londoners.	No theoretical framework. Descriptive research.	Participant observation. Ethnographic research.	The East London residents in deprived areas learned that the Olympic gentrification scheme in Newham was not occurring for their benefit. Displacement processes could well mean that they would no longer be able to live in their current neighborhood. The Olympics legacy is for others, not for them.	Lack of theoretical framework. Exploratory in nature.
Cities	Watt, 2018	Olympic Games–London 2012	To assess how gender, housing, austerity, and the right to the city inter-relate with reference to female lone parents from East London, the site of the 2012 Olympic Games.	Right to the city framework	Semi-structured interviews ( $n = 12$ ). Participant observation.	The post-Olympics' legacy has largely failed to address the housing needs of East London's low-income population. The lone parents could not afford the accelerating private rents or house prices in post-Olympics' East London and understandably prefer to access the diminishing pool of social rental housing which is still relatively secure and affordable. Their capacity to do so has, however, been reduced. Women's right to the city has eroded.	Single case study. Exploratory in nature.

(Continued)

**TABLE 1** | Continued

Source	References	Event	Research aim	Theoretical framework	Method	Findings	Limitations
Leisure Studies	Yoon, 2020	Winter Olympic Games–Pyeong-Chang (2018)	To explore the experiences of residents who lived near Mount Gariwang, a protected area that was developed into an alpine ski venue; and to examine how locals may have felt compelled to consent to the development.	Post-politics framework	Semi-structured interviews ( $n = 12$ ).	Post-politics processes have contributed to obtaining consent for the destruction of an ancient forest on Mount Gariwang. The process of dispossession and displacement was not entirely coercive, but rather, transpired via manufactured consent.	Single case study. Demographic homogeneity of interviewees. Not all interviews were recorded.
Real Estate Economics	Zheng and Kahn, 2013	Olympic Games–Beijing 2008	To examine the gentrification consequences of public investments in Beijing, the host of the 2008 Olympic Games.	No theoretical framework. Econometric model.	Secondary data from the National Bureau of Statistics of China. Multiple regression analysis.	The city government invested in the Olympic Village and in new subways, leading to increases in local home prices, construction, and restaurants of higher quality nearby. Higher-income and more highly educated households are attracted to live in those places. These investments have caused local gentrification. Homes of poor people, such as rural migrants, are demolished and they are pushed further out to the remote suburban areas.	Lack of theoretical framework. Data driven investigation. Lack of discussion about social impacts. Exploratory in nature.

affected house affordability and, consequently, displacement of economically disadvantaged residents (Sanchez et al., 2007). Sanchez et al. reported that 147 families were removed for the construction of the Olympic village, mainly elderly, widows, and low-income families. They also found that hosting the Games had a negative impact on affordability housing in the city, illustrated by strong increases in the prices of housing for rent (+145%) and for sale (+139%) in the period between 1986 and 1993. This was one of the first studies to conclude that the Olympic Games have served to exacerbate the consequences of privatization of housing, contradicting the human rights perspective where housing is seen as a basic need (Sanchez et al., 2007).

In the systematic review, we found a gap of empirical studies between Barcelona 1992 and Beijing 2008. We found in the literature, two studies that relied on comparisons between the cases of Atlanta 1996, Sydney 2000, Athens 2004, and other events (Kontokosta, 2012; Teeuwen, 2018) to discuss rights to housing. These studies were two of the 37 studies included for quality assessment. They were not included in the final collection of the systematic review because they are not directly related to resident displacement. But they offer some important contribution to understand housing issues in the context of those sport mega-events between Barcelona and Beijing. They echoed some of the problems that were reported in other settings—mainly increase in the prices of houses and rents, which can lead to indirect displacement of specific marginalized groups in the host city.

Beijing 2008 inaugurated a new era in the studies about sport mega-events and displacement. For the first time, studies started to use explicitly the framework of neoliberalism to explain Olympic gentrification and displacement of residents in a socialist host country (Harvey, 2003, 2005; Rock, 2012). Beijing 2008 was the scenario of four empirical investigations about displacement of residents (Rock, 2012; Shin and Li, 2013; Zheng and Kahn, 2013; Wang et al., 2015). Overall, the studies reported a state-sponsored gentrification, which led to evictions and indirect displacement of marginalized groups (e.g., residents with lower levels of education and/or income). Three of those studies investigated displacement of poor residents in the hosting area. For instance, Zheng and Kahn (2013) found that the gentrified area close to the Olympic Village attracted people with higher incomes and higher levels of formal education, pushing poor residents to farther remote suburban areas. Shin and Li (2013) investigated the effects of hosting on a very specific group of residents—the migrants (Shin and Li, 2013). They found that after the Beijing 2008, migrants had their houses demolished and received neither cash nor in-kind compensation. They were likely to be the most marginalized group of residents in the city. Beyond forced evictions, all studies in Beijing reveal a scenario of gentrification in the host area where poor residents could no longer afford living there. The selected empirical studies support some conceptual papers that have been written about the case of Beijing 2008 and displacement of residents (Broudehoux, 2007; Shin, 2013; Ren, 2017). There is an estimate that 1.25 million people were displaced from their houses in Beijing as consequence of hosting the 2008 Games (Vale and Gray, 2013).

Displacement has been rarely investigated in the context of Winter Olympic Games. The Winter Olympics have been less investigated than the Summer Olympics in all aspects (Chappelet and Kübler-Mabbott, 2008). In this systematic review, we found three exceptions. Two of them approached the Vancouver 2010 Games (Kennelly and Watt, 2011; Pentifallo, 2015). Kennelly and Watt (2011) and Pentifallo (2015) focused on the problem of displacement of homeless people from the streets, symbolizing an attempt to “clean” the city of Vancouver to receive the Games. Some conceptual works about the Vancouver 2010 case are aligned with the findings of the empirical articles (Vanwynsberghe et al., 2013; Boykoff, 2014). The Vancouver Games have been associated with punitive urban measures that criminalized homelessness and validated displacement of residents (Pentifallo, 2015). This specific marginalized group investigated in the case of Vancouver has similarities with other groups such as migrants in the context of Beijing 2008 (Shin and Li, 2013) and female lone parents in London 2012 (Watt, 2018). Still in the context of Winter Olympics, one study approached the case of PyeongChang 2018 (Yoon, 2020). Yoon (2020) found that elderly people living in an environmentally protected area in Mount Gariwang “agreed” to leave for the construction of the alpine ski venue for the 2018 Games. That “agreement” happened after local authorities applied post-politic tactics to convince them that their displacement was serving to a greater good.

With 11 empirical studies, London 2012 has been by far the most investigated Games regarding displacement of residents (Mahon, 2007; Kennelly and Watt, 2011, 2012; Kavetsos, 2012; Sadd, 2012; Watt, 2013, 2018; Cotton, 2018; Gillespie et al., 2018; Bernstock, 2020; Humphry, 2020). Some studies were conducted before the Games and others, after. Comparing these studies, we can see that previsions of displacement before the Games were confirmed by facts after the Games. Mahon (2007) reported that 5 years before the Games, over 1,000 people was facing threats of evictions from their homes, while housing prices were escalating, increasing chances of indirect displacement. Findings after the Games showed that marginalized groups were either evicted by demolition of their houses or indirectly displaced by gentrification (Watt, 2013; Cotton, 2018; Bernstock, 2020). In a later study, Watt (2013) reported that 400 houses were demolished at the Clays Lane estate in Newham, East London (Watt, 2013). Most of the studies, however, explored the relationship between preparing to host the Games and indirect displacement *via* gentrification. Bernstock (2020) and Cotton (2018) found that the 2012 Games led to the gentrification of the host area. They agree that the city government applied a neoliberal model to justify the gentrification of the area. The neoliberal model applied in London mirrors that used in Beijing some years before. The gentrified area in East London attracted new middle-class residents, displacing poor residents from the hosting area to other areas of the city.

Rio 2016 seems to be the apotheosis of the use of neoliberalism to gentrify areas and displace marginalized residents, mainly in the informal settlements of city called favelas. The literature has many conceptual papers about the problem of favela evictions in preparation for Rio 2016 Olympic Games (Richmond and Garmany, 2016; Sanchez et al., 2016; Ivester, 2017; Williamson,



2017). There is congruence between such papers and the two empirical articles that made the final selection of this systematic review. Talbot and Carter (2018) investigated the case of Vila Autódromo, a favela located a few meters from the Olympic Park (Talbot and Carter, 2018). They found that preparations to host led to activist resistance. While Vila Autódromo activist resistance became a case of success reported around the world (Ivester, 2017; Williamson, 2017), it did not, unfortunately, avoid the almost total removal of the community, along with other human rights abuses such as police violence (Talbot and Carter, 2018). Gaffney (2016) added that Olympic gentrification affected different areas of the city in different ways (Gaffney, 2016). However, in favelas, gentrification has unleashed market forces, which residents cannot cope with, just having the option to move out to other localities, characterizing indirect displacement. Gaffney's findings support some conceptual papers (Vannuchi and Van Criekegen, 2015; Freeman and Burgos, 2017) that proposed that neoliberalism has led to gentrification and displacement in Rio. A dossier prepared by an independent agency revealed that 77,206 residents were displaced to make way for Olympic infrastructure in Rio (Robertson, 2015; Boykoff, 2017).

Displacement of marginalized populations has been also reported in the context of Tokyo 2020. Suzuki et al. (2018) found that the reconstruction of the National Stadium for the 2020 Games led to displacement of two vulnerable groups: homeless people and tenants of a public housing estate (Suzuki et al., 2018). Similarly to what happened in Barcelona (Sanchez et al., 2007) and Vancouver (Kennelly and Watt, 2011), the case of Tokyo does not show mass eviction (as it happened in Beijing and Rio). Rather, it shows that specific, highly vulnerable groups were affected by authorities' decisions to change the structure of the city. Such decisions have caused both evictions and indirect displacements not only in Tokyo but also in London and Vancouver.

The absence of studies in the context of other sport mega-events is an important finding of the systematic review. The Olympic Games have special characteristics that have made them likely to promote resident displacement and, consequently, have attracted the attention of researchers. We discuss more about this in the conclusions. Two studies included for quality assessment were conducted in the context of FIFA World Cup. These were not included in the final collection of the systematic review because they were not specific about resident displacement from their houses. Ohmann et al. (2006) explored the perceived social impacts of the 2006 FIFA World Cup on Munich residents. They reported that one of the social impacts was that residents did not perceive an increase in house rents or prices, making displacement unlikely in Munich. Maharaj (2017) investigated the displacement of subsistence fisher folk from their workplace, during the regeneration of the port of Durban in preparation for the 2010 FIFA World Cup (Maharaj, 2017). Maharaj found that fisher folk were denied access to their workplace (Durban's beachfront) to make the area attractive for international tourists. Such fishers engaged in public protests with little effect.

The presence of different theoretical frameworks in the selected studies revealed that the problem of displacement can

be analyzed from different points of view. Three studies applied econometric models, to use to use real-world data to explain what was happening in the housing market (Kavetsos, 2012; Zheng and Kahn, 2013; Wang et al., 2015). Two of these studies were essentially descriptive, informing that rent and house prices had increased in the host area leading to displacement of marginalized communities. The exception was Wang et al. (2015) who tested an econometric model based on Freeman and Braconi's (2004) framework (Freeman and Braconi, 2004), where displacement was a function of residents' demographics and gentrification (social and physical regeneration). Wang et al.'s results supported the theory, informing that Beijing residents with lower levels of education and/or income were more likely to be displaced from areas affected by Olympic gentrification. The relationship between demographics that characterized marginalized populations and displacement is consistently found in other Olympic cities (Kennelly and Watt, 2011; Watt, 2013; Talbot and Carter, 2018; Yoon, 2020).

Theories related to the use of urban space—the right to city framework (Lefebvre, 1996), theory of spatiality (Lefebvre, 1991) and neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005)—have informed a group of studies that appear in the final collection of the systematic review (Kennelly and Watt, 2011; Cotton, 2018; Gillespie et al., 2018; Watt, 2018; Bernstock, 2020). The link between Lefebvre's theories of urban space (Lefebvre, 1991, 1996) and neoliberalism is made through the concept of “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey, 2003). Harvey (2003) proposed that, when neoliberal capitalism cannot generate growth anymore, then a redistributive process called “accumulation by dispossession” is put into practice (Harvey, 2003). In this process, privatization of land and displacement of poor residents are necessary to transfer capital from the poor to the rich. Hosting Olympic Games has been very efficient to attain both—privatization of the land and displacement of poor. To feed capitalism, the state needs to increase the value of the land in poor areas of the city. Therefore, the sites of the Olympic venues seem not to have been chosen by chance. In recent years, in many instances, local governments have chosen deprived areas of cities to build Olympic venues—from London borough of Newham (Watt, 2013) to Jacarepaguá in Rio (Sanchez et al., 2016). The argument is that the presence of venues would improve infrastructure and make the lives of the residents in those areas better. This has been the discourse in Olympic bids. Ex post facto reality has shown that, instead of improving the lives of current residents, infrastructure improvement has created accumulation by dispossession, displacing such residents from their houses. Once residents are out, the land can be negotiated by higher prices. A group of studies in this systematic review followed the logic of accumulation by dispossession in their theoretical arguments, but they rarely mentioned it explicitly. Most of the studies in this group prefer to draw upon the concept of neoliberalism—a political approach that decreases the control of the state and increased free-market capitalism. Therefore, another important contribution of the systematic literature review was to point accumulation by dispossession as a strong theory to explain displacement of marginalized residents as consequence of hosting sport mega-events.

## CONCLUSIONS

Although we have conducted the systematic review looking for any type of sport mega-event, all empirical studies that made the final collection have investigated displacement of residents in the context of the Olympic Games. The unique characteristics of the modern Olympic Games may explain why this event has been associated with resident displacement. The Olympic Games is the world's largest sport event hosted by only one city<sup>1</sup>. The centralization of such a huge event has created an allegedly need for large infrastructure changes in the host city. Preparing to host the Games has demanded constructions and improvements not only in sport facilities, but also in the city infrastructure, including airports, ports, green areas, roads, and public transportation. This demand used to occur in a relatively short period of time (usually 7 years<sup>2</sup>). A demand for large infrastructure changes in a short period of time helped host city authorities and organizers to create a sense of urgency. Under the assumption of delivering the event with excellence and on time, authorities have promoted what some authors have called a "state of exception," where business people and some local authorities are more likely to circumvent local and international laws, including human rights agreements, to attain the capital interest (Agamben, 2005; Vainer, 2011; Richmond and Garmany, 2016). Unfortunately, the state of exception in the context of the Olympic Games seems to have created a fertile terrain for neoliberal practices and displacement of residents. We are not aware of studies in the literature associating a state of exception with other sport events, maybe because they have not been so apparently urgent as the Olympic Games. With host cities now being selected earlier and not based on bids anymore, we hope that the argument of urgency will lose its appeal. The new approach to electing Olympic and Paralympic host cities takes an important step by pointing to the importance of existing facilities (IOC, 2021). The problem of being a gigantic event hosted in only one city is still there to be considered.

The systematic review revealed some limitations in the published empirical studies and possibilities of future studies. From a theoretical point of view, half of the empirical studies were conducted as descriptive investigations, with no theory supporting the research. This is a limitation of current studies. While descriptive studies may have their importance, the literature seems to have room to progress to more theory-based studies. One possibility for future studies is to expand the use of theories of urban space. For instance, the theoretical framework of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2003) offers an intuitive possibility to inform future studies. Beyond theories of urban space, other theories can inform future studies. The stakeholder theory, which was used by one study in the systematic review (Sadd, 2012), can inform future

studies by exploring the role of other important parties involved in the displacement process beyond the dyad local government-residents. These parties can be local stakeholders such as non-governmental organizations, public attorneys, public agencies, and private real estate organizations. They can also be international stakeholders, such as the IOC, the UN, and international human rights organizations.

From a methodological point of view, almost all studies (but two) that used primary data collection relied on qualitative methods to analyse data from documents and/or interviews. This reveals an emphasis on the interpretive paradigm. From the positive side, to date, studies have provided valuable in-depth data for us to understand the problem. But we have areas for improvement regarding quantitative studies. The studies that have been based on the positivist paradigm have analyzed secondary data to present econometric models (usually describing the effects of hosting on housing factors). But there is a lack of quantitative studies using primary data collection. Quantitative data collected from survey questionnaires, for example, should help to inform not only about special demographics of displaced residents, but also about their attitudes and behaviors when facing threats and/or actual displacements. Due to the nature of the problem, our suggestion is that mixed methods research should be beneficial to expand the knowledge. Qualitative studies are still necessary because we will need to understand the effects of new events (with their unique contexts) on displacement of residents. Quantitative studies could help to broaden our knowledge and explain, for example, whether and why residents resist evictions and displacements and whether and what strategies they use.

Regarding the context of the studies, more studies are necessary about the Winter Olympic Games. Beyond the three empirical studies that are in the final collection of this review (Kennelly and Watt, 2011; Pentifallo, 2015; Yoon, 2020), some studies have shown that the Winter Games host cities have applied neoliberal policies, as have the Summer Games (Vanwynsberghe et al., 2013; Müller and Gaffney, 2018). As a hypothesis, this might have led to indirect displacement of residents. But we have limited data to support this. Investigating the next Winter Olympics host cities—Beijing 2022 and Milan-Cortina 2026—may provide data to test that hypothesis. Beyond the Olympic Games, other sport mega-events can also be investigated. Some conceptual papers have discussed the problem of marginalized populations and displacement in the context of recent FIFA World Cup (Pillay and Bass, 2008; Kassens-Noor and Ladd, 2019). Empirical research is still in need. Other sport events, when they demand large infrastructural changes in the city, could also inform for future studies on the topic of displacement.

From the review, we missed studies investigating the role of the IOC, a key stakeholder in the process of hosting the Olympic Games. Most of the studies highlight only the responsibility of local governments for displacements. While the local government surely has much responsibility on this, the role of the IOC (and other sport mega-event guardians and governing bodies) should not be ignored. The IOC cannot control national policy in sovereign countries. But the IOC has certainly a role to play. The

<sup>1</sup>Olympic competitions of some few sports (e.g., football/soccer) have happened in different cities of the same country. This is an exception. Almost all competitions are centralized in the host city.

<sup>2</sup>This has recently changed as the IOC granted the host rights of the 2028 Games to Los Angeles in 2017, and the 2032 Games to Brisbane in 2021 – this one using the new approach to electing Olympic and Paralympic host, not based on bids anymore (<https://olympics.com/ioc/future-host-election>).

one responsible for granting host rights should not turn a blind eye to clear cases of human right abuses in host cities/countries of their most important event (Rocha et al., 2021). Acknowledging that resident evictions and displacements in host cities is also *their* problem can be the first step to show a practical support for the SDG 11–Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

We conclude from the selected studies in the systematic review that a contradiction has existed between the discourse of sport mega-event guardians (offering full support to the UN SDG) and the practice adopted in preparing cities to host. In practice, those involved in the preparation of cities to host (local government, organizing committee, sport mega-event guardians) have shown little concern for the SDG 11. The first target of the SDG 11 reads, “By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums” (United Nations, 2015). Results of the systematic review showed that hosting the Olympic Games has been directly linked to eviction and displacement of marginalized residents. Thus, hosting has neither

promoted adequate, safe, and affordable housing to all, nor helped to improve lives in deprived areas. Our results support some conceptual papers that have pointed the contradiction between discourse and practices (Horne, 2018). Evictions and displacements of marginalized residents are listed as the number one abuse of human rights (Worden, 2015).

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

CR was responsible for the conceptualization and writing of the article. ZX was responsible for searching the records, uploading them into Mendeley and removing the duplicates. All other steps were conducted independently by both authors, who met regularly to resolve divergences.

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# Critical Social Science in Sport Management Research: A Scoping Review

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Sport management scholars have called for the application of broader research approaches, including critical social science. Such approaches help uncover the less-desirable aspects of sport and, therefore, offer a basis for positive change. While there have been advancements in the use of innovative research approaches over time, there remains little understanding of how these calls have been addressed. The purpose of this scoping review is to examine trends, gaps, and the use of critical social science and associated approaches in sport management scholarship. Two hundred sixteen relevant articles were identified through a database search (i.e., five platforms), complemented with a manual search of 419 journals. Results indicate that an increase in critical research published in sport management journals was evident following 2005. Findings suggest that there remains space for increased publication of critical social science work in sport management journals and for researchers to better articulate their research approaches in scholarly outputs.

**Keywords:** philosophical paradigms, research approach, state of the field, theoretical contribution, systematic reviewing

## INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades, scholars have increasingly called for sport management researchers to include more critical social science in their work (Amis and Silk, 2005; Skinner and Edwards, 2005; Chalip, 2006). Notably, in Frisby's (2005) Zeigler Award address, a prestigious award offered by the North American Society of Sport Management (NASSM), the use and applicability of critical approaches to advance the sport management field was highlighted. Frisby (2005) stated that critical approaches to sport management research would help to illuminate the "ugly" sides of sport management in hopes of informing change to improve practice. Similarly, in the introduction to a special issue on critical reflection in sport management, Amis and Silk (2005) acknowledged that while sport management journals published a variety of research approaches, perspectives, and theories, there was still much to unpack regarding the philosophical and political backbone of work in the field. Critical approaches are heavily employed in sport sociology, and scholars have further suggested that drawing on critical sociological perspectives in sport management can strengthen the field and our understanding of power in sport organizations (Knoppers, 2015). Alongside such calls for the use of more diverse research approaches, scholars have recently employed a variety of paradigmatic, methodological, and theoretical strategies in their work (e.g., McSweeney and Faust, 2019). For this study, we focus on critical social science, which is "a way of empowering individuals by confronting injustices in order to promote social change" (Frisby, 2005, p. 2). This includes a variety of theories (e.g., critical theory; Kincheloe and McLaren, 2011) and associated research

approaches (e.g., participatory action research). Critical research approaches, and articulating such approaches clearly, help to unpack systemic issues within social spheres, and therefore offer new insight into areas that need improvement. Critical approaches typically offer the opportunity to investigate power structures within taken-for-granted systems and provide researchers with the tools for understanding how and why systems may be exclusive, oppressive, or otherwise need improvement (Knoppers, 2015; Sveinson et al., 2021). In sport specifically, this is important for practice to determine how to best provide programming and sport resources to as many people as possible.

Research has expanded beyond post-positivist approaches and has begun to explore various lenses through which sport management topics can be understood. One of many possible examples includes Singer's (2005) call for the use of critical race theory to address issues of race and ethnicity in sport. More recently, Chen and Mason (2019) made similar suggestions for decentering colonial perspectives and employing settler colonialism in research. Critical realist approaches to policy and management have also been brought forth as ways to incorporate broader perspectives in sport research more generally, and therefore offering a way to advance social justice objectives (Downward, 2005). These critical paradigms have offered significant advancement in understanding different points of view and have added the value of different research perspectives in the field.

With the addition and increase in the use of critical, interpretive, and constructivist paradigms, qualitative research methodologies have also increased in use. However, there remains work to be done in advancing these methods (Singer et al., 2019). Methodological approaches such as autoethnography (Hoeber and Kerwin, 2013; Cooper et al., 2017) and participatory action research (Frisby et al., 2005; Shaw and Hoeber, 2016; Hoeber and Shaw, 2017) are particularly valuable for critical social science. Most recently, Sveinson et al. (2021) have advocated for increased use of critical discourse analysis as a theory, methodology, and analysis in sport management scholarship. These methods engage diverse perspectives with a particular focus on advancing equity within sport, an important component of critical social science and associated research approaches. Further, upon investigating additional ontological and epistemological approaches, Quatman and Chelladurai (2008) advanced social network analysis as an avenue through which to address Frisby's (2005) call for advancing critical social science and associated research approaches. Alongside the increase in qualitative methodologies, mixed methods have begun to gain traction in recent years, as researchers have acknowledged the benefits of drawing upon diverse research methods in individual projects (van der Roest et al., 2015). Theoretically, scholars have sought to expand existing sport management research practices by introducing new theory and integrating theory from other fields into the management space (e.g., Sotiriadou and Shilbury, 2010; Kitchin and Howe, 2013). Each of these trends have advanced understanding of sport studies and sport management and have offered enriched perspectives regarding how to improve diversity, inclusion,

and equity in sport management practice through challenging dominant power relations (Cunningham and Fink, 2006), in part addressing concerns raised by various scholars and Zeigler award winners (e.g., DeSensi, 1994; Frisby, 2005; Chalip, 2006; Fink, 2016; McGarry, 2020). However, despite shifts in recent years to accept more diverse research perspectives and methodologies, the uptake of the recent calls for the use of critical social science and associated research approaches to sport management research, the use of innovative research methodologies, and to further center these approaches in the sport management literature has yet to be further understood (Cunningham and Fink, 2006; Knoppers, 2015; Singer et al., 2019).

There is little systematic work investigating the scope and patterns in methodology and theory used in relation to critical social science. As such, the purpose of this scoping review is to examine the trends, gaps in research approaches, and the state of use of critical social science in sport management scholarship. To widen the scope of this investigation, we go beyond the sport management journals specifically, and investigate sport management work regardless of the journal domain within which it is published. In doing so, we offer significant contributions to the sport management field by highlighting ways in which critical social science and research approaches have been used and ways that future research may employ such approaches. Investigating the use of critical approaches in sport management is necessary to understand the growth and applicability of such approaches over time and their contribution to the sport management body of literature to inform future critical directions in sport management research. The use of critical approaches in sport management work will help push the management field to expand our understanding of sport's role in society, how it may be an exclusionary space and to provide a strong theoretical basis for practical improvements by challenging power relations, such as drawing attention to equity and inclusion, and mitigating social injustice in the sport field (McGarry, 2020). As evidenced by recent sociopolitical events (e.g., rise of the Black Lives Matter movement) and the visible response in the sport-space (e.g., Colin Kaepernick kneeling during the United States national anthem; the WNBA and NBA integrating racial justice messaging in their leagues), it is clear that while sport can be an exclusionary space, it can also be a societal vehicle for change. Therefore, by understanding how critical approaches have been used in sport management, we can inform how these approaches can continue to be used to advance a social justice agenda within sport management, with the potential and intent to have implications more broadly. We acknowledge that this work may be done elsewhere in fields such as sport sociology, with which sport management scholarship shares many approaches, theories, and research contexts (Knoppers, 2015). However, for the purposes of this scoping review and based on calls for more critical research approaches in sport management specifically, we have focused our attention on the field of sport management as defined in the key terms section below. After defining the key terms central to this scoping review, we then present an overview of the scoping review methods employed. Subsequently we present the results and discussion, highlighting the state of the field and offer suggestions for future research.

## Key Terms

### Critical Social Science

Critical social science is “a way of empowering individuals by confronting injustices in order to promote social change” (Frisby, 2005, p. 2). This definition encompasses a wide variety of research approaches, including various critical theories (e.g., critical race theory, critical disability theory, etc.), various methods (e.g., participatory methods), and investigations of power structures (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2011). Therefore, we consider critical social science as including critical research approaches and the use of critical theory, as noted above. Critical theory is understood as a philosophical approach which considers historical and social context, accepts subjectivity, and addresses power (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). For this scoping review, we narrowed the scope of the study to include research that specifically stated employing a critical theoretical lens or taking a critical approach. While other studies have sought to code articles based on paradigmatic assumptions and underpinnings as opposed to explicitly stated philosophical paradigms (see van der Roest et al., 2015), this was not possible due to the number of articles collected for this review. Further, given that paradigms are described as belief systems (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), and therefore can be personal, we did not feel it was appropriate to assume or ascribe a critical approach to a paper where one was not stated by the author(s).

### Sport Management

Sport, and therefore sport management, can have a variety of meanings depending on the context of the discussion. For example, Coakley (2003) defined sport as “institutionalized competitive activities that involve vigorous physical exertion or the use of relatively complex physical skills by participants motivated by intrinsic and extrinsic rewards” (p. 21). Meanwhile, others have described sport much more broadly, encompassing all forms of physical activity and both casual and organized forms of participation (Council of Europe, 2001). Sport management itself has been broadly described as any combination of skills pertaining to planning, organizing, leading, and evaluating in the context of sport and physical activity (DeSensi et al., 1990). Given the wide array of accepted definitions for sport and sport management, for the purposes of this study, we adopted a definition of sport management adapted from the NASSM website and the Journal of Sport Management. Therefore, we define sport management as the coordination of the production and marketing of sport services and sport organizations, including sport management education (North American Society for Sport Management, n.d.).

### Scoping Review

A scoping review assesses the nature and extent of research evidence in a replicable and rigorous way (Grant and Booth, 2009; Whittemore et al., 2014). Scoping reviews provide an overview of a particular line of inquiry, including the size of available literature, scope of studies, and highlights gaps in study designs and approaches (Grant and Booth, 2009). A scoping review is the most pertinent type of review to address this study's purpose because contrary to other types of reviews such as

systematic reviews and meta-analyses, a scoping review does not appraise or synthesize the findings of the articles (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005; Grant and Booth, 2009). As such, due to the nature of scoping reviews and the scope of this paper, an appraisal of the quality of critical research outlined in the included papers will not be provided herein. Indeed, synthesizing findings would not be meaningful in the present investigation as the focus is on revealing the approaches and theories used, rather than the outcomes from a particular research topic.

## METHODS

This scoping review was conducted following Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) five-step framework, including Teare and Taks' (2020) extension of the process. In addition to Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) five-steps (i.e., Identifying the research question; Identifying relevant studies; Study selection; Charting the data; Collating, summarizing, and reporting results), Teare and Taks (2020) suggested that the process of identifying articles to be included in scoping reviews should be comprised of a minimum of two systematic approaches to article identification (expanding Arksey and O'Malley's step two: identifying relevant studies). This suggestion is based on previous findings that two different systematic approaches to article identification (i.e., database search and systematic manual search) led to different pools of articles, and thus a more comprehensive final pool of articles (Teare and Taks, 2020). As such, the approach taken here also includes the executions of both a traditional database and systematic manual search.

As per step one of the scoping review framework the selection process was established based on the following research question: “what are the trends, gaps, and state of the use of critical social science in sport management scholarship?”

### Article Selection Process

Preliminary readings of related articles (e.g., Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Amis and Silk, 2005; Frisby, 2005) served to identify search terms and inclusion criteria (step two). For this scoping review, inclusion criteria consisted of: (1) scholarly, peer-reviewed articles, available online, and written in English; (2) authors must have specifically stated employing a critical approach; (3) the research must fit within the definition of sport management previously provided. The database search took place in January 2020, with year limits in place from 1985 (when NASSM was founded) to 2019. The systematic manual search included all issues appearing in journals between 1985 and 2019.

### Database Search

Databases were chosen based on the research question and their likelihood to contain relevant articles. Based on preliminary readings and in consultation with a research librarian, the following five databases were used to search for articles published between 1985 and 2019: ProQuest Social Sciences, ABI Inform, Business Source Complete, SPORTDiscus, Sport Medicine and Physical Education Index. The following key search words were used [critic\* NEAR/3 (theor\* OR approach\* OR scien\*)] OR [critic\* NEAR/3 soci\* NEAR/3 (theor\* OR scien\*)] AND



(sport\*) OR [sport\* NEAR/3 (coordination OR product\* OR market\* OR manag\* OR admin\*)]. The asterisks mean that any combination of letters can appear after the specified word or part of the word appearing before the asterisks. The brackets mean that words must appear in the order that they are written. The “NEAR/3” is a search function that allows for the search to include instances where zero, one, two, or three words separate the two words between which the function appears.

This initial search revealed 1,521 total articles. Duplicates were then removed, leaving 665 articles to be searched in the first round of screening. Two rounds of screening took place to determine the articles to be included in the final pool of sources among two researchers independently from one another (step 3). First, using Covidence (a review management program; [www.covidence.org](http://www.covidence.org)), titles and abstracts were screened against the inclusion criteria (i.e., scholarly, peer-reviewed articles, available online, written in English; authors have specifically stated employing a critical approach; the research fits within the definition of sport management) and exclusion criteria (i.e., no explicit statement of a critical approach; not within the area of sport management). Articles that were deemed to fit with the inclusion criteria by both researchers were moved directly to the second round of full-text screening. Articles that were excluded by both researchers were immediately eliminated from the pool of articles. When the researchers disagreed, the articles were flagged, and both researchers met to discuss the titles and abstracts against the inclusion/exclusion criteria. Articles that were mutually agreed to be potentially relevant were moved to the second round of screening. After this first round of title and abstract screening, and discussing discrepancies, 152 articles were moved onto the second round of screening. The second round of screening involved the researchers independently reading the articles in full. Articles that were agreed upon to meet the inclusion criteria were immediately included in the final pool of articles, and discrepancies were again discussed. After the round of full text screening, the database search yielded 112 articles.

### Systematic Manual Search

As per Teare and Taks (2020), there are three steps involved in conducting a systematic manual search: (1) selecting the top field-specific journals (as determined by impact factors), (2) screening all issues for relevant articles (similar two-round process as the data base search: abstract screening, followed by full text screening); and (3) examining the reference lists of the identified articles for additional relevant journals. The same process is then completed for the journals of the newly identified articles; that is, a full journal search of these new journals was performed until no new journals arose (Teare and Taks, 2020). Top field-specific journals are a good starting-point for the systematic manual search as relevant articles are likely to appear in these journals. However, the systematic manual search is certainly not limited to only the identified field as it allows for journals from a variety of additional domains to be uncovered (Teare and Taks, 2020). Due to the varying terminology in interdisciplinary topics such as those in sport management, the key words used in the database search are likely limited to those words that researchers are familiar with, potentially excluding additionally relevant articles

(Teare and Taks, 2020). As such, the additional journals identified in the systematic manual search are useful in bridging this gap (Teare and Taks, 2020).

As the context of this study is sport management scholarship, the most relevant field is sport management. Thus, the top three journals in sport management as per impact factors as of 2019 include: Sport Management Review (SMR), Journal of Sport Management (JSM), and the European Sport Management Quarterly (ESMQ). Thus, these three journals were selected as entry point for the manual search. While the period for article selection was set between 1985 and 2019, it should be noted that the first issues of these journals were published in 1987 for JSM, 1998 for SMR, and 2001 for ESMQ<sup>1</sup>. All articles in all issues were examined using the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Titles, abstracts, and keywords comprised the first round of screening, followed by full text screening. Articles selected from these three base journals, led to six rounds of additional journal searches. In total, 419 journals were examined to reveal 166 articles in the systematic manual search.

### Combining the Search Methods

The database search yielded 112 relevant articles, while the systematic manual search yielded 166 relevant articles, for a total of 278 identified articles. When combining the results of the two search methods, only 62 articles were identified through both searches. Thus, this scoping review included 216 total unique articles (50 articles unique to the database search; 104 articles unique to the systematic manual search; 62 articles identified through both search methods; **Supplementary Material**). The distinctive outcome between the database search and the manual search is important as it provides further support for the extension to the scoping review framework by adding a comprehensive manual journal search (Teare and Taks, 2020).

### Data Analysis

Based on preliminary readings of scoping reviews (e.g., Inoue et al., 2015; Dowling et al., 2018; Hansell et al., 2021), categories of information to extract from the articles were developed prior to extracting the data (i.e., step 4 in the scoping review framework; Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). An overview of the data extraction criteria is provided in **Table 1**. Following data extraction, analyses were run to determine the relationships between data categories. As per step five from Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework (i.e., reporting results), the following sections report on descriptive analysis and trends that were evident from the extracted data. Specifically, comments on publication evolution, theories used, sport management focus, methodological approaches, and theoretical outputs will be offered.

<sup>1</sup>Note that ESMQ was preceded by the *European Journal for Sport Management*, which published its first issue in 1994. The *European Journal for Sport Management* is not available online and thus was not included in this scoping review.

**TABLE 1** | Data extraction categories.

Category	Description
Title	Article title
Keywords	Article key words
Journal	Journal name
Year of Publication*	Year
Journal domain*	E.g., sociology, geography, leisure, etc.
Purpose	Study purpose
Theory*	E.g., feminist theory, critical race theory, etc.
<b>Sport management focus</b>	
Context*	E.g., country context, organizational context
Area*	E.g., management, marketing, etc.
<b>Methodological approaches</b>	
Methods*	E.g., qualitative, quantitative, mixed, conceptual
Study design*	E.g., longitudinal, case study, etc.
Instruments	E.g., interviews, document analysis, etc.
Type of data*	E.g., primary, secondary, mixed
Study population*	E.g., youth, college athletes, female administrators, etc.
Type of analysis*	E.g., thematic, discourse, etc.
<b>Outputs</b>	
Key findings	Were key findings offered
Key implications	Were practical implications offered
Theoretical implications*	Were theoretical implications offered
Future research	Suggestions for future research
Limitations	Were limitations offered

\*Are elaborated upon in the body of the text.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results from the analyses indicate specific trends and gaps associated with the use of critical social science in the sport management field. Findings are outlined below.

### Evolution of Publications Using Critical Social Science

As stated above, a total of 216 articles were identified for this scoping review. At face-value, this might seem like a large number, putting into question if there is even an issue with the amount of critical social theory used in sport management research. When considering the number of publications per year, this is in fact a concerning small number. For example, our search produced 15 articles published in 2019. When considering the top three sport management journals specifically, there were 134 articles published in total in 2019 (JSM = 47, ESMQ = 33, SMR = 54). Of those 134 articles, only 4 (<1%; i.e., Chen and Mason, 2019; Shaw, 2019; Warner, 2019; Zipp et al., 2019) took a critical approach as per our inclusion requirements for this study.

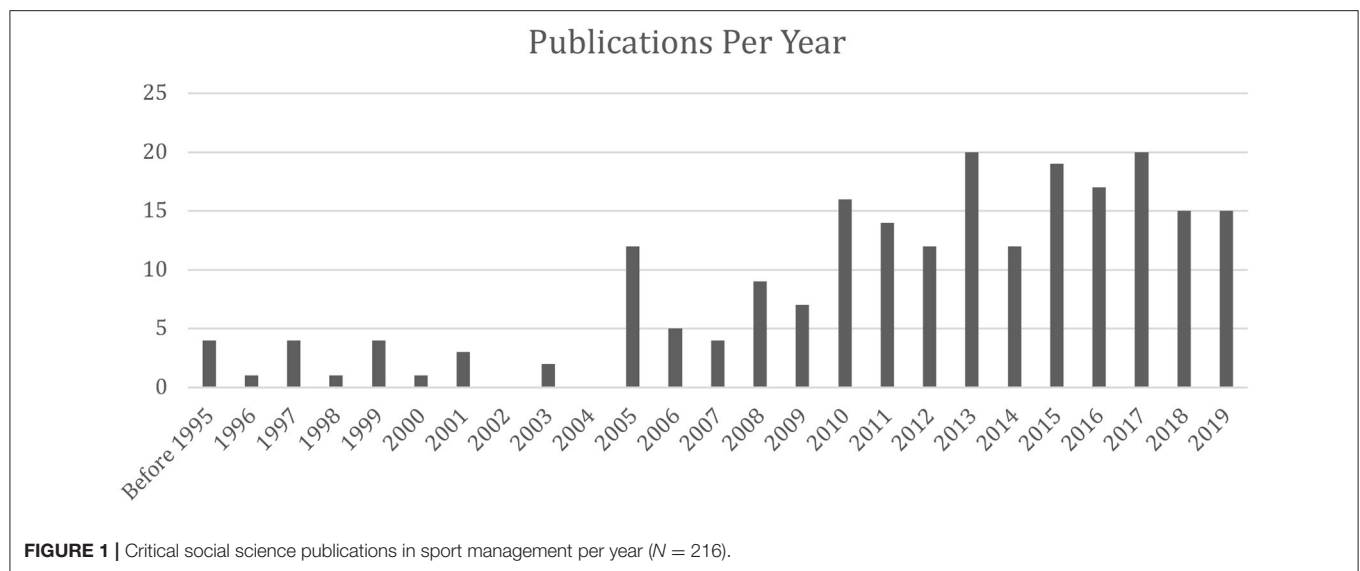
As seen in **Figure 1**, there had been an increase in the number of publications in 2005, followed by an increasing trend in publications per year. Perhaps Frisby's (2005) Zeigler lecture acted as a milestone for igniting the use of critical social theory in sport management studies, alongside other work published around the same time (e.g., Amis and Silk, 2005). Another

possible explanation for the increasing number of publications using a critical social science approach is that an increasing number of total publications, regardless of paradigmatic approach, across social science and humanities domains has been documented in general (Engels et al., 2012), perhaps due in part to the increased use of technology, making article publication faster and less expensive for publishers, as well as more accessible to readers. With increasing publication numbers overall, there may be more opportunity for scholars who complete innovative methodological, theoretical, or paradigmatic work to get their research published.

### Journal Domain

Not surprisingly, the largest proportion of studies published that used critical social science to address issues in sport management appear in journals that fall under the sport management and sport policy domains ( $n = 66$ ; 31%; see **Table 2**). This finding is likely due to the framing of the scoping review itself, however what is noteworthy is the journal domains aside from sport management within which identified articles have been published. Sport sociology journals ( $n = 42$ ; 19%) account for the next most popular outlets, followed by psychology/sociology ( $n = 21$ ; 10%), physical activity and leisure ( $n = 20$ ; 9%), education ( $n = 18$ ; 8%), communication ( $n = 12$ ; 6%), administration and business ( $n = 9$ ; 4%), geography and public health ( $n = 8$ ; 4%), and other ( $n = 20$ ; 9%). These findings indicate that critical work is being conducted, however may end up being published outside of a sport management domain when considering the variation in journal outlets. The choice to publish in the non-sport-specific journals might stem from a desire (or requirement, e.g., tenure and promotion criteria) for scholars to publish in journals outside of sport for higher impact factors. The results regarding journals appearing in the general sociology/psychology category (e.g., *American Behavioral Scientist*, *Disability and Society*, *Gender in Society*, *Journal of Sociology*) might reflect this metrics-driven publishing phenomenon in academia. Although outside the scope of this study, it may be a fruitful avenue for future research to explore this idea further and to examine authors' decision-making processes regarding publishing outlets alongside editors' and associate editors' perceptions of their journals and fields.

When further examining **Table 2** for the yearly number of publications per journal domain, some interesting trends appear. The domains of Administration/business, Communication, Physical activity/leisure, and Geography have consistent contributions throughout the 35-year period examined. Though a consistently low number of publications appear in these domains, it indicates that there seems to be a niche for sport management topics with a critical lens in these domains. For example, corporate social responsibility is a dominant topic among the articles that appear in the administration and business domain (e.g., Giulianotti, 2015; Levermore and Moore, 2015). In the communication domain, many investigations highlight how sport media reinforced social inequity through subtle discourse (e.g., Buffington and Fraley, 2008; Lavelle, 2010; Ličen and Billings, 2013; Masucci and Butryn, 2013; Gill et al., 2017; Toffoletti, 2017). The geography domain contains many articles on the geographies of sport events (e.g., Levermore,



**TABLE 2 |** Number of annual critical social science publications in sport management by research domain and publication period (percentages between brackets).

Year	Adm./bus.	Psych/Soc	Comm.	Educ.	Exercise/Leisure	Geography	Other	Sport Sociol.	Sport Management/Policy	Total n (%)
Before 2004	1	0	0	3	4	1	0	4	7	20 (9)
2005–2009	2	3	4	3	5	0	2	2	15	36 (17)
2010–2014	3	7	4	3	4	4	8	19	22	74 (34)
2015–2019	3	11	4	9	7	3	10	17	22	86 (40)
Total n (%)	9 (4)	21 (10)	12 (6)	18 (8)	20 (9)	8 (4)	20 (9)	42 (19)	66 (31)	216 (100)

2011; Samatas, 2011; McGillivray et al., 2018). Interestingly, there are no common themes present in topics within the leisure domain, possibly because leisure studies are often rooted in critical perspectives.

In the education domain, there had been a consistent number of publications up until the 2015–2019 time-period, where the average number of publications more than doubled. This could be due to the two special issues in *Sport, Education, and Society* (i.e., Gender, physical education, and active lifestyles: contemporary challenges and new directions in 2018; Researching Education within Sport for Development in 2016) and *Quest* (i.e., Social Justice and Sport: Religious, Sociological, and Capability Perspectives in 2019) on critical themes in a sport context. Regardless, the publication of special issues on certain topics indicates a need for, and interest in, particular themes in research and therefore reflect trends in the field more broadly.

There is a consistently increasing trend in the number of publications in the psychology and sociology domains. When looking at the number of journals in the sport management domain, there is a clear spike in the number of publications from the “before 2005” timeframe to the 2005–2009 timeframe. This may be due in part to Frisby’s (2005) call for the use of critical social theory in sport management research. This call could have inspired: (1) researchers to employ more critical social science and associated research approaches, and (2) journal editors and

reviewers to accept more critical research for publication in sport management journals. Though the increasing trend continues into the following two timeframes, the increase is not as large, and seems to start to level-off. It is interesting to compare the sport management domain trends with that of the sport sociology domain. Sport management and sport sociology publications are quite similar in the “before 2005” timeframe. In the 2005–2009 timeframe, however, there is a decrease in publications in the sport sociology domain, further providing support for the openness of sport management journals to critical research. In the 2010–2014 and 2015–2019 timeframes, there was a large jump in the number of publications in the sport sociology domain, closing in on the number of publications in the sport management domain. This trend could indicate that the increase in the number of publications in the sport management journals could have been a “fad” in response to Frisby’s (2005) Zeigler lecture, and there is less of an openness long-term for sport management journals to accept work using critical social science and associated approaches, and thus critical scholars in sport management are yet again choosing sport sociology journals as outlets for their work. As mentioned in the introduction, sport sociology and general sociology journals publish critical work extensively, and therefore authors may find their critical sport management research is more welcomed in those outlets compared to sport management or business/administration

outlets. Additionally, scholars have pointed to the tendency of sport management journals to privilege post-positivist work over more critical or qualitative approaches (e.g., Knoppers, 2015; Sveinson et al., 2021). Analyzing future trends can provide insight into the accuracy of the assumption that sport management journals are overall less open to publishing critical research.

## Theory

A large proportion of studies ( $n = 54$ ; 25%) included in this scoping review stated taking a “critical approach” but did not explicitly state they were using a critical theory or a critical paradigmatic position. A feminist approach ( $n = 45$ ; 21%) accounts for the next largest proportion theories used in critical sport management research. Race-based theories ( $n = 36$ ; 16%) are not far behind, followed by discourse analyses ( $n = 22$ ; 10%), critical theory ( $n = 17$ ; 8%), neoliberalism ( $n = 7$ ; 3%), Settler and post-colonial theories ( $n = 6$ ; 3%), (dis)ability theories ( $n = 4$ ; 2%), Bourdieu’s social theories ( $n = 4$ ; 2%), and Other ( $n = 21$ ; 10%). It is important to note that some studies used multiple theories. The most popular theory combination was a gender-based theory and a race-based theory (e.g., Travers, 2011; Prouse, 2015; Rankin-Wright et al., 2016), highlighting the importance of investigating sport through an intersectional lens (Shaw and Frisby, 2006; Anderson and McCormack, 2010).

Theory use is quite dispersed across the journal domains, with the following noteworthy observations. The largest proportion of race-based theory appears in the sport sociology domain ( $n = 10$  of the 36 studies that use race-based theories), which is interesting because the largest proportion of overall studies are in the sport management domain. The same trend appears with critical theory ( $n = 8$  of the 17 studies that use critical theory). Well over half of the settler/post-colonial studies appear in the sport management domain ( $n = 4$  of the 6 studies that use a settler/post-colonial theory). Gender-based theories are the most frequently used in the sport management domain ( $n = 14$  of the 45 studies that use a gender-based theory).

As discussed in the introduction and methods sections, it was necessary to clearly define inclusion criteria for the term “critical social science.” In limiting our scoping review to articles that explicitly stated the use of a critical theory or critical approach, the study at hand may have excluded articles that were underpinned by critical ways of thinking, addressed power relations, or could otherwise be considered “critical” work without having explicitly stated the approach. While this is indeed a limitation of the study, it was a necessary demarcation to ensure the scoping review was feasible and that assumptions regarding paradigmatic positioning of authors were avoided. Further, since we engaged in both a database and a manual search, we feel as though the articles included in the scoping review provide a thorough overview of the state of the field. Nonetheless, we realize that our search terms may have excluded some relevant work. Along these lines, our findings regarding the use and statement of theory suggest that there may at times be a lapse in communicating philosophical paradigms and theoretical underpinnings of scholarly work. While this may likely be due to space limitations associated with journal articles, clearly outlining philosophical foundations of research provide

the reader with a frame through which to better understand the findings and implications of the research (Creswell, 2013). Clearly situating research in relation to theory is important for explaining and understanding an area of inquiry (Doherty, 2013). Moving forward, scholars should ensure their philosophical underpinnings and assumptions are clearly stated to better situate their work and demonstrate a clearer line of critical inquiry in the field.

## Sport Management Focus

### Context

The studies included in this scoping review covered a wide range of contexts including: community sport ( $n = 39$ ; 18%), sport events ( $n = 37$ ; 17%), intercollegiate sport ( $n = 28$ ; 13%), sport governance ( $n = 27$ ; 13%), professional sport ( $n = 21$ ; 10%), sport management academia ( $n = 21$ ; 10%), sport for development ( $n = 20$ ; 9%), sport media ( $n = 10$ ; 5%), sport fans ( $n = 5$ ; 2%), and other ( $n = 8$ ; 4%). These results are not surprising given the varied accepted definitions for sport, and therefore sport management, depending on the personal beliefs and values of the authors, editors, and reviewers, and the mandates of specific journals. Further, the definition of sport varies depending upon which part of the world one is studying or referring to, as discussed in the introduction above (see DeSensi et al., 1990; Council of Europe, 2001; Coakley, 2003).

### Area

Stemming from the definition of sport management applied in this study, the following four areas of sport management were identified: Education, Governance, Management, and Marketing. Based on these areas of sport management, additional analyses were run to further explore the use of critical research approaches in the field in a more nuanced manner. When limiting the categorization of the study context to the facets of the definition of sport management (i.e., education, governance, management, marketing), there is a clear emphasis on management ( $n = 89$ ; 41%), followed by governance ( $n = 51$ ; 24%), then marketing ( $n = 43$ ; 20%), and education ( $n = 33$ ; 15%) not far behind.

Of the 33 education articles, the majority ( $n = 18$ ; 55%) appear in the sport management journals as opposed to journals of other domains. This is not surprising, as many of the education-centered articles are commenting on sport management as a field and education in sport management. Of the 51 governance articles, there are a similar number of articles in both the sport management ( $n = 19$ ; 37%) and sport sociology ( $n = 15$ ; 29%) domains. There is a fairly even distribution of articles in the other domains for the remainder of the governance articles. A similar trend is evident in the management ( $n = 89$ ) area as well, as these articles were similarly published in sport management ( $n = 21$ ; 24%) and sport sociology ( $n = 16$ ; 18%) journals. For the management articles ( $n = 89$ ), there are also several articles in the education ( $n = 10$ ; 11%) and physical activity/leisure ( $n = 10$ ; 11%) domains.

Interestingly, for the marketing domain ( $n = 43$ ), there are more articles published in the sport sociology ( $n = 10$ ; 23%) and communication ( $n = 9$ ; 21%) domains than the sport management ( $n = 8$ ; 19%) domain, and an equal



number of articles in the psychology/sociology domain ( $n = 8$ ; 19%). Marketing-driven articles in sociological oriented journals often rely on critical sociological theories such as Bourdieu's (1979) Theory of "La Distinction." This indicates that perhaps marketing-driven articles published in the sport management domain tend to not take on a critical perspective. This may be because critical marketing scholars prefer to publish in non-sport management journals, or perhaps sport management journals prefer to publish non-critical marketing studies. Regardless, this finding suggests that there is room for growth and acceptance of critical marketing work in the sport management field, particularly targeting underserved groups (i.e., target markets) in society.

## Methodological Approaches

### Methods

In alignment with the critical paradigm, the largest proportion of studies included in the sample use a qualitative approach ( $n = 124$ ; 57%). The next largest proportion of studies are conceptual pieces ( $n = 69$ ; 32%), followed by mixed methods ( $n = 12$ ; 6%), and then quantitative approaches ( $n = 7$ ; 3%), and other ( $n = 4$ ; 2%).

### Study Design

The most popular study design among the studies included in the sample are conceptual papers ( $n = 69$ ; 32%), indicating further potential for such conceptual pieces to be expanded upon empirically. Testing such conceptual pieces empirically could be a fruitful area of research to ensure the expansion of critical social science use in sport management moving forward. Of the empirical studies, the most frequently employed study designs are cross-sectional ( $n = 60$ ; 28%), followed by case studies ( $n = 59$ ; 27%), longitudinal ( $n = 14$ ; 6%), ethnographic ( $n = 12$ ; 6%), and finally, reviews ( $n = 2$ ; 1%).

### Type of Data

There is a relative balance between conceptual pieces ( $n = 69$ ; 32%), studies that use primary data ( $n = 64$ ; 30%), secondary data ( $n = 62$ ; 29%), and both ( $n = 21$ ; 10%). This finding indicates the potential of employing critical social science for expanding how research is conducted in the field. This potential has been discussed previously (Frisby, 2005), and sport management scholars specifically have suggested that variety in research methods and approaches could further strengthen the field (Olafson, 1995; Sotiriadou and Shilbury, 2010; van der Roest et al., 2015; Sveinson et al., 2021). Therefore, this finding provides further reasoning for employing a critical approach in sport management work and the value of such approaches for the field.

### Study Population

To accurately depict the distribution of populations within the collected articles, the percentages reported here reflect the total number of populations studied ( $n = 235$ ) and not the total number of articles ( $n = 216$ ) because some studies examined more than one population. The largest proportion are the non-empirical studies, without reference to specific populations ( $n = 69$ ; 29%). In the empirical investigations, the largest proportion of

studies considered administrators/organizations ( $n = 58$ ; 25%), followed by media outlets and media documents ( $n = 38$ ; 16%) that, combined, accounted for about two thirds of the empirical studies. Other populations consisted of amateur sport participants (adults and youth;  $n = 16$ ; 8%), other types of documents ( $n = 18$ ; 7%), elite athletes ( $n = 9$ ; 4%), communities ( $n = 9$ ; 4%), spectators ( $n = 6$ ; 2%), and other ( $n = 12$ ; 5%). This finding demonstrates that most critical research in the sport management field investigates the organizational level of sport. This clearly outlines a gap, and further suggests the need for future critical sport management research to involve diverse stakeholder groups (such as athletes, community members, BIPOC, etc.) to add to our holistic understanding of sport. For example, sport marketing and consumer behavior research could benefit from critical research approaches, particularly to better understand the power relations that prevent non-sport-participants from engaging in sport to inform how organizations could begin to remove barriers to participation.

### Type of Analysis

Considering the empirical investigations included in this scoping review ( $n = 147$ ), and the types of analyses conducted ( $n = 160$ ; some investigations conducted more than one type of analysis) the most frequently used types of analysis were thematic ( $n = 50$ ; 31%) followed by discourse/critical discourse ( $n = 35$ ; 22%), and not stated ( $n = 34$ ; 21%). Statistical ( $n = 11$ ; 7%), content ( $n = 9$ ; 6%), critical ( $n = 7$ ; 4%), policy ( $n = 6$ ; 4%), framing ( $n = 5$ ; 3%), and other ( $n = 3$ ; 2%) analyses were also used. Of note here is the finding that 21% of empirical articles collected for this scoping review did not state a type of analysis. This is noteworthy given the importance of demonstrating cohesiveness within projects to ensure quality of the research (Tracy, 2010). This finding indicates that researchers may need to be more explicit in terms of their critical research process and analysis to ensure the cohesiveness and quality of their work is demonstrated in manuscripts. By ensuring that quality criteria, particularly for qualitative research (Hoeber and Shaw, 2017; Hoeber et al., 2021), are met and explicitly outlined in research outputs may help to further demonstrate the value of diverse research approaches in the field.

## Outputs

### Theoretical Implications

Most studies included in this scoping review ( $n = 180$ ; 83%) did not specifically extend or develop the theory that was employed in the investigation. At best, only one third of the studies published in the administration/business domain developed theory ( $n = 3$ ; 33%). Of the studies in the sport management domain, only 27% ( $n = 18$ ) contributed to theory, followed by sport sociology ( $n = 6$ ; 15%), geography/public health ( $n = 1$ ; 13%), education ( $n = 2$ ; 11%), psychology/sociology ( $n = 2$ ; 10%), and communication ( $n = 1$ ; 8%). None of the studies in physical activity/leisure contributed to theory development. While critical social science may have grown in popularity and acceptance within the sport management field since 1985, this finding suggests that there is further work to do in advancing such theories, extending their applicability to sport-specific contexts,

and drawing upon the context of sport to extend theories for use in broader domains as well (Chalip, 2006). Theory improvement and extension, as well as theory development, are ways that sport management may contribute to broader literature in parent disciplines such as sociology, psychology, marketing, and administration (Gammelsæter, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

Over the past two decades, there have been calls from researchers in sport management to increase the use of critical social science and associated research approaches in the field. Frisby (2005) stated that using critical social science in sport management research would help to uncover the “ugly” side of sport, and from there, lasting change could be sought. Alongside such calls, scholars have begun to adopt more qualitative research methodologies, innovative theoretical approaches, and generally broaden research approaches in the field (e.g., Byers, 2013; Kitchin and Howe, 2013; Hoerber and Shaw, 2017; Chen and Mason, 2019). Despite these shifts, there had not yet been any systematic work investigating the state of the use of critical social science and associated research approaches in sport management scholarship. Employing critical social science in sport management research is important for unpacking the less-desirable aspects of sport as a social system and can therefore provide a strong base upon which positive change in sport can be made. As such, the purpose of our scoping review was to examine the trends, gaps, and the state of the use of critical social science and associated research approaches in sport management scholarship. By employing Arksey and O’Malley’s (2005) scoping review methodology, and Teare and Taks (2020) systematic approach to scoping reviews, we collected and examined 216 unique articles.

Our findings suggest that while there has been an increase in critical social science in sport management since 1985 and particularly since 2005, there remains a relatively low number of critical social science published in sport management journals specifically per year. As such, there remains potential for scholars to adopt critical social science and associated methodologies in sport management scholarship, and for sport management journals to accept and publish such work, as discussed elsewhere (see Sveinson et al., 2021). Further, our findings suggest that while there is some critical work published, there is room for expanding the use of these approaches to include additional perspectives and sport contexts. Interestingly, our results demonstrate that there remains a need for scholars to intentionally state their paradigmatic and theoretical positions within research outputs. There currently seems to be a lack of outright communication

regarding how critical social science is being used in sport management research. By ensuring research approaches are communicated clearly, readers will be better equipped to implement findings and to use existing work to push their own critical research forward. In doing so, more critical work will be readily available in sport management specific journals for sport management scholars, students, and practitioners to help inform future work and practice. Such critical academic work can support equity, diversity, and inclusion policy, the creation of safe sporting spaces, and ultimately support the provision of appropriate programming to as many diverse groups as possible.

## Future Research

This scoping review is a first step in better understanding trends, gaps, and the state of the use of critical research approaches in sport management scholarship. We acknowledge that given the nature of a scoping review there may be some articles that were not included as they did not explicitly state using a critical approach. Therefore, future work could employ a more targeted review approach by perhaps comparing publication trends in specific journals using full-text screening earlier in the search process. Specifically regarding the findings of this study, further research should uncover underlying reasons regarding author decisions to submit work to specific journals compared to others, as well as editor decisions to accept certain articles. Such work may uncover why critical sport management research is published more often in other journal domains as well as any constraints that may exist in publishing critical work in field-specific journals. Having a better understanding of the landscape of publication can help to create opportunities for increased critical scholarship in the field.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

KB and GT were responsible for the conceptualization of the manuscript, data collection and analysis, and writing the manuscript. MT provided guidance on the conceptualization, data collection and analysis, writing, and also involved in adding to, editing and revising the final draft. All authors have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved the submitted manuscript.

## SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

The Supplementary Material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fspor.2022.812200/full#supplementary-material>

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# Nationalistic Media Obsession With Olympic Medal Counts: The Case of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games

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Because Olympic medals are awarded to athletes representing an individual National Olympic Committee, it is natural for the media, and even the International Olympic Committee, to create a table indicating which nation has experienced the most athletic success. Problems, and even disagreements, arise when nations utilize different methods to count medals. The 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games, contested in 2021, provided a unique opportunity to observe how media organizations create a narrative around medal tables. American media outlets preferred to consistently show the United States at the top of the medal standings even though China had more gold medals for much of the Games' fortnight. Non-American media organizations took exception to that method of counting.

**Keywords:** media, Olympic Games (OG), medal counts, framing, nationalism

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## INTRODUCTION

“Nationalism has been heralded as the nemesis that has plagued the modern Olympic Games since their inception in 1896,” (Toohey and Warning, 1981, p. 118).

When Avery Brundage became president of the International Olympic Committee, he inherited an increasingly nationalistic Olympic movement. The creation of new nation-states following World War II, many of them aligned with either capitalist or communist ideologies, presented a myriad of problems for Brundage as he sought to uphold the vision Pierre de Coubertin had for the Games. That vision centered on Coubertin's linguistic addition, “Olympism.”

Scholars regularly analyze and attempt to interpret what Olympism truly means. In their edited book on Olympism, (Seagrave and Chu, 1981) believed the concept “Aims at the harmonious development of the intellectual, moral and physical aspects of a human being through athletic competition.” Similarly, (Smirnov, 2000) concluded “Olympism had the idea to educate through the provision and encouragement of sport as one of the humanities. Its ideal was to transcend individual and national pride in competition.”

The growing ideological polarization and increased nationalism which greeted Brundage in 1952 contradicted the spirit of Olympism. Yet the structure and organization of the Olympic Games always competed with that spirit. Athletes compete for nations, not against one another. The parade of athletes is by nation, not by sport. Following the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, which featured a particularly violent water polo match between the Soviet Union and Hungary, Brundage would go so far as to write to IOC members encouraging the elimination of all team sports (Senn, 1999).

A prominent and overt manifestation of nationalism in the Olympics is the media-driven medal counts. Seemingly since American broadcast networks began purchasing Olympic media rights, the networks aggressively promoted medal counts for American athletes as a way to stimulate interest in its product, television broadcasts, by creating a rivalry between the United States and the rest of the world.

The rivalry angle worked well during the Cold War period, the 1960s–1980s, when the Olympics provided a literal playing field to argue which ideology was better, communism or capitalism. Eastern bloc countries regularly participated in state-sponsored doping as a means to grow medal counts and demonstrate a superior way of life. For the most part, it worked. Even in the era of tape-delayed broadcasts, Olympic programming garnered impressive audiences. The 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles garnered in excess of a 25 rating despite the absence of the Soviet Union and other Eastern bloc countries (Kaplan, 1984).

This “USA vs. them” approach was at the forefront of NBC’s coverage during the opening ceremonies of the 2020 Olympic Games. After a lengthy patriotism-building introduction from Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson, NBC host Mike Tirico proclaimed definitively as Team USA entered the stadium, “613 athletes strong. Second largest Olympic team in U.S. History. No nation has won more medals at the Summer Olympics than the United States of America.” Given the changing geo-political landscape in the 1900s, that America has more medals than any other nation is not so surprising. The People’s Republic of China did not enter the Olympic arena until 1952 and Russia has competed under the Russian flag, the Soviet Union, the Unified Team, and the ROC.

But, like most statistics, Olympic medal counts can be viewed from multiple angles. Which is better: most gold medals, or most overall medals? NBC had certainly emphasized the overall angle during the Opening Ceremony broadcast. Team USA had comfortably garnered both titles during the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games, with 121 total medals, 46 of which were gold. Great Britain finished second with 27 gold medals while China was second with 71 overall medals.

The U.S. media’s attempt to play up the most patriotic narrative began to unfold early in Tokyo as Team USA failed to earn a medal in any sport on Day One of the Olympics for the first time since the 1972 Munich Games, nearly a half-century ago. As Yahoo’s Jack Baer qualified, the Day One sports which included archery, fencing, judo, shooting, and taekwondo, were not “ones that typically power the U.S. medal count, like swimming, track & field, gymnastics and basketball. There wasn’t even an American entered in the judo and taekwondo events” (Baer, 2021).

NBC used political analyst Steve Kornacki, famous for crunching election night numbers on his big board, to help break down the medal tally. During a morning interview on MSNBC on July 29, 2021, nearly a week into the Games, Kornacki noted, the United States was second behind China with 14 gold medals, but a graphic showed Team USA at the top with 38 total medals, seven in front of China.

As if to build early momentum for the narrative, Kornacki proclaimed, “There is a bit of a streak on the line here for the United States. The last two Summer Games before this they ended up finishing with the most gold medals. It was a runaway back in 2016. We still have plenty of time left in these games, so we’ll see if the U.S. can keep that streak going.

The other streak that is still alive for the U.S. is that they have had the most medals of any country at the Summer Games for six straight Olympic games now,” (Steve Kornacki’s Olympic Medal Update, 2021).

During NBC’s primetime coverage of the Games on August 1, Kornacki appeared at his big board, breaking down the U.S. medal situation. “How about the U.S. vs. the rest of the world? What does the medal race look like? With that 60th medal the U.S. just won, they extend the lead over China. Two streaks on the line here in Tokyo for the U.S. For six straight Olympic games, dating back to the 1990s, the U.S. Has finished with the most overall medals and they seem to be on course for that right now. Two straight Olympics, the U.S. Has finished with the most gold medals. That one they have a little work to do compared to China. 24-20 China,” Kornacki said.

The graphic on his board and NBC’s airwaves, however, positioned the United States on top, despite trailing China in the gold medal count. It was this narrative, the U.S. on top of medal standings despite having fewer gold medals than China, that created controversy but also served as a benefit for both countries’ media outlets.

NBC chairman Mark Lazarus had said in 2017, “I actually believe it should be based on total medals as opposed to gold only because I don’t think you should be diminishing the accomplishments of the silver and bronze medalists who have achieved something extraordinary, either personally or as a team. So that would be my take on it. But we’ve never formally discussed how we present it,” (Billings et al., 2017, p. 119).

## AMERICAN MEDIA CRITICIZED

At 9:15 a.m. EDT on August 2, 2021, the day after Kornacki’s graphic in primetime, the *New York Times* tweeted a Medal Count graphic showing the United States ahead with 64 total medals. The problem was in the ranking by gold medal where the U.S. trailed China, 29 to 22. Social media backlash was swift with many individuals pointing out the IOC structures its medals table by gold medals won, though the organization allows users to sort its online medal table by a number of criteria. As observers noted, this contradicted the *Times*’ own reporting at the conclusion of the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro in which Great Britain is listed second with 27 gold medals and China, with the second-most overall medals, is listed third (Rio Olympics Medals, 2016). The U.S. finished first in both gold and overall medals in 2016.

NBC also doubled-down on the narrative during its primetime coverage on August 2, 2021, showing a graphic similar to the *Times* with the United States on top with 64 overall medals, two ahead of China which held the lead in gold medals, 29–22. Tirico remarked, as the 10:00 p.m. EDT hour began, “It all adds into the medal count, which is what we’re looking at as we started this Tuesday in Tokyo. The United States still in the overall lead. China won five gold medals on Monday, so they’ve extended the advantage there.”

The next day, August 3, 2021 at 6:15 a.m. EDT, the *Times* tweeted a different graphic showing countries ranked by gold medals won to that point. China was first with the United States second. The damage was done. To the critics, this was blatant nationalistic homerism by the “Gray Lady.” As Graeme Massie reported in *The Independent* newspaper in the United Kingdom, under the headline, “American media outlets criticized over

Team USA bias in Olympic medal table,” the U.S. outlets were “misrepresenting” the results (Massie, 2021).

Some, not all, American media picked up on the controversy, led by Yahoo.com’s Dan Wetzel who opined on August 4, “China is kicking the United States’ tail (at least for now) in these Olympics, although you wouldn’t know it if you just scanned the medal tables in the American media. In an unexplained yet (apparently) nationally accepted counting method, Americans tally the standings not by what country wins the most golds, but what country wins the most total medals,” (Wetzel, 2021).

Wetzel continued, “The rest of the world favors gold over everything. That’s how the International Olympic Committee tallies it. Same with the medal standing on the Tokyo 2020 website. It’s good enough for media companies all over the world, just not in the U.S. apparently.”

That night, August 4, 2021, NBC seemingly began making excuses for the U.S. team’s performance. Following the broadcast of an American gold medal in the shot put, NBC showed the medal standings with the U.S. still on top in overall medals, 83–71, but trailing in golds, 32–27. Said Tirico as the graphic was being aired, “gold and silver for the United States in the shot put adds to the medal count where the U.S. continues to maintain the overall edge by a dozen up to the moment over China, five behind China in terms of the conversation for gold medals at these games. The medal count, of course, becomes one of the official records when we look back at Olympic Games, but with these Olympics, which of course coming in were destined to be remembered a little bit differently, one thing that’s become apparent is that with the best athletes, who they are and how they got here is more important than what they do here.”

Tirico continued talking about Simone Biles, Michael Phelps, and Noah Lyles and their public discussion of struggles with mental health and depression. Tirico commented, “A lot more story to write for (Lyles) and for all the athletes here, far beyond what that medal count that we share might tell you years from now.”

Was NBC attempting to shift the narrative away from medal tables and which country had the most gold medals and toward an athlete’s mental health? And, if so, why? Did the network fear Team USA would not live up to expectations?

In the end, the United States won both medal counts at the Tokyo Olympics, most overall medals (113 to China’s 88) and most gold medals (39 to China’s 38), thanks to the U.S. women’s volleyball team gold medal on the final day of competition (Shivaram and del Barco, 2021).

That night, during NBC’s broadcast of the Closing Ceremony, commentator Johnny Weir remarked, “Not only did (the United States) top the overall medal count but also the gold medal count at this games, so truly a spectacular performance.”

## CHINESE MEDIA PADS MEDAL COUNT

On the eve of the final day of competition, China’s state-run CCTV apparently took exception with the United States method of determining which country won the most medals, decrying the U.S. approach as “ranking the U.S. first based on ‘American

standards,” (Everington, 2021). At the time, China had more gold medals than the United States. In the days which followed, reports indicated Chinese state media had manipulated medal counts by including 12 medals won by athletes representing Taiwan, which competes as Chinese Taipei, and six medals won by athletes representing Hong Kong, both of which have independent National Olympic Committees sanctioned by the IOC. The new total, circulated on the Chinese social media platform Weibo, showed China with 42 gold medals and 106 total medals. It was accompanied with the caption, “Congratulations to the Chinese delegation for ranking first in gold medals and the total number of points” (Steinbuch, 2021). Using a point system of 3 for a gold, 2 for a silver, and 1 for a bronze, the new total would have China with 227 points and the United States with 225 points.

## BRITISH MEDIA SUGGEST ALTERNATIVE MEDAL TABLE

While the United States extended its streak to a seventh straight Summer Olympics in which it dominated the medal count, the BBC in the United Kingdom sought to frame the narrative differently. Consulting “economists and data nerds,” writer Robin Levinson-King envisioned a table in which medals were ranked by population and wealth. “Some countries over-perform, given their population size. The BBC came up with an alternative ranking, which looked at the number of medals won per million people,” (Levinson-King, 2021).

By population, the tiny European nation of San Marino, with its overall population of 33,000 and three total medals in Tokyo, came out on top. The United States ranked 60th by population. In considering wealth, as measured by GDP per capita, China emerged on top followed by the ROC and Kenya. The United States would have finished 15th.

“If a country is very poor, it won’t have the resources to convert that potential into actual ability to compete on a world stage,” David Forrest, an economist at the University of Liverpool told the BBC. “They’ve got to have the ability to participate in sport in the first place. For example, they might have a great natural ability in swimming that is waiting to be developed—but actually there won’t be any swimming pools,” (Levinson-King, 2021).

Levinson-King also noted the relationship between countries with lower GDPs, called “poorer countries,” and lower-cost sports such as wrestling and track. The inverse was also discussed in which higher GDP countries tend to out-perform in higher-cost sports such as equestrian and sailing (Levinson-King, 2021).

## CONCLUSION

Even if the International Olympic Committee adjusts its program to eliminate, or at least reduce, the influence of nationalistic rituals such as the parade of nations and playing of national anthems, the Games will continue to be subject to nationalism and the challenges which accompany it. Media organizations emphasize broadcasting

events featuring athletes from their countries because audiences appreciate it. This is particularly true of American television.

In their 2017 book on Olympic broadcasting, Billings, Angelini, and MacArthur interviewed NBC chairman Mark Lazarus who stated emphatically, “We don’t say ‘we’ and we don’t say ‘us.’ We say the Americans or Team USA. We also have a country that’s a melting pot and there’s a lot of people here cheering for other folks,” (Billings et al., 2017, p. 117).

However, as Billings et al. (2017) concluded in their study of 20 years’ worth of Olympic telecasts, that philosophy does not match practice. “While Team USA has enjoyed considerable success, the amount of network emphasis on American athletes is disproportionate to their success,” (p. 98-99). The authors observed that American athletes received 52.3 percent of mentions in NBC’s 2016 broadcast, roughly 3.5–4.2 times their medal count (Billings et al., 2017).

Billings (2008) was one of the early scholars to suggest a medals table, as a measure of overall achievement, could lead to a perception that a single nation “won” the Olympics. However, as the British economists noted in 2021, overall medal count is just one metric to evaluate a nation’s performance at the Olympic Games.

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- NBC’s Mike Tirico was correct. The medal count does become part of the permanent record of an Olympic Games. It is a documentation of the athletes and their performance. It does not need to be, as was observed in 2021, a proxy for a nation’s perceived superiority.

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The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

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# Social Media and the Olympics: A Chance for Improving Gender Equality

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The purpose of this paper is to explore whether social media content by the National Olympic Committees (NOC) during the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games strengthens or weakens the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) gender equality ambitions. As the media play an important role in creating the impressions that people cherish during and after the Olympics, the IOC has since the 1990s increased its responsibility for fair media portrayal of athletes and competitions by revising its own media production. In the past decade, this most notably concerns social media. Not only has it become an inseparable part of global sports consumption, but it is also seen as a tool for changing the biased and stereotypical portrayal of female athletes in news media, even though male and female athletes have become nearly equal in numbers of participants. Studies of media production and equality-informed decisions are, however, rare in sport. Drawing upon a quantitative analysis of social media accounts of three National Olympic Committees (NOC) (Norway, Czech Republic and Switzerland) and qualitative in-depth interviews with key informants—NOCs' and European Olympic Committee's (EOC) social media personnel—this study therefore explored the decisions and processes that influenced gender portrayal during the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. Findings of the study showed that media personnel have a significant influence on gender portrayal in their respective communication channels. In contrast to news media, they were aware of the frames they apply, and they applied them in alignment with the Olympic values. Consequently, they set a fairer agenda for both male and female athletes and strengthened the gender equality mission of the IOC.

**Keywords:** social media, Olympics, gender equality, National Olympic Committees, Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games

## INTRODUCTION

Ever since the invention of sport, women have been in a minority in terms of participation, and their underrepresentation, marginalization and repression has been mirrored in media coverage. Some of the reasons for this are that traditional media coverage is based on values that reproduce traditional conceptions of gender and national identity (Crossan et al., 2021) and it has been oblivious to female athletes (Fink, 2015). Only women's success in mega-sport events such as the Olympic Games has disrupted this practice (Arth et al., 2018). Every other year, billions of eyes are on the biggest sporting event in the world, observing how national pride and values at times override gender (Billings and Angelini, 2007).

With the advent of digital media in the previous decade, sports coverage evolved into an interpersonal, multicultural, and worldwide public realm (Creedon, 2014). Some scholars expected that this development would result in more equitable coverage for female athletes (LaVoi et al., 2019). However, initial studies suggest that old patterns of media representation are being reproduced (LaVoi and Calhoun, 2014; Adá-Lameiras and Rodríguez-Castro, 2021). To rectify this flaw, the IOC has been transformed into a large producer, rather than a conveyor, of media content. This allows them to create their own image rather than rely on news media. It operates the Olympic Channel, an over-the-top Internet television service, and several social media accounts with millions of followers. For example, on Instagram the IOC is followed by an audience of 5.2 million users. Similarly, each of the National Olympic Committees (NOC) runs its own account. How are these media outlets used for promoting the IOC's vision for increased gender equality? Recently, the IOC updated their Portrayal Guidelines for gender balanced representation (IOC, 2014) and its partnership with UN Women resulted in a major review project on gender equality. The result of this project are 25 action-oriented recommendations, with three focusing on balanced portrayal of both genders.

Due to the organizational commitment of the 206 NOCs and the European Olympic Committee (EOC) to support IOC's policies and be loyal to the latter's visions, they represent an important intermediary with national audiences. But how do NOCs translate this commitment in terms of producing gender-balanced content on social media? Sports coverage has been described as a hierarchical institution dominated by men with minimum coverage dedicated to female athletes (Cooky et al., 2015). To some extent, this has been caused by the patriarchal environment and hegemonic values in sports newsrooms (Hardin and Shain, 2005). Previous research revealed that journalists are influenced by their personal attitudes to female sport (Organista et al., 2021) and gender distribution of produced news is based on those attitudes (Billings, 2009). Furthermore, they justify women's underrepresentation by their masculine audience assumptions (Dashper, 2018).

Media research has also massively focused on newspapers coverage despite the prevalence of digital media formats (Geurin and Naraine, 2020). Against this backdrop this article contributes to the field by addressing an underexplored issue. Whereas there are many studies of media coverage related to the Olympics (Grabmüllerová and Næss, 2022) only a handful of studies focus on the production of Olympic media content. The research questions in this article are, consequently, threefold:

- What is the gender distribution in social media posts on NOCs' Instagram's accounts?
- Does the number of posts devoted to men and women on social media of Norwegian, Czech and Swiss NOCs correspond with participation and performance?
- How is the commitment of the Olympic movement to gender equality and women's empowerment reflected in NOCs' social media communication?

To answer these questions, this article couples theoretical perspectives on agenda setting and framing decisions with a mixed-methods approach based on social media content analysis

and semi-structured interviews. The analysis demonstrated how the commitment of the Olympic movement to gender equality and women's empowerment are reflected in their social media communication. The main findings show that personal influence had a significant influence on the provided content. However, unlike the news media (Organista et al., 2021), the media personnel identified themselves with the Olympic values and commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment. Consequently, it resulted in fairer portrayal of female athletes. This demonstrated how important a role organizational culture plays, a finding that can serve as a guide to news media houses that aim to improve gender equality in sports media coverage.

## Theoretical Framework

In recent years, a vast and expanding framing-theory literature has arisen from a variety of disciplines (Borah, 2011). Its application in media and communication studies has emerged from sociological perspective and is now perceived as a construct of social reality. On the one hand, media frames reality in a way that is comprehensible and predictable (McQuail, 2010). On the other hand, the audience has its own individual frames that help them to process information (Entman, 1993). Media producers may be influenced by social-structural, organizational or individual values and beliefs that leads them to select some aspects of perceived reality in order to make them more salient in communication (Entman, 1993). At the media level, frames then facilitate how media producers organize big amounts of information and deliver them to audiences. They can employ certain linguistic choices and highlight some aspects of reality while excluding others and/or impose a causal theme on their stories (Scheufele, 1999). Framing is a crucial aspect in understanding how the media establish relevance and importance (Fink and Kensicki, 2002).

Together with agenda setting, framing theory explains what role media plays in creation of public meaning. While framing theory describes how information is communicated, agenda setting theory is concerned with what topics are given space in media and to what extent. Agenda setting is based on the strong connection between the importance that mass media put on certain issues and the significance given to these issues by mass audiences (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). In this way, media can systematically affect how the audience perceives events (Price et al., 1997). Both theories have been widely used by scholars examining Olympic media coverage (Billings and Eastman, 2003; Billings et al., 2010; Eagleman, 2015) and sport media (Wensing and Bruce, 2003; Eagleman, 2011). In the past decades, scholars have mostly examined media frames and the consequences of framing but very little research has been dedicated to how are these frames produced (Carragee and Roefs, 2004; Borah, 2011). As Scheufele (Scheufele, 1999) noted, framing is a complex process involving frame (agenda) building, frame setting, individual-level effects of framing; and a link between individual frames and media frames. Geurin and Naraine (Geurin and Naraine, 2020) point out the lack of research concerned with the 'human elements of Olympic media' as there is a lack of examination of social actors, including politicians, organizations and social movements who determine and influence media creation. This is therefore a gap that needs to be filled, especially if

we consider that ‘media has strong, long-term effects on audiences, based on the ubiquitous and consonant stream of messages they present to audiences’ (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007, p. 10). Ambivalent sports media coverage of female athletes, as defined by Duncan and Hasbrook (Duncan and Hasbrook, 1988), has a negative consequence on public meaning and society and continues to obstruct the advancement of women’s sport. As Bruce (Bruce, 2013) further develops, media coverage of sport matters because it tells us who and what is important, and in what way.

To connect the theoretical framework with the case presented in this study, gatekeeping theory helps explore how and why certain pieces of information pass through so-called gates. Gatekeeping is a process of ‘selecting, producing, transmitting, and shaping information’ that occurs on multiple levels in various networks of people who produce sports media (Creedon, 2014, p. 17). It’s the gatekeepers who decide who and what is valued, relevant and interesting enough to be given attention (LaVoi et al., 2019). The common lack of knowledge of women’s sports might cause more generic and plain coverage (Dashper, 2018; Xu, 2019) and therefore reinforce the male domination of sports media production and consumption. Hence, it is crucial to further investigate the role of those actors in framing processes.

## Literature Review

Scholars continually report on sportswomen’s underrepresentation in news media (Mesnner et al., 1993; Eastman and Billings, 1999; Eagleman, 2015; Litchfield and Kavanagh, 2019). Their findings indicate that female athletes receive less airtime (Eastman and Billings, 1999; Billings, 2007, 2008) and less space in newspapers (Duncan, 1990; Lee, 1992; Pratt et al., 2008). Gender portrayal is also related to the gender of the producer (Schoch, 2013), to the cultural repertoires (Benson and Saguy, 2005) and the organizational environment (Silcock, 2002; Pfister, 2010). Furthermore, some have suggested that sports coverage of female and male athletes is not (only) affected by gender but other aspects such their percentage participation (Delorme, 2014), success (Bruce et al., 2010), nationalism, culture (Capranica et al., 2005), and the producers themselves (Hardin, 2005; Xu, 2019). Media also tend to pay more attention to “feminine” sports and ignore female athletes competing in “masculine” events (Vincent et al., 2002; Higgs et al., 2003). Furthermore, female Olympians are portrayed ambivalently (Bruce, 2013) and receive more stereotypical comments and comments about their appearance (Kinnick, 1998; Jones et al., 1999; Shields et al., 2004). Media houses also remain male dominated as they continue to use more journalists, male sources and announcers (Capranica and Aversa, 2002; Tuggle et al., 2002).

During the 2016 Olympics, social media really came to prominence and organizational communication gained in significance as they became an indispensable communication channel providing organizations with their own voice (Litchfield and Kavanagh, 2019). Some hoped that the open online space would challenge male hegemony in sports coverage (Bruce, 2013; LaVoi et al., 2019). However, Jones (Jones, 2013) and LaVoi and Calhoun (LaVoi and Calhoun, 2014) discovered

that major public broadcasters continued to underrepresent sportswomen even in online spaces. On the other hand, North American Olympic broadcasters generally framed gender along equitable lines on their social media accounts (Johnson et al., 2020). Together with traditional media, social media provide an important source of information and reference points for its audience (Darnell and Sparks, 2005). This implies that understanding the importance of media-intensive sports events like the Olympics requires a knowledge of the processes by which media texts are formed, as well as the reasons why they are constructed in specific ways.

While the IOC puts great importance on gender equality, it failed to translate its own media recommendations and guidance into practice. (Xu, 2019) analyzed gender portrayal in the Olympic Channel over 16 months from 2016 to 2018 revealing that 60.1 per cent of pictures of news stories were devoted to men with greater focus on masculine sports, and only 39.9 per cent to women. Litchfield and Kavanagh (Litchfield and Kavanagh, 2019) analyzed Twitter accounts of the Australian Olympic team @AUSOlympicTeam and Team GB @TeamGB. Despite some prevailing stereotypes, the British content offered fair representations of genders, but Australian women remained underrepresented.

Compared with the proliferation of media content studies, investigations of media content production processes within the Olympic setting are quite rare. Only three publications were discovered in this literature review. The first two focus on media production processes in news media. O’Neill and Mulready (O’Neill and Mulready, 2015) interviewed UK journalists during the 2012 Olympics. The respondents indicated that sports organizations play an important role in media production and they don’t do enough to promote women’s sport. As demonstrated on the Simon Whitfield case (Darnell and Sparks, 2005), media exposure play a vital role in the construction of athletes’ public image, which can endorse their marketability. At the same time, it is in the media producers’ hands to decide to whom they will provide the exposure (MacNeill, 1996).

Billings (Billings, 2009) explored whether NBC Olympic producers and sportscasters make choices that privilege one gender over another. He revealed that the producers felt they had set a fair agenda for both men and women, however, content analysis proved otherwise. Furthermore, they admitted they unintentionally and unconsciously report ambivalently on men and women. With regard to social media, Xu and Billings (Xu and Billings, 2021) contributed to the understanding of production of digital media in a sports organization committed to gender equality and women’s empowerment. By interviewing the media professionals working at the Olympic Channel, they discovered that individuals and their personalities have a significant influence on news production.

Notwithstanding the recent emergence of social media studies in relation to the Olympics, we know very little about how these platforms affects content production processes and existing content analyses of social media yielded mixed results. To address this gap, this study aims to explore how gender is constructed on social media accounts of the Olympic Movement. To that end, the next section will introduce the materials and methods used.

**TABLE 1** | Analyzed accounts.

Instagram accounts	Number of followers (October 2021)
Czech Olympic committee @olympijskytym	179 k
Swiss Olympic committee @swissolympicteam	51.2 k
Norwegian Olympic committee @olympicteamnorway	20.2 k

## Methodology

Although many studies have examined gender distribution in coverage of major sports events, few studies have used mixed methods to explain the ongoing underrepresentation of female athletes. To fill this void, a mixed-methods approach was applied to this study. The reason was twofold. First, it provides credible and usable knowledge by combining and integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies (Molina-Azorin and Fetters, 2019). By combination of different perspectives on social phenomena, mixed methods contribute to broader and deeper understanding of them (Hollstein, 2014). Such an approach enables a comparison with and contrast to the amount of content given and provides reasoning behind it. Secondly, while it has been commonly employed by social media researchers (Snelson, 2016), it has not yet been used to study production of the Olympic social media content.

A mixed-methods approach is here understood as “the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon” (Denzin, 1978, p. 291). Ideally, this means that “the bias inherent in any particular data source, investigators, and particularly method will be canceled out when used in conjunction with other data sources, investigators, and methods” (p. 14); and that “the result will be a convergence upon the truth about some social phenomenon” (p. 14). Denzin (1978), moreover, outlines the emergence of three possible outcomes from triangulation: convergence, inconsistency, and contradiction. Which of these outcomes characterized this study, and how the integration of different data types was analyzed, typically a conflict theme in methodology debates (Johnson et al., 2007), will be explained below. But first, the rationale for each method and corresponding data must be introduced (Table 1).

### Method 1: Content Analysis

Content analysis of social media network Instagram was employed. This analysis served to answer the first two research questions regarding the gender distribution and its connection to participation and performance. Instagram was used because it had the highest engagement rate<sup>1</sup> across social media networks used by the selected NOCs. To select relevant data, a non-probability judgmental (purposive) sampling method was used. Following Blaikie & Priest (2019), this method is optimal for selecting some cases of particular type in order to study some aspects of organizational behaviors. In such a case, the selection of the sample is a matter of judgements, which may be

<sup>1</sup>Engagement rate is calculated as a percentage of interactions per overall number of followers.

informed by theoretical considerations. For the purpose of this study, three European countries with diverse national identity, culture, economy, language, and sport habits were selected. Those countries are also situated in different parts of the scale of the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap report (World Economic Forum, 2021). The selection includes Norway, a country with long-term high ranking, the Czech Republic, a post-communist country that continuously ranks low, and Switzerland, a country that was one of the last in Europe to recognize women's rights, yet nowadays sits in the upper part of the scale. Such studies can focus and compare different aspects of individual attitudes, values and beliefs, and aspects of organizations, institutions and structures (Blaikie and Priest, 2019).

The data collection was conducted during the 2020 Tokyo Olympics that was held from 23rd July to 8th August 2021. Data was recorded manually and analyzed using Microsoft Excel. The data were recorded by the author and then validated by a disinterested but competent peer in the “peer debrief” process (Hail et al., 2011). Peer debriefing is defined as a “process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a way similar to an analytic session for the goal of examining parts of the inquiry that could otherwise stay simply implicit inside the inquirer's thinking” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 308). Statistical software R was used to analyze the data, calculate descriptive statistics and tests (Spearman correlation coefficients, tests of significance of the correlation coefficient and tests of independence). Categorization was adopted from the Portrayal Guidelines for gender-equal, fair, and inclusive representation in sport published by the IOC (IOC, 2014). “Visibility” category evaluating who is featured in the content was limited to: number of posts, type of post (picture or video), sport, and gender. Data in each category was compared to gender, participation, and medal success and used to establish a standard of comparison for quantity of media content.

### Method 2: Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were of use to answer the third research question the commitment of the Olympic movement to gender equality. Combining then the semi-structured interview method with quantitative measures allowed the former to bring nuance and depth to the latter's panoramic qualities. What is characteristic about the interviewee sample in this article's topic is that it is only a handful of persons that are responsible for social media in NOCs and the EOC. Given that “the content of inquiry is such that complete or in-depth information cannot be expected from representative survey respondents” (Kumar et al., 1993, p. 1634), the four informants included here are thus considered “key informants”. These informants “serve as gatekeepers regulating access to people and information and as cultural experts explaining culture to an outsider” (McKenna and Main, 2013, p. 116). As this research had an exploratory dimension (Blaikie and Priest, 2019), allowing participants to give freely their own experiences and feelings regarding their work habits, performances and management styles, the composition of the sample is crucial (Crouch, 2006).

Four interviews were conducted with media personnel of three European NOCs and the EOC with the aim to extract



professional experiences and insights and gain understanding of their working processes. Individuals representing the organizations were asked to report on their activities as they occurred in their natural settings. Following Blaikie and Priest (Blaikie and Priest, 2019), four main kinds of data of individuals' characteristics were collected: demographic characteristics, knowledge, attitudes, and reported behavior. Respondents were contacted and recruited by the researcher through email and LinkedIn. All respondents were anonymized. Three interviews took place from June to September 2021 around the time of the Tokyo Olympics, and one interview was conducted earlier as part of different but relevant study. Due to the pandemic, all the interviews were conducted via Zoom or Teams (based on respondent's preference). All the respondents were white, in their young adulthood, educated and had several years of experience in the field. Two respondents were women, two were men.

Literature on content production in sports and discussion with media experts preceded the development of the interview guide, which started with general and non-controversial questions (e.g., what is your job title?). After rapport was established, more probing questions were asked (e.g., to what extent do you think the NOC fulfills its promises in promoting gender equality?). After transcribing the interviews verbatim, thematic analysis was employed to interpret the data and understand how social media personnel constructed athletes' identity during the Tokyo Olympics. Themes and patterns of meaning within the data that were related to the research question were identified by employing inductive and theoretical thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Thematic textual analysis is a systematic and repeatable approach for analyzing texts. It is a method of deciphering the meanings of text to comprehend their greater cultural relevance. To evaluate the collected data, qualitative data analysis tool NVivo was used. Following this (Braun and Clarke, 2006), transcripts were reviewed to gain a sense of the information gathered. Then, the transcripts were processed to extract patterns and code the data. These codes were then re-examined and grouped into themes. Each theme was identified and named and is represented by quotes in the results section.

## Results: Content Analysis

The content analysis revealed the gender distribution on the social media accounts on the Czech, Norwegian and Swiss Olympic Committee's Instagram accounts. A total of 432 posts were analyzed. To provide a context, the participation and medal success of the teams are presented in **Table 2**.

The Tokyo Olympics was 'first ever gender-balanced' with overall participation at 48.8 per cent women and 51.2 per cent men. All the three analyzed teams were represented by a similar number of athletes (CZE: 115, SUI: 107, NOR: 93). The Czech team consisted of 64.3 per cent men and 35.7 per cent women, similarly the Norway ratio was at 63.4 per cent and 36.6 per cent, respectively. Swiss representation was 44 per cent women and 56 per cent men. In terms of success, the Czechs won 11 medals, 9 of them by men, 2 by women. Similarly, Norwegian men won 7 out of 8 medals for Norway. Switzerland received 13 medals, 10

of them won by women. Participation and performance figures provide a standard of comparison for quantity of media content.

The number of posts was analyzed based on participation proportion and success. In the case of the Czech Republic and Norway, the gender distribution of posts corresponded with the participation ratio. In the case of Switzerland, women received a higher number of posts (60 per cent). However, that can be explained by their medal success as they won most medals for Switzerland (76.9 per cent). In all three cases, media content was related to athletes' participation by sport. The Spearman correlation indicated that there is an association between sport participation and the amount of social media content (CZE:  $r_s = 0.534$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ; SUI:  $r_s = 0.904$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ; NOR:  $r_s = 0.615$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ). In the case of the Czech Republic and Norway, this association increased where the athlete is female; the more women participate in each sport at the Olympics, the more content they will receive (CZE: male:  $r_s = 0.445$ ,  $p = 0.04$ ; female:  $r_s = 0.591$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ; NOR: male:  $r_s = 0.571$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ; female:  $r_s = 0.801$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). On the other hand, in the case of Switzerland, the association increased when the athlete was male (male:  $r_s = 0.936$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; female:  $r_s = 0.733$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

In all three cases, the correlation of medal success and media content was significant for both male and female athletes (CZE:  $r_s = 0.928$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; NOR:  $r_s = 0.937$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; SUI:  $r_s = 0.814$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Sports in which athletes won medals resulted in more content. However, it's not only success that influences the amount of content but also its expectation and structural advantage of some sports. Sports that resulted in medal success received most of the posts in both Norway and the Czech Republic. This was especially true for Czech female athletes as only nine posts (16 per cent) were dedicated to sports, in which female athletes did not succeed. On the other hand, for the Swiss Olympic Committee medal success was not decisive. More posts were dedicated to sports that did not result in medal success.

## Results: Semi-structured Interviews

Even though the quantitative and qualitative data collection was ongoing simultaneously, the qualitative interviews served an explanatory and validity role (Johnson et al., 2007) in this study. As Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (Johnson et al., 2007) state, "during the data analysis stage, qualitative data can play an important role by interpreting, clarifying, describing, and validating quantitative results, as well as through grounding and modifying." Through this process, not only the third research question was addressed but also convergence of the two data sets was identified. In all three studied cases, content analysis revealed fair amount of content dedicated to female athletes with focus on both: their participation and success. This was stressed by the respondents:

"The whole coverage is based on our shared beliefs of being one team. We don't distinguish between sports or athletes; instead, we aim to cover all types of sports."

At the same time, one respondent described the additional content dedicated to successful athletes:

"We had graphics with a medal or position during the Olympic Games, but we didn't prepare it just for the medalists;

**TABLE 2 |** Number of participants, medals, and posts.

	Czech republic		Norway		Switzerland	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Number of participants	41 (35.7%)	74 (64.3%)	34 (36.6%)	59 (36.6%)	47 (44%)	60 (56%)
Number of medals	2 (18.2%)	9 (81.1%)	1 (12.5%)	7 (87.5%)	10 (76.9%)	3 (23.1%)
Number of posts	56 (36.1%)	99 (63.9%)	29 (34.9%)	54 (65.1%)	45 (65.1%)	30 (40%)

we had it for top 10 as that is still a wonderful accomplishment for us.”

Reflecting on the quantitative findings, three main principles were identified through the qualitative interviews: individual agency (the role of gatekeepers), living up to Olympic values (Organizational role), and social responsibility.

### The Role of Gatekeepers

Given that one of the IOC's key goals is to promote gender equality, it is not unexpected that the Olympic values have been embedded in the NOCs' communication. Media personnel of the NOCs expressed consensus that both men and women should receive equitable amount of content. The Olympic representative very specific about how Olympic values play an important role in their work:

“The coverage of the Olympic movement and its sports is our primary aim. Our fundamental concept is that we are one team, one sport, and our aim is to encourage a healthy lifestyle and sports participation in everyday life.”

And how they promote them despite the possible lower engagement:

“We have projects that are important to us as an organization and we see that there is a good reaction to it that encourages to do more, but we also have Olympic values content that is maybe not so popular, but we still like to do it because it's important to us. Like this we can implement it in the population or at least in the sport.”

This seemed to have a direct influence on the equality in the portrayal:

“We are really conscious when it comes to diversity. We want to portray both female and male athletes, to cover the broad range of different athletes and different sports that are out there.”

However, in some cases the respondents found it difficult as some sports and attire are more revealing:

“We avoid sexual connotation, pictures or anything like that but it's difficult in some sports like beach volleyball. Some sports naturally put the body in focus, but I think we are pretty sensitive to the topic.”

Notwithstanding the fact that they claimed to have considerable autonomy to express their individual personalities and opinions in their reporting, they stressed the importance of collaboration with colleagues:

“It's mostly my decision but if it's a controversial image, I ask someone else if this is okay, but I think we really try to show the sports.”

“Because the material is created by a large group of individuals, my job is to ensure that everything satisfies those specifications [of our identity]. I'm the one who approves it and decides whether or not it should be published.”

Furthermore, they explained the importance of balanced mixed gender teams in the work processes:

“It also helps that I'm a woman myself. I don't have a different view on it [women's and men's performance] and that's what's great with our department that consists of both men and women. We have those different perspectives, and we can always challenge each other when it comes to portrayal of athletes. I think it's our strength. We live up to the fact that we see them as athletes and it's not dependent on gender.”

All the three NOCs had mixed gender teams, and some stressed how their personalities and experiences had a positive impact on gender equality in the social media content:

“Maybe it's also personal because I was working with para-athletes before and there the pictures are even more important and sometimes it's sensitive pictures. So, I think I am a bit more aware what an image can do.”

### Organizational Role

The IOC recently published Portrayal guidelines “*recognizing that sports coverage is very influential in shaping gender norms and stereotypes*” with the aim to “*raise awareness and call for gender-equal and fair representation of sportspeople across all forms of media and communication*” (IOC, 2014). This seemed to have a great influence on the quality of the content, even if some of the NOCs did not follow specifically the IOC's guidelines but had their own internal rules.

“I think it's really important [the guidelines] and from our side, we follow these guidelines. I try to find a good balance between male and female portrayal also in our newsletter, on our website, or social media posts. We try, we are careful about this topic, we work hand-in-hand with the IOC. So basically, we follow the principles.”

Despite the document's recommendatory character, it seemed to also exercise a controlling effect:

“I think the IOC does have supervisory body during the games and I don't know which kind of system they use to catch the wrong message or the wrong attitude but since they have the guidelines that should be respected, I suppose that they do have some system to oversee this activity.”

On the other hand, they also mentioned how diverse structure of the Olympic events play role in the post's distribution:

“We want to maintain our communication continuous during the Olympics since certain events, endure for several days while some other sports have only a one-day competition. All of this must be considered.”

It is part of the IOC's Gender review project (IOC, 2018, p. 8) to have an “*equal representation of women's and men's events in the competition schedule*” and to ensure the competition formats

to be equal in the distances, duration of competition segments, number of round etc. However, this goal hasn't been met yet.

## Social Responsibility

Sports journalists previously justified men's domination of media coverage by financial profit and denied the responsibility of promoting women's sports (Vincent et al., 2003; Knoppers and Elling, 2004). In comparison to news media, the IOC's own media production is not a primary activity or source of finance. Media personnel of the NOCs do not therefore have to follow that logic:

"I think that there is a difference in between the traditional media and the Olympic movement. I see a lot the different points of view. We don't focus just on the consumption but also on the values."

"We are not run by engagement and likes and that popularity contest that is already out there. For us, it's never been a big goal to grow or get a ton of engagement on each post."

Most coverage that athletes receive is controlled by mass media, however, social media let athletes create their own portrayal. For athletes, social media provide a way to connect with fans, stakeholders, and sponsors. They can be especially beneficial for athletes from sports who usually do not receive mainstream coverage as social media is a tool to build and promote their own personal brand (Eagleman, 2013). While mass media ignore athletes' preferences of portrayal, media personnel of the NOCs took that into consideration:

"If we have a campaign and I use an athlete's picture, I ask if they are okay with that picture. Like now with the Olympic Games, we want to ask everyone if the photo is okay."

"We always want to please the athlete, even though we don't need their consent to work with their pictures."

"I'm not in direct contact with the athletes but a lot of us are, and if we use pictures that are not okay, then we will have a bad reaction from them directly."

Geurin-Eagleman and Burch (Geurin-Eagleman and Burch, 2016) explained that it is NOCs' interests to develop strong relationships with their athletes as it helps to create a positive impression of both the athletes and the sports organizations. Furthermore, athletes' self-representation also influences the reputation of their respective sports organizations. One of the respondents explained how this is executed:

"[My daily routine] includes keeping the relations with athletes...how should they communicate or what they should post, or if they want and advice—they come to us."

Geurin-Eagleman and Burch (Geurin-Eagleman and Burch, 2016) further explained that while NOCs cannot control athletes' social media accounts, they should develop a strong understanding of effective social media practices to further an athlete's desired long-term brand image. Ultimately, this a mutual relationship—NOCs influence the audience's perception of the athletes and the other way round.

## DISCUSSION

The first two research questions were: (1) What is the gender distribution in NOCs' social media communication? and (2) Does the number of posts devoted to men and women

on social media of the Norwegian, Czech and Swiss NOCs correspond with participation and performance? The content analysis showed equitable social media content in all three countries reflecting athletes' participation and performance. While in the case of the Czech Republic and Norway, success was a more prominent factor, Switzerland dedicated content to all participants regardless of performance. In comparison to previous studies that continuously drew attention to sportswomen's underrepresentation in sports coverage, the three NOCs provided fair amount of content dedicated to both female and male athletes. These results demonstrated that if media content is analyzed with consideration of participation and national success, masculine hegemony, and cultural preferences of certain sports disappears.

Even though medal success increased the number of posts dedicated to particular sports, less successful participants also received a proportional amount of content, and this applied to both genders. Seemingly equally important was the expectation of success, which bears out some of the previous studies (Bruce et al., 2010; Ličen and Billings, 2013; Crossan et al., 2021). Athletes that were favorites in their disciplines received more national coverage with no regard to their gender. At the same time, some sports are more complicated than others and have a structural advantage that results in more coverage (Wehden et al., 2019). Some events differ in length and advance structure as men's events tend to be longer and/or include more teams. Together with national success in these events, it naturally leads to more coverage.

From the perspective of framing and agenda setting, it is understood that media play a vital role in creation of public meaning. Therefore, fair portrayal of female athletes has an important impact on the consumer's perception of sport and its medialization. However, this study is limited to frame (agenda) building and frame setting. While the literature documenting gender distribution in Olympic coverage has been extensive (Grabmüllerová and Næss, 2022), the actual consequences of gender framing on audience remain understudied. Therefore, the individual-level effects of framing should be explored in future studies. More studies such Metcalfe's (2019) or Jones and Greer's (2012) exploring audience attitudes influenced by media consumption are needed.

In previous studies, sports journalist were described as misogynist and reluctant to cover female athletes claiming they are not responsible for the improvement of gender equality (Knoppers and Elling, 2004; Organista et al., 2021). In other studies, journalists who claimed fair agenda were contradicted by the actual content analysis (Billings, 2009; Xu, 2019). This study showed convergence of the quantitative and qualitative data (Denzin, 1978). Perhaps this is a result of more balanced Olympic content production teams (gatekeepers) comparing to the overly masculine environment of sports journalism (Knoppers and Elling, 2004). From the framing and agenda setting perspective, social media personnel consciously decided to cover athletes based on their participation in the Olympics and their success. Agenda and frames were described as result of collective work, however, at the end of the media process was one gatekeeper who had a significant individual influence on the final outcome

and consequently gender portrayal and distribution in their respective communication channel. As described earlier, those gatekeepers decide who and what receives attention (LaVoi et al., 2019). NOCs' media personnel were conscious about setting a fair agenda for both male and female athletes and aware of the frames they apply.

This answers the third research question: How is the commitment of the Olympic movement to gender equality and women's empowerment reflected in NOCs' social media communication? Loyalty to the Olympic movement and its values seemed to be vital to set a fair agenda in the content production. Social-structural or organizational characteristics, as well as individual or ideological variables, may influence producers' framing of an issue at the media level (Scheufele, 1999). During the interviews with the NOCs' media personnel, it became clear that this is the case. Organizational and personal dedication to gender equality was the key aspect. In this regard, it can be argued that the increased women's visibility in the social media is influenced by the IOC's gender equality policies and organizational context of the Olympic movement.

On the other hand, the cultural context did not influence the production or opinions on gender equality. Despite the different nations in this study, the same attitudes were identified in the interviews and female athletes were fairly represented in all the analyzed accounts. This can be explained by the commitment of the NOCs and their personnel to the IOC and Olympic values. While the European cultural context did not have an influence on the amount of content dedicated to female and male athletes, it affects female's involvement in sport in general. Professional sportswomen's participation and success is heavily associated with national gender regimes and women's higher empowerment in a society is reflected in elite sport participation (Meier et al., 2021). Therefore, more localized initiatives to promote gender equality in sport and society are needed. For future studies, more culturally diverse sample would be beneficial as it can provide an understanding of what role ethnicity and race play.

Despite the positive findings within the Olympic movement, outside of the period of major sport events, sportswomen's coverage in news media drops to minimum as one of the respondents mentioned:

"Very impressive figure is that only 4 per cent of the media coverage is dedicated to women in sport. And this is a very sad figure, and we should ask ourselves many questions about why it happens? I think the IOC is committed to this cause."

The IOC's initiative to increase women's participation and consequently opportunity to succeed is essential as this is mirrored in media coverage. Despite the claimed balanced participation in the Tokyo Olympics (Tokyo IOC, 2020), there are still sports and events that differ for female and male athletes. For example, men's football started with 16 teams while the women's tournament had only 12 teams. Similarly, ice hockey will feature 12 men's teams but only 10 women's teams in the upcoming Winter Olympics. Differences also remain in individual sports, for example men's longest cross-country skiing event is 50 km while women compete on a 30 km long track. This results in shorter events which can sway the gender distribution of the coverage.

## CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to explore the context of Olympic content production and gender distribution. The analysis showed that all three National Olympic Committees offered fair amount of content of female athletes corresponding with their participation and performances. Interviews with the media personnel showed convergence with the content analysis. The set fair coverage was a result of the personal and organizational commitment of the Olympic movement to gender equality and women's empowerment. This is an important finding for the theoretical perspectives of framing, agenda setting and gatekeeping as well as for the IOC and other media producers who wish to improve coverage of female athletes, as it provides an explanation of the contradictory results in many other studies of the Olympic coverage and gender distribution. It also serves as evidence supporting the anticipation that disruptions of the persisting narratives will come from media forms other than sports news or live sport (Bruce, 2013). Social media and other alternative digital spaces might have the power to shift the existing cultural and media discourses (Bruce, 2013; Peeters et al., 2019).

The scope of this study is limited because of its nature as a case study. To expand, the sample consists of diverse demographics, however, it is limited to Europe and countries with fair attitudes toward gender equality. Therefore, only "natural generalizability" can be considered (Blaikie and Priest, 2019). Furthermore, this research analyzed gender distribution in social media posts only quantitatively. Future research should examine social media content through qualitative media analysis as well as to explore how is such content and its framing interpreted by the consumers. Especially, since Smith Clavio and Lang (Smith et al., 2021) identified the effects of visual framing of athletes on social media. Such studies would help us to better understand the framing effects of ambivalent gender portrayal and the importance of gender equality in sports media.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes to the understanding how social media frames are constructed in the Olympic movement and revealed the influence of gatekeepers in the agenda setting. The implications for further research are that more studies on social media coverage and gender distribution are needed. We can deduce from this study that to improve gender equality in news media, institutional change would be required as well as local initiatives to promote gender equality in society. Media gatekeepers play an important part in it as they have the power to influence the audience's view of social reality by imposing their own perceptions on their media content (Xu and Billings, 2021).

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.



## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

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# How Leisure Involvement Affects Repurchase Intention in Fitness Clubs? The Mediating Role of Commercial Friendship

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This study explores the relationships among leisure involvement, business or commercial friendship, satisfaction, and willingness to repurchase in customers' use of customized fitness services. This study randomly sampled and analyzed the customers of fitness clubs ( $N = 234$ ) in China. The results showed that leisure involvement had a positive impact on repurchase intention and satisfaction. Moreover, the mediating effect of commercial friendship was found in the relationship between leisure involvement, repurchase intention, and satisfaction. Overall, the study contributes to the literature by exploring the interaction effects of different types of consumer leisure involvement and commercial friendships in customized fitness services models on satisfaction and repurchase intentions'.

**Keywords:** customized fitness consumption, leisure involvement, repurchase intentions, commercial friendship, mediated effect, fitness services

## INTRODUCTION

There has been an increase in people's interest in fitness and the number of fitness enterprises associated with physical activity, which could benefit society. Not only have people started paying attention to physical activities and fitness, but their fitness demands are also diversifying (Angosto et al., 2020). Due to these trends, the fitness industry has become the representative product of consumption upgrading (Baker et al., 2018).

The new fitness club model is becoming highly prominent. It has the main characteristics of human and technology interaction; data-intensive, customized optimization; and participation by a wider network community (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Baena-Arroyo et al., 2020; Ivens et al., 2020). Appearing in new market modes (i.e., private gym training studios and internet smart gyms), customized fitness services have become the main point of operating profit growth in the fitness industry due to their high prices (Angosto et al., 2020). Specifically, customized fitness services are offerings where private fitness coaches customize fitness plans and chart healthy diet recipes that meet customers' needs and provide frequent feedback and personalized guidance (Lovell, 1983). Customized services are part of merchants' promotion strategies, which are regarded as the main strategies affecting customer behavior (Montgomery and Smith, 2009). The positive emotions of customers after enjoying the customized services affect the customers' repurchase intentions (Pappas et al., 2014). In fitness centers, customers must be physically present and exercise actively for the service delivery process to be considered successful (Chiu et al., 2015). Thus, during the process of training and guidance, private fitness coaches get into direct contact with customers to encourage the latter's participation,



which requires the establishment of a close and trusting commercial friendship between the coaches and the customers.

Leisure involvement represents how an individual and the external stimulus are related (Baker et al., 2018). Therefore, leisure involvement can be considered as the extent to which an individual is involved in leisure and recreational activities. Moreover, the degree of customers' leisure involvement inevitably affects their fitness outcomes, such as increasing physical health or losing weight (Ramaswamy, 2009). Meanwhile, the process of forming a commercial friendship could create adverse feelings that harm the commercial friendship, leading to customer dissatisfaction (Baker et al., 2018). However, whether it also affects customer satisfaction has not yet been supported by empirical research. Therefore, the effects of commercial friendships on customer behaviors, such as leisure involvement and customer satisfaction, need to be explored.

Given the advantages of customer relationship management and customers' leisure involvement for consumers in the fitness industry and using this as the theoretical basis, this study seeks to explore the relationships among leisure involvement, business or commercial friendship, satisfaction, and willingness to repurchase in customers' use of customized fitness services. This study contributes to the literature in various ways by exploring the interaction effects of different types of consumer leisure involvement and commercial friendships in customized fitness services models on satisfaction and repurchase intentions'.

## HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

### Relationship Between Leisure Involvement, Satisfaction and Repurchase Intentions

Leisure involvement is a psychological state generated during the process of interaction between the individuals and the recreation activities, recreation destinations, and related recreation products; it is a behavior-driven feature (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Havitz and Dimanche, 1997; Rosenbaum, 2009). Leisure involvement is a multifaceted conceptualization, including three-facet solution comprised of attraction, centrality, and self-expression (McIntyre, 1989; McQuarrie and Phillips, 2005). Attraction reflects hedonic value and the enjoyment derived from an activity. Centrality relates to how central the activity is to the individual's daily life. Self-expression refers to the self-representation or the impression of the self that individuals wish to convey to others through their leisure participation (Kyle and Chick, 2004).

During the 1980s, Sherif and Hovland's work was extended to consumer behavior research to understand the purchasing behavior of consumer goods (Laurent and Kapferer, 1985) and has since been applied to leisure contexts. Scholars have found that leisure involvement positively influences the effects of consultations and communications via social networks and interpersonal relationships (Lin et al., 2017) and is positively related to place attachment and the identity with of the destinations (Shen et al., 2008). In one study, the leisure involvement of bicycle users was found to be positively related to place attachment (Li et al., 2012). Johnson et al. (2006) found that couple leisure involvement, leisure satisfaction, and

marital relationship satisfaction were positively correlated in their study. Further, Sato et al. (2014) reported that a single construct of leisure involvement was positively associated with life domain satisfaction.

In view of the literature, satisfaction has been widely used in various academic fields to measure consumers' views, cognition and behavioral performance of products and services, work, living environment and outdoor recreation quality, and has also become a common indicator to measure consumer behavior. Westbrook and Oliver (1981) argued that satisfaction is an emotion, which is a kind of psychological state in which the expectations are consistent with the actual, experienced feelings. In the final step of the satisfaction formation process, satisfaction determines the intentions of whether to patronize a store in the future. Customer satisfaction is the antecedent of customers "repurchasing of services (Fornell, 1992; Szymanski and Henard, 2001)".

Despite the wealth of literature, the concept of leisure involvement has rarely been studied in the field of fitness (Havitz et al., 2013). Under the premise that fitness has become a lifestyle, we expect that the three facets of leisure involvement in the activity will differently address psychological needs that promote satisfaction with fitness center services.

Given that each involvement facet has a distinctive meaning, For instance, fitness attraction could contribute to a detachment from work; fitness as centrality might be more associated with an affiliation with family or friends; and self-expression could be equated to the pursuit of the meaning in life. To examine whether the leisure involvement of the customers of customized fitness services is related to their satisfaction and repurchase intentions, our study puts forward the following hypotheses:

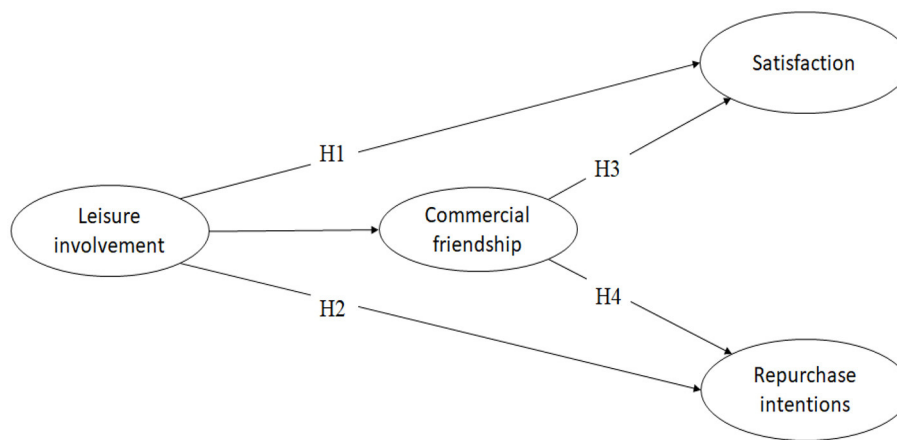
**Hypothesis 1 (H1):** Leisure involvement positively affects satisfaction.

**Hypothesis 2 (H2):** Leisure involvement positively affects repurchase intentions.

### Commercial Friendships as a Mediator

Commercial friendships refer to a gradual development of friendship between the service providers and the customers in the service industry through cooperation. Commercial friendships are characterized by expressiveness, instrumentality, and cooperation, as well as the sharing of information (Goodwin and Gremler, 1996; Wang et al., 2017). Commercial friendships between the service providers and the customers are mutually beneficial (Wu, 2000; Chen et al., 2005; Tsai and Huang, 2007). Commercial friendship has been found to have a positive impact on service satisfaction, loyalty, and public extolment (Kelley and Hoffman, 1997). It is also associated with promoted service personalization and transactions and improved satisfaction and public praising (Price and Arnould, 1999).

Numerous studies have suggested that the level of leisure involvement is positively linked to activity and equipment knowledge, frequency of participation, intensity of participation, and duration of participation (Havitz et al., 2013; Rosenbaum et al., 2015). Leisure involvement can be considered the extent to which an individual is involved in leisure and recreational activities. Thus, service providers establish trust



**FIGURE 1 |** Hypotheses model.

with customers, and customers focus on feelings and become perceptual purchase decision-makers (Johnson et al., 2011). In the fitness service industry, the production and consumption of services during the interactions between private fitness coaches and customers proceed simultaneously and cannot be separated. For example, commercial friendships between service providers and customers affect customer service satisfaction and the service quality (Price and Arnould, 1999). Similarly, the establishment of commercial friendships between the customers and the employees of fitness enterprises not only exerts a positive impact on customer loyalty but also causes the customers to identify with the enterprises, resulting in word-of-mouth promotion and repurchase intentions (Price and Arnould, 1999). In other words, commercial friendship may impact the relationship between leisure involvement and service satisfaction and the relationship between leisure involvement and repurchase intentions. Therefore, we put forward the following hypotheses (Figure 1):

**Hypothesis 3 (H3):** Commercial friendship mediates the relationship between leisure involvement and satisfaction.

**Hypothesis 4 (H4):** Commercial friendship mediates the relationship between leisure involvement and repurchase intentions.

## METHODS

### Participants and Procedures

Participants were recruited from three city's fitness clubs across China, in particular Quanzhou, such as Shuhua fitness management company, Center of Power Castle Fitness Management, and Zhong Kong City Fitness Center, which were selected to represent different marketing areas. It should be noted that the permission to conduct the survey was approved by all fitness centers. Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the first author's university. Moreover, all participants were asked to sign and submit consent forms, and

**TABLE 1 |** Demographic information of the participants.

Characteristics	N	%	Characteristics	N	%
<b>Gender</b>			<b>Age</b>		
Male	89	38	<20	7	3.0
Female	145	62	21–30	144	61.6
			31–40	78	33.3
			More than 41	5	2.1
<b>Income</b>			<b>Education</b>		
<3,000	20	8.5	Junior high or below	12	5.1
3,001–5,000	43	18.4	Senior high school	30	12.9
5,001–7,000	51	21.8	Vocational school	81	34.6
7,001–9,000	28	12	College/university	101	43.1
More than 9,001	92	39	Graduate and above	10	4.3

N = 229.

their responses would remain confidential and used for research purposes only. This study received 250 questionnaires but 16 surveys were discarded because of incomplete responses. As a result, there were a total 234 useable surveys, which were distributed to final sample. Of the total participants, most of them are male (56.6%,  $n = 456$ ) with an average age of 37.2 years ( $SD = 13.8$ ). Moreover, the majority of respondents education degree college (43.1%,  $n = 101$ ) (Table 1).

## Measurement

### Leisure Involvement Scale

The scales developed by scholars, such as Kyle and Mowen (2005) and McQuarrie and Phillips (2005), were mainly used for developing the leisure involvement scale and facilitating the understanding of the investigators. The scale was revised to suit the fitness field. The scale included three dimensions,

namely attraction (four questions), centrality (five questions), and self-expression (three questions). Items were rated on 7-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree). The internal consistency and the item-total correlation analysis methods were used. The Pearson product-moment coefficient was between 0.53 and 0.91, and the critical ratio (CR), value reached a significant level. Exploratory factor analysis was implemented, and the principal component analysis and varimax rotation method were used for testing. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of the leisure involvement scale was 0.932, and the Barlett sphericity test value was 1733.33, with  $p < 0.000$ . By selecting factors with a factor load of 0.5 or more, the total explained variance reached 84.036%. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was used to verify the internal consistency of the scale; Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values for the three factors of attraction, centrality, and self-expression were 0.95, 0.94, and 0.89, respectively, and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of the leisure involvement scale was 0.96, indicating good reliability and validity.

### Commercial Friendship Scale

Referencing the scales developed by McQuarrie and Munson (1987), Price and Arnould (1999), and other scholars for the hairdressing and club service industries, this study redesigned the commercial friendship scale to include dimensions like friendship (four questions), trust (three questions), and establishment of personal relationships (three questions). A seven-point Likert-type scale was used as a scoring method, with the highest score of seven indicating high consistency with the expression and the lowest score of one indicating high inconsistency with the expression. Exploratory factor analysis showed that the KMO value of the commercial friendship scale was 0.852, and the Barlett sphericity test value was 1697.661, with  $P < 0.000$ . The factors with a factor load of 0.5 or more were selected. As the question items of friendship and trust were similar, they were ultimately combined into the dimension of friendliness, excluding one question as a result. Two factors, namely, friendliness and the establishment of personal relationships, were extracted, and the total explained variance reached 89.78%. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values for friendliness and the establishment of personal relationships were 0.89 and 0.96, respectively, and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of the commercial friendship scale was 0.97, showing good reliability and validity.

### Satisfaction Scales

Referring to the satisfaction scales of Chen et al. (2005), Oliver (1980), Saha Gour and Theingi (2009), and other scholars for the tourism and catering industries, this study revised the satisfaction scale to include six questions. A seven-point Likert-type scale was used as a scoring method, with the highest score of seven indicating high consistency with the expression and the lowest score of one indicating high inconsistency with the expression. The results showed that the KMO value of the satisfaction scale was 0.704, and the Barlett sphericity test value was 472.961, with  $P < 0.000$ . The total explained variance was 90.16%, and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of the satisfaction scale was 0.96, showing good reliability and validity.

### Repurchase Intention Scales

Referring to the repurchase intention scales of Hu and Wu (2009), and other scholars for the home delivery and tourism industries, this study revised the expressions of the fitness services in the repurchase intention scale to include three items: "I am likely to buy the fitness course service of the current personal trainer again," "I will purchase customized fitness services through online booking under economic permission," and "I will purchase customized fitness services through online booking under time permission." A seven-point Likert-type scale was used as a scoring method, with the highest score of seven indicating high consistency with the expression and the lowest score of one indicating high inconsistency with the expression. The results showed that the KMO value of the repurchase intention scale was 0.704, and the Barlett sphericity test value was 472.961, with  $P < 0.000$ . The total explained variance was 90.16%, and the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of the repurchase intention scale was 0.94, showing good reliability and validity.

### Data Processing

The data analysis included the following critical stages. The data were analyzed via descriptive statistics, correlations, factor analysis, multivariate hierarchical regression analysis, and Sobel test (Hayes, 2018) using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 20.0; SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL).

## RESULTS

### Correlation Analysis Among the Main Variables

The Pearson relative analysis method was used, and the correlation matrix between the study variables is shown in **Table 2**. There was a significant correlation among leisure involvement, commercial friendship, satisfaction, and repurchase intentions. The study of the correlation among the variables provided a good research basis for the subsequent test of intermediary effects.

### Model Validation Factor Analysis

Multivariate hierarchical regression analysis was adopted, and before the regression analysis, a multicollinearity diagnosis of the data was conducted. Hellier Phillip et al. (2003) have pointed out that the variance inflation factor (VIF) value must be lower than 10 to avoid serious multicollinearity problems (Hair et al., 1995). In this study, the VIF values of all variables were less than four, implying that the multicollinearity problem did not exist. The model summary and the parameter estimation results obtained by the multivariate hierarchical regression method are shown in **Table 2**. All three variables of leisure involvement, satisfaction, and commercial friendship had significant implications for repurchase intentions. It can be seen from the change in the determination coefficient that satisfaction alone (Model 1) could explain 69.4% of the variation of the repurchase intentions, which supports H3 of this study. In Model 2, the newly added leisure involvement variable could significantly increase the explanatory variation by 4.1%. In Model 3, commercial friendship could further increase the explanatory variation by

1.1%. These three predictive variables could explain 74.6% of the variance of satisfaction. The standardized regression coefficient of satisfaction was the largest ( $\beta = 0.46$ ), indicating that it had greater explanatory power. It can be seen from the positive and negative values of the standardized regression coefficient that leisure involvement, commercial friendship, satisfaction, and repurchase intentions were positively correlated.

### Model Intermediary Effect Test

The intermediary effect was calculated by multiplying the Sobel test coefficients (product of coefficients,  $a*b$ ). Sobel's Z-value test and the 95% confidence interval test of the bootstrapping method were used for the intermediary effect test to cross-validate whether the intermediary effect was significant. As shown in Table 3, leisure involvement had a significant direct effect on satisfaction (standardized effect value = 0.77,  $p < 0.01$ ), thereby supporting H1. In addition, leisure involvement had a significant direct effect on repurchase intentions (standardized effect value = 0.81,  $p < 0.01$ ), supporting H2.

Furthermore, under the control of leisure involvement, commercial friendship had a significant effect on satisfaction (standardized effect value = 0.51,  $p < 0.01$ ), which supports H3. The indirect effect of leisure involvement on satisfaction through commercial friendship was 0.36, and the normal test value of the indirect effect was  $z = 5.725$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , showing a significant indirect effect (Table 4). In other words, commercial

friendship played a partial intermediary role between leisure involvement and satisfaction, which supports H3. The indirect effect of leisure involvement on repurchase intentions through commercial friendship was 0.35, and the normal test value of the indirect effect was  $z = 5.026$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , showing a significant indirect effect. In other words, commercial friendship played a partial intermediary role between leisure involvement and repurchase intentions, which supports H4 (Figure 2).

## DISCUSSION

### Relationships Among the Leisure Involvement, Satisfaction, and Repurchase Intentions of Customized Fitness Customers

This study explores the relationships among the leisure involvement, satisfaction, and repurchase intentions of the customers of customized fitness services, as well as the role of commercial friendship in leisure involvement's relationships with satisfaction and repurchase intentions.

The results showed that leisure involvement had a significant direct effect on satisfaction and a significant direct effect on repurchase intentions. Further, commercial friendship played a partial intermediary role between leisure involvement and satisfaction. Hillsdon (2001) confirmed that higher frequency

**TABLE 2 |** Summary of the descriptive statistics and correlation analysis results among the variables.

	M $\pm$ SD	Leisure involvement	Commercial friendship	Repurchase intentions	Satisfaction
Leisure involvement	2.65 $\pm$ 1.19				
Commercial friendship	2.69 $\pm$ 1.07	0.79**			
Repurchase intentions	2.38 $\pm$ 1.22	0.79**	0.78**		
Satisfaction	2.23 $\pm$ 1.156	0.79**	0.81**	0.83**	–

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

**TABLE 3 |** Summary of the results of the multivariate hierarchical regression of each variable explaining repurchase intentions.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Non-standardized coefficient B (standardization coefficient)	t	Non-standardized coefficient B (standardization coefficient)	t	Non-standardized coefficient B (standardization coefficient)	t
(Constant)	0.41	3.21**	0.13	0.94	–0.04	–0.29
Satisfaction	0.88 (0.83)	17.38**	0.59 (0.56)	7.56**	0.49 (0.46)	5.57**
Leisure involvement			0.35 (0.35)	4.67**	0.27 (0.26)	3.24**
Commercial friendship					0.24 (0.21)	2.55**
$R^2$	0.696		0.739		0.752	
Adjusted $R^2$	0.694		0.735		0.746	
$R^2$ change	0.696		0.043		0.012	
F-value	302.136		21.845		6.523	

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .



**TABLE 4 |** Test results of the intermediary effects of commercial friendship.

Effect	Impact path	Standardized effect value	Standard deviation	t
Direct effect	X→Y1	0.771	0.051	15.174**
	X→M	0.716	0.048	15.046**
	M.X→Y1	0.508	0.082	6.204**
	X.M→Y1	0.407	0.074	5.504**
Indirect effect		0.364	0.064	4.32**
Direct effect	X→Y2	0.809	0.055	14.851**
	X→M	0.716	0.048	15.046**
	M.X→Y2	0.484	0.091	5.344**
	X.M→Y2	0.462	0.082	5.662**
Indirect effect		0.347	0.069	3.45**

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

(X) leisure involvement, (M) commercial friendship, (Y1) satisfaction, (Y2) repurchase intentions.

leisure participation is associated with a lower likelihood of abandonment (Oliver, 1980). Therefore, fitness enterprises should strengthen the leisure involvement of fitness customers. For example, the managers of fitness centers could offer a variety of services and/or services with durations of more than 1 h (Hillsdon, 2001). Fitness enterprises could improve the visiting rate and participation of fitness customers by establishing member exercise reward systems that would make the fitness enterprise more attractive to the customers (Clavel San Emeterio et al., 2016).

Further, private fitness coaches can improve customers' leisure involvement by providing customized fitness services, which is more conducive than general fitness services to improving customer satisfaction and increasing the repurchase intentions of customers. In the process of providing customized fitness services, private fitness coaches should focus on the self-expression of the fitness customers while formulating personalized exercise plans, determining the training intensity and density, and taking into account both diet and nutrition. Moreover, in providing guidance and interactive exercise plans, the fitness coaches should guide the customers through language and behavior to increase the latter's attention to fitness, establishing the central position of fitness in their lives. Through the diversification of exercise plans, the attraction of the customized fitness customers to fitness can be enhanced, thereby raising the customers' leisure involvement as well.

## Intermediary Effect of Commercial Friendship

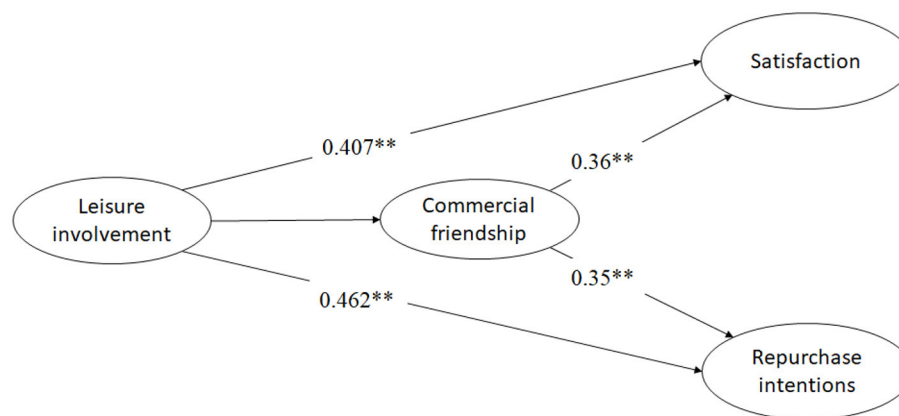
This study revealed that leisure involvement can affect the satisfaction and repurchase intentions of customized fitness consumers directly and indirectly through the intermediary effect of commercial friendship. Past research confirms have showed that the commercial friendship between customized fitness consumers and private fitness coaches is positively correlated with and could predict satisfaction and repurchase intentions (Price and Arnould, 1999; Partridge et al., 2014). The interaction

and communication among customers and between customers and enterprises can be increased by conducting activities, such as parties and outdoor activity days. The primary goal is to foster an emotional and psychological bond between customers and the firm (Wang et al., 2017). Enterprises can establish a fitness customer column in their virtual social media networks, through which customers can express their fitness experience and needs, thereby building an online community of commercial friendship. In this way, the community of commercial friendship cultivated by fitness enterprises would allow customers to develop friendships, encourage each other, exercise on time, and increase the degree of leisure involvement.

The commercial friendship between customers and private fitness coaches is a result of the economic and social exchanges between them and forms an important part of the relationship marketing of fitness enterprises (Rosenbaum et al., 2015). The commercial friendship between customers and private fitness coaches is also a relationship asset of fitness enterprises that is difficult for competitors to imitate and replace. At times, customized fitness consumers may no longer have the intention to repurchase due to such factors as a change of residence, change of jobs, and access to other leisure modes (Wang and Guo, 2006; Withall et al., 2011).

The strength of relatedness as commercial friendship captures both the social and service benefits of direct interactions between actors. Commercial friendship is a business-based relationship, built on affection, intimacy, and acts of social support developed over time (Withall et al., 2011). Given that results, the role of commercial friendship is to enhance the interactions and service production between fitness customers and service providers (i.e., fitness coaches), specifically when building long-term relationships (Garzaniti et al., 2011). In fitness context commercial friendship relationships, customers pursue not only direct service outcomes, but also look for interpersonal interactions with service providers to realize relational benefits that lead to greater satisfaction and repurchase intention (Wang et al., 2017).

In addition, noted that once people are active, high levels of social interaction, interest, and enjoyment are all associated with improved levels of retention. Thus, strengthening the interpersonal skills of private fitness coaches and the development of good friendships between the fitness customers and the coaches can increase customer retention. Role-playing can be used to simulate the interactions between fitness customers and private fitness coaches, in which the private coaches play the role of the fitness customers, deal with problems from the standpoint of the customers, and experience the feelings and needs of the customers. Therefore, fitness enterprises can change the service concept from customer first to customer as a friend and create a more humane fitness consumption environment for customers (Shain and Chalasani, 1992). In the process of interacting with customers, private fitness coaches should listen to the customers, pay attention to the inner feelings of the customers, adjust exercise programs and communication methods in time, increase the frequency of effective communication, and promote commercial friendships.



**FIGURE 2 |** The intermediary effect model of commercial friendship among leisure involvement, satisfaction, and repurchase intentions. \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

## Limitations and Future Directions

This study has certain limitations. First, in this study, as the customized fitness consumers of specific fitness clubs were included as the study group, the study results do not encompass all customized consumption groups of fitness and leisure services. Thus, follow-up studies are suggested to include different types of customized fitness and leisure service groups, such as competition consumers and outdoor sports consumers, to reassess the applicability of the research framework. Second, this study was a cross-sectional study, which was limited in its ability to track the subtle changes in the relationship between fitness consumers and private fitness coaches continuously. This study can't make causal inferences, and future directions will increase experimental control. Finally, all variables were collected at the same time point, which could have led to common method variance (CMV), because of which causal inferences could not be derived. Therefore, it is suggested that follow-up studies adopt the time-interval method to collect subscale data to reduce the causal confusion caused by CMV.

## CONCLUSION

In this study, the results showing the positive effects of consumer leisure involvement and commercial friendships on customers' use of customized fitness services were revealed to have good reliability and validity, suggesting that they could be used for the promotion of customized fitness services. In addition

to clarifying the relationships among leisure involvement, satisfaction, and repurchase intentions, this study discussed the intermediary mechanism of commercial friendship that could predict the effects of leisure involvement on the satisfaction and repurchase intentions of customized fitness customers. Overall, the results of this study contribute to the literature in various ways by exploring the interaction effects of different types of consumer leisure involvement and commercial friendships in customized fitness services models on leisure involvement outcomes. At the same time, these findings have allowed the research team to identify a range of recommendations for sports organizations and researchers, which will help them to address future studies and thus cultivate the growth of the evaluation of commercial friendship in the fitness industry.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

YW and F-JW: conceptualization. F-JW: methodology, writing—original draft preparation, and writing—review and editing. YW and YG: formal analysis and investigation. YW: data curation, funding acquisition, and project administration. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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# A Scoping Review Exploring Whether a Free “Offer” Devalues or Widens Sport and Physical Activity Participation Amongst Children and Young Adults Aged 0–25?

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**Background:** Socio-economic status continues to mediate physical activity engagement, despite a range of interventions aimed at reducing inequalities and widening sport and physical activity participation. As a result there has been increasing interest amongst policy makers, national governing bodies (NGB), county sports partnerships (CPS) and the sport and physical activity sector more broadly, in understanding how best to reduce inequalities and widen participation. The “price point” of offers and whether a “free offer” enables or devalues participation, has been a key area of interest. This scoping review aimed to explore this topic further by investigating whether “a free “offer” devalues or widens sport and physical activity participation amongst children and young adults aged 0-25?”.

**Methods:** This scoping review searched three electronic bibliographic databases (MEDLINE, PsycINFO, SPORTDiscus) using a structured search strategy to identify articles published between 2017 and January 2022. Studies were included using the PICO criteria of; Population: children and young adults aged 0-25; Intervention: free “offer” relating to physical activity; Context: areas of deprivation in the UK; Outcome: engagement, involvement, participation in sport and physical activity.

**Results and Discussion:** Five studies were eligible after screening 1301 titles and reviewing 14 full-text studies. Features reported included intervention design, outcomes, potential challenges and wider implications / future recommendations. Specifically, a narrative synthesis of the key themes of participation deprivation and cost effectiveness were outlined in more detail. A subsidized cost or free offer can improve participation generally and in attracting those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. However, the impact of such initiatives decrease with increasing deprivation highlighting that groups with the highest levels of deprivation have wider complexities affecting their participation. Competing priorities and potentially unrealistic expectations at stakeholders level was also identified.

**Conclusion:** Despite the paucity of current research exploring the impact of a “free offer” in children and young adults, recommendations for future research, practice and policy included the need for longitudinal, more holistic and participant centric approaches. Further research is required to explore the impact of a “free offer” from an individual, societal and policy-level perspective, in widening and increasing participation in sport and physical activity.

**Keywords:** sport, physical activity, widening participation, reducing inequalities, free offer

## BACKGROUND

Regular and sustained engagement in physical activity plays a major role in the promotion of health and wellbeing (Poitras et al., 2016; House of Lords, 2021). Regular engagement in physical activity has a variety of positive physical and psychological health and wellbeing benefits (Department of Health, 2011; Hills et al., 2015). One of the key public health goals in the UK is to increase engagement in regular physical activity within the population. As a result, there has been a plethora of policies within the UK (Department of Health, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2010a,b, 2011) and resultant interventions that have sought to improve participation in sport and physical activity, results however, have often been disappointing (Rabiee et al., 2015; House of Lords, 2021). Throughout this paper we use the term sport and physical activity participation to include “*experiences in physically demanding movement, sport, game, or recreational play that results in energy expenditure and perceptions of communal involvement*” (Ross et al., 2016; P.8).

Physical activity levels among members of minority ethnic groups and lower socio-economic groups continue to be particularly low (Department of Health, 2011). Individuals from lower socio-economic groups are also five times more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors such as smoking, excessive alcohol use, poor diet and low levels of physical activity (Rabiee et al., 2015). This picture also extends to childhood participation in sport and physical activity (Sport England, 2021). Current World Health Organization (World Health Organisation, 2010) and UK physical activity guidelines (Department of Health, 2019) recommend that school-aged children should spend at least 60 min per day in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity. However, only 44.6% of UK children met these guidelines, with children from the least affluent families lower again at 39% (Sport England, 2021). As a result socio-economic status continues to mediate physical activity engagement (Department of Health, 2011; Rabiee et al., 2015; House of Lords, 2021; Sport England, 2021).

As a result there has been a targeted effort to widen participation in sport and physical activity and reduce inequalities, especially for those from areas of deprivation and increase participation for lower socio-economic groups, in the UK. For example, the 4 million pounds “Be Active Wales Fund” from Sport Wales (2020a) aimed to protect and progress community sport. Specifically, the progress fund aims to progress sport and activity to the next step and support

long-term sustainability. This grant is intended to help clubs and community organizations: Tackle inequality, create long-term solutions to be more sustainable and take innovative approaches (Sport Wales, 2020a). Sport England (2020) has also devoted funding to specifically tackle inequalities in sport and physical activity participation through the Tackling Inequalities Fund (TIF). TIF was set up in April 2020 to help the sport and physical activity sector through the COVID-19 pandemic. TIF was created with £20 million of National Lottery funding to try and help reduce the negative impact on activity levels in these under-represented groups, with a specific focus on: Lower socio-economic groups, Culturally diverse communities, Disabled people, people with long term health conditions. The fund has now been extended and renamed the “together fund” and will run until March 2023 (Sport England, 2020). There have been a number of recent successful interventions that incorporated “free” offers within the adult population such as “Gym for Free” in Birmingham (Rabiee et al., 2015) and “Leeds Let’s Get Active” (Candio et al., 2020), yet little is known about the effectiveness of such interventions for young people aged 0–25.

The Welsh “Sport and Active Lifestyles Survey” (2019–2020) (Sport Wales, 2020b) also reported that in 2019–20, just prior to Coronavirus, 32% of adults (16+) participated in a sporting activity three times a week or more (808,000 people). 7% participated approximately twice a week (186,000 people), 11% participated approximately once a week (268,000 people) and 50% participated less than once a week (1,245,000 people). Moreover, 41% of adults had not participated in any sporting activity (1,040,000 people) in the previous 4 weeks. This data highlights how there is an opportunity to increase regular sport participation to over 1 million adults in Wales who are currently not engaging regularly in sport participation. In 2021, Sport Wales established a “foundation and participation” group, that consisted of representatives from national NGBs, SPs and wider stakeholders, with the aim of increasing and widening sport and physical activity participation. The notion of a free offer was a frequent topic of interest during meetings with mixed views on whether it would enable or devalue sport and physical activity participation. This scoping review was requested by the Sport Wales “foundation and participation” group to find out whether “*a free “offer” devalues or widens sport and physical activity participation amongst children and young adults aged 0–25?*”. Scoping reviews allow for a broader conceptual scope of the literature (Arksey and O’Malley, 2005) and can stimulate new research questions that can further advance research in this

area (Peterson et al., 2017). A specific focus on children and young people was requested to draw out recommendations for provision early in life supporting children and young adults in accessing opportunities to support their future adult behaviors. The findings of this review were presented back to the group to inform their future work.

## METHODS

A scoping review was conducted guided by Arksey and O'Malley's five-step methodological framework: (1) identifying the research question, (2) identifying relevant studies, (3) study selection, (4) charting the data, and (5) collating, summarizing, and reporting the results (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). This manuscript has also been prepared adhering to the PRISMA extension for scoping reviews (PRISMA-ScR **Appendix A**, Tricco et al., 2018).

### Research Question

The research was guided by the following research question *"Does a free 'offer' devalue or widen sport and physical activity participation amongst children and young adults aged 0–25?"*. The findings were used to inform future interventions amongst county sport partnerships and National Governing Bodies in Wales.

### Identification of Relevant Studies: Search Strategy

Prior to the database searches, a preliminary literature search was undertaken by searching MEDLINE using keywords, to gauge the volume and type of literature available, inform a more comprehensive search strategy and list potential eligibility criteria. A stakeholder engagement meeting with Sport Wales was conducted to expand and refine the potential search terms (**Appendix B**). Previous scoping and literature reviews were also screened to check for database selection, which were subsequently used to inform the selection of databases to search.

A search strategy was formulated using the PICO (population, intervention, context, outcome) framework. The *population* of interest was young people aged 0–24. Relevant *interventions* include any physical activity intervention that was subsidized, funded or free. Areas of deprivation in the UK represented the *context* of interest. *Outcomes* included (but were not limited to) participation, involvement, and experiences. Three electronic bibliographic databases (MEDLINE, PsycINFO, SPORTDiscus) were searched (see **Supplementary Material**) to identify articles published between 2017 and 31st of January 2022. Reference lists of included articles were also checked. A 5 year period was requested by the foundation and participation group to capture "contemporary" research in the pre and post COVID-19 landscape.

### Study Selection

**Table 1** describes the inclusion and exclusion criteria for this review. One author conducted title and abstract screening (LS). In the instance of uncertainty for study eligibility, the full text article was obtained and added to the full text screening phase for

**TABLE 1 |** Criteria for including studies in the review.

Inclusions	
Population	To include young people aged 0–24
Intervention	Focus on physical activity interventions which are free, subsidized or funded
Context	Areas of deprivation in the UK
Outcome	May include participation, engagement, experiences, factors relating to cost, or impact
Exclusions	
Population	No participants aged 0–24 (e.g., studies focusing on physical activity in retired populations)
Intervention	Studies that include other interventions (e.g. smoking cessation, nutrition)
Context	Non-uk; affluent areas
Outcome	No mention of any of the key outcomes listed in the inclusion criteria

further clarification. Each of the full text articles were reviewed by two researchers (EDM, LS).

### Charting the Data

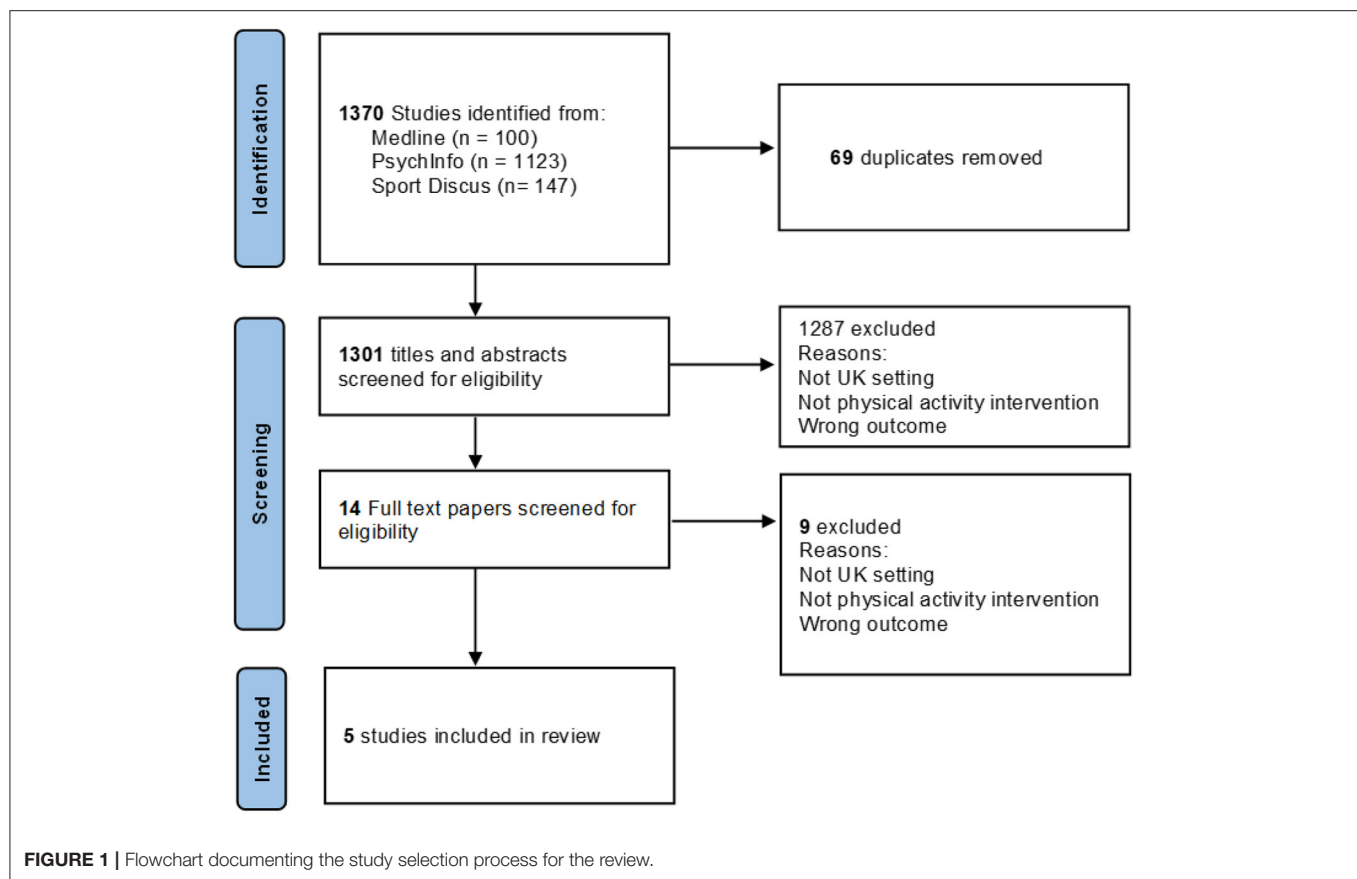
Key information obtained from each study included the author, year of publication, nature of the intervention, population and study setting, methods, key findings and recommendations, which were captured in a table.

### Collating, Summarizing and Reporting the Results

A narrative synthesis was conducted of the included papers. "Narrative synthesis" refers to an approach synthesizing findings from multiple studies that relies primarily on the use of words and text to summarize and explain the findings of the synthesis. Whilst narrative synthesis can involve the manipulation of statistical data, the defining characteristic is that it adopts a textual approach to the process of synthesis to "tell the story" of the findings from the included studies. As used here "narrative synthesis" refers to a process of synthesis that can be used in scoping reviews focusing on a wide range of questions, not only those relating to the effectiveness of a particular intervention (Popay et al., 2006). Several methods were utilized to enhance the review's validity, including using multiple researchers in the development of search terms, peer debriefing, strict inclusion and exclusion criteria in performing searches, and in the selection and analysis of papers.

## RESULTS

The searches identified 1,370 titles, leaving 1,301 after deduplication. The screening of titles and abstracts reduced the number of papers from 1,301 to 14. Of the remaining 14 full text papers, nine were excluded for reasons including non-UK context, no physical activity intervention and, wrong outcome of interest, leaving five papers eligible for the review. **Figure 1** sets out the review process in a flowchart. An overview of the five studies included in the review and a description of the intervention and the key findings is presented in **Table 2**.



## Results Overview

Whilst each study explored interventions or current provision that included a “free offer” (Higgerson et al., 2018a,b; Candio et al., 2020, 2022) or perceptions of free and subsidised offers (Ward et al., 2017) for swimming, gym, and/or fitness classes they all had different aims and outcomes, including sport and physical activity participation, cost-effectiveness, reach and efficacy. The duration of each intervention varied from a few weeks (during school holidays (Higgerson et al., 2018a), 39 months (Candio et al., 2020, 2022), to several years (Higgerson et al., 2018b).

Higgerson et al. (2018a) investigated the extent to which providing children with free swimming access during school holidays increased sport and physical activity participation and whether this effect differed according to socioeconomic deprivation of the neighborhoods in which children lived. Higgerson et al. (2018b) investigated the impact of an intervention providing universal free access to leisure facilities alongside outreach and marketing activities. Candio et al. (2020, 2022) analyzed the Leeds Lets get Active (LLGA) provision of universal access to free off-peak City Council leisure center-based exercise sessions to all city residents. Candio et al. (2020) focussed on the assessment of cost-effectiveness of the LLGA programme to reduce physical inactivity while Candio et al. (2022) evaluated the LLGA programme in terms of reach and efficacy and how these varied across population groups. Finally, Ward et al. (2017) investigated

public perceptions of entrance charges and how the charges influenced sport and physical activity participation by adults living in lower income neighborhoods. Two main themes emerged that warrant further discussion pertaining to 1) sport and physical activity participation and deprivation and 2) cost effectiveness.

## Participation and Deprivation

Increased participation was described as an outcome in all of the five studies. The study by Higgerson et al. (2018a) was the only paper identified that reported on increasing participation specifically for children and adolescents from disadvantaged backgrounds. The study investigated the extent to which providing children (5–18) with free swimming access during school holidays increased sport and physical activity participation and whether this effect differed according to socioeconomic deprivation of the neighborhoods in which the children lived. The intervention took place within a disadvantaged local authority in Northwest England (Blackpool). The results found that offering free swimming during the summer holidays was associated with an additional 6% of children swimming and an additional 33 swims per 100 children per year. The effects were greatest within areas with immediate levels of deprivation within the deprived local authority, and were greatest amongst the were greatest amongst children aged 10–14 years olds.



**TABLE 2 |** Study characteristics and data charting.

Study	Intervention	Population/ setting	Study aim	Methods	Key findings	Recommendations
Higgerson et al. (2018a)	Free swimming access during school holidays	Children aged 5–15 Highly disadvantaged local authority in Northwest England (Blackpool)	To investigate the extent to which providing children with free swimming access during school holidays increased participation and whether this effect differed according to socioeconomic deprivation of the neighborhoods.	Comparative regression discontinuity (intervention local authority V control local authority). Estimated differential effect of intervention across five groups, defined by quintiles of area deprivation.	Free swimming during the summer holidays was associated with an additional 6% of children swimming and an additional 33 swims per 100 children per year. The effects were greatest within areas with immediate levels of deprivation (quintiles 3 and 4) within the deprived local authority.	Providing free facilities for children in disadvantaged areas is likely to increase swimming participation and may help reduce inequalities in physical activity
Higgerson et al. (2018b)	Re:refresh scheme – began in 2008 providing free access to activities across nine leisure centers (swimming pools and gyms) at most times of day along with community outreach activities. The intervention included outreach and marketing activities. In 2016, a flat fee of £1 was introduced.	Initially the intervention was available to people ages over 50 years old. It was then extended to people aged 16–24, and again to those aged 25–49. Deprived local authority area in Northwest England	To investigate the impact of an intervention providing universal free access to leisure facilities alongside outreach and marketing activities	Quasi-experimental methods - Interrupted time series and difference-in-differences analyses of local administrative data and a large national survey	The intervention was associated with: A 64% increase in attendances in swimming and gym sessions An additional 3.9% of the population participating in at least 30 min of moderate intensity gym or swim sessions during the previous 4 weeks An additional 1.9% of the population participating in any sport or active recreation of at least moderate intensity for at least 30 min on at least 12 days of the last 4 weeks The effect on gym and swim activity and participation in physical activity was significantly greater for the more disadvantaged socio-economic group	The study suggests that removing user charges from leisure facilities can increase overall population levels of physical activity while reducing levels of inequality, when implemented in combination with outreach activities (delivered by Health Trainers and a healthy Community Partnership who offered 1:1 and group sessions to provide taster sessions and support behavior change through goal setting and motivational interviewing) and marketing and promotional activities.

*(Continued)*

TABLE 2 | Continued

Study	Intervention	Population/ setting	Study aim	Methods	Key findings	Recommendations
Candio et al. (2020)	Leeds Lets get Active (LLGA) – provision of universal access to free off-peak City Council leisure center-based exercise sessions to all city residents. Exercise sessions included the use of the free weights areas, swimming pool access and fitness classes. The intervention ran for 39 months from Oct 2013 to end Dec 2016.	551,874 residents aged 16 and over The North of England located in the most deprived areas of the city of Leeds Data was comprised of responses from 16–40yr - 61.5% 41–64yr - 31.5% Over 64–7%	To assess the cost-effectiveness of a proportionate universal programme to reduce physical inactivity	Continuous-time Markov chain model developed to assess the cost implications and QALY gains associated with increases in physical activity levels across the adult population. Baseline model data obtained from previous economic models, population-based surveys and other literature	A non-negligible level of uncertainty, regarding the effectiveness and therefore, cost-effectiveness of a universal offer of free leisure center-based exercise that targets hard to reach groups A proportionate universal offer of free off-peak exercise in public leisure centers can provide good value for money	Local governments should evaluate the possibility of providing universal access to off-peak exercise sessions in public leisure centers
Candio et al. (2022)	As above	As above	To evaluate the LLGA programme in terms of reach and efficacy and how these varied across population groups	Descriptive statistics used to summarize program data and participants Time to event, count and logistic regression models examined how different population subgroups engaged with the program (number of entries, weekly participation rates and drop-off patterns)	Of the 51,874 adults who registered to the program only 1.6% attended the free sessions on a weekly basis. Higher participation rates were estimated for groups of males, retired and non-inactive participants. A neighborhood-level deprivation status was found to have no marginal effect on the level and frequency of participation, but to be negatively associated with participation drop-off	Providing everyone with free-of-charge organized exercise opportunities in public leisure centers located in deprived areas can attract large volumes of residents, but may not sufficiently encourage adults, especially inactive residents and those living in disadvantaged neighborhoods to take up regular exercise

(Continued)

TABLE 2 | Continued

Study	Intervention	Population/ setting	Study aim	Methods	Key findings	Recommendations
Ward et al. (2017)	Current leisure center offer (some areas included a free offer for children)	83 participants aged 18 and above Four local authorities in the Northwest of England, in areas of significant socio-economic deprivation	To investigate public perceptions of entrance charges and how the charges influenced participation by adults living in lower income neighborhoods	Qualitative study – focus groups and interviews	Cost was a key factor which influenced physical activity participation in low-income neighborhoods Pre-paid options (direct debit memberships) encouraged participations Entrance charges incurred each time an individual participated had a negative impact of frequency but were a convenient way of paying for occasional use or for people who were unable to afford a pre-paid option Free access helped people who could not afford pre-paid membership to exercise regularly as well as incentivizing non-users to try activities	Public organizations that commission or deliver physical activity interventions and services should consider options that enable people to afford more easily to participate in a wider range of activities. This could include cheaper PAYG options for those who cannot commit to pre-paid membership, free sessions at a range of times and affordable provision at peak times for those on low-incomes.

The estimates made by Higgerson et al. (2018a) were greater than those reported in the evaluation of the national free swimming programme (an additional 1% of children swimming as a result of the free offer), which is significant because the national programme evaluation only looked at average effects across the country.

The search strategy identified two further papers (Higgerson et al., 2018b; Candio et al., 2022) that reported on participant engagement in free to access offers. These studies were typically aimed to engage the adult population and then altered to include younger participants. Higgerson et al. (2018b) refresh scheme began in 2008 providing free access to activities across nine leisure centers (swimming pools and gyms) at most times of day along with community outreach activities. The intervention was associated with a 64% increase in attendances in swimming and gym sessions. The effect on gym and swim activity and overall levels of participation in sport and physical activity was significantly greater for the more disadvantaged socio-economic group. The study suggests that removing user charges from leisure facilities can increase overall population levels of physical activity while reducing levels of inequality, when implemented in combination with outreach activities (delivered by Health Trainers and a healthy Community Partnership who offered 1:1 and group sessions to provide taster sessions and support behavior change through goal setting and motivational interviewing) and marketing and promotional activities.

Candio et al. (2022) reported that of the 51,874 adults who registered to the programme only 1.6% attended the free sessions on a weekly basis. Higher participation in sport and physical activity rates were estimated for groups of males, retired and non-inactive participants. A neighborhood-level deprivation status was found to have no marginal effect on the level and frequency of participation, but to be negatively associated with participation drop-off. Providing everyone with free-of-charge organized exercise opportunities in public leisure centers located in deprived areas can attract large volumes of residents, but may not sufficiently encourage adults, especially inactive residents and those living in disadvantaged neighborhoods to take up regular exercise.

## Cost Effectiveness

Four of the five studies included free to access offers with Ward et al. (2017) exploring both free and subsidized access. Only one study (Candio et al., 2020) evaluated cost effectiveness (in the longer term) with the others reporting on shorter term sport and physical activity participation rates. Only one study (Ward et al., 2017) reported the perceptions of cost-effectiveness from the perspective of users. Findings in relation to cost-effectiveness from Ward et al. (2017) and Candio et al. (2020) are expanded upon below.

Results from Candio et al. (2020) indicate that LLGA is highly likely to be cost-effective under base-case assumptions. The net benefits of implementing LLGA increase as a longer time horizon is considered. Scenario analyses also show that identification of the optimal strategy is highly dependent on variations to key structural elements regarding the sustainability of the intervention effect over time and assumed mechanisms

of survey non-response. Specifically, in relation to deprivation Candio et al. (2022) found that providing everyone with free-of-charge organized exercise opportunities in public leisure centers located in deprived areas can attract large volumes of residents, but may not sufficiently encourage adults, especially inactive residents and those living in disadvantaged neighborhoods, to take up regular exercise. They suggest that inactivity within areas of deprivation is more multidimensional than just creating free or subsidized opportunities.

Only one study (Ward et al., 2017) reported the perceptions of those whom the “free offer” was intended for, however, young people under 18 years were excluded from this study as it was anticipated that in most cases, parents/guardians would be responsible for paying entrance charges. The qualitative study by Ward et al. (2017) identified that the connection between cost and participation was multifaceted and influenced by factors such as motivation, value and affordability. Whilst the study did not solely explore a specific “free offer” intervention, focus groups and interviews were conducted with 83 public participants to identify perceptions of both free and subsidized offers and how these influenced participation in four local authorities.

With regards to subsidized access to leisure, findings suggest that concessionary rates were inadequate for those on low incomes and that price was a barrier to sport and physical activity participation which, in some cases, posed “a choice between exercising and eating”. In addition, subsidized access was reported to be largely available “off-peak”. A consequence of this was that participants with studying, work, or childcare commitments did not attend at all.

Findings relating to the value of free leisure access were mixed. Free access helped people who could not afford pre-paid membership to exercise regularly as well as incentivizing non-users to try activities. Some participants described how removing the price barrier through the provision of free sessions encouraged attendance for inactive people, and in some instances, resulted in more regular attendance. However, in contrast, some participants suggested that a “free offer” might not be valued and would therefore not result in regular sport and physical activity participation (“I don’t have to bother because it doesn’t cost me anything”). Whilst free sessions were valued by those who utilized them, the financial implications to the service provider were acknowledged by some participants.

Across several focus groups participants shared a view about the role of free swimming (which was available for all children in one area and during school holidays in others) to encourage more children to exercise. Free swimming was seen to be particularly important in getting parents to exercise with their children. However, the withdrawal of the free swimming offer in another locality was seen as a significant loss as people felt that a lot of families would not be able to afford to pay for swimming, particularly if they had more than one child.

## DISCUSSION

This scoping review has explored an important area in physical activity research to identify the impact of a “free offer” in



UK research. Despite a paucity of UK studies, five studies were included in the narrative synthesis. Findings indicate that free and subsidized offers can be effective in increasing sport and physical activity participation although this depends on a number of wider factors including type of physical activity/sport, target population, degree of deprivation, target age, family and individual employment status (16–25), additional protected characteristics such as disability, and environmental factors such as changing facilities and provision.

## Widening and Increasing Participation for Children and Young People

The conclusion by Higgerson et al. (2018a) conclude and recommend that providing free facilities and access to opportunities for children from disadvantaged areas, is likely to increase swimming participation and may help to reduce inequalities in sport and physical activity participation is also supported by other studies. Higgerson et al. (2018b) also indicate that removing user charges from leisure facilities in combination with outreach and marketing activities could potentially increase overall levels of physical activity while reducing inequalities. Refresh may have achieved lower inequalities in sport and physical activity participation due its universal nature, and availability of sessions during 90% of opening hours, therefore including people on low incomes who work full-time, who might be excluded from other more targeted schemes (such as the provision of cheaper facilities for those in receipt of state benefits) or only during off-peak hours.

As Higgerson et al. (2018a) outline, it is plausible that the effect of free swimming is greater in more deprived areas and the visibility of this impact can be lost when comparing the national average effect of a free swimming offer across the whole country. However, Higgerson et al. (2018a) also report that the effect size decreased as the severity of deprivation increased. This may be as a result of the population also experiencing multiple forms of deprivation for example. Poverty, disability, poor housing, unemployment. Given the multiple issues surrounding some families in these very deprived areas it is perhaps not surprising that the free swimming offer had a smaller effect on participation. Therefore, those in most need, may in fact require more support than just the removal of cost to access. For example, further funding may also be required to provide swimming lessons, equipment and swim suits for those who experience significant levels of deprivation as cost to access alone will not solve these wider cost implications.

Candio et al. (2020) however is more cautious highlighting the intrinsic complexity of PA behavior and the even greater complexity around impact capture, analysis and evaluation. They call for analysis to be embedded within intervention and programme design to better integrate the evaluation of projects and programmes in the pursuit of more valuable research outputs, as well as to support the building of local research and implementation capacity.

Candio et al. (2022) also presents a more complex conclusion which discusses the challenges associated with encouraging long term adoption of regular exercise. They argue that providing

everyone with free-of-charge organized exercise opportunities can attract large volumes of adult residents but are likely to encourage only a selective minority to take up regular exercise. While removing user charges can be a tempting strategy, it alone is not sufficient to promote sustained sport and physical activity participation at a population level. Universal policies do not achieve the desired outcome of supporting already inactive adults, hence alternative approaches should be considered. Unstructured involvements of research professionals limit the ability to adequately design, conduct and evaluate these interventions and their impact on health outcomes and inequalities. With increasing pressure on local government budgets, established collaborations with academic institutions would help support an efficient allocation of public health resources by adequately informing policy decision-making (Candio et al., 2022). This more complex view is also shared by Ward et al. (2017) who states that cost is one of the factors which influences levels of PA in low income neighborhoods but also highlights the importance of the range of entrance charges that are available when considering the impact of price on the use of LA leisure centers. The research also found that price can be important in encouraging sustained levels of PA, including for people who were previously physically inactive.

Additionally there were two noteworthy articles that were excluded during the screening process due to the research not meeting the inclusion criteria of being an intervention within the 0–25 demographic. These research articles instead, explored the stakeholder perceptions namely at the local government (Candio et al., 2021) and local authority level (Halliday et al., 2018) of providing cost effective incentives to promote physical activity engagement.

Candio et al. (2021) took a local government perspective for economic evaluation and articulated how this approach may affect economic conclusions. This research highlights the wider metrics, voices and actors guiding, informing and evaluating success in this arena. An awareness of the information and the metrics valued by decision makers and potentially budget holders is key, in understanding the wider landscape of promoting physical activity. In relation to our research question “Does a free “offer” devalue or widen sport and physical activity participation amongst children and young adults aged 0–25?” It could be extended to include “... and at what cost” in light of Candio et al. (2021) research. There may also be some important awareness advocacy work to be conducted in this space as the true cost may be far more than many may estimate. Candio et al. (2021) in their research found from a local government perspective, attracting a local resident to the programme (i.e. registration) was estimated at a cost of £2.77 per person/year. The average cost of achieving the goal of a resident attending at least one programme session was £6.11, whereas 3.8 times as much would be necessary for an inactive adult to engage. The average cost of moving an inactive resident to an active state was substantially higher, at £1,406.78 per year. Around 4.7 times as much would be necessary for achieving these goals for adults living in the most deprived areas. This highlights how expectations, especially those relating to cost of interventions when working with participants from areas of deprivation should be significantly different from general

population interventions, therefore perhaps the amendment of “... and at what relative cost” should be included within this research area.

Halliday et al. (2018) explored the perspectives of 33 leisure and public health professionals from 7 local authorities in Northwest England. They investigated the different approaches to pricing (facility charges) and the rationales that influenced the decision making. Halliday et al. (2018) offer some insights into the challenges of joint working for public health teams embedded within complex socio-political and economic environments. The results found that welfare orientated (e.g. affordability) and commercial drivers (e.g. income generation) featured most prominently across areas. Pricing policies placed less direct focus on public health goals, although tackling inactivity was articulated as part of leisure’s role more generally. Local targeting of free/concessionary offers was also defined and implemented differently. Decision makers described navigating competing pressures of providing services for the public “good” yet remaining financially viable.

Halliday et al. (2018) offer evidence of how pricing decisions are made and the approaches adopted in practice as well highlighting the conflicting priorities for decision makers especially within an austerity context. This is significant because if need or pressure for profitability and income generation outweighs public good then subsidized or free offers are not likely to be favorable at the decision making level. Especially as Candio et al. (2021) highlights reaching the deprived and inactive can be 4.7 times more costly. Therefore, this research encourages us to ask to what extent is public good, including widening participation in sport and physical activity and reducing inequalities valued in comparison to other factors or competing priorities such as income generation.

Both Higgerson et al. (2018b) and Candio et al. (2022) expressed estimates and expectations that were much higher than the actual impact on sport and physical activity participation in reality. This further supports that there might be an over-expectation of the impact free offers may have from key stakeholders in widening participation. While both Higgerson et al. (2018b) and Candio et al. (2022) did report improvements in sport and physical activity participation especially within areas of deprivation both argued that widening participation sustainably and for the inactive may not be as simplistic as creating a free to access offer, although this is a significant barrier for some. The over estimations and preconceived notions of effectiveness of increasing sport and physical activity participation with free offers especially for those who are inactive and from areas of deprivation (Higgerson et al., 2018b; Candio et al., 2022) demonstrates a naivety or perhaps visible privilege at policy and decision making level, with an assumption of needs and wants of the participants from the populations with complex societal needs and barriers. This coupled with the competing priorities and lessening resources makes for a difficult situation. Higgerson et al. (2018b) highlight that local authorities in the UK are facing severe cuts to their budgets while being granted greater responsibilities for promoting public health and reducing health inequalities. Local authorities are therefore having to make difficult decisions about the targeting of resources to

those interventions that are likely to have the most impact. Public organizations that commission or deliver physical activity interventions and services should consider options that enable people to afford more easily to participate in a wider range of activities. This could include cheaper PAYG options for those who cannot commit to pre-paid membership, free sessions at a range of times and affordable provision at peak times for those on low-incomes (Ward et al., 2017). For others including women from ethnic minority backgrounds and people with a physical disability, knowledge about the activities offered and the physical environment (including accessibility in the pool areas, privacy in the changing rooms and women only sessions) were reported to have as great a bearing on sport and physical activity participation decisions as the cost of attending (Ward et al., 2017).

## Strengths and Limitations

This scoping review used rigorous methods including the use of published guidance on the conduct of scoping reviews (Arksey and O’Malley, 2005) and the PRISMA extension for scoping reviews (PRISMA-Scr, Tricco et al., 2018). Two reviewers were involved in the development of search terms (along with key stakeholders) and eligibility criteria, conducting the searches and in the selection and analysis of papers. In line with guidance for conducting scoping reviews, quality appraisal of the included studies was not conducted, however it is recognized that this would have provided the reader with additional information relating to the trustworthiness of the results. For example, the Candio et al. (2022) paper had a significant number of participants (51,874 residents aged 16 and over with participants aged between 16–40 representing 61.5% of the results) but it failed to report on how many participants could be included within the 16–25 age range specifically. Searching databases for published research is another potential limitation of this scoping review as searching gray literature may have yielded valuable reports in the topic area. Another limitation included the date range of the inclusion criteria (between 2017 and 2022) as although these papers were published this date range many of the studies were conducted prior to this period. A wider or more flexible date range and may have revealed further results.

## Recommendations and Implications for Policy, Practice and Research

This scoping review has identified gaps in current literature and several implications for policy, practice and further research. We recommend that more research specifically focussed on children and young adults aged 0–25 in the UK is required. This should include public participant involvement whereby key questions are identified and informed by key stakeholders to ensure research is relevant to both policy makers, organizations and the end user. Universal approaches revealed both positive (Higgerson et al., 2018b) and negative (Candio et al., 2022) findings therefore more research is required to ascertain whether targeted or universal offers are more effective at widening sport and physical activity participation. Ward et al. (2017) support this view in their recommendation for further qualitative work located in socioeconomically diverse neighborhoods investigating attitudes to leisure facilities and PA more generally among all groups

who do not meet recommended activity levels. They go further to state that public organizations that commission or deliver PA interventions and services should consider options that enable people to more easily afford to participate in a wider range of activities. This could include cheaper PAYG options for those who cannot commit to pre-paid membership, free sessions on offer at a range of times and affordable provision in peak-times for those on low incomes or who work “non-regular” hours. However, leisure services and interventions may also risk increasing inequalities if barriers to accessibility and acceptability for different groups are also not adequately addressed alongside cost.

There is also little longitudinal research looking at sustained sport and physical activity participation over longer periods of time or interventions with inbuilt follow up protocols. More holistic approaches are also advocated including mixed methods studies that encompasses both economic evaluation, key stakeholder experiences, sport and physical activity participation and address both the localized and national picture to understand the provision available across different regions/countries in the UK as currently we don’t have an understanding of what features of interventions work in certain demographics/localities.

The studies identified also didn’t report on a retention or maintenance strategy, once participants are recruited and are participating how is this engagement retained? We recommend that wider research be drawn upon such as Norris et al. (2018) and their use of the RE-AIM framework criteria which aims to more holistically consider provision by considering Reach, Effectiveness, Adoption, Implementation and Maintenance.

In view of the changes in physical activity provision that have insured during the COVID-19 pandemic, further research is also needed to explore the landscape of a “virtual free-offer” and to identify the impact of this on sport and physical activity participation and end user experience. Drawing upon research such as Norris et al. (2018) delivering online and virtual opportunities may also widen sport and physical activity participation but not in the traditional form (football in sport and leisure settings). This is supported by Ward et al. (2017) who recommend further research with those who exercise at home or at community/private facilities and classes to understand why they chose these options rather than LA facilities. It is important to understand if a virtual approach to physical activity provision widens access or instead promotes inequality by excluding those without digital skills or access. A more comprehensive understanding of where, what and how children and young people may be active and how these range of opportunities can be designed with inclusivity and widening participation in sport and physical activity as a central focus is recommended. We recommend that a subsequent “systematic review” be undertaken to extend these initial findings from this “rapid scoping review” and may address many of these limitations by searching wider databases, gray literature and include a quality appraisal process. Widening the inclusion criteria to beyond the UK may also return insights from international research and wider contexts, that may

also be used to compare whether this scoping review results are consistent or different from other geographical contexts.

Finally, we recommend that caution be exercised when balancing competing priorities at a local decision making level. This is supported by Higgerson et al. (2018b) who argue that with the increasing cuts to local government budgets in the UK, many councils are considering whether to reduce the public subsidy of leisure facilities and discontinue the free leisure schemes that currently exist. There is also the potential for other funding such as local government public health grants or health service funds to be invested in subsidizing leisure facilities to promote public health. Higgerson et al. (2018b) provides evidence that expanding free leisure schemes is likely to increase physical activity and reduce inequalities, while discontinuing these schemes may have the opposite effect. As such, elevating the value and importance of free offers with key stakeholders while not over estimating their impact is essential in ensuring cost does not become the significant barrier for widening participation in sport and physical activity.

## CONCLUSION

This scoping review has highlighted that while there are free and subsidized offers that exist within the adult and young adult population, little research has been conducted within childhood. With childhood behaviors often tracking into adulthood, increasing and widening participation early is a significant opportunity to change the landscape of participation in sport and physical activity more broadly. Socio-economic status and the cost of opportunities continue to be mediating factors (among others) of participation in sport and physical activity. The research reveals mixed perspectives with regards to whether free offers can significantly improve participation in sport and physical activity. Further research is required to explore the impact of a “free offer” from an individual, societal and policy-level perspective, in widening and increasing participation in sport and physical activity.

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ED-M was the lead author on this paper with research support being provided by LS to conduct peer checking and database searches/cross referencing analysis. Both authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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# The FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Sustainability Strategy: Human Rights Governance in the Tripartite Network

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The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) has faced constant accusations of human rights violations associated with World Cup Qatar 2022, with prominent media coverage and international football team demonstrations. This study aims to analyze and discuss the approach taken by the tripartite policy network of actors, namely FIFA, Qatar's Supreme Council (SC), and the Local Organizing Committee (Q22) for the creation of the the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Sustainability Strategy (hereafter WCSS22) published in January 2020. The WCSS22 represents the first time FIFA has clearly articulated its responsibility in connection with impacts that are linked to the construction and operation of World Cup stadia and facilities, in line with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). The strategy was also the first to be planned and delivered jointly by FIFA, the SC, and the Q22. Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) of documents associated with the WCSS22 was performed to answer the following research questions: a) What are the recurrent features of the policy formulation and design process and what role do the UNGPs play? b) How do FIFA and the other policy actors contribute and position themselves in relation to human rights? c) What form did governance (interdependence, interactions, regulated rules, and steering) take in the policymaking process? The study establishes that there are four recurrent features of policy formulation and design: 1) a collective, systematic, and diverse policymaking approach, 2) emphasis on leveraging internal resources and external input, 3) the building foundation of best practice principles, guidelines, strategies, and existing initiatives, and 4) inconsistency on decision-making and accountability measures. FIFA contributes to policymaking primarily through their existing statutes, human rights policy, and commitments to mitigate negative human rights impacts. Furthermore, specified actions, and mechanisms for construction workers' living and working conditions and recruitment processes are articulated by the SC, who take a more prominent role in worker initiatives. Q22, although involved in collective action, and participating in workers welfare, takes a more peripheral role in the policymaking process. In conclusion, it was found that the

tripartite policy network of actors represents a participant-based governance approach with cohesive policy formulation, varied resources at their disposal, inconsistencies in accountability measures and with the lead network role dependent on specific actor initiatives and commitments.

**Keywords:** policy networks, human rights, sustainable development, network governance, FIFA 2022 World Cup Qatar

## INTRODUCTION

Circa \$200 billion has been invested for FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 with between 500,000 and 1.5 million foreign workers employed (Ganji, 2016). However, repeated accusations of human rights violations of migrant construction workers for the tournament infrastructure, their exploitation, and deaths of migrant construction workers for the tournament infrastructure, have dominated the associated literature (Renkiewicz, 2016; Amis, 2017; Heerdt, 2018; Heerdt and Duval, 2020). Prominent media coverage has subsequently resulted as well as international football team demonstrations (BBC, 2021; The Guardian, 2021). Despite being a non-state actor, the newly established regulatory and policy framework of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and the UNGPs identify FIFA's role as bearer of human rights responsibilities (Kirschner, 2019). The WCSS22, the first to be formulated jointly by FIFA, the host country SC, and Q22 (FIFA, 2020a), applies to all functional areas and projects involved in the preparations for and staging of the tournament, along with post-event activities (FIFA, 2020b). The strategy details policy commitments and objectives under five pillars: human, social, economic, environment and governance, with articulation of responsibility for the first time by FIFA in connection with human rights, in line with the UNGPs (FIFA, 2020e). Also highlighted in the WCSS22 is reference to the specific SDGs and targets. This includes Goal 8: *"Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all."* Referring to this goal, the WCSS22 states the intention to ensure decent working and living conditions and fair recruitment for workers engaged in the construction of, and provision of services for, FIFA World Cup 2022™ sites.

Developed by Professor John Ruggie, the UNGPs are considered the global standard of expected conduct for all companies regarding human rights policy, providing clarity and predictability and responsibility to respect human rights (Davis, 2012; Thuer, 2017). The principles articulate states' obligations to human rights and freedoms, the role of business enterprises to respect rights in line with the drive toward corporate social responsibility; and the need for remedies when rights and obligations are breached (United Nations, 2011).

In the aftermath of FIFA's commissioned report from John Ruggie and Shift Ltd. to analyze its internal governance in 2016 (Ruggie, 2016), a FIFA Governance Committee and FIFA Human Rights Policy was established to address human rights, as part of a sustainability program which has undertaken various activities to promote awareness and address negative impacts (FIFA, 2017).

Several commentators suggest FIFA's recent prioritization of human rights has quickly become central to its newly stated institutional mission and identity (Buhmann et al., 2019; Krech, 2020). Others claim FIFA have developed policies aligning with the UNGP principles to protect themselves from accusations of compliance, shying away from accepting responsibility for monitoring, and acting upon, human rights abuses (Næss, 2018; McGillivray et al., 2019). The UNGPs provide clarity in outlining the human rights duties of governments and private actors are independent of each other (OHCHR, 2011); however, not all governments may be willing or able to enforce international human rights standards effectively (Mares, 2011; Wettstein, 2015). To understand Qatar and its relationship with the FIFA World Cup 2022 event, Hayajneh et al. (2017) and Millward (2017) claim that the recent social and political context of the country must be understood first. A policy commitment, as statement of responsibilities or expectations with regard to respect for human rights across activities and business relationships (Shift and Mazars, 2015), has evidently been made to sustainable development as part of the state's ongoing development within the framework of the Qatar National Vision (QNV) 2030 strategy (GCO, 2008). The state of Qatar, however, continues to face the challenge of social inclusion and human and labor rights equality with persistent accusations of abusive labor practices (Talavera et al., 2019).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Public policymaking and delivery are being increasingly shaped by new and diverse organizational and structural configurations such as networks and strategic collaborations with varied modes of governance (Keast et al., 2006). Furthermore, policy is rarely based on shared meanings between different actors that are active in the changing nature of network governance (Bevir and Richards, 2009a). Unexplored to date from a research perspective, and potentially a key determinant in the analysis of the WCSS22, is the interaction, interdependence, and negotiation of a complex set of actors, and relevant impact in the policy process for the WCSS22 (Wolde, 2019). As the WCSS22 was the first FIFA World Cup Sustainability Strategy of its kind to be constructed jointly through multiple actors, with articulation of UNGP alignment for the first time, the question emerged - how was policy collectively formulated and designed to address human rights and what role did FIFA play in the process? Given the tripartite configuration of actors, a policy network perspective is a valuable tool to analyze the relations among actors in a policy area and further explain the reasons and

results of the existence of relationships (Luo et al., 2011). Policy networks consist of governmental and societal actors whose interactions with one another give rise to policy (Bevir and Richards, 2009b). They are viewed as a purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern (Miller and McTavish, 2013). Policy networks, it is argued, can have two tiers, a core, and a periphery, with a clear distinction between members with and without access to resources and influences (Rhodes and Marsh, 1992). Policy network analysis attempts to explain policy development by examining networks of actors concerned with a given policy problem, across the public and private sectors and throughout different levels of governance (Mikkelsen, 2006). This study employs an interorganizational perspective, which helps reveal private and public configurations that exist in policy formation, identifying the position on human rights of FIFA and other actors and the ways in which networks influence actors' capacity to use their resources, creating policymaking mechanisms (Thatcher, 1998). Application of this perspective also allows for the identification of relations or patterns of strategic actions between a set of actors in policy formulation (Kenis and Schneider, 1991).

Understanding the complex interactions of policy measures can play a significant role in policy design and analysis (Taeiagh, 2017). Policy design can be defined as an activity to pursue policy goals through gathering and applying knowledge, conducted in specific spaces, dependent on contextual conditions, and can be constrained by the previous design (Capano, 2018). Designing successful policies requires both substantive instruments, a set of alternative arrangements capable of resolving or addressing a policy problem, as well as a procedural instrument, and a set of activities related to securing some level of agreement among those charged with formulating, i.e., network structure (Howlett and Mukherjee, 2014; Mukherjee et al., 2021). The development of systematic approaches and tools is also required for the exploration of design spaces and diversity of preferences of different stakeholders (Taeiagh, 2017). Objectives, however, must be concretized in a set of specific targets or measures which allow policy resources (Olsson and Hysing, 2012) to be directed toward goal attainment (Howlett, 2009). The research objective concerning policy creation for this study is to identify the recurrent features of the policy formulation and design process and the role that the UNGPs play in relation to Qatar 2022.

An actor can be viewed as an organization that can make decisions and acts in a coordinated way (Hermans and Cunningham, 2013). Within a policy network, each actor has an interest and capacity to help determine its character (Luo et al., 2011), with strategies taken to use the network to satisfy their needs, interests, and goals, and manage their interdependencies (Van Waarden, 1992). Preferences and positions taken by actors can also translate values into a preference ordering over specific solutions (Hermans and Cunningham, 2013). The concept of design coalitions indicates relational structures of actors who advocate for specific policy design elements during the design process (Haelg et al., 2020) and adopt collective decisions to jointly deploy their resources (Füg, 2011). Finally, the term "policy community" concerns those actors who exchange resources to balance and optimize their mutual relationships,

while "issue networks" represent a range of interests, fluctuating interaction, and access for the various members (Rhodes and Marsh, 1992). The study's related objective is to find how FIFA and the other actors contribute and position themselves in relation to human rights in the WCSS22 strategy documents.

Governance is concerned with a complex matrix of interactions and interrelations between different actors, and between different sets of ideas and practices, and thus has significant implications for policymaking (Zafarullah, 2015). Within the network context, governance can arguably be interpreted through the conceptual model of interdependence between organizations, interactions caused by the need to exchange resources, game-like interactions regulated by rules negotiated and agreed by network participants, as well as network steering activities to manage and attain greater central control (Rhodes, 2007; Fawcett and Daugbjerg, 2012; Klijn and Koppenjan, 2012). In network analytical approaches, a common objective is to describe relational configurations (Provan and Kenis, 2007), with network governance a form of organizational alliance in which relevant policy actors are linked together and likely to identify and share common interests (Kim, 2006). Network management strategies also include organizing joint research and fact finding (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2012). Participant governed networks can be highly decentralized, involving equal network members interaction. While lead organization-governed networks occur when one organization has sufficient resources and legitimacy to play a lead role (Provan and Kenis, 2007), with elements of "networked power" in setting the agenda for decision-making (Castells, 2011, cited in Millward, 2017, p. 761). In addition to assessing the contribution and position taken by the actors in relation to human rights, this study also sought to ascertain what form of network governance took place in this particular policymaking process (Rhodes, 2007; Fawcett and Daugbjerg, 2012; Klijn and Koppenjan, 2012) using the conceptual model (interdependence, interactions, regulated rules, and steering) identified within the literature.

## METHODOLOGY

As the aim of this research was to understand and analyze the tripartite policy network of actors involved in a specific policymaking process, a qualitative approach was adopted. An interpretivist ontological position was taken to identify and understand the nature of the collaboration, using tripartite policy network processes and interactions (Bevir and Richards, 2009a). The strength and power of the interpretivist approach lies in its ability to address the complexity and meaning of situations (Black, 2006). Qualitative Content Analysis using interpretivist methods also assumes the meaning of text data is subjective and requires external information about the originator of the text (Lacity and Janson, 1994). Ontology, as a concept, is concerned with understanding the existence of, and relationship between, different aspects of society such as social actors and structures, with social ontology related to ascertaining the nature of social entities (Al-Saadi, 2014). Therefore, the qualitative approach and position taken allowed for meanings and understandings to be determined.

To provide a richer understanding of networks of actors involves methodologies, such as textual analysis, as a way of recovering meanings (Bevir and Richards, 2009b). Documents were used as the unitary source of data for this study given their usefulness as a standalone method for specialized forms of qualitative research producing rich descriptions of a single phenomenon or event (Bowen, 2009). Documents, including government plans and reports, can also provide useful information for researchers to address a variety of questions, with policy another important domain to generate network data (Hu, 2015). The examination of documents for this study allowed the researcher to understand the interorganizational collaboration through strategic alliance, management practices and policy making (Hu, 2015). Data was collected using the strategy documents associated with the publication of the WCSS22. The main documents used for analysis were the “FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Sustainability Strategy” (WCSS22) (FIFA, 2020b) and “The Development of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Sustainability Strategy” [hereafter DWCS22] (FIFA, 2020a), which was developed as a supporting document, providing an overview of the strategy development process (FIFA, 2020a). Other documents used to provide context were the “For the Game, For the World” report (Ruggie, 2016) “Executive Summary for FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Sustainability Strategy (FIFA, 2020f),” “FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 First Sustainability Progress Report (FIFA, 2020c),” “UNGPs” (OHCHR, 2011), and “FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Sustainable Sourcing Code (FIFA, 2020d).”

Based on the areas identified for analysis in the literature review, a text extraction plan was created which would form the basis of the study. Data was recognized within the strategy documents that would be of most relevance to the topic, to develop findings and create a structure for analysis. This included all sections, including annexes, of the DWCS22 and forewords, introduction, strategy overview, pillars (human, social and governance pillars), alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and annexes for the WCSS22. The economic and environment pillars for the WCSS22, while considered as reference guides, were not extracted for analysis in the study due to a lack of relevance to the topic of human rights.

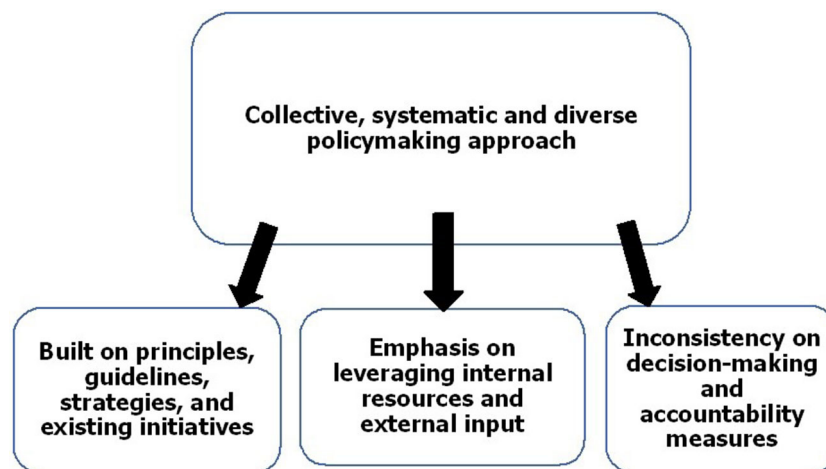
Qualitative approaches allow for exploring new or understudied network phenomena (Hollstein, 2014) with Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) used as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). QCA also involves the process of distilling words into fewer content-related categories (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008). Inductive (conventional) QCA is used when there is lack of, or limited, previous theories or research findings, while deductive (directed) QCA is used when some views, previous research findings, theories, or conceptual models regarding the phenomenon of interest exist (Armat et al., 2018). Using a directed approach, the categories created can be used to refine, test, or further develop conceptually the theoretical framework (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Assarroudi et al., 2018).

QCA was adopted for this study using inductive and deductive methods, both concurrently and independently (Armat et al., 2018). The text from the DWCS22 and WCSS22 were firstly added line by line to excel spreadsheets. An initial inductive approach was taken with open coding of the text which was then broken down further until the text fell into themes and then subcategories. These subcategories were then analyzed to establish four main categories (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Elo and Kyngäs, 2008) and summarized to create the recurrent features of the policy formulation and design process and role of the UNGPs. Through an iterative process (Bowen, 2009) and using a mixed methods approach, key segments of actor contribution were separated, using color coding, and grouping (inductive), extracted onto additional spreadsheets, and analyzed using the subcategories created (deductive) (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Elo et al., 2014; Assarroudi et al., 2018). Key human rights positioning pillars (see **Appendix A**) were established for each actor using the content summarized for the findings. To ascertain the governance form, a deductive approach was taken, using the key human rights positioning pillars for each actor, and aligning them with definitions of the conceptual model components (interdependence, interactions, rules and regulations and steering). These components were applied as the structured categorization matrix to form a summary of the key findings (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008; Elo et al., 2014; McGillivray et al., 2019).

The text data was then reviewed iteratively to ensure no relevant categories or topics were missed as part of the process while hand notes were also used consistently throughout the coding process. Both manifest and latent content approaches were applied to ascertain a deep understanding of the data (Assarroudi et al., 2018). The approach of de-contextualization, re-contextualization, categorization, and compilation was also adopted to ensure validity and reliability throughout the entire study, as the results must be as rigorous and trustworthy as possible (Bengtsson, 2016). Finally, to enhance the trustworthiness and address potential bias of the directed QCA study, three phases of preparation, organization, and reporting were also administered (Elo et al., 2014). Sample extracts from this coding process are included in **Appendix A**.

To understand tripartite processes and interactions, research was carried out comprehensively using WCSS22 documents and QCA, providing insight on how policy was collectively formulated and designed to address human rights issues and actor contributions. However, although documents provide rich understanding and meaning as a standalone research method (Bowen, 2009) and address a variety of questions (Hu, 2015), there are limitations to this study, being dependent on the WCSS22 narrative and researcher interpretation. Further studies could be conducted using approaches such as Qualitative Network Analysis (Ahrens, 2018), which provides additional knowledge into the meaning individual actors attach to their network ties and the network, and an insider view on the relationship. This study can, therefore, be used foundationally for further research to establish triangulation (Bowen, 2009), which might consist of extensive interviews or focus groups





**FIGURE 1** | Recurrent features of policy formulation and design.

with tripartite policy network representatives, or external stakeholders, to gain perspectives on policy implementation.

## FINDINGS

### Recurrent Features of the Policy Formulation and Design Process and Role of the UNGPs

Using the analysis methods described, four recurrent features of the policy formulation and design process were identified, as well as the role of the UNGPs. These are illustrated in **Figure 1**.

#### A Collective, Systematic, and Diverse Policymaking Approach

The tripartite or “tournament organizers” apply a collective, systematic, and diverse policy formulation approach to identify salient human rights issues and rights holder groups which could be impacted due to connected tournament activities, in accordance with the UNGPs. The term “we” is frequently applied across both strategy documents, with the tripartite policy network advocating a collective responsibility toward addressing potential impacts, providing remediation in line with the UNGPs and FIFA’s Human Rights Policy, and highlighting the collective recruitment of a large workforce of migrant workers.

*“We take responsibility for addressing the impacts of the FIFA World Cup 2022™ from our own activities as well as those linked to our business relationships and value chains.” – Tournament Organizers (FIFA, 2020).*

#### Emphasis on Leveraging Internal Resources and External Input

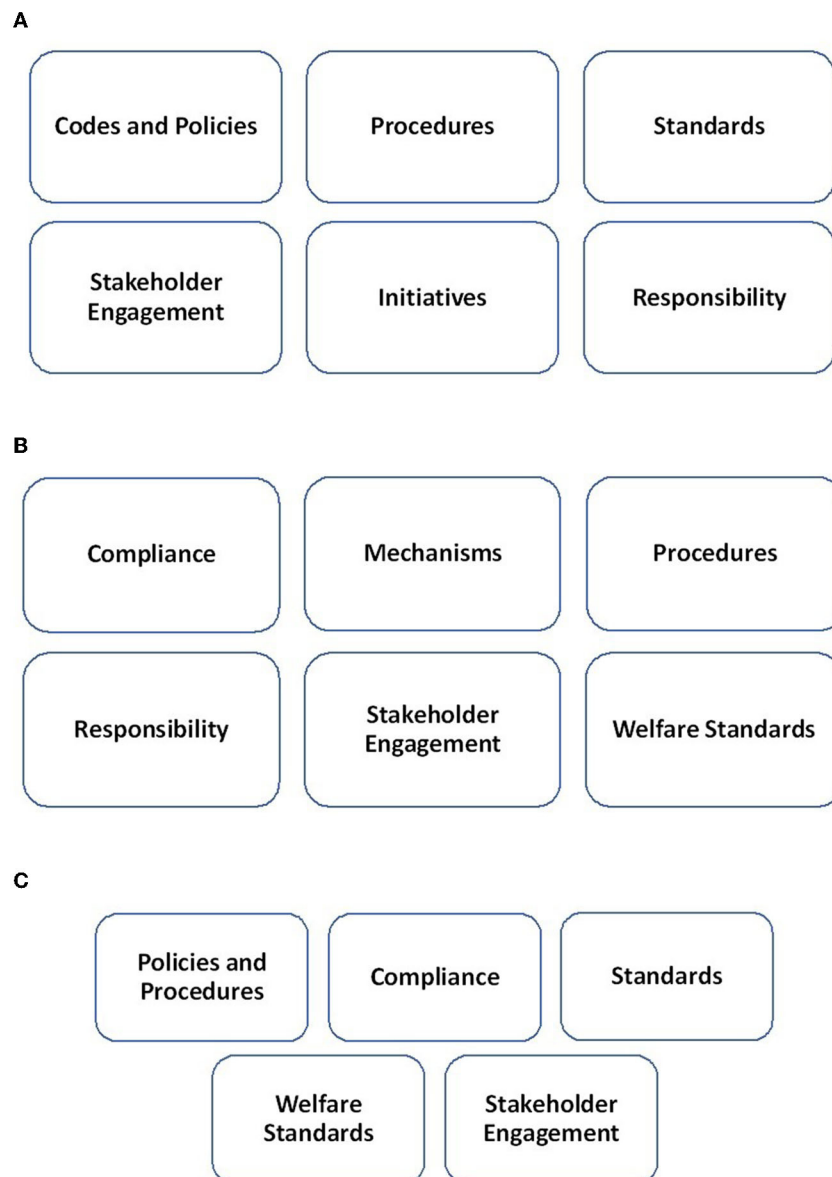
The collaborative approach to policymaking is validated through the host country’s scope of work, experience, and resources, via the participation of the SC. The strategy documents highlight a strong collaborative effort between multiple bodies is required

for successful policy and strategy delivery and evolution. The tripartite policy network addresses impact by comprehensively leveraging the best possible resources using institutions and organizations and internal (tripartite network) analysis conducted. Externally, the collective efforts also require state contribution with gaps remaining in Qatari labor regulations, despite FIFA’s efforts. The stakeholder survey instructions detailed as part of the human rights assessment within the DWCS22 also allude to factoring in the national context.

*“To be able to address the wide range of sustainability impacts of the tournament in the most effective and complete way and to leverage the best possible resources, FIFA, Q22 and the SC agreed to develop a joint sustainability strategy.” – Tournament Organizers (FIFA, 2020b).*

#### Built on Principles, Guidelines, Strategies, and Existing Initiatives

Principles such as inclusivity, integrity, transparency, responsibility, and respect for human rights guide the way the tripartite policy network delivers their joint commitments. Prioritization is also given to aspects of human rights which were already captured in the SC’s strategies, FIFA handbooks or previous events, e.g., World Cups. Policy design is carefully aligned to requirements for ISO20121 amongst other national and international guidelines such as the UNGPs. Alignment with the SDGs comes through identifying and selecting relevant topics to the sustainability of the tournament and defining policy statements and objectives. Specific reference is made to collaborating to contribute as a collective working toward initiatives under each goal such as ensuring decent working and living conditions and fair recruitment for workers under Goal 8- Decent Work and Economic Growth. However, despite collective action and responsibility, there are several instances of unilateral actions by policy actors and continuance of existing



**FIGURE 2 | (A)** FIFA human rights pillars. **(B)** The SC human rights pillars. **(C)** Q22 Human rights pillars.

initiatives such as the worker's technical cooperation program and work with contractors to reimburse fees (SC).

### Inconsistency Concerning Decision-Making and Accountability Measures

A "culture of compliance" is a phrase used consistently to provide transparency and accountability to stakeholders through decision-making and performance. However, independent experts are utilized for the human rights assessment to "gain insight of typical perspectives" instead of engaging with affected stakeholders directly. While separately, engagement

is intended with those most affected to discuss progress in policy implementation. In terms of accountability, no defined outcomes are outlined, with limited detail provided regarding the "Sustainability Action Plan" for key responsibilities and KPIs, and Sustainability Management System (SMS) for monitoring process conformance, ensuring integrity and stakeholder involvement.

*"We will establish and continually improve a sustainability management system (SMS) to ensure that we fulfill our obligations.... we will develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions by maintaining an SMS." - Tournament organizers (FIFA, 2020b).*

## FIFA and Policy Actor Human Rights Positioning and Contribution

The analysis conducted resulted in the identification of policy actor contribution and positioning in relation to human rights throughout the policymaking process. **Figures 2A–C** illustrate the human rights pillars for each member of the tripartite policy network of actors.

FIFA are highlighted in the strategy documents as the ultimate decision maker and contribute primarily through their existing statutes, human rights policy, and commitments to mitigate negative human rights impacts. FIFA also stated in the WCSS22 their position to champion human rights, underlining procedures for their own staff, ensuring respect by business partners, and upholding the highest international labor standards and principles with a pledge to safeguard the rights and welfare of workers. However, specified actions, and mechanisms for tournament related construction workers' living and working conditions and recruitment processes, are articulated through SC initiatives. Despite this, in accordance with the UNGPs, FIFA prioritizes the protection of human rights defenders, a group of persons whose rights may be at particular risk due to the very nature of their work, and media representatives and emphasizes the increasing inclusion of human rights-related clauses in tournament contracts.

*"Reinforcing FIFA's commitments, we pledge to safeguard the rights and welfare of workers engaged on FIFA World Cup 2022™ sites and to promote their rights in projects and supply chains directly linked to the FIFA World Cup." – FIFA Secretary General (FIFA, 2020b).*

The SC (Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy), the lead Qatari government entity responsible for the delivery of the tournament stadiums and infrastructure and associated services, takes a more prominent role regarding workers' rights, working and living conditions, and recruitment processes and standards. The SC attempts to be measure driven, extensive, and transparent in their strategic approach through external compliance and public progress reports. The SC also highlights their accountability and efforts to address complaints using effective grievance and remedy mechanisms, having implemented several requirements for contractors to detail recruitment and accommodation arrangements for associated workers. Furthermore, the entity, adhering to FIFA's human rights and equality statutes, advocates their Workers' Welfare Standards.

*"The SC holds itself and its partners accountable to the Workers' Welfare Standards, regularly monitoring adherence to them, and immediately addressing any cases where a party falls short." – The SC (FIFA, 2020b).*

Q22 is a limited liability company incorporated by FIFA and the Qatar 2022 Local Organizing Committee, responsible for the planning and delivery of operations. Although involved in collective action, Q22's input within the strategy is limited and primarily procedure driven, establishing several policies which reflect their responsibility and commitment to operate in an

ethical manner, consistent with best practices locally and high standards internationally. Q22 are also members of a workers' welfare stakeholder group to holistically tackle the issues faced by workers. Finally, the Senior Sustainability Manager, part of the Q22 team, is also tasked with coordinating the related strategy development efforts.

## Exhibited Form of Network Governance in the Policy Making Process

Network governance as identified in the literature (Rhodes, 2007; Fawcett and Daugbjerg, 2012; Klijn and Koppenjan, 2012), is used to ascertain its utility to explore the human rights related WCSS22 policymaking process. This in turn, assisted to identify the governance form taken. **Figure 3** illustrates the connection between governance and the human rights pillars revealed from the analysis to establish the governance form of the tripartite network.

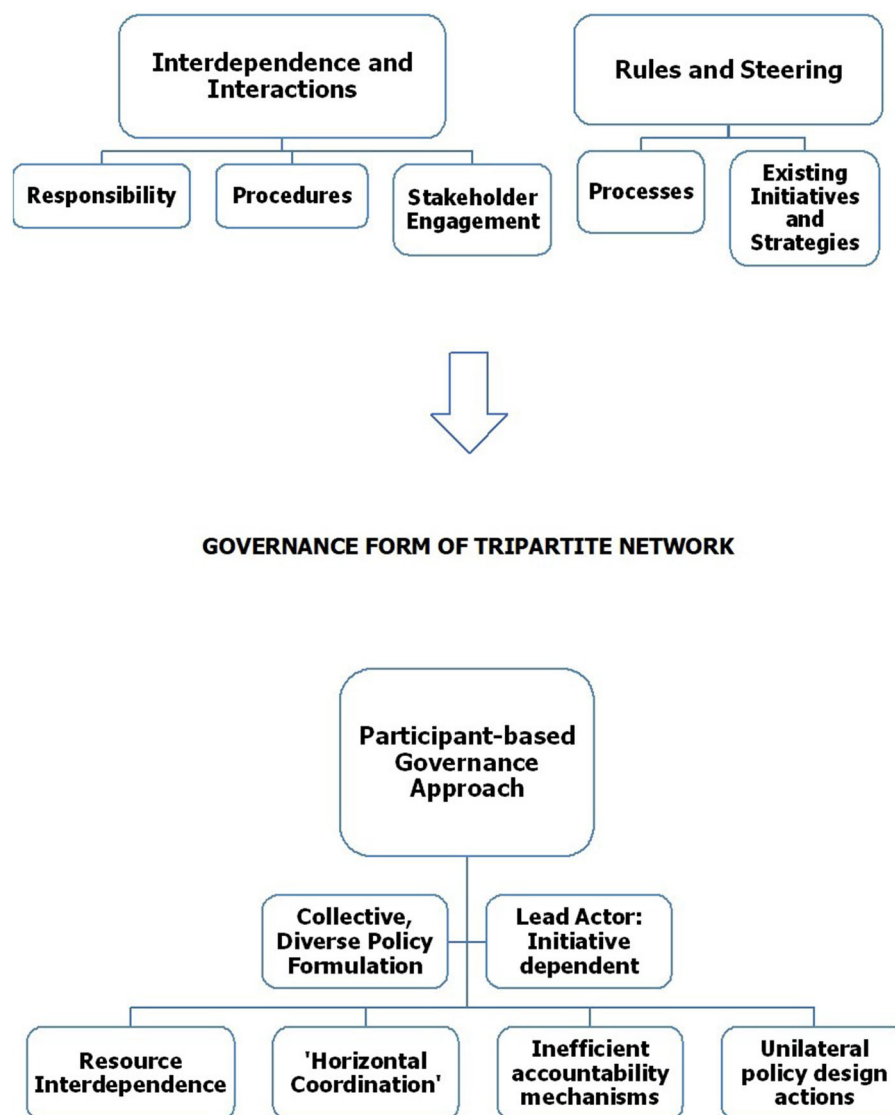
## Interdependence and Interactions

Interdependencies exist through the consensus required for actions taken and the delivery of the strategy, with each actor in the tripartite network involved in policy and strategy approval. The WCSS22 Steering Group represents an integrated approach, composed of senior executives from the tripartite network, and having overarching responsibility for reviewing performance and providing adequate resources. The WCSS22 Working Group, composed of sustainability experts from FIFA and the SC, manages the implementation of strategy and policy and provides support to project teams. However, representatives and associated tripartite network actors are not included. Interactive processes are frequent, with experts from the tripartite engaging in one-to-one meetings to build awareness of the strategy development process and discuss strategy topics, while senior executives also review and provide their input. In addition, for the human rights survey conducted as part of the strategy development process, employees of the tripartite network actors were asked to rate the level of influence of the tournament organizers to change the impacts on those most affected because of their activities. Special focus groups were carried out by actors in the tripartite network with Qatari nationals working for the SC.

*"...a meeting was held with all members of the Sustainability Steering Group to approve the full sustainability strategy, and both the FIFA Secretary General and Q22 Chairman/SC Secretary General approved and signed off on the final document." – Tournament Organizers (FIFA, 2020a).*

## Regulated Rules and Steering

In conjunction with carrying out assessment processes, commitments are made collectively by all actors to comply with policies and procedures in addressing potential negative human rights breaches caused by their activities. All tripartite network actors are involved in analyzing the context, identifying the initial human rights that may be breached, and coordinating the mechanisms to ascertain stakeholder feedback. Although coordination is within their remit, obscurity exists regarding the capacity of the Senior Sustainability Manager with a limited



**FIGURE 3 |** Governance form of tripartite network.

role description provided. However, the stated goals of the state and Qatar's national development strategies and goals, QNV and National Development Strategy (NDS), are claimed to be instrumental in the alignment of priorities, pillars, and objectives for the WCSS22.

*"FIFA World Cup 2022™ is to serve as a catalyst for the achievement of Qatar's development goals...which define the long-term outcomes for the country"* - **Chairman of the SC** (FIFA, 2020a).

## DISCUSSION

The findings from this study present distinct features of human rights' policy formulation and design, identify actor positioning and contribution concerning human rights, and illuminate the

governance form in the tripartite network. The findings are discussed below with reference to existing literature, detailing their implications, and considerations for further study. Firstly, in addressing human rights through policy formulation and design, the tripartite network adopts a collective approach through systematic, integrated, and diverse mechanisms. Rather than creating discrete and distinct stages, the process for policy formulation for the WCSS22 is systematically integrated (Kim, 2006; Hermans and Cunningham, 2013; Hudson et al., 2019; Haelg et al., 2020), and coalition-based, with actors using their resources and advocating for specific policy design elements and actions based on assessment (Thatcher, 1998; Füg, 2011; Haelg et al., 2020). Collective responsibility is also adopted to identify causation or contribution to such impacts, and to provide for or cooperate in their remediation through legitimate processes, in line with the UNGPs and FIFA's Human Rights



Policy (Baumann-Pauly and Nolan, 2016; Karp, 2020). From a policy network perspective, the collective approach by the tournament organizers indicates cohesive and interconnected network attributes, with actors inclined to self-identify as a cluster (Bressers and O'Toole Jr, 1998), through continued use of the term “we.” This is particularly evident for the dedicated segment related to SDG alignment, with emphasis placed on a collaborative effort to establish meaningful contribution. This collective action, as Carlsson (2000) highlights, is a way of distributing the tasks among different actors and the creation of an intelligent conformity, or coordination to guide the activities performed.

External input and internal resources are also leveraged and utilized to construct the policy commitments made. The participation of the SC adds weight to policymaking due to its scope of work, experience, and resources. However, significant emphasis is placed on leveraging internal resources and external input to develop knowledge, create objectives and policy commitments, influence, and ultimately achieve goal execution (Capano, 2018). As Klijn (2008) states, mutual dependencies emerge because actors do not themselves possess enough resources for survival or for the achievement of goals. The emergence of the tripartite network configuration appears deliberately and consciously formed to bring together the dispersed resources of network actors as suggested by Harini and Thomas (2020). Externally, joint research mechanisms (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2012), are conducted with extensive stakeholder input needed to develop a framework for the identification of salient sustainability and human rights topics, rights holder groups at risk and initiatives to address cases (Taeihagh, 2017). State contribution is also a factor with gaps remaining in Qatari labor regulations (Mares, 2011; Wettstein, 2015). However, sustainable development is complex and can involve network management practices to address multiple stakeholders, as addressed by Van Zeijl-Rozema et al. (2008) and Klijn and Koppenjan (2012).

Best practice principles and guidelines, previous and current tripartite network strategies and alignment with existing initiatives play a key role in the policymaking process. Although networks can be strongly integrated, with high levels of coordination, individual participants may also have varying interests (Carlsson, 2000) with many instances of unilateral initiatives by WCSS22 actors apparent due to their access and resources to implement (Rhodes and Marsh, 1992). The continuance of existing initiatives involving individual actors, although pertinent due to assessment feedback, might be interpreted as an issue of policy development where new elements are added to the policy mix without the removal of older ones, while existing elements are stretched to try to fit new goals and changing circumstances, as covered by Howlett and Mukherjee (2014). Nevertheless, revising existing programs or initiatives may be more sensible, achievable, and efficient, and thus may produce better policy in the long run (Peters, 2018). The state, however, plays a crucial role for policy commitments, pillars, and objectives for the WCSS2022 through alignment with Qatar's national development strategies and goals. As Rhodes (2007) and Fawcett and Daugbjerg (2012) highlight, networks are

not accountable to the state, however the state can indirectly and imperfectly steer networks.

Inconsistencies exist regarding decision-making and accountability measures. Though the policy actors use best practice principles and guidelines, whilst drawing from previous and existing strategies, as was highlighted in the work of Capano (2018), there are inconsistencies concerning decision-making and accountability measures. Democratic legitimacy and greater accountability, it is argued, can be created through meaningful engagement with the wider public (Thompson and Pforr, 2005) and affected stakeholders (Amis, 2017). However, in this study, the decision was made to consult with independent experts rather than engage with affected stakeholders directly for the human rights assessment, to gain insight of typical perspectives of rights holder groups. One might argue that although the importance of experts for contributing to policy-relevant ideas can bring recognized expertise and competence in a particular realm and policy-relevant knowledge (Kisby, 2007), transparency about choices made regarding who to involve, and how the expertise is integrated into a judgement, are essential to be able to evaluate the applicability and possible biases in expert consultations (Fischer et al., 2014). Relating back to conformity, detailed by Carlsson (2000), specified targets or measures also allow policy resources to be directed toward goal attainment (Howlett, 2009). However, despite references to the Sustainability Action Plan and Sustainability Management System (SMS) for the WCSS22, which aimed to monitor conformance to processes and outcomes achieved, responsibilities and KPIs, the details of both are insubstantial. From a policy network perspective, this may have implications regarding maintaining trust and relevancy, with accountability fundamental to give account to network actors and the community (Voets et al., 2008).

FIFA's strategy to policymaking for the WCSS22, and their positioning on addressing human rights, primarily focuses on initiatives incorporating their existing codes and policies, procedures, standards, and strengthening stakeholder relationships, with emphasis placed on the importance of relationship building within a network structure in the work of Van Waarden (1992) and Hermans and Cunningham (2013). The organization states their position on the protection of human rights, however measures for tournament construction workers, with respect to living and working conditions and recruitment policies, fall dominantly under SC initiatives. This relates strongly to the argument made by Heerdt (2018) who claims any attempt to establish responsibility or accountability for major sport event-related human rights violations have either been unsuccessful or only addressed by a fraction of the actors. Thus, uncertainty prevails regarding how FIFA frames their corporate responsibility for the treatment of workers due to a lack of direct intervention in connected initiatives, as was indicated by Kirschner (2019). This, arguably, contradicts their commitments to deliver long-term positive impacts (Woods and Stokes, 2019), with FIFA's policy and principle driven approach lacking processes of enforceability and monitoring (Millward, 2017; Næss, 2018; McGillivray et al., 2019). It would appear, from a network perspective, the SC have the administrative and financial resources at their disposal (Rhodes and Marsh, 1992; Olsson and Hysing, 2012), particularly

through government connection, to influence direct action for associated workers. FIFA interacts, therefore, to optimize their mutual relationship and resources through policymaking collaboration, creating a more community-based structure, a structure described in the work of Rhodes and Marsh (1992).

SC's positioning is, arguably, aimed at enhancing transparency and gaining legitimacy in their strategic approach, acting extensively to justify their authority (Provan and Kenis, 2007; Bijlmakers, 2013) on the issue of the treatment of workers connected to their activities. Substantive instruments are predominant (Howlett and Mukherjee, 2014) through their Workers' Welfare Standards and grievance mechanisms. However, the procedural instrument of network structure, as highlighted by Mukherjee et al. (2021), may not be applicable in this case, with specific measures for tournament construction workers linked directly to SC operations, rather than being network centered. Despite being the Local Organizing Committee and contributing to collective action, with the Senior Sustainability Manager on their staff, Q22's input is primarily peripheral (Rhodes and Marsh, 1992), and procedure driven, establishing numerous policies which reflect their responsibility and commitment to operate ethically (Wettstein, 2015).

Interdependencies and interactions are commonplace and deliberative throughout the policymaking process (Rhodes, 2007; Van Zeijl-Rozema et al., 2008; Fawcett and Daugbjerg, 2012; Klijn and Koppenjan, 2012), underlined by the unified, formalized, and enhanced approach to sustainability management for the tournament via the WCSS22 Steering Group and Working Groups. The interdependent nature of the tripartite network is evident through their resource driven approach (Klijn, 2008) to address the salient human rights topics, with cooperation from other institutions and organizations. Regarding regulated rules, all tripartite network actors work extensively and collectively in the processes of analyzing the context and initial topics as well as the mechanisms to formulate policy. The notion of "horizontal coordination" (Fawcett and Daugbjerg, 2012; Hermans and Cunningham, 2013) seems appropriate, with the limited number of actors for the tripartite network resulting in agreement as to the "rules of the game" indicating a relative stable network (Fawcett and Daugbjerg, 2012). However, the impact and influence of the state is evident due to clear pillar alignment with national development strategies, with the state acting as a regulator that organizes the arena in which the tripartite operates (Voets et al., 2008). As Fawcett and Daugbjerg (2012) highlight, states continue to play a central political role in setting the ground rules and context within which governance takes place. However, because of the contingent approach (Fawcett and Daugbjerg, 2012) taken for the WCSS22, and due to insufficient accountability instruments, the tripartite network may be difficult to steer or control and determine who is in charge (Keast et al., 2006). Furthermore, the complexity associated with the network and interdependence may also impede policy success by diffusing the authority and accountability mechanisms (Hale, 2011).

Finally, FIFA is noted as the lead organization concerning ownership of the tournament and the primary decision maker (Millward, 2017), with the other actors of the tripartite network adhering to FIFA statutes. However, the organization, arguably,

does not have sufficient resources or control over all major network-level activities to characterize a lead governing structure (Provan and Kenis, 2007) for the tripartite. A participant-based governance form appears relevant to the study, with organizations composing the network collectively working to make both strategic and operational decisions (Provan et al., 2007). Networked power is specific to the "program" of each network (Castells, 2011, cited in Millward, 2017, p. 761), with the lead network role for the WCSS22 dependent on actor initiatives and commitments due to unilateral actions (Provan and Kenis, 2007; Howlett, 2009; Ingold et al., 2021). Based on the findings of the study, there is evidence to suggest this conceptual model of governance can be used for other studies of policy networks in mega sport events, via methods that capture the network partners dialogue throughout the policy formation process.

## CONCLUSION

This study aimed to understand the role played by FIFA, and other actors, as they looked to address human rights through policy formulation and design for the WCSS22, using UNGP alignment, and a policy network theoretical framework. In addition, this study also intended to identify the governance form established. The findings highlight a cohesive and coalition constructed policy formulation approach, anchored through leveraging tripartite network resources and extensive stakeholder input. Policy design is produced using the building foundation of best practice principles, guidelines, strategies, and existing initiatives; however, unilateral actor actions are prominent with inconsistencies concerning decision-making and accountability measures. In terms of policy actor position and contribution, FIFA focus on their existing statutes, human rights policy, and commitments to mitigate negative human rights impacts. However, their efforts appear to lack enforceability with specified measures for tournament construction workers' conditions, articulated through the SC's initiatives. The SC's positioning is, arguably, based on enhancing transparency and gaining legitimacy, and projecting their accountability, using their resources to take a more prominent role concerning worker initiatives. Despite involvement in collective action, and a workers' welfare stakeholder group, Q22's input is predominantly peripheral. Interdependencies and interactions are commonplace, through both the WCSS22 Steering and Working Groups, with state contribution influential, through alignment with their national development strategies. Due to insufficient accountability mechanisms, the tripartite network demonstrates difficulties in determining those steering and responsible. This bodes ill for the capacity of the governance form to deliver the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 at the level of the UNGPs standard. With varied resources at their disposal, a participant-based governance form was identified with the lead role dependent on actor initiatives and commitments. In summary, the findings from the study highlight the significance and relevance of the tripartite network in relation to human rights and further enhance our understanding of network policymaking processes and actor interrelations and interactions.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Both authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

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# The “autonomy” of developing countries in the Olympic Movement: Assessing the fate of sports governance transplants in the Global South

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**Introduction:** The International Olympic Committee (IOC) imposes very specific ideas on sports governance, more precisely on sports autonomy, on countries joining the Olympic Movement. Given that the idea of sports autonomy originated in the Global North, this article introduces the concept of governance transplants to evaluate the impact that being part of the Olympic Movement has on domestic sports governance in Global South developing countries. The article explores the extent to which the IOC is successful in implementing the norms and regulations on sports autonomy as a governance transplant at the national level in countries from the Global South that are part of the Olympic Movement.

**Methods:** The article employs a comparative qualitative case study research design that explores the relations of the IOC, National Olympic Committees (NOCs), and national governments in Botswana, Guatemala and Sri Lanka. Research relies on a mix of document analyses and expert semi-structured interviews conducted during field trips to those countries. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed by means of thematic analysis. The analyses focus on domestic policies and contexts, formal and institutional compliance with sports autonomy, provision of public funding, and participation in national sport policy-making.

**Results and discussion:** Findings suggest that national structures and legacies have an impact on the way in which the autonomy of sport, as the governance transplant, is translated in those three countries. Although national governments enjoy some agency in “translating” governance transplants, results also suggest that misfits and tensions persist between governmental and sport stakeholders at the national and international level. Such misfits might force the IOC, as a private transnational regulator, to adopt a more pragmatic view on the enforcing of its governance transplants. The results are of relevance to existing discussions on global sports governance and debates as to whether the countries in the Global North might be able to impose their views and their governance transplants if the Global South gets a greater say in transnational sports governance.

## KEYWORDS

transnational private governance, International Olympic Committee (IOC), sports autonomy, governance transplants, Global South, Guatemala, Botswana, Sri Lanka

## Introduction

The interest of developing countries in being recognized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and being part of the Olympic Games has been well-documented. Joining the Olympic Movement “is one of the “signs of statehood” that gains them [countries] recognition from the global community” [(1), p. 1005]. In particular post-colonial or smaller countries, which might lack “historical or other contemporary sources of national recognition,” use sport often to present the nation at the global stage [(2), p. 100]. Moreover, according to Houlihan and Zheng (3), being part of the Olympic Movement gives small states visibility in the international arena, because participant countries are granted an equal symbolic status. Finally, being part of the Olympic Movement can have a positive impact in sports development of developing countries due to IOC funding (1).

However, when developing countries (or any country, for that matter) become part of the Olympic Movement, they enter a very particular and well-defined governance structure with a set of core policies and beliefs. Indeed, countries join the Olympic Movement when their National Olympic Committee (NOC) is formally recognized by the IOC. And it is the IOC who decides on the criteria for such recognition. Countries and their sport systems also have to recognize and respect the provisions of the Olympic Charter and the authority of the IOC as the highest governing body of the Olympic Movement. The IOC is not only the gatekeeper of this process, but also an agent of policy transfer who partly imposes its vision on the structures that new countries’ sport systems need to adopt to join the Olympic Movement.

In that context, the aim of this article is to explore the relationship between the policies of the IOC at the international level and the regulatory structures of sport at the national level in developing countries. The article aims to assess the impact of IOC norms on developing countries, and whether these might have any room for agency in the application and implementation of these norms at national level.

Thus, our first research objective is to assess the extent to which the IOC is able to implement its policies on sports governance in countries in the Global South that are part of the Olympic Movement. We use the terms Global South and Global North to distinguish the generally less prosperous nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America from the wealthy industrialized nations (including the U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and European Union member states). In contrast to alternative notions such as developing countries, the concept of the Global South indicates that these countries share a history of Northern economic and political domination and face persistent power asymmetries. As the Global North is wealthier and more powerful, it can use its control of international organizations to globalize its discourses and to pursue its ideas of developmentalism and teleological progress according to which the Global South has to “catch up” (4). Hence, the article’s second

objective is to investigate the extent to which countries in the Global South might find it difficult fitting into the governance structures of the Olympic Movement. Our final objective is to evaluate how those countries implement the requirements of the IOC into their national sport systems.

These aims and objectives are relevant because, as Reiche has pointed out [(1), p. 997], research into the participation of emerging countries in the Olympic Movement is not excessively developed. Whereas the benefits have been explored (see above), other consequences, such as the impact on national sports governance and policy, have received less attention.

In order to meet our research objectives, the article focuses on the implementation of a fundamental principle of the Olympic Movement: The autonomy of sport. The autonomy of sport is one of the main pillars of the Olympic Movement’s governance; it is defined as the demand that the regulation of sport falls into the exclusive domain of sport governing bodies and that sport bodies do not suffer any political interference from governments or other political actors (5). Thus, sports autonomy seeks to ensure “the preservation of the values of sport, the integrity of competitions, the motivation and participation of volunteers, the education of young people and their contribution to the wellbeing of all, women, men and children, thereby contributing to its credibility and legitimacy” (5, 6). The strategic importance of sports autonomy for the Olympic Movement is demonstrated in the Olympic Charter, which stipulates that one of the missions of the IOC is, indeed, “to preserve the autonomy of sport” [(7), Art. 2.5].

The IOC expects, therefore, countries participating in the Olympics to adhere to its standards of sports autonomy as specified in the IOC’s regulation (5, 8). In doing that, the IOC acts as a powerful transnational private regulator because it defines the norms for any actor or stakeholder who wants to join the Olympic Movement or interact with it (9). This debate is even more interesting because, formally, the rules of the IOC are regulations of a private nature and should not affect public sports policy. The Olympic Charter is not an international treaty, nor public regulation. However, as Cafaggi [(10), p. 4–5] has put it:

While, formally, private regulations are voluntary instruments to which parties are free to subscribe or alternatively, abstain, their adoption has often come to be understood as the precondition for access to global markets or other regulatory spaces. Frequently then, these transnational private regimes are legally voluntary but socially or economically binding.

Compliance with the norms defined by the IOC implies usually amending existing national laws or adopting new ones in order to ensure the structures of the national sports system complies with the requirements of the Olympic Charter. As James and Osborn [(11), p. 99] elaborate, the IOC “does not fulfill its tasks in cooperation with states, but by requiring them to act on its behalf.”

In order to operationalise our analysis, the article introduces the concept of “governance transplants,” which is inspired by the debate about “legal transplants” in comparative legal research [e.g., (12)]. The article conceptualizes the autonomy of sport as a governance transplant; that is to say, a set of rules and norms defined by the IOC that countries joining the Olympic Movement are required to incorporate into their national sports systems. Thus, the article explores, in a nutshell, how successful the IOC might have been on transplanting its governance concept of sports autonomy, and whether (like in traditional transplants) misfits and tension persist.

Methodologically, the article adopts a qualitative comparative case study research design. A comparative case study on “sports autonomy” in three countries from the Global South (Botswana, Guatemala, and Sri Lanka) to explore how national political structures have adapted to and negotiated the requirements of autonomy imposed by the IOC. Data collection is done through analysis of national sports policy documents and semi structured interviews with representatives of sport stakeholders in those countries.

The article proceeds now in four steps. First, we present our analytical framework based on the concept of governance transplants. Second, we discuss our research design and methods. Third, we present the results of the three case studies adopting a comparative approach. Finally, we discuss the implication of our findings.

## Theoretical framework

### Governance transplants as analytical concept

When countries are part of the Olympics, they need to abide by the rules contained in the Olympic Charter. This qualifies as a policy transfer from the IOC to the members of the Olympic Movement. Whereas policy transfer is commonly associated with the transfer of institutions (13), policy transfer can also refer to the transfer of goals, tools, ideas and ideologies as well [see (6, 14, 15)]. In order to emphasize that such policy transfers can challenge domestic political and social systems in a fundamental manner, we introduce the concept of “governance transplants.” The transplant metaphor is borrowed from the notion of legal transplants, which refers to the application of laws and norms designed in a particular legal context to a different environment for which the norms were not designed (12). Comparative legal research claims that a transplanted law must “fit” with the institutional, social and cultural context to which it is transplanted in order to work appropriately (12). This fit, however, is not necessarily easy to achieve since, as historical institutionalist arguments argue, domestic governance arrangements reflect deeply entrenched national policy traditions, which prevent a simple policy transfer (16, 17). Indeed, policy transfer research has stressed that certain policies

are not transferable because they are neither ideologically or culturally proximate (13). It is certainly no coincidence that the notion of “governance transplants” has already been used before within the context of comparative corporate governance research. Here, the notion served to indicate that U.S. models of corporate governance cannot be easily transferred to other contexts and that the efficacy of corporate governance models is path-dependent and contingent on local configurations of formal and informal institutions (18, 19). Moreover, scholars have used the notion to emphasize that governance transplants may result in “superficial convergence in form but divergence in function” [(20), p. 880].

Essential to our concept is that governance transplants, such as the autonomy of sport, do not aim to transfer isolated policies, instruments or tools but affect a very fundamental dimension of governance, that is, the distribution of responsibilities between public authorities, private actors and society for producing policy outcomes (in our case, the division of competencies between national governments, on the one hand, and sports federations and NOCs, on the other). Governance transplants can, thus, challenge the incumbent domestic understanding of the role of governments, which is the path-dependent outcome of historical struggles and compromises. Accordingly, a misfit between governance transplants and domestic governance arrangements is likely to occur, and it has the potential to impede compliance and implementation.

Marsh and Sharman (21) emphasize that there is a degree of agency of the receiving countries in policy transfers, which inspired Stone (22) to employ the notion of “policy translation.” Policy translation is often a dynamic, creative and haphazard process, which involves bricolage, experimentalism and learning (22).

Depending on the degree of misfit between the transplants and local preconditions, governance transplants might be modeled and structured (i.e., “translated”) in a way that their impact on domestic governance arrangements is minimized. Therefore, we ask to which extent the countries in the Global South might be able to shape or modify the IOC governance transplant into their sport governance structures or not.

### Sports autonomy as governance transplant

The IOC’s key governance transplant that we analyse in this article is, as explained above, sports autonomy. This is a principle of strategic importance for the IOC and the Olympic Movement, as demonstrated not only by its inclusion in the Olympic Charter, [(7), Art. 2.5], but also in the so-called Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance of the Olympic Movement (23). The concept of sports autonomy, originated in the Global North where liberal political ideology forced governments to practice self-restraint in regulating citizens’ leisure and where a strong



and resourceful civil society could provide sport activities (24). Sports autonomy qualifies as a governance transplant because it restricts state sovereignty and political discretion, and raises serious questions about democratic accountability (25, 26). Moreover, sports autonomy rests on very specific political and societal prerequisites, that is, political self-restraint and a strong civil society.

The IOC implants sports autonomy into national sports systems via the NOCs. The NOCs are located between the IOC and national governments. The NOCs are not governmental bodies but act as the national representative of the IOC within the respective country (11). The Olympic Charter demands the NOCs to “preserve their autonomy and resist all pressures of any kind, including but not limited to political, legal, religious or economic pressures” [(7), Art. 27.6]. However, existing research on NOCs indicates that their autonomy is contested outside the Global North. Chappelet and Kübler-Mabbot (27) claimed that the majority of NOCs is actually government-controlled via funding or political ties [see also: (28)]. We try to demonstrate that the contested state of sports autonomy reflects the substantial misfit between the governance transplant and the receiving national systems. Although national public authorities are forced to formally comply, they “translate” the governance transplant (i.e., the autonomy of sport) according to the logics of domestic sport policy-making.

## Research design and methods

The article adopts a comparative qualitative case study research design, which is the preferred methodological choice of the existing literature on policy transfer that our theoretical framework is built upon (13, 22). This is a logical choice, as case study research design is especially suited for research that (1) studies a phenomenon over a period of time, (2) uses data from different sources, (3) answers research questions of how and why, and (4) it is delimited in terms of geographical scope (29). In our case, we explore the compliance with sports autonomy and the relations between public authorities and NOCs with a longitudinal perspective, and with a clear geographical scope of the chosen country. Our research clearly focuses on exploring the hows and whys of the implementation of sports autonomy as a governance transplant, hence the case study research design is a valid epistemological choice for this research. Finally, our research does indeed collect data from a variety of sources, as we employ both analysis of official policy documents and semi-structured interviews as research methods.

Indeed, as State [(30), p. 1] points out a case study research design “looks for the detail of the interaction with its contexts,” which summarizes very aptly this article’s research aims and confirms the suitability of our methodological choice.

The case studies employ the method of structured focused comparison (31) in order to explore not only formal

compliance to IOC provisions on sports autonomy, but also the interactions between public authorities and NOCs in the three selected countries.

Our case selection was informed by the following criteria. Countries have to (1) come from the Global South, (2) be part of the Olympic Movement, (3) have a recognized NOC, and (4) show sufficient formal compliance with sports autonomy. In order to fulfill the last point, countries could not have their membership of the IOC suspended because of political interference (i.e., lack of autonomy) at the time the research was done. Moreover, we aimed to select countries with a substantial variety concerning domestic legacies likely to create possible misfits with the governance transplant. Therefore, whereas all countries had to comply with the selection criteria, the research design also aimed for variety in order to enhance the explanatory powers of the study.

Once all the countries meeting the criteria were listed, we proceeded to contact the respective NOCs, whose level of response was variable. The IOC services advised the research team on the NOCs that tended to be more responsive to external requests, and the levels of responsiveness they used to have from NOCs around the world. A final shortlist of 20 countries was done amongst those who responded to the call and could provide the level of information required. This led to the final selection of Botswana, Guatemala and Sri Lanka because these three countries met the sampling criteria, provided the best access to interviewees and documents, and represented a good global spread of different sport, political and social cultures. Decisions on shortlisting and final selection of the three cases were taken exclusively by the research team, without input from the IOC. We acknowledge that this final selection was informed by access, as it was necessary to secure the widest possible access to sources given the nature of the research, and that needs to be listed as a limitation. However, the three countries do meet the pre-established sampling criteria and provide a good geographical spread. We would argue that such spread, coupled with the access to participants and documents to provide rich data sources outweighs that limitation. The three countries are small in population terms, characterized by low GDP per capita and by limited success at the Olympics. However, we argue that they show substantial variance in terms of their NOC’s operational capacity, as demonstrated in their NOC’s budget, share of public spending and size (Table 1).

In order to examine how the governance transplant is received in different national contexts, we focus first on *formal/institutional compliance* with the principle of sports autonomy. However, we build on Dolowitz et al. [(32), p. 460] who have emphasized, that policy transfer should not be examined as one-off event but studied as a process “that develops as it enters and works its way through the domestic policymaking setting.” It is also important to realize that the NOCs are institutionalized as permanent “agents of transfer,” which remain active in the transfer process. Therefore, we argue

TABLE 1 Characteristics of the country case studies.

Indicator	Guatemala	Botswana	Sri Lanka
Population in million	17.263	2.250	21.670
GDP per Capita in US\$	8,413	18,654	13,443
National independence since	1,823	1,966	1,948
NOC recognized in	1,947	1,980	1,937
First participation in the Olympics	1,952	1,980	1,948
	(Helsinki)	(Moscow)	(London)
Olympic medals won			
Gold	0	0	0
Silver	1	1	2
Bronze	0	1	0
Medal rank	134	129	123
NOC budget 2017 in thousand US\$	9,633.76	1,359.47	404.84
Share of government funding	92.59%	81.26%	5.22%
NOC staff	150	18	14+4
Number of interviewees	14	25	13

World Bank, Olympic database, financial reports of the NOCs and fieldwork notes.

that the outcome of governance transplants is best studied by examining how the transplant has impacted political practices beyond mere formal compliance. Accordingly, the case studies focus also on the *budgeting process for the NOCs*, and *their role in domestic sport policy-making*.

## Sampling and data collection

The data used here come from two main sources: official documents from governments and NOCs, and expert semi-structured interviews. During three field trips to Botswana, Guatemala and Sri Lanka, we were able to collect both documents and interview 51 key informants. Documents included the sports legal regulatory framework of the country, including primary and secondary legislation, as well as any past and existing sport public policy strategy; policy and strategic documents of NOCs in relation to their collaboration with public authorities were also collected and analyzed.

We followed a purposeful sampling strategy to select interviewees [(33), p. 70–71], which included a combination of maximum variation, and snowball sampling [(33), p. 70–71]. Participants were approached and selected because of the information they could provide about the relationship between the NOC and public authorities in the country. Sampling, therefore, was designed to recruit participants including both NOC and government representatives, but also representatives of sports federations, athletes and/or coaches, in order to have a wider view from stakeholders; this was also supplemented with a decision to include participants from local media and academics, where possible, that could

TABLE 2 Interviews' sample composition.

Stakeholder category	Guatemala	Botswana	Sri Lanka	Total
NOC	5	5	5	15
Governmental body				
Ministry	1	2	4	7
Sport commission/agency	1	3	N/A	4
Other public authorities	1			1
Sport federations	1	4	1	6
Other sport stakeholders				
Athletes		7	1	8
Coaches		1		1
Other	3			3
Media		2	1	3
Independent academics	1	1	1	3
Total number of interviewees	13	25	13	51

provide a more independent point of view. Participants from external stakeholders were especially important to contrast and triangulate the versions of the NOCs and the governments. Table 2, lists the final composition of the sample, whereas Table 3 provides information about the interviews that are cited in this article. This research followed a strict protocol for data collection, analysis and storage and management. The research received ethical clearance of Loughborough University Research Ethics Review Sub-Committee under reference number HPSC–2495. As participants were granted the right to anonymity, extreme care has been taken to ensure their identities cannot be traced, as can be seen below.

It is necessary to acknowledge that in all three cases senior administrators from the NOCs acted as gatekeepers and facilitators, providing access to the NOC and facilitating local contacts. Whereas, this needs to be acknowledged as a limitation for the sake of openness and transparency, the work of those gatekeepers did not prevent access to any stakeholder or participant that was deemed necessary to ensure as representative a sample as possible. Quite to the contrary, the NOCs were open and facilitated the research team's work during their fieldwork visits. Moreover, the inclusion of independent participants ensured we were able to minimize the impact of this limitation.

Written documents were used to inform process tracing of the NOC-government collaborations that are analyzed in each of the case studies. They were also used to inform the design of the interview guides. Since the main objective of this research was to analyse the collaboration (or lack of) between NOCs and national governments, the design of the interview guides built on the methodological recommendations of the academic literature on collaborative governance (34, 35) to allow for structured focused comparison (31). This body of literature recommends that when comparing cases of collaborative governance, focus should be threefold: (1) The socio-political and institutional

TABLE 3 Interviews cited in the text.

Interview code	Interviewee's position	Country	Location	Date
Interview 1	Official, Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sport and Cultural Development	Botswana	Gaborone	28/03/2019
Interview 2	Senior director NOC SL	Sri Lanka	Colombo	23/07/2019
Interview 3	Sports coach	Botswana	Gaborone	01/04/2019
Interview 4	Guatemala NOC senior officer	Guatemala	Ciudad de Guatemala	10/04/2019
Interview 5	Guatemala NOC senior officer	Guatemala	Ciudad de Guatemala	08/04/2019
Interview 6	Top government official, Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka	Colombo	24/07/2019
Interview 7	Botswana National Sports Commission Official	Botswana	Gaborone	28/03/2019
Interview 8	Official, Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sport and Cultural Development	Botswana	Gaborone	28/03/2019
Interview 9	Former NOC SL board member	Sri Lanka	Colombo	22/07/2019
Interview 10	Advisor to Ministry of Telecommunication, Foreign Employment and Sports	Sri Lanka	Colombo	24/07/2019
Interview 11	Junior administration officer, NOC SL	Sri Lanka	Colombo	24/07/2019
Interview 12	Guatemala NOC board member	Guatemala	Ciudad de Guatemala	08/04/2019
Interview 13	Senior NOC SL official	Sri Lanka	Colombo	22/07/2019
Interview 14	Board member CONADER	Guatemala	Ciudad de Guatemala	10/04/2019
Interview 15	Board member, BNSC	Botswana	Gaborone	28/03/2019
Interview 16	Board member Botswana Table Tennis Association	Botswana	Gaborone	29/03/2019
Interview 17	Board member Botswana NOC	Botswana	Gaborone	27/03/2019
Interview 18	Former senior government official	Sri Lanka	Colombo	23/07/2019

context, (2) the drivers and dynamics of the collaborative process, and (3) the process outcomes. The interview guides, therefore, were designed to cover these three areas. The first part of the interview guide aimed at understanding the legal and institutional framework of the country's sports system. This was also vastly informed by the written documents, mostly primary and secondary legislation. The second and third parts of the interview revolved around collaboration between NOCs and the government. This was more open ended, as interviewees were asked to name what they thought were the three main areas of collaboration. Within each one of those areas the questions then addressed the dynamics and outcomes, covering the origin of the initiative, sources of funding and human resources, decision-making and implementation, as well as perceived quality of the outcomes. Interviews were, however, semi-structured in nature, which allowed the research teams to focus on the policy collaborations and the structural design according to the level of seniority, knowledge and expertise of each interviewee.

Interviews were transcribed and analyzed following the well established stages suggested by Braun and Clarke [(36), p. 87] for thematic analysis: (1) Familiarizing with the data; (2) Generating initial codes; (3) Searching for themes; (4) Reviewing the themes; (5) Refining and naming the themes. Data gathered in Botswana and Sri Lanka was originally in English and analyzed in that language. Data gathered in Guatemala was originally in Spanish, though. To ensure a strong reliability of the analysis, it was analyzed in the original language (rather than being translated and then analyzed). Coding of the data from the three countries

was done by the same member of the research team, who is a native Spanish speaker, as well as a fluent English speaker, for practical reasons but also to ensure a homogenous coding process. In order to provide some structure to the analysis, code generation combined a deductive and inductive approach. Informed by the literature on collaborative governance and our framework on policy transplants, three main areas of interest were pre-defined as codes, namely the institutional and policy context, and the participation of the NOC in policy initiatives. Within this wider framework, the material of each country was inductively coded considering the country's particularities. These coding and theme building decisions were intensely discussed within the research team. In the presentation of the findings below this results in sub-themes that are aligned with each one of the country case studies.

## Translating governance transplants in the Global South

We present now the findings of the case studies. This is done thematically and comparing the three countries under each one of the themes. First, we discuss the domestic policy and historical context in which the case studies are situated. Second, we analyse the legal and regulatory framework in our case studies, as this represents the formal compliance with the governance transplant. The third theme discusses funding of the NOCs and the extent to which this might condition

their autonomy, hence shaping the outcome of the governance transplant. The final section analyses the participation of NOCs in national sport policy-making.

## Domestic policy contexts and legacies in the case studies

**Botswana.** The Republic of Botswana gained independence on 30 September 1966. Botswana is a parliamentary democracy and one of the most stable countries in Africa. The Botswana National Olympic Committee (BNOC) was established in 1978 and recognized by the IOC in 1980. In contrast to other African countries, sport and sport development did not figure prominently in government policies until the mid-1990's. Since then, the government started to adopt a much more active role. After the mining of diamonds heavily improved the economic situation, the government became the biggest sponsor of elite and grassroots sports (37).

**Guatemala.** Guatemala is an independent republic since 1847 with an eventful history. Regarding sports, Guatemala was one of the pioneering countries in the diffusion of Olympic sports in Latin America during the 1920's. Moreover, the country had a domestic legacy of sports autonomy because after the Guatemalan revolution of 1944, the first democratic government promoted the autonomy of several social institutions. Hence, in 1945, the Guatemala Autonomous Sports Confederation (CDAG) was formed. Sports autonomy was, however, abolished by the juntas, which ruled between 1954 and 1984.

**Sri Lanka.** Sri Lanka is a country with complex economic, socio-political, religious and ethnic social fabric. The country gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1948 but it was only in 1972 when the country became a republic, adopted its first own constitution and was renamed as the Democratic and Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. The country suffered a civil war for almost 30 years, ending only in 2009, which served to highly politicize every societal sphere. While the Sri Lanka National Olympic Committee (NOC SL) was founded in 1937, national sport culture is dominated by cricket, a non-Olympic sport.

## Formal and institutional compliance with sports autonomy

### *Botswana: Tensions between the NOC and the National Sports Commission*

The legal framework for sport in Botswana consists primarily of the Botswana National Sports Commission Act of 2014. The Act created the Botswana National Sports Commission (BNSC), which reflects the governmental ambition

to play a central role in national sport policies. This is not well-received by stakeholders in the sports sector:

[The 2014 Act] is very bad ... it is a very bad piece of legislation, because it took over the powers from the national federations in relation to the Sports Council. So previously, we would have seven positions [in the Sports Council Board] that national federations could elect six out of seven. So, it was really a body elected by us, by the sport organizations. But now most of the board members of the BNSC are appointed by the government. The balance of power has completely shifted [with the new 2014 Act], and the federations now only elect two out of the eleven members of the [BNSC] board. And, I feel some of the provisions in the Act also were not favorable to sports, not really. (Interview 16)

The Sports Minister holds wide-ranging powers over the BNSC, in particular with respect to appointing key office holders and terminating a board member's term in office. Moreover, the minister may also give the BNSC board "written directions, of a general or specific nature" (BNSC Act of 2014, Art. 6). The BNSC has a very wide remit as it is entrusted with regulating sport "at all levels," and with providing "leadership and guidance on sport development" (BNSC Act of 2014, Art. 4). In contrast, the 2014 Act barely mentions the BNOC. Besides the call to cooperate with the BNOC in sport development and participation in international competitions, the Act assigns the BNOC the responsibility "for dealing with Olympic matters" (BNSC Act of 2014, Art. 2). Although Botswanan government officials are quite aware of the IOC's provision on NOC autonomy, there is a tendency to perceive the BNOC as a government agency similar to the BNSC:

It is a complex relation, even somehow overlapping [...] In a sense, you can say the BNOC is the sub-set of BNSC. (Interview 8)

So, we do have two agencies there implementing sport policy, we have the National Sports Commission, and we have the National Olympic Committee, they are doing sport development programs on behalf of the Ministry. (Interview 1)

As the BNOC is expanding its activities, the relationship between BNSC and BNOC is becoming rather complex resulting in organizational rivalries. Therefore, both organizations perceived the need to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU):

It was decided that it was a good thing to do because whether you like it or not, when we have two entities that serve sport, that serve to develop sport, that serve to promote



sport, it is not good if they go differently and not coming together [...]. So let us synchronize the way we do things, we will probably make some savings bringing these committees together, the human capital together, the budgets together [...]. (Interview 15)

The MoU is a relatively short but ambitious document. The MoU considers merging several structures of both organizations, having joint disciplinary committees and auditing practices. The MoU also mentions the development of a joint national strategy. During fieldwork, it seemed just a matter of weeks having the MoU signed:

With the [Botswana National Sport] commission, in principle we have already agreed to a memorandum of understanding between the two parties, what is outstanding now is for the boards to sign, but otherwise the principle of what and how we are cooperating, that has already been agreed (Interview 17).

However, it took some time for the MoU to be finally adopted in November 2020 (38), which clearly signals the resistance to enhance cooperation between the two institutions, despite the positive words of the interviewees. The delay in reaching this agreement was due to several reasons, including a change in the Sports Ministry and the resistance from the BNSC who feared a potential loss of political control over the sport sector.

### **Guatemala: A very strong regulatory and institutional framework**

After the rule of several juntas, the democratic constitution of 1985 reinstated sports autonomy in Guatemala. Article 91 of the Constitution provides the base for the financial autonomy of the Guatemalan National Olympic Committee (GNOC), and Article 92 stipulates sports autonomy [authors' own translation]:

Article 91. On the budgetary allocation for sport. It is the duty of the State to encourage and promote the practice of physical education and sport. In order to ensure that, there shall be a budgetary provision of no <3% of the Ordinary General Budget of the state dedicated to sport.

Article 92. Autonomy of sport. It is recognized and guaranteed the autonomy of federated sport through its governing bodies, *Confederación Deportiva Autónoma de Guatemala* and Guatemala National Olympic Committee, both of which have their own legal personality and their own assets. These organizations are hereby exonerated from paying all type of taxes and administrative fees.

Moreover, Article 170 of National Sports Act of 1997 declares that the Olympic Charter takes precedence over any

national legal text. The Act further specifies budget allocation and distribution of competencies in sport policy. Accordingly, GNOC receives an annual allocation of 0.3% of the state budget; this means that 10% of the public sport budget is managed by the GNOC.

The Act pursues a holistic approach for the national sport system and defines clear responsibilities for governmental and non-governmental organizations. The responsibility for elite and professional competitive sport, defined as “the autonomous sphere,” falls into the responsibilities of the autonomous body for federated sport in the country (*Confederación Deportiva Autónoma de Guatemala* – CDAG) and of the GNOC. CDAG is responsible for coordinating and structuring the efforts of national sport federations in athlete identification and development, while GNOC is responsible for preparation and development for high performance sport. At present GNOC and CDAG are two separate organizations as the restrictive legislative framework does not facilitate a merger. However, the two organizations have developed a framework agreement for collaboration and shared services.

### **Sri Lanka: Heavy politicization in the sport system**

Sport in Sri Lanka is regulated through the Law 25/1973, which also recognized the NOC of Sri Lanka (NOC SL), later amended by the Sports (amendment) Act no. 47 of 1993. The 1973 Act is clearly interventionist reflecting the socialist ideology dominating after the country's independence. The 1973 Sports Law provides ample powers to the government and in particular to the Sports Minister and the Director of Sports, a ministerial position below the minister but with major responsibilities. The Minister of Sport has the power to dissolve a national sport federation, or to replace the elected president and executive committee members with an interim management committee. The government makes regular use of this option, and some interviewees suggested that the government might be trying to control NOC SL “through the back door” (Interview 9). Yet, the government justifies such interventions by financial misconduct within the federations (Interview 6). The 1993 amendment of the 1973 Sports Law included some more comprehensive provisions in relation to the NOC SL, mostly in relation to term limits in office, and the need for the annual accounts to be audited by the Auditor General of Sri Lanka.

The highly interventionist legal framework clearly contradicts IOC stipulations on sports autonomy. Therefore, a legal reform has been a major strategic priority for the IOC and NOC SL, in particular since the government released even tighter regulations for sport associations since 2010 (Interview 2). Two meetings between the IOC and delegations of Sri Lanka government and NOC SL officials in Lausanne resulted in some minor changes in 2016 through ministerial regulations. However, the crucial issue of the power of the Sports Minister to dissolve federations' executive committees and appoint interim committees was not addressed. Governmental efforts

to comprehensively reform Sri Lanka sports governance never materialized due to multiple changes of government (Interviews 9, 18). Another “cordial” meeting between IOC and Sri Lanka government officials in Lausanne in June 2019 (Interview 10) also failed to produce results due to yet another change of government following elections (Personal correspondence with NOC senior board member, 07/08/2020). This failed legislative reform is characteristic for sport policy-making in Sri Lanka where a constant change of ministers impedes the development of long-term agendas (39). Recent events in the country that included not only COVID-19 but also major economic, social and political crisis have meant no progress has been made in this respect.

## Provision of public funding

### *Botswana: Heavy governmental dependence*

Much like the entire Botswanan sport sector, the BNOC is strongly dependent on government funding:

Yes, we receive money from the government. We receive an administration grant on an annual basis for our running costs, and then we receive a games grant that depends on the years that we have games [...]. On a non-games year, the contribution of the government to our overall budget would be approximately 55% or so, but during a games year, the figure goes anything from that 55 to up to about 70–80%. (Interview 17)

However, the government does not impose excessive strings to the grants for the BNOC, nor sets any targets for sports performance. Nevertheless, the annual budgetary process is a source of tensions. Government grants are given to the BNOC based on an annual draft budget request submitted to the Ministry of Sports. During that process, the Ministry of Sport, the Treasury or the Parliament might question some of the BNOC budget lines. It is in that process where personal relations with Permanent Secretaries, desk officers or even the Minister are important to iron out any problems, as recognized by interviewees from both sides.

### *Guatemala: Public funding for sport shined in the constitution*

The specific Guatemalan legal framework grants the GNOC a very significant fixed budget, which can be spent according to the budgetary provisions designed by the GNOC itself. Accordingly, most the GNOC budget (93%) results from the government’s constitutional budgetary provision. The substantial financial resources allow the GNOC to play a very active role. However, the external auditing process is very detailed and exhaustive, which reflects Guatemala’s efforts to mitigate corruption. The GNOC tries to act as model

organization and pursues a ‘management by process’ approach (Interview 5).

### *Sri Lanka: Prioritizing financial independence from the government*

In order to avoid the governmental interference related to resource dependencies, the NOC SL, especially under the presidency of Hemasiri Fernando (1997–2018), prioritized financial independence:

We are self-financed and not dependent of the government funding for our activities. We try to avoid as much as we can to get government money in our accounts, so for example now we ask them to organize and pay travel expenses for athletes directly, rather than giving the money to us to do the bookings (Interview 2).

Accordingly, NOC SL’s budget is the smallest of the three countries under study in this article, and it is also the budget with least government funding (5%). NOC SL raises its own income through different commercial operations such as the commercial exploitation of sport facilities, and also receives important income from the IOC through Olympic Solidarity (Interview 2). The financial independence implies limited resources and restricts the activities of the NOC SL. The largest expenditure area is training and education, in which NOC SL sees itself as a pioneer in south Asia (Interview 13).

## Participation of the NOC in national sport policy-making

### *Botswana: Expansion of NOC activities but limited influence due to organizational rivalries*

The Botswana National Sports Commission Act of 2014 shrines BNSC as key government agency in sport, but crucially it does not restrict the BNOC’s remit. With the help of IOC grants, the BNOC has expanded its activities, which has resulted in organizational rivalries and duplication of efforts.

The Long-Term Athlete Development Framework (LTADF) is an ambitious initiative of the BNOC to improve athlete identification and development from an early age. Yet, according to the BNSC Act of 2014, sport development is a responsibility of the BNSC. According to BNOC representatives, the LTADF emerged simply as an opportunity thanks to Olympic Solidarity funding. External observers, however, suggested that the BNOC was motivated by the deficiencies of BNSC’s existing athlete development programs.

Well, you know, the Commission is doing something very similar to that [the LTADF], but the problem with it is that I do not think they understand it. So, they will not take the athletes through the stages of a long term development

program. They will have group of athletes who comes every weekend or two or whatever, to come and play, and they develop from that, you know [...]. They try to identify talent from that. But it's not structured. (Interview 3)

The LTADF represent an ambitious and very detailed initiative:

This document outlines the principles, best practices and considerations for Botswana Sport Associations and other relevant sport organizations in Botswana, to design and implement scientifically sound and practical programs and activities for participants at all ages and levels, for productive and rewarding participation and competition in sport and physical activity in Botswana. (40).

The initiative aimed to bring together all stakeholders in Botswana sport and should have been implemented in collaboration with the BNSC. Although the project found ministerial support, the LTADF has never taken off due to organizational rivalries with the BNSC:

The long-term athlete development program, it's a brilliant program. But what I can tell you is we made a mistake of identifying it with an institution. That should not have been encouraged. It should not be owned by the NOC [...] It should not be owned by Commission, either. It is a Botswana framework. Because if the country pays for that, at the end of the day, who are we celebrating? We are celebrating a Botswana athlete; we are not celebrating a Commission athlete or an NOC athlete. [...] So, I will say that is how I perceive that it was not accepted, but I do not think anyone just rejected it (Interview 7).

Another area of tensions between the BNOC and BNSC is the preparation of teams for international competitions. The Olympic Charter stipulates that the BNOC is responsible for selecting and registering teams for Olympic competitions. The BNSC has been traditionally responsible for international single sport competitions, such as world championships or African championships. Tensions have arisen after the Association of National Olympic Committees of Africa (ANOCA) took over the responsibility for organizing the African Games, which implied that the BNOC became responsible for sending and heading the Botswana delegation to the African Games causing strong tensions between BNOC and BNSC. Finally, BNSC and BNOC reached an understanding to collaborate in sending the Botswana team to the 2019 African Games hosted by Morocco:

Botswana National Olympic Committee (BNOC) chief executive officer Tuelo Serufho announced that the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sport and Culture Development is investing BWP 18 million (€1.4 million) before the

team leaves for Morocco for the Games due to begin on August 19. The BNOC is also working together for the first time with Botswana National Sport Commission to coordinate the team for the Games scheduled to end on August 31. 'For the first time, the Association of National Olympic Committees in Africa and African Union (AU) Sport Council are delivering the Games together' Serufho told local newspaper Mmegi (41).

The episode illustrates the regular organizational tensions as well as their usual solution. Despite tensions and clear political and turf wars, both organizations maintain a working relationship and are normally able to achieve a working compromise for the sake of Botswana sport.

### ***Guatemala – Strong and powerful influence of a strong NOC***

While the legal framework grants the GNOC substantial influence on high-performance sport, the GNOC is able to shape wider sport policies (beyond high-performance sport) in a more comprehensive manner through its participation in the National Council for Physical Education and Recreation (*Consejo Nacional de la Educación Física y la Recreación* – CONADER). CONADER is an inter-institutional coordinating body established in the National Sports Act. CONADER is formed by five persons: The president of the Directorate General for Physical Education (*Dirección General de Educación Física*–DIGEF, a governmental department) representing the Physical Education System, the presidents of both GNOC and CDAG (non-governmental organizations), the Deputy Minister of Culture and Sport and a person appointed by the President of the Republic. CONADER represents the forum in which Guatemala sport policy and its strategic plans are designed and adopted:

The legislative framework defines CONADER as the coordinating institution in charge of proposing national sport policy [...] Thus, we could be seen as the top authority in the sport system, but only to some extent because decisions need to be taken by consensus as they then need to be observed and implemented by those around the table (Interview 14)

Regardless of unanimity rule, GNOC and CDAG tend to dominate the discussions because they seem to be the institutions with a more elaborated strategic vision:

The current leaders of the GNOC and the CDAG have more experience and have been in their positions for longer. They bring a clear strategic vision and this is very positive for us as a system. The governmental side, however, experiences far more changes, so it is difficult for them. (Interview 14)

CONADER solidifies in this way the role of the GNOC as key actor in national sport policy-making communicating on equal footing with the government.

Since the NOCs are supposed to serve the diffusion of Olympic sports by influencing national education programs, the GNOC has also assumed a very proactive role as its Olympic Education Academy collaborates with different government departments:

Our mandate, according to the Olympic Charter, is to disseminate Olympic values through the population. Therefore, we are completely aware that having good relations with governmental departments will help us to achieve those objectives. We can be much more powerful and reach out to more people, especially around the country, that if we were just on our own. Therefore, as we seek to reach the general population, we make a conscious strategic decision to set up collaborations with governmental departments and ministries. I would say this is especially true in the area of education, but we seek to cooperate with any department that can help us [...] (Interview 4)

The GNOC formalized these collaborations through the signature of a Framework Agreement with the Ministry of Education in 2018 for a period of 3 years. The Framework Agreement stipulated that collaboration was focused on design, funding, implementation, and evaluation of specific programmes.

### ***Sri Lanka – NOC Self-restraint, political interference and instrumentalization***

Sri Lanka's sport system is heavily politicized by means of government funding and regulations. This politicization is also reflected in personal and political ties between government and the sports sector (39). Thus, the former president of NOC SL, Hemasiri Fernando, was a Secretary in the Ministry of Postal Services, and Chef de Cabinet to the country's Prime Minister before being elected to chair the NOC. After the end of his tenure in 2018, Fernando was appointed as Defense Secretary. In such a heavily politicized setting, sport administrators inevitably end up tangled in complex networks of personal and political relationships. The collaboration between NOC SL and governmental departments depends either on good personal relations or the political capital of NOC SL leadership. The politicization of sport becomes evident in the selection of national teams to participate in international competitions and the bidding for sport event hosting.

Sri Lanka has implemented a very specific procedure for national team selection that gives very strong powers to the government, with the sports minister supervising and signing off the list of athletes for international competitions. This very interventionist policy is related to a historical incident. After two cricket selectors controversially picked themselves to play

ahead of other cricketers for a 1968 tour of England, the tour was eventually canceled by ministerial intervention. The incident stirred major controversies and is also cited as a reason for the interventionist character of the 1973 Sports Law (42). Despite the time that has passed, current government officials justified the politicized selection process with the difficult legacy of the 30-year long civil war. Political control is supposed to prevent athletes from displaying symbols in support of the country's Tamil minority (Interview 10).

Hence, whereas the selection of athletes and teams is usually the privilege of national sport federations, in Sri Lanka the Sports Ministry appoints a National Selection Committee, comprised of Secretary General and President of the NOC, and three other "independent" members. For major competitions, the National Selection Committee scrutinizes the suitability of each individual athlete selected by sport federations. Eventually, the Sports Ministry has the power to veto athletes' selection, a power that has been used at times (Interview 2). The politicized selection process is a source of persistent conflict between government and NOC SL. Interviewees claimed that, in the past, some athletes employed political ties to get selected for international competitions (Interview 11), although this could not be verified independently.

The hosting of sports events also demonstrates the strained and complex relationship between government and NOC SL. Sri Lanka organized the South Asian Games twice (1991 and 2006) and the South Asian Beach Games once (2011), which were characterized as "small, manageable games that fit the limited capabilities of the country" (Interview 18). However, the government decided to bid for the Commonwealth Games in 2018, which qualify as a mega sport event. One interviewee described the bid as "purely a propaganda project" of the government. The NOC SL and the national sport federations had serious doubts about the project's feasibility and feared negative effects on Sri Lanka's developing economy. However, according to several interviewees, non-cooperation on behalf of the NOC SL "was not an option." Due to the institutional framework of international sport, the NOC SL was inevitably a key actor in the project, which implied close cooperation with top government officials. The government funded the preparation of the bid, whereas the NOC SL provided its expertise in event organization. The bid was eventually lost to Australia, which many of the interviewees deemed as the more optimal outcome for Sri Lanka. This case, again, demonstrates how NOC SL had to follow political decisions even if these were considered to be negative for sport in the country and for the organization itself.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

In this article, we have argued that the IOC imposes sports autonomy—as a governance concept, which originated in the Global North—on countries from the Global South that have



sought to be part of the Olympic Movement. However, in accordance with policy transfer research, we have tried to show that the coercive transfer of a governance transplant has its limits. With regard to sports autonomy, we have characterized political self-restraint and a strong civil society as crucial prerequisites for a successful transplantation. If these prerequisites are absent, the governance transplant is translated in accordance with path-dependent domestic institutions and practices. Translation means here that the transplant is adapted and customized to make it compatible with existing local political practices (22). Our case study evidence supports these ideas.

The full or unrestricted transfer of the sports autonomy *via* constitutional provisions in Guatemala, which could be characterized as “gold plating” from an IOC perspective, results from the fact that the country had a domestic legacy of sports autonomy. Accordingly, elite sport development is largely given into the hands of autonomous (non-governmental) organizations. In Guatemala, the GNOC is actually an agenda-setter for the government in sport policy-making. Accordingly, our case studies demonstrate also in case of a good “fit” with domestic legacies, the governance transplant can have very strong influences on domestic institutions and practices.

A note on the case of Guatemala, though. During the time that took the review of this article after its first submission, the GNOC has been involved in a major battle with the government of the country as a result of the latest GNOC elections. Actually, the IOC has suspended the membership of GNOC (43), which means that Guatemala is, for the moment, outside of the Olympic Movement and, if this were to be maintained, the country could not compete in the Olympic Games. The conflict refers to the latest GNOC presidential elections. The incumbent president, Gerardo Aguirre, sought re-election, but faced a competing candidate, thought to be supported by the government of the country (44, 45).

At the time of writing, the latest development is that Guatemala's Constitutional Court intervened in the legal dispute, finding in favor of the competing candidate (44). The GNOC has accused some Constitutional Court justices of being politically biased toward the government and not upholding the constitution's provisions on sports autonomy (46). The intervention of the Constitutional Court in the GNOC elections, and the whole legal process is vehemently opposed by the current GNOC leadership and its president, Gerardo Aguirre, who accuse the country's government of willing to control federated sport and the GNOC through the back door (46). In response to this, the IOC (43) decided to suspend Guatemala considering that the interventions of both the government and the country's Constitutional Court were a breach of the fundamental principle of autonomy. Membership suspension is the IOC's measure of last resort to protect the autonomy of sport, and it is often used to protect NOCs from political intervention of governments [(34); see also (9)]. In a way, these

latest developments could question some of the conclusions from our research in relation to the strong autonomy of the GNOC, and how the institutional framework of the country empowers the GNOC in the Guatemala sport system. However, it can also be argued that, actually, the government of Guatemala finds so difficult to politically interfere in the GNOC that it had to resort to extreme and very controversial measures, such as intervening in the GNOC electoral process. Furthermore, even in this case, it is not being easy for the government to influence the electoral process because the IOC and the NOC have still tools to enforce autonomy. At the end of the day, despite the efforts, Gerardo Aguirre still considers himself to be the GNOC president at the time of submitting this article, even if the country has seen its IOC membership suspended and the rival candidate has declared himself to be the rightful president of the GNOC. On the other hand, this could also be seen as a test whereby the GNOC and its president, Gerardo Aguirre, are testing how autonomous the GNOC is, and how far they can go with exerting political influence in the country's sport system (45), even when facing heavily interventionist impulses from the government. For our purpose in this article, it was necessary to mention these latest developments for the sake of transparency, but also to reflect on the need for further research.

Whereas these latest developments might introduce some nuances, they do not challenge fundamentally one of our main conclusions, though: the stark difference in the degree of autonomy between the case of the GNOC and the NOCs of Botswana and Sri Lanka. Indeed, without the IOC stipulations on sports autonomy, the NOCs of Botswana and Sri Lanka would very likely be part of a state controlled and/or strongly politicized sport system. Notwithstanding the acceptance of the transplant (with different forms of translation in these countries), persistent misfits are visible. In Botswana, a stable democracy, sports autonomy contradicts the government's ambition to play an active role in domestic sport policy-making. Thus, tensions between the government's sport agency and the autonomous NOC occur regularly although they are usually solved on the base of a shared commitment to national sport development. In contrast, in Sri Lanka's politicized post-civil war society, the idea of sports autonomy does not figure, which results in self-restraint and marginalization of the NOC. There is little evidence for a better integration of the governance transplant into domestic sport policy-making (Table 4).

The case of Sri Lanka comes also with broader implications as it raises the question why IOC practices a rather conciliatory approach to the enforcement of sports autonomy, which differs very much from the one adopted by the *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* (FIFA) (8, 47), or actually the more recent decision on Guatemala. Even though Sri Lanka failed to amend its domestic legal framework in accordance with the IOC's stipulation on sports autonomy, Sri Lanka got not suspended from Olympic competitions. We claim that the conciliatory approach is indicative of the IOC's fundamental

TABLE 4 The autonomy of the National Olympic Committees.

	Botswana	Guatemala	Sri Lanka
Domestic context and legacies	Strong government ambitions in sport policy-making	Strong legacy of sport autonomy	Strong interventionist legacy, politicization due to civil war
Formal compliance	Formal acceptance of autonomy but unclear division of responsibility between government agency and NOC	Sports autonomy adopted in constitution	Legal framework does not respect sports autonomy
Provision of public funding	Strong dependence on government funding but limited government interference in budgeting	Fixed provision of public funding specified in the constitution, autonomous budgeting by the NOC	Prioritization of financial independence in order to avoid political interference
Participation in sport policy-making	Expansion of NOC activities but limited influence due to organizational rivalries	Strong influence of NOC	Self-restraint, political interference and instrumentalization
Translation of the governance transplant	Iron out tension	Full transfer or “gold-plating”	Marginalization

enforcement dilemma. While the IOC controls the access to the Olympics, the Olympic Movement's long-term viability in political, economic and social terms rests on the successful diffusion of its specific sports model, which includes cooperation with national governments around the world. The difference with football and FIFA is that, while football migrated with apparent ease all over the world due to its simple rules and low infrastructure needs, diffusing Olympic sports requires support and investments by public authorities in different policy domains. Moreover, these requirements can change as the recent modernization efforts of the IOC show. The IOC aims to increase the attractiveness of the Olympic Games for younger audiences by including formerly non-Olympic youth sports, while getting rid of traditional sports, which no longer appeal to audiences. Such changes imply that public authorities face some uncertainty whether their investments will pay off. Hence, in some respects, the IOC faces similar enforcement problems as other transnational regulators, which operate in diverse national settings and remain dependent on public authorities (10). Strict enforcement of a governance transplant might risk losing the support of public authorities and thus contradict the diffusion aims of the IOC. Actually, the IOC has greatly modulated its emphasis on sports autonomy lately (9). The departure from strict enforcement of sports autonomy indicates that the IOC is aware of its dependence on public authorities in diverse political and social contexts.

The broader theoretical relevance of the fate of sports autonomy in the Global South is that international sport represents a transnational policy domain where asymmetrical transfer dynamics from the Global North to the Global South might come to an end. The political and organizational center of the Olympic Movement has moved from the West toward Asia, Middle East and Eastern Europe. As governance transplant, which is likely to face substantial misfits with national legacies and political ambitions, sports autonomy might be ultimately at stake (28). Hence, in the not-too-distant future, the Global

South might use its increasing influence in international sports to get rid of the obligation to accept governance transplants in exchange for market access.

However, before making bold claims about the future of sports autonomy, it is important to emphasize the limitations of our comparative case study design. Our small sample size does not allow to fully explore potential sources of misfit between the governance transplant and local path-dependences and configurations of formal and informal institutions. Future research on sports autonomy as governance transplant should cover more cases sampled on the base of a larger set of potential explanatory variables.

## Data availability statement

The datasets presented in this article are not readily available because the raw and anonymized data supporting this article can only be made available upon express authorization of the participants. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to the corresponding author.

## Ethics statement

This study, involving human participants, was reviewed and approved by Loughborough University Ethics Review Subcommittee. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

## Author contributions

BG undertook data collection in the three fieldwork visits. Both authors contributed to conception and design of the study, and to the thematic analysis of the coded data; they contributed equally to drafting and editing the manuscript, and

to manuscript revision. Both authors read, and approved the submitted version.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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# Challenges associated with implementing anti-doping policy and programs in Africa

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Concerns regarding the capability of the International Olympic Committee to address doping in sport catalyzed the formation of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) in 1999. In its establishment phase, WADA sought geopolitical legitimacy and support from governments (including non-Western states) for financing and acceptance. Africa was not considered during WADA's creation, relegating African states to a passive role in the global anti-doping program, and yet is still subject to the strict compliance requirements for WADA's global policy. African countries face challenges establishing anti-doping support structures and implementing the universal policy, including competing macro-level policy demands that favor addressing legacies of colonialism and human capacity development. To develop robust anti-doping support structures, African nations must spearhead anti-doping initiatives by leveraging existing infrastructure and encouraging collaborations between NADOs such that capacity can be built for policy implementation.

## KEYWORDS

African sport, clean sport, neo-colonialism, sport governance, sport policy

## Introduction

On November 5, 1998, the members of the Monitoring Group of the Council of Europe's Anti-Doping Convention held an extraordinary meeting in Strasbourg, France, to prepare proposals for the 1999 World Conference on Doping in Sport and recount recent events in the doping sphere. This included discussions on the Festina affair in France where large quantities of the endurance-enhancing drug erythropoietin were uncovered by custom agents on route to a professional cycling team, the case of Chinese swimmers' attempted effort to bring human growth hormone into Australia during the World Swimming Championships, and deficient doping control procedures in Italian football (1). In sum, there were concerns that doping was out of control and would erode public confidence in sport. Though the Convention was open to signatories outside Europe, only two non-European States (Canada and Australia) had signed, out of a total of 41 countries, by the end of 1998 (2). While South Africa honored the invitation, no other African country was invited. Though the Supreme Council of Sport in Africa was enjoined in the development of WADA after the conference, like most non-European countries, Africa's input was limited in implementing the conference's recommendations. Such developments suggest that the African perspective was not considered during the anti-doping policy

formation processes. Yet, there are strict compliance requirements to mandatory aspects of a seemingly Western-European formulated anti-doping policy, to which African signatories to the WADA Code (the rules that harmonize anti-doping policy globally) are bound. It is salient to mention that academic studies of anti-doping policy have similarly been dominated by a Western-European perspective. Therefore, we contend that it is critical to understand anti-doping policy practices from other regions, in our case, Africa. In this policy brief article, we discuss Africa's peripheral role in forming WADA and the potential impact on anti-doping policy acceptance in the continent. We further examine issues that position sport initiatives in Africa as peripheral and illuminate the challenges associated with establishing anti-doping support structures and implementing anti-doping policy and programs. In doing so, we argue that the slow progress in developing vigorous anti-doping programs in Africa is due to neo-colonial factors and African governments' priorities that render sport and anti-doping initiatives inconsequential, perhaps a perspective underappreciated by Western-European counterparts. Actionable recommendations to build anti-doping capacity through leveraging existing structures and establishing collaborations with various actors are provided.

## Africa's peripheral role in the creation of WADA

The failure to adequately incorporate Africa in the activities preceding the formation of WADA was myopic and arguably led to decisions that undermined WADA's legitimacy in Africa. Executive decisions to create WADA were made predominantly from a western-centric standpoint (3), yet compliance was sought beyond Europe. This fueled the notion of neo-colonialism, especially in Africa. This apparent imposition of the Eurocentric version of sport (including anti-doping) may be perceived as cultural imperialism and colonization (4). African states had their unique experiences with sport which they participated in long before colonization. For example, wrestling was popular in Africa with organized intervillage or interkingdom competitions accompanied by various rituals officiated by elders (5). These physical contests were important social events and drew audiences from miles around with male competitors training with fathers and other close relatives far in advance in hopes of "throwing" their opponents and, thus, being deemed an asset to family and community (6). Wrestling was central to the acquisition of manhood (6) and developed to the extent that makes it comparable with the Olympic Games (7).

Though the organization and governance of modern sport might seem foreign, the nature of activities engaged in are not any different from those of the pre-colonial generation. Performance and winning competitions were of utmost

importance in both instances. Yet, ill-will had no place and credit was given for the exhibition of fairness (5). To gain credit for their kin-group, wrestlers sometimes took to "doping" by swallowing stimulants both before and during the match (5). Such practices were not against the "Spirit of sport" but were in fact part of the sport's milieu. Indeed, when anti-doping was introduced in Senegal, West Africa, in 2015, a local wrestling champion, Sa Thies equated the imposition of doping control as an attempt to modernize wrestling, when he stated, "We don't need doping tests in our sport. Wrestling isn't a white man's business" (8). Beyond wrestling, other sports popular in Africa had practices that challenged Western and Eurocentric conceptualization of doping. For instance, the use of "jujus" and "jars" (e.g., talismans) was a common and revered form of spiritual doping that was prevalent in football in West Africa (9). While these practices would not violate anti-doping rules, by not contemplating or addressing such deeply embedded cultural beliefs the legitimacy of WADA, from an African perspective, may have been called into question. In effect, disregarding the African context led to anti-doping policies that, without explanation, simultaneously outlawed practices not considered doping while ignoring others that were thought performance-enhancing. Such sentiments demonstrate the folly of not incorporating the African perspective in anti-doping.

However, WADA has sought other strategies to gain acceptance in Africa. WADA's need for geopolitical legitimacy during its formation phases, instigated the establishment of a regional office in Cape Town, South Africa (10). The office was to educate and convince governments about the importance of a harmonized global approach to preventing doping in sport. The establishment of the regional office was crucial to eliminating neo-colonial perceptions of a Western-led global anti-doping program from African leaders. Additionally, the funding model adopted by WADA sought to reduce the financial burden on the region and consequently gain acceptance. The Olympic Movement and Governments of the world equally fund WADA's core budget. As per the Copenhagen Declaration, the African region is expected to contribute 0.5% of the governments' share (11). Despite the lower financial expectation, the contribution from the region has been inconsistent. Africa contributed 64% (12) and 44% (13) of their share in 2021 and 2022, respectively. To further gain the trust of African leaders, WADA facilitated the creation of five Regional Anti-Doping Organizations (RADOs) in 2004 to specifically support anti-doping policy implementation in less-resourced National Anti-Doping Organizations (NADOs) and National Olympic Committees (NOCs) through funding, training, and ongoing anti-doping assistance. These RADOs are led by individuals within the region, therefore allowing these regions to administer their anti-doping programs. At the national level, NADOs are expected to fund their operations. Article 23.3 of the Code requires signatories to the Code (e.g.,

NADOs) to devote sufficient resources to implement anti-doping programs (14). However, as we shall demonstrate in this policy brief, there are competing needs that governments in developing countries deem essential. Unfortunately, sport is not one of them.

These efforts to support anti-doping programs in Africa by WADA are seemingly instrumental in gaining geopolitical legitimacy. Furthermore, African governments support the world anti-doping program, as shown by 52 African countries that have ratified the International Convention against Doping in Sport (15). To date, 25 of 54 African countries have operational NADOs, and all these organizations were established within the last ten years. Also, WADA has incorporated African states in its current governance structure (16). The WADA President, Witold Bańka, has recognized the need to build capacity across the African continent such that each nation has its own robust anti-doping program (17). However, such efforts need to be contextualized in the history of colonialism experienced in Africa.

## The brunt of colonialism: limited resources and competing needs

The developmental processes experienced by African states, which are associated with colonialism and the subjugation of African states by European imperialists, have created circumstances where sport policy and programs, in general, and anti-doping policy can be fringe. Colonialism is regarded as a practice by one people or political power of obtaining full or partial control over another people or political system (country), occupying the controlled state with settlers, and exploiting the controlled people and space economically (18). In Africa, colonialism, which took place between 1880 and 1935, was signified by white hegemony that elicited social stratifications and benefited the white minority colonists (19). The governance structures founded on white hegemony ensured that the subordinate autochthons were disadvantaged politically, socially, and economically. In the wake of Pan-Africanism and revolutionary rhetoric, many African states attained independence from their colonizers, inheriting colonial legacies (e.g., poor education for black people, poverty, poor living conditions, unemployment for the youth, and vast wealth and social inequality) requiring urgent attention.

From a public policy perspective, social issues that are regarded as critical receive attention from policymakers and the public. Social issues become part of government policy agenda through a series of discussions by policymakers and social indicators that draw attention to the need to address the matter through policy intervention (20). Likewise, the importance of colonial reparations in an African context (e.g., providing clean water, housing, electricity, education to black Africans, and public health) influences government budgetary allocations,

largely limiting financial resources to sport-related programs. The larger socio-economic issues associated with the colonial legacy and a nation's economy are, therefore, competing needs that inform overall government priorities which limits attention to sport (21). For example, sport for development initiatives in African countries such as Tanzania struggled to gain attention or resources as these efforts have had to contend with the nation's key policy priorities, such as addressing extreme poverty and attempting to develop *via* tourism and trade (22).

The limited funding to sport presents challenges to implementing, monitoring, and evaluating sport policies and programs (23). Furthermore, Ruwuya (21) has reported that critical issues in African sport (e.g., corruption, competition manipulation, human rights abuses including sexual abuse, and age cheating) other than doping, concern policymakers. Consequently, the scant resources in sport are also used to address these issues. With limited funding, critical issues in sport are prioritized, and as discussed, those issues that resonate with the public and policymakers (e.g., sexual abuse) are more likely to be placed higher up on the policy agenda. Moreover, the shortfall is left to a sport industry that is nascent and incapacitated. The result is the impeded development of robust sport programs, including doping programs, and inadequate implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of sport-related policies and programs (22, 23).

Limited financial resources, additionally, hinder the establishment of anti-doping support structures and systems. By signing the UNESCO Convention against Doping in Sport, State Parties committed to supporting the world anti-doping program in their countries. The commitment to support the anti-doping program has a financial burden, especially concerning establishing an independent NADO responsible for administering anti-doping programs (doping control and testing programs, anti-doping education programs, and anti-doping research) in a country. For example, doping control and testing is a central tenet of the universal anti-doping program (although WADA has recognized the importance of anti-doping education showcased by the development of the International Standard for Education), however, it is expensive for nascent NADOs to implement adequately. Consequently, International Federations (e.g., World Athletics through the Athletics Integrity Unit) continuously fund anti-doping testing initiatives for under-resourced NADOs in Africa to ensure the adequate testing of athletes.

While 52 African countries ratified the UNESCO Convention against Doping in Sport, only 25 African nations have established independent NADOs within the last decade. Although this signifies a wider acceptance of the universalist anti-doping program and growth of anti-doping work in Africa, the delayed progress can be linked to the overall government objectives to address inequalities and broader social issues as legacies of colonialism, as aforementioned. Additionally, the absence of the experienced personnel needed

to develop the necessary support structures to run such programs further hinders the efforts to establish strong anti-doping programs.

## Capacity and anti-doping programs in Africa

There are limited opportunities to study sport and related areas in Africa. Consequently, most African countries have developed little human resource capacity in sport management. This lack of expertise presents challenges for anti-doping policy implementation, education programs, and management of sport in general. This means that sport has largely remained intellectually starved, with the running of sport left to people who lack relevant training, possibly government-appointed, and serve limited terms leading to high turnover and a loss of institutional knowledge (21). For example, Mwisukha and Mabagala (24) note that most personnel serving in various national federations and organizations in East Africa lack adequate sport management skills. Such limited human capacity negatively impacts service delivery in sport and sport development (25). Even when trained staff are available, they may only work part-time, which has implications for the reach and depth of anti-doping programming. For instance, Juma and colleagues (26) observed that many anti-doping educators in Kenya worked part-time and their time with athletes was fleeting. While elite athletes received support, most Kenyan athletes had limited to no access to education. However, the Anti-Doping Agency of Kenya (ADAK) took a novel approach. It partnered with the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) to roll out a values-based education program to promote positive sporting values among school-going children. Such efforts demonstrate that implementing anti-doping policy (such as education requirements) can be achieved using existing structures to overcome the constraints that African anti-doping policymakers and administrators encounter.

## Actionable recommendations

For African nations to develop robust anti-doping programs, they may need to spearhead anti-doping initiatives within the continent and encourage partnerships and collaborations between NADOs in Africa to build capacity. African nations may also need to pursue partnerships between NADOs/RADOs and corporations, as well as partnerships with other government departments and agencies to counter resource inadequacy. We, therefore, propose the following recommendations.

First, in addition to WADA's efforts to assist and support African nations to establish vigorous anti-doping programs by establishing the RADOs and the WADA office in South

Africa, there is a need for African countries to spearhead anti-doping efforts in the continent. A case in point is health research in Africa, where there has been a shift from international-led research and capacity building towards more Africa-led models (27). This move has been deemed important by scholars, such as Izugbara et al. (28), since Africans are better placed to understand, articulate and prioritize their social issues. Though support from other partners outside of Africa is important, we agree with Kasproicz and colleagues (27) that capacity within the continent will not improve unless African countries take a leading role. When African countries initiate research activities, the outcomes can be improved. This is evident in African-led initiatives in health research which have led to improved research outputs (29), relevant topics and communication of findings in cultural and policy contexts (30, 31).

To achieve this, greater demand for human capital in the region is needed. Some efforts in this regard are taking place, as shown by the NBA's movement into Africa (32) and partnerships between European and African Football Clubs (33). However, more opportunities exist. For example, International Federations and major sporting organizations could award more events to African states. The regular hosting of events could spur interest in sport, leading to greater and sustainable demand for skilled workers. Such efforts would need to be enacted with caution so that this does not lead to an undue financial burden on the host country (34). However, smaller events, such as the 2017 IAAF World U18 Championship and the 2021 World Athletics U20 Championships, have been successfully hosted in Nairobi, Kenya, and the 2026 Summer Youth Olympic Games will take place in Dakar, Senegal. This demonstrates African countries' capability to host international sporting events. Developing demand for trained workers to manage and organize sport would also benefit anti-doping organizations in the region. Such strategies (i.e., the development of African-led sport and anti-doping administration) would spur acceptance of programs among athletes and stakeholders alike as these might not be deemed foreign. Thus, the development of human capital would enable African countries to lead anti-doping efforts within the continent, while fostering ownership and encouraging Code compliance.

Second, partnerships and collaborations between NADOs in Africa offer great opportunities for capacity building through information sharing and technical training based on mutual understanding and appreciation of socio-cultural factors. WADA's President, Witold Bańka has previously underscored the importance of collaboration in building anti-doping capacity across the continent of Africa (17). With the paucity of research in sport in Africa, policy implementation and partnerships could borrow from existing frameworks in other sectors such as food and health. In their research on policy



partnerships on mental health and poverty projects in Ghana, South Africa, Uganda, and Zambia, Mirzoev et al. (35), identified the principles of trust, openness, equality, and mutual respect as the core of partnerships with individual, organizational and contextual factors influencing its success. In forging these partnerships, organizations should make efforts to ensure that the personal expectations and perceived benefits of the individuals involved are realistic and achievable. In addition, roles and responsibilities including the internal structures of these partnerships should be non-bureaucratic, formalized, and clearly stipulated in a Memorandum of Understanding. Also, of importance to the success of these partnerships are contextual factors such as political goodwill. African states should appreciate the rich history of sport in Africa and the impact it can have when leveraged (5). Consequently, African governments should foster environments where sport thrives, ensuring the growth of these partnerships.

After the creation of WADA, African states looked up to established NADOs in Europe and Asia for technical support as they sought to operationalize their NADOs. Apart from South Africa, there was no country in Africa which had the technical knowhow of anti-doping. When the ADAK launched its program, it relied heavily on NADOs from England, China, and Norway to develop the technical competencies and educate its staff (36). As countries in Africa develop their anti-doping technical competencies, partnerships between NADOs in Africa are desirable. The partnerships between Kenyan NADO and Ghana (37), and South African and Ethiopian NADOs (38) are cases in point. Both partnerships seek to give developing NADOs access to the resources and experience of more developed and experienced NADOs. However, capacity building involves more than formal training and individual development but rather a long-term process requiring lasting mentorship, coaching, and leadership development, including an individual commitment to continued self-development (39). The NADO-NADO partnerships should have a long-term engagement strategy based on mutual and beneficial objectives for all parties involved to maintain enthusiasm and continued engagement. Conferences, workshops, and symposia offer information-sharing opportunities which African NADOs can leverage to share information on best practices. An annual or bi-annual conference where African countries meet to share their experiences on anti-doping would spur the development of good practices, knowledge generation, sharing, and acquisition.

Third, NADOs could leverage the existing infrastructure and collaborate with other government agencies to run anti-doping programs. Government agencies such as departments of Health, Education or Social Services are ideal partners in anti-doping education. The ADAK-KICD partnership mentioned earlier provides an exemplar case. Resources too can be acquired through collaboration. Partnerships between NADOs and

corporations could plug the budgetary deficit experienced by most NADOs. These additional resources could be used for anti-doping programming such as capacity development of staff and athletes' education. In the former case, this could eventually lead to the increased attraction of sport management as a career choice. Regional and continental partnerships for anti-doping purposes should be pursued by the RADOs, and the WADA Regional Office with the help of WADA. Recently, WADA signed a sponsorship agreement with SuperSport (African-based broadcaster) that will provide direct funds and in-kind value to promote and coordinate the protection of clean sport in Africa (40). Though this is a positive development, WADA's regional office in Cape Town should play the leading role in the operationalization of the partnership. This will serve to limit the perception of western influence on African states. Additionally, the IOC and WADA should set aside resources which African nations could tap into to support the development and operationalization of NADOs.

## Conclusion

In this policy brief article, we have historically situated the challenges of implementing anti-doping policy and programs in Africa. These challenges have been associated with the peripheral role Africa played in the creation of WADA, and the colonial legacies that governments prioritize over sport, limiting financial resources and human capacity in sport. Though Africa continues to address inequalities and other social issues linked to colonialism, we have provided recommendations that may assist building robust anti-doping programs, and aid anti-doping policy implementation in the continent. The resource and capacity inefficiencies notwithstanding, African states are taking steps to implement anti-doping policy. As such, these countries should be supported in developing their NADOs.

## Author contributions

Conceptualization, JR, BOJ, and JW; Investigation, JR and BOJ; Supervision, JW; Writing—original draft preparation, JR, BOJ, and JW; Writing—review and editing, JR, BOJ, and JW. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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