

# Exploring and Establishing a Framework For Effective Governance in European Grassroots Sports Organisations

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## Abstract

This paper is based on a study that was initiated to better understand the dynamics of the grassroots sport landscape and establish a framework for effective governance practice in this important area of sport policy and management. Researchers had previously identified the value of exploring good governance specific to the nonprofit sector and in particular the unique features of informal sports organisations and small community clubs. The research methodology blended a meta-analysis of relevant literature to identify key principles followed by primary data collection to evaluate and validate the emerging framework. The main results of the study provided a typology of the sport governance landscape and clear evidence of the need to develop a framework for effective governance appropriate to the needs of grassroots sports organisations. Furthermore, it supported the construction of a flexible and dynamic self-regulatory instrument—known as SATSport—that organisations might use for measuring and illustrating commitment to good governance.

**Keywords:** *governance; grassroots sport; good practice; self-assessment*

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## Introduction

### The Study: Background and Context

The topic of good governance has high relevance today. It represents an issue that is debated in formal and informal organisations of all sizes and among public, voluntary, and private sectors. This debate is also interesting the sport sector. Researchers had previously identified the value of exploring good governance specific to the nonprofit sector, and in particular the unique features of informal sports organisations and small community clubs. By way of endorsement for such policy investment and practical endeavour, Hoye, Smith, Westerbeek, Stewart, and Nicholson (2009) had previously identified the importance of exploring good governance specific to the nonprofit sector, but more importantly, as suggested by Taylor, Doherty, and McGraw (2008), mindful of the unique features of sport.

It was also highlighted that informal sports organisations and small community clubs, arguably the true grassroots, appear not to be accounted for in a realistic and practical way in current governance arrangements (Hoye et al., 2009). By implication, the emphasis of existing studies has been on the role of the board and national federations and formal compliance activities rather than the grassroots reality of small committees, community clubs, and local level innovations (ACEVO, 2011).

There are a number of research questions or issues that emerge from reflections on the topic, and these appear to be related to context or typology and content or framework (Bramham, Hylton, Jackson, & Nesti, 2007; Harford, 2012; Houlihan & Green, 2008). In terms of context, the three main themes appeared to be first, how the apparent emphasis in the literature on the application of governance principles to national governing bodies/associations, and more specifically the board function, apply to the informality of grassroots sports clubs and committees, and vice versa (Hoye et al., 2009). Second, how to be less prescriptive and more realistic in considering the demands and constraints facing those responsible for governance arrangements in grassroots sports (Ferkins, Shilbury, & McDonald, 2005). Third, to fully explore and better understand the practicality of implementation via a methodological approach that draws on qualitative and experiential data collection (Ferkins et al., 2005).

In terms of content, the three main themes appeared to be first, the extent to which governance practiced in the corporate world could be applied to the nonprofit sector (Hoye et al., 2009); second, how well the broad sweep of the nonprofit sector catered for the unique features of sport (Taylor et al., 2008); and third, how a universal model of governance for the sports sector worked across and catered for different national legal systems and governance expectations (Deutsche Sporthochschule Köln, 2011; ESSEC Business School, 2008). In effect, the central issue here was how best to develop a governance model broadly capable of meet-

ing the needs of nonprofit grassroots sport organisations across geographical and sectorial boundaries.

### **The Study: Key Features and Main Objectives**

This paper on governance arrangements in grassroots sport was based on a two-year action research study funded by the European Commission under the 2011 Preparatory Action in the Field of Sport. The governance study was initiated to explore effective practice in this important area of sport policy and management. This paper explores, explains, and reflects on this action research project, drawing implications for current academic knowledge and applied practice, then concludes by identifying potential topics for future research. The Preparatory Action was intended to reconnect with and build on a range of key principles of good governance highlighted by the European Commission in the White Paper on Sport (2007) and the Communication on Sport (2011). It had a key objective of working in collaboration with a target population of selected academic, policy, and practitioner partners ( $n = 18$ ) from the grassroots sport community in Europe to increase the evidence and knowledge base for a clear and practical governance framework. The intended and anticipated outcomes of the study were as follows:

- A better contextual understanding of the wider sport system or typology and the role of grassroots sport organisations in particular
- The identification of a practical and pragmatic framework for effective governance in grassroots sports organisations

## **Literature Review**

### **Literature Review Research Strategy**

A research strategy and Working Group (WG) were developed in accordance with the general purpose of the study. Multiple searches through databases were conducted, whereby key terms were cross-referenced until a saturation point was reached. Furthermore, considering that there is a vast area of “grey literature” yielded from projects and experiences implemented at EU level that are difficult to find via conventional channels but representing an important source of information (Auger, 1989), the WG also analysed reports, internal documents, and declarations. The review of this kind of multiple and heterogenic data gave a concrete and real advantage in terms of triangulation. However, it must be noted that there were disadvantages of comparability of data derived from different approaches in terms of measurement, interpretation, and definitions of the key concepts. Overall, for the purposes of the review, the WG considered that the advantages of reviewing multiple sources of data from different academic disciplines and different sources far outweighed the disadvantages.

## Shape and Boundaries

As previously outlined, the Preparatory Action had a key objective of working in collaboration with selected partners ( $n = 18$ ) actively involved in the grassroots sport community in Europe. In effect, this objective, focused on governance practice in Europe, significantly shaped the boundaries and scope of the literature review. However as the literature review unfolded, it became apparent through repeated citations that the geographical scope should be widened to positively consider notable examples of good practice in Australia, New Zealand, the USA, and Canada. It was also decided that it would be most appropriate to actively consider and focus on contemporary material mindful of the dynamic and evolving nature of both governance and sport (Beech & Chadwick, 2012), but that established and important works would not be deliberately ignored.

The literature comprised applied guides, studies, and reports as well as academic journals, books, and a PhD thesis. Of particular note, based on academic citations and participant validation were the following practical guides: the *Voluntary Code of Good Governance for the Sport and Recreation Sector* (2011) published by the Sport and Recreation Alliance (UK), *Nine Steps to Effective Governance* (2004), published by Sport and Recreation New Zealand, and the *Basic Principles of Good Governance* (2008) published by the International Olympic Committee. In addition, the following evaluative studies have made notable contributions to the field: a *Survey of UK National Governing Bodies of Sport* (2010) by Birkbeck Sport Business Centre provided a useful (and potentially transferable) analysis and critique of governance practice, while the exhaustive study on the funding of grassroots sport in the European Union (2011) by Deutsche Sporthochschule Köln and other collaborative partners identified two important themes. The first theme was the apparent complexity of the field and the range of different legal frameworks and financing systems in Europe. The second theme was the perception of a common political will across sovereign boundaries to increase participation in sport and physical activity and a pragmatic preference for self-regulation of the sector by the sector.

## Relevant Issues

One potential issue emerging from the literature even with the exemplary documents listed above was the scale and complexity of the practical guidance and evaluative studies, with typically circa 100 elements for consideration presented over on average 165 pages. Overall, the focus of the body of knowledge was on mainstream nonprofit organisations and sport-specific governing bodies, with only one PhD thesis (Burton, 2009) directly examining the operational practices of grassroots sport. The governance topics consistently identified were “hard” issues such as board structure, organisational strategy, and operational systems, with less emphasis on “soft” issues, such as people engagement, organisational culture, and innovative practice (Peters & Waterman, 1980).

Following on from the emergence of political (World Bank, 1989) and corporate governance (Cadbury, 1992), in the late 80s and early 90s, the notion of sound governance in sports organisations has been a comparatively recent development. It has become increasingly important in the face of three notable challenges (detailed below) confronting the industry and, in response, the need for a philosophy and framework to ensure both organisational conformance and performance (Hoye et al., 2009). The first challenge for sports organisations is that funding bodies are increasingly seeking a convincing case for financial support and clearer evidence that investment has impacted on wider community objectives and successful elite performance (Bramham et al., 2007; Houlihan & Green, 2008). The second challenge is that sports organisations have to respond to changes in legislation and the risk of litigation as their operating environment shifts increasingly from amateur arrangements to professional management. Slack and Parent (2006) identified a number of specific threats, including financial compliance, freedom of information, and board directors' liability. The third challenge is that sports organisations increasingly operate in a competitive and commercial landscape that requires more businesslike practices and quicker decision making (Beech & Chadwick, 2012). The traditional model, or Corinthian approach to governance, is unlikely to provide the strategic clarity and level of decisiveness or responsiveness needed to both survive and prosper in the contemporary context (Harford, 2012).

### **Mainstream Governance**

Mainstream governance has been defined in simple and straightforward terms by Tricker (1984) and Carver (1991) as a strategic enabling role and ethical process. In this definition, the role of the board is to set direction and act fairly while allowing managers and staff to undertake day-to-day operational responsibilities.

With regard to sport governance, the European Commission (2007) and Sport New Zealand (2004) define the concept in more specific and detailed terms as a set of guiding principles (including accountability, democracy, and transparency) and a disciplined process of policy making, risk management, and performance evaluation.

Grassroots sport is considered by the European Commission (2011) to cover all sport disciplines practised by nonprofessional participants and organised at a national level although enacted predominantly through a network of small local clubs. This definition therefore excludes individuals who practice extensively, perform competitively, and generate a living revenue from sport activity.

Hoye et al. (2009) suggest that the grassroots sport landscape appears to comprise both formally structured bodies that are governed by national boards but may also include more informal clubs that are managed by committees or even individual personalities. In this regard, a definition—or interpretation—of grassroots sports needs to be appropriately broad or fluid to reflect the scope and realities of the sector.

Drawing on the various characterisations of governance and grassroots sport, the authors propose the following working (albeit aspirational) definition of governance as the philosophy and practice of steering and shaping organisational life and performance. The benefits of a sound approach to governance are collaborative, working between the strategic board and operational executive. The goals of such collaboration are maximising organisational performance while sensibly managing risk along with the fostering of confidence and trust in the wider stakeholder community (Pedler, Burgoyne, & Boydell, 2010).

### Theories and Principles on Governance

During the course of the literature review, a number of notable organisational features and characteristics appeared to emerge. There are a number of models or frameworks that seek to make sense of organisational design and structure, including the 7S model (Peters & Waterman, 1980), the five configurations (Mintzberg, 1979), and the five-star model (Galbraith, 1973). In addition, Kantor (2012) and Pedler et al. (2010) offer contemporary insights on issues of organisational dynamics including culture and change.

Beyond the process of defining sport governance and grassroots sport and the benefits of such an approach, there are six contemporary theories that inform and underpin the understanding and practice of the discipline. Two of the theories (Agency and Stewardship) take a narrower, internal view on governance as a process and balance between the board exercising authoritative control and placing delegated trust in employees (Clarke, 2004). The remaining four theories (Institutional, Resource Dependence, Network, and Stakeholder) take a broader, externally orientated perspective of governance as a contextual and relational issue mindful of wider expectations (Clarke, 2004). The theoretical explanation and framework for governance therefore suggests a blend of the following is required for effective practice—appropriate internal control, development of internal capabilities, and active consideration of the external environment.

Building on these theoretical explanations about governance, Henry and Lee (2004) identified seven core principles of sound practice; in effect, whatever the context, these criteria should be present—or actively emerging—in organisations committed to effective governance. In summary, the seven principles advocate that organisations should be governed in a way that is open (transparency), fair (democracy, equity), and effective (responsibility, accountability, efficiency, effectiveness). The principles of openness, fairness, and effectiveness in governance practice that Henry and Lee (2004) advocate are important because they resonate with the literature on the wider cultural characteristics of high performing, healthy, and adaptive organisations (De Geus, 1999; Denison & Mishra 1995; Pascale et al., 1997). The extent to which these characteristics manifest and thrive are attributed to a range of mechanisms but most significantly to the presence of active leadership role modelling by the board, committee, or club figurehead (Schein, 2010).

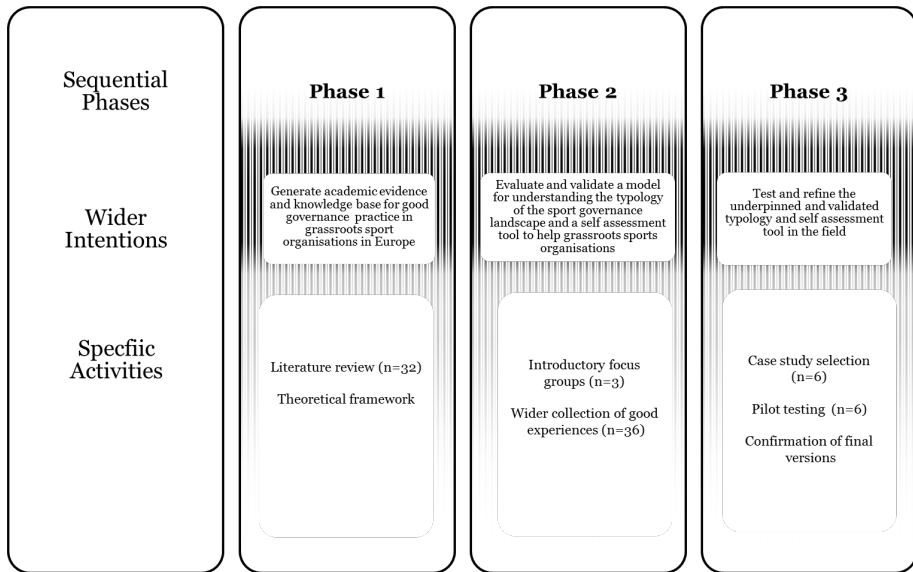
However, while the activities, significance, and benefits of the topic have been established, a report in 1997 by the Australian Standing Committee on Recreation and Sport (SCORS)—referring both to national and sporting organisations—identified a perceived lack of effectiveness at board and council level. Major sport agencies in the UK, New Zealand, and Canada had also recognised that a strategic priority was to improve their governance arrangements—including the recruitment, training, and appraisal of board members—in the future (Hoye et al., 2009).

Research methodologies employed to date have blended a qualitative approach (predominantly questionnaires and semi structured interviews) to primary data collection and a number of desk-based theoretical reviews of secondary data. Ferkins et al. (2005) draw attention to the need to make greater use of qualitative research methods perhaps as a way to more fully explore and better understand not just theoretical principles but the practicality of implementation. In this research endeavour, it may also be appropriate to be less prescriptive and more realistic in considering the professional and personal demands and constraints facing those responsible for governance arrangements in grassroots sports (Ferkins et al., 2005). However, while there are a number of useful and informative definitions, theories, and principles (as summarised above), it is important that individual meaning of the concept is explored in the organisational context in order to surface a shared understanding of the discipline (Allen, 2008). From this shared understanding, board members, executives, employees, and volunteers can assess, identify, and nurture the organisational conditions for effective governance. In this regard, grassroots sport may have particular challenges and constraints that need to be actively and qualitatively considered (Ferkins et al., 2005).

## Methods

### General Framework

The main framework of the adopted methodology was based on three different, but interconnected, levels of action (See Figure 1). First, the research aimed at increasing the theoretical knowledge base and evidence for good governance practice in grassroots sport through an extensive literature review. Second, it sought to evaluate and validate a typology of the sport governance landscape and a specific self-assessment tool for grassroots sport organisations through focus groups and the collection of good experiences. Third, it sought to explore and refine the typology and self-assessment tool through action research case studies and pilot testing. This resulted in the confirmation of final versions of the typology and the self-assessment tool. For this purpose, a working group (WG) composed of researchers ( $n = 7$ ) developed a framework that supported the collective understanding of good governance.



**Figure 1.** Research Methodology Framework

As a first step, the WG implemented an extensive and systematic literature review of relevant scientific journal and studies concerning governance in grassroots sport (described above). Results obtained with the literature review represented the ground for a theoretical framework and the construction of a self-assessment regulatory tool, known as SATSport (see Appendix A), designed with the intention of offering organisations a simple and effective tool relying on self-assessment and regulation to enable organisations to determine and measure their commitment to good governance. The construction of SATSport followed three principal steps:

1. Introductory focus group and working sessions with Good Governance in Grassroots Sport (GGGS) partners and related organisations
2. Wider and parallel collection of good experiences
3. Action research case studies and specific pilot testing of the self-assessment tool

### Focus Group and Working Sessions

During the first phase, board members representative of the organisations involved in the GGGS project ( $n = 18$ ) were asked to join focus groups ( $n = 3$ ) in which key analytical units concerning governance—problems, norms, roles, process, and nodal points—were discussed and critically analysed. Three types of organisations were involved in the process: national federations, regional associations, and local clubs. The geographical distribution was also relevant with the following European countries represented: France, Romania, Czech Republic,



Ireland, Spain, Italy, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, and Slovenia. All organisations were invited to openly discuss typical organisational features and characteristics of governance in grassroots sport organisations, by adopting their own perspective. Then, they were asked to map a range of potential actions that could be used to increase the quality of governance procedures in connection with the identified organisational features. During this phase, all participants were required to adopt a “devil’s advocate” role (Creswell, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1994) by critically analysing and revising the processes and the emerging evidence in terms of opportunities for improvement. From the data collected, a matrix covering the main themes, the keywords, and the analytical units that emerged, was developed.

### Collection of Good Experiences

At the end of the first step, good experiences of organisations, working at grassroots level, and showing relevant results in terms of commitment to good governance were collected and analysed ( $n = 36$ ). Therefore, an ad-hoc data collection of experiences was launched via several routes and mechanisms: GGS’s web platform; direct contacts with members, partners, stakeholders, and network contacts of the partners of the GGS project; web posting; and electronic newsletters. A relatively simple self-description questionnaire was adopted as the main research tool for the data collection. The questionnaire contained four sections and 23 questions that were related to 19 items (see Table 1).

The construction of the questionnaire followed a logical course (Silverman, 2009), with the above-mentioned matrix (covering the themes, the keywords, and the analytical units) that had been operationalised in measurable and observable items. The questionnaire was developed and tested with six organisations before its use in data collection. Given the carefully considered and context specific nature of the questionnaire and the carefully managed and controlled nature of the test, issues of validity and reliability were actively assessed and subsequently monitored and recalibrated through follow-up interviews carried out by three independent researchers. Following this, data collected (questionnaires and interviews) were analysed and validated by the independent researchers during a focus-group aimed at refining wording and content of the questionnaire and further strengthening its consistency.

Interested organisations were required to complete the questionnaire to provide information about organisational features and approaches adopted in terms of governance in their activities/projects. Thirty-six organisations responded, a sample that was aligned with the expectations and the research strategy that had been adopted. The scope of the call was to identify good quality data from key organisations operating at a grassroots level with the motivation first to gain a better understanding the procedures that are adopted in terms of governance and, second, to pilot test the emerging self-assessment tool. Thereafter, a further selection or refinement was implemented, and six respondent organisations were considered as case studies, relevant for the project and its terms of reference, and useful for the development and critical analysis of the self-assessment tool.

**Table 1**

*The Structure of the Questionnaire*

<b>Sections (n = 4)</b>	<b>Questions (n = 23)</b>	<b>Items (n = 19)</b>
<b>Introduction to the organisation</b>	Name of organisation Date of formation Principal location (local, regional, national, international) Total (evt. estimated) number of paid staff Total (evt. estimated) number of volunteers (including trainers, helpers and voluntary board and committee members) Contact person E-mail address Website of the organization	Dimension of the organisation, general structure, general information
<b>Understanding context</b>	What are the significant external challenges and opportunities facing you as an organisation and your ability to survive and prosper in the future? How would you summarise the strategic vision and direction of your organisation? Who are your active and established stakeholders and who are the stakeholders that you feel are currently under represented? How do you involve and include stakeholders in decision making?	Strategic vision, stakeholder analysis, stakeholder involvement, decision-making process, representativeness, risk analysis, inclusivity
<b>Developing capability</b>	What do you think are the important personal qualities and interpersonal skills of the political leaders of your association? How would you describe the values that guide your organisational purpose and activities? I would put this one out and use just the one on the first page – yellow line How do you establish clear roles and responsibilities for the board, management, staff, and volunteers? How do you create opportunities for organisation members to influence and shape both strategic policy and practical implementation?	Leadership, decision-making process, skill development, accountability, democracy, organisational culture, strategic vision
<b>Monitoring compliance</b>	What are your key instruments or processes for financial planning and control? What are the key operational risks that your organisation faces and how are these assessed and subsequently managed? What actions do you take to manage quality in your organisation? What measures do you set and review to assess organisational performance? How do you ensure open exchange and sharing of information on organisational matters for members and stakeholders? What organisational information do you make available to members and stakeholders and how (process: meeting, website, administrative handbook, annual report...)? How do you create opportunities for organisation members to influence and shape both strategic policy and practical implementation?	Monitoring and evaluation, efficacy and efficiency, quality system, performance, transparency, decision-making process, strategic vision.

### Action Research and Pilot Testing

In accordance with Yin's model (2009), case studies were carefully selected (opportunistic sample) with a logic of literal replication based on the theoretical framework defined. The six respondent organisations were chosen on the basis of three main criteria: the quality and the relevance of the information provided; the representativeness of the three types of level of organisation (national federation, regional association, and local club) taken into account in the theoretical framework; and finally, they were also selected in terms of setting and geographic distribution, with the aim being to work across national, regional, and local levels and test findings across different contexts and sport systems. The latter offers to the project a strength in terms of transferability of the findings (Creswell, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and the possibility to analyse the influence of the context on the effectiveness of the decisions and strategies concerning governance. In this regard, the dependability and the impact of the different contextual influences on the research process were evaluated and the influence of individual settings was considered, although the emphasis of evaluation was at the national and regional levels.

SATSport was pilot tested and evaluated in its accuracy with the selected case studies. A first phase saw the organisations completing the self-assessment tool; this was followed by a second phase in which respondents were asked to take part in follow-up interviews. The evidence collected was finally used to complete the construction of SATSport, reflect important governance issues, and measure its capacity to illustrate the commitment of an organisation to the good governance.

### Data Analysis

Data collected during the focus group sessions were first analysed inductively and thematically using an open coding process (Charmaz, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Following this, the initial coding was compared and further refined with the literature review through a deductive approach (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Silverman, 2009).

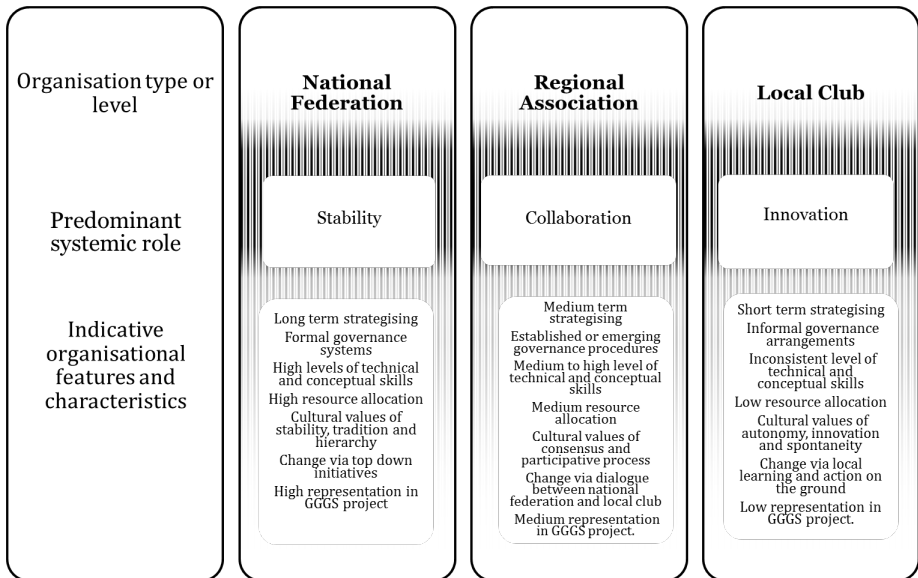
Descriptive statistics of the collected good experience were examined to derive data about governance procedures and originate indications for the selection of the case studies. Matrix queries were also used to look at the attributes (structure, reported problems, etc.) of each experience, in order to triangulate quantitative data and identify common patterns.

The analysis of data collected during the action research and pilot test phase was conducted with a lightly structured case-study approach based on a multiple-case design. Each case was analysed in connection with the context and in comparison with all the other case studies.

## Results

### Multidimensional Approach

The triangulation of data collected offered concrete evidence about specific organisational features and characteristics of governance in grassroots sport organisations. Although there are common patterns in terms of activity, grassroots organisation might differ significantly in the typology of services/activities provided. A proposed typology of the sport governance landscape emerging from the research process is proposed in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Sport Governance Organisational Typology

Good governance for grassroots sport organisation is a multifaceted issue that requires organisations to adopt a multidimensional approach. This approach must be contextual and flexible enough to evolve in different forms during the life cycle of an organisation. The analysis of focus groups and the follow-up interviews with the respondents highlighted the complexity of the decision-making processes that influence the effectiveness of an organisation in terms of governance. There is clear evidence that the environment in which an organisation operates and the unique features that each organisation has in terms of organisational structures, purposes, human resources, target groups, and services/activities provided influence the governance process. This is particularly evident for grassroots sport organisations that operate in a social context that tends to be more dynamic.

Essentially, there are organisations whose primary goal is to promote sport and enhance participation among the population. Considering the structural characteristics, they differ from those organisations seeking to use a sport-based approach as a means of social intervention. In this specific case, activities are designed to promote the use of sport to address social problems—such as the integration of migrants—and develop community capacity. These two different typologies of organisation, although operating within the proposed framework for good governance, might be required to adopt a different approach in terms of, for instance, transparency and participation for the target population.

### **Inclusiveness**

Generally, governance is influenced by external variables such as socioeconomic conditions, public opinion, policy decisions, and stakeholders' strategy. It must also be regarded as dynamic, flexible, and adaptable. At a policy level, grassroots sport organisations are required to be inclusive, enabling a broad range of groups to be involved in decision-making processes. This includes the involvement of underrepresented groups in decisions, the access of these groups to activities, and the inclusion of external stakeholders. This issue emerged as relevant for the six case studies even though several difficulties were reported, especially for what concerns the implementation of a participatory approach inclusive of the underrepresented stakeholders in the decision-making processes. However, the organisation should be able to establish informal pathways for the involvement and inclusion of underrepresented groups and, more in general, of all those stakeholders who have a relevant impact on the activities provided and the services implemented. The participation of all stakeholders should be regarded also as a democratic process that offers an open and frequent access for people (members, target groups, paid staff, volunteers, etc.) of the organisation to influence the political and strategic direction and leadership. It entails both the equal right of people to run and vote for political leadership functions as well as the possibility to debate and influence the key decisions of the organisation. The inclusion of different stakeholders, as well as the direct participation of all the relevant parts, appears to be crucial to improve the impact that grassroots organisations have on the target population.

### **Accountability**

Data collected further showed the importance of accountability in grassroots organisations. It is seen as a way to define clear responsibilities for the different parts of the organisation, including the board, the management, staff, and volunteers/voluntary committees. The adoption of this approach is demanding for a small organisation in terms of resources needed for an effective implementation. Notwithstanding, it offers advantages far outweighing disadvantages. In particular, a systematic and clear definition of the responsibilities for the different parts of the organisations provides a useful means of overcoming some of the well-es-

tablished barriers to effective implementation of the activity of the organisation. A common feature that involves all the processes implemented, both internal and external, transparency in grassroots sport organisations ensures that members as well as stakeholders know the way the organisation is operating and have a vehicle to address concerns. It includes organisations keeping accounts and ensuring policies and procedures are accessible for a wider audience.

Broadly, the analysis of the case studies revealed that key principles of good governance are, generally speaking, identified within a grassroots organisation. Nevertheless, the engagement with concrete actions that might enhance the level of inclusion, accountability, and transparency as previously presented are infrequently implemented. In addition, excluding few examples, a well-established strategy conceived to improve organisational readiness in terms of good governance is rarely defined. This might be partially explained by issues regarding leadership competencies, individual motivation, and team dynamics in the board and the management, and finally, available time (grassroots governance is essentially a voluntary endeavour, an addition to other professional and personal commitments).

### **The Efficacy of SATSport**

Linked to and underpinned by the SATSport framework (see Figure 3) is a self-assessment tool comprising 20 key questions that allow organisations to consider and operationalise the important principles and practices of good governance. Above all, SATSport proved to be a flexible and dynamic self-regulatory instrument that organisations might use with the overall purpose of measuring and illustrating commitment to good governance. Furthermore, it is intended to help organisations to develop autonomous and original systems and processes of good governance taking into account the external and internal variables influencing the strategy that an organisation might have put in place.

The theoretical framework underpinning the tool was based on the principle that grassroots sport organisation should enable a broad range of groups to be involved in the decision-making process by also including underrepresented groups and creating pathways for their involvement. It also refers to people, democracy, and accountability and it is intended to measure the level of access for members of the organisation to influence the political and strategic direction and leadership of the organisation. Furthermore, in terms of accountability, the self-assessment tool was intended to help organisations to have a better insight for defining clear responsibilities for the different parts of the organisation. Finally, it refers to process and transparency and offers to the organisation information on how it is operating to ensure that members and stakeholders have clear and precise information about policy, internal and external processes, procedures, and decisions adopted.

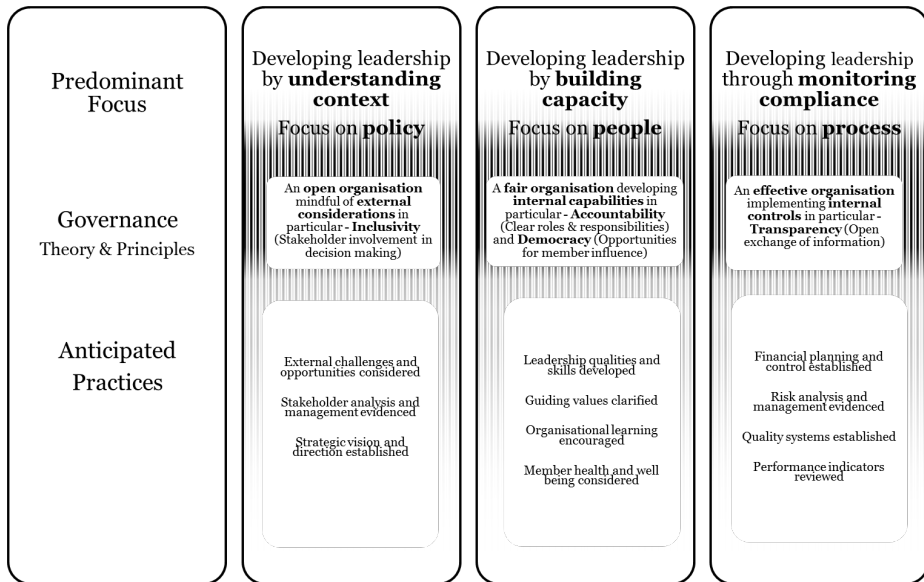


Figure 3. SATSport Framework for Effective Governance

In this view, SATSport, while giving a direction and establishing a framework for effective governance, is able to fulfill specific criteria of flexibility and adaptability, helping organisations to identify the most appropriate approach. Flexibility and adaptability are two of the key emerging themes from the analysis of the six case studies, with organisations putting emphasis on the need to put in place a dynamic adaptation to the processes of governance to respond to the changes of the context in which they operate. Once again, SATSport was proved to provide precise and understandable indications about the inclusiveness of the adopted processes of governance.

## Discussion and Implications

### Sport Governance Typology

Informed by a range of theorists (Galbraith, 1973; Kantor, 2012; Mintzberg, 1979; Pedler et al., 2010; Peters & Waterman, 1980), an initial typology was offered to help frame and understand the governance landscape in sport from three perspectives: national federation, regional association, and, in particular, local grassroots club. In constructing and discussing this typology, there was an initial perception during the process of participant validation that the landscape was based around a sense of hierarchy. With this notion were associated judgements about each organisation's role in this structure based on good and bad performance in terms of vision, formality, resourcing, adaptability, etc. While there are clearly necessary minimum requirements around safety, prudence, and ethics, good gover-

nance is not a simple linear progression but a more holistic and delicate system, as demonstrated by the proposed typology, that requires different complementary components held in balance. Each body or club, member, or volunteer plays an important role in the health of the wider governance network.

The typology appeared to consider issues raised in the literature regarding the need for any definition of grassroots sports to be appropriately dynamic or fluid so as to reflect the scope and realities of the sector as well as the demands and constraints facing those responsible for governance arrangements in grassroots sports (European Commission, 2011; Ferkins et al., 2005; Hoye et al., 2009; Slack & Parent, 2006). Johnson and Broms (2008) suggested that in such a complex and interconnected system, as previously outlined, that there are three fundamental principles which should be evident in the broader community of practice, namely stability, collaboration, and innovation. Rather than trying to be everything to everyone, it may be that a practical implication of the project is that each body, federation, and club should acknowledge—mindful of minimum thresholds—their individual constraints and build on their unique operating strengths and contribution to the governance landscape. For a national body that may mean an emphasis (but not reliance) on policy direction, for a regional association on facilitating consensus, and for a grassroots clubs, a focus on innovative practice.

### **The Use of SATSport**

The SATSport framework was considered to provide the community of practice with a clear, simple, and balanced approach to both strategising and implementing effective governance practice. In particular, the proposed framework was intended to be demonstrably appreciative (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005) in tone, encouraging the active participation and consideration of stakeholders, recognising good practice (and acknowledging individual constraints) while also providing a scoring matrix for quantitative evaluation. The literature review had previously identified that the scale and complexity of the existing guidance was a potential issue and that there was not enough emphasis in much of the documentation on “soft” issues, such as people engagement, organisational culture, and innovative practice (Birbeck Sport Business Centre, 2010). As a consequence, it could be argued that governance leadership is predominantly focused on authoritative conformance rather than a more contemporary facilitation of collaborative performance (Hoye et al., 2009) as advocated by the SATSport framework. This collaborative style is perhaps particularly relevant in today’s increasingly competitive circumstances when organisations rely on the discretionary efforts of employees and volunteers (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006).

### **Broad Theoretical Frame of Governance**

There appeared to be an opportunity emerging from the project’s action research process to explicitly broaden the theoretical frame of governance with its focus on internal controls and capabilities as well as external relationships and ex-



expectations to actively consider organisational change. In so doing, this broadening of the theoretical frame beyond the established governance definitions and explanations might assist academics, practitioners, and policy makers in better understanding—and therefore managing—the multidimensional and complex nature of the discipline. OPP (2004) suggest that organisations successfully complete about 30% of change initiatives or transitions. Siegel et al. (1996) argue that one of the main reasons change is “unsuccessful” is because leaders do not understand the theories of change.

It was clear that one of the significant governance responsibilities of the board was to steer an organisation forward and in this regard much emphasis was placed on strategising and the strategic process (Hamel & Prahalad, 1994; Mintzberg, 2000; Porter, 1980). However, in complex and competitive environments (Peters & Gitsham, 2009), the board role’s is broader than just steering and setting direction; it is also about adapting and changing course to respond to notable challenges (Hoye et al., 2009). Change has been defined as a process of transition from a current state to a desired future state (Bridges, 2009; Siegel, Church, Javitch, Waclawski, Bud, & Bazigos, 1996). Rather than an emphasis on strategic control, it invites board members to recognise and embrace ambiguity (Pfeffer, 1977) as a useful navigational mind-set. This balanced approach to governance might be summed up succinctly, if a little simply, as plan, execute, and adapt.

### **Practical Implications**

A broader understanding of organisational change in conjunction with a sound grasp of specific governance theories has the potential to develop—or unearth—more contemporary, balanced, and effective governing of bodies, associations, and clubs. In this regard, SATSport begins to challenge thinking and surface the importance of these issues through the themed sections on understanding context and building capacity. In addition to this initiative, practical steps to develop relevant knowledge and skills for board and committee members could be considered through induction, appraisals, and training while also being reflected in the recruitment process. The perceived lack of effectiveness at board or council level identified in the literature review (Australian Standing Committee on Recreation and Sport, 1997; Hoye et al., 2009) might be a practical challenge (as described above) of recruiting appropriate candidates with enough time and sufficient skills to undertake the potentially onerous responsibilities of the role. A suggestion emerging from the study was that rather than board effectiveness being a simple micro level issue of time and skills, it may be a macro level issue based on a particular world view of sport governance. A more realistic assumption of the complexities of the landscape (based on the typology) and the collaborative execution of a relatively simple but adaptable framework (based on the SATSport model) might enhance board and subsequently organisation performance.

## Limitations

A practical limitation of the appreciative, simple, and self-managing ethos of the SATSport model is the assumption that board members, officers, and volunteers are both selflessly motivated (McClelland, 1961) and fundamentally trustworthy (Gibb, 1964). Such a limitation is not a dark or cynical step into the shadow side of organisations (Egan, 1994) but rather a realistic sense of human nature (Lombardo & McCaulay, 1988). Such risks could be managed through internal rules, standards, and values as well as external exchange and benchmarking (Ouchi, 1979). Nevertheless, a strengths-based or positive approach to organisational leadership appears to offer the potential to achieve greater productivity and commitment from employees and volunteers (Rath & Conchie, 2009).

It could be suggested that the literature review undertaken had a limitation in terms of access to the knowledge available. The review was rather limited to the defined scope of the study (Hart, 1999), focusing prevalently on English, Italian, and French sources of knowledge that were considered relevant for the grassroots sector. Furthermore, it is important to note that in the literature there is not a general consensus on the categories through which the concept of good governance should be understood. Scholars tend, in fact, to identify different themes and principles resulting in a plethora of conceptual frameworks. In light of that, for the purpose of this study, the authors decided to adopt a theoretical framework that combined the different models analysed, identifying common points and conceiving a global theoretical framework embracing the different sources of knowledge consulted. Thus, the theoretical framework adopted should be considered holistically, not compartmentally, as a combination of the sources of knowledge utilized in the literature review. Filters adopted to review the literature, select, and summarise themes and principles might represent a limit with the consequence that the theoretical framework adopted may be considered too general.

As stated above, the research study was part of an EU-funded project. This particular configuration offered a relative advantage in terms of access to representative subjects of the grassroots sport sectors in Europe. Furthermore, it facilitated the construction of SATSport and the collection of experiences. However, the approach adopted has the limits typically related to the opportunity sampling method in that the sample might not result fully represent the sector being studied (Black, 1999). This might also have effects in terms of transferability and generalisation of the findings. However, it must be noted that the sample adopted embraces all the three different types of organisational level that have been considered relevant for the grassroots sector. In terms of transferability and generalisation of the findings to organisations operating outside the grassroots sport sector, further research needs to be developed.

## Conclusion

The study has unearthed a number of useful principles and practices. As elements of the project continue to unfold, it will be interesting to see how some of the issues identified are addressed and the practice of governance in grassroots clubs develops. It may be that future research questions might seek to go broader, wider, and deeper. By that, it is meant broader to examine further a systemic, connected, and balanced view of the governance landscape (and as a consequence develop or challenge the proposed typology); deeper into the roots of local clubs to continue learning about their constraints and possibilities (and as a consequence develop or challenge the proposed SATSport model); and finally, wider to explore further the implications of some of the relevant theoretical and conceptual issues identified (and as a consequence develop or challenge established explanations and assumptions and subsequent board effectiveness).

The value of SATSport as a flexible, dynamic, and self-regulatory instrument must be further assessed in order to gather more robust evidence on its efficacy to illustrate and plot the commitment of an organisation to good governance and the potential effects that information gathered by an organisation using the tool might have on its performance. Specifically, SATSport must be applied—and tested—through a sociodiachronic approach with data collected longitudinally through a long-term intervention that assesses the impact of SATSport on the development of systems and process of good governance. In other words, more concrete evidence on the benefits that the self-assessment tool might have for organisations operating in the grassroots sector needs to be produced and validated.

## Appendix A

### SATSport

Please indicate your impression of the elements listed in the table on the next three pages by following the score key written here and tick the relevant number on the scale from 1 to 4:

**We don't do this at the moment:** score 1, which means:

- No current evidence of Required Elements.
- It is not a priority at the moment.

**We do this in some way:** score 2, which means:

- Some evidence of Required Elements, but this is either informal or not consistently reflected in practice.

**We do this quite well:** score 3, which means:

- Evidence of established system with Required Elements present and generally reflected in practice. Some Good practice elements evident..

**We do this very well:** score 4, which means:

- Score 3 plus evidence of ongoing monitoring, review, and reporting on the effectiveness of the various elements of the governance system leading to continuous improvement. Governance systems and related documentation have been well communicated among Board members staff, and are well understood and evident in practice.

### “Developing leadership by understanding context: Focus on policy”

Topic	We don't do this at the moment: score 1	We do this in some way: score 2	We do this quite well: score 3	We do this very well: score 4
1. Our organisation has developed a clear long-term organizational strategic vision.				
2. Our organisation has developed a clear short-to-medium direction that guides our work.				
3. Our organisation has considered the significant external challenges facing us and potential opportunities open to us.				
4. Our organisation has considered its ability to survive and prosper in the future.				
5. We know who our active and key members and stakeholders are, including possibly under-represented groups.				
6. We involve and have plans in place to include both established stakeholders and underrepresented groups in decision making.				

## Appendix A (cont.)

### “Developing leadership by building capacity: Focus on people”

Topic	We don't do this at the moment: score 1	We do this in some way: score 2	We do this quite well: score 3	We do this very well: score 4
1. We, organisation's leaders, have the strategic and interpersonal skills to guide, engage, and develop the organisation.				
2. We have a set of clear values that guide our organisational purpose and activities that are documented in a Code of Ethics.				
3. We establish clear roles and responsibilities for the board, management, staff, and volunteers.				
4. We create opportunities for organisation members to influence and shape both strategic policy and practical implementation through transparent and democratic procedures, including open debates and fair elections.				
5. We facilitate organisational learning and personal development.				
6. We create a positive working environment and ensure the well-being of organisation members.				

### “Developing leadership through monitoring compliance - Focus on process”

Topic	We don't do this at the moment: score 1	We do this in some way: score 2	We do this quite well: score 3	We do this very well: score 4
1. As organisational leaders, we are involved in the overall financial planning and general financial control.				
2. We know how to differentiate between regulatory and commercial functions in our organisations.				
3. We review and assess organisational performance.				
4. We ensure open exchange and sharing of information and different views on organisational matters with members and stakeholders.				
5. We make key strategic and financial documents, board meetings agendas, and reports publicly available.				
6. We are ethically responsible and treat everyone fairly and equally.				
7. We know what the routine operational risks are in our organisation and how these are assessed and subsequently managed.				
8. We ensure there is a conflict of interest policy in place and that declarations of interest are updated at least once a year and declared in relation to agenda items at each board meeting.				

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S. Digennaro wrote the paragraphs "Theories and Principles on Governance" and "Methods"

A. Borgogni wrote the paragraph Results

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In fede  
Simone Digennaro

