

CHARLES UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Physical Education and Sport

DISSERTATION THESIS

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**Towards democratic sports systems—examining the concept of
stakeholder democracy**
PhD Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Title: Towards democratic sports systems—examining the concept of stakeholder democracy

Objectives: This dissertation aims to highlight the relationship between sport and democracy with the intention of reforming both sporting practice and the governance of sport to become more democratic. This is primarily done via the conceptualisation of ‘agonistic social practices’—those activities such as sport and democracy, which facilitate cooperation and competition in the service of human development. There are five objectives of the dissertation: 1) conceptualise normative and descriptive understandings of terms related to democracy and citizenship, and how they relate to the international sports system, 2) explain the relationship between sport and democracy, 3) analyse the current role of democracy in the governance of sport and top-down approaches to reforms in the international sports system, 4) analyse the current role of democracy in the practice of sport and bottom-up approaches to reforms in the international sports system, and 5) devise policy recommendations for practical approaches to the democratisation of sport and the development of sport citizenship.

Methodology: This is a desk study that analyses philosophical, management, and historical texts, as well as news articles and official documents relevant to understanding sport, governance of sport, stakeholder democracy, democratisation, and citizenship. Document analysis and secondary data analysis are employed regarding good governance in sport and the current role of democracy. The method of conceptual analysis is also utilised in relation to terms such as agonistic social practices, institutional and cultural democracy, and sport citizenship, among others. Analytical philosophy is a prerequisite for policy recommendations, since we need to accurately identify our concerns. Moreover, all policy decisions are based on values, which requires thinking within applied ethics.

Results: The conclusion of this dissertation is that both sporting practice and governance ought to be reformed to become more democratic. I argue for an expanded understanding of democracy, which extends beyond its political context and emphasises both cooperation and competition. This expanded understanding can be experienced through sporting practice, given the similarities

between sport and democracy as agonistic social practices. While democracy is an ideal that cannot be met, the international sport system can and should strive for greater democratisation—that is to move closer to the democratic ideal. This will require both the top-down efforts (e.g., sports governing institutions) as well as bottom-up efforts (e.g., athletes, clubs). Effective changes are possible with a commitment to greater stakeholder inclusion in the governance of sport and more athlete-centred practices regarding preparation and competition on the field. The suggested reforms constitute the democratisation of the international sports system. Moreover, other stakeholder groups, including but not limited to media, sponsors, local communities, and international sporting bodies, can be lead to become sport citizens and contribute to the democratisation of sport.

Keywords: Sport, Democracy, Stakeholders, Governance, Agon, Sport Citizenship

ABSTRAKT

Název: Směrem k demokratickým sportovním systémům – zkoumání konceptu stakeholder demokracie

Cíle: Tato disertační práce se zabývá zvýrazněním vztahů mezi sportem a demokracií s cílem reformovat jak sportovní praxi, tak řízení sportu, aby byly více demokratické. Toho je primárně docíleno skrz konceptualizace „agonistické sociální praxe“ – tj. aktivity jako jsou sport a demokracie, které umožňují kooperaci a soutěživost ve službách lidského rozvoje. Tato disertační práce má pět cílů: 1) konceptualizovat normativní a deskriptivní porozumění termínů spojených demokracií a občanstvím a jejich vztah k mezinárodnímu systému sportu, 2) vysvětlit vztah mezi sportem a demokracií, 3) analyzovat současnou roli demokracie v řízení sportu a přístupy k reformování systému mezinárodního sportu orientované shora dolů, 4) analyzovat současnou roli demokracie ve sportovní praxi a přístupy k reformování systému mezinárodního sportu orientované zdola nahoru, a 5) navrhnout doporučené praktické postupy k demokratizaci sportu a rozvoji sportovního občanství.

Metodologie: Jedná se o studii, která analyzuje filozofické, manažerské a historické texty, stejně jako novinové články a oficiální dokumenty relevantní pro porozumění sportu, řízení sportu, stakeholder demokracii, demokratizaci a občanství. Práce využívá analýzu dokumentů a analýzu sekundárních dat pro popsání řádné správy sportu a současné role demokracie. Metoda konceptuální analýzy je využívána pro vysvětlení pojmů, jako jsou například agonistické sociální praxe, institucionální a kulturní demokracie a sportovní občanství. Analytická filozofie je předpokladem pro tvorbu strategií, protože musíme přesně identifikovat naše téma. A veškerá politická rozhodnutí jsou založena na hodnotách, což vyžaduje myšlení v rámci aplikované etiky.

Výsledky: Obojí, sportovní praxe i řízení sportu musí být reformováno, aby se stalo více demokratickým. Argumentace v práci podporuje rozšířené porozumění demokracii, které přesahuje za jeho politický kontext a zdůrazňuje jak kooperaci tak soutěživost. Toto rozšířené porozumění může být zakoušeno skrze sportovní praxi vzhledem k podobnostem mezi sportem a demokracií jakožto agonistickým sociálním praxím. Zatímco ideál demokracie nemůže být

dosažen, mezinárodní sportovní systém může a měl by usilovat o větší demokratizaci, tj. přiblížit se demokratickému ideálu. Toto bude vyžadovat přístup jak shora dolů (např. sportovní organizace) tak i zdola nahoru (např. sportovci, kluby). Efektivní změny jsou možné díky závazku většího začlenění stakeholderů v rámci řízení sportu a většího zaměření na sportovce ohledně přípravy a závodění. Navrhované reformy představují demokratizaci mezinárodního sportovního systému. Navíc i další skupiny stakeholderů zahrnující např. média, sponzory, lokální komunity a mezinárodní sportovní organizace, také mohou být vedeni k sportovnímu občanství a přispět k demokratizaci sportu.

Klíčová slova: Sport, demokracie, zúčastněné strany, řízení, agon, sportovní občanství

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List of Abbreviations

ASOIF	Association of Summer Olympic International Federations
BUPGG	Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance
CAS	Court of Arbitration for Sport
CHINADA	Chinese Anti-Doping Association
CJEU	Court of Justice of the EU
EC	European Commission
FIFA	Federation of International Football Associations
GRG	Governance Reform Group
IBA	International Boxing Association
IOC	International Olympic Committee
IF	International Federation
IGO	International Government Organisation
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
ISB	International Sporting Bodies
NGB	National Governing Bodies
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
NOC	National Olympic Committee
OCOG	Organising Committees for the Olympic Games
OVEP	Olympic Values Education Programme
RHB	Rights Holders and Broadcasters
SAQ	Self-Assessment Questionnaire
SGO	Sport Governance Observer
TSS	Trialectics of Societal Spheres
USADA	United States Anti-Doping Association
WADA	World Anti-Doping Association

INTRODUCTION

Background and Topic

This dissertation aims to address a gap in the research regarding the potential role of democracy in sport. While democracy is commonly recognised as a tenet of good governance (Geeraert, 2015; Henry and Lee, 2004; Thompson et al., 2023), it is often interpreted narrowly, focusing on elections, term limits, and democratic procedures. However, the concept of democracy can be applied more broadly to sport, affecting both its governance and practice. Identifying democracy as a positive contributor to the international sports system is not a novel concept. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) cites ‘structures, regulations and democratic process’ as one of its Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance (2008). The EU Expert Group on Good Governance (2013) lists ‘stakeholder identification and roles’ and ‘democracy and minimum standards’ as two of the 10 principles that help define the concept of good governance in sport. The International Sport and Culture Association (ISCA) published Guidelines for Good Governance in Grassroots Sport and claimed that democracy, transparency, accountability, and the inclusion of stakeholders were four major dimensions of good governance (2012). Democracy is consistently identified as an integral part of good governance (Geeraert et al., 2014; IOC, 2022; Thompson et al., 2023).

The title of this dissertation specifically refers to stakeholder democracy in sport, since the initial intention was to examine greater involvement of traditionally excluded stakeholder groups, with special attention paid to athletes. Eventually it became apparent that greater democratisation of the international sports system would require addressing institutional sporting bodies (ISBs) such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and World-Anti Doping Agency (WADA) with respect to them considering democratisation, in addition to addressing athletes and other stakeholders disadvantaged in the current system with respect to emphasising preparation for the democratisation. In other words, democratisation should be approached from the top-down and bottom-up. Therefore, the scope has been slightly expanded to not only examine the system itself but also the role of athletes as citizens within a potentially democratised international sports system.

The IOC has been publicly committed to upholding good governance standards since the release of the Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance in 2008 (IOC 2008), later

reaffirming that commitment by releasing an updated version in 2022 (IOC 2022). The IOC is the guardian of the Olympic Movement, so the standards and regulations that it sets must be upheld by other members of the Olympic Movement, including, but not limited to, International Federations (IFs), National Olympic Committees (NOCs), as well as National Governing Bodies (NGBs) (IOC, 2025b). The Olympic Movement's commitment to good governance 'serves to obtain the respect and confidence of all partners' (IOC, n.d.-c). However, there are a number of lawsuits¹²³ currently being litigated due to athletes' dismay with the current system (Dunbar, 2023; Picazo, 2025; Scarcella, 2024), indicating distrust in the system. These actions suggest that athletes, in particular, are interested in attaining more of a decision-making role in the international sports system, which would consequently be a more democratic system. This study will explore an approach to sport governance that is better able to incorporate athletes into governance processes. This topic is very timely across the international sports landscape as athletes and communities have become more vocal in recent years regarding the autonomy of sports bodies and ways in which corruption can negatively impact the athletes and communities.

Research Gaps

Much scholarship about good governance in sport has been published over the last two decades with major topics including the analysis of governance principles and governance structure (Chappelet and Mrkonjic, 2019; Henry and Lee, 2004; Hoye et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 2023; van Bottenburg, 2021) and the difficulties associated with sports governance due to their autonomy (Chappelet, 2018b; Di Marco, 2019; Foster, 2005; Geeraert, 2019; 2021c). Empirical studies related to the governance of sport have been limited in scope to the role of executive boards of sport organisations (Ferkins and Shilbury, 2012) and are frequently concerned with assessing sport

¹In December 2023, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruled in three sport-related cases that sport organisations are bound by European law and that current regulations may violate EU competition law. The ECJ does permit sport organisations to restrict competition with appropriate justification though these rulings do seem to imply that these justifications will be more heavily scrutinised than in the past (James and Duval 2024; Villanueva 2023).

²In the United States, a U.S. District Court in San Francisco ruled in favor of World Aquatics in January 2023 regarding the Shields vs. World Aquatics and International Swimming League (ISL) vs. World Aquatics antitrust lawsuits (Dunbar 2023). In September 2024, the swimmers and ISL filed an appeal, during which the Ninth Circuit Court found that the swimmers and the ISL had enough evidence of World Aquatics' anti-competitive practices, allowing them to proceed with their case (Scarcella 2024).

³In March of 2025, the Professional Tennis Players Association filed multiple lawsuits against the Association of Tennis Players (ATP), Women's Tennis Association (WTA), the International Tennis Federation (ITF), and the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) accusing the organisations of corruption and exploitation (Picazo 2025).

organisations in their attempts to uphold governance standards (Geeraert et al., 2014; Geeraert, 2015; Pielke et al., 2020). While researchers acknowledge the issues associated with the current approach, their solutions tend to revolve around institutional improvements; calling for more ethical leadership (Auweele, 2015; Geeraert, 2021a) or more government intervention (Chappelet, 2018b).

With respect to the individual good governance principles, more attention has been paid to transparency and/or accountability (Henne, 2015; Pielke, 2013; Sugden and Tomlinson, 2004). The historical relationship between sport and democracy has been moderately covered, though they tend to centre the relationship between democracy and sporting practice and stop short of arguments for making the sport governance system more democratic (Christesen, 2012; 2013; López Frías and Isidori, 2014). There are scholars who have argued for the implementation of stakeholder democracy (Næss, 2020), deliberative democracy (Kihl et al., 2007; Thibault et al., 2010) and democratic responsiveness (Stenling and Sam, 2020; Stenling et al., 2023) in sport. The works which do focus on democracy's role in sport governance are focused on the internal workings of the organisation, relying on the IOC and other institutions as intermediaries as opposed to finding additional ways for athletes and other stakeholder groups to have more of a role in decision-making.

Hyper-focusing on the role of governing institutions as a conduit for other stakeholders whilst not providing ways to hold those governing institutions accountable, has practical consequences for the overall health of the system. I propose that a more democratic approach to sports governance and sporting practice can help alleviate some of the difficulties.

Scope and Organisation of the Dissertation

The study is interdisciplinary in nature, drawing on a variety of theoretical frameworks to examine governance and democracy more generally and will serve as a basis for the democratisation of sport. The following frameworks and theories will be invoked when referring to democracy in more formal contexts (relevant for governance proceedings); stakeholder theory (Freeman, 2009), stakeholder democracy (Moriarty, 2014) and stakeholder capitalism (Freeman and Phillips, 2002) as a means to implement democratic practices in organisations, Dahl's account of procedural and substantive democracy as a means to differentiate between process-oriented and outcome-oriented democracy (Dahl et al., 2003), and deliberative democracy theory with respect to the quality of

interactions (Benhabib, 2021; Cohen, 1997; Held, 2006). Regarding democracy in its more general sense, these include Dewey's framing of democracy as a 'way of life' (Dewey, [1916] 2001), Christesen's (2013) conception of 'democratisation', and Turner's (1990) typology with respect to citizenship theory. The relationship between democracy in more formal contexts and more informal experiences with democracy are framed by what I refer to as two dimensions through which we engage with democracy; the institutional and cultural dimensions of democracy.

With respect to the scope of sport, Parry's (2023, p. 53) definition of Olympic sport, 'an institutionalised, rule-governed contest of human physical skill', will serve as a basis for the understanding of 'sport' throughout the dissertation. Those activities that might lack a competitive aspect or have not been institutionalised by an external body of sorts are excluded. The aforementioned democratic frameworks and theories (e.g., stakeholder democracy, democratisation, etc.) will be applied to the governance of sport as well as sporting practice since this dissertation is concerned with both the top-down and bottom-up approaches to reforms in sport. Top-down approaches to reform would centre institutions such as the IOC, while bottom-up approaches would be decentralised in practice, including perspectives from multiple levels of power, not just those at the top. While those reforms aimed at institutions (top-down) are plentiful in the sports governance scholarship, the role of democracy is underutilised and those reforms relevant to sporting practice and education for governance (bottom-up) have been given less attention. This research will be focused on the democratisation of the international sports system as an ideal, meaning that the ideas explored and arguments made may not be applicable or feasible today. However, that does not mean that reforms cannot be attempted, or at least thought through. Moreover, the *process* is being emphasised as opposed to prioritising a 'successful' outcome.

This dissertation is organised into three parts. Part I introduces concepts relevant throughout the dissertation, with the three central concepts: agonistic social practices, sport, and democracy. Chapter one serves to situate sport and democracy as agonistic social practices, illustrating their similar relationship to the concepts of *polemos* and *agon*. Chapter two presents the intended meaning and scope of sport and the sport system (e.g., sport governance, sporting practice, and the sport 'ecosystem') referred to throughout the dissertation. Chapter three introduces democracy and examines the concept beyond its typical political context. The concept of democracy is further explored in chapter four, which presents two dimensions of democracy: the institutional dimension and the cultural dimension. Chapter five, the final chapter of the

section, explores the relationship between sport and democracy in society and how that relationship can be improved.

Part II examines the institutional dimension of democracy and its relationship to the governance of sport. Chapter six explores the history and role of democracy in global institutions. Chapter seven discusses the relevant types of democracy for the governance of sport; representative democracy and stakeholder democracy. Chapter eight investigates the interpretation of democracy in the governance of sport. Chapter nine theorises what the democratisation of sport governance would involve. Concerning governance frameworks, stakeholder theory will be applied to the governance of sport, which will be foundational to Part II alongside sport governance frameworks including the IOC's Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance (BUPGG), Sport Governance Observer (SGO), and the ASIOF's IF Governance Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ).

Part III focuses on the cultural dimension of democracy and its relationship to sport. Chapter ten explains the significance of civic education in democratic systems. Chapter eleven examines the current approach to education in sport (e.g., Olympic education). Chapter twelve theorises what the democratisation of sporting practice would entail. Finally, chapter thirteen presents the concept of sport citizenship as the ultimate means of democratising the sport system. Part III will centre around Coubertin's notion of 'Olympism' as well as how democracy and education pertain to it (Coubertin, 2000a; 2000b; 2000c). Additionally, Dewey's conception of civic education will serve as a foundation for the last section (Dewey, [1916] 2001).

Research Aims

The research objectives include the following:

- 1) Conceptualise normative and descriptive understandings of terms including democracy, institutional dimension democracy, cultural dimension of democracy, citizenship and how these terms relate to the international sport system
- 2) Explain the relationship between sport and democracy
- 3) Analyse the current role of democracy in the governance of sport (institutional dimension), the limitations of the approach, and how improvements can be made
- 4) Analyse the current role of democracy in the practice of sport (cultural dimension)n and how improvements can be made

- 5) Devise policy recommendations for practical approaches to the democratisation of sport and the development of sport citizenship

The first objective revolves around the conceptualisation of terms related to democracy, citizenship, and how they relate to the international sports system. Section I will justify the invocation of democracy as a way of life throughout the study, as opposed to limiting democracy to its political context. Additionally, the terms institutional dimension of democracy and cultural dimension of democracy will be introduced, and their relevance to the study will be explained. The relationship between democracy and citizenship will also be analysed, as well as the relevance of this relationship to sport.

The second objective seeks to relate sport and democracy via the concepts *agon* and *polemos*. The principles upon which sport and democracy are built are similar. Therefore, sport is already democratic in a sense. This objective is foundational to the research since understanding the nature of sport and democracy and their similarities is an important step in arguing that a more democratic approach to sport would be beneficial for all involved.

The third objective further delves into the institutional dimension of democracy and its impact on sport. This includes examining the role of democracy in sport governance by analysing the evolution of good governance in sport in addition to documents from the IOC (e.g., Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance (IOC, 2008; 2022), Olympic Charter (IOC, 2025b)) and other institutional authorities in sport (e.g., Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF, 2023), Sports Governance Observer). Stakeholder democracy and its applicability to sport are also introduced under this objective.

The fourth objective centres the cultural dimension of democracy and what it means for sport. Part III of the dissertation covers civic education and its role in developing citizens who are prepared to participate in a democratic system. Coubertin's intentions for education and democracy will also be explored in addition to the modern approach to Olympic Values Education in Sport.

The final objective involves policy recommendations for reconceiving the sport system to become more democratic in terms of the governance of sport and sporting practice.

METHODOLOGY

This is a desk-study with the primary methods consisting of conceptual analysis, document analysis, and critical reasoning. The study will utilise literature research and the philosophical technique of conceptual analysis. Conceptual analysis will be employed when examining the following concepts; *agon*, *polemos*, sport, democracy, the institutional and cultural dimensions of democracy, stakeholder democracy, citizenship, and sport citizenship. The research will be grounded in analytic political philosophy and democratic theories within it. The goals of analytic philosophy include investigating concepts and providing justification for positions. As a result, the research will include a normative analysis of the value of democracy as well as a descriptive analysis to better understand how democratic systems may function in practice.

Secondary data analysis will be employed throughout. There has been much research produced about good governance in sport as well as the difficulties associated with its implementation (Chappelet, 2016a; 2018b; Di Marco, 2019; Geeraert, 2015; Geeraert and van Eekeren, 2021; Henne, 2015; Thibault et al., 2010; Thompson et al., 2023). Similarly, democracy, stakeholder democracy, citizenship, and civic education will also be approached via secondary data analysis. Document analysis will also be utilised throughout the dissertation. This will be the primary method of research when analysing the role of democracy in sport governance. Various sport-related documents will be analysed, including the IOC's BUPGG and the Olympic Charter.

This dissertation will include policy recommendations for the development of more democratic sports systems (when appropriate). Policy issues raise questions about what we should do and are, therefore, matters of value. Since empirical research is concerned with gathering and interpreting facts, it would not be an appropriate mode of inquiry because of this fact/value gap. In practice, policy proposals should go beyond the collection and interpretation of facts. Analytic philosophy is the most appropriate method to pursue the research because it will allow for the appropriate value analysis necessary to develop relevant policy recommendations.

PART I: KEY CONCEPTS

Chapter 1: Agonistic Social Practices

This chapter will introduce the concept of ‘agonistic social practices’. It is intended to connect sport and democracy via *agon* and *polemos*. The chapter will begin with an introduction to the ontological *polemos* before exploring its ontic counterpart, *agon*, leading to a conception of agonistic social practices. The chapter will then conclude with a succinct examination of philosophy, democracy, and sport as agonistic social practices.

1.1 *Polemos*

Polemos is a concept originating from ancient Greece. It roughly translates to ‘war’ or ‘struggle’, which is more significant for this dissertation. When explaining *polemos*, Drew Hyland (2020) refers to Heraclitus’ the Fragments. The term *polemos* is referenced three times in the text, though it is translated into English as ‘war’.

War is father of all and king of all; and some he has shown as gods, others men; some he has made slaves, others free. (D-K 53)

One must realise that war is shared and conflict is justice, and that all things come to pass (and are ordained) in accordance with conflict. (D-K 80)

The god: day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, satiety and hunger. It alters, as when mingled with perfumes, it gets named according to the pleasure of each one. (D-K 67) (Hyland, 2020, 112)

Hyland (2020) settles on ‘struggle’ or ‘opposition’ as a more appropriate translation for *polemos* than ‘war’. All three excerpts refer to a universal experience of sorts, and while war is familiar to many individuals, it is not a universal experience. On the other hand, ‘struggle’ or ‘strife’ is a universal experience. Everyone encounters internal struggle as they work toward goals and overcome obstacles.

Polemos is a concept that philosophers have discussed throughout history, even if they do not refer to it as such. Nietzsche, influenced by the works of Heraclitus, frequently wrote about a phenomenon that is reminiscent of *polemos*. He wrote:

[t]he strife of the opposites gives birth to all that comes-to-be; the definite qualities which look permanent to us express but the momentary ascendancy of one partner. But this by no means signifies the end of the war; the contest endures in all eternity. Everything that happens, happens in accordance with this strife, and it is just in the strife that eternal justice is revealed. (Nietzsche, 1998, p. 55)

While Nietzsche's interpretation of Heraclitus and *polemos* was integral to his work, the emphasis was more on power than on the constructive and communal elements of the concept, which are more relevant to this work. For an interpretation that better aligns with the aims of this research, it is more fitting to turn to Patočka, who also wrote about a concept that can be identified as *polemos*.

McCoy and Martínková (2022) cite Patočka (1996) as he references Heraclitus in his analysis of the 'three movements of human existence' regarding historical development. '*Polemos*' is related to the 'ancient Greek *polis* (city-state) and philosophy' (McCoy and Martínková, 2022, p. 249). They compare the democratic polis to pre-democratic structures, such as kingdoms, wherein 'society was contained within one view of the world' (ibid, p. 249). In pre-democratic systems, members had few options because there was little room to question the established order. *Polemos* cannot emerge in such conditions. However, once the closed system is replaced by one with more openness and opportunity, *polemos* arises in the society. This transition happens naturally, whenever members of a society become disillusioned by the established ways of a kingdom and are curious about what could be possible for themselves and their society.

When explaining the concept of *polemos*, McCoy and Martínková (2022, p. 249) explain that it 'depicts the character of struggle in our existence, giving rise to a world wherein we find ourselves in situations set against each other. However, whilst capturing the struggle and agonism within our human condition, *polemos* also unites us'. Understanding *polemos* as related to the human condition is ontological in nature since ontology deals with the nature of being, particularly human existence. *Polemos* refers to an aspect of the human condition that involves struggling against ourselves and others as we try to overcome that struggle. Although in that universal experience of struggle, we are also united in it. *Polemos* is better understood in relation to *agon*, which is the expression of *polemos* through activities.

1.2 *Agon*

Agon can be translated as 'contest' (MacIntyre, 2007) and serves as the ontic counterpart to the ontological *polemos*, an underlying aspect of human existence that manifests through various ontic

expressions (i.e. competition in different forms). Once these expressions are institutionalised, they can become agonistic social practices (McCoy and Martínková, 2022, p. 252). For Morford (1973), *agon* embodies the struggle we face in life while striving for personal excellence. Members of a society where *polemos* is present are driven to engage in agonal or agonistic activities that facilitate competition and cooperation. In Hyland's (1988, p. 236) article, Competition and Friendship, he writes that competition 'is a questioning of each other *together*, a striving *together*, presumably so that each participant achieves a level of excellence that could not have been achieved alone, without mutual striving, without the competition'. The manner in which sport is presented by Hyland (1988) situates it as an agonistic social practice, providing opportunities for participants to test their boundaries together and pursue excellence through the act of competition.

McCoy and Martínková (2022) distinguish between two forms of *agon*: 'physical agon,' which pertains to war and sporting competitions, and 'intellectual agon,' which pertains to political and philosophical debates. They draw from two works regarding the characteristics associated with *agon*. Daqing (2010, p. 6809) cites three characteristics to illustrate the agonistic spirit: 1) the openness of *agon*, 2) the fairness of *agon*, and 3) the justice of the procedure. Openness refers to accessibility and the unknown outcome, as the result must be decided through the agonistic encounter. Fairness of *agon* pertains to the equality of participants, who are only rendered unequal by the outcome of their performance. Justice of the procedure relies on the regulations and guidelines associated with the activity; if they are violated, such injustices can be rectified by a neutral decision-making entity.

The other characteristics associated with *agon* are sourced from Loy and Morford (2019), who propose three steps in the quest for excellence concerning the *agon* motif:

- (1) "Preparing to be the best" by learning to excel by engaging in youthful play- fighting and athletic activities;
- (2) "Competing with the best" by testing oneself in the course of competing against one's immediate peers;
- (3) "Winning against the best" by risking defeat while achieving victory against the best of one's peers.

(Loy and Morford, 2019, p. 24)

They are specifically referencing *agon* in a sporting context; however, the steps are relevant for any agonistic activity. Each step in the quest for excellence is necessary but not sufficient on its own to embody the agonistic spirit. McCoy and Martínková (2022) apply each step to sports as an

example. Step one includes the physical training and mental preparation necessary for pursuing excellence. While important, training or exercising alone or with others in low-stakes scenarios is not sufficient to approach the agonistic spirit. Regarding step two, McCoy and Martínková (2022) write that it ‘can be easily overlooked by athletes, coaches and fans, as they may not value the role that competitors play as participants, or the role of the contest itself in the quest for excellence’ (p. 257). They also highlight the language employed in the second and third steps, noting that the phrasing of ‘*competing with the best*’ in the second step points to the cooperative aspects of *agon*. This contrasts with the third step phrasing of ‘*winning against the best*,’ which emphasises the adversarial nature of *agon*. To be clear, winning is not necessary in the quest for excellence, though the *desire* to win is.

All steps are important, so it is crucial not to neglect the first two steps in favour of the third. Doing so prevents participants from experiencing the full value of engaging with *agon*. Focusing too much on the third step is also more likely to lead to unsportsmanlike conduct (McCoy and Martínková, 2022). When engaging with *agon*, the process should be prioritised, not just the outcome. Humans can reach their potential when they test themselves and engage with the agonistic spirit. Habermas argues that ‘the individual can get a clear sense of commonalities and differences, and hence a sense of who she is and who she would like to be, only in the public exchange with others who owe their identities to the same traditions and similar formation processes’ (1994, p. 4). Humans can truly understand the result only by understanding the process and how that result was achieved. This illustration of human nature explains the significance that agonistic social practices can have on our experiences and on society.

1.3 Characteristics of Agonistic Social Practices

The characteristics discussed in the previous section from Loy and Morford (2019) and Daqing (2010) constitute what McCoy and Martínková (2022) refer to as the internal and external characteristics of agonistic social practices.

The internal characteristics (preparing to be the best, competing with the best, and winning against the best) derive from Loy and Morford (2019) as they primarily relate to the mindset or attitude that participants bring to the agonistic social practice at hand. Using sport as an example, these internal characteristics hinge on the athlete’s intentions and goals. Preparation, including training, nutrition, and physical therapy, takes place on their own time prior to competition. Competing with the best by testing oneself and winning against the best by risking defeat both

depend on the participant's willingness to step up and challenge themselves against appropriate competitors while genuinely striving to overcome the challenge and abiding by the rules. (Loy and Morford, 2019) Throwing a match or doping would indicate a lack of commitment to these internal characteristics and would mean they do not receive (all of) the benefits that come with participation in agonistic social practices (McCoy and Martínková, 2022).

The external characteristics are based on Daqing's (2010) characteristics associated with *agon* (openness of *agon*, fairness of *agon*, and justice of the procedure). They are called external characteristics because they are more focused on the organisation of the agonistic social practice and, therefore, fall under the responsibility of the institution organising the activity. Using sports as an example once again, the organisation must strive to ensure that the activity is accessible to both participants and spectators, while also establishing appropriate parameters to ensure the outcome remains uncertain beforehand. For instance, this may involve organising qualifying rounds to guarantee that the final competition includes the strongest competitors. Fairness depends on the institution's ability to maintain a level playing field and base the outcome of the competition on the participants' performances. Lastly, a just procedure relies on institutions addressing violations of rules pertaining to openness and fairness. Although the institution responsible for organising the competition should prioritise openness and fairness, this does not mean that athletes or other institutions cannot undermine them. The institution is required to provide the infrastructure for competition, which includes rules, regulations, and expectations prior to the event, along with a process for adjudication if things do not go according to plan.

While the interpretation of external characteristics may be limited to the practice of sports and the organisation of sporting competitions, I would argue that the concept of internal and external characteristics applies to the international sports system as a whole. The internal characteristics (i.e., preparing to be the best, competing against the best, and winning against the best) require an attitude that must exist long before participants take part in a match. Commitment to these internal characteristics necessitates that participants engage in and abstain from certain behaviors, such as appropriate training, proper nutrition, and avoiding banned substances well before the event begins. The same applies for the external characteristics (i.e., fairness, openness, and justice of the procedure). The preservation of the sports system by institutional authorities requires that they conduct matters openly, fairly, and justly long before match day. The decisions that shape perceptions of openness, fairness, and justice are governance decisions made before

sports events occur, such as awarding event hosts, banning substances, and establishing eligibility criteria related to age or gender. Therefore, the internal and external characteristics associated with competitive social practices should also apply to the governance of sport.

The agonistic social practice can occur without embodying both the internal and external characteristics. The only ‘essential aspect is conflict in the form of debate/contest/competition’ (McCoy and Martínková, 2022, p. 258); however, some combination of the characteristics should be present for the experience to be a meaningful agonistic social practice. Striving to incorporate as many characteristics as possible should be of interest to enhance the chances that participants are able to fully engage with the agonistic spirit and experience benefits such as an improved understanding of themselves and others. Having fewer characteristics can also undermine the integrity of competitions. If the external characteristics (openness, fairness, just procedure) are perceived as lacking, participants may be less inclined to maintain those internal characteristics. In the case of sports, if athletes perceive that the outcome of the competition is already decided, they may be less motivated to follow the rules. If athletes believe that their competitors are doping, they may feel pressure to dope as well.

1.4 Expanded Applications of *Agon*

The internal and external characteristics also apply to other agonistic social practices, such as philosophy and democratic politics. Plato’s dialogues exemplify the *agon* in philosophy because they are presented in the form of conversations, with characters exchanging ideas in pursuit of ‘truth’. Even when philosophical inquiry occurs in solitude, the goal is to eventually present those ideas so they can be built upon and challenged. Democratic politics should include ‘explicit discussion and contest over our future ways of living together’ (McCoy and Martínková, 2022, p. 248).

Not all agonistic activities are ‘agonistic social practices,’ with a marked difference between ‘agonistic social practices’ and ‘agonistic anti-social practices’ (McCoy and Martínková, 2022). Those practices belonging to the former reflect the ‘polemic human condition’ and ‘support the development of the human and of society’ (ibid, p. 247), while the latter are more destructive to human development. Philosophy, democratic politics, and sport are examples of agonistic social practices, whereas ‘war’ can be considered an agonistic anti-social practice. War is a manifestation of *agon* (it is an essentially contested activity) that brings out the more violent aspects of the human

condition. This is especially true for modern warfare, which relies less on the characteristics associated with *agon*, as guerrilla techniques, drones, and media are employed. Some activities can be engaged in ways that emphasise or suppress their agonistic characteristics.

Capitalist business practices can also be understood as agonistic since capitalism is based on free market competition, arguably a similar basis as the internal and external characteristics of agonistic social practices. Freeman and Phillips (2002) introduce the concept of ‘stakeholder capitalism,’ asserting that it emphasises value creation (rather than value distribution or the accumulation and control of substantial amounts of capital), which is the fundamental essence of business. They contend that value creation and trade arise from the human desire to create, and our common values motivate us to take action in our lives. They argue that “the desire for solidarity fuels capitalism, the desire to come together and build something which no single person can accomplish” (Freeman and Phillips, 2002, p. 340). The principles associated with stakeholder capitalism and value creation are:

- (1) *The Principle of Stakeholder Cooperation* says that value is created because stakeholders can jointly satisfy their needs and desires by making voluntary agreements with each other.
- (2) *The Principle of Stakeholder Responsibility* claims that parties to an agreement must accept responsibility for the consequences of their action. When third parties are harmed, they must be compensated, or a new agreement must be negotiated with all of those parties who are affected.
- (3) *The Principle of Complexity* claims that human beings are complex psychological creatures capable of acting from many different values and points of view.
- (4) *The Principle of Continuous Creation* says that business as an institution is a source of the creation of value. Cooperating with stakeholders and motivated by values, businesspeople continuously create new sources of value.
- (5) *The Principle of Emergent Competition* says that competition emerges from a relatively free society so that stakeholders have options. Competition emerges out of the cooperation among stakeholders, rather than being based on the primal urge to “get the other guy. (Freeman and Phillips, 2002, pp. 341-4)

The description of value creation resembles how *polemos* has been portrayed throughout this chapter—as the strife that accompanies possibility within an open and democratic society. This perspective positions value creation in business alongside other agonistic social practices: philosophy, democratic politics, and sport.

The core principles of stakeholder capitalism listed above (i.e., cooperation, responsibility, complexity, creation, and competition) are presented in a manner that allows stakeholder

capitalism to be considered agonistic. Freeman and Phillips's (2002) principles of cooperation, creation, and competition align with the internal characteristics associated with agonistic social activities as they deal with the mindset of stakeholders participating. The principle of responsibility aligns with the external characteristics with respect to fairness and justice for the endeavour in question. Additionally, all of Freeman's principles reflect the polemic nature of humanity; our shared desire to strive for more despite our different social realities.

If applying Freeman and Phillips's (2002) principles of stakeholder capitalism in sports, these principles can be viewed from two perspectives: one that focuses on the participants and another that considers the role of all stakeholders in a match setting. The first perspective is limited to the athletes in a match, who cooperate to create an experience in which they engage in competition. The participants agree to abide by specific rules and are responsible for upholding that agreement; if the rules are violated, the participants are held accountable through an adjudication process. The complexity principle can be examined by considering the spheres of influence in the international sports system, which is addressed in Chapter Two, section four of this study.

The second view expands to consider the roles of institutional authorities, Rights Holders and Broadcasters (RHBs), sponsors, event organisers, volunteers, spectators, athlete participants, and more. From this perspective, the principles of cooperation and creation are explored through the collaboration of stakeholders working together to organise a sporting event and ensure its success. Stakeholder responsibility is emphasised through the commitment to adhere to various guidelines, such as those pertaining to anti-corruption for sporting bodies, anti-doping for athletes, and appropriate fan behavior (e.g., no racism or hooliganism). The principle of complexity is again acknowledged through the different spheres of influence that shape stakeholder behavior. Finally, the principle of emergent competition can be examined through negotiations among stakeholder groups, such as sporting bodies and athletes (e.g., improved conditions, a larger share of prize money), or competition among sports equipment providers with regard to innovation. Both views can be applied to the modern international sports system, highlighting the identification of stakeholder capitalism as an agonistic social practice.

Freeman and Phillips (2002) acknowledge that capitalism has suffered from 'bad public relations' as the belief that those acting on behalf of businesses do so solely out of self-interest has persisted. Therefore, they argue, it is necessary to explore the fundamentals of business and understand how businesses can and should operate (ibid, p. 343). Another way to articulate the

critical view of capitalist business operations is through the internal and external characteristics of *agon* as interpreted in sport⁴s. In this case, the perception of capitalism is that the external characteristics are not being met. The commitment to openness, fairness, and a just procedure is arguably lacking. For instance, businesses are able to be passed down through families and participants with the most money and resources have a greater advantage. If the perception is that the external characteristics are not being upheld, then it is less likely to result in participants upholding the internal characteristics (e.g., why even try if the system is rigged against the majority?). The presentation of ‘stakeholder capitalism’ and its accompanying principles is compelling, even if capitalist business practices rarely qualify as meeting the standard of an agonistic social practice in actuality. The idea that stakeholder capitalism is an ideal to aspire to has significant implications when discussing potential reforms to the international sports system. Rather than arguing for the end of commercialisation in sports as the solution to its current issues, one can argue for these commercial practices to be conducted in a more agonistic manner⁵.

If sport, philosophy, democratic politics and capitalist business practices have the capacity to be engaged with so that the internal and external characteristics of agonistic social practices are both honored, then sporting practice and the governance of sport (which together will be referred to as the ‘international sport system’ throughout this dissertation) can become more aligned with the agonistic spirit. While it may be more readily accepted that *agon* can enhance engagement with sporting practice, there will likely be resistance regarding *agon*’s potential role in sporting governance given the assumptions that democracy is not feasible in organisations, especially international organisations (Dahl, 1999; Harrison and Freeman, 2004). Nevertheless, the governance of sport could align with democracy (regarding the diverse memberships and various relevant stakeholder groups), philosophy (pertaining to policy development and decisions), and capitalist business practices (regarding commercialisation and revenue generation).

The four examples of agonistic social practices are relevant for the reform of both sporting practices and the governance of sport. These agonistic social practices share many of the same underlying principles, although scholars have more frequently emphasised democratic values or principles when discussing what I refer to as the internal and external characteristics associated

⁴ The internal and external characteristics of agonistic social practices as presented by McCoy and Martínková (2022) were constructed with sport in mind. While they will serve as the basis for characteristics of all agonistic social practices examined throughout this work, they may not always be suitable in every instance.

⁵ The commercialisation of sport will be revisited in Chapter 5 in relation to the institutionalisation of sport.

with *agon*. Furthermore, given my focus on the sport system, the IOC's commitment to democracy as a principle of good governance in sport has also influenced the decision to concentrate on democratic principles rather than the agonistic spirit. For these reasons, the remainder of this dissertation will discuss how sport can become more democratic, which ultimately means embracing democratic principles rooted in *polemos* and realised in *agon*.

CHAPTER 2: SPORT

The previous chapter established sport as an agonistic social practice. This chapter serves to position the concept of sport more effectively for the reader. It includes a definition of sport, an introduction to relevant models of sport, and the type of sport central to this dissertation's arguments. The scope of sport and its implications are also presented before introducing the primary stakeholders and major influences on sport through Eichberg's (2009) *Trialectics of Societal Spheres*.

2.1 Definition of Sport

The definition of sport used throughout this work is an Olympic-type sport from Parry (2023), who defines sport as 'an institutionalised, rule-governed contest of human physical skill' (p. 53). For the purposes of this dissertation, sports and their respective governing institutions that resemble those belonging to the Olympic Movement are included in the scope of sport. Some aspects of Parry's (2023) definition should be highlighted, including 'institutionalised', 'rule-governed', and 'contest'.

'Institutionalised' and 'rule-governed' are directly related to the external characteristics of agonistic social practices discussed in Chapter One. The external characteristics of fairness, openness, and justice in the procedure can only occur once the activity (in this case, sport) has been institutionalised. Some form of institutional authority is necessary for the infrastructure required for international sporting competitions. The 'rule-governed' aspect is also linked to the external characteristics of agonistic social practices. Rules communicate expectations to participants and spectators. Without rules, fairness, openness, and justice lack context. Different rules may apply to different competitions. For example, men's tennis has 5-set matches for grand slam tournaments and 3-set matches for other Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) tour events. This is acceptable as long as an authoritative body can set a standard for the rules and communicate that standard. The term 'contest' is relevant to *agon*, which was established as a site where participants can act on their polemic drive (McCoy and Martínková, 2022).

Sports that are part of the Olympic Movement hold particular significance. This is due to the commitment that Olympic sports have made to uphold good governance principles, as required by the Olympic Movement and its guardian, the IOC (those specific principles will be further explored in Part II). Furthermore, even those sports that are not (yet) part of the Olympic program

strive to uphold the standards set by the IOC, since the IOC has final approval of any sport seeking to be included in the Olympic Games (IOC, 2025b).

2.2 International Sport System

In the first chapter, sport was identified as an agonistic social practice; therefore, it has those aforementioned internal characteristics (preparing to be the best, competing with the best, winning against the best) and external characteristics (openness, fairness, justice of the procedure) (Daqing, 2010; Loy and Morford, 2019; McCoy and Martínková, 2022). Sport is an arena of life in which participants have the capacity to engage in both competition and cooperation via *agon*. In this way, sport reflects our humanity, as we desire to respond to a polemic urge to accept challenges and prove to ourselves and others that we can succeed. However, this dissertation is not only concerned with sporting practice; instead, it focuses on the overall ‘international sport system.’ The international sport system encompasses sporting competitions or practices, as well as the governance of sport and its implications for communities around the world. Those implications include, but are not limited to, the response from spectators, such as joy or frustration when watching sport; the experiences of sport volunteers; and the impact of hosting mega-events or constructing stadiums for a particular community.

The term ‘*international* sport system’ is used instead of simply ‘sport system’ because athletes (as well as other personnel) and institutions exist within their national contexts, which may align or misalign culturally with the values that support the international sport system. As of 2024, the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Democracy Index indicated that nearly forty percent of the global population lives under authoritarian regimes (EIU, 2025). One can assume that a significant portion of the global sporting community also comes from contexts that can be identified as authoritarian, which contradict the foundational values of the Olympic Movement. While individuals and institutions are embedded in various cultural contexts, they have agreed to adopt the values of the Olympic Movement in exchange for the opportunity to participate in Olympic-sanctioned competitions.

This includes not only elite sport competitions and elite-level athletes but also grassroots sporting practices. Elite sports significantly influence grassroots sport, with many athletes, coaches, and officials being introduced to sport through spectatorship and hoping to advance through the system. Sports clubs also maintain relationships with their National Governing Bodies

(NGBs) and National Olympic Committees (NOCs), likely adhering to the rules set by national and international sports bodies. The IOC has the power to revoke organisations' Olympic sport status, as was the case for the International Boxing Association (IBA) in 2023 (CAS, 2023), so the IOC's perspective on the foundational principles of Olympic sports is one that should not be overlooked and will be referenced throughout.

The criticisms of the current system throughout this work should not be mistaken for a case for abolishing the IOC. The IOC's position and influence are accepted rather than argued against because the commitment to good governance principles benefits the international sports system. There is value in having an institution that provides opportunities associated with the Olympic Games, and it is necessary for the understanding of sport employed in this research (Parry, 2023). However, the international sports system can be improved, and re-evaluating how good governance principles are interpreted and implemented is part of that process.

This is a broad interpretation of the sports system; some may argue that it is too broad to be meaningful. However, I would counter that these various elements of sport and their relationships are connected, and throughout the dissertation, I will make the case that embracing democratic principles can enhance the experiences of various groups with sport. This is not to suggest that such an approach is simple. Reforming the way decision-making in sport becomes more democratic should be rewarding in many ways, but it will not be easy. The way sport is discussed throughout this dissertation positions it as an ideal. The expectation is not that sport will be reformed to meet some notion of a 'perfect' system. However, attempts to move closer to the ideal outlined in this work would better serve the system as a whole. This is why the dissertation began with the presentation of *polemos* and *agon*; engaging more effectively with the agonistic spirit better serves participants in the sports system.

2.3 Stakeholders of the International Sports System

The subtitle of this dissertation is "examining the concept of stakeholder democracy." Although the scope of the dissertation is broader than initially intended, the role of stakeholders in the democratisation of sport remains central to the research. Hence, this section will introduce the primary stakeholders of the Olympic Movement⁶.

⁶ Stakeholder theory and stakeholder democracy will be addressed more thoroughly in Part II of the dissertation.

Chappelet (2021) lists the following entities as stakeholders of the Olympic Movement: the IOC, Organising Committees for the Olympic Games (OCOGs), International Federations (IFs), National Olympic Committees (NOCs), National Governing Bodies (NGBs), athletes, governments, media and , Rights Holding Broadcasters (RHBs), sponsors, sport regulators (e.g., WADA), professional sports leagues, athletes and clubs, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), national courts, volunteers, and spectators. While all are significant to the international sports system, they do not wield the same amount of influence. One way to distinguish stakeholders is by recognising them as internal stakeholders and external stakeholders.

The internal stakeholders can be seen as institutional authorities in the Olympic Movement. From 1894 to the 1970s, Chappelet (2016b) notes that there were five core stakeholders: the IOC, OCOGs, NOCs, IFs, and NGBs. Throughout this dissertation, these stakeholders will be referred to as internal stakeholders. These groups have not always shared the same interests and have competed for influence; for instance, the OCOGs and IOC both sought control over broadcasting and sponsorship rights to the Olympic Games—a battle that the IOC would eventually win (Chappelet, 2016). Nevertheless, as the Olympic Movement has grown more complex, these organizations have maintained the most power and influence in the system, with the IOC exerting the greatest influence.

External stakeholders include those not regarded as institutional authorities in the international sports system, such as athletes, governments, sponsors, media, RHBs, NGOs, spectators, and more. These groups have a limited role in sport governance. The IOC and other internal stakeholders recognise the need to acknowledge these stakeholders while still protecting the autonomy of sport (Chappelet, 2016b; Geeraert, 2019). However, not all external stakeholders are on equal footing regarding their influence in the international sports system. Internal stakeholders are most skeptical of governments, fearing that they may try to use sport for their political agendas (Chappelet, 2016a; Geeraert, 2021c). Sponsors and RHBs may exert more influence than NGOs or athletes due to their financial investment in the system (Slack, 2014). Entities such as WADA and the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) occupy unique positions, as they are technically independent bodies; however, they do receive funding from the IOC and IFs, which raises questions about their impartiality. Both WADA and CAS have also faced criticism for lacking transparency regarding their decisions.

Due to the varying circumstances that external stakeholders face, a further distinction is being made: those stakeholders who are at a greater disadvantage due to a lack of institutional support and financial resources will be referred to as non-institutional and vulnerable stakeholders. This group will consist of athletes, athlete advocacy groups and unions, local community members (e.g., groups concerned about the effects of hosting mega-events or constructing stadiums in their neighborhoods), environmental groups, researchers, and others seeking greater transparency and accountability. Although some of these stakeholder groups are institutionalised, they are largely excluded from the international sports system and are therefore at a greater disadvantage than other external stakeholders like sponsors.

All of the stakeholders referenced above play a significant role in the international sports system, however it is the international sporting bodies (ISBs) (e.g., the internal stakeholders, WADA, and CAS) and athletes are arguably the most pertinent to the topic. This research will approach the issue of democratisation from both top-down and bottom-up perspectives. The ISBs, and more specifically, the IOC, best epitomise the ‘top’ of the international sports system as its central authority, while athletes best embody the ‘bottom’ of the system as those on the receiving end of decisions and most impacted by the decision-making, with few avenues to challenge the central authority⁷. The top-down democratization of the international sports system will be the central focus of Part II, while the bottom-up democratization of the international system will be the focus of Part III.

2.4 Influences on the Sport System: Trialectics of Societal Spheres

The last aspect of sport that will be explained in this chapter includes the different logics that influence ethical decision-making in sport. Eichberg (2009) proposes a trialectical approach to decision-making in sport: public logic (the state), private logic (the market), and civil logic (civil society). These logics are related to the stakeholders referenced in the previous section. Different stakeholders are engaging with sport from different perspectives, some from the position of organiser and authority, others for economic benefits or the fostering of community. The stakeholders behaviour will be influenced by their relationship to sport.

⁷ Decisions may be made with input from athletes or other external stakeholders through commissions, and these decisions can be challenged via CAS. However, most commission members are appointed, and commissions lack decision-making power. Additionally, there are concerns regarding conflicts of interest with CAS, as previously noted. Consequently, athletes can be perceived as having limited options for challenging the decisions of the IOC and IFs.

Eichberg's (2009, p. 412) *Trialectics of Societal Spheres (TSS)* states that 'in modern society, human action develops in three sectors of different rationalities, which create different conditions for ethical behaviour – state, market and civil society.' The 'state' refers to the public sphere and consists of activities dictated by political decisions intended to facilitate integration, safety, and justice. This is opposed to the private sphere, in which individuals are their own legislator, and freedom is privileged over equality. Eichberg introduces a third type of ethics, which he says develops in civil society and involves 'voluntary networks and associations like social societies, clubs, cooperatives, and formal as well as informal collectives' (Eichberg, 2009, p. 413). Accordingly, the world of ethics not only consists of equality and freedom stemming from the public and private elements of life but also solidarity, which stems from this aspect of civil society. These spheres 'create different conditions for ethical behaviour' (Eichberg, 2009, p. 412), and this results in contradictions that can easily be detected with regard to sport.

The TSS as presented by Eichberg (2009) serves to illustrate the major influences on the sport system and point us toward some of the issues arising from an imbalance of those influences. For instance, as head of the Olympic Movement, the IOC can be characterised as the 'state' and represents the public sphere in sport, which 'has a monopolistic structure: there is only one state in any given territory' (Eichberg, 2009 p. 412). The IOC's role should arguably be limited to the public sphere, as it is responsible for protecting the interests of sport and providing the setting in which athletes can compete and hopefully engage with all three societal spheres. However, the IOC and other governing institutions have partnered with external institutions with commercial interests, which means it also has a prominent role in the private sphere. Sport has become more commercialised, and additional stakeholders have been brought in that are not native to the sporting experience (e.g., sponsors, media, RHBs). As Eichberg writes, 'as free competition leads to monopolistic market power, it produces a paradox: the freedom of monopolies restricts the liberty of the single participant' (2009, p. 413).

The TSS each have an impact on decision-making in sports. The private sphere significantly influences modern sports through commercialisation and sponsorship. Not all stakeholders motivated by the private sphere's influence have ill intentions; however, the integrity of the sport and the preferences of athletes are not their primary concerns or reasons for engaging with the international sports system. For instance, there were accusations levelled by athletes suggesting they faced inconvenient competition times during the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympic

Games to benefit broadcasters and to accommodate spectators watching from other parts of the world (Reuters, 2021). Influences from the private sphere and civil sphere are reliant on the IOC, which operates as the ‘state’ in the centralised international sports system; it establishes the rules that other stakeholders are expected to follow and creates opportunities for competition (IOC, 2025b). Therefore, the IOC and other internal stakeholders can play a major role in curtailing and facilitating the influence of other societal spheres and external stakeholders.

Much of this work focuses on fostering activity within the civil sphere of the sports system. This is how influences from the public and private spheres can be stabilised. Each sphere reflects an aspect of *agon*: the public sphere is essential for organising and providing a setting for agonistic social practices, the private sphere addresses the struggle and competitive aspects of *agon*, while the civil sphere embodies the cooperative aspects of *agon*. Institutions are structured around power and status (MacIntyre, 2007), and those institutions primarily concerned with the public and private spheres in sports have been able to accumulate power and influence within the sports system. However, the civil sphere offers an opportunity for non-institutional participants to build mutual trust, allowing them to overcome institutional forces. A more comprehensive understanding of the civil sphere and its benefits to participants (e.g., mutual trust, understanding, and social capital⁸) can be encouraged by embracing sport as an agonistic social practice, which will lead to sport becoming more democratic.

⁸ This idea will be further explored in the fourth chapter, Sport and Democracy.

CHAPTER 3: DEMOCRACY⁹

This dissertation frames democracy through its institutional and cultural dimensions. These dimensions facilitate our engagement with the various aspects of democracy. This chapter concludes with the conceptualisation of *democratisation*—striving for a more democratic system by engaging further with the cultural dimension of democracy.

Both Anderson (2009) and Gingerich (2024) use the term cultural democracy or democracy as a culture, and I have adopted this term to describe bottom-up engagement with democracy. I have chosen to use the term ‘institutional democracy’ due to the similarities in Anderson’s (2009) and Gingerich’s (2024) descriptions of democracy’s other roles. These characteristics have been identified as institutional in the field of political science, with Britannica noting that an institution refers to ‘a set of formal rules (including constitutions), informal norms, or shared understandings that constrain and prescribe political actors’ interactions with one another (Gilad, 2025). The term ‘institutional dimension of democracy’ will refer to those formal and constrained interactions with democracy, which is how most people conceive of it. The cultural dimension of democracy broadens the scope of democracy and incorporates Deweyan notions of democracy as a way of life. The institutional and cultural dimensions of democracy should not be viewed as separate but rather as highlighting different modes of interaction with democracy.

3.1 Institutional Dimension of Democracy

The institutional dimension of democracy encompasses the formal proceedings and procedures associated with democratic systems, alongside the interactions of participants within those formal settings. Democracy is often linked to this dimension as a mode of government (Anderson, 2009), shaped by elections, public debate, and formal political institutions (Gingerich, 2024). The institutions, their structures, and procedures are essential components of this institutional dimension of democracy. Within these formal settings, the quality of interactions among citizens is also significant regarding the institutional dimension of democracy. Members of a political community owe each other equal respect whenever engaging in political interactions (Gingerich, 2024). Besides political settings and interactions, this concept can also be extended to view

⁹ This chapter incorporates significant portions of the article McCoy, B. (2025). Democratisation of sport: The role of institutional and cultural democracy. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, 1-18.
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democracy as a membership group (Anderson, 2009), which helps illuminate democracy beyond the political realm, emphasising relationships among those who meet the system's eligibility qualifications for membership.

The integrity of democratic institutions and activities, as well as the quality of interactions among members, is central to the institutional dimension of democracy. Institutional actors work on behalf of the democratic system to maintain the necessary infrastructure for democracy to thrive. These actors are also responsible for enforcing equal status among members of society, addressing discriminatory behaviour by individuals and non-political institutions appropriately. Without the efforts of these institutional actors, democracy would not be sustainable. Therefore, the institutional dimension of democracy takes a top-down approach. Members of the democratic system must trust the integrity of its structures and procedures and owe each other respect during interactions; however, ultimately, the responsibility for the procedures and opportunities linked to the institutional dimension of democracy lies with the institutional actors advocating for the democratic system. In relation to the sports system, a commitment to good governance principles and stakeholder engagement exemplifies engagement with the institutional dimension of democracy. The Olympic Movement emphasises fair elections and democratic procedures (IOC, 2008) and focuses primarily on formal contexts and interactions.

3.1.1 Traditional Applications of Democracy

Traditional applications of democracy pertain to its institutional dimension. Democracy as a system of governance relies on the procedures and infrastructures provided by institutional authority. Part II of this dissertation will further explore the impact of democracy's institutional dimension on sports governance, which is a context where the procedures and formalities associated with democracy are essential. Various approaches to democracy, including representative democracy and deliberative democracy, can offer guidance regarding governance reform in sports. This section will introduce the traditional types of democracy that are relevant for the rest of the work.

Rather than arguing in favour of one variation over another, this section will highlight aspects of democracy relevant to sport governance. The IOC has already taken a stance on democracy, so I will seek to build upon the understanding they have expressed in their

documents¹⁰. This section will present political democratic principles that better explain phenomena that are already somewhat present. Conceptions of democracy are diverse since it is an essentially contested concept (Crick, 2002) due to differing ideas about what's most important. Some scholars emphasise the protection of citizens, others focus on procedural aspects, such as free elections, while others stress the importance of citizens' proximity to democratic proceedings. Section 3.3 Assessing Democracy will examine a distinction related to procedures and outcomes. This section emphasises citizens' proximity to democratic processes.

Most instances of political democracy can be divided into two broad types: participatory democracy (also known as direct democracy) and representative democracy (also known as liberal democracy) (Held, 2006). The former involves citizens directly in decision-making, while the latter refers to a system in which elected officials represent the interests and views of citizens in their decision-making (Cunningham, 2002; Held, 2006). Although representative democracy is the form generally adopted in modern societies, this does not imply that participatory democracy is any less beneficial for a society or system. Rousseau and Mill believed that participatory democracy fosters human development, reduces estrangement from centres of power, nurtures concern for collective issues, and develops an active and knowledgeable citizenry (Pateman, 1970). Held (2006) states that the primary justification for participatory democracy is "an equal right to liberty and self-development can only be achieved in a 'participatory society', a society which fosters a sense of political efficacy, nurtures a concern for collective problems and contributes to the formation of a knowledgeable citizenry capable of taking a sustained interest in the governing process" (p. 215). The benefits associated with participatory democracy will be addressed in section 3.2, 'Cultural Dimension of Democracy', as this is the dimension primarily concerned with the development of citizens.

Representative democracy (sometimes referred to as liberal democracy) is generally seen as more feasible and efficient in practice compared to participatory democracy. Although he acknowledged the advantages of participatory democracy, Mill argued that:

[...] it is evident that the only government which can fully satisfy all the exigencies of the social state is one in which the whole people participate; that any participation, even in the smallest public function, is useful; that the participation should everywhere be as great as the general degree of

¹⁰ The IOC's interpretation of good governance principles, including democracy, will be examined in Part II.

improvement of the community will allow; and that nothing less can be ultimately desirable than the admission of all to a share in the sovereign power of the state. But since all cannot, in a community exceeding a single small town, participate personally in any but some very minor portions of the public business, it follows that the ideal type of a perfect government must be representative. (Mill, 2003, pp. 313-4)

A representative democracy is one in which individual and group liberties are well protected, and where the spheres of civil society and private life are insulated from state control (Cunningham, 2002; Diamond, 2003). In addition to elections, liberal democracy prioritises 1) the absence of reserved domains of power for the military or other actors who are not accountable to the electorate, 2) the horizontal accountability of stakeholders to each other, which constrains executive power in addition to the vertical accountability concerning the rulers being accountable to the ruled, and 3) it includes extensive provisions for political and civic pluralism so that a variety of values can be expressed through an ongoing process, not just through periodic elections (Diamond, 2003).

Over time, the liberal view of democracy has been subdivided into various forms of representative democracy. Representative democracy is the form of democracy most commonly implemented by governments (Cunningham, 2002) and includes many variations, such as protective democracy, developmental democracy, competitive elitist democracy, legal democracy, pluralism, and deliberative democracy. Despite the many types of democracy that exist and can be implemented in systems, only those types relevant to the concepts presented in this dissertation will be discussed: representative democracy (covered above) and deliberative democracy.

Deliberative democracy emphasises the importance of discussion and informed debate among participants (Cunningham, 2002). This form of democracy differs from others as it can be utilised in conjunction with different forms. Valuing deliberation and informed debate can be applied to a system that implements participatory democracy or one that utilises representatives. Deliberative democracy pertains to the quality of democratic interactions, which will be revisited in section 3.3 of this work.

The forms of democracy presented above are not mutually exclusive and have many overlapping characteristics. Several of the forms mentioned can be applied to a system simultaneously. It is unlikely that any society has a system that could be characterised solely by one of these forms. Throughout this work, it will be argued that the political forms of democracy

presented in this section are also relevant for non-political institutional contexts. Instead of being designated as relating to political systems, the conceptions of democracy in this section should be identified as belonging to democracy's institutional dimension. The following section will further conceptualise democracy's cultural dimension and relate it to a Deweyan conception of democracy.

3.2 Cultural Dimension of Democracy

Unlike the institutional dimension, the cultural dimension reflects a bottom-up approach to democracy. There is no reliance on institutions, as citizens choose to engage more with democratic principles in settings that are neither formal nor overtly political. For Anderson (2009), the culture of democracy consists of the 'the freewheeling cooperative interaction of citizens from all walks of life on terms of equality in civil society' (p. 214). Gingerich's view of cultural democracy asserts that 'all members are equal and exclusive authors of and co-contributors to their communal lives. The scope of democracy, on this view, encompass all those aspects of their lives that are the product of their joint action, in the sense of action that the people take in concert with one another' (Gingerich, 2024, p. 1150). Instead of relying on institutions when engaging with democracy, participation in the cultural dimension depends on system members taking the initiative and applying democratic values to as many interactions in their daily lives as possible in an effort to strengthen communal bonds. Citizens can choose to engage with the cultural dimension of democracy whenever they find it appropriate, as long as they are in a communal setting. Such behaviour exemplifies Christesen's (2012) notion of democratisation; applying democratic principles to our lives outside of the political sphere.

Cultural democracy involves cultivating a sense of shared community and the ability to contribute to decisions that benefit the community rather than just individuals (Kelly, 2022). Acting in accordance with the cultural dimension of democracy means strengthening social bonds and building mutual respect, which in theory leads to better understanding among community members. Furthermore, when conflict arises, community members are better positioned to address issues (through engagement with the institutional dimension of democracy) from the perspective of what's best for the community, not just what's best for themselves. Engagement with the cultural dimension of democracy is recognised as a bottom-up approach because it is not solely the responsibility of institutional authorities to facilitate the process. Institutional authorities

should not hinder citizens' engagement with the cultural dimension of democracy; rather, it is the duty of citizens to form bonds and better understand each other so they can make decisions that benefit the community. In relation to the sports system, engagement with the cultural dimension of democracy is more likely to manifest in sports clubs and on the field. Any situation that allows participants to interact on equal footing and attempt to address concerns without institutional assistance promotes this engagement.

3.2.1 Scope and Core of Democracy

The conception of cultural democracy introduced appeals to Dewey's ([1916] 2001; [1939] 2021) notion of democracy. For Dewey, democracy was more than a form of government. The broader view of democracy recognises it as 'a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience' (Dewey, [1916] 2001, p. 91). Through Dewey's writings, it becomes evident that the democratic ideal extends beyond government. Democracy should also influence how institutions operate within a democratic society and embody democratic principles.

As with *polemos* and *agon*, the perspective of humanity tied to this conception of democracy is an optimistic one. According to Dewey, 'democracy is a way of life controlled by a working faith in the possibilities of human nature' (Dewey, [1939] 2021, p. 84). A commitment to democracy necessitates trust in one's own abilities, as well as in other citizens' capacities to make decisions that are best for society. Possibility accompanies *polemos* when it arises within a society, and this sense of possibility encompasses a commitment to not allowing kings or any authoritarian figures to make decisions on your behalf (McCoy and Martínková, 2022). Much of what Dewey wrote when referring to democracy can be applied to my conception of democracy's cultural dimension, including:

[...] extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity (Dewey, [1916] 2001, p. 91).

The benefits of democracy include increased exposure to individuals with differing experiences, allowing people to grasp how their actions affect others. The elimination of barriers related to class, race, and national territory occurs as citizens develop a more comprehensive understanding

of their interconnectedness. This may lead to decision-making that considers not only what is best for oneself but also the well-being of society as a whole. While a shift in reasoning when making decisions is not guaranteed, participants will at least better understand their choices and their impacts on others.

The approach to democracy throughout this dissertation relies on the assumption that the ideal of democracy—trusting in one’s own ability, as well as the ability of those around them, to solve issues together—can be applied to any aspect of social life (Dewey, [1916] 2001; Gingerich, 2024). In anticipation of doubts about whether sport is an appropriate setting for the type of democratic interactions advocated by Dewey ([1939] 2021), he specifically references sport to illustrate that both cooperation and competition are integral to democratic life just as they are in sport. Dewey ([1939] 2021) wrote that democracy is ‘the belief that even when needs and ends or consequences are different for each individual, the habit of amicable cooperation—which may include, as in sport, rivalry and competition—is itself a priceless addition to life’ (Dewey, [1939] 2021, p. 86). Democracy is a commitment to address issues collaboratively and amicably through discussion rather than force in any area of life.

A guaranteed result of ‘success’ is not being promised. As with agonistic social practices, the process is most important and yields the sought-after outcomes. In a piece titled *Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us*, Dewey wrote:

Democracy is the faith that the process of experience is more important than any special result attained, so that special results achieved are of ultimate value only as they are used to enrich and order the ongoing process. Since the process of experience is capable of being educative, faith in democracy is all one with faith in experience and education. (Dewey, [1939] 2021, p. 88)

Even if the system in which democracy operates becomes less efficient or less financially successful, those participating in democratic engagement would still benefit from the experience. For Dewey, ‘to cooperate by giving differences a chance to show themselves because of the belief that the expression of difference is not only a right of the other persons but is a means of enriching one’s own-life experience, is inherent in the democratic personal way of life’ (Dewey, [1939] 2021, p. 86).

The extent of democracy’s impact on society is somewhat concealed when prioritising the institutional dimension. However, engaging with the cultural dimension reveals just how

significantly democracy can influence our individual and collective experiences. Dewey wrote that a ‘society which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic’ (Dewey, [1916] 2001, p. 104). Democracy should provide citizens the opportunity to participate in decision-making and equally benefit from those decisions. Furthermore, institutions (including non-governmental organisations) should be responsive to citizens to better understand their needs. This is the core of democracy, and a system can only centre the needs of its members by providing the members a way to express their needs and respond to decision-makers. The democratisation of the sport system should prioritise the cooperation and competition referenced by Dewey ([1916] 2001), the internal and external characteristics associated with agonistic social practices (McCoy and Martínková, 2022), and the necessity for members of the system to provide feedback and challenge the institutional authorities. Such a process is more likely to occur when engaging with both the institutional and cultural dimensions of democracy.

Democratic participation that is enriching is not an automatic process; it requires skills that must be developed. It requires an education that should begin at a young age. Education for democracy will be primarily explored in Part III. However, I will note here that education for democratic preparation can occur in various contexts, both formal and informal. The type of preparation that can be cultivated through sporting participation is more informal. The key to democratic preparation is to enable participants to encounter *agon* with as few restraints as possible because ‘everything which bars freedom and fullness of communication sets up barriers that divide human beings into sets and cliques, into antagonistic sects and factions, and thereby undermines the democratic way of life.’ (Dewey, [1939] 2021, p.85). The institutional authorities striving to foster democratic systems should provide opportunities for cooperation, competition, and problem-solving. This reflects the ‘core of democracy,’ which is applied to sport throughout the dissertation.

3.3 Assessing Democracy

The typical ways of identifying democracy as a system of governance are applied when examining the institutional dimension, as engagement with democracy occurs in formal settings. Two views are typically considered when identifying democracy in practice: the procedural and substantive

views (Dahl et al., 2003). The procedural view holds that democracy relies on the presence of certain institutions, regardless of the outcomes produced by their operation. In contrast, the substantive view regards institutions as necessary but not sufficient to characterise a political regime. Other important factors include achieving public good, representing citizen preferences, holding governments accountable, maximising citizen participation in political life, enhancing economic equality, implementing rationality, and improving economic conditions, among others (Dahl et al., 2003).

The procedural view revolves around elections as the central focus of a democratic system. However, this minimalist definition of democracy has been criticised for placing too much emphasis on electoralism and overlooking the role of other dimensions of democracy (Diamond, 2003). This same overreliance on elections is evident in the interpretation of the democratic principle in sport governance. While elected officials are a necessary feature of democratic systems, other essential factors should also be considered, such as the core elements of cooperation, competition, and cooperation cited in the previous section.

Applying the procedural view to the institutional dimension of democracy shows that a system is democratic as long as there are procedures in place that enable representatives to be elected and subsequently held accountable by citizens. In contrast, the substantive view is more demanding and considers the outcomes of the democratic system. Specific outcomes are emphasised, such as the enhancement of economic equality and the improvement of economic conditions (Dahl et al., 2003). While terms such as ‘enhancement’ and ‘improvement’ imply a normative value judgment that can be measured in some way, the substantive view can also be applied to less tangible outcomes, given the benefits conferred through participation. However, this results in the substantive view being more challenging to identify than the procedural view. The rate of participation may be considered, along with citizens’ satisfaction with the performance of their elected officials. The procedural view of democracy applied to sport would argue that the procedures tied to the democratic principle in sport governance are sufficient. This contrasts with the substantive view, which would examine the outcomes of the democratic system and its procedures.

One of the main distinguishing factors between the procedural and substantive views is the emphasis placed on the quality of democratic interactions. Adopting the substantive view typically requires the acceptance of deliberative democracy. Although deliberative democracy is sometimes

cited as a theory of democracy alongside liberal and participatory democracy (Cunningham, 2002), it can also be seen as an extension of other democratic theories, unlike other democratic theories that emphasise organisation of procedures or the amount of rights, deliberative democracy is concerned with the quality of interactions within a system deemed democratic (Gutmann and Thompson, 2002). The quality of democratic interactions is integral to the perceived legitimacy of the democratic system, as a democratic system is sustainable only as long as citizens or members of the system have faith in it (Schumpeter, 2003).

Regardless of the results from some sort of ‘impartial assessment’ of a democratic system, if the citizens’ do not believe that the system is fairly electing officials who are carrying out the will of the people, then the system is at risk. decision-making process is more collective, it is more likely to be perceived as legitimate and rational (Benhabib, 2021). Legitimacy is attained when participants accept the outcome of decision-making and view it as fairly reached. Rationality is achieved if the outcome arises from a reasonable and informed decision-making process. One of the major concerns related to democratic rule is that an uneducated or unprepared populace can still participate in democratic processes and may not be able to make decisions that benefit the ‘common good’ (Cunningham, 2002; Dahl, 2021)¹¹. Scholars such as De Tocqueville and Mill expressed concerns about the ‘tyranny of the majority’ (Dahl, 2021), arguing against participatory democracy despite its potential benefits for participants.

Regarding the assessment of democracy, Cohen (1997) argued that deliberative democracy aligns with the substantive view due to its significance being captured in values and principles such as equality, liberty, deliberative inclusion, the common good, and participation. This contrasts with Benhabib (2021), who argued that proceduralism is more appropriate when addressing value conflicts since ‘agreements in societies living with value-pluralism are to be sought for not at the level of substantive beliefs but at that of procedures, processes, and practices for attaining and revising beliefs’ (p. 73). Benhabib (2021) is concerned that focusing on outcomes through the substantive view can diminish the plurality of voices in society, which should be respected. Benhabib (2021) also acknowledges the limitations of a procedural view of deliberative democracy due to its inadequate condition of rationality, stating, “procedures can neither dictate outcomes nor define the quality of the reasons advanced in argumentation nor control the quality of the reasoning

¹¹ Education of the populace also plays a role in the quality of democratic interactions, which will be further explored in Part III of the dissertation.

and rules of logic and interference used by participants” (p. 73). However, Held (2006) suggests that deliberative democratic systems can enhance civic education programs to address rationality. Ultimately, Cohen (1997), Benhabib (2021), and Held (2006) agree that deliberative democracy is the ideal form of democracy, capable of meeting legitimacy standards, though they disagree on how to assess the quality of that deliberative democratic system concerning rationality.

The key consideration is that regardless of adopting a procedural or substantive view of democracy, legitimacy and rationality are two aspects that should be taken into account if the system is to be sustained. Objective accounts of democratic systems are less important to the sustainability of a system than the perception of legitimacy by those citizens belonging to the system or the citizens’ ability to come to decisions based on reason. The concepts above pertain to the institutional dimension of democracy and the democratic interactions taking place in more formal contexts.

Evaluating the procedures and systems related to the institutional dimension of democracy is easier to accomplish than assessing the cultural dimension of democracy. There are laws and organised activities (e.g., elections) that result from democracy’s institutional dimension. In contrast, engagement with the cultural dimension is less tangible and leads to social bonds and mutual understanding, which influence behaviour when interacting with the institutional dimension of democracy. Social bonds and mutual understanding may be harder to recognise because they cannot be documented like the procedures associated with democracy’s institutional dimension, but this does not diminish their importance. Therefore, assessing engagement with the cultural dimension is more challenging. In theory, engagement with the cultural dimension of democracy would correlate with higher-quality engagement with the institutional dimension and stronger communal bonds. However, these outcomes are difficult to identify and assess. Instead, *democratisation* can provide guidance on engaging with the cultural dimension of democracy.

CHAPTER 4: DEMOCRATISATION¹²

4.1 Democratisation—aspiring to the democratic ideal

For the purposes of this research, the process of becoming more democratic will be referred to as ‘democratisation’ throughout. Challenging authority in a meaningful way that confronts the relationship between the powerful and the less powerful within the system, possibly leading to a shift in the power dynamic, describes the process of democratisation. Christesen (2012, p. 15) argues that ‘[i]f one adopts an understanding of democracy as a commitment to equality in all spheres of social life, a shift from vertical toward horizontal relationships outside of the governmental sphere in and of itself represents a form of democratisation’. Acknowledging democracy as a way of life, therefore, provides more opportunities to engage with democratic principles across various life arenas, furthering the process of democratisation.

While democracy shapes our existence as we navigate through society (e.g., citizens of democratic societies understand the freedoms and rights they possess and conduct themselves accordingly), the modern perspective on citizenship views it as one aspect of an individual's personal life. The ‘individual need do little of a civic kind because necessary democratic vigilance over the political process is assured by democratic institutions’ (Enslin and White 2003, p. 113). These citizens may not consciously see themselves as active citizens until they participate in political activities, such as attending a town hall meeting or voting in an election. The process of democratisation entails a shift towards recognising oneself as a citizen participating in a democratic society more frequently and outside of traditional political contexts. This dissertation advocates for such a shift to occur in sport.

The shift from democracy to democratisation prioritises the process of shifting power and making vertical relationships more horizontal (or balanced), which implies that relationships between stakeholders may vary in degrees during the process of democratisation. It is not simply a matter of stating whether a system is democratic or not; systems can be *more* or *less* democratic. Political democracy is inherently continuous in nature regarding democracy and exist as a matter of degree (Bollen and Jackman, 1989). Bollen defined democracy as the “extent to which the political power of the elite is minimised and that of the non-elite is maximised” (1980, p. 372) and

¹² Significant portions of this chapter are from the article McCoy, B. (2025). Democratisation of sport: The role of institutional and cultural democracy. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, 1-18.
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later argued that the degree of political democracy was determined by the power dynamic between elites and non-elites. In other words, when non-elites have little control over elites, democracy is low, whereas a system that better allows elites to be held accountable to non-elites would rate higher in democracy (Bollen, 1991). Although Bollen and Jackman were referring to political democracy, this conception could extend to systems aspiring toward the democratic ideal in non-political contexts.

Building off of Bollen and Jackman's (1989) assessment that democracy should be measured in terms of degree suggests that democracy exists on a spectrum made up of various principles, each principle existing on a continuum. For any definition or conception of democracy, each of the principles can be assessed in isolation and measured on a continuum. Therefore, a system cannot be labeled as democratic or non-democratic; however, institutions and individuals can continually strive to be *more* democratic by addressing the principles associated with democracy. Such striving constitutes a form of democratisation. In addition to the shifting power dynamics among relationships, the quality of democratic interactions should also be considered.

4.2 Horizontal Relationships and Social Capital

The close relationship between sport and democracy is explored in Chapter One, which presents both sport and democracy as agonistic social practices. Beyond this, sport is viewed as having a positive impact on society by aiding in the cultivation of social capital. Social capital, which results from voluntary associations and social networks in civil society, affects both the larger society and the participants of the voluntary associations (Putnam, [2000] 2003). According to Putnam ([2000] 2003), voluntary associations like social clubs or sports clubs are schools for democracy where social and civic skills (e.g., deliberation, trust building) are developed. The voluntary associations described by Putnam (2003) exist in Eichberg's (2009) civil sphere, referenced in Chapter Two.

Though developing these skills and participating in voluntary societies does not guarantee a healthy society, it does encourage political engagement with a foundation of cooperation and competition. In systems with greater social capital, these systems are more innovative and effective, and elites are less likely to dominate the system (Putnam, [2000] 2003). Since sport is an example of voluntary associations in society, when engaged with in a particular manner (e.g., emphasising the agonistic characteristics and embracing the civil sphere), it can positively impact

society and serve as an example of how society and relationships between individuals should be (Christesen, 2013).

The type of relationship modelled in sport is described as ‘egalitarian’ or ‘horizontal’ by Christesen (2013). In different works, Christesen uses the terms ‘hierarchical’ and ‘vertical’ to describe relationships characterised by an unequal distribution of power. The dominant party is generally able to compel the subordinate party to comply with its desires. Alternatively, Christesen uses the terms ‘egalitarian’ and ‘horizontal’ in reference to relationships involving parties that have relatively equal access to social power¹³. These parties can influence each other by emphasising solidarity, trust, and reciprocity while interacting in a cooperative manner. This does not mean that the parties have identical social power nor does it suggest that *complete balance* is the goal of democratisation.

There is a high degree of fluidity as parties’ social power increases or decreases based on meritocratic competition. However, these relationships are characterised as horizontal because no party can dominate another. Eliminating the stratification of power among parties within a particular circumstance is unlikely in most contexts, including sports. The aim of democratisation is to encourage more interactions among groups or individuals that exhibit qualities more reflective of horizontal relationships (Christesen, 2013), seeking greater balance in power relations in the process. Sports provide an opportunity to engage with others on a more equal basis, and the habits learned during such activities are transferable and can be applied beyond this initial setting (Christesen, 2012; Putnam [2000] 2003).

Regarding how sports have fostered democratisation, Christesen (2012) suggests this occurs in four ways: 1) facilitating horizontal relationships, 2) cultivating trust, 3) fostering a sense of political efficacy, and 4) developing self-disciplined individuals who are predisposed to obey rules and authorities. The fourth point is incomplete as individuals will be inclined to follow rules only if they perceive the proceedings and the system at large to be fair and serving their interests. This point relates to the external characteristics associated with agonistic social practices and the role of legitimacy in democratic systems mentioned in the previous chapter. The first three points listed by Christesen (2012) are outcomes of sport’s ability to cultivate social capital.

¹³ The terms ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ to describe relationships marked by domination or more mutual influence will be used throughout this article as opposed to ‘hierarchical’ and ‘egalitarian’ for simplicity.

There are three types of social capital (bonding, bridging, and linking), which are based on individuals' identities, the nature of their relationships, the intensity of their bonds, and the orientation of the group (Christesen, 2012, p. 67). 'Bonding social capital' refers to individuals interacting with similar social statuses and social identities, who have horizontal relationships. 'Bridging social capital' refers to individuals interacting with similar social statuses but dissimilar social identities and maintaining horizontal relationships. Due to the differences between bonding and bridging social capital in terms of social identity, the former results in bonds that are stronger in intensity and group exclusivity, while the latter leads to more intermediate bonds and a more inclusive setting. 'Linking social capital' refers to interactions between individuals who differ in terms of social power and exhibit vertical relationships that foster variable bonds and inclusive group dynamics. Social capital impacts both the institutional and cultural dimensions of sport, with bonding and bridging types being more relevant for the cultural dimension, while linking social capital is more pertinent to democracy's institutional dimension.

Sport participation can cultivate all three types of social capital (Christese, 2012). Bonding social capital develops within grassroots team sports, where participants typically share similar backgrounds and identities. These individuals enter the situation with a mutual understanding due to their comparable identities, and the team environment enables them to easily form strong connections and fosters an 'us vs them' mentality, leading to an exclusive group dynamic. Bridging social capital is more likely to occur at higher levels of sport, such as the interactions between Olympians. These individuals are all the best at what they do and are present for the same reason; however, they come from diverse backgrounds and compete against one another. Although the orientation is inclusive due to their common status as Olympians and likely mutual respect, the bonds formed will not be as strong as those created through bonding social capital because of their varied backgrounds and the heightened nationalism associated with the Olympic Games. Linking social capital involves vertical relationships and typically occurs among various stakeholders, such as coaches and athletes or sport institutions and athletes.

The horizontal relationships associated with bonding and bridging social capital more effectively cultivate trust, as participants are more likely to view themselves as similar and working towards shared goals (Christesen, 2012; Putnam, 1993). Therefore, while sports foster all these forms of social capital to varying degrees, bonding and bridging forms should take precedence over linking social capital. Additionally, bonding and bridging social capital positively influence

political efficacy by enhancing confidence, assertiveness, and agency through collective decision-making (Putnam, 1993). Conversely, the vertical relationships associated with linking social capital may reduce democratisation if athletes are not encouraged to actively engage in their sporting experience (Christesen, 2012).

Vertical relationships, and by extension, linking social capital, are more aligned with cultivating discipline in sports. This may be valued for predisposing citizens to comply with rules and follow authority. It is not uncommon for sports to be approached in an authoritarian manner, with athletes being unable to question those deemed authorities in the environment (Butterworth, 2014; Kidman, 2005). In this type of environment, athletes may not have an active role in planning their training, nutrition, or even match strategy. The disciplinary element is also present in horizontal relationships; however, it is more muted, which is the goal for democratised societies since it is necessary for citizens to accept the outcomes of elections and legislation (Christesen, 2012). While vertical relationships are expected in sports, too much control diminishes the agency of athletes and reduces the likelihood of cultivating bridging and bonding social capital, as well as other benefits of a more democratised approach.

The focus of this chapter, social capital and horizontal relationships, is more relevant to the cultural dimension of democracy. While the third chapter prioritised democratic interactions in more formal contexts, this chapter emphasises democratic interactions in the civil sphere, which are supported by democracy's cultural dimension. A greater social capital among participants will be essential before engaging in more formal democratic settings, such as governance proceedings, in order to better contend with groups that have more power and influence. Part II of the dissertation will further explore the role of democracy's institutional dimension in sport, while Part III will examine the role of democracy's cultural dimension in sport.

SUMMARY OF PART I

The first part of the dissertation has introduced foundational concepts that will be carried forward, including agonistic social practices, *agon*, democratisation, and institutional and cultural dimensions of democracy. Additionally, the definition and scope of both sport and democracy relevant to the dissertation were also explained.

Chapter One, Agonistic Social Practices, connected sport and democracy as agonistic social practices (McCoy and Martínková, 2022) and introduced the concepts of both *agon* and *polemos*. By engaging with sport and democratic politics, participants can tap into their polemic drive, making sport and democratic politics reflective of a facet of human nature. Participants experience both cooperation and competition, unified in their shared experiences. While sport, democratic politics, and philosophy are referred to throughout the chapter as primary examples of agonistic social practices, capitalist business practices, when presented via stakeholder capitalism, also constitute an agonistic social practice. Therefore, both sporting practices and the activities tied to the commercial and organisational aspects of sport can be considered agonistic social practices. The chapter concluded by advocating for an embrace of agonistic principles in sport and democracy, arguing that this should lead to more meaningful experiences with these activities.

Chapter Two, Sport, presented the definition and scope of sport that will be used throughout the dissertation. The definition of sport, ‘an institutionalised, rule-governed contest of human physical skill’, from Parry (2023, p. 53), is introduced. Following this, clarification was provided on the scope of sport considered throughout this dissertation, along with an explanation of the ‘international sport system’. The notion of a more democratic international sport system, referenced throughout this work, is an ideal that may never actually be attained. However, this does not mean we should not aspire to achieve it. This chapter also introduced the stakeholders of the Olympic Movement, including athletes, national and international sports governing bodies, regulatory bodies, media and Rights Holders and Broadcasters (RHBs), sponsors, NGOs, spectators, and others (Chappelet, 2021), distinguishing between them as internal and external stakeholders (Chappelet, 2016; Geeraert, 2021b). This was followed by the introduction of spheres of influence on the sport system via Eichberg’s (2009) *Trialectics of Social Spheres*: the public, private, and civil spheres, which play a role in decision-making within sport. The stakeholders outlined earlier in this chapter make decisions in accordance with the spheres of influence based on their orientation to the international sports system. The IOC, for instance, acts as the ‘state’

within the international sports system, while sponsors are influenced by the private sphere, and athletes can be influenced by all spheres, though the civil sphere is the primary domain of communal activities like sport.

Chapter Three, *Democracy*, introduced two dimensions of democracy: the institutional dimension and the cultural dimension. The institutional dimension, which emphasises procedures and occurs in more formal settings, will serve as the basis for democracy in the governance of sport in Part II. The cultural dimension, which facilitates engagement with democracy in our everyday lives, will serve as the basis for democracy in sporting practice covered in Part III.

A brief overview of democracy's traditional applications was introduced as part of democracy's institutional dimension. Though these forms of democracy are not necessarily foundational to the dissertation, there are aspects that are relevant for Part II, which examines the implementation of the democratic principle in the governance of sport. A broadened scope of democracy, grounded in the Deweyan conception of democracy, was then presented as part of democracy's cultural dimension. Dewey ([1939] 2021) sees democracy expressed as a 'faith' in one's ability and the ability of others to address issues together. It was also acknowledged in this chapter that the democratic principles associated with sport will be accepted and assessed instead of providing a separate definition to be applied to sport. The emphasis was placed on the core features of democracy and sport as agonistic social practices and the process of democratisation rather than arguing for any number of definitions of democracy over the countless others that could also apply. This chapter culminated with an exploration of how democracy can be assessed (i.e., via the procedural and substantive views) and what should be considered (e.g., legitimacy and rationality), which is particularly important for the institutional dimension of democracy.

Chapter Four explored the concept of democratisation, introduced as the progression toward the democratic ideal. I proposed that the ability—and willingness—to challenge entrenched dynamics within a system is central to the democratisation of sport. The quality of democratic interactions is also addressed in Chapter Four, with emphasis on stakeholders' perceptions of the legitimacy and rationality of the democratic system (Benhabib, 2021; Crick, 2002; Held, 2006). The chapter concluded by framing the cultivation of social capital as a key aspect of sporting participation (Christesen, 2012; Putnam, 2003) and argues that engaging with sport as an agonistic social practice and placing greater emphasis on the civil sphere (introduced in Chapter Two) and the cultural dimension of sport can benefit the international sport system.

Part I has introduced concepts that are foundational to the remainder of this research including relating sport and democracy as agonistic social practices (e.g. and the accompanying internal and external characteristics, the conception of the international sports system utilised throughout the dissertation, the significance of Eichberg's (2009) *Trialectics of Societal Spheres* with respect to how decisions are made in the international sports system, the introduction of democracy's institutional dimension (e.g., traditional application of democracy in formal settings for governance) and cultural dimension (e.g., democracy as a way of living one's daily life) of democracy, democratisation (and how it can be approached from the top-down and bottom-up), and the significance of the cultivation of social capital in sport. These concepts are carried through the remainder of the dissertation as the democratisation of the international sports system is explored from the top-down in Part II and from the bottom-up in Part III.

PART II: THE INSTITUTIONAL DIMENSION OF DEMOCRACY IN SPORT

Part II of this dissertation examines the role of democracy's institutional dimension in the governance of sport or democratisation from the top-down. The dynamics being explored involve International Sporting Bodies (ISBs) and other stakeholder groups, particularly those advocating for a greater role in the governance process. In relation to Eichberg's (2009) *Trialectics of Societal Spheres*, the ISBs represent the public sphere, functioning as the 'state' in a system that privileges the autonomy of sport. Besides the institutional dimension of democracy, other pertinent themes include legitimacy, the impacts of institutionalisation and globalisation on sport, stakeholder theory, good governance of sport, and the democratisation of sport. Chapter Five offers brief overviews of the institutionalisation and globalisation of sport and explains how the international sport system operates. Chapter Six presents background information on the IOC's adoption of good governance in sport and the current role of democracy in sport governance. Chapter Seven investigates stakeholder inclusion in governance through stakeholder theory. Chapter Eight outlines what the democratisation of sport governance would require.

Introduction to Part II¹⁴

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has stated a commitment to the principle of democracy and good governance in sport via the publishing of its Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance (BUPGG) (IOC, 2008; IOC, 2022). Furthermore, stakeholders, such as athletes, Rights-Holding Broadcasters (RHBs), and sponsors, amongst others, have an integral role in the Olympic Movement. The IOC and other leading international sporting bodies, such as the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), have stated commitments to stakeholder engagement (IOC, 2014; IOC, 2025b; WADA, 2023), which can be interpreted as an attempt to further democratise their governance.

Despite this consistent stance, various stakeholder groups have expressed dissatisfaction with the opportunities for engagement they have been provided since the introduction of the BUPGG in 2008 (Nelson and Cottrell, 2016; NOlympicsLA, 2025; UNIGlobal, 2023). A number

¹⁴ Most of the Part II introduction is from the article McCoy, B. (2025). Democratisation of sport: The role of institutional and cultural democracy. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17511321.2025.2513025>

of athlete-centred advocacy groups have been established since 2008, including the World Players Association (World Players Association, 2017), Global Athlete (Global Athlete, 2019), and Athleten Deutschland (Butler, 2018). These groups are challenging the current leadership approach of institutions like the IOC, as there is a perception that athletes (and other stakeholder groups) are at a disadvantage in the current system. Næss (2020), for instance, cites the Sport for Rights Coalition, Centre for Sports and Human Rights, and Sport and Rights Alliance as organisations and coalitions that have contested the legitimacy of the IOC (and other major international sports organisations).

Additionally, there has been significant criticism regarding the IOC's handling of various issues, including the participation of Russian athletes in sanctioned competitions related to the Olympic Movement after the Russian doping scandal (Harris et al., 2021); concerns about the appropriateness of Olympic Charter Rule 40, which addresses freedom of expression (Ormond, 2014), as well as Rule 50, which restricts advertising and prohibits political, religious, and racial demonstrations (Harris et al., 2023); and criticism directed at WADA for its policies and treatment of athletes (Campos et al., 2023). While one might argue that these criticisms do not provide sufficient evidence of the less than satisfactory results of the IOC's current approach to stakeholder engagement, the IOC has asserted that their commitment to good governance (including democracy) 'serves to obtain the respect and confidence of all partners' (IOC, n.d.-c). If stakeholders continually question the IOC's motivations and lack trust in the system's ability to address concerns, then the IOC's approach to democracy and good governance more broadly should be re-evaluated and improved upon.

Engagement with the institutional dimension of democracy can improve the international sports system while also addressing the IOC's legitimacy issues. Legitimacy and rationality were discussed in Chapter Three, section 3.3, on assessing democracy, highlighting their contribution to the quality of democratic interactions. In a sense, legitimacy and rationality are extensions of democracy. Although they are not characteristics of democracy (or characteristics of *agon*), the absence of legitimacy and rationality will hinder successful democratic interactions. In terms of the democratisation of sport, legitimacy arises from stakeholders' perception that the IOC and other institutions are trustworthy and hold rightful leadership positions. Alternatively, rationality pertains to the quality of democratic interactions, requiring that participants are educated and act reasonably. This part of the dissertation, Part II, has three main objectives: first, to explain how

the international sports system operates and the IOC's current approach to good governance; second, to justify the adoption of stakeholder democracy; and third, to present what the democratisation of sport governance could entail.

CHAPTER 5: GLOBAL SPORTS INSTITUTIONS

5.1 Institutionalisation of Sport

A theme throughout this dissertation centres the assumption that humans have a polemic nature that should be honoured (McCoy and Martínková, 2022). This can be achieved through participation in agonistic social practices such as democratic politics and sports. This idea is supported by the work of Pierre de Coubertin, the father of the modern Olympic Movement, who believed that proper understanding of and engagement with sport would lead to triumph of the will and the human ideal (Coubertin, 2000a, p. 121). The first chapter of this dissertation introduces agonistic social practices—*agon* being the ontic manifestation of the ontological *polemos*. Sport is cited as an example of an agonistic social practice, and through participation in sport, we can act out the polemic drive. As stated in that first chapter, this requires the activities to be institutionalised. However, it also makes activities such as sport more vulnerable to corruption. Understanding what a ‘practice’ is may clarify why these activities can be susceptible to external influences.

MacIntyre (2007) defined a practice as “any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity” (p. 187). Therefore, practices are meant to facilitate the realisation of internal goods associated with a specific practice. In sports, those internal goods are numerous and include teamwork, perseverance, resilience, and testing one’s physical and mental limits. Ideally, the opportunity to realise these internal goods would remain central to participation in practices. However, over time, greater emphasis has been placed on external goods rather than internal goods, which is arguably tied to the institutionalisation of practices.

Practices are not institutions. According to MacIntyre:

Chess, physics and medicine are practices; chess clubs, laboratories, universities and hospitals are institutions. Institutions are characteristically and necessarily concerned with what I have called external goods. They are involved in acquiring money and other material goods; they are structured in terms of power and status, and they distribute money, power and status as rewards. Nor could they do otherwise if they are to sustain not only themselves, but also the practices of which they are the bearers. For no practices can survive for any length of time unsustained by institutions. (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 194)

In modern sporting culture, many external factors may influence participation and mindset. Those at the elite level often have their funding affected by results, and winning frequently leads to sponsorships and prize money. Additionally, there are institutions that exist outside of sports but are heavily invested in them, such as the betting industry. While institutionalisation is necessary for competitive social practices, it also has a corrupting effect.

Notably, Coubertin's ideal version of the Olympic Movement centred Olympism as a moral attitude rather than an institution (Müller, 2000, p. 44). Furthermore, he maintained that institutions needed to carefully evolve and remain aware of their foundational principles, writing:

In reality, there are almost always *two* forms of evolution in an institution: the evolution of appearances, and the evolution of the soul. The first tries to adapt to current trends, and changes according to the whims of fashion. The second remains as steadfast as the principles on which the institution is based. It evolves slowly and healthily, in conformity with the laws of humanity itself. Olympism falls within the second of these categories. (Coubertin, 2000d, p. 584)

Adopting a good-faith interpretation of ISBs would lead one to accept that they have made institutional and governance decisions in line with their foundational principles. However, it should also be noted that the scale of the Olympic Games, the funds generated by sponsorship deals and media rights, and several other factors may have led ISB's leadership away from their foundational principles. Many sports teams are owned by billionaires or corporations, and over time, professional sports have increasingly focused on return on investment for shareholders rather than on sporting achievements (Slack, 2014).

Institutionalisation has led to increased funding for mega sport events and elite athletics in general, indicating the growing influence of the private sector in sports. Media organisations bid for broadcasting rights to sporting events, corporations invest millions to sponsor athletes, teams, or events, the salaries of high-ranking officials are steadily rising, and high-achieving athletes can change not only their own lives but also those of their family members. Some areas of the sports system have been nearly entirely captured by the private sector. Gerrard (2004) described the professional team sports industry as a highly commercialised commodity, stating that “teams buy the services of players and coaches. Fans buy game tickets, subscriptions to TV sports channels and team merchandising. TV companies buy sports broadcasting rights to deliver games to the

stay-at-home fans. Big businesses buy executive suites, corporate hospitality and sponsorship opportunities” (p. 247). In some cases, every aspect of sport has become commodified, which can lead to corruption. Consequently, the governance of sport and sporting practices has been tainted. The importance of honouring intrinsic values or the pursuit of excellence diminishes when such large sums of money are involved. Furthermore, those external values are jeopardised when trust is eroded among institutions and participants. If institutions are perceived as lacking integrity, athletes or officials may be less inclined to operate with integrity.

For example, corruption scandals related to bidding for events like the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympics (Chappelet and Kübler-Mabbott, 2008; Maennig, 2005; Sam et al., 2022) and the 2022 Qatar World Cup (Awad, 2023; Bayle, 2024) may cause athletes to see governance officials as hypocrites. Athletes are subject to numerous rules, while governance officials disregard the rules and standards they are supposed to follow. Similarly, scandals such as state-sanctioned doping in Russia and the response (or lack thereof) by sporting institutions may cause athletes to question why they are upholding rules that others are not. In such cases, the perception that external characteristics are compromised leads to the internal characteristics being compromised, as the mindset or attitude of participants is affected.

MacIntyre (2007) positions institutionalisation as a necessary evil. The institutionalisation of sport has provided the necessary infrastructure for competitions to exist, exemplified by the external characteristics associated with agonistic social practices. The cultivation of virtues combats corrupt practices (MacIntyre, 2007). However, I would argue that promoting a better understanding of practices, why we participate in them, and how we benefit from that participation is more important. The more participants understand the practice, the more functional and sustainable it will be. This slightly differs from MacIntyre’s stance that maintaining the integrity of practices is based on the virtues exercised and sustained during the institutionalisation of those practices (MacIntyre, 2007) because the mention of virtues implies that they are not native to sport. This is unnecessary because, as an agonistic social practice, sport is inherently pro-social and beneficial to participants’ development. All that is needed is to better understand the sport’s pro-social value.

It is possible for activities of institutions to be conducted in a manner that encourages cooperation, competition, and participation, which aligns with the principles of Freeman and Phillips’ (2002) stakeholder capitalism. However, this approach to organisational governance is

challenging, given that institutions tend to become rigid. This rigidity presents a dilemma since sport necessitates institutionalisation (i.e., institutionalisation distinguishes exercise or play from sport). While institutionalisation is essential for legitimacy and regulation, it may also lead to unintended consequences. Some of these side effects could be detrimental to the core mission of the institution (MacIntyre, 2007). Institutionalisation signifies that individuals are dedicating themselves to factors outside the institution's primary focus. When an institution is built around sport, there must be attention to other aspects to ensure its sustainability. For example, the IOC's mission centres the Olympic Games and the Olympic Movement; however, once established, it must also address funding these initiatives and recruiting teams to manage them. Some negative effects are further intensified by globalisation in sport and the authority and influence the IOC wields as the leader of the Olympic Movement, as well as the overall autonomy of sport.

5.2 Globalisation of Sport

Globalisation has impacted many industries, but its effect on the international sports system is unique in some ways. As sports have become more globalised, the influence of international sports organisations has grown stronger. This is not necessarily negative; however, the independent nature of sports has resulted in little to no oversight of these organisations (Chappelet, 2016a; Geeraert, 2021b), and they have arguably become more authoritarian in nature.

Globalisation can be described as a process that encourages the cross-cultural and border flows of goods, services, money, people, information, and culture (Held et al., 1999, p. 16). This allows localities around the world to be impacted by events occurring many miles away, ensuring that globalisation will influence the politics of the nation-state as well as the lives of citizens (Giddens, 1990, p. 64; Gems and Pfister, 2014). Regarding sports, the values that the IOC and other international sports bodies, such as WADA, have been able to export represent a particular set of values through their influence on the sports system. In this case, those values largely reflect 'Western values' (Bayle, 2025). The IOC, along with most other international federations, is based in Europe, with some based in the United States. These international federations are also most often led by Europeans or 'Westerners.' The 2025 IOC election cycle resulted in the first African president of the IOC. Prior to this, all presidents had been from Europe or the United States (IOC, n.d.-d). Globalisation tends to be driven by business enterprises and corporations, science and technology, ecological problems and concerns, belief systems/ideologies, political institutions,

agencies and bodies (UNO), civil society organisations (Red Cross, Greenpeace), and other initiatives and institutions that are transnational in their scope, such as international sports organisations (Gems and Pfister, 2014).

The increasing influence of globalisation is reflected in the rise of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) over the last century and the growth of International Government Organisations (IGOs) can be seen as a response to the rise and influence of INGOs. According to Sugden and Tomlinson (2004), “in 1909 there were only 37 IGOs and 176 INGOs, while by 1996 it was calculated that there were 260 IGOs and a staggering 5,472 INGOs” (p. 24). That number has likely increased over the last quarter century, and all of this growth in such a short period has greatly influenced the sports world.

Some of the aforementioned INGOs include international sports organisations such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA), which has led to the sports world’s own process of globalisation over the last century. Sports organisations have often positioned themselves as apolitical spaces that should be protected from the influence of nation-states or International Government Organisations, which have political agendas that may conflict with the Olympic Movement. Consequently, International Sporting Bodies (ISBs) have sought independence and have generally been permitted to operate autonomously, outside the purview of governments or any oversight bodies, thus shifting the responsibility of regulation to the international sports bodies (Foster, 2005).

As international sporting competitions have broadened their reach and increased in frequency, so have the power and influence of international governing bodies of sport. Furthermore, these organisations have been able to avoid accountability to outside entities due to the assumption that they are committed to good governance principles such as democracy (Bayle, 2025; Harris et al., 202). International sports bodies like FIFA and the IOC were established by individuals who considered themselves to be well-meaning individuals who believed in the separation of sport and politics (Sugden and Tomlinson, 2004). However, growing frustration exists with the level of autonomy granted to sports organisations as stakeholders question whether the motives of ISBs are self-serving, especially as global sport becomes more commercial and professional in nature.

The value set that has been disseminated throughout the international sports system can be summarised through ‘good governance’. The popularity of good governance as a concept can be

linked to the post-Cold War promotion of democratic principles in various societies and sectors around the world (Woods, 1999). Even countries that do not aim to uphold democratic principles have been exposed to good governance due to the West's adoption of these principles and their subsequent export through globalisation.

5.3 How the International Sports System is Organised

The Olympic Movement has various stakeholders. According to Chappelet (2021), these include the IOC, OCOGs, NOCs, IFs, National Governing Bodies (NGBs), Olympic athletes, governments, media and Right Holding Broadcasters (RHBs), sponsors, sports regulators, professional sports leagues, civic groups, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), national courts, athletes and clubs, parents, entourage, volunteers, fans, and spectators. Although the IOC is not the only significant stakeholder or institution in the international sports system, its structure and governance approach are emphasised due to its role as the guardian of the Olympic Movement.

The IOC acts as the primary influence from the public sphere in Eichberg's (2009) *Trialectics of Societal Spheres*. The international sports system maintains a policy of political neutrality (IOC, 2025b). Therefore, while the public sphere is generally associated with governments, the IOC functions as the 'state' that exerts public influence over the international sports system. Although the governance structures and operations may differ between the IOC and International Federations (IFs), the IOC establishes the standards against which IFs and other members of the Olympic Movement are measured. The Olympic Charter mandates that the IOC, IFs, NOCs, and the Organising Committees for the Olympic Games (OCOGs) must comply with its regulations (IOC, 2025b, p. 7). Membership in the Olympic Movement also necessitates recognition by the IOC (IOC, 2025b, p. 9).

IFs, NOCs, and NGBs that want to remain in good standing with the IOC must abide by the guidelines in the Olympic Charter and other documents, such as the Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance (BUPGG). Consequently, the IOC's structures, policies, and interpretation of democracy as it relates to governance in sport are the primary considerations for understanding democracy's role in the international sports system. The IOC has a particularly significant role as an INGO in the sports system due to its relationships with other stakeholders in addition to the independence afforded to the sports industry. The former point will be addressed in the rest of this chapter, while the latter point will be discussed in the following chapter.

To begin, the management of sport and the governance of sport should not be conflated. For instance, the management or administration of the IOC consists of day-to-day activities. The Director General, who also serves on the EB, is essentially the CEO and serves as the link between the governance and management of the IOC. There are various departments responsible for carrying out the IOC's mission and vision, as well as the mandates that arise from the IOC Session. These departments include Olympic Solidarity, NOC Relations, Olympism365, Olympic Games, Sports Department, Athletes' Department, Medical and Scientific, Corporate and Sustainable Development, Corporate Communications, Olympic Broadcasting, IOC Television and Marketing, Digital Engagement and Marketing, Olympic Channel Services, Finance, Human Resources, Legal Affairs, Ethics and Compliance, and more (IOC, n.d.-a).

These departments are responsible for the following:

- [...] preparation, implementation and follow-up of decisions taken by the Session, Executive Board and President;

- preparation and follow-up of the work of all commissions; permanent liaison with the IFs, NOCs and OCOGs;

- coordination of preparation for all Olympic Games and Youth Olympic Games;

- organisation and preparation of other Olympic events;

- circulation of information within the Olympic Movement;

- advice to Interested Parties;

- relations with many international governmental and non-governmental organisations dealing with, in particular, sport, education and culture;

- liaison with Olympic Solidarity and implementation of many other tasks of an ongoing or ad hoc nature assigned to it by the President and the Executive Board. (IOC, n.d.-a)

Those involved in sports management are often full-time employees who do not develop rules and policies; however, they are frequently tasked with carrying out the vision set by those in sports governance. Most individuals involved in the governance of sport do not work full-time on governance duties. Typically, there is little overlap in personnel between the management and governance of sport. The components of the IOC's governance are as follows:

- [...] an executive board consists of the president, four vice presidents, ten members and a director general;
- a number of commissions focused on specific topics and intended to advise the organisation;

and 105 members and 39 honorary members serving as “representatives of the IOC in their respective countries, and not their country’s delegate within the IOC”. (IOC, n.d.-a).

The IOC members are elected by the IOC Session for a term of eight years, which can be renewed. They meet once a year at the Session, also known as the general assembly. According to the IOC, responsibilities of the members at this yearly meeting include “[taking] decisions concerning the institution and the Olympic Games, such as the election of the hosts of the Games, changes to the Olympic Charter, election of the IOC President, Vice-Presidents, and members of the IOC EB, as well as the cooptation of new members” (IOC, 2023b, p. 1). The IOC honorary members and honorary members do not vote at the IOC Session.

The members of the executive board (EB), excluding the Director General, are elected to serve four-year terms and may serve two consecutive terms. After completing two terms, they can be re-elected following a two-year hiatus from the board. The responsibilities of the EB include organising the assessment of candidates and selecting the host for the Olympic Games, enacting regulations to ensure the implementation of the Olympic Charter and the organisation of the Olympic Games, reporting proposed changes to the Olympic Charter to the IOC Session, managing the IOC’s finances and preparing a report on those matters, and generally overseeing the administration of the IOC (IOC, 2023b).

Exploring the democratisation of governance is one of the objectives of this dissertation and is the focus of Part II. The democratisation of governance is emphasised rather than the administration of these institutions because the strategy and direction for the organisation are determined by the governance sector. The employees of the IOC are tasked with implementing strategy and direction, making the understanding of sport as an agonistic social practice essential for this group as well. However, they are not the focus of this work. This study is concerned with the individuals who participate in the IOC Session and contribute to the agenda-setting process. These individuals can set the agenda with minimal external input. Chapter 6 has provided context for why the IOC is the focal point for democratisation in sport governance and interaction with the institutional dimension of democracy.

The IOC exerts even greater influence on the sports system than most other INGOs, as sporting institutions can operate autonomously due to concerns that governments might exploit these bodies to exercise soft power or influence sports through state-sanctioned doping, as seen in

East Germany and, more recently, Russia. While these scenarios are understandably concerning, a more democratic approach to governance can help address some of the current issues facing the IOC, such as combating corruption and refining the commitment to good governance that the Olympic Movement already embraces—this will be the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6: CORRUPTION, AUTONOMY AND THE BASIS FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE

Chapter Five provided an overview of the institutionalisation of sport and the impact of globalisation on sport, as well as the significant role that the IOC plays in the international sports system. Chapter Six will provide background on the IOC's adoption of good governance principles and its goals for doing so. As a reminder, approaching democracy in relation to the governance of sport exemplifies engagement with the institutional dimension of democracy since it deals with procedures and formal activities. To better understand the institutional dimension of democracy in the context of sport, we must examine how democracy has been interpreted by sports institutions.

6.1 Corruption in Sport

Corruption, in all its forms, flourishes due to cultural and structural factors. Corrupt cultures can exist in geographic contexts as well as within organisations, and there is ample evidence to suggest that corrupt cultures are present in ISBs, with the most notable examples being the IOC and FIFA (Geeraert, 2018). While this work primarily focuses on the concept of good governance, it is helpful to support this analysis with a brief description of corruption in sport, as it serves as the catalyst for initial reform. Maennig (2005) categorised corruption into two main groups: those related to competition and those related to management. Although the primary focus of this work is on the latter, it is important to note that these forms are interrelated. Perceived corruption at the governance and/or managerial level can negatively affect competition, as stakeholders may be less inclined to show their support or engage in fair competition if they perceive those in power as exploiting their positions.

Geeraert (2018) states that corruption has been a norm in both institutions, allowing the IOC and FIFA to persist for so long with such a culture because they have been “shielded from external (public) interference” (p. 50). Furthermore, due to sport's autonomy, these organisations are not subject to the regulatory scope of outside bodies. Although ISBs claim to be proponents of accountability and transparency, the public often does not learn about corruption cases until governmental authorities share their findings. Such was the case recently with investigations into the Tokyo Olympic Games (Wade, 2019) and the Paris Olympic Games (Charlton and Dunbar, 2023) regarding various corruption-related allegations.

Not long after the Salt Lake City Winter Games scandal in 2002, scholars began suggesting that engaging more stakeholders in decision-making processes would be an appropriate response to the corruption issues facing the IOC (Mason et al., 2006). Mason and colleagues (2006) claimed this was due to a belief that it is “unlikely that IOC members will be willing to give up the degree of autonomy and power that they have enjoyed in order to reduce opportunism” (p. 69). The IOC has responded by making various changes over the last two decades, including releasing the BUPGG (Chappelet, 2016a; Chappelet and Kübler-Mabbott, 2008). However, several stakeholder groups have continued to question the IOC’s ability to address corruption and lead the global sports community fairly (IOC, 2023b). The IOC has identified the autonomy of sport as a tool for combating corruption, as it becomes more difficult for nations to manipulate sport for their own political means (ibid).

The Olympic Charter reads:

Recognising that sport occurs within the framework of society, sports organisations within the Olympic Movement shall have the rights and obligations of autonomy, which include freely establishing and controlling the rules of sport, determining the structure and governance of their organisations, enjoying the right of elections free from any outside influence and the responsibility for ensuring that principles of good governance be applied.

5th Fundamental Principle of Olympism, Olympic Charter (IOC, 2025b, p. 8)

Part of the IOC’s mission is “to take action to strengthen the unity of the Olympic Movement, protect its independence to maintain and promote its political neutrality and to preserve the autonomy of sport” (IOC, 2025b, p. 13). This requires that NOCs ‘preserve their autonomy’ while resisting political, legal, religious, economic, and other pressures that may impact their ability to comply with the Olympic Charter (IOC, 2025b, p. 61). It is implied that greater institutional autonomy is necessary to prevent outside political, legal, religious, and economic agendas from corrupting sport. However, Harris and colleagues (2021) affirm that sport’s autonomy has not always prevented corruption, noting that scandals have consistently occurred. Despite this, it is widely accepted that autonomous governance is the best way to protect sport, and this has remained the status quo (Chappelet, 2016a; 2018).

6.2 Autonomy of Sport

While the IOC first mentioned the significance of sport's autonomy in 1949 (Chappelet, 2016a), it was not until several court decisions, including the Bosman ruling in 1995, that the Olympic Movement faced threats to its autonomy. This led to lobbying efforts to have the EU officially recognise this status (Chappelet, 2018), and since then, sports organisations have successfully ensured it remains a core feature of their governance strategy. Even as corruption scandals in sports continue to jeopardise the integrity of athletics, the IOC and other leaders within the Olympic Movement have strengthened the autonomy of sports to combat corruption and enhance the management of sports organisations (Chappelet, 2016a; Thompson et al., 2023). A degree of autonomy is likely necessary; however, excessive autonomy can lead to institutional behaviours that appear authoritarian—the very behaviours autonomy is intended to protect sport against.

Before the emphasis on the autonomy of sport, the Olympic Movement argued that the 'specificity of sport' entitled them to certain exemptions from governance standards that other institutions are required to uphold (Chappelet, 2018, p. 157). By the early 21st century, this was affirmed by the EU, which acknowledged sports' specific characteristics in the Nice Declaration released in 2000 and the specific nature of sport in the Lisbon Treaty, signed in 2009 (Chappelet, 2016a; 2018). Today, the phrase 'specificity of sport' is frequently invoked to justify the relative autonomy granted to sporting institutions, distinguishing it from other economic and social activities (European Commission, 2016). The IOC and other members of the Olympic Movement have embraced the concept of sport autonomy when defending their governance structures.

The transition from emphasising the specific nature of sport to the autonomy of sport was partly due to the Meca-Medina case (calling into question the anti-doping sanctions of two Romanian swimmers), which was ruled on by the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) in 2006 (European Case Reports, 2006). Although the CJEU ruled in favour of the International Swimming Federation (now known as World Aquatics), the case report included the following:

If the sporting activity in question falls within the scope of the [Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union or Treaty of Lisbon], the conditions for engaging in it are then subject to all the obligations which result from the various provisions of the Treaty. (European Case Reports, 2006, I-7019)

This insertion meant that the IOC and other ISBs could have their authority questioned regarding decisions made in, or relating to, the EU. This was followed by additional lobbying efforts by the IOC—now seeking official recognition of the autonomy of sport. These lobbying efforts included hosting two seminars in 2006 and 2008 on the autonomy of sport (Chappelet, 2018, p. 160). According to Chappelet (2018, p. 161), by the time the IOC hosted the second seminar, they had ‘realised that sports organisations could not expect to keep their autonomy unless they were well governed’ (ibid, p. 161). Soon, the IOC adopted the first iteration of the BUPGG.

Prior to the release of the BUPGG, the IOC held its second seminar on the autonomy of sport and issued resolutions, some of which clarify the IOC’s perspective on the role of autonomy and good governance in sport. Resolution 2 read ‘To re-iterate that the Autonomy of the Olympic and Sports Movement is essential for the development of sport and the promotion of its values, for the benefit of all athletes’ and Resolution 5 read ‘To emphasise Good Governance as the fundamental basis to secure the Autonomy of Olympic and Sports organisations and to ensure that this Autonomy is respected by stakeholders’ (IOC, 2008b). While the IOC has maintained its stance that good governance is integral in its pursuit to ‘obtain the respect and confidence of all partners’ (IOC, 2024), it has not explicitly defined good governance in its official documents such as the BUPGG, Olympic Charter, or Code of Ethics. As a result, one must look beyond the IOC for a general understanding of what good governance in sport is.

6.3 Good Governance in Sport

In Henry and Lee’s (2004) seminal article on governance in sport, the authors declared that sport governance comprises three dimensions: systemic governance, good governance, and political governance. Systemic governance pertains more to the structural management of power and resources (i.e., hierarchical governance or network governance). Political governance refers to the specific role that government authorities play in regulating sport and their relationship with non-governmental sport organisations. Good governance relates to the normative behaviours that stakeholders are expected to follow (ibid). All three dimensions are significant for the governance of sport, with systemic and political governance more closely tied to authority while good governance is linked to legitimacy. The significance of good governance’s relationship to legitimacy will be addressed in Chapter 9. It is referenced here because Henry and Lee (2004) suggest that the purpose of good governance is related to legitimacy. Therefore, when examining

the approach to good governance, one should be aware that legitimacy should be an intended outcome.

Organisations such as the IOC have been granted the authority to make decisions; however, whether those decisions are accepted by the individuals and groups being governed depends on stakeholders' belief that decision makers are following the proper procedures that benefit the sporting movement (Bayle, 2024; Næss, 2020). The latter point describes legitimacy. Harris et al. (2021) argue that institutions only conform to pressure from stakeholders if they believe such conformity will enhance their perceived legitimacy. Although good governance is intended to ensure that sports organisations are governed effectively (Geeraert et al., 2014), there is some evidence suggesting that 'good governance initiatives in sport may produce sub-optimal or downright negative outcomes such as cosmetic reforms without substantial change' (Geeraert, 2021c, p. 2).

The difficulties associated with effective governance in sports are partially due to conceptual vagueness (Geeraert, 2021c) as well as an inability to meaningfully address the cultural causes of corruption. Despite this vagueness surrounding good governance in sports, a consensus has emerged regarding the importance of democracy, accountability, transparency, and responsibility after Thompson et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review of governance principles in sports and found that these principles were the most frequently mentioned¹⁵.

Such findings are compatible with the prevailing sentiment of experts. In their seminal work on governance in sport, Henry and Lee (2004) name the same four principles as Thompson et al. (2023), along with three others:

- Transparency – clarity in procedures and decision-making, particularly in resource allocation. Organisations charged with care of a public good such as sport have a particular obligation not simply to act in a fair and consistent manner but also to be seen to do so. Thus their inner workings should as far as possible be open to public scrutiny.
- Accountability: - sporting organisations are not only responsible to financial investors through financial reporting procedures, but also to those who invest other resources in the organisation – athletes, coaches, parents, supporters, sponsors and so on, even where that investment is largely emotional rather than material.

¹⁵ While the BUPGG lists many good governance principles, this article will focus on transparency, accountability, responsibility and democracy due to their frequency in the literature as well as the first three principles being highlighted in the Section D, Article 11 of the IOC Code of Ethics.

- Democracy: - access to representation in decision-making should be available to those who make up the organisation's 'internal constituencies' – with for example representation on Boards of such organisations for constituencies such as players, supporters, and managers as well as owners
 - Responsibility: - for the sustainable development of the organisation and its sport, and stewardship of their resources and those of the community served.
 - Equity: - in treatment of constituencies – for example gender equity in treatment of sports participants and in terms of positions within the organisation; and equity in treatment of sports participants (and employees) with disabilities.
 - Effectiveness: - the establishing and monitoring of measures of effectiveness with measurable and attainable targets.
 - Efficiency: - the achievement of such goals with the most efficient use of resources.
- (Henry and Lee, 2004, p. 31)

Thompson et al.'s study (2023) also references effectiveness and efficiency, though these concepts are cited less frequently than the primary four principles. Henry and Lee (2004) are referenced to demonstrate the consensus in the academic literature; however, as explained in chapter 6, the IOC's interpretation of good governance and its accompanying principles is what matters most. The significance of transparency, accountability, and responsibility as relevant good governance principles for the IOC is reaffirmed in Section D, Article 11 of the IOC Code of Ethics (2023), which states 'The Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance of the Olympic and Sports Movement, in particular transparency, responsibility and accountability, must be respected by all Olympic parties' (IOC 2023a, p. 15). As with good governance as a concept, the principles associated with it are also vague.

CHAPTER 7: GOOD GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES ACCORDING TO THE IOC

7.1 Principles in the Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance

The IOC does not provide much guidance on how NOCs should interpret the principles in the BUPGG, although the members of the Olympic Movement are required to adopt the BUPGG. In the Preamble of the most recent iteration of the BUPGG, released in 2022, the IOC states that ‘all members of the Olympic Movement shall adopt these Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance and reflect these standards in their respective rules, regulations, policies and operations’ (IOC 2022, p. 1). The Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance (BUPGG) were presented by the IOC as principles that all members of the Olympic Movement should adopt as a minimum standard (IOC 2008) and include the following seven principles: 1) vision, mission, and strategy, 2) structures, regulations, and democratic process, 3) highest level of competence, integrity, and ethical standards, 4) accountability, transparency, and control, 5) solidarity and development, 6) athletes’ involvement, participation, and care, and 7) harmonious relations with governments while preserving autonomy.

The initial BUPGG document was vague, offering between three and ten themes for each of the seven principles and at least one element to consider for each point. For instance, the principle of ‘harmonious relations with governments while preserving autonomy’ had three themes: ‘Cooperation, coordination and consultation’, ‘Complementary missions’, and ‘Maintain and preserve the autonomy of sport’ (IOC, 2008a, p. 12). The last theme had one element to be considered, ‘the right balance between governments, the Olympic Movement and sporting organisations should be ensured’ (ibid, p. 12). In the updated 2022 BUPGG, minor changes have been made to the seven principles; although still generally vague, this version provides additional guidance to organisations, including the suggestion that they pursue additional revenue streams to protect their autonomy (IOC, 2022). This limited direction leaves much open to interpretation and permits ISBs to engage in various behaviours that could be regarded as corrupt while also aligning with the seventh principle and its themes. The Olympic Charter places special emphasis on the principles of transparency, responsibility, and accountability, which is reaffirmed in Section D, Article 11 of the IOC Code of Ethics (IOC, 2024).

7.1.1 Responsibility and Accountability

Accountability and responsibility will be considered together due to their similar intentions. While the IOC specifically mentions responsibility alongside accountability and transparency as principles that Olympic Members should uphold, responsibility does not seem to be recognised as a distinct principle within the BUPGG or IOC Code of Ethics more broadly. Responsibility is briefly mentioned in various sections, including solidarity and responsibility (Mission and goals, 1.2), the roles and responsibilities of the governing bodies (Structures, 2.1), committees with specific responsibilities (Governing bodies, 2.3), governing bodies being accountable for their areas of responsibility (Accountability, 2.4), athletes' rights and responsibilities (5.1), Environmental and social responsibility (6.2), and sport organisations and government authorities working together with mutual respect for each other's jurisdictions and responsibilities (Cooperation and coordination with government authorities and external partners, 7.2). Although the IOC mentions responsibility alongside accountability and transparency as principles that Olympic Members should commit to, it does not seem to be recognised as a distinct principle within the BUPGG or IOC Code of Ethics more broadly.

Accountability is described by the following statements:

- all governing bodies, the management and staff of sports organisations shall be accountable for their area of responsibility;
- the executive body shall report to the General Assembly;
- management shall be accountable for the implementation of the decisions made by the governing bodies;
- an annual activity report, including institutional information, main events and financial reports, should be publicly available. (IOC, 2022, p. 5)

Within the BUPGG, responsibility and accountability are being conflated. Responsibility lacks a specific section defining its meaning, and the accountability section states that management and staff are accountable for their respective areas of responsibility. This description of accountability is not very helpful, as it uses a variation of what it seeks to clarify (i.e. actors should be accountable for their respective areas of responsibility). However, no clear definitions for responsibility or accountability are provided. This vagueness poses challenges for sports organisations as they try to implement these principles in their procedures.

7.1.2 Transparency

In the updated BUPGG, both accountability and transparency details are included under the fourth point of the institutional governance principle (2.4). This section defines transparency as information that is easily accessible on the website, including “vision, mission, goals and strategy; organisational structure; list of elected officials and the management structure; rules, regulations and policies; main activities and decisions; annual audited financial statements; awarding procedure for sports events, when applicable” (IOC, 2022, p. 6).

Transparency, as presented here, is general in scope and prioritises transparency of outcomes. However, organisations are not being encouraged to share justification regarding how they make decisions. Based on the information stated in the BUPGG, there is also room for interpretation regarding what type of information is to be shared on the website. Transparency in sports governance entails that sports organisations share information about values, decisions, processes, structures, procedures, functioning, and performance with stakeholders (Henne, 2015; King, 2015). This makes it more difficult for governing bodies to conceal corruption from stakeholders, thus serving an important function for accountability (Geeraert, 2021a).

Moreover, while transparency may be one of the more straightforward principles to grasp conceptually, there is still much to consider, such as how complete the information shared should be, how timely the release of information should be, and the frequency of information sharing (King, 2015). These considerations are not mentioned in the BUPGG, and although they should not necessarily be applied rigidly across all sports and organisations, there should be an acknowledgment that they must be considered.

7.1.3 Democracy

Notably, the IOC emphasises the most common principles reported by Thompson et al. (2023) with the exception of democracy. Although democracy is not highlighted in Section D, Article 11 of the IOC Code of Ethics, it is considered a significant principle of good governance for this research due to its frequency in the literature (Thompson et al., 2023), its inclusion in the ASOIF Self Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ), and the EU’s designation of it as a component of the European Model of Sport and a principle of good governance (European Commission et al., 2022). The explanation for the democratic process in the BUPGG states:

[...] all members shall have access, in due time, to the relevant information relating to meetings, including the agenda, the relevant documents, the minutes of the meetings, etc; governing bodies shall meet on a regular basis, taking into consideration their specific duties, and the General Assembly shall be held at least once a year.; Meetings may take place in person or remotely (through secure and appropriate electronic means); and all members shall have the right to express their opinion on the topics on the agenda. (IOC, 2022, p. 6).

As with accountability and transparency, the democratic process applies to internal stakeholders (more specifically, the members of the organisation) and has limited scope, as it is only referenced in relation to General Assembly meetings and elections (2.6). The first part of this description, which addresses the availability of information, reflects the transparency principle more than the democratic principle. Furthermore, while the emphasis on the frequency of meetings and the right of all IOC members to express their opinions may contribute to a democratic process, they are certainly not the only noteworthy aspects.

The International Sport and Culture Association (ISCA) defines democracy as open and frequent access for the organisation's members to influence the strategic direction of the organisation, which includes the ability to participate in debates as well as run for and vote for leadership (ISCA, 2013). This is a limited application of democracy because the use of 'members' extends to the members within the organisation as opposed to the constituency that the organisation serves. A democratic process that does not emphasise stakeholder participation is cause for concern (Kihl and Schull, 2020; Næss, 2020). While this characterisation of the democratic principle refers only to the participation of internal stakeholders, it more effectively communicates the active participation of the community when compared to the detail in the BUPGG. This issue is better addressed by Geeraert (2021a), who defines democracy as 'a system of rules that establishes competition (electoral competition between political alternatives), participation (affected actors' influence over collective decisions), and deliberation (fair and open debates)' (p. 22). Though not very detailed, this conception of democracy does allow for stakeholder participation (i.e., affected actors' ability to participate and influence collective decisions).

When attempting to define democracy, there tends to be an overreliance on the mention of fair elections, as seen in the BUPGG excerpt and the definitions cited from the ISCA and Geeraert. This occurs because democracy is usually defined in reference to political institutions, which can be limiting if one understands the principle of democracy as being related to egalitarianism and fairness more broadly. Christensen (2013) navigates this issue by focusing on democratisation

instead of democracy, defining it as ‘either a condition in which the balance between hierarchical and egalitarian relationships in a given situation is tilted strongly toward the latter or the process that brings such a balance into being, maintains it, or extends it further toward egalitarianism’ (Christensen, 2013, p. 212). In relation to sport governance, the aim is to embrace a democratic approach that allows for better checks and balances among stakeholders to better balance power. This is not in alignment with how the IOC addresses governance issues with members of the Olympic family; for if that were the case, it would result in the relevant stakeholder groups for that sport gaining more power and a larger role in the governance structure when addressing corruption. However, in dealing with corruption concerns related to the governance of the IBA, the case ultimately resulted in the IOC gaining all the power that it stripped from the IBA.

Although the IOC does not provide much guidance on how the BUPGG principles should be interpreted, the Preamble of the most recent iteration of the BUPGG, released in 2022, states that ‘all members of the Olympic Movement shall adopt these Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance and reflect these standards in their respective rules, regulations, policies and operations’ (IOC, 2022, p. 1). This can leave organisations under the Olympic umbrella vulnerable.

7.2 Analysis of the IOC’s Approach to Good Governance: Practical Shortcomings

The IOC’s approach to good governance poses practical challenges that negatively impact other ISBs. Regarding the applicability of the BUPGG, the IOC has offered little conceptualisation of the principles. Based on the IOC’s presentation of good governance principles, it seems that those representing the Olympic Movement hold what Dahl et al. (2003) refer to as the procedural view concerning the assessment of good governance principles (and the governance of sport as a whole). The IOC identifies principles and characteristics associated with good governance and then requires members of the Olympic Movement to comply. According to traditional theories on governance, each organisation should be able to implement its own governance decisions based on its needs (Mitchell et al., 2023). However, due to the unique structure of the international sports system, the IOC can impose governance decisions on all organisations in the Olympic Movement and mandate their adoption.

With this approach, the conceptual clarity of the principles is important since the IOC expects organisations under the Olympic Movement umbrella to meet good governance standards and warns of consequences for those that do not. However, the conceptual clarity of the BUPGG

is lacking. For instance, responsibility and accountability are somewhat conflated. Responsibility is not given a dedicated section describing its meaning, and the accountability section notes that management and staff are accountable for their respective areas of responsibility. There are similarities between responsibility and accountability, but a significant distinction must be acknowledged: the former involves providing an answer while the latter involves liability (King, 2015). This distinction highlights the role of stakeholders because accountability concerns the relationship between those calling for adjustments to the actions or behaviours of decision-makers being held to account (King, 2015). The lack of conceptual clarity allows for flexible interpretation and implementation of the principles, which can lead to a distortion of those principles.

The IOC lacks the infrastructure to monitor the Olympic Movement organisations. Although the BUPGG has been adopted by Olympic sports since it is part of the IOC Code of Ethics, there is currently no official apparatus in place to monitor the implementation of good governance standards. The IOC relies heavily on governance assessment tools offered by third-party organisations. It expects IFs to perform self-evaluations regularly and share that information with the IOC upon request (IOC, 2022). ASOIF has released the Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ), which is built upon the BUPGG and Olympic Charter and IFs can use to better understand their obligations (ASOIF, 2023a).

In the 2023-24 edition, the fourth section is meant to measure democracy and contains 12 indicators which IF representative(s) score their organization on and provide evidence to justify said score. These indicators include 1) election of the president and a majority of members of all executive bodies, 2) clear campaign policies/rules, 3) election process with secret ballot, 4) publicise all open positions for elections and non-staff appointments, 5) establishment and publication of eligibility rules for candidates, 6) term limits for elected officials, 7) representation of key stakeholders (active athletes) in governing bodies, 8) adoption of athletes' rights and responsibilities in accordance with Athletes' Declaration, 9) provide support to IF member associations, 10) monitor governance compliance of IF member associations, 11) ensure equal opportunities for members to participate in the General Assembly and 12) statutes or rules of procedure that specify what decisions are made at what level (ASOIF, 2023b).

While the SAQ does ask for more from IFs and provides more guidance than the BUPGG with respect to IFs' obligations and best practice examples; it offers limited support to organisations responsible for evaluating and monitoring the effective implementation of

governance standards. For instance, the phrase ‘state of the art’ is invoked to illustrate that an IF has excelled with respect to the implementation of one of the above indicators (ASOIF, 2023b). However, the phrase is incapable of providing normative guidance for the implementation of the issue in question and ‘state of the art’ may be different for organisations with varying levels of resources. Moreover, relying on assessment tools like the SAQ allows for the misrepresentation and limitation of principles (Geeraert, 2021b). In the example of guidance for the democratic principle above, the focus remains on internal processes within the organisations and does little to encourage the cooperation of the constituency that the organisation serves.

As stated in Part I, a system aspiring toward democratic ideals should prioritise cooperation and competition in addition to maintaining the external characteristics associated with agonistic social practices, which then aid in the upholding of the internal characteristics (McCoy and Martínková, 2022; McCoy, 2025). I am not suggesting that issues related to the implementation and distortion of principles are occurring intentionally (though the lack of conceptual clarity would give bad actors the means to take advantage of the situation). However, difficulties will accompany a centralised approach to development that relies on organisations to implement and monitor the standards without considering their unique circumstances.

Geeraert (2019) identifies three primary reasons why relying on IFs for implementing and monitoring standards is problematic: first, good governance should be tailored to the organisational context, often requiring expertise (Aguilera and Cuervo-Cazurra, 2004; Wymeersch, 2006); second, the standards are subject to interpretation and allow for significant flexibility, making them difficult to apply (Wymeersch, 2006); and third, smaller organisations may lack the resources necessary to establish robust procedures (Parent and Hoyer, 2018). Furthermore, questions arise regarding whether the metrics used reflect the good governance principles they are meant to measure (Geeraert, 2021b; Pielke et al., 2020), whether the selected metrics focus on specific points of measurement while neglecting other potentially important aspects (Geeraert, 2021b), and the limitations of only being able to account for the internal dynamics within an organisation (van Bottenburg, 2021).

Due to the effects of globalisation and the autonomy of sport discussed earlier in this dissertation, the IOC’s approach to good governance has significant implications for other institutions within the Olympic Movement. While the IOC has always had the authority to revoke international federations’ ability to organise events for their sports at the Olympic Games (Olympic

Charter), it had not exercised this power until recently. The IOC's decision to withdraw financial support from the IBA and revoke its ability to participate in the Olympic Games necessitates an evaluation of the current approach to good governance in sports.

7.2.1 The Case of the International Boxing Association

In 2023, the IOC made the unprecedented decision to strip the IBA, the International Federation for Olympic Boxing, of its status as a member of the Olympic Family (Bayle, 2024; CAS, 2023). As a result, the IBA cannot organise the boxing program at the 2024 Summer Olympic Games (OG), and boxing will be organised by a different IF, World Boxing, for the 2028 OG (IOC, 2025a). The IBA is also ineligible to receive financial support from the IOC (Bayle, 2024). The IOC had previously claimed it had no authority to compel International Federations (IFs) to implement the governance standards outlined in the BUPGG (Abanazir, 2024; Geeraert, 2019), even though most IFs rely on the IOC for funding (Krieger and Duckworth, 2023). As the 'guardian' of the Olympic Games, the IOC has always possessed the power to strip federations of their authority; however, it had not previously cited failure to comply with the good governance standards laid out in the IOC Code of Ethics as a reason for taking such drastic actions (Abanazir, 2024).

In a letter explaining why they took such a step, the IOC provided three reasons for their decision: failure to comply with good governance standards, concerns about the IBA's financial situation, and the integrity of the referee and judging processes (IOC, 2023c). The IOC had warned the IBA to improve these areas since 2017. After the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, multiple IBA members and several media outlets alleged that IBA senior staff, referees, and judges were involved in corrupt conduct during the 2000, 2004, 2012, and 2016 editions of the Olympic Games. Following an investigation, the IOC suspended its financial contributions to the IBA and officially notified the organisation of their corruption concerns in 2017 (CAS, 2023).

The IOC published the IOC Inquiry Report in 2019, which led to the establishment of the IOC Boxing Task Force to organise the boxing competition at the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games, as well as the formation of the IOC Special Monitoring Committee that monitored the IBA's areas of concern for two years (CAS, 2023). In June 2021, the IBA engaged both McLaren Global Sport Solutions Inc. (McLaren Sport) and the Governance Reform Group (GRG). McLaren Sport was tasked with investigating the specific instances of corruption that occurred during and after the

2016 Olympic Games, along with the behaviour of past IBA presidents and those involved in the IBA's management, administration, and finances from 2006 to 2020. The GRG was to assist the IBA with governance reform and the implementation of recommendations (CAS, 2023). In September 2021, at the conclusion of the monitoring period of the IOC Special Monitoring Committee, the IOC found that there were still unresolved issues regarding governance, finance, and integrity.

In November 2021, the GRG made recommendations regarding integrity, democracy, checks and balances, and crisis management. Recommendations concerning integrity included establishing an Independent Integrity Unit and specified the composition of that unit as well as additional sub-units (Schärer et al., 2021). Recommendations focused on democracy included reducing the size of the board, ensuring meaningful composition and skills within the Board, dissolving the IBA Council, establishing clear and comprehensive eligibility criteria, creating a diversity policy, and instituting a reorganising committee (ibid). Suggestions related to checks and balances involved having a singular IBA Head Office and dissolving the President's Office (referred to by the IOC as a 'shadow office'), elevating the Secretary General to CEO, separating financial advice from the audit committee, and promoting accountability and strategic planning. Recommendations for crisis management included initiating a fresh start in leadership, appointing a Liaison Officer with the IOC and an External Restructuring Expert, ensuring the President's regular physical presence in Lausanne, and establishing a timeline for implementation. Regarding transparency, the GRG requested that various processes, procedures, eligibility criteria, financial audits, etc., be available on the IBA website (Schärer et al., 2021).

The IBA adopted these recommendations in late November, and in December 2021, the IOC encouraged the IBA to implement the governance recommendations made by the GRG. This included increasing financial transparency, diversifying revenue streams, and improving integrity in the refereeing and judging of official competitions. After considerable back and forth between the IOC and IBA, by 2023, the IBA had not successfully implemented the changes, leading the IOC to withdraw the IBA's recognition as an Olympic Federation in 2023 (CAS, 2023).

7.2.2 Analysis of the IBA Case

According to Geeraert (2019), the BUPGG 'have not been translated into clear criteria for assessment' (p. 528), and he further argues that this indicates the IOC never intended to monitor

the implementation of the BUPGG. However, despite the vague guidance on good governance principles in the BUPGG, the IOC has chosen to hold governing organisations accountable for failings related to good governance, as evidenced by the withdrawal of the IBA's Olympic family status.

This case highlights multiple issues with the current approach to good governance, including concerns noted in earlier sections (vague conceptualisation with limited scope and flexible implementation). In the IOC's comprehensive report on the IBA case (IOC, 2023c), it was noted that the IBA had received warnings since 2017 regarding governance standards, the referee and judging program, and its financial situation. However, the IOC did not provide detailed guidance to the IBA on how to improve their governance and integrity standards in 2017 or 2019 (or at least, there is no publicly available documentation detailing support from the IOC). According to the documents made public regarding this case, the IBA sought assistance from two outside groups, McLaren Sport and the GRG. These entities provided detailed recommendations for reforming the IBA's financial practices, competition integrity, and governance (CAS, 2023), which the IOC later approved. Furthermore, unlike the information found in the BUPGG, the recommendations from these outside groups were very detailed and addressed issues that may not have been covered by the guidelines presented in the BUPGG or SAQ (with the exception of those recommendations related to transparency). Regarding the recommendations related to democracy, neither the BUPGG nor the SAQ mentions the size of the Executive Board (IOC, 2022; ASOIF, 2023b), and one cannot assume that a board consisting of 17 members is any less likely to engage in corruption than a board consisting of 22 members.

The broad guidance provided by the BUPGG does not conflict with that of the GRG, although the guidelines in the BUPGG can be interpreted and implemented in various ways. For instance, regarding the checks and balances (e.g., accountability) recommendations, it is implied that the President's office should be dissolved due to concerns of corruption (CAS, 2023); however, there is nothing in either version of the BUPGG that would necessarily prevent organisations from developing their structures in this manner. Additionally, there is no mention in the BUPGG of how leadership offices should be arranged, and it is unclear why this would sufficiently indicate good governance. A head office and president's office are more problematic if they cannot be held accountable, whereas both could exist in alignment with good governance standards if appropriate checks and balances and robust levels of transparency are required. These

criticisms are not highlighted to suggest that the IBA was not in need of serious reform, but to illustrate that the recommendations made by the Governance Reform Group and IOC are insufficient if the goal is to reduce corruption.

This case reveals the inadequacy of the current approach to good governance. Initially, the guidance provided to the IBA and other ISBs via the BUPGG is conceptually vague (Geeraert, 2019), leaving much room for confusion and flexibility in implementation. Once the IBA was identified as an organisation in need of governance reform, the IOC relied on outside groups for guidance. After the recommendations were made, some appeared to be beyond the scope of the initial guidance in the BUPGG and other benchmark tools. If the initial guidelines provided by the IOC were not clearly conceptualised, it may be unfair to strip the IBA of its status under these specific circumstances. The IOC is invested in protecting the autonomy of sport and sees good governance as significant in this regard; however, good governance and its implications for organisations cannot be treated as an afterthought. This attempt to shield ISBs from outside influences may have left them vulnerable if they lack support to meet good governance standards or are not permitted to tailor implementation strategies to their unique situations. Regardless of intent, the failure to meaningfully apply good governance principles in sport may have exacerbated integrity issues (Geeraert, 2021c; Harris et al., 2021). This calls for a reassessment of the approach to good governance.

The IOC's lack of conceptual clarity regarding its BUPGG and the absence of guidelines for organisations looking to implement them indicate a failure of due diligence, since governance standards should not be introduced without an intention to monitor and evaluate their implementation (Geeraert, 2019; Huberts, 2018). The focus of this section is not to determine whether the IBA should have had its status stripped in response to governance failings. However, this decision by the IOC, along with the lack of conceptual clarity surrounding good governance, calls for closer scrutiny of its approach. Before suggesting reforms to the IOC's approach to good governance, I will introduce stakeholder theory and stakeholder democracy as means to implement more democratic decision-making in organisational settings.

CHAPTER 8: DEMOCRACY IN ORGANISATIONS—STAKEHOLDER THEORY

In anticipation of hesitancy regarding the implementation of democracy in organisational contexts, this chapter will present stakeholder theory, stakeholder democracy, and stakeholder capitalism as means through which democratic behaviours can be incorporated into organisational settings. Deliberative democracy is the traditional form of democracy most associated with stakeholder democracy (Dawkins, 2015), and as stated in Part I, deliberative democracy enhances the quality of democratic interactions (Benhabib, 2021). In the case of organisations, deliberative democracy is viewed as able to balance the interests of less powerful stakeholders with those who are more influential (Dawkins, 2015; Mouffe, 1999). To reiterate, the goals of deliberative democracy and stakeholder democracy in organisations are to further democratise the interactions (not bring about complete balance between stakeholders), thereby achieving greater legitimacy and embracing the characteristics associated with *agon*. Embracing stakeholder democracy would allow the international sport system to include stakeholders and build trust while maintaining the quality of democratic interactions.

8.1 Theoretical Framework: Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory is a theory of organisational management and ethics that explicitly centres morals and values and emphasises the importance of acknowledging the interests of groups that can impact (positively or negatively) the organisation's pursuit of objectives (Phillips et al., 2003, p. 481). The term 'stakeholder theory' is frequently attributed to Robert Freeman after he published *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* in 1984, though he has acknowledged that other scholars in the 1960s and 70s also used the term and countless others have influenced the development of the idea over the last several decades from different perspectives (Freeman, 2009; Vandekerckhove, 2009).

Stakeholder theory should not be viewed as a singular theory but rather as a genre of stakeholder theories (Freeman, 1994; Freeman and Phillips, 2002; Freeman, 2009) with different types of stakeholder theory that have been presented over the years. The three types of stakeholder theory often noted (Donaldson and Preston, 1995; Hendry, 2001) include:

descriptive stakeholder theory proposes stakeholder answers to questions of fact [;]

instrumental stakeholder theory proposes stakeholder-oriented answers as to how managers should meet specific objectives, which may or may not have ethical elements [; and]

normative stakeholder theory, in contrast, draws on ethical [principles] to propose stakeholder-oriented answers to questions of governance. (Hendry, 2001, p. 163)

For the purposes of this dissertation, normative stakeholder theory is particularly relevant as I seek to better understand how it can be applied to effectively serve all stakeholders. Furthermore, Hendry (2001, p. 167) identifies various theories under the normative stakeholder theory umbrella, including modest theories (which focus on treating stakeholders with respect), intermediate theory (which emphasises incorporating stakeholder interests in the governance of the organisation), and demanding theory (which advocates for participation by all stakeholders in decision-making processes). Based on the characterisations provided by Hendry, the intermediate and demanding theories are most pertinent when considering the democratisation of governance. Nevertheless, all three of Hendry's (2001) theories are presented to emphasise that interpretations of stakeholder theory are diverse.

Due to the magnitude of potential modes of application, stakeholder theory elicits strong responses from scholars regarding conceptual confusion and feasibility (Fassin, 2012; Hendry, 2001; Kaler, 2002; Stoney and Winstanely, 2001). For instance, critics have highlighted how challenging it is to effectively hierarchise stakeholders (Carson, 2003; Fassin, 2012). Mitchell et al. (1997) proposed that there are three types of stakeholders: latent, expectant, and definitive, with a combination of power, legitimacy, and urgency serving as defining characteristics that determine which type of stakeholder is being examined. Clarkson (1995) argued that a distinction must be made between primary stakeholders—those whose involvement in the organisation is essential for its survival—and secondary stakeholders, who influence the organisation or are affected by it but are not necessary for its survival. Fassin (2012) introduced the concepts of stakeowners (genuine stakeholders with a legitimate stake), stakewatchers (pressure groups), and stakekeepers (groups that monitor or regulate).

While the theory has been accused of lacking utility and relying on other theories for testability (Trevino and Weaver, 1999), this does not imply it lacks value. Embracing this perspective within organisations requires more of a shift in mindset or values rather than expecting a detailed guide on how to value stakeholders. Similar to the concept of democracy, we should be

cautious not to place excessive emphasis on the distinctions among the various types of stakeholder theories or their operationalization. Doing so may cause scholars and practitioners to lose sight of the original concept and the purpose of the initial exploration. Stakeholder theory fundamentally concerns shifting focus from shareholders to stakeholders and balancing the interests of these stakeholders.

8.2 From Stakeholder Theory to Stakeholder Democracy

Citing Freeman and his collaborators over decades, Moriarty (2014) argues that stakeholder theory can be reduced to a distributive component that tells managers what results to achieve: “keep the firm *healthy* and *balance* the interests of all stakeholders” (p. 823) and a procedural component that concerns *participation* and who should have input within the decision-making process (p. 824). The essence of stakeholder theory—maintaining a healthy, balanced organisation and allowing for stakeholder participation—should always be at the forefront of anyone’s attention who is attempting to work with the theory. Therefore, he argues that stakeholder democracy is more likely to achieve the aforementioned distributive goal of balancing all stakeholder interests (Moriarty, 2014, p. 828). This aligns with the definition of democratisation presented in Part I, which seeks to bring hierarchical relationships closer to an egalitarian ideal. As with democratisation, the idea is not to ensure an outcome of completely equal stakeholder influence, but to seek greater balance among stakeholder interests, given the existing power disparities.

Moriarty (2014) refrains from asserting that stakeholder democracy can more effectively advance the procedural goal of participation in governance, as Freeman (1994; 2009) does not clearly articulate the level of influence stakeholders should have. Although Moriarty (2014) hesitates regarding stakeholder democracy’s ability to further this procedural goal, one could argue that insufficient modes of participation weaken the distributive goal of maintaining the organisation’s health. Non-democratic modes of participation can lead to frustration, undermine institutional legitimacy, and erode trust (King, 2015). In response, stakeholder democracy has gained greater emphasis over time, as demands have increased for enhanced organisational accountability and transparency, societal participation in decision-making, and a greater prioritisation of societal interests in decision-making (Matten and Crane, 2005, p. 7). Freeman’s focus on the role of managers as a conduit for stakeholder engagement is too limiting and arguably undermines both aspects of stakeholder theory.

It should be noted that Freeman's audience was the managerial class, as he aimed to develop a framework to assist with their responsibilities and enhance strategic management (Vandekerckhove, 2009, p. 30). Governance and management are not interchangeable terms, as the former is tasked with shaping the general direction of an institution (i.e., mission and vision) while the latter operates in a more administrative role and executes the vision established by those governing the institution. For Freeman, the manager is not among those stakeholders whose interests need to be considered. Instead, he explains to managers why they should take stakeholders into account in their management of organisations and offers resources to help them manage effectively (Freeman, 2009, p. 106). While Freeman may have viewed organisational management as a mediator between external stakeholders and the executive board, doing so undermines the significant role that organisational staff play as stakeholders who are often overlooked and undervalued.

Just as stakeholder theory is not a single theory, there is also not one conception of stakeholder democracy. A common interpretation of stakeholder democracy involves stakeholders controlling the board through representatives (Matten and Crane, 2005; Moriarty, 2014; Turnbull, 1994). Matten and Crane (2005) define stakeholder democracy as "stakeholders' participation in processes of organising, decision making, and governance in corporations" (p. 6). According to Moriarty (2014), stakeholder democracy has representative, deliberative, and aggregative aspects, and it involves extending voting rights to all stakeholders through the election of the corporate board. Each stakeholder group would elect and be represented by a board member, and their voting power would be weighted according to the stakeholder group's stakes. Turnbull (1994) states that "stakeholder democracy is predicated upon individuals who have an operational interest in property or an organisation, obtaining control rights" (p. 326). Similar to Moriarty (2014), control of the board is crucial; however, Turnbull (1994) advocates for 'demarchy,' or the appointment of representatives from interest groups by random selection instead of election and emphasises the importance of mechanisms that allow stakeholders to hold representatives accountable.

The suggestions of an elected board with a weighted voting system (Moriarty, 2014) or demarchy (Turnbull, 1994) are just two examples of how stakeholder democracy can be implemented. What is more important is the ability of stakeholders to challenge the institutional authorities within the system and hold them accountable. When examining the shift from stakeholder theory to stakeholder democracy, it should be noted that the latter generally *requires*

active participation, or at the very least, representation of stakeholders and focuses on the practical aspects of stakeholder theory. It seeks to address how stakeholders should participate in the management and governance of organisations. While the earlier definition of stakeholder theory presented (from Phillips et al., 2003) underscores the importance of acknowledging the interests of stakeholder groups, this definition from Moriarty explicitly states that balancing the interests of those stakeholders is also an objective. Moriarty (2014) maintains that stakeholder democracy was consistently associated with stakeholder theory by Freeman and others during the theory's earlier years, noting their support for stakeholders having formal and binding control over the corporation's board of directors in writings published in 1988, 1990, and 1994 (p. 821).

However, over time, Freeman and other proponents abandoned the more democratic elements of the theory, adopting a more neutral stance that stakeholder theory does not require extending voting power to stakeholders but emphasises democratising the organisation by “thinking through, in innovative ways, how to make our companies more attentive to the moral foundations of capitalism” (Harrison and Freeman, 2004, p. 53). It is understandable for authors' views to evolve over time; however, it is highly unlikely that organisations will operate more democratically without outside pressure (Moriarty, 2014). While operational managers and/or a board of directors (all of whom are typically appointed, not elected) thinking creatively about how they can achieve their moral obligations while achieving capitalist goals is not a bad thing, it does not represent a democratic way of doing things. Harrison and Freeman's (2004) interpretation of the term ‘democratising’ above highlights how easily a concept like democracy can be distorted.

As mentioned in the chapter on democracy (see Part I), the core features of democracy include, competition, cooperation, and creating more egalitarian relationships, as well as, the external characteristics associated with agonistic social practices: openness, fairness, and justice of the procedure. Any activity or institution deemed democratic should encompass those essential facets of democracy, regardless of the various modes of implementation that may be applied. The use of ‘democratising’ by Harrison and Freeman (2004) is an instance where democracy is referenced without adherence to those core features, as engagement with stakeholders and equitable power relations do not appear to be addressed when concentrating solely on how the managerial class can pursue democratisation.

However, when these core features of democracy are absent in contexts where they are expected, constituents will eventually notice and will call for reforms (King, 2015). Referring back

to the goals of stakeholder theory—maintaining organisational health, balancing the interests of all stakeholders, and considering who provides input in the decision-making process—a manifestation of stakeholder theory with enhanced stakeholder engagement would better achieve at least some of the goals as argued by Moriarty (2014). Based on the depiction of democracy as an agonistic social practice in Chapter 1 and the account of stakeholder theory in this chapter, one can infer that the values of democracy are aligned with stakeholder theory. Furthermore, although Freeman has not endorsed stakeholder democracy, he has endorsed stakeholder capitalism and recognises that this concept is compatible with the democratisation of organisations.

8.3 Stakeholder Capitalism and *Agon*

The relationship between stakeholder theory and *agon* is best illustrated through the concept of stakeholder capitalism. Initially introduced in Chapter 1, the principles of stakeholder capitalism include stakeholder cooperation, stakeholder responsibility, complexity, continuous creation, and competition (Freeman and Phillips, 2002). While Harrison and Freeman’s solution for how to democratise corporations does not include stakeholder engagement and is therefore not very democratic, Freeman has acknowledged that his core principles of stakeholder capitalism share similarities with democracy. In response to Vandekerckhove’s (2009) article comparing Freeman’s approach to stakeholder theory with Rhenman’s Industrial Democracy, Freeman writes

While it is certainly true that my preoccupation has always been with stakeholder theory as a theory about business, and that Rhenman’s was also concerned with industrial democracy and how society could be better organised, perhaps there is room for a connection, here...[W]hile I am not qualified to rewrite Rhenman’s book, I do believe that an adoption of the principles of stakeholder capitalism would bring these two projects together. (Freeman, 2009, p.100)

The principles of stakeholder capitalism align with the interpretation of democracy presented throughout this work. This alignment includes both internal characteristics (preparing to be the best, competing with the best, winning while risking defeat) (Loy and Morford, 2019; McCoy and Martínková, 2022) and external characteristics (openness, fairness, justice) of agonistic social activities (Daqing, 2010; McCoy and Martínková, 2022).

Stakeholder theory’s major goals of balancing stakeholder interests, maintaining a healthy organisation, and allowing for stakeholder participation (Moriarty, 2014), along with the core

principles of stakeholder capitalism—cooperation, responsibility, complexity, creation, and competition—align with the sport governance principles presented earlier. Given that the core principles of these concepts do not conflict with each other, there is no reason why the ideologies of stakeholder capitalism or stakeholder democracy could not be applied to the international sports system. Both stakeholder democracy and stakeholder capitalism are relevant because the international sports system has been significantly influenced by commercial interests, which is likely irreversible. However, even in a highly commercialised sports environment, principles that resonate with *polemos* and *agon* can still be honored, as illustrated by the concept of stakeholder capitalism.

The parallels between value creation (via stakeholder capitalism) and the concepts of *agon* and *polemos* further reinforce the idea that a democratic approach to stakeholder theory is integral to a healthy sports system. Stakeholder theory, democracy, and capitalism are not foreign to the international sports system because of their overlap with good governance principles. However, adopting more of the principles discussed in this chapter would represent further democratisation, as the international sports system should continually strive to be more democratic.

CHAPTER 9: DEMOCRATISATION OF SPORT GOVERNANCE¹⁶

Chapter six discussed some of the history associated with the adoption of good governance and sport's autonomy in response to several court cases. The international sports system is once again threatened by external forces, as indicated by court cases filed against ISBs charging them with exploitation and corruption (Dunbar, 2023; Picazo, 2025; Scarcella, 2024; Villanueva, 2023). In the past, the IOC responded by reinforcing the principle of sport autonomy (as illustrated in chapter six), but this may not be an effective solution this time around. The legitimacy of the IOC is being questioned, and athletes, in particular, seemingly want a greater role in decision-making. The institutional dimension of democracy is already being engaged in the governance of sport through the lawsuits and the creation of athlete advocacy organisations.

Throughout Part II, I have advocated for a democratic engagement that honors its core, including cooperation and competition, along with the external characteristics associated with agonistic social practices (i.e., fairness, openness, and justice). The current approach to the democratic principle in the governance of sport does not meet this standard. This chapter will argue that the shortcomings of the current approach are primarily due to presenting good governance principles in isolation, undervaluing the democratic principle, and excluding external stakeholders.

9.1 Analysis of the IOC's Approach to Good Governance: Philosophical Missteps

Chapter seven included an analysis of the IOC's approach to good governance from the perspective of the principles being difficult to implement for member organisations. In addition to that critique, the approach to good governance from a philosophical perspective undermines the good governance principles altogether and The IOC's presentation of good governance principles, isolates principles that are intertwined and further limits the principles by emphasising their applicability to 'internal stakeholders.' Subsequently, the vertical relationships in the international sports system are reinforced, thereby undermining stakeholder trust and potential value creation.

9.1.1 *Isolated principles*

The IOC has endorsed tools such as the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF, 2023) Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ) and Sports Governance Observer (SGO)

¹⁶ A considerable part of this chapter is from the article McCoy, B. (2025). Democratisation of sport: The role of institutional and cultural democracy. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, 1-18.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17511321.2025.2513025>

(Geeraert, 2015), which have been developed by other organisations to assist ISBs or third parties in assigning points or checking off boxes for the standards they meet for the principle being examined (ASOIF, 2023). While more detailed, these tools follow the same general structure found in the BUPGG and are also vague enough to allow for manipulation. Furthermore, isolating the principles (in an attempt to make them easier to implement) obscures their interdependent nature, leading to further conceptual confusion.

Isolating principles without understanding their interrelationships obscures their meaning and intention. Researchers have often focused more on improving transparency and accountability measures separately to enhance governance (Henne, 2015; Næss, 2021; Pielke, 2013). However, transparency enables stakeholders to access information related to the organisation's processes and conduct, without which they cannot question decision-makers (O'Boyle and Shilbury, 2016). This complicates the ability of governing bodies to hide corruption from stakeholders. Therefore, transparency is a prerequisite for accountability (Geeraert, 2021a; King, 2015), and these two principles are better understood in relation to one another. The connection between responsibility and accountability was previously referenced, further illustrating the additional clarity gained by examining the principles in relation to one another. The democratic principle encompasses all other good governance principles. A sense of responsibility is crucial for leadership in a democratic system. Members of a system aspiring toward representative democracy should be able to hold leadership accountable for their decision-making. As previously explained, accountability is not possible without transparency.

Addressing the principles independently has not yielded the positive change that the Olympic Movement claims it is pursuing. Efforts at reform have simply reaffirmed the IOC's authority through alternative means, allowing them to 'directly assert their authority to achieve outcomes that reflect their interests' (Harris et al., 2021, p. 372). A skeptical view of good governance in sport would argue that the Olympic Movement remains highly centralised despite its ongoing commitment to good governance principles, raising questions about the IOC's dedication to principles like transparency, accountability, and democracy (Bayle, 2025).

9.1.2 Emphasis on Internal Stakeholders

The language used by the IOC in presenting good governance principles in the BUPGG suggests an interpretation of the principles that is limited in scope, focusing on internal stakeholders rather

than external ones. This is further clarified when comparing the principles in the BUPGG to the definitions provided by Henry and Lee (2004). For example, Henry and Lee (2004) define transparency as “clarity in procedures and decision-making, particularly in resource allocation... their inner workings should as far as possible be open to public scrutiny” (p. 31); accountability as “sporting organisations are not only responsible to financial investors through financial reporting procedures, but also to those who invest other resources in the organisation” (p. 31); and responsibility as “the sustainable development of the organisation and its sport, and stewardship of their resources and those of the community served” (p. 31). By contrast, the framing of accountability in the BUPGG can be described by what Geeraert (2021a) refers to as ‘internal accountability.’ This internal approach includes a clear separation of powers and an internal compliance system to monitor decision makers’ adherence to rules. However, the language used suggests that organisations are only expected to be accountable to other parts of their organisation (e.g., the executive body being accountable to the General Assembly (IOC, 2022)), and there is no mention of stakeholders external to the organisation aside from the IOC.

Chappelet (2021) identifies the following stakeholders of the Olympic Movement: the IOC, OCOGs, NOCs, IFs, National Governing Bodies (NGBs), Olympic athletes, governments, media and RHBs, sponsors, sport regulators, professional sports leagues, civic groups, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), national courts, athletes and clubs, parents, entourage, volunteers, fans, and spectators. Good governance principles typically refer to the internal operations of the Olympic institutions (IOC, IFs, NOCs, NGBs), which are expected to collaborate closely with OCOGs and sport regulators (e.g., WADA). These stakeholder groups can be regarded as internal stakeholders. Among external stakeholders, some groups wield more power and influence than others due to their financial contributions to the Olympic movement or the Olympic Games (e.g., RHBs and top sponsors) (Chappelet, 2021). They are contrasted with more vulnerable stakeholders (e.g., athletes). Athletes, organisations representing athlete interests, watchdog organisations, other NGOs supporting the needs of marginalised stakeholder groups, fans and spectators, and local communities affected by decisions made within the sport system exemplify more vulnerable stakeholder groups that have less influence on the process.

The insistence that internal accountability be employed rather than external accountability should be understood as more of a shift toward responsibility, since those on the receiving end of decisions are seemingly unable to address those making the decisions. Technically, accountability

can be viewed with internal stakeholders in mind. However, this undermines the purpose of accountability because corrupt practices are less likely to be addressed unless there is external pressure (Harris et al., 2021; Walters and Tacon, 2018). The use of good governance tools such as the SAQ (ASOIF, 2023) and SGO (Geeraert, 2015) can also only account for the internal dynamics within an organisation and are therefore insufficient to address the issues that may arise in a broader context (van Bottenburg, 2021).

The emphasis on internal stakeholders undermines legitimacy because external stakeholders cannot grasp the reasoning or process behind decision-making. While the IOC and other ISBs might be justified, their lack of transparency with other stakeholders has compromised their legitimacy. Conversely, a more collective decision-making approach is likely to be perceived as more legitimate (Benhabib, 2021). Given the Olympic Movement's aim to adopt good governance principles, it is crucial to focus *on* how the IOC's approach to good governance is perceived.

9.1.3 Reinforcement of Vertical Relationships

Ultimately, I have argued that the overall philosophical approach to principles in the BUPGG undermines good governance principles because the IOC appears to have committed to good governance while attempting to preserve a centralised sport governance system (Bayle, 2024). The language of good governance has been adopted without adhering to the core meaning of the principles. This can be observed when examining the current application of the democratic principle. The role of democracy in sport is interpreted through the composition of the board, equitable representation of member nations, and election processes (Thompson et al., 2023). These are not the only methods to assess the democratic principle, but they are the most common, and the international sporting community has coalesced around them. Over time, it has become evident that these dimensions can be manipulated, as there are multiple reasons to question whether these practices should be considered democratic. Having IOC Members serve as representatives who can be held accountable could address the needs of external stakeholders. However, in practice, the democratic policies lack the key characteristics associated with democracy, such as accountability, cooperation, fairness, openness, and justice.

While the membership of the IOC is diverse, comprising 110 members and 39 honorary members from 90 countries (IOC, 2023b) who possess equitable voting rights, the members are

not elected by the nations they represent and, therefore, cannot be held accountable by most stakeholders, including athletes. The IOC has clarified that its members do not serve as representatives for their countries but as *IOC members from their nations* (Burke, 2022). In other words, these members are intended to represent the interests of the IOC, not the nations from which they come. The process for becoming an IOC member involves nomination by the IOC Members Election Commission, followed by confirmation from other IOC members (IOC, 2023b). This process takes place entirely within the IOC and does not involve stakeholders outside the IOC organisation.

Though the BUPGG and SAQ do not include external stakeholders in the governance process, this is somewhat balanced by stakeholder inclusion through commissions since commission members typically consist of IOC members, experts in the relevant topics, and stakeholder groups from the Olympic Movement. The IOC has commissions focused on athletes' needs, sustainability, human rights, and more (IOC, n.d.-c). These commissions provide a way for some stakeholder groups to be represented and offer consultation on their respective areas of interest. However, the members are invited to participate by the organisations, and although commission members are tasked with representing specific groups or issues and reporting to the institutions, they serve in an advisory capacity and can only make recommendations. Furthermore, those appointed to their positions are often selected because they share the viewpoints of the dominant power (Harris et al., 2021). While these implementations may appear democratic, if not managed carefully, the value of the democratic principle can be distorted, and power dynamics can be reinforced in the process.

The IOC's current approach to good governance indicates that they may be more focused on managing perceptions rather than addressing the cultural issues that contribute to corruption in sporting bodies (Harris et al., 2021). This challenge is not unique to sports, as Mitchell et al. (2023) argue that the 'lack of real progress is that the revisions to corporate governance have been merely cosmetic, addressing superficial symptoms while leaving the root causes unaddressed' (p. 488). I do not intend to suggest that the IOC should not pursue good governance at all. However, the way they have approached good governance has resulted in the reinforcement of the current dynamics, including the vertical relationships among stakeholder groups that undermine legitimacy.

9.2 Democracy First

A more democratic approach can address the issues associated with the current model of good governance in sport, including the conceptual confusion stemming from the isolation of good governance principles. Other principles such as responsibility, accountability, and transparency are better served with a democratic approach. Additionally, the other objectives that the IOC has articulated in its commitment to good governance, such as building stakeholder trust and protecting the autonomy of sport, would also be effectively addressed through a more democratic lens. The international sports system is already democratic to some extent, with the IOC indicating a commitment to collaborating with partners (IOC, 2014; n.d.-c) and the BUPGG referencing democracy in the context of institutional governance (IOC, 2022). However, the international sports system can be further democratised by incorporating stakeholders outside of the ISBs into the governance process.

9.2.1 Stakeholder Democracy in the International Sports System

Sporting institutions have applied principles of stakeholder theory to their governance practices. The last couple of decades have seen the IOC and other International Federations (IFs) attempt to improve their governance (Bayle, 2024; Chappelet, 2016; Geeraert, 2019; Parent and Hoye, 2018); however, they have still faced criticism, and the legitimacy of sport organisations continues to be questioned. Although the concept of stakeholder democracy has previously been applied to sport (Ferkins and Shilbury, 2012; Ferkins and Shilbury, 2015; Naess, 2020; Naraine et al., 2019; Parent, 2016), its application is often more limited in scope, as the focus remains on the ‘manager’ or ‘managing group’ instead of all potential stakeholders. Sports organisations have incorporated normative and ethical standards for managerial behaviours (Zintz and Gerard, 2019), aiming to use management as a means to engage stakeholders.

However, they have overlooked modes of stakeholder engagement that do not centre the IFs as managerial actors. The focus of democratic governance in sport is often limited to the representation of membership and the composition of governing boards (McLeod et al., 2023; Naraine et al., 2019; Stenling et al., 2023). While the needs and desires of stakeholders are acknowledged in sport governance (Naraine et al., 2019), the actual inclusion of sport stakeholders in decision-making has yet to be fully embraced. This approach has resulted in external

stakeholders being neglected, and criticisms about the lack of stakeholder inclusion have increased over the years (Chappelet, 2016a; Pielke, 2013).

There has been less of a concerted effort within sports to examine what an application of stakeholder democracy looks like when attempting to balance power relations among stakeholders and hold governing institutions accountable. This is said to be one of the primary aims of stakeholder democracy (Moriarty, 2014; Dawkins, 2015). The inclination to manage for stakeholders is not uncommon in stakeholder theory (Bridoux and Stoelhorst, 2022; Freeman, 2009; Harrison and Freeman, 2004); however, certain features unique to sports, such as its status as an agonistic social practice, call for greater levels of stakeholder engagement. There is also an argument to be made that enhanced stakeholder involvement allows for better organisational operation and value creation, as suggested by ‘stakeholder capitalism’ (Freeman and Phillips, 2002; Freeman, 2009).

The relationship between a more limited approach to stakeholder theory and stakeholder democracy is comparable to the relationship between responsibility and accountability. The insistence that ‘internal accountability’ be employed instead of ‘external accountability’ can be understood as more of a shift toward responsibility, as those impacted by decisions seem unable to address those making them (King, 2015). Accountability is more likely to be associated with stakeholder democracy due to stakeholders’ inclusion in the governance process, allowing them to hold officials accountable. More limited applications of stakeholder theory depend on some form of institutional authority to act as a ‘manager,’ responsible for considering stakeholders’ needs and desires.

The more independence an institution is afforded, the greater its sense of responsibility should be. However, a sense of responsibility alone is not sufficient, as accountability has greater utility and is better equipped to address corruption and other cultural issues that may arise in communities and organisations. It is not enough for ISBs to be held accountable by the executive board; they must also confront and respond to those affected by their decisions. Some scholars argue that organisations only conform to pressure from stakeholders if they believe that doing so will enhance their perceived legitimacy (Harris et al., 2021; Mason et al., 2006), and accountability enables stakeholders to exert pressure on those sporting institutions.

Alternatively, one could argue that embracing more democratic ideals would lead to sacrificing a more professional approach to sports governance, along with important functions

such as strategic focus, expertise, and accountability (Ferkins and Shilbury, 2012; Harrison and Freeman, 2004; Stenling and Sam, 2020). Professionalisation is perceived to enhance efficiency, while democracy can be seen as positively impacting legitimacy (Stenling and Sam, 2020). Considering Freeman and Phillips (2002) arguments regarding collaboration as beneficial for value creation and the significance of legitimacy for the sustainability of a system, democracy's positive effect on legitimacy arguably outweighs the efficiency argument. Furthermore, over time there has been a notable shift in how sports governance is analysed, with professionalism now considered less relevant for positive structural change than commitment to good governance, stakeholder involvement and engagement, and brand governance (Hoye et al., 2020; O'Brien, 2022).

Much of the literature regarding stakeholder theory in sport focuses on defining and ranking relevant stakeholders, illustrating the challenges of such a process (Ferkins and Shilbury, 2015; Naraine et al., 2019). While it may be necessary to classify stakeholders based on their legitimacy (Fassin, 2012), the level of participation and distribution of power will be contextual and dependent on the specific issue at hand. The approach discussed throughout is idealised, indicating that it is not suggested this can be easily 'accomplished.' Nonetheless, the process of democratisation is worthwhile, even if it proves difficult to implement. This process would benefit stakeholders in the international sports system, regardless of the outcome. At this stage, a general acknowledgment that stakeholder groups should be included in decision-making is sufficient, even if that inclusion is limited to holding institutional authorities accountable. With a focus on democratisation, any progress toward a more democratic system merits pursuit. In addition to creating value and enhancing the likelihood of balancing stakeholder needs, a more democratic approach to sport governance will also help protect the autonomy of sport and increase the legitimacy of sporting institutions.

9.2.2 Protecting the Autonomy of Sport

One can presume that the focus on those within the organisation is related to the autonomy of sport principle. The IOC has argued for limited input from outside forces by presenting itself as the protector of the Olympic Movement (Geeraert, 2018; Kreft, 2018). Lobbying efforts led to the European Council recognising the specificity of sport (in the Nice Declaration of 2000) and later, the autonomy of sport (Chappelet, 2018). In 2008, after holding its second seminar on the autonomy of sport, the IOC released several resolutions stating that autonomy is crucial for the

development of sport, the promotion of its values, and the benefit of athletes. Good governance was declared part of the strategy for preserving the autonomy of sport organisations (IOC, 2008). The IOC has identified the autonomy of sport as a tool for combating corruption in sport since it makes it more difficult for nations to manipulate sport for their own political agendas (IOC, 2025b).

The autonomy of sport guarantees that sports organisations have the right to control the rules of the game, determine the structure and governance of the organisations, hold elections (free of outside influence), and ensure that principles of good governance are applied (IOC, 2025b). This principle of autonomy has largely inhibited the intrusion of nations, although it may have also made it more challenging for certain stakeholder groups, such as athletes, to engage with the system (Harris et al., 2021). The system is designed to sustain itself without input from external stakeholders; while some representation exists through participation on committees, the lack of decision-making power significantly limits their impact.

Considering that the autonomy of sport is a major component of the ethical and legal foundation of sport (Abanazir, 2024), sports governance organisations are unlikely to invite external stakeholders. However, ISBs are bound to be concerned with the decisions made in the current system. If dissatisfied stakeholder groups are given no means to present their concerns within the system, they will consider options for redress that exist outside the sport system. Some athletes have responded by attempting to settle their grievances outside the sports system.

In recent years, various high-profile lawsuits have been filed in non-sport-related court systems (Dunbar, 2023; Picazo, 2025; Scarcella, 2024; Villanueva, 2023). The concerns raised in these lawsuits range from anti-competition to exploitation. Regardless of the issues highlighted throughout the lawsuits, the athletes and athlete associations have asked that non-sport courts in Europe and the United States hear their arguments and decide their fate, implying that there is either no avenue to file such grievances within the respective sport organisations or that the stakeholders filing do not trust the sport organisations to make a just decision and would therefore prefer outside court systems to decide. While the decision by athletes and their accompanying unions to file lawsuits is still an example of engagement with the institutional dimension, the athletes coming together to express their dissatisfaction with the system and their willingness to fight for change also signifies some engagement with the cultural dimension of democracy.

Genuinely committing to the aforementioned good governance principles would require an inclusive approach and a willingness to collaborate with stakeholders rather than treating them as obstacles to overcome (Maennig, 2017; Sam et al., 2022; Thibault et al., 2010). Any institution that can be considered democratic must exhibit specific characteristics associated with democracy, such as balancing power dynamics in relationships, fostering cooperation, and encouraging competition. Furthermore, institutions should be accountable for embodying the external characteristics linked to agonistic social practices: openness, fairness, and procedural justice. A more democratic approach to governance can sensibly be understood as enhancing transparency, accountability, and responsibility; thus, it could be argued that *good* governance equates to *democratic* governance.

9.2.3 Increasing Legitimacy

The previous sections in this chapter have illustrated how the IOC came to embrace ‘good governance’—driven by a desire to protect the autonomy of sport in response to threats of corruption, along with the goal of building trust with stakeholders. Such an approach was crucial as the IOC faced a crisis of legitimacy by the time Thomas Bach took over as the head of the organisation in 2013 (Bayle, 2024). Beyond the events leading to the adoption of the Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance in 2008, several other issues contributed to the crisis. These issues included skepticism regarding hosting the Olympic Games, the fight to protect sport’s integrity (including anti-doping measures, corrupt sports leaders, the well-being of athletes, and the inclusion of LGBTQI+ athletes), concerns about sport’s impact on the climate, and more (Bayle, 2024). According to Bayle (2024), Bach defended the IOC’s position with two main points: “responsible autonomy through good governance’ and the benefits sport and Olympism bring to society” (Bayle, 2024, p. 1757).

Stakeholders are scrutinising sporting institutions because the Olympic Movement’s adoption and advocacy of good governance principles have undermined efforts to reduce corruption in sport or have improved some aspects while worsening others (EC, 2022; Harris et al., 2021). Even if this stance were to be contested, given the issue’s complexity, the prevailing perception is that ISBs are not genuinely committed to good governance and seem more focused on preserving their power and maintaining the status quo. Such a perception should not be easily dismissed, as it has contributed to legitimacy concerns regarding ISBs. These legitimacy issues

arise from conflicts related to accountability and hierarchical power, as appointed representatives are accountable not to constituents but to those who appointed them (Thibault et al., 2010, p. 280).

The perception that the IOC is not committed to good governance in sport could be addressed by including external stakeholders in the governance process. The introduction to Part II presented several examples of stakeholders' dissatisfaction with the current system and how decisions are made. There are frustrations with various aspects of the international sports system including perceived unfairness regarding prize money, monopolistic actions of ISBs, exploitation of athletes, and more. The issues presented suggest that stakeholders, especially athletes, desire a greater role in the governance process since those decisions significantly impact them. The IOC and other ISBs are receiving information through lawsuits and the establishment of athletes' rights groups indicating that athletes want a more substantial role. The longer their calls for change go unanswered, the more the IOC's legitimacy is affected. According to Bayle (2024), "moral legitimacy arises when society perceives a practice or organisational form as consistent with existing cultural norms" (p. 1763). Many athletes' actions imply that there is dissonance between the actions of ISBs and cultural norms related to governance. For example, the use of 'internal' as a qualifier for stakeholders when addressing transparency, accountability, and democracy. This dissonance can be remedied by allowing greater inclusion of stakeholders. Such a shift would be challenging and may bring discomfort because most stakeholders are not prepared for this level of responsibility.

SUMMARY OF PART II

Part II has delved further into democracy's institutional dimension and its relevance to sport.

Chapter Five, Global Sports Institutions, discussed the necessity of institutionalised sports as well as the challenges that accompany this process. The institutionalisation of the international sports system has established the essential infrastructure for competitions and the organisation of global sports. However, this institutionalisation has also led to the commodification of sports and the influence of private interests seeking a return on their investments, regardless of whether human development occurs as a result. The impact of globalisation on sports is also addressed in this chapter. The globalisation of sports has only reinforced the IOC's influence over the system. While this presents challenges regarding the constraints that can be imposed on the IOC, the globalisation of the sports system can also facilitate the spread of good governance principles throughout national sports organisations. Lastly, this chapter clarified the relationship between sport management and sport governance, emphasising that the governance of sports is the primary focus when considering the democratisation of sports. It also explores the relationship between the IOC and other entities like IFs, NOCs, NGBs, and OCOGs. Given the IOC's role as the guardian of the Olympic Movement, it exerts significant influence over other internal stakeholders. Consequently, the IOC's interpretation of the democratic principle in sport governance takes precedence.

Chapter Six provided context for the IOC's adoption of good governance principles. At the beginning of the 21st century, corruption scandals related to the governance of sports were attracting the attention of national governments, spectators, and athletes. The Salt Lake City Winter Games scandals of 2002 marked a turning point for the IOC, which then began implementing changes. As part of this process, the IOC identified the autonomy of sport as a tool to combat corruption, particularly those influences stemming from governments seeking to use sports for their own political agendas. The autonomy of sport is not a new concept; the IOC first mentioned the term in 1949. However, the Olympic Movement had not actively lobbied for its autonomy until it was threatened by several court cases, including the Bosman ruling in 1995 and the Meca-Medina case in 2006 (Chappelet, 2016a; European Case Reports, 2006). After hosting two seminars on the autonomy of sport in 2006 and 2008, the IOC released the Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance (BUPGG), which all members of the Olympic Movement are expected to abide by. Chapter Six concluded with the introduction of the good governance concept

in sports and its accompanying principles, including democracy, referring to works by Geeraert (2021c), Henry and Lee (2004), and Thompson et al. (2023).

Chapter Seven continued the examination of good governance in sport by shifting focus to the IOC's interpretation of good governance principles. The IOC Code of Ethics places special emphasis on responsibility, accountability, and transparency, so these principles are explored. Given the focus of this dissertation, the IOC's interpretation of democracy, which is also mentioned in the BUPGG, is examined as well, even though it is not addressed alongside responsibility, accountability, and transparency. The IOC has outsourced the assessment of good governance principles to other organisations, such as the ASOIF, for evaluating governance standards. Although the IOC reserves the right to audit IFs, it appears to rely on tools like the SAQ from the ASOIF or the Sports Governance Observer tool to guide IFs on the standards they should uphold. Based on the IOC's assessment approach, they seem to maintain a procedural view of democracy, emphasising the incorporation of democratic principles such as fair and open elections rather than the outcomes tied to a substantive view.

Chapter Eight introduced stakeholder theory, which can serve as a foundation for the democratisation of sport. At its core, stakeholder theory acknowledges that organisations' stakeholders (not just shareholders) are vital to their success and should be considered during decision-making processes. Stakeholder democracy is more demanding and requires organisations to involve stakeholders in their decision-making. Stakeholder theory is linked to *agon* through Freeman and Phillips' (2002) concept of stakeholder capitalism. The principles of stakeholder capitalism can be seen as agonistic, highlighting the significance of stakeholder theory, democracy, and capitalism in the governance of sport. Stakeholder theory is already being implemented in sports organisations, which recognise that stakeholders should be taken into account. However, I argued that these organisations should further democratise and adopt a form of stakeholder democracy. Such further democratisation would assist the IOC in achieving its stated goals related to good governance. Additionally, the principles of stakeholder capitalism suggest that increased democratisation could lead to greater value creation.

Lastly, Chapter Nine considered information from previous chapters in Part II—including the IOC's objectives when adopting the BUPGG, the issues that have accompanied its particular approach to good governance, and the benefits of stakeholder capitalism and stakeholder democracy—while presenting an argument for the democratisation of sport governance. The

current approach to good governance examines these principles in isolation. Responsibility, transparency, accountability, and democracy are presented separately, which can obscure their interrelationships. For instance, responsibility, accountability, and transparency can be addressed through the principle of democracy. Consequently, the international sports system should prioritise democracy in relation to good governance in sport. Democratisation should help boost the perceived legitimacy of the IOC and other ISBs. One of the main objectives of this work is to ensure that engagement with the institutional dimension of democracy occurs in a way that promotes its core elements, including democratic procedures, accountability, cooperation, and competition. Currently, the interpretation of democracy in the international sports system fails in that area due to the focus on internal stakeholders. Embracing stakeholder democracy would enable the international sports system to achieve the IOC's goals of gaining the support and trust of stakeholders, protecting sport's autonomy, and better encapsulating the core principles of democracy.

Pursuing democratic decision-making may address the perceived legitimacy surrounding decision-making but not the rationality of outcomes (Benhabib, 2021). A common critique against advocating for more democratically run institutions is that not all stakeholders may be equipped to make decisions in the best interest of sport. However, embracing a democratic approach does not mean that professionalism or expertise are no longer valued, nor does it entail the dissolution of institutions or the abandonment of a globalised sporting community. It will, however, require the preparation of stakeholders through education to increase the likelihood of rational decision-making. This is where democracy's cultural dimension re-emerges, which is the focus of Part III.

PART III: THE CULTURAL DIMENSION OF DEMOCRACY IN SPORT

Introduction to Part III¹⁷

Part II focused on the institutional dimension of democracy and its potential impact on sport governance from the top-down. There is much work that ISBs can do to support the democratisation of the sports system, including involving stakeholders in sport governance and providing channels through which objections or questions from external stakeholders can be addressed by institutional authorities. However, the role of non-institutional stakeholders is just as crucial, if not more so, than that of institutional stakeholders. The work of non-institutional stakeholders begins with engaging democracy's cultural dimension. This shift in focus from institutions to non-institutional stakeholders reflects the transition from democracy to citizenship.

A democratic system relies on both its institutions and citizens for well-being and sustainability (Dewey, [1916] 2001). The focus of democracy is on the procedures and infrastructure necessary for the system, while citizenship centres the experiences and behaviours of its members. Citizenship and democracy are interwoven with democratic principles (Zilla, 2022, p.1529). Furthermore, citizenship entails a sense of responsibility to uphold the democratic system by respecting others' status as free and equal. It requires 'learning of a capacity for action and for responsibility . . . learning of the self and of the relationship of self and other' (Delanty, 2002, p. 64). The term 'sport citizen' will be invoked throughout and rhetorically emphasises the rights as well as responsibilities associated with democratic principles. The responsibilities are relevant to the rationality necessary for a democratic system. As referenced in Part I, both legitimacy and rationality play a factor with respect to the quality of democratic interactions. For the democratisation of the international sports system to be addressed responsibly, athletes (and any other stakeholders seeking a greater role) will need to be prepared to make decisions in the best interest of the international sports system and its stakeholders.

Part III will focus on the role of democracy's cultural dimension in democratising sport since engagement with the cultural dimension prepares individuals for engagement with the institutional dimension. Chapter ten will examine why democracy's cultural dimension is essential for the democratisation of sport. Chapter eleven explores the role of education in preparing

¹⁷ Most of the introduction to Part III is from the article McCoy, B. (Publication forthcoming in 2025). Cultivating sport citizens. *Acta Universitatis Carolinae Kinanthropologica*.

potential sports citizens. Chapter twelve delves into the cultivation of citizenship in sport. Lastly, chapter thirteen appeals to sport citizenship and envisions how this may look for various stakeholder groups.

CHAPTER 10: THE IMPORTANCE OF DEMOCRACY'S CULTURAL DIMENSION¹⁸

10.1 Limitations of democracy's institutional dimension in sport

While the sports system does embrace some democratic principles and is therefore democratic to some extent, its commitment to democratisation is limited due to a focus on the institutional dimension of democracy. Part II concentrated on engagement with democracy's institutional aspect and employed a top-down approach to democratisation; it relies on the IOC to set the agenda for good governance in sports and to dictate the role that democracy plays in that agenda. Although many IFs and other governing bodies have committees or commissions assigned to represent specific groups or issues and report to the institutions, these bodies serve in an advisory capacity and can only make recommendations. The current application of the democratic principle primarily stems from the institutional dimension of democracy. This is to be expected when reviewing documents and policies, as they arise from engagement with this institutional dimension.

However, even if sporting institutions were willing to involve external stakeholders more in decision-making processes, those stakeholder groups would need to be ready to participate. Furthermore, non-institutional stakeholders will still face disadvantages in navigating regulatory authorities, such as the IOC, and against those stakeholders with financial resources. Emphasising the organisations' internal members and their engagement with the institutional dimension of democracy has contributed to tension between the IOC (and other governing institutions) and other stakeholder groups, particularly athletes, which has led to undue influence from the public and private spheres on the system—putting athletes at a disadvantage in the process.

10.1.1 Undue influence from institutions

The more vulnerable stakeholders in sport have depended on institutions for the health of the system and, therefore, have been overly dependent on the institutional aspect of democracy. Increased engagement with the cultural dimension of sport would enhance the likelihood of athletes utilising their collective influence to address their grievances. The aforementioned lawsuits—in addition to the constitution of organisations such as the World Players Association,

¹⁸ Most of this chapter is from the article McCoy, B. (2025). Democratisation of sport: The role of institutional and cultural democracy. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17511321.2025.2513025>

Global Athlete, and other union-like entities—indicate a desire to gain additional rights. However, citizenship also entails participation in civil society (Talisso, 2003). Therefore, citizenship encompasses both rights and responsibilities (King, 2015). Being aware of their status as citizens within the sport system is crucial for strengthening their position and better contending with other, more influential stakeholders.

The influence of institutional authority and other influential stakeholders can be explained through Eichberg's (2009) *Trialectics of Societal Spheres* (TSS), which states that “in modern society, human action develops in three sectors of different rationalities, which create different conditions for ethical behaviour – state, market and civil society” (p. 412). The ‘state’ refers to the public sphere and encompasses activities governed by political decisions aimed at facilitating integration, safety, and justice. This contrasts with the private sphere, where individuals act as their own legislators and prioritise freedom over equality. Eichberg introduces a third type of ethics, which he states develops in civil society and involves ‘voluntary networks and associations like social societies, clubs, cooperatives and formal as well as informal collectives’ (Eichberg, 2009, p. 413). Thus, the realm of ethics comprises not only the equality and freedom stemming from the public and private elements of life but also the solidarity emerging from civil society. These spheres ‘create different conditions for ethical behaviour’ (Eichberg, 2009, p. 412), and the external factors influencing behaviours lead to contradictions that can be easily observed in sport.

As head of the Olympic Movement, the IOC can be characterised as the ‘state’ and represents the public sphere in sport, and “the public sphere has a monopolistic structure: there is only one state in any given territory” (Eichberg 2009, p. 412). The IOC's role should arguably be limited to the public sphere, since it is responsible for protecting the interests of sport and providing the environment in which athletes can compete and hopefully engage with all three societal spheres. However, the IOC and other governing institutions have partnered with external entities that have commercial interests to maintain a prominent role in the private sphere. Sport has become more commercialised, and additional stakeholders that are not inherent to the sporting experience (e.g., sponsors, media, RHBs) have been introduced (Sam et al., 2022; Stenling and Sam, 2020).

International Federations (IFs) have chosen to treat sport as a commodity while simultaneously dominating the market as a monopoly, threatening athletes with suspension if they participate in events not sanctioned by the IF, and effectively ensuring that no other stakeholders can challenge them or hold them accountable (James and Duval, 2024; Villanueva, 2023). As

Eichberg writes, “as free competition leads to monopolistic market power, it produces a paradox: the freedom of monopolies restricts the liberty of the single participant” (Eichberg, 2009, p. 413). The reliance on the institutional dimension of democracy in a system that only includes internal stakeholders has led to the IOC acting as a monopolistic power. If the IFs and the IOC had competitors, then athletes and other stakeholder groups could explore alternatives and go wherever they felt their interests were properly considered. Whenever the possibility of this has begun to arise, IFs have sought to defend their position in court, hoping to undermine their competition (Dunbar, 2023; Scarcella, 2024). Since the current system allows for little negotiation due to the monopolistic status of governing institutions in sports and the influence of commercial partners, more vulnerable stakeholders should rely on the civil sphere to advance their interests.

Those more vulnerable stakeholder groups (which lack significant financial means and regulatory power) have also participated in a system that does not allow their involvement in decision-making due to reliance on the institutional dimension. Acknowledging that they should be able to participate in processes that affect them would arise from engagement with the cultural dimension of sport within the civil sphere. The solidarity cultivated in the civil sphere can occur in more formal settings, but it is typically stimulated by engagement with the cultural dimension of democracy during which various forms of social capital are cultivated (e.g., bonding and bridging). Sport is influenced by all three spheres, but it is uniquely situated in the civil sphere. The civil sphere and its associated activities, such as sport, are uniquely positioned to serve as a bridge between the public and private spheres. By fostering mutual understanding and respect, the civil sphere provides a more neutral space for information gathering that supports athletes’ decision-making as they navigate the influences from the private or public spheres.

The current approach to sports leaves external stakeholders vulnerable compared to institutions in the public and private sectors, while sport’s external stakeholders have limited ways to challenge the decisions made by internal stakeholders. McCoy and Martínková (2022) identify sport and democracy as agonistic social practices, with both requiring conflict and cooperation. This gives participants an opportunity to prove something to themselves and others as they engage with the internal characteristics (i.e., preparation and commitment, competition, desire for achievement (Loy and Morford, 2019; McCoy and Martínková, 2022)) and external characteristics (i.e., openness, fairness, justice (Daqing, 2010; McCoy and Martínková, 2022)) associated with all agonistic social practices. If the Olympic Movement aims to uphold democratic principles in its

governance, it should not overlook the embrace of these internal and external characteristics. The external characteristics, in particular, cannot be engaged if stakeholders outside the most influential institutions lack the ability to contest decisions within the sports system (beyond the select few individuals who serve on commissions).

10.2 Potential role of the cultural dimension of democracy in sport

The tendency to rely on the institutional dimension of democracy has created a circular dilemma in the current sports system: the system does not allow for the participation of more vulnerable external stakeholder groups, such as athletes; therefore, athletes are not prepared to engage with the system. Embracing the cultural dimension of democracy better equips athletes for engagement with the system, making it more self-sustaining. The issues mentioned above stem from focusing on the institutional dimension of democracy, but addressing the cultural dimension of democracy would benefit the most vulnerable stakeholders, prioritise the civil sphere—which can serve as a bridge between the public and private spheres—and better protect the autonomy of sport.

Further engagement with the cultural dimension of democracy addresses concerns regarding external stakeholders by better preparing the most vulnerable participants for involvement with the institutional dimension of democracy. According to Anderson (2009), democratic government is a manifestation of democratic culture, so undervaluing the latter would likely lead to a decline in quality for the former. In sports, engaging with the cultural dimension of democracy requires athletes to embrace democratic principles as often as they can. Coubertin was a proponent of sport's democratic and educational elements, writing that sport played two roles in democratic systems: “the role of agent of human equilibrium ... and the role of social educator” (2000f, p. 448). For him, Olympism was to serve as an educational tool for the preparation of democratic citizens, as he believed that ‘whatever the government of a democracy, its political institutions, its aspirations or its social features, it needs cooperation to live and to prosper. It matters little whether that cooperation is fully free or is directed and supervised by the State. Cooperation must be *learned*, and there are advantages to learning it from the earliest childhood’ (Coubertin, 2000e, p. 152). This work recommends that the spirit of cooperation be applied to the governance of sports as well. Opportunities to participate in the governance of sports would also prepare participants to take on more active roles in society, supporting Coubertin's overall vision of Olympism.

The central idea of the democratisation of sport is to challenge hierarchies of power as often as possible and find solutions through deliberation and collaboration. Decisions traditionally made by managers, coaches, or trainers can be revisited through a collaborative approach that includes athletes or teams. An approach already being employed in sports—and promoting engagement with the cultural dimension of democracy in a sports setting—is referred to as an ‘athlete-centred approach’ to coaching. According to Kidman (2005), an athlete-centred approach “is a leadership style that caters to athletes’ needs and understandings where athletes are enabled to learn and have control of their participation in sport” (p. 16). Such an approach to coaching facilitates athletes’ engagement with the cultural dimension of democracy. Additionally, athlete-centred coaching contributes to the process of democratisation by challenging the typically rigid hierarchical relationship between coaches and athletes. Coaches adopting an athlete-centred approach need to be prepared to allow athletes to take ownership of their learning and direction. In practice, this could involve athletes taking larger roles in their nutrition and training plans or even collaboratively determining the frequency of training instead of the coach making that decision. Advantages of this approach include stronger motivation among athletes and a better understanding of tactics and skills (Kidman 2005, p. 17).

Some sporting competition settings are designed to provide more opportunities to engage with the cultural dimension of democracy. For example, the reduced role of coaches during elite tennis tournaments serves as an illustration of a sport that facilitates the cultural dimension of democracy. Athletes must be prepared to adjust their strategy and read their opponents during the match, in addition to any preparation that may occur with their coaching team before the matches. Tennis athletes are more likely to take responsibility for their learning and performance, cultivate mutual respect with coaches and other athletes, cooperate to enhance shared goals, and be more coachable due to their freedom and choice (Kidman, 2005). Tennis contrasts with American football games, where it is common, at both the university and professional levels, for coaches to call plays. The frequency of breaks between plays also allows for advice from coaches. The tennis example requires athletes to have a deeper understanding of their sport, their competitors, and themselves. In contrast, athletes in the American football context can rely on their coach’s knowledge and interpretation during in-game decisions.

Beyond sporting practice, the cultural dimension of democracy can influence the social dynamics within sports clubs and affect how decisions are made or how conflicts are addressed.

Any dynamics occurring within sports clubs or during sporting competitions present opportunities since every location where a communal activity takes place has the potential to serve as a site for cultural democracy (Gingerich, 2024). Engaging with the cultural dimension of democracy in informal or low-pressure settings should better prepare athletes for interactions with the institutional dimension of sport in more formal governance contexts.

Engagement with the cultural dimension of democracy should also lead to a more holistic sports system that can effectively tackle issues within the framework. In pursuit of political neutrality, the IOC aims to prevent nation-states from influencing the governance of sports due to concerns over exploitation. However, many athletes and athlete associations are increasingly turning to court systems to resolve their grievances with the current system (Dunbar, 2023; Picazo, 2025; Scarcella, 2024; Villanueva, 2023). The rulings of these courts will reflect the values of their respective national cultures. By reforming the sports system to incorporate the needs of more vulnerable stakeholders—those disadvantaged by the influences of public and private sectors—the autonomy of sports would be better preserved, as athletes would be less inclined to seek resources outside of sports to address their issues.

10.2.1 Engage with the Cultural Dimension, Invest in the Civil Sphere

The social capital and sense of community stemming from engagement with the cultural dimension of democracy also reinforce commitment to the civil sphere. Strengthening the influence of the civil sphere is one way athletes can overcome the pressures of both public and private spheres. Eichberg's (2009) *Trialectics of Societal Spheres* each impact decision-making in sports. The private sphere significantly affects modern sports through commercialisation and sponsor influence. While not all stakeholders driven by private sphere factors have ill intentions, the integrity of the sport and the preferences of athletes are not their primary motivators. For instance, there were accusations that athletes endured inconvenient competition times during the 2020 Tokyo Summer Olympic Games because they benefited broadcasters and schedules for spectators watching from other parts of the world (Reuters, 2021). Influences from the private sphere are centred around the IOC, which operates as the 'state' in the sports system; it establishes the rules that other stakeholders are expected to follow and provides competition opportunities.

Due to the autonomy of sport, the IOC as an institution wields significant power in both the private and public spheres, while athletes engage with these spheres in a more passive manner.

In the current landscape, Meeuwsen and Kreft (2023) argue, “power is concentrated in the IOC and specific sport bodies, with more power in those associations which represent big sport business. On the other side, it marks the position of ‘everyday athletes’ as subjected to the power hierarchy” (p. 350). The public and private spheres collaborate on behalf of large sports enterprises, leading to some disapproval of rules and regulations in which athletes have little input. Focusing on engagement with the cultural dimension of democracy in the civil sphere could help address this imbalance between the IOC and athletes. The cultivation of solidarity and mutual respect would occur in the civil sphere, and strengthening the bonds among participants would increase the likelihood of them coming together and challenging authority.

The social capital cultivated in the civil sphere align with an understanding of sport as an agonistic social practice and reflect Coubertin’s vision for Olympism. Once the benefits of self-understanding and solidarity are realised, it is unlikely that they will be applied solely to sporting practices. A deeper understanding of their sport and a sense of responsibility toward their sporting community could motivate athletes to seek a greater role in decision-making and improve the likelihood of them being more prepared for such responsibilities. This demonstrates how embracing the cultural dimension of democracy enhances experiences with the institutional dimension. This is not to suggest that athletes should abandon their personal interests or focus entirely on sport policy issues. However, in the civil sphere, athletes gain insights into the perspectives of their peers and competitors. With such understanding, athletes are better positioned to determine whether mass efforts to challenge authority on specific issues are justified or not.

Athletes, in particular, have expressed dissatisfaction with the current system and are advocating for greater decision-making power, as indicated by the constitutions of organisations such as the World Players Association, Global Athlete, and the Professional Tennis Players Association. Additionally, numerous lawsuits have been filed against institutional authorities in sports over the past few years, questioning monopolistic practices and the exploitation of athletes (James and Duval, 2024; Picazo, 2025; Scarcella, 2024). Although athletes have been striving for a more significant role, the focus on internal stakeholders within sports governance has led to a system that cannot accommodate athlete participation. If athletes are to leverage their influence, they must recognise themselves as active participants responsible for the system’s well-being, which will require education.

CHAPTER 11: EDUCATION IN SPORT¹⁹

11.1 Civic Education, Democracy and Sport

This chapter will address the challenge of authority as a democratic principle that can be improved. Unlike decisions made with mass public participation, democratic authority in more modern and larger societies relies on the ability to challenge authority (Enslin and White, 2003; Warren, 1996). Challenging authority may involve various behaviours, such as holding representatives accountable during elections or utilising court systems. Athletes have been able to push back against some of the standards set by international sport institutions through lawsuits; however, they are unable to do so within the international sport system.

The behaviours necessary to challenge the system are not innate; they must be taught or nurtured in some way. Civic education is one of the tools designed to help citizens understand their rights and responsibilities within a democratic system (Held, 2006). Dewey understood democracy as political, moral, economic, and educational, and placed special emphasis on education's role in promoting deliberative democracy and preparing future citizens for their expected engagement in the governance of society (Dewey, [1916] 2021). The aim is not to convince them of how they should feel about certain issues (Garrison and Neiman, 2003), but to develop the skills necessary for deliberation and for fulfilling civic duties (Benhabib, 2021). Such skills include reasoning, critical thinking, and communication. Educational institutions should prepare citizens to engage in critical thinking and reasoning when faced with political issues and public policy matters (Bailin and Siegel, 2003).

In addition to the significance that school curriculum can have, Dewey also believed that school as an institution possesses its own social life, which provides additional education (Darling and Nordenbo, 2003). This includes navigating relationships with authority figures, such as teachers and staff, as well as opportunities to build social capital and develop relationships with peers.

11.1.1 Formal, Non-Formal, and Informal Education

¹⁹ A notable part of this chapter is from the article McCoy, B. (Publication forthcoming in 2025). Cultivating sport citizens. *Acta Universitatis Carolinae Kinanthropologica*.

Different techniques can be used for civic education. One way to understand learning techniques is by employing formal, non-formal, and informal approaches. Formal education is structured by learning objectives, time, and space. This type of learning occurs in institutionalised contexts and has a hierarchical flow of knowledge from teacher to pupil. Non-formal education typically takes place outside of institutionalised settings and, while it can be organised, the main goal is not learning itself but engaging in worthwhile activities, often in non-educational environments such as workplaces or clubs (Eichberg and Jespersen, 2009, p. 429). Informal education happens during daily life and fosters mutual learning, with no fixed hierarchy, allowing parties to learn from one another. Education that traditionally occurs in school classrooms exemplifies formal education, whereas learning derived from participation in social dynamics within the school is more indicative of non-formal and informal education.

When applying the different ‘configurations of learning’—formal, non-formal, and informal—to sport, Eichberg and Jespersen (2009) refer to them as education ‘for’, ‘by’, and ‘through’ sport. According to the authors, education *for* sport is “mostly of a technical character, and normally linked to well-defined sport disciplines and competitive activities” (Eichberg and Jespersen, 2009, p. 435). This is likely what comes to mind for most when they think of education in a traditional sense, learning about a specific sport or technique to better engage with it. Education *by* sport serves a more functional role, with sport “regarded as a tool for certain ‘functions’, which are good for the individual or for society as a whole” (Eichberg and Jespersen, 2009, pp. 435-6). The main outcome of education by sport is social welfare, with examples from Eichberg and Jespersen (2009) including healthy lifestyle, social and ethnic integration, and sport for peace. Lastly, education *through* sport is a way of developing oneself through the practice of sport, with Eichberg and Jespersen (2009) stating that “the way is valued more than a certain result or product” (p. 436). The outcome of education *through* sport includes enabling and empowering participants and learning about others.

Education *through* sport highlights the educational aspects of sport and symbolises the shared values between sport and democratic principles. Similar to schools, sport serves as a setting that involves many young people, and it is arguably more effective at fostering citizen development than traditional educational environments. Coubertin writes, “sport would seem an excellent preparatory school for our lives these days, and an excellent peacemaker, too. Note that these principles of competition and mutual assistance are linked closely to the egalitarianism we were

discussing earlier - an equality not of conditions, but of relationships” (Coubertin, 2000b, p. 216). Sport is better suited for non-formal (education *by* sport) and informal (education *through* sport) educational methods than traditional school settings.

The more rigid the hierarchy in a system, the less democratic the educational activity becomes. In school settings, hierarchical relationships are more entrenched, with the teacher and other staff serving as authority figures while students are expected to adhere to the rules set by school officials. Additionally, opportunities for multifaceted relationships with peers are limited since students are not in competition with one another and may not work together unless a teacher assigns group projects. Much of their time with peers in school settings revolves around casual socialization (e.g., not requiring cooperation and competition or non-agonistic), which is important but arguably less significant for civic education. In contrast, sports offer more opportunities for participants to navigate relationships with peers, and the roles of coaches and other authority figures can be minimised without significantly harming the activity.

11.1.2 Educational Nature of Sport

The educational nature of sport is also a significant feature of Olympism. Pierre de Coubertin, the father of the modern Olympic Movement, viewed Olympism as a philosophy of life (Müller, 2000). The revival was not an homage to the past; rather, it included an ideological agenda (Gruneau, 1993). Coubertin considered education—more specifically, peace education—as the key to addressing the world’s ills and fostering peace among nations (Müller, 2000). Therefore, Olympism serves as an educational tool that can be utilised to improve the world (Müller, 2000; Kidd, 1996). The idea that Olympism is an educational philosophy has persisted and continues to be an aspect of the modern Olympic Movement. An excerpt from the 2025 iteration of the Olympic Charter states that:

Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example, social responsibility and respect for internationally recognised human rights and universal fundamental ethical principles within the remit of the Olympic Movement. (IOC, 2025b, p. 8)

The Olympic Games serve as a means to present ethical sport to the world (Parry, 2020). Durántez et al. (2010) refer to sport as “the transmission belt of [Olympism’s] fundamental formative,

peacekeeping, democratic humanitarian, cultural; and ecological principles” (p. 4). In addition to Olympism and sport serving peace education, Olympism also symbolises a commitment to democratic egalitarianism (Durántez et al., 2010). The values associated with Olympism are those which, according to Parry (2020, p. 144), “are already, necessarily, in sport.” De Coubertin recognised that those values inherent to everyday sport were also present in communities aspiring to embody liberal humanism around the world (ibid).

In 1919, Coubertin declared that the ‘the athletic group is, in a way, the basic cell of democracy. The only inequality that continues to exist in that group derives from nature while the artificial inequality introduced by men is banished (Coubertin, 2000c, p. 739). The dynamics among athletes make sports activities a medium for civic education because the nature of sport shares similarities with democracy. Sport inherently embraces many of the values associated with democracy, as they are both agonistic social practices (McCoy and Martínková, 2022). Agonistic social practices provide an arena for our polemical nature to express itself. *Polemos* (i.e., struggle or strife) is an aspect of our humanity that drives us to challenge ourselves and achieve something. Though *polemos* leads to competition with others, it is also a uniting force since it impacts everyone. This sentiment is echoed by Coubertin, who wrote that “sport calls for an intense spirit of competition and solid camaraderie... Thus, sport is based on mutual assistance and competition. These same principles serve as the foundations of modern democracy” (Coubertin, 2000b, p. 216).

As agonistic social practices, both sport and democratic politics possess internal characteristics (preparing to be the best, competing with the best, and winning while risking defeat) (Loy and Morford, 2019; McCoy and Martínková, 2022) and external characteristics (openness, fairness, and justice) (Daqing, 2010; McCoy and Martínková, 2022). These internal and external characteristics, exemplifying education through sport, indicate shared values that are essential to democratic engagement in political life and sport, which are not inherently present in other institutions like schools.

Coubertin’s linking of sport to democratic principles seems to have been confined to sporting practice. However, the sports system as a whole can also be viewed as existing on the democratic spectrum. In some respects, athletes can currently be understood as citizens within the sports system. If certain democratic principles are present (e.g., there is a possibility of challenging authority), then the system can be considered democratic to some degree. The democratic education gained from sport participation could also be applied to prepare athletes for their future

involvement in the governance of sport. Sport and democracy may be naturally inclined toward specific behaviours, but there is a way to engage with the activities that reinforces particular values or diminishes them. These variations can be better understood by examining different types of citizenship and how they are nurtured.

11.2 The Case of Olympic Values Education Programme (OVEP)

This section of the chapter examines the official Olympic Values Education Programme (OVEP) to gain a better understanding of the IOC's concept of education in sport. The OVEP is founded on the Olympic philosophy that learning occurs through the 'balanced development of body and mind' (IOC, 2023a). The resources are designed to complement school curricula and promote the benefits of sport and physical activity through an understanding of Olympism and its impact on health, enjoyment, and community (IOC, 2023a). Regarding Olympic Education curricula, there is no strict implementation or interpretation of Olympic values. Excellence, respect, and friendship are the core Olympic values (IOC, 2023a), but education curricula may vary among countries and could differ among schools in a localised area if they are being taught at all.

Beyond the core Olympic values, an array of Olympic educational themes is covered throughout the OVEP, including balance, excellence, fair play, friendship, joy of effort, pursuit of excellence, and respect for others. Other topics include many issues that the Olympic Movement has faced recently, such as equality, environmental sustainability, and inclusion. Additionally, Olympic symbology (e.g., the Olympic Rings, Olympic Flame, Olympic Oath) and the history of the Olympic Games are also addressed. The OVEP activities are designed to enhance communication skills, debating skills, and critical thinking skills (IOC, 2023a).

The subject matter covered in the OVEP suggests that the IOC uses the curricula to teach students not only about Olympic values and their application in students' lives but also the history and culture of the Olympic Games from a cultural anthropological perspective. The curriculum does not appear to involve sports participation or significant physical activity. The activities are adjusted based on the target age group, presenting a wide variety of options. Examples of activities include drawing pictures, answering reflection questions, role-playing, engaging in group discussions or debates, writing speeches, and interviewing athletes or other relevant personnel.

11.2.1 OVEP and Democracy's Cultural Dimension

Based on the goals and values expressed throughout the OVEP, it has the potential to facilitate engagement with the cultural dimension of democracy. The educational themes of fair play, pursuit of excellence, respect for others, and so on can all be considered values that align with *agon* and democracy. The OVEP Activity Sheet Glossary even states that ‘civic literacy’ is ‘an understanding of how to engage within a community (local, global) to strengthen a society’ (IOC, 2023a, p. 71). The OVEP glossary also includes ‘peer teaching’, which has repeatedly shown that allowing students to teach one another helps them better connect with both the material and their peers and has a profound impact on the learning success of both the student and the teacher’ (IOC, 2023a, p. 73). Civic literacy and peer learning would also be goals of a Deweyan curriculum. As was the case in Part II, I am not disputing the principles or values that the IOC has put forth in the OVEP; however, I am questioning the means through which they purport to realise these values.

Among the 36 activities in the OVEP Activity Sheet, two specifically highlight ‘civic literacy’ as a learning skill. Activity Sheet 12, Peace and the Olympic Games, aims to ‘initiate dialogue that will help learners understand the importance of peaceful interactions’ (IOC, 2023a, p. 20). Four activities have been adapted for different age groups:

Primary (ages 5-8): “Colours for Peace: A fun way to learn about Olympic Truce.” This activity encourages participants to understand peace and the Olympic Truce through reading and colouring. Find this resource by clicking on the link above, in the Appendix or on the International Olympic Truce Centre web page

Intermediate (ages 9-11): Make a “Promise Mural”. Students write down on sheets of paper (perhaps sticky paper) promises/ideas that they can use to promote and keep peace in their own lives. After posting their thoughts on the wall, students are encouraged to sort them into clusters. What themes seem to be widely experienced? Have the students discuss their reasons/commitments to peace. Ask the question “Is there anything that would strengthen your commitment to these suggestions or undermine them?”

Middle (ages 12-14): Search for art and pictures that represent peace. Which symbols come out more often? Create your own work of art that represents peace and acceptance in the world.

Senior (ages 15-18): Divide a page into two columns. In the left-hand column write down examples of fair play in sport. In the right-hand column write down examples of unfair play. On the next page is a collection

of inspiring and insightful sayings about living a life of peace. Read the sentences and then discuss the ideas in the right-hand column. (IOC, 2023a, p. 20)

The activities include coloring, searching for symbols of peace, encouraging students to consider ways to promote and maintain peace in their own lives, listing examples of fair play in sports, and holding discussions based on quotes about peace. While these types of tasks can help students understand peace, the only elements of these activities connected to sports are the emphasis on the Olympic Truce in the coloring activity and the examples of fair play in the senior activity. The values presented throughout the activity sheets are inherent to sports and can be explored through the practice of sports. The types of activities presented through OVEP should be viewed as additions rather than the main focus of Olympic education.

The OVEP currently indicates formal education or education ‘for’ sport; it is part of an established curriculum that originates from a central authority, in this case, the IOC. Such an approach reinforces vertical relationships since teachers lead these lessons and are expected to measure outcomes. This is not to suggest that the current approach should be abandoned; however, a more robust approach to Olympic values education should include formal, non-formal, and informal education. The informal education, or education ‘through’ sport, encourages engagement with the cultural dimension and does not require the development of resources. Embracing the inherent characteristics associated with sport as an agonistic social practice would also convey the values illustrated throughout the OVEP. Physical activity or participation in sport, which Gessman (2010) argued is essential for Olympic education, would also be promoted. The type of education advocated for in this work is deeply connected to participation in sport through the internal characteristics of agonistic social practices.

11.3 Education Reform in Sport

If seeking to approach education in a way that prepares athletes to actively participate, the following changes could be made using education *for*, *by*, and *through* sport as a framework for understanding how they may one day be active sport citizens. In addition to the rules and technical competence required for a particular sport, education *for* sport could also include education about sport as an agonistic social practice, the values in sport, and the significance of categorising athletes. This would likely involve formal instruction, though it does not have to be limited to

formal settings. Education *by* sport would incorporate efforts to use sport as a means of cultural integration (e.g., sport for development programs) or to reinforce social capital and charitable acts (e.g., volunteerism in sport). These efforts are generally intentional, extending beyond sport itself. The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) exemplifies advocacy for sporting participation to reinforce religious values, while the Sokol movement in Slavic societies illustrates how sport can reinforce cultural principles related to strengthening minds and bodies (Pavlin and Čustonja, 2018). Education *through* sport might consist of approaching sport in a manner that facilitates horizontal relationships instead of reinforcing vertical relationships. This could involve athletes taking a more active role in their nutrition and training plans or even collaboratively determining the frequency of training, rather than relying solely on the coach's decisions. According to Butterworth (2014), it is problematic that "athletes are largely expected to think passively, as a part of a team that overrides any individual convictions" (p. 879). Challenging traditional approaches to the athlete-coaching dynamic (as well as those with other authority figures) could exemplify education *through* sport.

Some strategies could also be a hybrid of the educational modes presented by Eichberg and Jespersen (2009). Based on the characterisation by Mareš (2023), philosophical consultation could serve as an example of a hybrid approach that prioritises goals related to education *for*, *through*, and *by* sport. Mareš writes, "the main purpose of philosophical consultation with an athlete is to challenge and clarify his/her thinking and deepen his/her understanding of the self and the (sporting) world" (Mareš, 2023, p. 193). A number of strategies could be employed to cultivate behaviours that are indicative of more active citizenship, thus fostering a sense of community and a greater understanding of themselves and the activity in which they are engaging.

Education *for* and *by* sport can support the effort, but education *through* sport has the capacity to facilitate athletes' engagement with the public influences in sport. As expressed by Eichberg and Jespersen (2009), education *through* sport leads to philosophy through sport, and given the understanding of sport, philosophy, and democracy as agonistic social practices (McCoy and Martínková, 2022), education *through* sport would also lead to 'democracy through sport.' The capacity to morally educate and prepare participants for democracy in institutional contexts is inherent to sport. The difference between a sports system that yields participants who experience moral development and better understand themselves and others (education *through* sport) is a matter of mindset and the opportunity to develop in such ways. Institutions are more likely to

recognise formal education as ‘real’ and set aside funds to support it. However, with small changes and a willingness from authority figures in sport to facilitate more horizontal interactions between participants, non-formal (education *by* sport) and informal (education *through* sport) educational opportunities would be plentiful.

Sport, much like democracy, is relational, and when approached in a certain way, it fosters a culture of trust and mutual understanding. Such qualities are more likely to be exhibited in active citizens than in passive ones. While education *for* sport or formal educational techniques can be utilised (e.g., Olympic Education, knowledge of sport as an agonistic social practice), it should mainly require a shift in mindset regarding the approach to sporting practice (i.e. education *by* sport, education *through* sport).

CHAPTER 12: BOTTOM-UP DEMOCRATISATION: CULTIVATING CITIZENSHIP²⁰

12.1 Cultivating Citizenship

Educational techniques play a significant role in preparing athletes to engage in the governance process, particularly in fostering relationships with teammates and competitors. These interactions influence how citizens perceive the handling of concerns and whether they will take action for change or rely on institutional actors to lead. Alongside the types of education that can be pursued, different forms of citizenship that can potentially be cultivated should also be considered. This chapter will focus on the behaviours associated with different types of citizenship and how these may impact the democratisation of sport, specifically the cultivation of citizenship in sport.

12.1.1 Active and Passive Citizenship

Citizenship behaviours are often described as either passive or active (Crick, 2002; Kymlicka and Noman, 1994). A passive perspective of citizenship offers a more ‘thin’ conception of ‘citizenship-as-legal-status,’ while the active perspective suggests that the ‘extent and quality of citizenship is a function of citizens’ participation in the community’ (Zilla, 2022, p. 1527). There are differing notions regarding the rights and responsibilities that accompany such a status. Enslin and White (2003) present two conceptions of citizens: citizens as passive bearers of rights and citizens of robust republican virtue.

Enslin and White (2003) describe the former as ‘one aspect of a person’s life may be variously weighted by different individuals, and that in the end exists, as does politics, to support individuals in their personal and shared projects’ (p. 113). The latter is marked by ‘participation in political affairs has an intrinsic value and playing an active part in the political life of one’s society is held to be superior to the private pleasures of family, personal relationships, and work’ (Enslin and White, 2003, p. 113). The distinction is not made to suggest that one form is superior to another. It is reasonable to assume that citizens would exhibit behaviours aware of the different forms of citizenship and how they are cultivated.

²⁰ A notable part of this section of the chapter is from the article McCoy, B. (Publication forthcoming in 2025). Cultivating sport citizens. *Acta Universitatis Carolinae Kinanthropologica*.

How civic education is approached in a society will also impact the relationship to citizenship. Those citizens who are passive bearers of rights would be less active in the civil sphere and rely more on existing democratic institutions and pressure groups like NGOs and the media (Crick, 2002; Enslin and White, 2003). Education for this citizenry would likely focus on raising awareness of rights and responsibilities and may encourage citizens to take action if democracy is threatened. In contrast, citizens with robust republican virtue would prioritise citizenship as one of the most, if not the most, important aspects of their lives and would need to be prepared for democratic vigilance while consistently engaging in the public sphere (Enslin and White, 2003). An understanding of civic virtues becomes even more significant in this latter case. The curriculum can be shaped to reflect characteristics of either passive or active citizenship and should be carefully considered. Ultimately, it is up to individuals in a society to decide what type of citizen they aspire to be, but they should be presented with various options so they can make informed decisions.

12.1.2 Turner's Typology

Other external factors that impact citizenship behaviours include how a democratic society originated. In response to Marshall's (1981) idea that full citizenship comprises the civil, political, and social aspects, Turner (1990) argued that there are two noteworthy dimensions of citizenship: the private/public dimension and the above/below dimension (the latter of which will henceforth be referenced as top-down and bottom-up). Turner associates the passive/active dichotomy with whether citizenship was fought for from below or granted from above (Turner, 1990). The tension in the other dimension lies between the 'private realm of the individual and the family in relationship to the public arena of political action' (ibid, p. 207). The dimensions should be viewed as existing on a continuum: public/private should be considered from left to right, while above/below should be viewed from top to bottom. Any system that purports to be democratic would be located in one of the quadrants, though no two systems would be exactly in the same place.

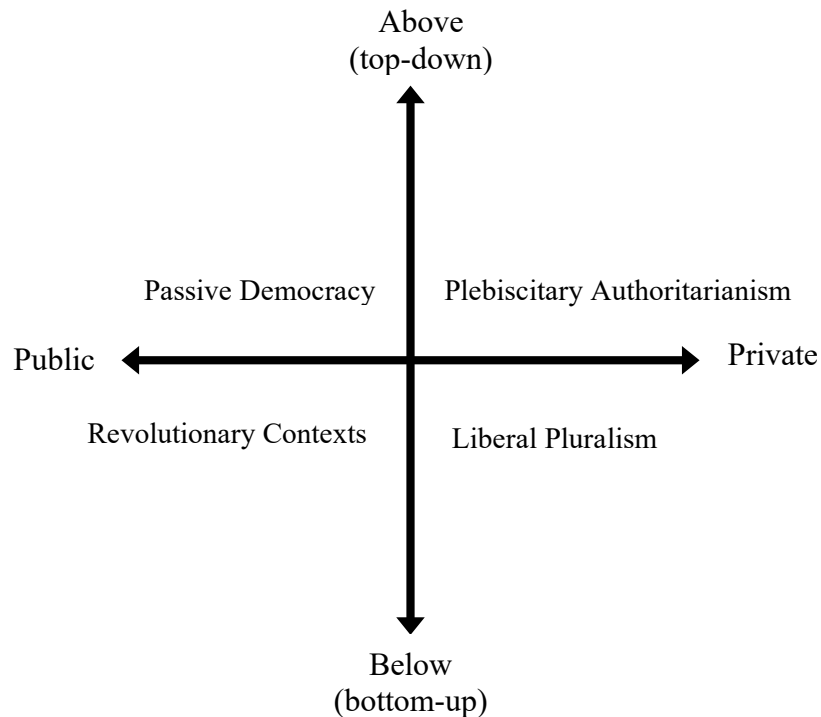


Figure 1: Author's interpretation of Turner's (1990, p.200) Heuristic Typology of four political contexts for the creation of citizenship rights.

Turner examines how citizenship emerged in France, Germany, England, and the United States to illustrate his typology. According to Turner (1990), *revolutionary citizenship*, as observed in France, emphasises the public arena while viewing the private world of individuals with suspicion and is driven by bottom-up forces. He argues that it often devolves into totalitarianism and leads to 'forms of public terror' (1990, p. 200). *Liberal pluralism*, which he associates with American liberalism, arises from interest group formation, resulting in bottom-up movements for rights. However, these movements are somewhat constrained due to a commitment to nurturing virtues in private. The focus is on 'the rights of the individual for privatised dissent' (ibid, p. 200), and there is concern that mass movements may lead to a trade-off of individual freedoms for expanded equality.

Passive democracy, arising from top-down influences and an emphasis on the public sphere, leads to citizens who are subjects rather than active participants in society. Such was the case in England, where the citizen was merely subject. While the legitimacy of representative institutions is recognised, there is 'no established tradition of struggles for citizenship rights' (Turner, 1990, p. 200), which relegates citizenship to a strategy for the institutionalisation of class conflicts controlled by governmental agencies. The authoritarian form of democracy, which Turner

refers to as *plebiscitary authoritarianism*, also stems from a top-down approach to citizenship wherein ‘the state manages public space, inviting the citizens periodically to select a leader, who is then no longer responsible on a daily basis to the electorate’ (Turner, 1990, p. 201). This results in citizens viewing private life as a sanctuary from the tyranny of state regulation. He associates this form with a fascistic brand of citizenship that emerged in Germany. In democratic systems that skew farther right, the citizenry becomes more passive. More active citizenship would result from systems that skew farther left. Most systems fall between these two extremes, as is the case with sports (without its embeddedness in political systems).

12.2 Cultivating Citizenship in Sport

The cultivation of sport citizenship is influenced by external factors that affect citizens’ relationships to their citizenship and education techniques. A characterisation of citizenship in the international sports system would also encompass two dimensions. The top-down (above)/bottom-up (below) distinction in sport can be interpreted as the governing institutions in sports being all-powerful, while athletes are the recipients of rights and protections, as opposed to athletes acting more as sovereign actors who are not reliant on the state. The public/private distinction relates more to space or the athletes’ preferred sphere when cultivating virtuous behaviour or addressing injustices: do they utilise the public arena (e.g., protests, petitions, unions), or do they rely on the private realm (e.g., individual, family)? Sport exists somewhere along the spectrum between both endpoints, although it tends to lean closer to one end for both dimensions.

Citizenship rights in sports are imposed from above, as there is a reliance on governing institutions, with athletes functioning more as subjects. Within the Olympic Movement, athletes must adhere to the decisions made by governing bodies (e.g., IOC) and regulatory organisations (e.g., WADA). While there are limited opportunities for athletes to participate through committees, they are generally not involved in establishing rules or standards. Furthermore, the sport tends to emphasise the individual commitment to development and preparation more than collective efforts. There have been occasions when athletes unite to challenge dominant structures, such as joining forces to ensure the exclusion of apartheid South Africa (Booth, 2003; Nixon, 1992) or athletes and fans collaborating to oppose the football ‘Super League’ (Hamilton, 2021) or voting in referendums in cities regarding the hosting of mega-events (Kassens-Noor and Lauermann, 2017; Könecke et al., 2016; Morgan, 2019).

All dimensions are essential for a functioning sporting system. However, the current approach to sport relies heavily on top-down influence and the private side of the continuum, resulting in a *passive democracy*. This is not a criticism of athletes. The concept of citizenship linked to a system has little to do with the current citizenry; they inherit factors that shape their relationship to citizenship. The public/private and above/below distinctions serve as examples of factors to consider when the goal is to shift power. Although sport may lean towards influences from the private and above, efforts can still be made to engage in behaviours more associated with the public and below if the aim is to challenge authority and shift power.

Challenging regulations they consider unfair could be a way for athletes to engage with the public sphere and the bottom-up aspect of the continuum. However, such behaviour is sometimes discouraged by the rules. The Olympic Charter Rule 50.2 states, “No kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas” (IOC, 2025b, p. 94). In response to the IOC’s stance, it is reasonable to expect athletes to focus more on cultivating excellence in private, developing a mindset that benefits training and competition at the elite level rather than engaging in the policy development process or challenging the system. This perspective is vital in sports, as the internal characteristics associated with athletics as an agonistic social practice, such as preparing to be the best, competing with the best, and winning while risking defeat, indicate the athlete’s engagement with the private sphere.

This has been the outcome without much active effort to approach sport in a manner that produces sports citizens who are able to participate in its governance or cater to issues that arise in sporting clubs or on the field of play. A sport system that exhibits the characteristics of a *passive democracy* is not inherently negative because a range exists regarding the public/private distinction and the above/below distinction.

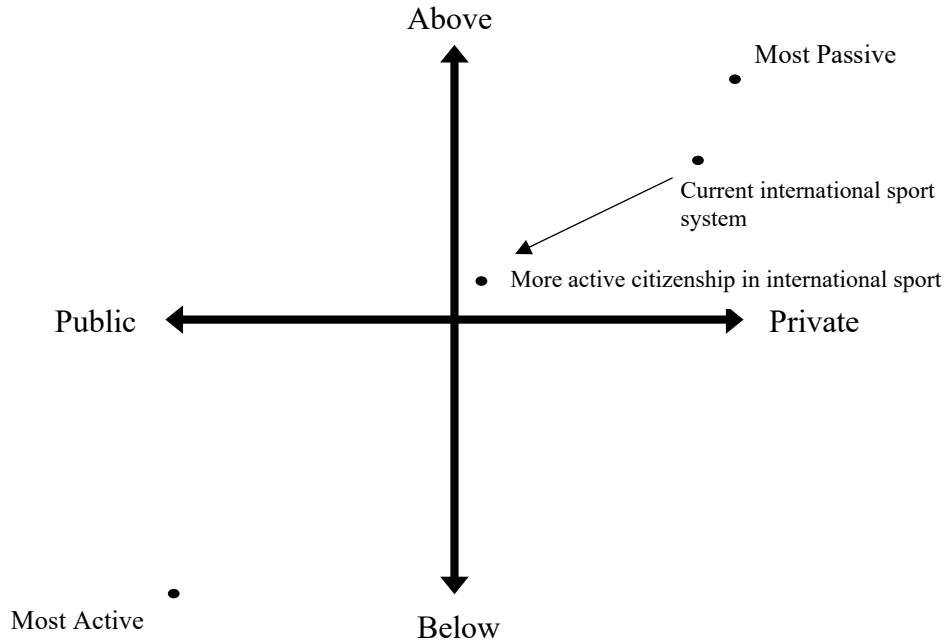


Figure 2: Author's re-interpretation of Turner's (1990) Heuristic Typology of four political contexts for the creation of citizenship rights with the addition of most passive and active points and an illustration of citizenship in sport becoming more active as the arrow demonstrates.

The figure above was created using Turner's (1990) typology. The points added in the far-right upper corner and the far-left lower corner indicate hypothetical systems that would develop the most passive behaviours and the most active behaviours. With regard to sport, a hypothetical international sports system nearing the most passive point would entail a framework that leaves athletes completely vulnerable to the tyranny of the IOC and other governing institutions while relying on the private sector to ensure success and address issues. A hypothetical sports system approaching the most active point on the figure would view athletes as active participants in decision-making, with the IOC serving to implement those decisions and pursuing redress collaboratively within the public sphere. In reality, the behaviours within most systems are more 'mild,' which is why passive and active citizenship should not be viewed in absolutes. The current sports system is situated in the passive democracy quadrant, though it is not at the most passive point; while the system is heavily reliant on the role of institutions, there is still some involvement from other actors. The private sector is also preferred over the public sphere, although there have been occasions when athletes unite for a common issue. As denoted in Figure 3, while the sports

system may fall into the *passive democracy* category, *more* active citizenship in sport is still possible. This can be advanced within the current system by working to cultivate a bottom-up approach and engaging more with the public sphere in sport. Utilising various educational techniques in sports is one way of attempting to connect with grassroots and public influences in sport.

CHAPTER 13: SPORT CITIZENSHIP

The culmination of everything covered throughout this dissertation can be understood through ‘sport citizenship’. The democratisation of the governance of sport will only be achievable if athletes and other vulnerable stakeholder groups become ‘activated’ as sport citizens. The governance of sport can be further democratised, but the overall health of the system will suffer if stakeholder groups do not consider themselves sport citizens and remain unprepared for a greater role. This final chapter will conceptualise ‘sport citizenship’, emphasising the rights and responsibilities of potential sport citizens before exploring what that may entail for various stakeholder groups.

13.1 Sports Citizenship—Rights and Responsibilities of Stakeholders

The stakeholders involved in the international sports system, and therefore have the potential to become sports citizens, include athletes, coaches, fans, sponsors, media, governments, sports governing institutions, as well as watchdog organisations (e.g., Transparency International) and integrity organisations (e.g., WADA), and other NGOs etc. (Chappelet, 2021; Ferkins and Shillbury, 2012; Ferkins and Shillbury, 2015; Kihl and Schull, 2020). Additional stakeholders should also be considered, such as scientists or indigenous groups advocating on behalf of the environment. Anyone invested in the process or outcome of sporting participation should be considered as potential sport citizens. What is most important is the willingness of these potential sport citizens to participate in a democratic sports system in an active and engaged manner, as the goal is to invoke an active form of citizenship rather than a passive one. More active forms of citizenship emphasise the responsibilities that sport citizens would have. King (2015) highlights informed decision-making and engagement as crucial elements for active citizenship. The relationship between these is as follows: “active citizenship requires being engaged in a process that leads to informed decisions that have the public good in mind rather than private gain” (King, 2015, p. 75).

For sport stakeholders to take a more active role in governance, greater emphasis should be placed on the responsibilities of stakeholders alongside their rights (Fassin, 2012; Ferkins and Shillbury, 2015). While I have argued in favour of stakeholders having a larger role in decision-making that impacts the international sports system, stakeholders should also feel a sense of

responsibility to the international sports community. Ideally, stakeholders would view themselves as protectors of the international sports system. These responsibilities primarily focus on preparedness for their participation. Outside of sports, members of a system striving for the democratic ideal are expected to educate themselves on issues before attempting to influence those issues. They are also expected to show a healthy level of mutual respect for other citizens. In modern times, both education and mutual respect are lacking, and the well-being of democratic societies has suffered as a result (Crick, 2002; Enslin and White, 2003). To avoid this in sports, a constant commitment to education (including formal, non-formal, and informal education) and the understanding that both competition and cooperation are essential to the system will be key in cultivating sport citizenship. Both democracy and sport offer opportunities to demonstrate to individuals that community is vital to their success. Even when we compete against one another, we are both contending with and collaborating with each other to achieve our goals. Without opposition, it would be impossible for anyone to overcome—something that many of us have a deep desire to do (polemic spirit).

Adopting an approach to sports governance that centres ‘sport citizenship’ could align it more closely with our polemic experience expressed in sporting participation (McCoy and Martínková, 2022). A recontextualisation of sport stakeholders as ‘sport citizens’ is not only more suitable for some of sport’s unique characteristics such as the passion and emotional investment displayed by stakeholders (Hoye et al., 2008; Lachance et al., 2023) or its role as a public utility (Di Marco, 2019; Lachance et al., 2023), but it also provides an opportunity to engage more fully with sport’s social, educational, and cultural functions (Di Marco, 2019).

The sporting world has already started moving toward expanded rights for some stakeholder groups. For instance, various cities have held referendums to include local citizens in the decision to host mega-events like the Olympic Games. Referendums in Munich, Boston, Krakow, Calgary, and many other cities have halted a city’s efforts to host a Summer or Winter Olympic Games, and the IOC has considered implementing changes to the candidature process for hosting the Olympic Games, including a request that cities hold a referendum (Morgan, 2019). The results of these referenda almost always lead to a city withdrawing its candidacy for hosting an event, as local citizens indicate that they do not want their respective city to host (Kassens-Noor & Lauermann, 2017). While the overall effort of local authorities to involve citizens in their decision-making process is worthy of praise, the ideas presented above suggest that this may be indicative of

what King (2015) refers to as ‘action against,’ depending on how much education and deliberation occurred prior to the referendums. A lack of effort to educate and present differing options and opinions exemplifies giving rights without clarifying responsibilities, which can lead to rash and uninformed decision-making.

The overall effort of local authorities to include citizens in their decision-making processes is part of the goal in embracing the development of sports citizens. However, this type of participation is presented without fostering meaningful engagement and indicates a tendency to perceive stakeholders as groups to appease or pacify (Friedman et al., 2004; Naraine et al., 2019), reinforcing the idea that stakeholder engagement focuses on rights rather than responsibilities, which can lead to reactionary, rash, or uneducated decision-making. As stakeholders’ rights expand in relation to sport governance, it is important that the significance of accompanying responsibilities is not overshadowed to enable them to participate in an educated and responsible manner. Embracing the cultural dimension of democracy during sporting practice and preserving sport’s agonistic characteristics will reinforce the education of stakeholders.

Engaging with cultural democracy in sports will require trial and error to understand what the right balance is between vertical and horizontal relationships within an institution or activity (and this may change over time). Cultural democracy can aid in this process, given its informal context compared to more institutionalised forms of democracy. There is less pressure associated with making decisions in cultural democracy because they seem less binding and permanent. While decision-making in more formal and institutional democratic contexts is also not necessarily binding or permanent, it is likely more challenging to implement those changes. Participants may have to wait until the next electoral cycle or gather significant political resources to contest decisions made within these formal democratic systems. The stakes also seem lower to some extent with cultural democracy, as there is less concern about making decisions that could seriously affect citizens’ quality of life. Though the interactions are democratic in all these contexts, the more relaxed environment of cultural democracy may inspire greater creativity and willingness to participate, and arguably better prepare citizens for those forms of democracy that centre the political aspects of life, including those beyond sports.

Preparing and educating stakeholders for engagement will not guarantee that they align with a particular side of an issue, as the process remains the focus rather than the outcome. Nonetheless, these efforts should increase the likelihood of understanding the true nature of sport,

improve the relationships that various stakeholder groups have with each other (i.e. social capital) and with sport, and their responsibilities toward the international sports system. This should also reinforce the idea that even those with differing opinions strive to enhance our experiences with sport.

13.2 The Role of Different Stakeholders

13.2.1 The Role of Athletes

Though many stakeholder groups have the capacity to become sports citizens once activated, the populations most significantly affected are those with on-the-field experiences, such as athletes, their support personnel (e.g., coaches, trainers), and officials. The suggested shift toward sport citizenry would influence their experiences with sporting practice and governance. Among the aforementioned groups, athletes have consistently expressed a desire for a larger role in decision-making processes, as demonstrated by the filing of lawsuits (Dunbar, 2023; Picazo, 2025; Scarcella, 2024; Villanueva, 2023) and the work of organisations advocating for athletes' rights (Global Athlete, 2019; Uni Global Union, 2023).

Sport citizenship requires engagement with the cultural dimension of democracy to cultivate stronger bonds with fellow participants. The pursuit of such behaviour demonstrates a commitment to the civil sphere, which allows athletes to overcome the influences of the public sphere (e.g., the IOC) and the private sphere (e.g., sponsors, RHBs). Cultivating sport citizenship should involve diverse approaches, including education *for* sport, education *by* sport, and education *through* sport. Education *through* sport emphasises the educational nature of sport and plays a crucial role in fostering sport citizenship. This form of education is particularly effective in cultivating citizenship due to the shared principles between sport and democracy as agonistic social practices. Building connections among participants cannot be taught in a classroom setting. A teacher or coach may articulate these ideas, but true understanding only arises from the experience of being alongside others, as teammates, competitors, and partners in the sporting journey.

Once the above steps have been taken and athletes are recognised as sport citizens, they will be better prepared to engage with the institutional dimension of democracy and participate in stakeholder democracy. Institutional authorities may resist embracing stakeholder democracy (Harris et al., 2021; Moriarty, 2014), in this case, athletes will need to advocate for the rights and

responsibilities associated with sport citizenship. The potential for such a need highlights why engagement with democracy's cultural dimension and investment in the civil sphere are essential. To fight for additional rights and responsibilities, athletes must view themselves as part of a community capable of acting together and advocating for themselves and one another.

The manner in which athletes gain additional rights and responsibilities will be influenced by the response of institutional stakeholders like the IOC. Based on Turner's (1990) typology, I have situated citizenship within the current sports system in the top right quadrant, plebiscitary authoritarianism. However, this does not rule out the possibility of moving around the quadrant—in directions that necessitate more active citizenship and could potentially lead to revolution. Efforts to engage with the system from the bottom-up and interact with the public sphere would result in athletes being less dependent on institutions to meet their needs and less focused on their own individual experiences. I began this dissertation by presenting *agon* and *polemos* to illustrate that it is in our nature as humans to gravitate toward agonistic encounters and embrace democratic ideals. Athletes, in particular, are already showing this as they resist institutional authorities that seek to make decisions impacting them without their input. The IOC and other ISBs can continue to fend off these groups, or they can guide them into the next stage, where they are prepared to be more active participants in the governance process.

As King (2015) explains, when citizens are not engaged in the deliberative process that should inform their decision-making, they tend to participate out of spite and take action *against* the government rather than *with* the government. This behaviour is more likely to lead to decisions focused on individual aims instead of what is best for the collective. Even if other stakeholders are not taking their responsibilities seriously, athletes have the ability to demand change. Athletes' embrace of the cultural dimension of democracy and turning to the civil sphere is imperative in the pursuit of democratising sport. While this research has emphasised the significance of cultivating sport citizenship within the athlete population specifically, other stakeholders have a role to play as well.

13.2.2 The Role of International Sporting Bodies (ISBs)

Institutional Sporting Bodies (ISBs) are the stakeholder group most aware of their rights and responsibilities. Therefore, the cultivation of sport citizenship as a means to combat a lack of influence in the system does not apply to them as it does for other stakeholder groups. However,

ISBs do play a role in facilitating rights for other stakeholders. The IOC, in particular, operates as the guardian of the Olympic Movement and has worked to maintain its central authority in the international sports system. ISBs can help further democratise the sports system by being more transparent with external stakeholders and providing additional channels for accountability within the sports system. For the system to be self-sufficient and effectively protect the autonomy of sport, ISBs must be willing to include other stakeholder groups. Although the IOC has maintained authority, its legitimacy is increasingly being challenged, and a more inclusive approach to governance is essential for achieving greater legitimacy.

The process of making governance of the international sports system more inclusive and further democratising it can be gradual. For instance, ISBs can start by incorporating athletes, as they have expressed dissatisfaction with current outcomes. ISBs could also initiate measures that allow stakeholder groups to hold the institutions accountable in some way. This may include a formal process for expressing grievances both officially and publicly or holding IOC members responsible for the decisions they make on behalf of all stakeholders. ISBs will need to facilitate education that is necessary for stakeholders to become sport citizens. For example, formal education techniques should be developed by or at least approved by an institutional authority such as IFs.

The filing of lawsuits and the ongoing formation of interest groups aimed at promoting athletes' rights suggest that it is not a matter of *if* athletes will play a greater role, but rather *when* and *how* this will happen. If ISBs continue to disregard athletes, their perceived legitimacy will continue declining. ISBs can facilitate this process in a controlled way by investing in educating athletes so they are better equipped to participate in decision-making related to the international sports system.

The most significant barrier for ISBs is gaining an understanding that athletes and other external stakeholder groups do not inherently pose a threat to the system. In line with the principles of stakeholder capitalism, greater value creation can be generated by collaborating with stakeholders (Freeman and Phillips, 2002). If athletes or other stakeholder groups decide that the IOC and other ISBs are not acting on behalf of the international sports system, then even the authority of these groups could begin to be questioned. While I have argued that the institutionalisation of the system is important, that does not mean the IOC cannot be replaced by a different institutional authority or that the individuals working on behalf of the IOC cannot be

replaced if stakeholders completely lose faith in their ability to lead, or in the event of an uprising of sorts.

Referring to the previous chapter, additional rights can be granted from the top (i.e., the IOC) or fought for and won from the bottom. Citizenship from the top can result in passive citizenship, while citizenship from the bottom can lead to some form of revolution, potentially destabilising the entire system. A balance between these two extremes is preferable; ultimately, that outcome depends heavily on how the institutions behave.

13.2.3. The Role of Local Community Members

Local community members may find it most challenging to cultivate a sense of sports citizenship. In theory, education for this group could be harder to approach because they are more difficult to define. A given community might not realise they are being, or could be, affected by decisions made in the international sports system until something goes wrong. For example, there have been issues related to displacement during the construction of facilities for sports teams or mega-sporting events like the Olympic Games or FIFA World Cup. Local community members in a host city (or cities) might not be aware of their risk of displacement until it is already occurring. For these groups, which are not actively participating in the sports system but could be affected by its activities, staying informed when their city is under consideration to host a mega-sporting event and educating themselves about the potential implications of hosting such an event is crucial. This way, citizens will be better positioned to support event hosting, the construction of new stadiums, or to protest against such activities. The rights and responsibilities for this group are less clearly defined. This is not necessarily a negative; however, individuals in this group should have a means to voice grievances related to the impact of the international sports system.

13.2.3 The Role of Governments

The role of governments in the democratisation of sport and cultivation of sports citizenship is challenging to assess. The potential manipulation of sport by national governments for their own interests raises significant concerns for the IOC and has consequently reinforced the commitment to the autonomy of sport. The infringement of national governments on sport was validated as a serious concern following the systematic doping scandal in Russia, where the government was found to be facilitating such activities. Additionally, other governments have acknowledged some

responsibility to the international sports system by enabling their court systems to adjudicate grievances, utilising national resources to investigate potential corruption in sport, and enacting laws to combat corruption in the realm of sports (e.g., the Rodchenkov Act), as seen in the United States. It can be difficult to determine when government influence shifts into government overreach. Nevertheless, governments should feel a responsibility to the international sports system, just as other stakeholders should.

Europe may be the best example of a government that is committed to good governance and the autonomy of sport. The core features of the European Sport Model are as follows:

A pyramid structure for the organisation of sport and of sport competitions (from grassroots to national and international levels) and a central role for the sports federations;

A system of open competitions based on the principle of promotion/relegation;

Solidarity between the various constituent elements and operators;

A broadly autonomous sports movement that may develop partnerships with the public authorities (autonomy of sport);

Structures based on voluntary activity. (European Commission et al., 2022, p. 2)

The European Commission acknowledges the authority of sports federations and the autonomy of sport. European agencies are also committed to enforcing European laws, such as those related to freedom of movement and EU competition law (European Case Reports, 2006). Based on this information, one can assume that European agencies respect the principle of sport autonomy while also feeling a responsibility to the international sport system community by holding ISBs accountable when necessary. The European Commission further highlights the importance of nurturing the bottom-up aspect of sport governance, recognising that top-down and bottom-up relationships in the pyramidal structure are vital for democracy, transparency, and good governance. Furthermore, the “lack of a bottom-up relationship contributes in some way to undermining the [European Sport] Model” (European Commission et al., 2022, p. 224).

Although the IOC, IFs, and NOCs have made changes to their governance structures and processes to better reflect good governance principles, and the EU has reaffirmed the autonomy of sport, there remains a belief that the European Sport Model (ESM) should more accurately reflect European values such as democracy (European Commission et al., 2022, p. 5). A study conducted on the European Model of Sport found that some surveyed stakeholders viewed the current iteration of good governance principles as a threat to the European Sport Model, believing that

more needed to be done to ensure commitments to democracy, human rights, and stakeholder engagement were upheld (European Commission et al., 2022, p. 68). Ongoing research and information gathering further demonstrate the European agencies' commitment to their responsibilities as stakeholders in the sport system.

This level of commitment and responsibility may not be achievable for all governments. As a region aspiring to the democratic ideal, the nations belonging to the European Union adhere to good governance principles. Influence from governments that are less committed to these principles may cause more harm than benefit. Therefore, the international sports system should be cautious when governments attempt to influence it and should limit their scope of influence.

13.2.4 The Role of the Media

The media plays a significant role in the democratisation of sport as current stakeholders in the international sports system. Regarding the rights of media personnel, they often have access to sports events and press conferences. However, this access may come at a cost. For instance, if ISBs are portrayed unfavourably, the reporters' access may be reduced or revoked. This creates obstacles for media personnel, as they have a crucial role in revealing information that should be provided by ISBs in the spirit of transparency, should the ISBs choose not to share it. Such information can then be used to hold ISBs accountable. For example, in 2024, various publications and broadcasters, including The New York Times, ARD, Reuters, and The Associated Press, broke news regarding the tension between CHINADA, USADA, and WADA related to a lack of transparency concerning anti-doping measures leading up to the 2024 Paris Olympic Games. This is the type of behaviour expected from personnel interested in being sports citizens.

13.2.5 The Role of Other Stakeholders

Other stakeholders, including Rights Holders, Broadcasters, sponsors, and others invested in the international sports system, such as those in the betting industry, have a financial interest in this system. According to Eichberg's (2009) *Trialectics of Societal Spheres*, these stakeholders belong to the private sphere. While they have a responsibility to the sports system, it is assumed that their primary focus is on returning their investments. Due to a lack of transparency, it is difficult to ascertain the rights these stakeholder groups have received in exchange for their financial support. One can reasonably infer that they possess some degree of influence or rights based on their

financial investments, primarily in the Olympic Games and other World Championships. It may be naïve to suggest, but a significant reason for these organisations to take their responsibilities seriously is the sustainability of the international sports system.

Advocacy groups, such as those seeking to protect human rights or the environment, along with athlete unions (or athlete rights organisations), are institutional stakeholders. However, they likely lack the financial resources to influence the system in the same way that sponsors do. These groups can build social capital by investing in the civil sphere, much like athletes can. Advocacy groups and unions can also act similarly to the media when it comes to sharing information that can be used to hold ISBs accountable. For instance, the World Players Association released the Universal Declaration of Player Rights (World Players Association, 2017). Likewise, the Centre for Sport and Human Rights publishes guides and reports related to safeguarding and anti-discrimination, among other issues (Biscoe, 2025; UM and CSHR, 2025). The citizenship behaviours for these stakeholders would primarily focus on their responsibilities to athletes, local communities, the environment, and the international sports system as a whole.

SUMMARY OF PART III

Part III has focused on the role of democracy's cultural dimension in the international sports system. Chapter 10 explained the limitations of democracy's institutional dimension. Improvements to the governance of sport can and should be made in pursuit of democratisation. However, investment in the cultural dimension of democracy is also necessary. The current approach to good governance in sport emphasises internal stakeholders such as the IOC, IFs, NOCs, OCOGs, and regulatory bodies like WADA when addressing principles such as accountability, transparency, and democracy. Nevertheless, limiting the commitment to these principles to internal stakeholders undermines the principles themselves. The IOC's goals in committing to good governance principles include building trust with stakeholders, which will not happen if transparency, for instance, is not extended to all stakeholders. The current approach has also led to excessive influence from both public and private institutions. Vulnerable stakeholder groups, such as athletes, have been disadvantaged in the current system, whereas those stakeholders acting as extensions of the state, including the IOC and other ISBs, along with those representing private interests, have been able to exert greater influence on the international sports system. To address this, investing in democracy's cultural dimension is crucial. Engaging with the cultural dimension of democracy will foster the development of bridging and bonding social capital and better equip vulnerable stakeholders to participate in the institutional dimension of democracy during the governance of sport.

Chapter 11 explored the considerations for education in sport. Three types of education are introduced: formal, non-formal, and informal education. All three are essential; however, the current approach to Olympic education emphasises formal education. The Olympic Values Education Programme (OVEP) aims to instill Olympic history and values in a classroom environment. The assignments in OVEP vary from drawing pictures to interviewing athletes (IOC, 2023a). Grounded in the values of the OVEP, it has the potential to foster engagement with the cultural dimension of democracy. Nevertheless, the lack of sport engagement in the OVEP acts as a barrier to connecting with democracy's cultural aspect, which is crucial for preparing participants for interaction with democracy's institutional dimension. Education reform in sport should prioritise what Eichberg and Jespersen (2009) call formal education (education *for* sport), non-formal education (education *by* sport), and informal education (education *through* sport) if athletes are to become active participants in the system.

Chapter 12 highlighted the importance of citizenship in the process of democratisation. Shifting focus from democracy to citizenship prioritises the participants in the democratic system rather than the structural features of the system. The significance of the ‘citizen’ role in an individual’s life determines whether they are a passive or active citizen (Enslin and White, 2003). Turner (1990) presents two key criteria—the top-down/bottom-up dimension and the private/public dimension—that create four distinct types of systems with different citizen behaviours. If rights are granted from below and public space is favoured over private space, then the system represents a passive democracy, and citizens are more likely to display a passive approach to their civic duty (as long as the state continues to meet their needs). If rights are granted from above and citizens prioritise private space over public space, this leads to plebiscitary authoritarianism, resulting in the most passive citizens among the four types presented here. If rights are fought for from below while citizens value private space over public space, the system type is liberal pluralism, encouraging citizens to strive to meet their own needs, even against significant odds, rather than relying on the state. If rights are fought for from below and citizens prioritise public space over private space, the result is revolutionary contexts, and citizen behaviours are at their most active. There is no right or wrong system; they are shaped by historical and cultural circumstances. Nevertheless, participants can still aim to be more active or place greater value on public space while remaining within their specific quadrant. Participants in the sports system can evolve into active sport citizens by embracing democracy’s cultural dimension during sporting practices and through exposure to various educational types.

Chapter 13 focused on sport citizenship, a concept I want to leave readers with. Sport citizenship prioritises both rights and responsibilities, which vary for each stakeholder group; however, the rights and responsibilities of athletes may be the most significant. Athletes can embrace their sense of sport citizenship by cultivating connections with other athletes and engaging in the civil sphere. This approach allows them to counter the influences of the public sphere (e.g., the IOC) and private sphere (e.g., sponsors), enabling them to play a more substantial role in a system that deeply affects them.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout this dissertation, I have referenced several issues related to good governance in the international sports system. In response to these issues, I have advocated for further democratisation of the sports system. The approach presented throughout addresses both the institutional and cultural dimensions of democracy. Part II of this work concentrated on the impact of the institutional dimension on the governance of sport, while Part III examined the potential influence of the cultural dimension of democracy on the most significant non-institutional stakeholder group—athletes. The policy recommendations will pertain to the institutional dimension and focus on what the IOC or other institutional authorities can do to support democratisation. This will not only benefit those stakeholders currently more vulnerable in the existing system but will hopefully lead to greater value creation for the international sports system and legitimise ISBs such as the IOC. The IOC initially adopted good governance principles to protect the autonomy of sport (by combating corruption) and build trust among stakeholders. If this remains the IOC's goal, then changes to the approach should be considered. This does not necessitate abandoning the good governance principles that the IOC has already committed to. Instead, the Olympic Movement should deepen its commitment to good governance principles, which also support the project of democratisation.

Incorporation of 'external stakeholder' into the governance process

The first policy recommendation is to include external stakeholder groups, such as athletes, NGOs, and local communities, in the governance process. This recommendation primarily responds to the belief that greater democratisation and collaboration will enhance the overall health of the international sports system by sustaining it and creating additional value. Furthermore, greater inclusion should help to further legitimise the IOC. Athletes are already advocating for a more meaningful role in decision-making, and how those additional rights are realised will impact behaviour.

The variations in behaviours based on how rights are acquired were mentioned in Chapter 12, in the section on cultivating citizenship. If ISBs respond to athletes' calls for greater inclusion, then athletes may be more receptive to the idea that institutions are stakeholders working alongside them to improve the sports system. Alternatively, if athletes are eventually able to gain additional rights from below and perceive that ISBs are working against them, then the relationship between

these stakeholder groups could become more fraught. I am not suggesting that this happened immediately or that athletes have as much decision-making power as institutions like the IOC currently possess, but I am highlighting the fact that athletes are already asking for a greater role in decisions that affect them in the international sports system. If institutional authorities are willing to collaborate with athletes, gradual steps can be taken to ensure that the transition is handled responsibly.

There are also various ways that athletes (and eventually other external stakeholders) can be incorporated. For instance, it may be more feasible to start by developing channels that stakeholders can use to voice opposition or address grievances within the sports system. Athletes currently turn to national court systems or the media to express their displeasure, hoping that issues will be resolved. By involving national court systems or prompting investigations by government agencies, the autonomy of sport is being threatened. If the IOC intends to protect the autonomy of sport, then establishing channels within the international sports system that allow athletes to communicate their needs and preferences should at least be considered. These channels should be available to all athletes, not just those serving on commissions. As stated in Part I, complete balance among stakeholders is not the goal. However, the ability to challenge institutional authorities is a way to further democratise the system gradually, incorporating stakeholders.

Implicit in the incorporation of stakeholders regarding the decision-making process is a greater commitment to transparency and accountability. If stakeholder groups are to participate, they should be equipped with sufficient information to make informed decisions. If the ISBs want to be viewed as legitimate, then they must provide information to other stakeholder groups explaining and justifying their decision-making processes. With increased transparency, athletes and other stakeholder groups are better positioned to accept or challenge the decisions. Along with more transparency, athletes and other stakeholder groups seeking a greater role will also need education, which forms the basis for the second policy recommendation.

More Robust Stakeholder Education

Education reform is necessary for an improved experience within the international sports system. The Olympic Values Education Programme (OVEP) was not designed to prepare participants for involvement. The focus of educational reforms would be to foster a more comprehensive understanding of sport. This can be accomplished by leveraging the educational aspects of sporting

participation alongside formal teaching methods like those employed for the OVEP. Chapter 11 referenced three types of educational techniques: formal (education *for* sport), non-formal (education *by* sport), and informal (education *through* sport).

The institutional authorities, such as the IOC and IFs, are not responsible for facilitating engagement with the cultural dimension of democracy, as this should originate from the bottom up and be driven by athletes. However, the IOC and IFs can support educational efforts that enhance athletes' understanding of the values of sport. If ISBs are confident that the decisions they make on behalf of the international sports system are in the best interest of the athletes and/or the system as a whole, then educating athletes about the sport system and how to protect it should increase the perceived legitimacy of ISBs.

Regarding the content explored in education for sport, it should include information about sport as an agonistic social practice and how *agon* can be better emphasised. Moreover, the significance of competition and cooperation should also be highlighted. These suggestions can be added to OVEP in its current state. However, it is important that these 'classroom techniques' be supplemented with on-field activities to reinforce their importance for actual sporting practice. Additionally, athletes can be encouraged to apply the knowledge they acquire to their own training programs and club activities.

When possible, athletes should also be encouraged to resolve matters amongst themselves. Many aspects of preparation, training, and competition are approached hierarchically, with coaches and other authoritative figures making decisions for athletes or clubs. Learning about the nature of sport in formal settings should eventually lead participants to engage with sport in a way that fosters the cultivation of bridging and bonding social capital and mutual respect among participants. Consequently, this can result in education *through* sport occurring in a more organic manner. A major theme of the dissertation has been that sport is inherently so rich in many ways that it is unnecessary to infuse it with democracy or rely solely on formal modes of education. Simply having a better understanding of sport itself and leaning into its similarities with democracy as an agonistic social practice is beneficial enough to yield substantial results.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has advocated for greater democratisation of the international sports system. The first objective was to conceptualise normative and descriptive understandings of terms including democracy, stakeholders, institutional dimension democracy, cultural dimension of democracy, citizenship, and how these terms relate to the international sports system and its proposed reforms. While I considered democracy's traditional applications, an expanded notion of democracy, based on the ideas of Dewey ([1916] 2001; [1939] 2021), was applied throughout the dissertation. Democracy as a way of life is then referred to as the cultural dimension of democracy, which I argued is essential for cultivating social capital and fostering horizontal relationships among athletes in the international sports system. Engagement with democracy's cultural dimension should be applied to the democratisation of sporting practice. This contrasts with the more traditional application of democracy, referred to as democracy's institutional dimension, which can be applied to the democratisation of sports governance. The democratisation of the international sports system refers to more horizontal relationships among stakeholder groups, not complete equality.

The justification for the democratisation of sport is partly explained by the relationship between sport and democracy as agonistic social practices, which was the second objective. Participants engaging with these practices experience both cooperation and competition, allowing them to demonstrate something to themselves and others. The internal and external characteristics associated with agonistic social practices can be further amplified in the international sports system. Thus, democratising sport while leaning into its inherent characteristics will enable participants to gain more from their sporting practice and will also benefit the international sporting system as a whole.

Embracing characteristics associated with sport as an agonistic social practice could enhance the international sports system due to the perceived shortcomings of the current sport governance framework. The adoption of good governance principles by the Olympic Movement aimed to gain the respect and confidence of stakeholders, thereby increasing its legitimacy. However, athletes, in particular, represent a stakeholder group in the international sports system that has expressed dissatisfaction with the current governance approach. This dissatisfaction is conveyed through lawsuits and the formation of athletes' rights groups. The third objective

involved analysing the current role of democracy in the governance of sport, the limitations of this approach, and identifying potential improvements.

In Part II of the dissertation, I argued that the current approach to sport governance has suffered from the isolation of principles such as transparency, accountability, and democracy. Furthermore, the interpretation of these principles is limited to internal stakeholders belonging to organisations such as the IOC or IFs. In response to these limitations, I argued that the role of democracy should be expanded since it necessitates responsibility, transparency, and accountability. Therefore, prioritising the democratic principle should lead to a more comprehensive understanding of how the principles of good governance relate to each other while also requiring a greater commitment to them. Top-down reform of the international sports system focuses on the democratisation of sport governance and requires engagement with the institutional dimension of democracy. The democratisation of sport governance can address concerns related to the legitimacy of International Sports Bodies in addition to enhancing value creation and protecting the autonomy of sport. By including stakeholders that have been excluded from the process, such as athletes, the likelihood of outside challenges from national court systems or governments decreases.

Though I have argued for a greater role in decision-making for those stakeholder groups that desire more involvement, this should not happen immediately. Athletes and any other stakeholder group seeking a larger role will need to prepare for the additional rights and responsibilities that come with the proposed reforms. This was addressed through the fourth objective, which focused on the cultural dimension of democracy in the democratisation of sporting practice. It was argued that the international sports system is shaped by the public sphere (e.g., the IOC), the private sphere (e.g., sponsors), and the civil sphere (e.g., collective influence). Investing in the civil sphere is how athletes can unite to combat the influences of the public and private spheres. By further engaging with the cultural dimension of democracy and embracing the civil sphere, athletes can overcome the regulatory and financial pressures from both the public and private sectors.

Investment in education will be necessary for this process, with three types of education highlighted: education *for* sport, education *by* sport, and education *through* sport. The current OVEP serves as an example of education *for* sport, which can be enhanced by expanding it to include information about sport as an agonistic social practice. However, it is education through

sport that truly teaches athletes about their own relationship to sport and their relationship with other participants. Education through sport occurs through participation and reflects the educational nature of sport. A curriculum does not need to be tied to this type of education. By simply engaging in sport in specific ways that help athletes understand sport as an agonistic social practice and facilitate the cultivation of social capital and horizontal relationships, athletes will be better prepared to participate in the governance of sport. The emphasis on engaging with democracy's cultural dimension, education in sport, and the cultivation of citizens in Part III will be crucial for the development of rational decision-making when pursuing the democratisation of the sports system from the bottom-up.

The final objective focused on developing policy recommendations that involved incorporating non-institutional or external stakeholders into the governance process and investing in more robust stakeholder education. The latter recommendation is necessary to responsibly address the former. Pursuing these policy changes should strengthen the international sports system by making it more self-sustaining (enabling issues to be resolved within the international sports system instead of national court systems), thus protecting the autonomy of sport. Additionally, the IOC's perceived legitimacy should improve due to its willingness to include stakeholders in the governance of the international sports system.

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