

2. Achieving good governance in international sport organisations

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Introduction

In the past few decades, international sports governance has come under increased scrutiny following a series of “high profile difficulties”, including performance-enhancing drugs use, match-fixing, and the inability to ensure environmental sustainability (Henry & Lee, 2004, p. 26; Parliamentary Assembly Council of Europe, 2018). In addition, an increasing number of corruption accusations enveloping senior sport officials have been brought to light. Sports governance scholars argue that the governance structures of international sport organisations are not equipped to deal effectively with these difficulties (Forster, 2016; Henry & Lee, 2004; Katwala, 2000; Pieth, 2014). Consequently, these organisations are increasingly expected to enhance the quality of their institutional practices.

Academics, governmental actors and the sports world have wrapped this agenda in terms of “good governance” (European Union Expert Group Good Governance, 2013; Geeraert, 2019). During the past decade, good governance has even assumed the status of a mantra in sports governance discourse. However, the complexity and conceptual vagueness of good governance yields uncertainty about what governance standards are appropriate, and whether or not these principles are actually implemented by international sport organisations.

Said organisations have signalled their commitment to implementing good governance. This is no surprise: governance reforms are usually introduced in response to outside pressure. Institutions are incentivised to signal their commitment to governance improvements in order to minimise both public interventions, and reputation costs imposed by civil society actors. Yet, they, their senior officials, and their stakeholders often have a vested interest in status quo. As a result,

governance reforms are often not sufficiently far-reaching. At worst, they function primarily as public relations ploys that adamant business-as-usual practices (Geeraert, 2018).

This report aims to shed light on the status quo in regard to good governance in international sport organisations. It answers the following five main questions:

1. Why has good governance assumed the status of a mantra in international sports governance?
2. What is good governance, and why is it important for international sport organisations?
3. What measures have been taken by international sports organisations to improve their governance?
4. What are the major challenges for achieving good governance in international sport organisations?
5. Have the recent governance reforms been effective?

In answering these questions, the report mainly builds on the author's own empirical and theoretical work on good governance in international sport organisations.

Why has good governance assumed the status of a mantra in international sports governance?

For a long time, international sport organisations enjoyed an almost blanket autonomy from state interference (Geeraert, 2020). Nevertheless, over the past decades, governance failures have led to debates about the accountability of these organisations (Geeraert, 2019; Henry and Lee, 2004). Criticism includes a lack of serious commitment to combat doping (i.e., the illegal use of performance-enhancing drugs in sport), match-fixing (i.e., actions aimed at improperly altering the course and/or result of sport competitions) (Geeraert & Drieskens, 2020), and environmental degradation (Geeraert & Gauthier, 2018). In addition, international sport organisations' lack of democratic structures provides a major source of conflict, as disgruntled stakeholders increasingly seek legal redress to ensure their rights (Geeraert, 2016). Finally, senior sport officials have been accused of engaging in a variety of corrupt practices, including bribe-taking, fraud, vote rigging, extortion, and money laundering.

Most well-known is the litany of corruption-related indictments surrounding Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA). However, FIFA is not alone. Two reports issued by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) found extortion, fraud, and bribery practices at the highest levels of the International

Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) (WADA Independent Commission, 2015, 2016). Allegations of corruption levelled against smaller international sport federations are also well documented. Mexican Ruben Acosta allegedly received at least \$33 million in personal commissions during his 24 years as president of the International Volleyball Federation (FIVB) (Hoy, 2005). Tamas Aján, president of the International Weightlifting Federation (IWF), failed to account for the disappearance of an estimated \$5 million in International Olympic Committee (IOC) grants from two Swiss bank accounts (Hartmann, 2013). Hassan Moustafa, president of the International Handball Federation (IHF), secured a contract worth €602,000 with a German sports marketing company, which later acquired the International Handball Federation broadcasting rights (Ahl, 2013).

In response to these failures of governance, international institutions have changed their discourse, making the conditional nature of sporting autonomy more explicit. In other words, there is a growing idea that sport organisations need to earn their autonomy. The European Commission, for instance, holds that “Good governance in sport is a condition for the autonomy and self-regulation of sport organisations” (European Commission, 2011). The European Parliament has called “upon all sports governing bodies to commit to good governance practices [...] in order to reduce the risk of falling victim to corruption” (European Parliament, 2015). Also the Council of Europe has argued that “[t]he mainstreaming of good governance principles in the management of sports bodies is seen as an appropriate way to prevent and mitigate unethical behaviours including corruption” (Council of Europe, 2016).

The sport movement has partly embraced this mantra. Notably, current International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach has indicated on several occasions that “sports organisations need to justify their autonomy and demonstrate good governance” (Bach, 2013). Over the past decade, particularly the last five years, a large group of international sport organisations, including IAAF and FIFA, have engaged in governance reforms. Still, these reforms have been met with scepticism by scholars and international organisations alike (e.g. Pieth, 2014; Chappelet, 2017; Parliamentary Assembly Council of Europe, 2018, point 12). Whether international sport organisations are actually able to reform themselves is put into question. After all, governance reforms have an impact on established equilibria, as they may restrict particular individuals’ leeway, influence, and decision-making power. Those negatively affected by imminent reforms will therefore have a strong incentive to minimise change. As a result, governance

reforms are often insufficiently far-reaching or, as mentioned, even function as mere public relations ploys.

One could argue that the lack of (high levels of) good governance is unproblematic. After all, governance failures could be caused by a few “bad apples”; a small number of senior sport officials lacking moral character. In that case, it would suffice to replace the bad apples by good ones. The next section demonstrates, contrarily, that implementing good governance is crucial to decreasing corruption risks and increasing effectiveness.

What is good governance and why is it important for international sport organisations?

“Governance” and “good governance” are extremely broad and abstract notions for which no single definition exists. Within a sporting context, good governance is mostly concerned with prescribing bureaucratic practices and institutional rules and procedures. Geeraert (2018) advances four dimensions of good governance (see figure 1).

<p>1. Transparency refers to the reporting of an organisation’s own internal workings, which allows others to monitor these.</p> <p><i>This includes the online publication of statutes and internal regulation, multi-annual policy plans, the agenda and minutes of general assembly meetings, board decisions, annual reports (including financial statements), and remuneration reports.</i></p>
<p>2. Democratic processes entail free, fair, and competitive elections, actors’ involvement in decision-making processes that affect them, and fair and open internal debates.</p> <p><i>This includes ensuring the democratic (re-)appointment of board members, aiming for a differentiated and balanced composition of the board, organizing annual general assembly meetings, regular board meetings, establishing term limits, institutionalizing the participation of stakeholders in the policy processes, and implementing a gender equality policy.</i></p>
<p>3. Internal accountability and control refers to both the separation of powers in an organisation’s governance structure, and a system of rules and procedures that ensures staff and officials comply with internal rules and norms.</p> <p><i>This includes adopting a clear governance structure according to the principle of separation of powers, establishing an internal financial or audit committee, undergoing an external audit on an annual basis, ensuring that decisions can be contested through internal or external mechanisms, enforcing a code of conduct, and establishing conflict of interest procedures.</i></p>
<p>4. Societal responsibility refers to deliberately employing organisational potential and impact to have a positive effect on internal and external stakeholders, and society at large.</p> <p><i>This includes offering consulting to member organisations in the areas of management or governance, and implementing policies addressing health risks of sporting activities, sexual harassment in sport, doping, match-fixing, social inclusion through sport, discrimination in sport, gender equality in sport, environmental sustainability, and the dual career of athletes.</i></p>

Figure 1 The four dimensions of good governance

Implementing these dimensions of good governance is seen as a means to an end. More specifically, it has a positive impact in terms of legitimacy, effectiveness and resistance to unethical practices (see figure 2).

Implementing the four dimensions contributes to perceptions of fairness and legitimacy.
Transparency enhances trust, and incentivises staff and officials to perform better.
Democratic processes allow for more effective policies, as stakeholders contribute specialised knowledge to the decision-making process. Stakeholders are also more likely to accept policies when they feel a degree of ownership over them. In addition, open debate generates more effective solutions to policy problems, and free, fair, and competitive elections incentivise officials to perform better, as well as generate new problem-solving ideas.
Internal accountability and control stimulates learning, and decreases the likelihood of power imbalances, abuses of power and unethical conduct.
Demonstrating societal responsibility has a positive impact on legitimacy, because it enhances external audiences' trust. A positive relationship with internal and external stakeholders also contributes to more effective policies.

Figure 2 The impact of implementing the four dimensions of good governance

Implementing the four dimensions of good governance is not a panacea, though. It does not necessarily imply that organisations thereby automatically become effective, legitimate, and ethical. Conversely, organisations that fail to implement the dimensions and related principles are not necessarily corrupt, ineffective, and illegitimate. Such organisations will, however, experience a higher risk for falling into these categories.

To put it another way, if international sport organisations do not implement a sufficiently high standard of good governance, how can they be expected to be effective actors in the fight against doping, match-fixing, human trafficking, fraud, and money laundering in sports? Obviously, the organisations in question cannot address these transnational and multifaceted issues alone. Yet their private regulatory authority enables them to play a pivotal role in the governance networks that are established to effectively address these problems. In addition, international sport organisations operate in an environment where corruption risks are high. It is clear that the rapid and vast commercialisation of sport, as well as its potential for political instrumentalisation, has incentivised individuals to engage in corrupt practices. While implementing good governance in itself does not eradicate such practices, it does discourage corruption by increasing the likelihood that related acts will be discovered and punished. Organisations that do not adhere to high levels of transparency, democracy, and internal accountability are therefore exposed to higher risks of corruption.

This begs the question, to what extent do international sport organisations implement good governance? And have significant improvements been made? The subsequent sections provide a nuanced answer to these questions.

What measures have been taken by international sports organisations to improve their governance?

Responding to increasing threats by the European Union, the International Olympic Committee in 2008 introduced principles of good governance for the members of the Olympic Movement (Chappelet, 2016). The Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance of the Olympic and Sports Movement (PGG) are organised around seven themes and 38 sub-themes. Each sub-theme, in turn, contains “elements to be considered” (48 in total) (IOC, 2008a). They were formally adopted by the 2009 Olympic Congress in Copenhagen, which brought together representatives of the Olympic international sport federations and other Olympic Movement constituents (IOC, 2008b, 2009, point 41). The PGG are applicable to all Olympic Movement organisations, including the seven Winter Olympic and 28 Summer Olympic international sport federations.

It is clear that the PGG failed to establish a universal adoption of good governance practices by international sport federations. Indeed, the formal adoption of a good governance code does not necessarily imply the actual implementation of the standards put forward, especially when compliance is voluntary (Cuomo, Mallin, & Zattoni, 2016; Wymeersch, 2006). For over two decades, many observers assumed that international sport federations lacked good governance (Henry & Lee, 2004; Katwala, 2000). Even so, they did not empirically establish deficits – which would require the construction of indicators quantifying what the term comprises. That changed when Chappelet & Mrkonjic (2013) developed the Basic Principles of Governance in International Sport (BIBGIS), the first comprehensive set of indicators for assessing good governance in international sport federations. Geeraert (2015) followed, being the first to empirically assess good governance in a large group of international sport federations. He introduced the Sports Governance Observer, a benchmarking tool developed to quantify the quality of governance in international sport federations by means of an “SGO index”, composed of 46 indicators dispersed over four dimensions. In a report published by Danish NGO Play the Game, he demonstrated significant deficiencies in terms of transparency, democracy, and accountability within the majority of the 35 Olympic international sport federations (Geeraert, 2015; see table 1).

Table 1 Sports Governance Observer 2015 indices

Sports organisation (acronym)	SGO index	SGO transparency index	SGO democratic process index	SGO checks & balances index	SGO solidarity index
International Boxing Association (AIBA)	47%	45%	53%	42%	
Badminton World Federation (BWF)	56%	56%	50%	54%	64%
International Federation for Equestrian Sports (FEI)	76%	77%	70%	88%	68%
International Basketball Federation (FIBA)	44%	43%	39%	50%	
International Bobsleigh & Skeleton Federation (FIBT)	41%	39%	43%	42%	
International Fencing Federation (FIE)	51%	73%	60%	21%	
International Federation of Association Football (FIFA)	68%	73%	53%	71%	75%
International Federation of Gymnastics (FIG)	45%	48%	53%	42%	39%
International Hockey Federation (FIH)	43%	38%	44%	46%	
International Luge Federation (FIL)	34%	39%	39%	25%	
International Swimming Federation (FINA)	44%	45%	41%	46%	
International Ski Federation (FIS)	61%	77%	35%	58%	75%
International Federation of Rowing Associations (FISA)	55%	73%	48%	58%	39%
World Archery Federation (FITA/WA)	45%	50%	48%	46%	
International Volleyball Federation (FIVB)	38%	41%	36%	38%	
International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF)	53%	50%	43%	65%	
International Biathlon Union (IBU)	38%	48%	38%	29%	39%
International Canoe Federation (ICF)	43%	48%	50%	30%	
International Golf Federation (IGF)	28%	33%	25%	25%	
International Handball Federation (IHF)	48%	38%	43%	65%	
International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF)	53%	58%	50%	50%	
International Judo Federation (IJF)	36%	42%	38%	33%	32%
International Sailing Federation Limited (ISAF)	55%	47%	63%	56%	
International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF)	27%	43%	35%	17%	14%
International Skating Union (ISU)	42%	40%	43%	38%	
International Tennis Federation Limited (ITF)	37%	30%	47%	42%	29%
International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF)	46%	63%	50%	21%	50%
International Triathlon Union (ITU)	30%	33%	50%	17%	21%
International Weightlifting Federation (IWF)	39%	45%	40%	46%	21%
Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI)	48%	57%	36%	50%	
Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne (UIPM)	46%	44%	53%	21%	68%
United World Wrestling (UWW)	42%	50%	31%	46%	
World Curling Federation (WCF)	39%	52%	55%	25%	25%
World Rugby (WR)	46%	50%	48%	25%	61%
World Taekwondo Federation (WTF)	44%	48%	48%	46%	36%

Following the publication of the Sports Governance Observer 2015 report, the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF), an association of the 28 international sport federations that make up the Summer Olympic Programme, in 2016 introduced the Key Governance Principles and Basic Indicators (KGP) (ASOIF, 2016, p. 1). The KGP consist of 50 precepts of good governance, dispersed over five dimensions: transparency, integrity, democracy, sports development and solidarity, and control mechanisms (ASOIF, 2016). They have been approved by the association's General Assembly, which is comprised of the above mentioned federations (ASOIF, 2016a). The Association of Summer Olympic International Federations actively supports implementation of the principles among their members, and monitors compliance through a self-assessment questionnaire. Though they were developed specifically for the Summer Olympic sport federations, the Winter Olympic equivalents more recently also have signalled their commitment to implementing the principles (ASOIF, 2018).⁴³

In addition to these joint initiatives, a number of international sport federations have engaged in their own governance reform processes. Most notable are the reforms undertaken by FIFA and World Athletics (formerly IAAF) following the ethical scandals that enveloped these organisations in 2015. Moreover, subsequent to the Russian doping scandal that came to light in 2014, WADA in 2018 implemented governance reforms intended to strengthen its independence. These reforms were all based on recommendations put forward by (ad hoc) reform committees.

Can we trust the sport movement to regulate itself on good governance? According to the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations, "the Sports Movement is [...] in the best position to enact the key governance principles and indicators all international federations must abide by" (ASOIF, 2016, p. 3). More sceptical voices argue, contrarily, that self-regulation "privilege[s] business-as-usual practices" (Isailovic & Pattberg, 2016, p. 472) and often functions as a "public relations ploy designed to ward off government regulation" (Haufler, 2001, p. 1). Sports governance scholars echo these claims. They generally assume that international sport federations are unlikely to significantly improve their governance on

⁴³ Most recently, a general governance standard for sport organisations is being discussed within the framework of the International Partnership Against Corruption in Sport's (IPACS) Task Force 3 (optimising the processes of compliance with good governance principles to mitigate the risk of corruption). IPACS is a multi-stakeholder initiative which involves governmental representatives, international organisations, and international sports organisations.

their own account (Katwala, 2000; Pieth, 2014). The next section therefore explores the limits and opportunities of the PGG and KGP.

What are the major challenges for achieving good governance in international sport organisations?

Achieving and implementing governance reforms is not an easy feat. Geeraert (2019) identifies five potential barriers that render international sport federations unwilling and/or unable to implement good governance (see figure 3).

The potential barriers to implementing good governance
Barriers that render international sport federations unwilling to implement good governance
<p><i>Barrier 1: Costs for the organization and decision-makers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implementing good governance requires searching for, bargaining over, and establishing internal procedures, practices, and bodies, such as ethics and audit committees. - Implementing good governance may have negative effects on established power equilibria in organisations. - Implementing good governance may severely restrict the leeway of decision-makers (e.g. due to transparency requirements), or potentially even result in their dismissal (e.g. because of the establishment of term limits).
<p><i>Barrier 2: illegitimate governance standards</i></p> <p>International sport federations may not accept particular elements of good governance standard for appropriate conduct. For instance, they house officials from cultural backgrounds where good governance practices are not commonly accepted. Additionally, international sport federations are embedded in a sport governance culture in which practices associated with “bad governance” have been considered the normal way of conducting business.</p>
Barriers that render international sport federations unable to implement good governance
<p><i>Barrier 3: lack of expertise</i></p> <p>Good governance needs to be tailored to its specific organisational context, considering factors such as the number and nature of tasks conducted. Doing so requires specific governance expertise, which international sport federations may not have.</p>
<p><i>Barrier 4: vagueness of standards</i></p> <p>Standards of good governance are often subject to interpretation, as they rarely are formulated in a strict fashion, in order to allow for flexibility. Consequently, there is a high risk of inadequate implementation.</p>
<p><i>Barrier 5: insufficient financial means</i></p> <p>Small organisations may not have the economic resources necessary to establish robust internal procedures and control bodies.</p>

Figure 3 The potential barriers to implementing good governance

Achieving good governance requires taking these barriers into account. More specifically, the PGG or KGP will only achieve fundamental change if they are accompanied with compliance mechanisms that address the five potential barriers

to implementing good governance in international sport federations. Geeraert (2019) demonstrates that the International Olympic Committee does not implement compliance mechanisms for the PGG addressing said barriers.

Table 2 shows a more nuanced picture with regard to Association of Summer Olympic International Federations and its KGP. The association namely implements mechanisms that address the second, third, and fourth barriers. This means that the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations removes important barriers that render international sport federations unable to implement good governance (i.e. lack of expertise and vagueness of standards). It also aims to persuade international sport federations of the legitimacy and importance of the KGP. This is crucial: federations that believe in the significance of implementing the principles are motivated to take responsibility in the implementation process and apply good governance beyond (minimal) formal requirements. Accordingly, these are all necessary mechanisms for achieving it.

These mechanisms, however, are not sufficient. Importantly, the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations does not sanction international sport federations that do not comply with the KGP. Federations able but refusing to implement them, for instance, because of the negative impact they have on decision-makers, do not face sanctions. Needless to say, they will continue to resist implementation. This is particularly problematical for principles of good governance that potentially have negative repercussions for decision-makers, such as reporting on remuneration, and establishing ethics commissions and term limits. Those negatively affected by impending reforms of the kind will naturally have a strong incentive to minimise change. Simply put, without sanctions, it is unlikely that international sport federations universally would implement good governance.

Table 2 The mechanisms implemented to induce compliance with the PGG and KGP

Barriers	Compliance mechanism	PGG	KGP
Costs for the organization and decision-makers	<p>Monitoring Monitoring compliance decreases the likelihood that non-compliance with governance standards will go unnoticed. Rigorous monitoring requires the construction of clear criteria for assessment. Monitoring must be independent, as those who are scrutinised are incentivised to produce reports that reflect favourably upon themselves.</p>	Absent	Self-assessment, reviewed by independent consultant.
	<p>Credible and heavy sanctions To induce compliance, sanctions should be credible and impose a cost greater than the benefit of non-compliance. In that case, a high likelihood of sanctions in case of non-compliance provides a measure of latent control.</p>	Absent	Absent
Illegitimate standards	<p>Persuasion Persuasion uses arguments about the effectiveness and legitimacy of standards.</p>	Largely absent	Self-assessment questionnaire aims to persuade international sport federations to comply, in order to achieve higher scores on the individual indicators. Continued intensive dialogue and individual meetings with identified contact points to entice the federations to achieve higher scores.
	<p>Social learning Social learning occurs, when ideas and experiences are shared between organisations. Actors face social disapproval when deviating from governance standards.</p>	Largely absent	Dispersing best practice examples from a diverse range of federation workshops, allowing them to share experiences and ideas. Informing international sport federations how their scores on the assessment rank in relation to each other.

Barriers	Compliance mechanism	PGG	KGP
Lack of expertise	Transfer of knowledge and resources Actors that do not have the financial, administrative, and technical capacity to comply are directly hampered in their compliance efforts. An appropriate problem-solving strategy is then to engage in capacity building via transfer of knowledge and resources.	Absent	Regular on-demand advice to federations on offer. Dispersing best practice examples from a diverse range of federations.
Vagueness of standards	Rule interpretation/specification Both authoritative clarification of norms and specification of implementation obligations remedy non-compliance stemming from failures to practically implement (often nebulous) governance principles. Such a mechanism needs not be formalised in an adjudication body, but can be informal and non-binding.	Absent	Ensuring consistency in the federations' self-assessment scores via an authoritative body (the Governance Task Force). Individual meetings with all federations to explain scores, and indicate how they can be improved. Distribution of best practices, which gives federations easy to implement practical examples. Regular on-demand advice on the implementation of principles. Potential voluntary and confidential corrective action reports, which assist the implementation of certain principles.
Insufficient financial means	Providing financial support or pooling resources	Absent	Absent

What would such sanctions ideally look like? To begin with, compliance with enforceable minimum criteria of good governance established on the basis of the KGP would be monitored independently. International sport federations that deliberately opted for non-compliance would subsequently face credible and heavy sanctions. These in the shape of a variety of cost imposing measures, including financial repercussions, exclusion from other benefits, and reputational costs associated with “naming and shaming”. Case in point, a fully-fledged naming and shaming strategy entailing the full disclosure of data on insubordination (i.e. “naming”) accompanied with some form of disapproval (i.e. “shaming”), would increase the price of non-compliance. Defiant federations would thereby face additional costs in the form of adverse publicity, and increased pressure from third parties (i.e., news media, stakeholders, and international organisations) to reform

(Vogel, 2006). The Association of Summer Olympic International Federations assesses implementation of the KGP on the basis of a self-assessment questionnaire. Yet thus far, it has never published the individual scores of reviewed federations.

Why do the International Olympic Committee and Association of Summer Olympic International Federations not simply enforce their codes of good governance by means of sanctions? In fact, neither has the authority to do so. Because they have been incorporated into the International Olympic Committee Code of Ethics, which forms an “integral part” of the Olympic Charter (IOC, 2016a, rule 22), the PGG in principle are mandatory for the (Olympic) international sport federations. The Code, however, only applies to them “in all their relations with the IOC” (IOC, 2016b, p. 12), which softens the legal status of the PGG. Moreover, the International Olympic Committee confirms that it has no (de facto) authority to force the PGG upon Olympic international sport federations (Avison, 2014). The Association of Summer Olympic International Federations stresses that “[e]ach international sport federation owns its evaluation and monitoring system” (ASOIF, 2016, p. 3).

Compliance with both the PGG and KGP is thus (de facto) voluntary, and international sport federations can simply withdraw from the KGP. The Association of Summer Olympic International Federations therefore needs a broad consensus among its constituents, before it can implement sanctioning mechanisms. The problem is a lack of rational incentives for sport federations to delegate far-reaching enforcement authority to the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations, or any other third party. Put simply, international sport federations seek to retain control over their internal workings.

What does this mean for the potential of self-regulation to achieve good governance in international sport federations? Since the PGG lack significant mechanisms removing the barriers to compliance, they are unlikely to have a significant impact. The KGP, by contrast, are accompanied by such mechanisms. They accordingly constitute a necessary step towards truly achieving a common governance standard in international sport federations. However, as the KGP’s compliance system lacks fully independent external monitoring of minimum criteria, and non-compliant federations do not face sanctions, this system is unlikely to achieve the universal adoption of good governance by international sport federations.

What would the solution be, then? Different types of actors can play different roles in ensuring that the necessary compliance mechanisms are implemented. That

being the case, a number of actions could work in tandem with Association of Summer Olympic International Federations' initiative. On one hand, sanctions could be implemented by public and/or civil society actors. For example, NGOs and universities could impose costs via naming and shaming. International sport federations' host countries could implement laws and policies that enforce a minimum standard for the formers' governance. Public actors could also organize their own compliance monitoring. The EU could in that regard set a governance standard for international sport federations. Willing federations would then voluntarily pledge their commitment to implementing the standard, and the European Commission could monitor compliance. Such a system is already in place for digital companies like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Microsoft, with regard to combating online hate and disinformation. Given the importance international sport federations attach to having a good relationship with the EU, this mechanism could be expected to be very effective (Geeraert & Drieskens, 2015).

On the other hand, public actors could apply pressure on international sport federations to implement adequate monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms from within. Pressure could also be applied on Association of Summer Olympic International Federations to publish the good governance scores of the individual sport federations, which in its turn could lead to naming and shaming sanctions. This pressure is more likely to be effective when jointly applied, for instance, within the context of an international/regional organisation such as the EU or Council of Europe.

Is it really necessary to apply pressure on international sport federations to improve their governance? Does it not suffice to have them regulate themselves in order to address the most severe deficits? To answer those questions, our next section explores the effectiveness of recent governance reforms.

Have the recent governance reforms been effective?

It is clear from the above that imminent governance reforms usually face internal resistance. The reforms that are actually being implemented are therefore often sub-optimal. WADA, for instance, still faces criticism about its lack of independence from the International Olympic Committee and national governments, limited budget, failure to achieve adequate compliance with the World Anti-Doping Code, inability to reasonably take into account the viewpoints of athletes, and failure to

sufficiently protect athletes' fundamental human rights (Houlihan & Hanstad, 2019; Waddington & Møller, 2019).

To accurately signal governance strengths and deficits, there is a need to move beyond basic indicators and principles. Consequently, in order to assess recent governance reforms, the Sports Governance Observer 2015 indicators were overhauled when Geeraert (2018) introduced the new Sports Governance Observer 2018 benchmarking instrument. It builds on an all-new set of now 57 principles of good governance, measured through 309 indicators. The latter are dispersed over the same four dimensions of good governance as those used in the Sports Governance Observer 2015 report, namely transparency, democratic processes, internal accountability and control, and societal responsibility.

Danish NGO Play the Game published Geeraert's assessment of the governance of the international sport federations for football, athletics, swimming, tennis, and handball. The research shows that, despite implementing highly publicised governance reforms, FIFA and IAAF still have important institutional deficiencies. The International Swimming Federation, International Tennis Federation Limited, and International Handball Federation even fail to meet acceptable standards of good governance. Table 3 summarises the results of the study.

Table 3 Main results of the Sports Governance Observer 2018 survey

Sports organisation (acronym)	SGO index	SGO transparency index	SGO democratic process index	SGO internal accountability index	SGO societal responsibility index
International Federation of Association Football (FIFA)	61%	68%	51%	64%	62%
International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF)	41%	20%	58%	43%	43%
International Handball Federation (IHF)	37%	23%	45%	47%	34%
International Swimming Federation (FINA)	23%	33%	21%	24%	18%
International Tennis Federation Limited (ITF)	29%	49%	31%	23%	16%

While the Sports Governance Observer 2018 scores vary greatly among these federations, a few common issues are noteworthy:

- The surveyed federations' boards are unsatisfactorily held to account by their respective general assemblies. Said federations fail to act strategically, meaning do not establish clear strategic plans that outline objectives and envisioned actions.
- The surveyed federations lack formal strategies for involving different stakeholder groups in their policy processes.
- Establishing term limits appears to become an accepted standard of good governance in international federations. By contrast, a number of good governance elements are not (yet) regarded as expected appropriate conduct. These include ensuring that a proportion of the board members are independent, reporting on corruption risk assessments and conflicts of interest, requiring entities that receive funding to implement anti-corruption controls, and organising board self-evaluations.
- With the exception of FIFA, the surveyed federations generally fail to report adequately on policy plans, board decisions, and allocated funds. While implementing new governance structures may take time, from a practical point of view, publishing information is less demanding. Appropriate reporting could therefore be regarded as a short-term priority in federations' good governance (reform) policies.
- When implementing good governance, the devil is in the detail. Elements of good governance that, on the surface, appeared to be implemented were often not found to adhere to sufficiently high standards.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to compare the five surveyed federations' Sports Governance Observer 2018 scores with their results on Association of Summer Olympic International Federations' KGP. Indeed, the association only publishes anonymised federation scores. It is likely, however, that the five federations achieve higher scores on the latter assessment. The reason is two-fold. First, though the Sports Governance Observer benchmarking instrument is based on principles similar to those issued by Association of Summer Olympic International Federations, it relies on more detailed indicators of good governance. Achieving high scores simply is easier, when the parameters used for assessment are broad.

Second, the Sports Governance Observer 2018 advances a number of principles and indicators that are clearly not (yet) considered standard for appropriate conduct in international federations, including for example independent board members, and conducting and publishing corruption risk assessments. This despite the fact that

the Sports Governance Observer 2018 principles and indicators are based on established international best practices and recommendations.

In closing, while it is clear that progress has been made in the past few years, the small yet diverse surveyed sample demonstrates that international sport federations still have significant governance deficits. It also demonstrates the necessity of a detailed, independent assessment of good governance to expose deficits.

Conclusion and recommendations

As a result of the many failures of governance and resultant external pressure to improve the institutional quality of international sport organisations, good governance has assumed the status of a mantra in international sports governance discourse. Few sport organisations would today deny its importance and relevance. Nonetheless, good governance is an abstract concept for which there exists no single definition. The principles of good governance advanced by the Olympic and sport movement are too broad and vague to serve as a clear and sufficient minimum standard. It is therefore difficult to establish if and when an international sport organisation implements a high enough standard of governance.

In other words, there is a lot of uncertainty about good governance. This report aims to shed some light on the status quo with regard to good governance in international sport organisations. It shows that there is both reason for optimism and pessimism. On the one hand, important progress has been made in the past few years. Significant initiatives include Association of Summer Olympic International Federations' KGP and its related persuasion and support mechanisms. A number of major international sport organisations, including FIFA, World Athletics, and WADA, have furthermore engaged in substantial reforms. The movement towards better governance in international sport appears to be genuine.

On the other hand, there still is a lot of room for improvement, as international sport organisations – some more than others - still have serious governance deficits. Because they were so severe, establishing these deficits used to be relatively easy. It only required the construction of basic indicators of good governance to empirically demonstrate that the gaps were quite abysmal. Now that a large group of organisations is implementing basic standards of good governance, assessment requires more sophistication and nuance. As more expertise is required to assess good governance, international sport organisations find it easier to ward off external pressure for improvement. For instance, even those that are seriously underperforming in

the area can refer to their participation in Association of Summer Olympic International Federations' initiative, to indicate being "on the right track". Yet even though the association's efforts are commendable, they fall short of establishing a common proper standard of good governance in international sport organisations.

To be clear, good governance is not a panacea. Implementing structures, rules, and bureaucratic practices associated with transparency, democracy, accountability, and social responsibility will not simply render an organisation effective, legitimate, and ethical. Expertise, leadership, innovation, and organisational culture are only a few of the other key elements that influence organisational performance (Geeraert & van Eekeren, 2021). Moreover, good governance needs to be implemented in a smart and flexible manner, or it risks producing negative effects. Organisations that do not implement good governance can, even so, almost certainly be expected to encounter serious problems, as many examples in international sports governance demonstrate.

In order to establish a common high standard of good governance in international sport organisations, this report recommends the following actions. These can work simultaneously (see figure 4).

1. Require the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations to publish the individual scores of its annual governance assessment.
2. Require the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations and the International Olympic Committee to implement more far-reaching principles of good governance.
3. Require the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations and the International Olympic Committee to implement a robust monitoring and sanctioning mechanism for their principles of good governance.
4. Support the democratisation of international sports governance via capacity building initiatives that ensure the bottom-up organisation of key stakeholders, such as athletes.
5. Establish a clear minimum standard for the four dimensions of good governance for international sport organisations (i.e. transparency, democracy, internal accountability and control, and societal responsibility), and ensure their commitment via a pledge board established at the EU level.
6. Empower civil society organisations that independently can monitor (i.e. via naming and shaming) the implementation of good governance by international sport organisations, such as WADA, the Court of Arbitration for Sport, and the International Olympic Committee.
7. Form a coalition of willing countries that aim for good governance in international sport organisations.
8. Apply pressure on international sport organisations' host countries to enforce a minimum standard of good governance.

Figure 4 Recommended actions to achieve a universal high standard of good governance in international sport organisations

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