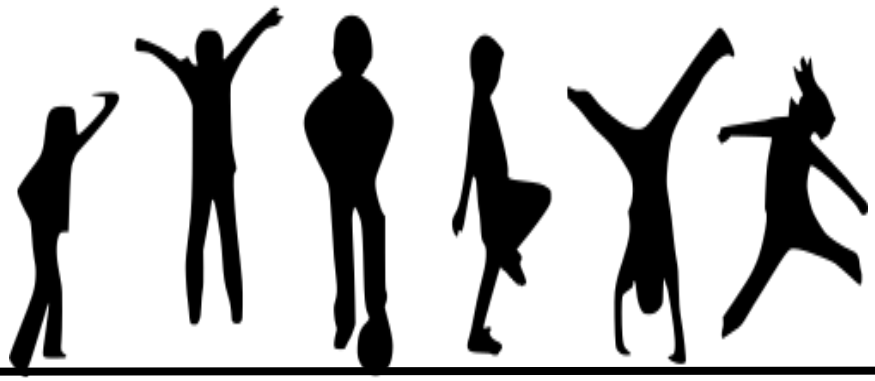
Athens Journal of Sports

Quarterly Academic Periodical, Volume 12, Issue 4
Published by the Athens Institute
URL: https://www.athensjournals.gr/ajspo Email: journals@atiner.gr
e-ISSN: 2241-7915 DOI: 10.30958/ajspo



Athens Journal of Sports

Quarterly Academic Periodical, Volume 12, Issue 4, December 2025
Published by the Athens Institute
URL: https://www.athensjournals.gr/ajspo Email: journals@atiner.gr
e-ISSN: 2241-7915 DOI: 10.30958/ajspo

Front Pages

Athens Journal of Sports

Published by the Athens Institute

Athens Institute is an Athens-based World Association of Academics and Researchers based in Athens. Athens Institute is an independent and non-profit Association with a Mission to become a forum where Academics and Researchers from all over the world can meet in Athens, exchange ideas on their research and discuss future developments in their disciplines, as well as engage with professionals from other fields. Athens was chosen because of its long history of academic gatherings, which go back thousands of years to Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum. Both these historic places are within walking distance from Athens Institute's downtown offices. Since antiquity, Athens was an open city. In the words of Pericles, Athens"…is open to the world, we never expel a foreigner from learning or seeing". ("Pericles' Funeral Oration", in Thucydides, The History of the Peloponnesian War). It is Athens Institute's mission to revive the glory of Ancient Athens by inviting the World Academic Community to the city, to learn from each other in an environment of freedom and respect for other people's opinions and beliefs. After all, the free expression of one's opinion formed the basis for the development of democracy, and Athens was its cradle. As it turned out, the Golden Age of Athens was in fact, the Golden Age of the Western Civilization. Education and (Re)searching for the 'truth' are the pillars of any free (democratic) society. This is the reason why Education and Research are the two core words in Athens Institute's name.

The *Athens Journal of Sports* (AJSPO) is an Open Access quarterly double-blind peer reviewed journal and considers papers from all areas of sports and related sciences. Many of the papers published in this journal have been presented at the various conferences sponsored by the Sport, Exercise, & Kinesiology Unit of the Athens Institute & the Panhellenic Association of Sports Economists and Managers (PASEM). All papers are subject to Athens Institute's Publication Ethical Policy and Statement.

Athens Journal of Sports
ISSN NUMBER: 2241-7915 - DOI: 10.30958/ajspo
Volume 12, Issue 4, December 2025
Download the entire issue (PDF)

Athens Journal of Sports
Editorial and Reviewers' Board

President's Message

All Athens Institute's publications including its e-journals are open access without any costs (submission, processing, publishing, open access paid by authors, open access paid by readers etc.) and is independent of presentations at any of the many small events (conferences, symposiums, forums, colloquiums, courses, roundtable discussions) organized by Athens Institute throughout the year and entail significant costs of participating. The intellectual property rights of the submitting papers remain with the author. Before you submit, please make sure your paper meets the basic academic standards, which includes proper English. Some articles will be selected from the numerous papers that have been presented at the various annual international academic conferences organized by the different divisions and units of the Athens Institute for Education and Research. The plethora of papers presented every year will enable the editorial board of each journal to select the best, and in so doing produce a top-quality academic journal. In addition to papers presented, Athens Institute will encourage the independent submission of papers to be evaluated for publication.

The current issue is the fourth of the twelfth volume of the *Athens Journal of Sports (AJSPO),* published by the Sport, Exercise, & Kinesiology Unit of the Athens Institute under the aegis of the Panhellenic Association of Sports Economists and Managers (PASEM).

Gregory T. Papanikos
President
Athens Institute

26th Annual International Conference on Sports: Economic, Management, Marketing & Social Aspects 11-15 May 2026, Athens, Greece

The Sports Unit of ATINER organizes its **26th Annual International Conference on Sports: Economic, Management, Marketing & Social Aspects, 11-16 May 2026, Athens, Greece** sponsored by the Athens Journal of Sports. The aim of the conference is to bring together academics and researchers of all areas of sports. Please submit a proposal using the form available (https://www.atiner.gr/2025/FORM-SPO.doc).

Academic Members Responsible for the Conference

Dr. Gregory T. Papanikos | Dr. Maria Konstantaki | Dr. Chris Sakellariou | Dr. Sharon Claire Bolton | Dr. Valia Kasimati | Dr. Cleopatra Veloutsou | Dr. Christos Anagnostopoulos

Important Dates

- Abstract Submission: **20 January 2026**
- Acceptance of Abstract: 4 Weeks after Submission
- Submission of Paper: **13 April 2026**

Social and Educational Program

The Social Program Emphasizes the Educational Aspect of the Academic Meetings of Athens Institute.

- Greek Night Entertainment (This is the official dinner of the conference)
- Athens Sightseeing: Old and New-An Educational Urban Walk
- Social Dinner
- Mycenae Visit
- Exploration of the Aegean Islands
- Delphi Visit

Conference Fees

Conference fees vary from 400€ to 2000€
Details can be found at: https://www.atiner.gr/fees

22nd Annual International Conference on Sport & Exercise Science 27-31 July 2026, Athens, Greece

The Sports Unit of ATINER will hold its **22nd Annual International Conference on Sport & Exercise Science, 27-31 July, Athens, Greece** sponsored by the Athens Journal of Sports. You may participate as stream leader, presenter of one paper, chair a session or observer. Please submit an abstract (email only) to: atiner@atiner.gr, using the abstract submission form (https://www.atiner.gr/2026/FORM-FIT.doc).

Important Dates

- Abstract Submission: **23 December 2025**
- Acceptance of Abstract: 4 Weeks after Submission
- Submission of Paper: **23 June 2026**

Academic Member Responsible for the Conference

- Dr. Maria Konstantaki, Academic Member, Athens Institute & Senior Lecturer, Buckinghamshire New University, UK.

Social and Educational Program

The Social Program Emphasizes the Educational Aspect of the Academic Meetings of Athens Institute.

- Greek Night Entertainment (This is the official dinner of the conference)
- Athens Sightseeing: Old and New-An Educational Urban Walk
- Social Dinner
- Mycenae Visit
- Exploration of the Aegean Islands
- Delphi Visit
- Ancient Corinth and Cape Sounion

More information can be found here: https://www.atiner.gr/social-program

Conference Fees

Conference fees vary from 400€ to 2000€
Details can be found at: https://www.atiner.gr/fees

Athens Journal of Sports - Volume 12, Issue 4, December 2025 – Pages 181-198

Team Culture as a Function of Team Success

By Colin Pennington[*] & Zach Nipper[±]

Sport has gained significant importance globally, acting as a refuge for individuals to express themselves freely. A strong "sporting culture" within teams is crucial for their success, as it defines their identity and promotes teamwork towards common goals. The primary aim of this study was to explore the best sport coaching styles and establish a desired team culture by synthesizing existing literature to gather and synthesize the existing body of knowledge related to coaching styles and team culture in sports. The review focused on peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and other academic sources published in the last two decades to ensure the inclusion of contemporary research findings. The following data were systematically extracted: (1) coaching styles: specific coaching approaches or behaviors discussed (e.g., autocratic, democratic, transformational, transactional, etc..); (2) team culture: key themes related to team dynamics, shared values, communication patterns, and group cohesion; (3) outcomes measured: metrics used to assess the effectiveness of the coaching style (e.g., athlete performance, team cohesion, psychological outcomes, satisfaction); (4) findings: summary of results and recommendations for coaching and team culture development. This article concludes by synthesizing themes from the literature into recommendations and suggestions for team coaches and team leaders to establish and maintain a positive team culture to enhance the likelihood of team success.

Keywords: *Sport success; coaching; leadership; sport performance; sport psychology*

Introduction

Sport, over the past decades, has become increasingly influential for people around the world. As the popularity of sports grows, interest in them becomes more detailed. Fans have come to be concerned about not only what is seen superficially but also what is happening behind the games, such as personal interests, coaches, stories about players, game styles, and strategies (Kang-Won 2021). A 'sporting culture' is considered one of the most prominent contributors to the success of an organization (Cole & Martin 2018). A team or organization will not be as effective without a strong culture as it could be with one.

A positive sporting culture refers to an environment within sports that promotes respect, inclusivity, integrity, teamwork, fair play, and enjoyment, while discouraging negative behaviors such as cheating, violence, and discrimination (Australian Sports Commission n.d.). This type of culture focuses on the well-being of athletes, encourages personal and collective growth, and fosters a sense of community and mutual respect among participants, coaches, and fans. In a positive sporting culture, success is defined not only by victories but by the development of character and relationships.

[*]Director, Assistant Professor of Exercise Science, Gwynedd Mercy University, USA.
[±]Sport and Exercise Science student, Randolph College, USA.

Key aspects of a positive sporting culture include (see Australian Sports Commission, n.d.) (a) respect for others - encouraging mutual respect among teammates, opponents, coaches, and fans, creating an environment of understanding and tolerance; (b) fair play - prioritizing honest competition, where winning is not achieved by breaking rules or manipulating outcomes; (c) inclusivity - ensuring that sports are accessible to people of all backgrounds, abilities, and genders, promoting diversity and equal opportunities; (d) health and well-being - focusing on the mental and physical well-being of athletes, encouraging balanced lifestyles and stress management, and discouraging overtraining or harmful practices; (e) leadership and mentorship - coaches and senior players are expected to lead by example, guiding younger or less experienced athletes, and fostering a growth mindset. The ultimate purpose and outcome goal of a positive sporting culture is to foster consistent winning and peak athlete performance from the positive sporting culture ingredients.

A team's culture is about the conduct and behavior of everyone involved in the organization, it is working together towards shared objectives and, as such, is an immediately identifiable part of the group's identity (Hughes 2018). A team culture will also need influential personnel that will step up and become architectural leaders for the rest of the team members as well as the coaches and fans to recognize as someone fully embodying the team's culture throughout their everyday life.

Reflecting the team culture the most are team captains. Captains are trusted, respected, encourage teamwork, suitable role models, have a high sense of belonging to the team, competitive, unyielding, and courageous (Gökduman et al. 2023). For the culture and the players to function and be successful, a good, strong-minded coach respected by all is important. Players and staff alike would probably not perform up to their full potential if they do not trust their coaches and teammates. Trust is the basis of all human relationships and can be said to be the most fundamental power to continue the relationship. In addition, trust is accepted as an attitude toward the formation and maintenance of human relationships (Lee et al. 2023).

Bearing in mind the importance of team culture on athlete and team success, the purpose of this paper is to inform athletes along with current and prospective coaches on what an effective team culture is, how to build an effective and long-lasting team culture, the type of personnel required in order to carry out the team culture, and how to enforce the team culture into action in order to achieve success on the field as well as off it.

Method

The primary objective of this systematic literature review was to synthesize existing knowledge on sport coaching styles and their influence on the development of a successful team culture. This section details the research design, systematic search strategy, data extraction protocol, and thematic analysis approach employed to address the study's aim.

Research Design

This study adopted a systematic literature review design to comprehensively identify, evaluate, and synthesize empirical evidence pertaining to coaching styles and team culture in sports. This methodological choice was predicated on its rigorous and transparent approach to knowledge synthesis, enabling the identification of key trends, theoretical underpinnings, and best practices within the field (Moher et al. 2009; Petticrew & Roberts 2006). The review specifically focused on peer-reviewed academic literature to ensure the inclusion of high-quality, evidence-based research.

Search Strategy and Study Selection

A comprehensive and replicable search strategy was implemented across multiple electronic databases to maximize the identification of relevant studies. The following academic databases were systematically searched: PsycINFO, SPORTDiscus, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), Scopus, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected for their extensive coverage of psychological, sport science, education, and broader scientific literature.

The search was conducted using a combination of carefully selected keywords and phrases, including: "sport coaching styles," "effective coaching in sports," "team culture in sports," "coach-athlete relationships," "leadership in sports," and "team dynamics." Boolean operators (AND, OR) were utilized to combine these terms effectively.

To augment the database search, reference lists of key articles identified during the initial search were manually scanned for additional relevant studies that might not have been captured.

Studies were systematically screened for inclusion based on the following pre-defined criteria:

- Empirical research focusing on the relationship between coaching styles and team culture in any team sport.
- Publication date between January 1, 2013, and December 31, 2023, to ensure the inclusion of contemporary research findings.
- Language of publication restricted to English.
- Publication type limited to peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, and academic books.
- Content relevance providing direct insights into the interplay between coaching style, team culture, and team performance outcomes.

Studies were systematically excluded if they met any of the following criteria:

- Did not focus on team-based sports or coaching within a team context.
- Were not peer-reviewed (e.g., conference abstracts, opinion pieces, editorials).
- Focused primarily on individual sports or aspects of sport performance unrelated to coaching or team dynamics.

Following the systematic application of inclusion and exclusion criteria, a total of 104 articles were selected for full-text review and thematic analysis.

Data Extraction Protocol

For each of the included articles, relevant data were systematically extracted using a standardized protocol to ensure consistency and comprehensiveness. The extracted data categories included:

- Coaching Styles: Specific coaching approaches or behaviors examined (e.g., autocratic, democratic, transformational, transactional, laissez-faire).
- Team Culture: Key themes related to team dynamics, shared values, communication patterns, and group cohesion as described in the study.
- Outcomes Measured: Metrics used to assess the effectiveness of the coaching style or the characteristics of the team culture (e.g., athlete performance, team cohesion, psychological well-being, athlete satisfaction).
- Key Findings and Recommendations: A concise summary of the study's main results and any explicit recommendations for coaching practice or team culture development.

Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

A thematic analysis approach, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed to identify, analyze, and report patterns within the extracted data. This iterative process involved several distinct stages:

All 104 selected articles were thoroughly read and re-read to achieve an immersive understanding of their content, key arguments, and findings related to coaching styles and team culture.

The extracted data were systematically coded to identify recurring patterns, concepts, and ideas. This involved assigning descriptive labels to segments of text that captured specific coaching behaviors, their perceived impacts, and their connections to team culture outcomes.

Theme Development

Initial codes were then collated and grouped into broader, overarching themes. These emergent themes were organized under two primary categories reflecting the study's aim: (a) Effective Coaching Styles and (b) Team Culture Development. Each primary category contained sub-themes delineating specific coaching approaches and cultural practices consistently identified as beneficial.

Reviewing and Refining Themes

The developed themes were critically reviewed to ensure they accurately reflected the data and captured the essence of the findings. This involved checking for internal homogeneity (coherence within themes) and external heterogeneity (clear distinctions between themes).

Defining and Naming Themes

Each theme was precisely defined and given a clear, concise name that encapsulated its meaning and scope. Illustrative examples from the extracted data were used to support the themes.

Integration and Synthesis of Findings

The final stage involved synthesizing the identified themes to construct a coherent and overarching narrative regarding best practices for sport coaching styles and the establishment of a desired team culture. This synthesis aimed to highlight areas of consensus, identify any notable discrepancies or contradictions in the literature, and pinpoint extant gaps requiring future research.

Ethical Considerations

As this study constitutes a systematic literature review and did not involve direct interaction with human participants or the collection of primary data, ethical concerns related to participant consent, privacy, and confidentiality were not applicable (Petticrew & Roberts 2006). However, meticulous care was taken to ensure that all included studies adhered to established ethical guidelines in their original research. Furthermore, rigorous academic integrity was maintained throughout the review process, with all sources being properly cited in accordance with APA guidelines.

Thematic Analysis

Culture

Culture is a very important quality that all sports teams should incorporate into their philosophies (Pennington 2017; 2019). A culture requires strong values that the majority of the team agree on and are capable of carrying out every day; if this fails, then the culture will not work as efficiently and successes that may be desired will be much harder to achieve (Godbout 2023). Success often has absolutely nothing to do with good luck but typically has much to do with a good culture (Hughes 2018). A conscious understanding of culture can better ensure that its influence is strong and positive (Cole & Martin 2018). Knowing that a good culture will be strong and

positive, being able to identify a team's culture and who shows it and embraces it the most is important (Pennington et al. 2018; Strand & Slater 2023). Identification and culture are thought to be valuable notions that can reveal the behavior of individuals in the sports organizations or clubs to which they belong, along with their sense of belonging, their feelings, their commitment and whether they feel valued (Çevik & Onag 2023).

Identified by Campbell (2021), there are three main pillars that can identify what a winning culture is founded upon. The first pillar is *personal growth*. Using techniques like individual development planning, each team member is able to look at their existing career and map out where they want to go and how they may want to get there (Campbell 2021). The second pillar is *diversity and inclusion*. A team that focuses on diversity and inclusion will not only provide alternative perspectives and ideas but will also provide opportunities that might not otherwise be available (Campbell 2021). The third pillar is *connect, collaborate, and having fun*. This pillar emphasizes activities that ensure everybody is well informed, in good contact, and can openly share in a safe environment (Campbell 2021).

When a person part of a team feels they are trusted and backed by the entire team, they will perform much better and closer to their full potential. This applies to the coaches as well, knowing they have their full support from their players will give them more confidence when coaching and mentoring the players, allowing for better understanding between players and coaches. Communicating what the end goal is and making sure everybody is on board and pulling in the same direction is the foundation of a winning culture (Campbell 2021).

Styles of Culture

There are many different styles of cultures a team may pursue, but the decision may depend on many factors. It may depend on the type of players on the team and how they behave amongst themselves, how the head coach wants to run the program themselves, or the number of resources the team has to be successful. Once the ability to establish culture is achieved, it is important to understand what values should comprise that culture (Cole & Martin 2018). Recent research has identified numerous styles of cultures, however, there are five main cultural styles that have been found in numerous business settings that have been translated for many amateur and professional sports teams that have been implemented as their day-to-day philosophies. These cultural models are listed and described in the following sections.

The Star Model

A star model is when a team gets the best player in the league and wishes it will create success on its own. It has been observed that executives have hired from elite universities or other successful companies and gave employees huge amounts of autonomy (Hughes 2018). This translates to sports as occasionally some teams will simply "invest" in the best players and coaches that are available by offering contracts that there competitors just simply might not be able to. Not only do they attempt to get the best personnel, but they will also acquire and maintain the best facilities possible using economic resources far beyond their competition. This model can have been seen to achieve success very well by big sports clubs, for example, like Real Madrid Football Club and the New England Patriots American Football Team, but this model has been shown how it can equally bring tremendous failure. If one piece falls out of place or does not work as well as it once did, the whole team can come crashing down. This was seen when Cristiano Ronaldo won four Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Champions League titles and then left Real Madrid in 2018. This was also observed when Tom Brady won six Super Bowls and then left the New England Patriots in 2020. Both of these teams have endured very rough hardships and now have had to spend years trying to rebuild the success they once had in the aftermath of radical change.

Autocracy and Bureaucracy Models

The autocracy and bureaucracy models are fairly similar in structure and how they are run; the only difference between them is who is running it at the very top of the chain of command. In the bureaucratic model, cultures emerged through thick ranks of middle managers (Hughes 2018). There will be a small group of equal people at the top that form a common ground on decisions that they will make together that will impact the club. This model has most famously been used by Liverpool Football Club, who uses a six-man committee to influence who the team can transfer in and out of the club and decides their next coaches to take over the team. An autocratic structure is similar, except that all the rules, job descriptions and organizational charts ultimately point to desires and goals of one person (Hughes 2018).

An autocratic culture suggests one influential person at the top has an impact on everything around them. An autocracy has shown previously success is very possible, but it can become dangerous when it becomes about just one person. Sir Alex Ferguson was a Scottish manager who was the manager for Manchester United Football Club for 26 years and saw the most success by any manager in the history of soccer, winning 38 major trophies and most notably winning 13 Premier League Titles. However, when Sir Alex retired in 2013, Manchester United did not know the next steps to move forward out of Sir Alex Ferguson's shadow, having been nowhere near the level they were at when he was in charge (Hughes 2018).

The Engineering Model

An engineering model describes how a team or organization who have similar personnel who are somewhat average programs that over a period of time, gradually build themselves up over time, and becomes better through very technical expertise in specific areas (Hughes 2018). When everyone comes from a similar background and mindset, one can rely on social norms to keep everyone on the same path (Hughes 2018). Success in this culture may take longer than others, but signs of success can be seen at times throughout the process. This has been the case for teams like Arsenal Football Club when they hired Mikel Arteta in 2019. When Arteta came in, Arsenal was in a bad spot with very average players. Arteta used his technical expertise to build up the players and the club over a span of almost three mediocre seasons to a team that is now a consistent title contender. A unique scenario contains Athletic Bilbao, a soccer team in Spain, is similar to what an engineering model represents. Bilbao's transfer policy for bringing in players is that they will only sign a player if they are from one specific region in Spain. Simply put, the club only signs players who were born or raised in the Basque Country, a region of Spain that has a distinct language and culture (Grant 2023).

This approach means that every single player that has played at the club since the 1930s has some connection to the club and its heritage. The policy is not just a marketing gimmick or a temporary strategy – it is a deeply ingrained philosophy that has shaped the identity of the club for 80 years (Grant 2023). While this approach does have obvious downsides to it [such as…?], seeing how the club will not be interested in signing any other player around the world unless they are from that region, it has shown very good success. The talent pool in the Basque Country is relatively small compared to other parts of Spain, which means that Athletic Bilbao cannot compete with the likes of Barcelona or Real Madrid in terms of star power or transfer fees, however, apart from giants like Real Madrid and Barcelona, Athletic are the only team that can boast the feat of never being relegated from La Liga, the number one league in Spain (Grant 2023).

The Commitment Model

The commitment culture in sports leadership refers to the creation and maintenance of an environment within a sports team or organization where individuals (athletes, coaches, and staff) are deeply engaged and dedicated to the collective goals, values, and success of the team. In this culture, the commitment goes beyond mere participation or compliance; it is characterized by a strong sense of personal responsibility, passion, and unwavering support for the team's objectives and vision. An example of a commitment culture in sports leadership can be found in teams like the New Zealand All Blacks rugby team. The leadership within the team emphasizes "sacrifice" and "selflessness" for the good of the group. This culture encourages players to put in their best efforts consistently, even when faced with personal challenges or setbacks. The leaders within the team ensure that each player understands their role and the importance of their commitment to the team's legacy and success.

The commitment culture has been known to be the most difficult type of culture to establish, but it has been found that once it has been established with the right personnel carrying it out, the success that follows it is tremendous (Hughes 2018). Hands down, a commitment culture outperformed every other type of management style in almost every meaningful way (Hughes 2018). In a business setting, it was found that the companies that installed a commitment culture were 22% more profitable and employees found that a pay raise of 33% was not required in order for them to stay as they found the business to be so good for them that they did not need it (Hughes 2018). One of the main reasons why commitment cultures were successful, it seemed, was because of the sense of trust that emerged among workers, managers, and customers, which enticed everyone to work harder and stick together through the setbacks inevitable in any industry (Hughes 2018).

Commitment cultures are driven by a clear sense of purpose and behaviors that become the rules of the membership to become a part of that organization by putting equal people at the organization's center. The most notable usage of a commitment culture is Football Club Barcelona. After performing in a very below average manner, the club decided change was necessary, and brought in Pep Guardiola. Guardiola and Barcelona immediately installed a system that required 100% determination, effort and hard work from every player for the good of the team, not individually. This culture also does not just go through the team, it must go through the entire club in order for it to work. Breadth occurs when the culture is present in all of an organization's functional areas from top to bottom (Cole & Martin 2018). The success Barcelona Football Club achieved after the installment of the commitment culture and the hiring of Pep Guardiola was staggering. Barcelona won eight out of the next 10 La Liga's, three UEFA Champions Leagues, and Barcelona's success cycle was 2.5x longer than the average success cycle in the world of football, lasting roughly 10 years (Hughes 2018).

A potential limitation or weakness of the commitment culture in sports leadership is the risk of burnout and overtraining among athletes. In a commitment-driven environment, where there is a strong emphasis on dedication, discipline, and sacrifice for the team's success, athletes may feel pressured to consistently push beyond their limits. This can lead to a number of negative outcomes, including burnout and unrealistic expectations. While the commitment culture can foster high performance and cohesion, coaches and team leaders need to recognize these potential downsides. It is important for leadership to balance commitment with adequate support systems, opportunities for rest and recovery, and attention to the holistic well-being of athletes to prevent these negative outcomes.

Formal and Informal Leaders

Athlete leadership has been defined as "an athlete, occupying a formal or informal role within a team, who influences a group of team members to achieve a common goal" (Newman et al. 2019). Formal leaders are typically coaches or captains who have official authority granted by the team structure or organization. They make strategic decisions, give instructions, and enforce rules. Whereas informal leaders do

not have an official title but hold influence over their teammates due to their experience, personality, or relationships. Their authority is derived from trust, respect, or social dynamics within the team.

As formal leaders, team captains are asked to fulfill predefined tasks, while informal leaders are expected to take on external responsibilities such as the social environment, which is formed as a result of human relations and interactions (Gökduman et al. 2023). A team captain is someone that can be chosen by the team, the coach, or both to represent the team as a strong and influential person. A team captain is considered to be a transactional leader. Transactional leadership has been described as an exchange of requests or needs to be satisfied between the leader and the followers (Kang-Won 2021). This kind of leader works to clarify the roles and task requirements of followers, recognizes the needs and desires of subordinates and make it clear that if they work to fulfil their job requirements, then those needs and desires will be met (Kang-Won 2021). Team captains act as a source of peer leadership within the team, often displaying social support, positive feedback, and democratic decision-making behaviors (Newman et al. 2019). By effectively developing team captains as formal leaders, they are equipped to provide leadership in sport and are more likely to transfer leadership skills to other domains of their lives (Newman et al. 2019).

Even though studies have found that both forms of shared leaderships are very beneficial for group and team dynamics, a formal leader position can become a good platform for athletes to develop even more, as well as continue to practice their leadership skills and behaviors (Newman et al. 2019). An informal athlete leader is one who emerges as a leader within the group as a result of their behavior and interactions with team members but does not necessarily assume a position such as team captain (Lower-Hoppe et al. 2020). People that could qualify as informal leaders would be asked to fulfill duties as task and social leaders. Task leaders solve problems, make decisions, and also make referrals for team goals, while social leaders build trust by providing psychosocial support to the team (Gökduman et al. 2023). A leader on a team does not necessarily have to be a team captain, they can just be someone that the whole team can trust and respect and who will hold one another accountable. However, some leaders, whether they be formal or informal, may not be born natural leaders. They may need someone, like a coach or mentor, to help develop them into good leaders.

Formal and informal leaders may sometimes experience conflict due to differences in their roles, influence, and approaches to leadership. Conflicts between formal and informal leaders in sports teams typically arise from differences in authority, leadership style, decision-making, and the role each leader plays within the team's dynamics. Formal leaders may feel undermined if informal leaders influence the team without following official directives. On the other hand, informal leaders might resist formal leaders' authority if they believe their influence and contributions are not acknowledged or respected. This conflict could manifest in disagreements about team strategy, training methods, or player roles.

An additional potential conflict could arise if a formal leader's directive approach may clash with the informal leader's more democratic or player-focused style. Further, if/when team loyalty is split between formal and informal leaders harming overall team unity, thus team trust, communication, and chemistry. It is crucial for formal

leaders to recognize and value the influence of informal leaders, while informal leaders must respect the formal leadership structure. Communication, mutual respect, and alignment of goals can help resolve potential conflicts and ensure that both types of leadership complement each other for the benefit of the team.

Coaching Leadership

A head coach and coaching staff will always have a huge impact on players' performance on the field and off. It is vital for coaches to express their wishes across to their team, so it is crystal clear on what they expect and hold as the standards. The learning process, success, motivation and achievements in sports influences leadership style, because a positive relationship with the coach provides motivation and desire for success (Capric et al. 2023). While the players are the ones actually playing in the games, it is up to the coaches to set up the team as best as possible by creating good tactics and selecting the right players to carry out those tactics to give the team the best chance to succeed. Coaching staffs experience significant pressure in their roles due to the multifactorial nature of team's performances including match outcomes and competition ranking during the season (Gómez et al. 2021). Coaches and owners are people in a sports club that can be considered transformational leaders. Transformational leaders communicate a clear vision of the potential and priority of an organization. The vision helps followers see what an organization can accomplish, helps followers understand their purpose in the organization, and helps guide followers' actions and decisions (Kang-Won 2021).

Player-Coach Relationship

The overall quality of coach–athlete relationships has been shown to positively associate with the coach's leadership effectiveness on athletes' outcomes (Zhao & Jowett 2023). Trust between coaches and players is the basis of all interactions, and performance varies depending on the level of trust in coaches (Harmon et al 2019). The influence a coach has on the athletes they train is synonymous with the direction in which the athlete's life in the sports world will evolve, stagnate, or disappear (Nicolae et al. 2023). A strong relationship with good communication between a player and their coaches drastically improves both the athlete and the coach's development, skills, and chances of success with each other. The degree of relationship with the coach perceived by the athlete directly or indirectly affects the individual's motivation, emotion, and behavior as well as the exercise-related perception (Lee et al. 2023). A coach should be capable of motivating their players for action, in which case, it will get the players energized and ready, giving a better chance of success. Besides motivation, all the mental processes and psyche of the athlete are involved in the sports activity, and the coach has the role of supporting and potentiating their qualities, as well as diminishing and inhibiting the defects as much as possible (Nicolae et al. 2023).

Coaching Changes

At the elite level, the assessment of a coach's ability in sport is mainly based on win-loss records within national and international competitions with poor success leading to a coaching change at any stage of the season (Gómez et al. 2021). A coaching change in sport is an extreme, but frequently occurring phenomenon (Gómez et al. 2021). The process of changing coaches has many steps that have to be met in order to bring someone new in and depending on the severity of the situation at a club, the process of finding a new man for the job can either take a few days, weeks, or even months. Many sports teams will not even wait until the end of the season to make a coaching change. If a team is normally very good and they start to have a bad season, the club might decide to part ways with that coach in order to bring someone in to prevent the situation from getting worse during the season. A 'manager boost' is when a team will bring in a new coach and that coach will immediately start to produce positive results for the team. At the end of the season, these results produced during that manager boost may be the difference between either relegation from a league or a much-needed financial boost for the club.

An example of this manager boost method was seen recently with the 2022 Philadelphia Phillies Major League Baseball team. In the midst of the 2022 season, the Phillies fired their manager, Joe Girardi, standing at an underwhelming 22-29 record to start the season. The Phillies then, on the same day of firing Girardi, hired Rob Thomson as interim manager (Skiver 2022). An essential part of Thomson's managerial style was giving players opportunities to overcome slumps and mistakes (Skiver 2022). With this management and trust in his players, Thomson led the Phillies to an improved 87-75 record, securing the last playoff wildcard spot and making it all the way to the World Series in the process (Skiver 2022).

There have been several theories proposed that could substantiate the effects of a possible coaching change. The common-sense theory proposed that a coaching change would disrupt the current negative trend with improvements in subsequent performances via invigorated players and fan base (Gómez et al. 2021). The vicious-circle theory proposed that a coaching change would affect the internal club/team relationships and improve subsequent declining performance (Gómez et al. 2021). The ritual scapegoat theory proposed that firing a coach would decrease stakeholders' frustration with the team's poor performance and subsequent performances perceived to be better (Gómez et al. 2021).

Discussion

It has been suggested the true qualities for a sports team of any level of competitiveness if success is desired within that program. A team must require a strong and fully supported culture style that the whole team can agree on and be willing to express every day in their lives both on and off the field of play. Also, developing leaders and captains massively increases the chances of team success as captains command respect, accountability, and hard work from their teammates and coaches, and represent these qualities to lead by example. Finally, a successful coach is someone who is respected by their players and surrounding staff members. They are people that are able to establish and maintain a good player-coach relationship and become someone that people can go to with any concerns about the team or possibly something in their personal life that they may need advice for.

The authors call for athletes and coaches to use the aforementioned suggestions to build new and productive cultures that hold strong values and standards for everyone in the program to be successful on and off the field. They should build players to become team leaders and captains that are strong, respected, and hold everyone - including themselves - accountable, without being self-absorbed. Coaches should have communication skills and effectively use those skills with their players and be capable of acting in bad situations and resolving them in a manner that is mature and respectful. These topics warrant further study and discussion. Of particular interest would be an exploration of individual and team sport differences regarding coaching styles and philosophies. Further, a comparison between men and women's sports, with a coach of the opposite gender would yield value to the coaching community.

The following sections outline recommendations on methods and techniques on how to select the right team culture, to develop as a coach, and also how to develop team leaders.

Creating the Right Culture

Some may regard the coaching staff as purely responsible for the type of culture needed to influence their team and for the team to execute, but that is not always the case (Cole & Martin 2018). A player-driven program gives the athletes on the team the opportunity to run the culture and have the coach just be able to hold the players accountable to what they want to have as the team standards. For sports teams at the professional, amateur, and collegiate levels, a strong and clear vision of a culture might be a better advantage when attempting to attract new recruits and staff. It is recommended for the team and the players to get together and to identify and develop a team 'why' statement, trademark behaviors, and keystone habits that will represent the values of the culture. Have the team ask themselves one question for each of the aspects, to which they can contribute multiple answers. First, ask, "why do I play this sport?" This question is for the why statement. Next, ask, "who are you/what describes you when you are at your best?" This question will be for the trademark behaviors. Finally, ask, "what do you do when you are at your best?" This question will be for the keystone habits. Once these questions have been answered by the

entirety of the team, have each member of the team select off of the list of answers for each question which ones they may agree to the most. This will dwindle the number of responses until each question has few answers on which everybody agrees are the most important and become the standards of what the team now holds. This will allow everyone to be a leader for this new culture since it is something that they can all agree on for the most part. Cultural norms define how an organization will define leadership and leaders create and manage culture (Kang-Won 2021).

Developing Team Leaders

The proper development of team leaders will not happen overnight; it will take time. Therefore, it is recommended that players and coaches' study some of the great team captains in sports history - current and retired - and understand what they do for the team and why they do it (Newman et al. 2019). In addition, coaches should ask the players who they believe are the most qualified to hold the team accountable to the coach's standards. This will allow the coaches and prospective team leaders to gain trust and confidence in their abilities. Then, influential players begin to gain the respect and attention of teammates, making them a team leader.

Developing Coaching Skills

Leadership coaching is promising for leadership development and its practice and has become a widely used intervention for leadership development (Ladegard & Gjerde 2014). Therefore, it is recommended prospective coaches undergo leadership training and professional development (Ladegard & Gjerde 2014). Some teams may have many individuals from similar places and backgrounds, but some may not, and coaches must be prepared for those times. It is important to understand that a diverse and inclusive team means a coaches' staff may not share in those same motivations or be driven by the same things; and that is actually a good thing (Campbell 2021). In this case, prospective coaches should use their resources and enquire other coaches about how they have dealt with complicated situations in the past and be able to build on those situations into their own practices.

Concluding Recommendations

The pursuit of a successful team culture in sport coaching necessitates a nuanced understanding of leadership dynamics beyond traditional hierarchical models. While the presence of designated formal leaders (e.g., coaches, team captains) remains crucial for structural clarity and strategic direction, this article posits that cultivating leadership qualities across all team members significantly contributes to a more robust and resilient team culture. This perspective aligns with contemporary theories emphasizing distributed leadership and collective responsibility within organizational settings (Gronn 2002; Spillane 2006).

Encouraging leadership attributes in every player offers several demonstrable benefits for team cohesion and performance. Firstly, the diffusion of responsibility, as opposed to its concentration in a few individuals, enhances decision-making agility and collective accountability (Cohen & Bailey 1997). When leadership is shared, teams can maintain functionality and adapt to unforeseen challenges even in the absence of formal leaders. Secondly, the exhibition of leadership qualities—such as proactivity, peer motivation, accountability, and constructive feedback—fosters stronger interpersonal relationships among teammates. This shared commitment cultivates a profound sense of unity and collective purpose, where each individual perceives their contribution as vital to the team's overarching success (Yukl 2012). This concept is supported by research indicating that shared leadership positively correlates with team effectiveness and satisfaction in sports contexts (Loughead et al. 2016). Thirdly, empowering athletes through the cultivation of leadership skills significantly boosts individual confidence and intrinsic motivation, particularly in high-pressure situations requiring initiative and resilience (Ryan & Deci 2017). Finally, this approach facilitates comprehensive leadership development, preparing athletes to assume leadership roles in various contexts, both within and beyond the sporting arena. The diversity of leadership styles that naturally emerges from such an environment—ranging from vocal leadership to leading by example or providing emotional support—can effectively address the multifaceted needs of a dynamic team (Northouse 2018).

However, it is equally important to acknowledge potential challenges associated with a blanket expectation of formal leadership from every player. The primary concern lies in the potential for overlapping roles and subsequent confusion, which can disrupt established team structures and decision-making processes. A clear understanding of formal leadership roles (coach, captain) is essential to prevent ambiguity and internal conflict (Chelladurai 2007). Furthermore, not all individuals are inherently inclined or comfortable assuming overt leadership responsibilities. Forcing such roles upon players who prefer supportive or follower positions can lead to discomfort, resentment, and ultimately hinder individual and team performance (Avolio et al. 2009). The critical balance between individual leadership contributions and primary team responsibilities must also be maintained to prevent neglect of core roles in favor of leadership aspirations. Finally, an overemphasis on individual leadership without clear guidance can precipitate power struggles and interpersonal tension, thereby undermining team cohesion rather than enhancing it (Carron et al. 2002).

In conclusion, while it is neither necessary nor always beneficial for every player to assume a formal leadership position, fostering intrinsic leadership qualities—such as accountability, responsibility, and peer support—across the entire team is highly advantageous for developing a successful and resilient team culture. This approach, grounded in principles of distributed leadership, should complement individual strengths and contribute to a positive, collaborative environment. Crucially, this distributed leadership must operate within a framework of clear role distinctions and under the guidance of formal leaders (coaches, captains) to prevent fragmentation or conflict. The most effective strategy involves allowing leadership to emerge organically while providing structured support and clear expectations, thereby

ensuring the seamless functioning and sustained success of the team (Burton & Raedeke 2008).

References

Australian Sports Commission (ASC) (n.d.) *Positive Coaching*. Retrieved from https://www.sportaus.gov.au/

Avolio BJ, Walumbwa FO, Weber TJ (2009) Leadership: Current theories, research, and future directions. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *60*, 421-449.

Burton D, Raedeke TD (2008) *Sport psychology for coaches*. Human Kinetics.

Braun V, Clarke V (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101.

Campbell J (2021) The Three Pillars for a Winning Culture. *GreenMaster*, *57*(4), 18–20.

Carron AV, Brawley LR, Widmeyer WN (2002). *The measurement of cohesion in sport teams*. National Coaching Certification Program.

Çevik S, Onag Z (2023) Review of the Impact of Organizational Identification and Organizational Culture in Football Teams on Team Success (Tff League 1 Example). *Pamukkale University Journal of Social Sciences* Institute/Pamukkale Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi, 55, 399–413.

Chelladurai P (2007) *Managing organizations for sport and physical activity: A systems perspective*. Human Kinetics.

Cohen SG, Bailey DE (1997) What makes teams work: Group effectiveness research from the shop floor to the executive suite. *Journal of Management*, *23*(3), 239-290.

Cole J, Martin AJ (2018) Developing a winning sport team culture: organizational culture in theory and practice. *Sport in Society*, *21*(8), 1204–1222. https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2018.1442197

Godbout P (2023) Situation awareness: a pivotal process for sensemaking and decision making in the learning and practice of physical activities. *Athens Journal of Sports*, *10*(3), 163-180.

Gökduman Ç, Kartal M, Temel C, Toros T, Esen T (2023) Sustainability of Success in Sports Teams: Who Will Be the Captain? *Sustainability*, *15*(5), 4316. https://doi.org/10.3390/su150543164

Gómez MA, Lago-Peñas C, Gómez M-T, Jimenez S, Leicht AS (2021) Impact of elite soccer coaching change on team performance according to coach- and club-related variables. *Biology of Sport*, *38*(4), 603–608. https://doi.org/10.5114/biolsport.2021.101600

Grant R (2023) *Athletic Bilbao`s unique transfer policy and its impact on Spanish football*. Playfundwin.com.

Gronn P (2002) Distributed leadership as a unit of analysis. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *13*(4), 423-451.

Harmon H, Siegien J, Watt C, Rebers K, Pennington CG (2019) Attachment Theory in Coach-Athlete Relationships. *Professional Association of Athlete Development Specialists Research Digest*. *3*(9), 14-16. https://www.paads.org/page/researchdigest.

Hughes D (2018) *The Barcelona way: How to create a high-performance culture*. Pan Macmillan.

Kang-Won Y (2021) The Effect of Transactional and Transformational Leadership Behaviors on Factors Establishing Teams' Cultural Aspects to Promote Organizational Effectiveness. *Sport Mont*, *19*(3), 35–40. https://doi.org/10.26773/smj.211008

Ladegard G, Gjerde S (2014) Leadership coaching, leader role-efficacy, and trust in subordinates. A mixed methods study assessing leadership coaching as a leadership

development tool. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *25*(4), 631-646. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2014.02.002

Lee S, Kwon S, Jang D, Kwon H (2023) The effect of coach–athlete fit on the coach–athlete relationship in team sport: Role of trust in coach. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, *18*(4), 986–993. https://doi.org/10.1177/17479541231164771

Loughead TM, Bloom GA, Roberts DC (2016) Leadership in sport. In G. Tenenbaum & R. C. Eklund (Eds.), *Handbook of sport psychology* (4th ed., pp. 248-264). John Wiley & Sons.

Lower-Hoppe LM, Newman TJ, Brgoch SM, Htitton TA (2020) The Management and Development of Sport Team Captains as Human Capital Resources: Perspectives from Collegiate Coaches. *International Journal of Sport Management*, *21*(3), 261–292.

Moher D, Liberati A, Tetzlaff J, Altman DG (PRISMA Group) (2009) Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses: The PRISMA statement. *PLoS Medicine*, *6*(7), e1000097.

Newman TJ, Lower LM, Brgoch SM (2019) Developing sport team captains as formal leaders. *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action*, *10*(3), 137–150. https://doi.org/10.1080/21520704.2019.1604590

Nicolae D, Văduva M, Iancu A, Ion L, Stepan R (2023) Athletes' Perception Regarding the Level of Physical Training and the Importance of the Coach-Athlete Relationship. *Ovidius University Annals, Series Physical Education & Sport/Science, Movement & Health*, *23*(2), 154–161.

Northouse PG (2018) *Leadership: Theory and practice* (8th ed.). Sage Publications.

Pennington CG (2017) Moral Development and Sportsmanship in Interscholastic Sports and Physical Education. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance.* 88(9), 36-42. https://doi.org/10.1080/07303084.2017.1367745.

Pennington CG (2019) Creating and Confirming a Positive Sporting Climate. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance. 90*(4), 15-20. https://doi.org/10.1080/07303084.2019.1568936.

Pennington CG, Ivy V, McEntryre K, Baxter D (2018) Championship Caliber Character: Strategies for Building Well-Rounded Athletes. *Professional Association of Athlete Development Specialists Research Digest*. *3*(6), 14-15. https://www.paads.org/page/researchdigest.

Petticrew M, Roberts H (2006) *Systematic reviews in the social sciences: A practical guide*. Blackwell Publishing.

Ryan RM, Deci EL (2017) *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. Guilford Press.

Skiver K (2022) *How Rob Thomson salvaged Joe Girardi's Phillies and guided them to the World Series.* Sporting News.

Spillane JP (2006) *Distributed leadership*. Jossey-Bass.

Strand B, Slater K (2023) How do Graduate Students' Perceptions of Gamesmanship Change when exposed to a Sport Ethics Course. *Athens Journal of Sports*, *10*(2), 71-82.

Yukl GA (2012) Effective leadership behavior: What we know and what questions need more attention. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, *26*(4), 66-85.

Zhao C, Jowett S (2023) Before supporting athletes, evaluate your coach–athlete relationship: Exploring the link between coach leadership and coach–athlete relationship. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, *18*(3), 633–641. https://doi.org/10.1177/17479541221148113.

Athens Journal of Sports - Volume 12, Issue 4, December 2025 – Pages 199-216

A Historical Overview of Legalized Sports Gambling in Canada

By Bryson Boddy[*] & W. James Weese[±]

Although gambling on sporting events has been a practice since ancient times, government-regulated single-event sports betting is a relatively new phenomenon in Canada. While strictly prohibited and generally considered unthinkable in earlier times, gambling in professional sports is omnipresent today (e.g., sponsorships, broadcasts), and it generates vast sources of revenue for teams, their respective leagues and provincial and federal governments through taxation revenues. The authors of this paper do not advocate for legalized sport gambling in Canada, but more accurately endeavour to explore the seismic shift and historic growth of legalized sports gambling in the country. In addition to chronicling the economic benefits that the practice has brought to the sports industry, the gambling establishments, and the federal and provincial governments, the authors document the negative elements associated with legalized sports gambling (e.g., addictions, financial hardships, and mental and physical health impacts). Regardless of one's opinion on the appropriateness of legalized sports gambling in Canada, the practice appears to be deeply embedded in society and is destined to continue.

Keywords: *sports gambling, Canada, history, legislation*

Sports Gambling in Canada: A Historical Primer

While legalized sports gambling is relatively new to Canada, it is a well-established practice in other countries. For example, the United Kingdom and Australia have long histories of sports betting that generate significant levels of income that is reallocated to support other government priorities. Legalized sports betting in the United States also has a long history and generates in excess of $120B annually (Kaburakis, et al. 2014) in tax revenue to support other government initiatives.

Until recently, Canadian authorities formally shunned the notion of legalized gambling in sport. However, records show that the concept was discussed as early as 1892 (Smith 2012). That stated, gambling on sporting events (with the notable exception of horse racing) remained illegal in Canada until recent times. This is not to suggest that gambling in sport didn't exist. The practice was alive and well, through bookies and social gambling (i.e., betting pools) or large-scale sporting events, such as the Super Bowl (Smith 2012).

However, over time, attitudes towards legalized sports gambling began to change, undoubtedly due to the realization of the amount of money changing hands in the black market, all without government regulation or taxation.

[*]Graduate Student, Western University, Canada.
[±]Professor, School of Kinesiology, Western University, Canada.

Historians point to Canada's experience hosting the 1976 Montreal Olympic Games as a key turning point in the government's entry into the sports gambling arena. The immense debt accrued as a result of hosting these Games required a revenue generation catalyst, and it was found in the form of Lotto Canada.

Provincial legislators soon took note of the revenue generated federally and also sought to benefit from this windfall. With the Federal government's blessing, the provinces were granted jurisdiction to launch and oversee sports-related gambling programs (Villeneuve & Pasquier 2018). However, in exchange, the provincial governments agreed to contribute $100 million to the hosting costs of the 1988 Winter Olympic Games in Calgary, Alberta (Villeneuve & Pasquier 2018). Government involvement in sports gambling was initiated and, with the expansion into contemporary sports gambling opportunities and practices, has evolved into a $14 billion per year industry (Lewis 2024). How did this happen, and what milestones transpired to pave the way for this development?

Establishment of Canadian Gambling Laws

Following Confederation in 1867, most of the laws governing Canada reflected their origins of the United Kingdom, with a notable exception of sports gambling, which remained illegal in Canada for many years. Over time, Canada developed its own set of laws, including those related to gambling. These developments were seen in the drafting of the original *Criminal Code of Canada* in 1892 documents. Several gambling activities were formally written into law as illegal, and only horse racing, office pools and personal challenges in places like billiard halls or golf courses were technically legal (Smith 2012). The debt crisis caused by hosting the 1976 Olympics triggered the need for incremental government revenue, and, in many ways, as history has illustrated, paved the way for formalized sports gambling in Canada.

Introduction of Government-Sanctioned Parlay Betting

The financial success of government-sanctioned lotteries was indisputable, and government leaders soon became convinced that other revenues could be generated through sports gambling (Matheson 2021). Government leaders in Canada began authorizing the use of lotteries for sports betting (Smith 2012). This change meant that Canadians of legal age were allowed to bet on sports legally, within a strict set of parameters established by government officials.

To generate government revenue, most provincial sports betting schemes were structured to ensure a financial windfall for the legislators (Humphreys & Perez 2012). In addition, provincial sports betting lotteries had payout limitations, ensuring that bettors did not win excessively large amounts. The take-home profit for legal betting schemes also far outweighed the potential returns for the person placing the bet (Smith 2012).

Sport organizations in Canada continued to shun the gambling industry. At that time, leaders believed that the purity of sport was too important to be compromised by the perceived evils of gambling (Humphreys & Perez 2012). With time, attitudes changed. Some point to the shifts in society's view of civil liberties and the personal right to choose (Kaburaski et al. 2014). Others suggested that stakeholders recognized the significant revenue that could be generated by engaging in sports gambling (Matheson 2021; Villeneuve & Pasquier 2018). In all likelihood, these factors collectively facilitated the shift and the corresponding need for legislation to regulate and formalize gambling in professional sports (Brandt 2017).

The Passing of Bill C-218

Sports gambling quickly became an irresistible revenue source for sport organizations and government officials. Single-event sports betting was seen as an especially attractive option for gamblers and those seeking incremental revenue. However, the practice needed to be formalized and regulated. It was through the enthusiastic passing of Bill C-218.

Bill C-218 was unanimously passed in its first reading in the Canadian House of Commons in March 2012, before being sent to the Senate for final review and adoption (Villeneuve & Pasquier, 2018). Supporters justified their endorsement by noting that the sport betting revenues are essentially a voluntary tax which one is not obligated to pay. Additionally, individuals who did choose to participate in sports betting were perceived to have higher incomes than the average Canadian, making the implicit tax both voluntary and progressive (Humphreys & Perez 2012). However, not everyone was convinced. For example, the National Hockey League (NHL) governors opposed sports betting, claiming that the adoption of Bill C-218 would potentially increase the likelihood of match-fixing (Rodriguez et al. 2017). Ensuring a greater take for sport organizations like the NHL appeared to soften the leaders' opposition and garnered their support for the practice.

Onset of In-Game/Contextual Betting

In-game betting, also commonly known as contextual betting or in-play betting, is a wager that occurs during a sports competition with constantly live, updated odds. This feature, now fully legal in Canada, is regarded as the 'cash cow' of gaming styles for sportsbooks. The goal for many sportsbooks is to increase the total number of in-game betting players, which is why their advertising is so concentrated during live competitions. In their study, Lopez-Gonzalez et al. (2018) found that almost half of the advertisements (46%) portrayed characters betting while watching sport. In addition, Lopez-Gonzalez et al. (2018) confirmed the perception that the advertisements keep consumers more engaged. This style of betting is far more interactive than a traditional sports wager. In-play betting requires the gambler to monitor shifting payout odds in a manner similar to someone trading in the stock market.

With live odds constantly changing, the adrenaline effect of gambling is significantly prolonged (Lopez-Gonzalez et al. 2018), which helps explain why some researchers (Baker et al. 2024) have found strong links between problem gambling and in-game betting. Gambling intensity is magnified through in-game betting, which is why some foreign markets have implemented measures to curtail or limit the practice.

> "In Australia, live-betting odds were found to be advertised via several methods in stadiums including on 'pull-through banners' or 'pop-ups' and website addresses were provided alongside the live odds, so that customers know where to place an instant bet. However, it is important to add that online in-play sports betting in Australia has since been made illegal" (Killick & Griffiths 2022, p. 19).

Proliferation of Sports Gambling Advertising and Sponsorship

Sports betting companies seek advertising partnerships with athletes, teams, and leagues to increase awareness and attract more public support and engagement. Generally speaking, sportsbooks offer products that are poorly differentiated for consumers in a highly competitive market. As a result, marketing and advertising play a significant part in artificially creating the illusion of product or service differentiation in the hopes of attracting customers (Lopez-Gonzalez & Griffiths 2017). With this emphasis on consumer marketing, it is no surprise that betting companies usually opt for the largest and most dominant sponsorship assets. Researchers have discovered that "embedded" advertisements during live sports events frequently appear in high-profile locations, such as on-field signage and team uniforms, or during periods when spectators are more likely to be watching, such as during halftime (Killick & Griffiths 2022). Prominent advertisements on competitors' jerseys have also grown to become the most frequently purchased sponsorship asset by betting companies (Killick & Griffiths 2022). Jersey sponsorships of professional soccer teams in Europe went from one deal in 2002 to 26 deals as early as 2010 (Lopez-Gonzalez & Griffiths 2017). Professional sport in Canada has witnessed comparable growth (Banerjee 2024).

Sportsbooks all offer a very similar product and pricing, so sponsorship and marketing are viewed as the best ways to increase market share. So far, it appears that these sponsorships tend to be visibly significant, with betting companies opting for the most eye-catching and primary sponsorship assets. This includes assets such as jersey sponsorships, board sponsorships, and on-field or court logos. Another common aim of betting companies is to dominate the televised commercial space during sporting events. Today, Canadian sport consumers are inundated with betting advertisements and invitations to participate. Many of these companies utilize underlying themes to enhance their image and gain public acceptance. The theme of gambling as a social behaviour is common, and humour is often used, as are celebrity endorsements (Killick & Griffiths 2022). Marketing strategies like these are portrayed to provide the sensation that gambling is a safe and fun activity.

The primary concern that should be held by Canadians as sport betting continues to gain greater visibility is the prevalence of gambling addiction and problem gambling (Winters & Derevensky 2019). As has been observed in foreign markets, with heightened awareness of gambling accessibility, consumers are likely to gamble more frequently on sports (Lole et al. 2019). Athletes themselves have also been subject to scrutiny over the years as several notable figures have succumbed to gambling addictions. While the public attitude in Canada has shifted in regard to gambling, the results of other countries must be analyzed before making a serious judgment on the deregulated sports betting. Gambling is now viewed as a 'victimless crime' or an unavoidable taboo, which may as well be taxed. As such, sports betting makes the case for deregulation because it will undoubtedly bring new revenues. However, due diligence must be done before seriously committing to this path.

Nearly 70% of all sports betting advertising occurs during live sporting events (Killick & Griffiths 2022). The realization of these advertisements during broadcasts takes a few different forms (e.g., advertisers encouraging viewers to place bets during games, betting odds posted during broadcasts, and in-venue signs promoting odds and potential returns). These approaches have appeared to pay handsome dividends for betting companies. It has been observed that television ratings increase when local market teams cover the point spread and when the uncertainty of the point spread outcome increases (Stadler Blank et al. 2021). This effect is stronger for games which typically don't generate much fan interest (Stadler Blank et al. 2021). Researchers have found that these types of advertisements stimulated greater interest and participation in gambling activities. "Greater intended frequency of sports betting in the next six months was most strongly predicted by greater exposure to gambling promotions during sports broadcasts, higher problem gambling severity, and previous sports betting participation" (Hing et al. 2014, p. 15). However, as sportsbooks became increasingly pervasive, gambling addictions became more prevalent (Lopez-Gonzalez et al. 2019). Besides directly inciting problem gambling in consumers (Baker et al. 2024), several other complications were found to arise from the promotion of sports betting.

> "An important commercial benefit of sports sponsorship is that it associates sponsors' products with healthy positive images, something that is particularly important for products that pose risks to health. The association of a healthy activity with such products obscures the health risk issue while at the same time promoting consumption" (Maher et al. 2006, p. 2).

By permitting the display of logos and gambling connections on uniforms, in arenas and in stadiums, sport organizations furthered the cultural absorption of sports betting. Killick & Griffiths (2022) pointed out that gambling content posted alongside sports news and events normalizes gambling in a broader social context while further strengthening the relationship between gambling and sports. This contributed to the normalization of the activity. Many sport organizations now also post betting odds and sponsored content online via social media channels. Sports betting advertising is delivered by numerous social media influencers, including

credible journalists, and as a result, gambling advertising appears to be increasingly tied to the sport itself (Lopez-Gonzalez et al. 2018). Not long ago, these markets were formerly distinct from one another. Now, with the proliferation of cross-marketed sports gambling strategies, specifically online, a convergence has occurred between the gambling and sports industries (Lopez-Gonzalez et al. 2017), and this alliance has appeared to normalize sports betting behaviours.

A tidal wave of gambling advertising has desensitized consumers and has led to an inevitable increase in the practice of problem gambling (Lopez-Gonzalez et al. 2017). This saturation was also observed in foreign markets where sports betting has long been deregulated, allowing researchers to benefit from the passage of time and historical context to study the situation in detail. According to Lopez-Gonzalez et al. (2017), social normalization takes over, and sports gambling appears to have less of a stigma attached to it in society when compared to other forms of gambling (e.g., casino activities). In a qualitative study, Lopez-Gonzalez et al. (2018) found that some members of society believe that sports gambling does not actually constitute gambling. That said, Canadian officials can learn from the researchers and the experiences of other countries and make necessary changes to avoid duplicating practices that promote problematic behaviour.

Gambling industry officials are quick to point out the responsible gambling messages embedded in their advertisements. However, researchers counter this point by noting that these messages are largely ignored, if noticed at all (Lole et al. 2019). Additionally, gambling sponsorships visible in venues and on player jerseys do not include responsible gambling messages. Furthermore, gambling advertisements featuring celebrities and sports heroes glamorize and justify the practice (Lole et al 2019). If sports gambling is to be widely permitted in society, those who allow for the activity must also be willing to accept the inevitable consequences of allowing and promoting such behaviour.

The determining factor in normalizing sports betting lies in how it is presented to consumers. In an attempt to make sports betting palatable to a wider audience, many sportsbooks have tailored the image of their product to that of a stock market. This is an attempt to make sports betting feel more mainstream and that success is driven by the individual instead of fate.

> "Online sports betting is represented as a stock market wherein bets are products that bettors buy. Furthermore, sport competitions are the real world where events happen and cause stock to change its value, and bettors try to interact with it, observing events in sports, and predicting how team performance will impact bet value" (Lopez-Gonzalez et al. 2017, p. 8).

Visualizations like these begin to shift the conversation about betting away from its negative consequences. For some markets, it may simply be too late. Regarding the current situation in Australia, Constandt et al. (2022) noted that the growth of the gambling industry has turned gambling into a socially permissible and regularly occurring leisure activity. As Canada's sports betting reality transitions from infancy to adolescence (Banerjee 2024), the appropriate images need to be shared with consumers before attitudes are permanently shaped.

The Explosive Growth of Sports Betting

The biggest perceived difference between sports betting and regular gambling in the eyes of consumers is the illusion of control. Gamification is a concept that is best defined as the addition of game-like elements to deepen interest or attract new consumers. Sports gambling is a perfect example of gamification. However, the gamification of sports betting is inherently dangerous because consumers often believe their knowledge will allow them to predict the outcome. If a gambler feels like they know the sport, they believe that they increase their chances of winning. It's been found that many sports bettors firmly believe this assertion and view sports betting as a skill-based game of a kind (Lopez-Gonzalez & Griffiths 2017). This perception makes sports betting appear much safer than conventional gambling and promotes increased betting. This again relates to how fantasy sports have blurred the reality of sports betting for many. While this is perfect for betting companies, sports organizations that allow them to sponsor must understand how their product impacts consumer behaviour.

By analyzing the results from foreign markets that already have a similar betting system, the Canadian sports system can develop guidelines to facilitate the transition into this new reality. If done correctly, sports organizations can continue to incorporate sponsorship money from betting companies while maintaining some semblance of social responsibility.

In markets where sports betting has been legalized for quite some time, many themes have emerged from advertising. These themes have also been quickly replicated in Canadian betting commercials. For many sportsbooks, the goal is to make sports betting appear as a social, risk-free, and fun activity, allowing bettors to demonstrate loyalty to their favourite teams (Killick & Griffiths 2022). Betting due to sports loyalty is a theme that sportsbooks frequently promote to tap into the emotional connection that sports frequently evoke. The concept of gambling as a social activity pairs perfectly with sport and has also been a prevailing theme throughout betting advertising:

> "Gamblers were depicted as being socially surrounded by individuals prior to placing their bets… Alcohol drinking more commonly occurred in sports advertisements which involved a higher number of characters shown within the advert, merging friendship bonding and alcohol drinking in the context of sports betting" (Killick & Griffiths 2022, p. 17).

Themes that incorporate gambling as an aspect of male friendship are prevalent in sports betting advertising, as young males are the primary target demographic in this industry (Killicks & Griffiths 2022). As such, appealing to them specifically is a crucial marketing goal.

> "Previous research has identified that male friendship is a prominent aspect in sports betting narratives in other types of gambling advertising. In the current study, these displays were directly targeted at young male sports fans, supporting the previous literature this is the typical demographic for sports betting marketing" (Killick & Griffiths 2022, p. 20).

Understanding that young males are their primary market, betting companies have developed several marketing themes, beyond socialization, that focus on their desired demographic. An effective strategy which makes consumers view betting in a more positive light is the use of celebrity cameos. In foreign markets where sports gambling is heavily entrenched, such as the UK, this theme has become a mainstay. Slightly less than a quarter of betting advertisements (i.e., 23%) contained a minimum of one celebrity personality, with famous soccer players being the most common choice (Killick & Griffiths 2022). For many, celebrities are viewed as trusted personalities. If these celebrities happen to be athletes, they can also serve as role models for healthy living for many. This association becomes problematic because the athlete is now endorsing a product which can be used irresponsibly and cause damage to consumers. Unlike traditional gambling, sport often conveys health and purity to gambling. Positive attributes such as fair competition, talent, perseverance, physical well-being, and exercise are seamlessly transmitted to the gambling activity (Lopez-Gonzalez et al. 2017). Betting companies are essentially using sport to sanitize their image. Consumers today have numerous choices, so the product must be perceived as safe. Sports organizations that allow betting companies to sponsor them need to understand their own role in this relationship. Sponsorship and marketing managers are often tasked with solving the return-on-investment puzzles for sponsoring companies. In information-overloaded environments, such as sports media and venues, it is these managers who decide how the advertisements can be presented (Breuer et al. 2021).

Researchers who have studied the behaviour of betting companies in foreign markets have concluded that their efforts to engage young males have been effective. They do this mainly through subtle messaging in advertisements. These researchers have shown that males are often found to be depicted in humorous scenes, while women often play secondary roles in advertisements and are commonly objectified in swimwear or fantasy situations" (Killick & Griffiths 2022). Lopez-Gonzalez et al. (2018) found that over three-quarters of advertisements (i.e., 77%) did not include any women who held main roles in the advertisements' narratives, with only five advertisements including a minimum of two women. This is a practice that is arguably tone deaf to the fact that females account for nearly half of all sports fans. More professional sports leagues and teams are emerging and gaining significant media attention. However, this segment of the population could also be targeted and exploited, making gambling in sports an even larger phenomenon.

Another area poised for growth and, unfortunately, exploitation is the youth market. Children are impressionable, and with gambling openly advertised during live and televised sporting events, many researchers have indicated that this could be a target market ripe for exploitation. Lopez-Gonzalez et al. (2017) found that children in Australia were acutely accurate in identifying sports betting companies. Their arguably most concerning finding was that one-fifth of children associated their team with the betting company Bet365, even if the company was not the actual jersey sponsor (Lopez-Gonzalez et al. 2017). Killick & Griffiths (2022) noted that these impressions are not limited to identification, as many of the

children surveyed could relay the intended messages of the advertisements. In one study, a few children acknowledged that betting advertisements taught them they could influence the odds of an outcome if they had sufficient knowledge and preparation, and that skill is fundamentally a part of the game (Lopez-Gonzalez et al. 2017).

> "Youth have been 'overexposed' to commercial gambling advertisements on television; they are able to recall specific advertisements, slogans and jingles; and that youth problem gamblers reported being more likely to gamble on certain products if they had seen gambling advertisements for them" (Hing et al. 2013, p. 4).

People who gamble in sports typically engage in other addictive behaviours. Many engage in sports betting while consuming alcohol and smoking tobacco. Researchers have discovered that smoking and alcohol consumption are more frequently seen in people who engage in sports betting compared to those who do not (Nabifo et al. 2021). These types of behaviours have been proven to promote further gambling as the person's judgment is inhibited. Nabifo et al. (2021) found that alcohol consumption is significantly associated with sports betting. In their study, the likelihood of sports betting among individuals in the moderate alcohol consumption category was double that of those in the low consumption category, which served as the reference group. Compounding the potential harm of gambling with overconsumption of alcohol could have detrimental impacts on consumers. It's these types of situations which sports organizations must consider most when promoting sports gambling practices and sponsorship arrangements.

Additional Issues and Cautions

With the passage of Bill C-218, Canada now has open-market, legalized sports betting. The NHL has accepted sponsorship money from major gambling establishments. A review of the experiences of other countries with longer sports gambling histories provides valuable insights into what might happen in Canada. For example, a key challenge for countries that opt for legal sports betting is maintaining control. One of the significant challenges rests with the sheer volume of sports gambling advertising that occurs. Rawat et al. (2020) used ecological momentary assessment tools to collect and analyze advertising data from 102 sports bettors and 110 horse race bettors. The researchers uncovered that the participants received a total of 931 direct advertisement messages over a one-week period (Killick & Griffiths 2022). The number of direct messages is not the only issue, but also the amount of time those broadcast advertisements consume. It has been estimated that during Australian Football League and the National Rugby League matches, spectators are exposed to roughly 10 to 15 minutes of gambling advertisements (Lopez-Gonzalez et al. 2017). Sports spectators and those following games and events through various traditional and nontraditional forms of media are inundated with sports gambling advertisements. Additionally, betting companies can promote any product and image they choose. The only condition is that gambling companies are required to accompany their own advertisements with a safe

gambling message. However, many betting companies appear to be minimizing the impact of this warning system. Messages encouraging responsible gambling were generally obtuse and usually presented in a text-heavy format at the end of the advertisement or at the bottom of the screen in a small font (Lole et al. 2019).

Several key elements of the new sports betting reality in Canada could lead to an increase in problem gambling (Winters & Derevensky 2019). One of these is what's referred to as in-play or in-game betting. This type of betting occurs during a live game, featuring up-to-the-minute live odds that correspond with the flow of play. It is often the main priority for betting companies and has been described as their cash cow of betting features (Killick & Griffiths 2022). Australia, a country that has had legal sports betting for many years, has repealed this feature of sports gambling, making it illegal once again. (Killick & Griffiths 2022) This is mainly due to the fact that in-play betting has been seen to cause the highest levels of problem gambling among sports bettors (Lopez-Gonzalez et al. 2017). The danger with in-play betting is the sheer volume at which a person can place bets during a game. With consistently changing odds, the bettor can trade bets like a day trader on the stock market (Mahan et al. 2012). While this practice has been found to increase spectator interest and engagement, it also creates a situation where consumers could be purposefully exploited.

(a) Gambling Addiction & Problem Gambling

When assessing the impact of the sports betting industry's rise, the possibility of inciting gambling addiction must be discussed. It is seen as a necessary evil for the industry as many fans gamble casually, and not all are capable. One of the reasons for this can often be peer pressure. "Peer facilitation has been identified as a fundamental contributing factor to impulse betting, with excessive betting being more plausible when sport matches are viewed in the company of others" (Lopez-Gonzalez et al. 2017, p. 10). If people are watching live sporting events in groups and there is some gambling interest among the group, the gambling probability increases for all.

Part of this is due to the saturation of gambling advertising during broadcasts. Researchers have shown that people suffering from a gambling addiction report that watching sports betting commercials worsens their behaviour or at least lessens their ability to abstain (Lopez-Gonzalez et al. 2017). One undesired side effect of these commercials is that their greatest impact is often on people who may already possess a gambling issue. One study conducted with a sample of 6,034 gamblers found that problem gamblers had a greater involvement with gambling advertising, even in cases where they were equally exposed as non-problem gamblers (Lopez-Gonzalez & Griffiths 2018). This research confirmed that people who had not previously gambled are far less likely to respond to advertising than those who had. Lole et al. (2019) found that these advertisements are more likely to encourage further sports betting, rather than enticing non-gamblers to take up the activity. This occurrence may be the result of people's personal tendencies when viewing the advertisements in question.

"Two studies that looked at embedded sports betting advertising found that responsible gambling messages were present during television breaks and live odds announcements, but signs of responsible gambling messages were not present on sponsorship shirts or very infrequently in stadium banner advertising" (Killick & Griffiths 2022, p. 17). As Canada begins to allow open betting sponsorships of sport, the content and use of these messages must also be considered.

The content of many sport sponsorships by betting companies can be harmful because they outwardly promote gambling to new consumers as well as encourage current gamblers to heighten their engagement in the practice. Sportsbooks often offer welcome bonuses for new bettors, free bonuses for loyal customers, and money-back guarantees on accumulated bets (Lopez-Gonzalez et al. 2017). While this does not always succeed in establishing new customers, it appears to be effective in prolonging engagement from casual or heavy gamblers. These results are detrimental because they play directly into problem gambling behaviour (Winters & Derevensky 2019). Conclusions drawn from the research of Lole et al. (2019) confirmed that gamblers were more likely to place a greater number of bets based on incentive offers. Responsible gambling messages had minimal impact. Other researchers confirmed this finding in their research.

> "Amongst 365 self-selected female gamblers in Ontario, 20% reported that gambling advertising had aroused urges to gamble. It was found that 46% of the 131 pathological gamblers in the sample reported that TV, radio and billboard advertisements triggered their gambling" (Hing et al. 2014, p. 3).

With gambling so integrated into the sport system, the effect it has on consumers must be taken seriously. Not only can consumers be incited to gamble, but the athletes, too, are also at risk.

(b) Gambling by Elite Athletes

Athletes competing at the highest level are subject to immense pressure, and they are typically fierce competitors. Many also feel confident in all their activities, including the prospect of being successful in gambling (Håkansson et al. 2021). These factors, coupled with their sizable salaries, should be a concern. While mental health issues seen in elite athletes can include a broad range of disorders, there are some addictions that have been highlighted as more of a risk for athletes. One of these addictive disorders seen in elite athletes is a gambling disorder (Håkansson et al. 2021). It appears that elite athletes can succumb to problem gambling because of the contextual factors of their lifestyles. Athletes are often under far more public scrutiny than the average person, making it more difficult for them to seek treatment. People falsely believe that they have a high degree of life satisfaction due to their high earnings and good health (Håkansson et al. 2021). However, the reality is that athletes are often in a situation which facilitates and enables increased gambling. Håkansson et al. (2021) found that the rates of problem gambling detected in each setting with elite athletes are elevated compared to the general population. Additional reasons this may be the case include athletes

being even more exposed to gambling in sports than the average person and their individual competitiveness.

Besides the personal problems it can create for the athletes themselves, elite athletes gambling is more problematic because they are marketed as role models.

> "Elite athletes may be role models for younger athletes and for the general public, and the extent of gambling problems in elite athletes, over and above other health concerns in affected individuals, may also influence attitudes toward gambling in the general population" (Håkansson et al. 2021, p. 2).

The marketing of elite athletes can be a powerful tool for reshaping consumer attitudes (Brandt 2017). However, the betting companies, now emboldened by the prevailing legislation, use much more than elite athletes to market their new product.

(c) Ubiquitous Ease of Access

One of the primary concerns associated with deregulated sports betting is that it becomes immediately accessible to consumers. The ubiquitous access to handheld technology exacerbates the problem. The instant availability of sports gambling on smart devices, when paired with increased advertising, has been shown to be associated with increased participation in gambling behaviour and decreased perception of potential harm (Lole et al. 2019). When gambling becomes as convenient as using mobile apps, the psychology of the activity shifts. In the past, people wishing to gamble would have to visit specific venues in order to place a wager. With the introduction and subsequent rise of online gambling, people can now literally gamble from everywhere around the globe (Constandt et al. 2022). The push to engage consumers in online gambling is problematic because it increases their willingness to gamble but also inhibits their ability to self-monitor. Houghton et al. (2019) found that because of the spontaneous decision-making and the intangible nature of spending money online, gamblers betting online are less able to monitor their spending while playing than offline players. Online sports betting greatly benefits sportsbooks because they save on staff expenses by not requiring brick-and-mortar establishments, and the psychology of online gambling increases their customer engagement. Due to this situation, betting companies have been making a marketing push to move consumers online:

> "The use of betting technology, such as mobile smartphones and tablets, appeared in over 60% of the advertisements. Similarly, Lopez-Gonzalez et al. (2018) found that mobile betting technology appeared in 92.4% of the betting advertisements, presenting the accessibil0ity and availability of this form of gambling" (Killick & Griffiths 2022, p. 18).

These efforts increase the accessibility of sports betting. As the collaboration 00between sport organizations and betting companies evolves, it is crucial for sport organizations to understand the role that they play in distributing this same message.

Sports gambling is more accessible than ever, given the digital technology available. Gamblers are provided with rich information to help them make gambling decisions and create a greater illusion of control. Team statistics, player trends, injury reports, and line-up changes are readily and immediately available to sports gamblers through technology. With the availability of big data and the emergence of online streaming platforms, it is now feasible to tailor sponsor messages mid-game based on the viewers' data and match context (Breuer et al. 2021). The illusion of control and of making "informed" wagers is omnipresent. In addition, broadcasters and "sport insiders" are providing insider information and predictions during their broadcasts to help gamblers make seemingly informed wagering decisions.

> "ESPN… features gambling predictions alongside each day's sports matchups. ESPN.com's NBA scoreboard places gambling predictions alongside basic game information, ticket links, and key players to watch. It includes the predicted winner of each contest, margin of victory, and total points scored in the contest" (Houghton et al. 2019, p. 2).

Providing this type of information can be harmful to consumers because it manipulates them into believing gambling is a skill instead of a phenomenon based on luck.

(d) Gamification and the Illusion of Control

While playing slot machines at casinos is undoubtedly a purely luck-based activity, because of external influencing factors, many believe that sports betting can be skill-based. Sports betting has been labelled as the most irrational, driven type of gambling (Lopez-Gonzalez et al. 2018). This helps demonstrate the role of perceived skill and knowledge in irrational beliefs related to sports gambling. Skill was perceived to have a positive influence on the odds of winning. However, because sports are unpredictable, no matter the wager, there are no guarantees. Part of this perception is due to the role of fantasy sports. Many gamblers began with pay-to-play fantasy sports, where both player and team information are used to inform weekly betting decisions. Fantasy gaming is quickly becoming a significant component of the sports gambling scene, most notably in the United States, where fantasy sports websites that have evolved into sportsbooks have partially captured the online sports betting consumer base (Lopez-Gonzalez & Griffiths 2017). The danger of associating fantasy sports with the current sports betting landscape is that sports betting becomes gamified. Consumers don't place enough emphasis on the severity of their actions while engaging in sports gambling.

> "Contemporary betting marketing highlights the active role of bettors and the way mobile technologies can be used to enhance the control over the betting experience, and implicitly, over the bet outcome itself. The development of betting interfaces towards more involved experiences featuring more options for bettors to interact with the ongoing bets (e.g. cash out) has gamified sports betting" (Lopez-Gonzalez & Griffiths 2017, p. 10).

This reinforces the point that sport organizations need to be cognizant of how they display sports betting sponsorships. If the experience is gamified, consumers can believe that they can improve at sports betting over time, as they often experience with traditional sports. This facilitates the 'illusion of control". Clarke et al. (2006) concluded that gambling advertisements reinforced the notion in problem gamblers that they had the experience and insights to win. The perception is that in sports betting, training, knowledge, experience, and skills separate those who win from those who lose" (Lopez-Gonzalez & Griffiths 2017, p. 11). When coupled with problem gambling, the gamification of sports betting can result in dangerous scenarios.

Research has already found that sports betting advertising incites gambling in some, and now there have been studies that show it manipulates people to believe they can win too. Beyond planting the belief that winning is consistently possible, betting advertisements have also found alternative strategies to gamify the experience. Commercials for sportsbooks often feature themes related to the sport or competition. One example of this is the bravery versus cowardice dichotomy, which is used to encourage betting to prove one's skills and knowledge over other bettors or a bookmaker (Lopez-Gonzalez et al. 2017). In addition to implying that consumers are guaranteed to win, these new commercials attempt to trigger consumers' competitive urges. This association with bravery is similar to the way activity on a stock market is branded. Whereby stockholders must constantly read and predict trends, and then react to them, despite the chaotic environment. The concept of sports gambling being similar to stock markets has been explored before, and it also contributes to the illusion of control problem. "In online sports betting, cashing out is understood as a way to adapt to the changing cycles of the market. By cashing out, bettors minimize their losses from downward trend bets, as when selling stock" (Lopez-Gonzalez et al., 2017 p. 9). Contorting gambling into a system where consumers can influence their own outcomes is troubling because it also contributes to social normalization.

A Way Forward

Ultimately, the objective of sport organizations should be to find a healthy way to collaborate with betting companies while not inflicting additional societal harm. It begins with sport organizations collectively using their image and power to demand concessions from betting companies. As it stands, betting companies gain far more from the relationship than sport organizations. The most common way for gambling sponsors to measure the effectiveness of their advertisement is through visibility, rather than traditional efficiency (Breuer et al. 2021). This metric is known as 'media exposure'. If this visibility is how betting companies are measuring the success of their sponsorships, the current situation for them is ideal. One proposed potential solution to equitable collaboration between sport organizations and sportsbooks is the concept of attenuated property rights (Dietl & Weingärtner 2014). Under this scenario, the right to offer bets on games would be held by the sport organization itself and would be up for sale to sportsbooks in a way very

similar to how broadcasting companies purchase the rights to televise games (Dietl & Weingärtner 2014). This proposed solution would greatly empower sport organizations to decide how they will collaborate with sportsbooks. Attenuated property rights would significantly shift the balance of power in favour of sport organizations and coupled with the legal changes necessary to grant them their own "betting rights," it would make enacting this change very challenging. Ultimately, a solution will require a balance between the two.

When finding a balance between sport organizations and gambling entities, the principal demand must be the elimination of in-game betting, or at the very least, its promotion. It's common for sports betting companies to offer bets on fractions of games. It has been suggested that prohibiting these fractional bets could help reduce the addictive properties by restricting bets which have short feedback loops (Parsons 2020). The addictive properties of in-game betting are exactly why Australia, a country with a deeply rooted gambling culture, made it illegal again after deregulating sports betting. The way for sport organizations to use their selling power here is to refuse sponsorships to any betting company that promotes in-game betting, or for sport organizations to refuse that gameplay be advertised using their sponsorships. In this scenario, sport organizations would retain the ability to accept sponsorship dollars from gambling companies while not directly inciting the most problematic version of the practice.

However, the limit can be pushed further, and additional concessions could be realized. These additional demands would require betting companies to introduce more transparent and responsible gambling messages on any sponsored material. Moreover, many commercial sport organizations are represented as wagerable events on the websites of the sponsoring betting companies. Sport organizations could demand these same transparent, responsible gambling messages on all wagers which apply directly to their team. Researchers have shown that, specifically in the context of electronic gambling machines, using pop-up responsible gambling messages mid-play has been successfully used to encourage healthy gambling behaviours (Lole et al. 2019). This fix is also easy, with a simple colour swap on messages needed to increase awareness. The advertisements that captured the most attention were those with a contrasting background, which highlighted the benefits of more visible messages (Lole et al. 2019). By simply introducing colour contrast, sport organizations can responsibly claim they have done their duty in presenting responsible gambling messages to their customers.

Another way in which sport organizations can compromise with betting companies on sponsorship is by dictating when logos can be displayed. An ideal pair for betting companies is promoting in-game betting during high-stakes or dramatic situations during the game. The interest level of fans is often dependent on the perceived level of uncertainty in a game. As a result, sponsors hoping to advertise themselves should prefer exposure during periods with high outcome uncertainty, such as overtime or sudden-death situations (Breuer et al. 2021). Sports managers issuing sponsorships for commercial teams could contractually remove the ability for betting companies to display their logos in situations such as overtime games, shootouts, and even under certain parameters related to match score and timing. Thus, removing more emotionally stimulating moments for

gambling promotion. The display of betting logos in venues could also be prohibited, but the demands of sports organizations must be reasonable enough that betting companies are still willing to cooperate and sponsor. Government officials also have a role to play and, through legislation, could scale back the intensity with which sports betting companies are advertising, sports organizations are able to commit to a few practices themselves. These are small-scale changes, yet they are profound enough to demonstrate the sports industry's commitment to promoting fair competition and healthy living. All the while sport organizations can make these demands while still adding to their bottom line through new sponsorships. However, before these alterations can be implemented, domestic research must be conducted to gather insight into Canada's unique situation.

Conclusion

While legalized sports gambling has had a long and complex history in other countries, the concept was not legalized in Canada until 2022, with the passage of Bill C-218 by the Canadian government. Since that time, the practice of legalized sports gambling in Canada has expanded, driven by the widespread availability of digital technologies, increased social acceptance, and government, sports organizations, and gambling establishment officials who recognize and value the financial benefits that can be accrued.

In this paper, the authors trace the developments that led to the legalization of sports gambling in Canada. They highlight the explosive growth of the field and provide a blueprint for action to help ensure that the practice remains lawful and in the best interests of sport and society. However, further research is needed in this area to ensure that the benefits outweigh the risks associated with the activity. To date, the bulk of research conducted in this area has been carried out in foreign markets, where the activity has been legal for quite some time. While the results of these studies inform policy decisions in Canada, domestic research needs to be undertaken to strategically shape the industry and protect stakeholders. The authors believe that sport leaders and government officials could, and should, do more to ensure more positive outcomes for the sports industry and its followers.

References

Baker SR, Balthrop J, Johnson MJ, Kotter JD, Pisciotta K (2024) *Gambling away stability: Sports betting's impact on vulnerable households.* Accessed on March 7, 2024 at http:// dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4881086.

Banerjee P (2024). *The expansion of sports gambling means Canadians will be betting away their shot at building wealt*h. Toronto: The Globe and Mail.

Brandt A (2017) Professional sports leagues' big bet: Evolving attitudes on gambling. *Stanford Leadership and Policy Review, 28,* 273.

Breuer C, Boronczyk F, Rumpf C (2021) Message personification and real-time adaptation as the next innovations in sport sponsorship management. *Journal of Business Research, 133*, 309-316. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.j.usres.2021.05.003.

Clarke D, Tse S, Abbott M, Townsend S, Kingi P, Manaia W (2006) Key indicators of the transition from social to problem gambling. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction, 4*(3), 247–264.

Constandt B, Rosiers J, Moernaut J, Van Der Hoeven S, Willem A (2022) Part of the game? Exploring the prevalence and normalization of gambling in Belgian sports clubs. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *19*(11), 6527. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19116527.

Dietl H, Weingärtner C (2014) Betting scandals and attenuated property rights: how betting-related match-fixing can be prevented in future. *The International Sports Law Journal*, *14*(1–2), 128–137. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40318-014-0040-x.

Håkansson A, Durand-Bush N, Kenttä G (2021) Problem gambling and problem gaming in elite athletes: A literature review. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-021-00692-y.

Hing N, Lamont M, Vitartas P, Fink E (2014) Sports-embedded gambling promotions: A study of exposure, sports betting intention and problem gambling amongst adults. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, *13*(1), 115–135. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-014-9519-9.

Hing N, Vitartas P, Lamont M (2013) Gambling sponsorship of sport: An exploratory study of links with gambling attitudes and intentions. *International Gambling Studies*, *13*(3), 281–301. https://doi.org/10.1080/14459795.2013.812132.

Houghton D, Nowlin EL, Walker D (2019) From fantasy to reality: The role of fantasy sports in sports betting and online gambling. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, *38*(3), 332–353. https://doi.org/10.1177/0743915619841365.

Humphreys B, Perez L (2012) Who bets on sports? Characteristics of sports bettors and the consequences of expanding sports betting opportunities. *Estudios de Economía Aplicada*, *30*(2), 579–598.

Kaburakis A, Rodenberg RM, Holden JT (2014) Inevitable: Sports gambling, state regulation, and the pursuit of revenue. *Harvard Business Law Review, 5,* 27.

Killick E, Griffiths MD (2022) Sports betting advertising: A systematic review of content analysis studies. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, *21*(5), 3076-3102. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-022-00775-4.

Lole L, Li E, Russell AM, Greer N, Thorne H, Hing N (2019) Are sports bettors looking at responsible gambling messages? An eye-tracking study on wagering advertisements. *Journal of Behavioral Addictions*, *8*(3), 499–507. https://doi.org/10.1556/2006.8.2019.37.

Lopez-Gonzalez H, Estévez A, Griffiths MD (2017) Marketing and advertising online sports betting: A problem gambling perspective. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, *41*(3), 256–272. https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723517705545.

Lopez-Gonzalez H, Griffiths MD (2018) Betting, Forex Trading, and Fantasy Gaming Sponsorships—a Responsible Marketing Inquiry into the 'Gamblification' of English Football. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, *16*(2), 404–419. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-017-9788-1.

Lopez-Gonzalez H, Guerrero-Solé F, Estévez A, Griffiths M (2017) Betting is loving and bettors are predators: A conceptual metaphor approach to online sports betting advertising. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, *34*(3), 709–726. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-017-97 27-x.

Lopez-Gonzalez H, Guerrero-Solé F, Griffiths MD (2018) A content analysis of how "normal" sports betting behaviour is represented in gambling advertising. *Addiction Research & Theory*, *26*(3), 238–247. https://doi.org/10.1080/16066359.2017.1353082.

Lopez-Gonzalez H, Estévez A, Griffiths MD (2019) Internet-based structural characteristics of sports betting and problem gambling severity: Is there a relationship? *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, *17*(6), 1360-1373. https://doi.org/10.1007/s 11469-018-9876-x.

Mahan J, Drayer J, Sparvero E (2012) Gambling and fantasy: An examination of the influence of money on fan attitudes and behaviors. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, *21*(3), 159–169.

Maher A, Wilson N, Signal L, Thomson G (2006) Patterns of sports sponsorship by gambling, alcohol and food companies: An internet survey. *BMC Public Health*, *6*(1), 1-9. https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-6-95.

Nabifo S, Izudi J, Bajunirwe F (2021) Alcohol consumption and sports-betting among young male motorcycle taxi boda boda riders in urban southwestern Uganda. *BMC Public Health*, *21*(1), 1-8. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-10406-7.

Parsons J(2020) Better bettors: Regulatory proposals to reduce societal costs associated with gambling disorder in states that permit legal sports betting. *Law & Psychology Review*, *44*, 267.

Rawat V, Hing N, Russell AM (2020) What's the message? A content analysis of emails and texts received from wagering operators during sports and racing events. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, *36*(4), 1107-1121.

Rodríguez P, Humphreys BR, Simmons R (Eds.) (2017) *Economics of sports betting*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Smith G (2012) Sports betting in Canada; Law and policy. *The International Sports Law Journal*, 288-303.

Stadler Blank A, Loveland KE, Houghton DM (2021) Game changing innovation or bad beat? How sports betting can reduce fan engagement. *Journal of Business Research*, *134*, 365–374. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.05.036.

Villeneuve J, Pasquier M (Eds.) (2018) *International sports betting: Integrity, deviance, governance, and policy*. Routledge.

Winters KC, Derevensky JL (2019) A review of sports wagering: Prevalence, characteristics of sports bettors, and association with problem gambling. *Journal of Gambling Issues*, 43.

Athens Journal of Sports - Volume 12, Issue 4, December 2025 – Pages 217-228

Youth Perceptions of Democracy in Relation to UEFA Rankings in EU Countries

*By Gregory T. Papanikos**

Democracy plays a vital role in the functioning of the European Union (EU). All levels of political representation, including the European Parliament—which reflects the voices of citizens across the 27 member states—are democratically elected. However, democracy also relies on the active participation of its citizens. In contrast, football represents a domain of mass participation that, in certain cases, can give rise to ochlocracy (mob rule), thereby undermining democratic principles. Countries where citizens express lower levels of satisfaction with democracy—both at the national and EU levels—tend to exhibit higher levels of mass mobilization, which is often reflected in the strength and popularity of their football associations, as measured by UEFA rankings and scores. This paper investigates the relationship between young people's perceptions of democracy within the EU and their respective countries' UEFA scores. If football is a reflection of mass culture and democracy a product of civic engagement, one might hypothesize that in contexts where democratic satisfaction is low, football serves as a compensatory outlet for collective identity and expression.

Keywords: *Democracy, Ochlocracy, Youth, European Union, Fans, Football, Sports, UEFA.*

Introduction

Youth and sports have been closely connected since the time of the ancient Olympics. While there is no legal age discrimination in sports participation, biological constraints do exist. Young people are more engaging, playing a dual role in sports: as active spectators (consumers) and as players (producers).

Sports—especially team sports such as football—are closely intertwined with politics, and by extension, with democracy. History teaches us that the youth of the world compete either on the battlefields of real wars or on the metaphorical battlefields of sports stadiums. Needless to say, sane individuals, if given the choice, would prefer the latter.

Nevertheless, sports competition in contemporary European societies is not immune to violence, which, in some cases, results in serious injuries or fatalities. A recent incident in Athens involved premeditated violence by football supporters directed at law enforcement, culminating in the tragic death of a police officer. This event underscores the more troubling aspects of sports culture and its entanglement with democratic values.

In the Athenian case, the incident quickly escalated into a political issue, with voices from both sides expressing concern that democratic principles were under

*President, The Athens Institute, Greece. The author has previously taught in many Canadian, Greek and U.K. Universities.

threat. The owner of Greece's largest football club—a prominent and influential public figure—publicly accused the government of political persecution following his indictment. Conversely, hooliganism has not only compromised the integrity of football but has also been interpreted as a broader challenge to democratic institutions. Far-right and neo-Nazi groups have frequently exploited the organizational structures of major football clubs, using the guise of fandom to disseminate extremist ideologies and evade scrutiny.

Democracy is the central focus of this paper. We draw on data from the most recent Eurobarometer survey, which investigates the perspectives of young EU citizens on democratic values. The target population consisted of EU citizens aged 16 to 30, and the survey was conducted between February 11 and 20, 2025, with a sample size of 25,993 respondents. This study employs simple descriptive statistics to identify notable differences in youth attitudes across the 27 EU member states.

In addition, we incorporate the 2025 Union of European Football Associations. (UEFA)[1] scores of men's European football associations to examine the potential relationship between young people's satisfaction with democracy—both at the EU level and within their respective countries—and national football performance. If football functions as the "opium of the masses," a negative association would be expected between levels of democratic satisfaction and the success of national football associations.

Including this introduction, the paper is organized into five sections. The second section presents a theoretical framework that conceptualizes the relationship between democracy and football. The third section discusses young people's opinions about democracy in their respective countries and in the EU. The fourth section explores the association between democratic satisfaction and UEFA scores, using descriptive statistical analysis. The final section offers concluding remarks.

A Conceptual Model

Democracy is an ideal political system where people participate in making decisions about their current and future affairs. I have examined various aspects of democracy in a series of studies (Papanikos, 2016, 2017, 2020, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2025). I developed five criteria to evaluate democracy and argued that democracy has a bright future through education. If education is missing, the required active people's participation may turn into a political system known since antiquity as ochlocracy (mob rule).

Democracy requires citizens, and ochlocracy requires masses (mobs). Similar in sports especially popular team sports such as football in Europe require participation. People attending football are called fans. Like in democracy they are called spectators

[1]UEFA has been the subject of many studies. This journal has dealt with various aspects of UEFA; see the studies by Cincimino (2014), Espita Escuer & Garcia Cebrian (2016), Nunes & Valério (2020), and Zambom Ferraresi et al. (2017).

and enjoy the game and behaving with virtue. Some of these fans may turn into a mass/mob using violence against all "others" however the latter are defined.[2]

From a different perspective, the biggest threat to democracy lies in populist policies and populist leaders. Particularly during periods of economic crisis, these leaders often exploit the most popular sport—football, especially in EU countries—to draw supporters to their political agendas.

A common trait shared by populist leaders and popular football teams is fanaticism: a fervent loyalty that often disregards core democratic values such as human rights, equality, and non-discrimination. The most visible expression of this behavior can be observed in popular team sports. It is no surprise, then, that UEFA has been committed to eliminating fanaticism from football.

I have attempted to incorporate this discussion into a conceptual model, illustrated in Figure 1. The model begins with the premise of active popular participation, which is a prerequisite for both democracy and ochlocracy. In contrast, other political systems—such as tyranny (dictatorship) and aristocracy (oligarchy)—do not rely on any form of political participation by the people.

Political participation may come from either *citizens*, defined here as ethical individuals who have received a basic education, or the *masses*, defined as people lacking virtue. The distinction lies in the outcome of their participation: citizens give rise to democracy, while masses lead to ochlocracy.

The dashed line between masses and citizens in the model represents the continuous and dynamic flow between these two groups, which is largely influenced by economic conditions. This flow is bidirectional. In times of economic prosperity and strong social cohesion, more people tend to become citizens. Conversely, during severe economic crises—especially when not addressed by inclusive policies—citizens on the margins may shift into the category of the masses or mob.

This transition often finds its initial expression in settings where large crowds gather, such as football stadiums. As more citizens become part of the masses, the risk increases that democracy will be undermined and replaced by authoritarian leadership.

History teaches us that even through democratic processes, a majority can elect authoritarian regimes, which may then consolidate power either through outright dictatorship or in the form of what are now termed *illiberal democracies*. Hitler, for instance, rose to power through democratic elections.

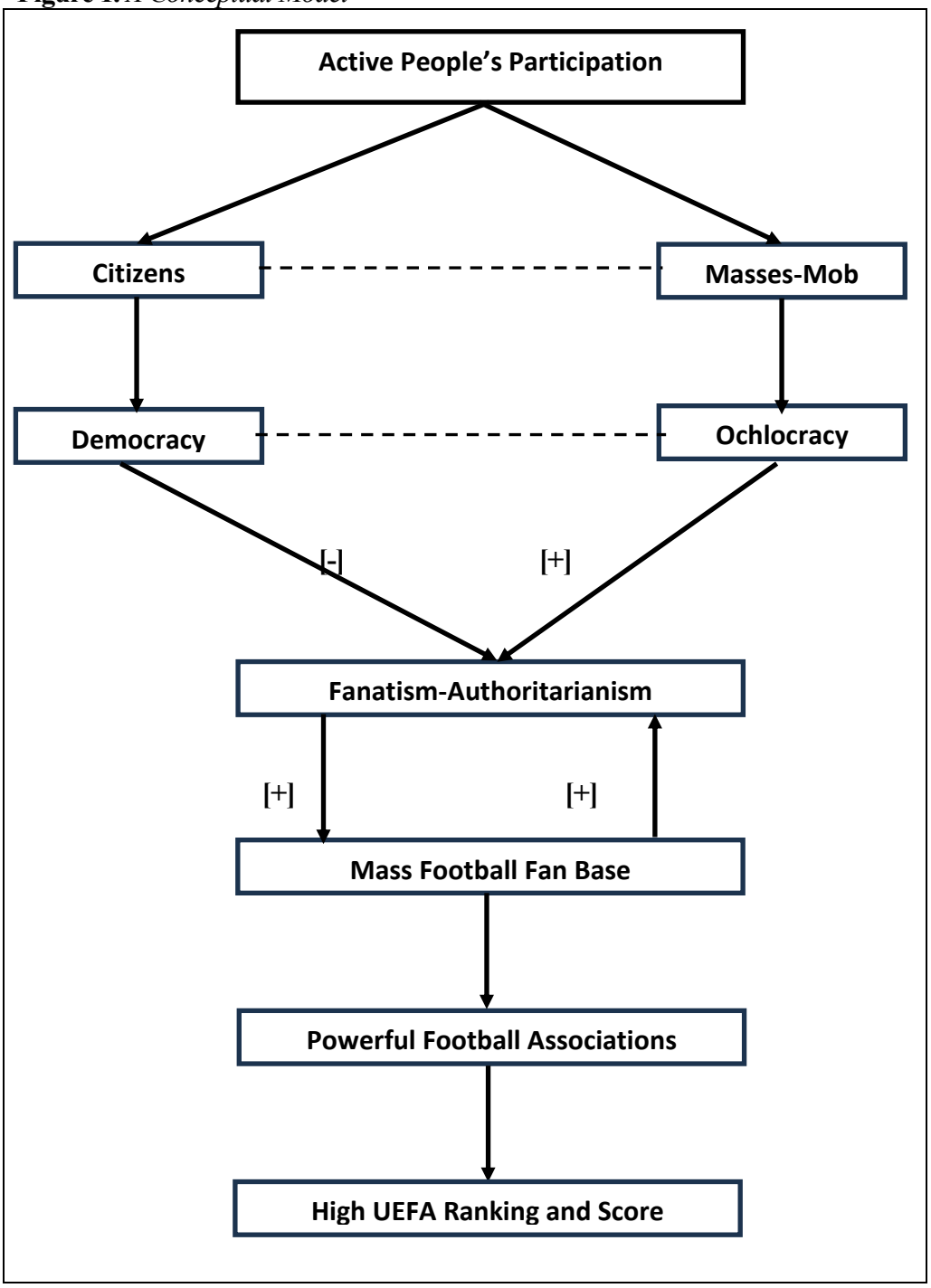
It is often said that democracy is based on majority rule—but this must be coupled with respect for minority rights. Hitler infamously used sports as propaganda to advance his dangerous political goals. The spectacle of the 1936 Olympic Games was the most dramatic display of this strategy, taking place just before the outbreak of war in Europe.

The flow of the diagram illustrates the negative relationship between democracy and fanaticism, and the positive relationship between ochlocracy and authoritarianism. Fanaticism in society often translates into fanaticism in football. The masses organize

[2]The role of fans in sports—especially in popular sports such as football in Europe—has received considerable attention in both research and the mass media. Many studies have appeared in this journal that examine the role of fans, including those by Binjwaied et al. (2015), Borges (2018), Ibrahim (2014), and Özgen & Argan (2017).

themselves around football clubs, which then become a pretext for undermining social cohesion—and ultimately, the political system.

Figure 1. *A Conceptual Model*



Strong support for football teams fosters strong national team identities, with competition playing out not only at the national level but also on the international stage. In UEFA club competitions, stadiums across Europe become symbolic

battlefields in a new kind of "war"—one that too often escalates into real violence, sometimes even resulting in the loss of lives.

The above analysis suggests a negative relationship between citizens' appreciation of democracy and the strength of football fanaticism. Large groups of people become loyal fan bases, which are often leveraged by club owners to further strengthen their teams. One measure of this strength is the ranking of national football associations in European competitions.

This negative relationship—between support for democracy and UEFA scores/ rankings—is empirically examined in the following two sections of the paper. The next section analyzes youths' responses to two questions related to their perception of democracy.

Measuring Youth Satisfaction with Democracy

The following two questions were included in the Eurobarometer survey (European Union, 2025):

1. On the whole, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way democracy works in your country?
2. On the whole, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way democracy works in the EU?

Respondents were asked to choose one of five options: *very satisfied*, *rather satisfied*, *rather dissatisfied*, *very dissatisfied*, or *don't know*. Tables 1 and 2 present the responses to the first and second questions, respectively. Sixty-five percent of young EU citizens are *very* or *rather satisfied* with democracy at the EU level, while 59% are satisfied with the democracy that exists in their own country. The corresponding dissatisfaction rates were 38% and 29%, respectively.

The correlation between the two satisfaction rates is 0.8148. However, the means differ: satisfaction with democracy among EU citizens is lower for their country than for the EU. A t-test of the difference in means shows that this difference is statistically significant at the 1% level ($t = 2.76$).

Tables 1 and 2 do not provide a clear picture of the variations within individual countries. Table 3 presents summary statistics for the two variables. To provide a clearer view, we created the category "satisfaction with democracy," defined as the sum of *very satisfied* and *rather satisfied* responses at both the country and EU levels. The mean is now calculated across countries rather than across the entire sample. This country-level mean is higher than the overall sample mean because youth in smaller countries, in terms of population, tend to be more satisfied with democracy than those in larger countries.

In any case, the focus of this study is on variations. The first notable differences are in the maximum and minimum values. The minimum satisfaction percentage was found in Italy (46% for democracy at the country level) and in France (56% for democracy at the EU level). In Italy, 56% of its youth are satisfied with EU-level democracy. Incidentally, as we shall see in the next section, Italy has the highest

UEFA score, followed by Germany, Spain, and France. The maximum satisfaction values—90% for country-level democracy and 86% for EU-level democracy—were recorded in Luxembourg.

There appear to be greater variations among youth regarding democracy at the country level compared to the EU level. The range (maximum minus minimum value) is 44 percentage points for democracy at the country level and 30 percentage points for EU-level democracy. The standard deviation is 12 for country-level democracy and 8 for the EU level.

Table 1. *Satisfaction with Democracy at the National Level*

	Very satisfied	Rather satisfied	Rather dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Don't know
EU27	17	42	26	12	3
Belgium	36	48	12	2	2
Bulgaria	36	32	21	9	2
Czechia	14	59	19	4	4
Denmark	33	52	10	4	1
Germany	12	44	29	12	3
Estonia	29	50	15	4	2
Ireland	40	42	12	4	2
Greece	29	30	22	19	0
Spain	12	37	31	17	3
France	11	38	30	17	4
Croatia	26	33	26	12	3
Italy	8	38	34	18	2
Cyprus	30	42	19	8	1
Latvia	22	46	22	6	4
Lithuania	34	44	15	4	3
Luxembourg	48	42	8	1	1
Hungary	24	34	20	18	4
Malta	44	34	14	7	1
Netherlands	25	53	15	6	1
Austria	29	45	18	6	2
Poland	14	50	22	5	9
Portugal	21	50	23	4	2
Romania	32	42	18	8	0
Slovenia	26	43	21	7	3
Slovakia	19	38	27	14	2
Finland	31	50	14	3	2
Sweden	14	48	24	9	5

Skewness measures the asymmetry of a data distribution. A skewness value of zero indicates that the distribution is symmetric (i.e., normal). At the country level, the skewness is -0.29, which indicates a slight negative skew—meaning the distribution has a small leftward tail. This suggests the distribution is nearly symmetrical, with a minor tendency for lower values to occur more frequently than higher ones.

Table 2. *Satisfaction with Democracy at the EU Level*

	Very satisfied	Rather satisfied	Rather dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Don't know
EU27	15	50	22	7	6
Belgium	31	51	11	3	4
Bulgaria	32	45	15	4	4
Czechia	10	56	20	6	8
Denmark	26	52	13	5	4
Germany	11	48	28	8	5
Estonia	25	52	15	2	6
Ireland	35	50	11	2	2
Greece	22	49	23	5	1
Spain	10	50	24	8	8
France	10	46	26	10	8
Croatia	23	45	20	7	5
Italy	8	57	22	8	5
Cyprus	21	55	18	4	2
Latvia	22	56	14	3	5
Lithuania	28	50	15	3	4
Luxembourg	38	48	11	1	2
Hungary	28	44	17	6	5
Malta	36	44	14	3	3
Netherlands	21	51	18	6	4
Austria	24	49	17	8	2
Poland	11	55	18	6	10
Portugal	19	59	16	2	4
Romania	29	51	16	3	1
Slovenia	23	49	20	4	4
Slovakia	18	55	17	6	4
Finland	24	53	13	5	5
Sweden	8	52	21	8	11

At the EU level, the skewness is also negative, at -0.50. This represents a moderate negative skew, indicating a somewhat longer or heavier left tail. It suggests a more pronounced asymmetry compared to the country level, with a greater concentration of values toward the higher end, but still a noticeable tendency for lower values to occur.

Kurtosis measures the "tailedness" or sharpness of the peak in a data distribution. It indicates how much of the variance is due to outliers (extreme values) and how the data are distributed around the mean.

A kurtosis value of -0.79, as seen in the case of country-level democracy, suggests a platykurtic distribution—meaning the data has a flatter peak and lighter tails than a normal distribution. This indicates the data is more evenly spread out, with fewer extreme outliers, and suggests less frequent occurrence of extreme values compared to a normal distribution.

Table 3. *Variations of Satisfaction (Sum of Very and Rather Satisfied)*

Statistic	Satisfaction (Country)	Satisfaction (EU)
Mean	69	73
Median	71	73
Mode	78	78
Minimum	46	56
Maximum	90	86
Range	44	30
Standard Deviation	12	8
Skewness	-0.29	-0.50
Kurtosis	-0.79	-0.46

Similarly, a kurtosis value of -0.46 for EU-level democracy also indicates a platykurtic distribution, though the flattening of the peak is less pronounced than in the country-level case. This means the distribution is still flatter than a normal distribution, but the difference between the peak and the tails is less significant.

The variations in young people's appreciation of democracy in their respective EU countries are contrasted in the next section with the UEFA ranking of national men's football associations. The hypothesis is that lower satisfaction with democracy is associated with a higher football ranking.

UEFA Scores and Democracy

This section is purely descriptive in nature. Ideally, we would develop a regression model in which UEFA rankings depend on a range of variables reflecting economic, social, cultural, and other country-specific conditions, as well as the level of democracy. However, this is left for future research.

Figure 2 shows the UEFA rankings and scores in descending order for the 27 EU countries. The rankings are calculated as a weighted average over the last five football seasons, starting with the 2020–21 season and ending with the 2024–25 European football season.

The four largest football associations are Italy, Spain, Germany, and France. There is a strong correlation with population (0.8122), but there are notable exceptions—small countries in terms of population with relatively high UEFA rankings, such as Cyprus. This is important issue is not discussed here.

Figures 3 and 4 depict the scatter diagrams of the UEFA scores and youth satisfaction with democracy at both the country and EU levels. There appears to be a strong negative relationship between the strength of the national football association of the men's team and satisfaction with democracy.

Both figures show a negative non-linear association. As youth satisfaction with democracy increases, the UEFA ranking (score) decreases at a decreasing rate. Luxembourg has the lowest UEFA score but the highest youth satisfaction rate regarding its democracy. Luxembourg has a population of 691,000 people, making it the second smallest after Malta, which has a population of 587,000. Malta has the

fourth-lowest UEFA ranking. Of interest is the case of Cyprus, which ranks relatively high in the UEFA rankings—13th among the 27 EU countries—with a population of 949,000 people. On the other hand, there are also variations in the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and GDP per capita, which may also explain variations in the UEFA rankings, assuming the cause runs from these variables to UEFA scores. As mentioned, this more important issue is left for future research.

Figure 2. *UEFA Score in EU Countries*

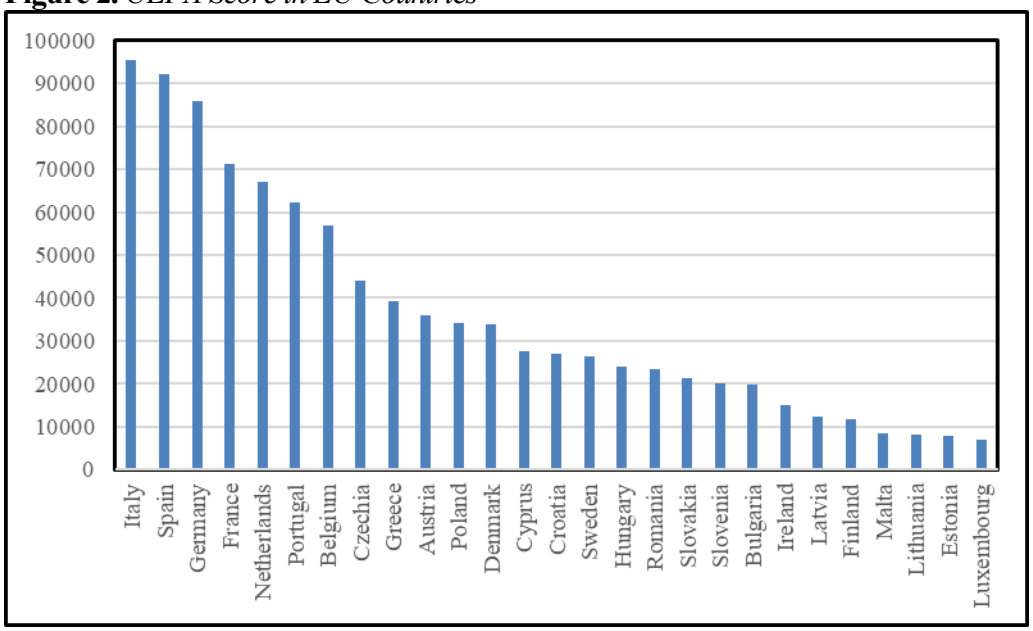
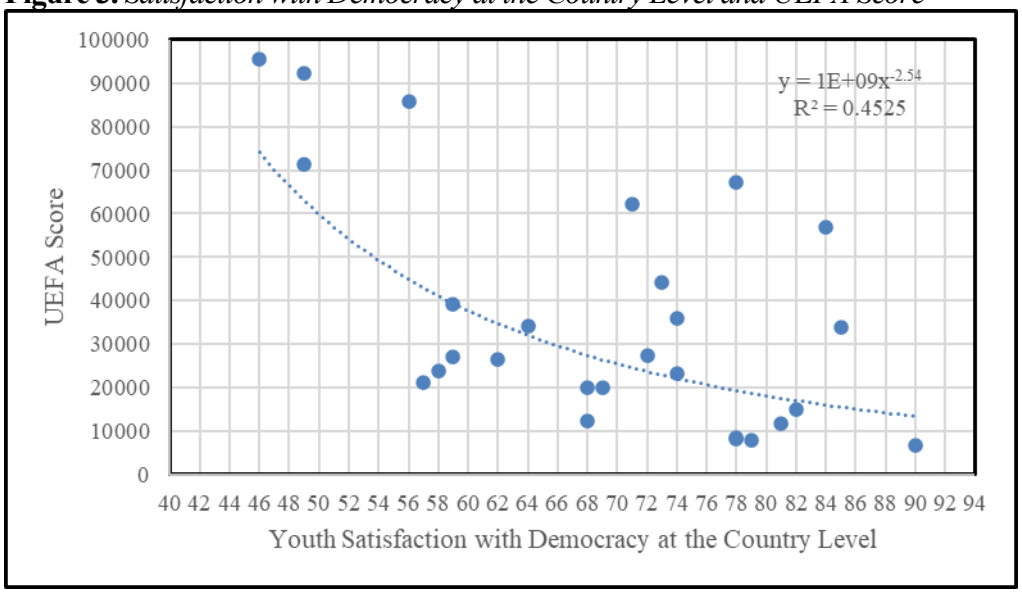


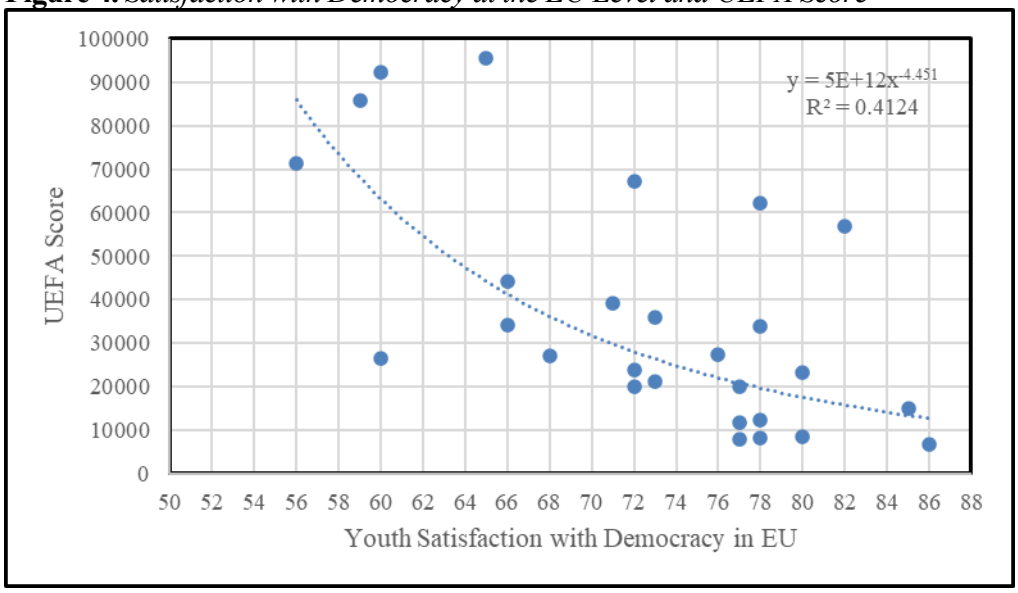
Figure 3. *Satisfaction with Democracy at the Country Level and UEFA Score*



There are many ways one could evaluate this descriptive evidence of the negative relationship. One obvious interpretation is that people who value democracy may view football as an inferior good, suitable only for the uneducated masses who, under

the right circumstances, could turn into a mob and undermine democracy by imposing the worst form of popular rule—ochlocracy.

Figure 4. *Satisfaction with Democracy at the EU Level and UEFA Score*



Of course, causality may run the other way. A lack of democracy, often accompanied by social exclusion, may lead young people to seek social recognition through affiliation with football fan communities. These fanatic supporters are usually organized into clubs that go beyond simply watching their favorite team play. The club becomes a kind of family, and members spend significant time together engaging in subcultural activities, which may include the abuse of alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs. As a result, they distance themselves from politics and democratic processes. This phenomenon may be especially prominent in large cities and countries with substantial populations.

Conclusions

Drawing from the UEFA ranking and the Eurobarometer data on youth appreciation of democracy, a negative association was established between the two variables. This is a descriptive approach and a more analytical study is needed to examine the cause-effect relation between democracy and UEFA rankings.

This study raises more questions than it answers, which are left for future research to address. Two directions for future research have been identified. First, a more formal model should be developed and tested to explore how economic and social variables may affect variations in UEFA rankings. Additionally, time-series data, either at the country level or as a panel of countries, may shed light on how changes in the perception of democracy by the EU's youth may influence their interest in association football and, consequently, UEFA rankings.

The preliminary evidence presented in this study cannot reject the hypothesis that democracy and football do not go hand-in-hand. It seems that better football

performance is associated with less satisfaction with democracy. Alternatively, it may suggest that lower satisfaction with democracy among the youth of EU countries drives them into the mass of people who participate in football.

This negative association explains why UEFA is struggling to promote respect for human rights, equality, and non-discrimination in football. I believe UEFA is on the right track, but even more attention and additional initiatives may be needed to improve the situation. This is of great interest because football could potentially be used to foster democratic values, thus having a positive effect on establishing more democratic societies. In other words, football, instead of being a threat, could become an opportunity to enhance EU youth satisfaction with democracy. How to achieve this becomes another important issue for future research.

References

Binjwaied M, Richards I, O' Keeffe L A (2015) The Factors Influencing Fans' Attendance at Football Matches in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. *Athens Journal of Sports* 2(2): 111-122.

Borges FV (2018) Always Together: How Football Clubs Want Constant Connections with Fans. *Athens Journal of Sports* 5(4): 263-278.

Cincimino S (2014) Revenues From Related Parties Transactions and UEFA Financial Fair Play. The Search For An Alternative Solution To Fair Value Measurement for the Break-Even Result Assessment. *Athens Journal of Sports* 1(2):103-118.

Crouch KL, Larson A, DeBeliso M (2022) Motivation Differences Between Youth Single-Sport, Multi-Sport, and Single-Sport Specialized Athletes in the Western United States. *Athens Journal of Sports* 9(1): 37-50.

Espita Escuer M, Garcia Cebrian LI (2016) Productivity And Competitiveness: The Case Of Football Teams Playing In The UEFA Champions League. *Athens Journal of Sports* 3(1): 57-86.

Eperthener AS (2022) Financial And Management Barriers to Safety Education in Youth Sports in the United States. *Athens Journal of Sports* 9(2): 101-114.

European Union (2025) Flash Eurobarometer 556 – EU challenges and priorities: Young people's views. Data annex. Brussels: European Union.

Ibrahim LA (2014) An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Sports Sponsorship Among Football Fans in Egypt. *Athens Journal of Sports* 1(2): 73-86.

Máté T (2018) Social Impacts of International Sport Events – Based on Experiences from European Youth Olympic Festival 2017 Győr. *Athens Journal of Sports* 5(3): 227-242.

Nunes AB, Valério N (2020) UEFA: A Successful Pan-European Organization During the Cold War. *Athens Journal of Sports* 7(1): 55-76.

Ozgen C, Argan M (2017) The Turkish Version of the Grandiose Narcissism Scale: A Validity and Reliability Study of Football Team Fans. *Athens Journal of Sports* 4(3): 165-180.

Papanikos GT (2022a) The Five Ancient Criteria of Democracy: The Apotheosis of Equality. *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts* 9(2): 105-120. https://bit.ly/33EmFNk.

Papanikos GT (2022b) The Bright Future of Democracy is in Education. *Athens Journal of Education* 9(2): 353-364. https://bit.ly/3sJGsoN.

Papanikos GT (2022c) Democracy and Politics: An Introduction to the Special Issue of the Athens Journal of Social Sciences. *Athens Journal of Social Sciences* 9(2): 89-94. https://www.athensjournals.gr/social/2022-9-2-Introduction.pdf.

Papanikos GT (2020) *Democracy in Ten Lessons* [in Greek: *Η Δημοκρατία σε Δέκα Μαθήματα*]. Athens: Athens Institute for Education and Research (ATINER). https://bit.ly/3IrcZUv.

Papanikos GT (2017) Democracy in Ancient Athens and in the Contemporary World. *Opening speech at the 4th Annual International Conference on Humanities & Arts in a Global World 3-6 January 2017, Athens, Greece.* https://bit.ly/3ib4PFk.

Papanikos GT (2016) What can we learn about Globalization from Ancient Athens? The Democracy Effect. *Opening speech at the 10th Annual International Conference on Global Studies: Business, Economic, Political, Social and Cultural Aspects, 19-22 December 2016, Athens, Greece.* https://bit.ly/3z11BM9.

Papanikos GT (2025) Are Human Rights a Luxury or a Normal Good? *Athens Journal of Politics and International Affairs* 1(1): 9-38. https://shorturl.at/fzAMT

Roberts K, Kovacheva S, Kabaivanov S (2020) Careers in participant sport and other free time activities during youth and young adulthood in south and east mediterranean countries. *Athens Journal of Sports* 7(2): 99-114.

Zambom Ferraresi F, CarciaCebrian LI, LeraLópez F (2017) Sports Results Measurement and Efficiency in UEFA Champions League. *Athens Journal of Sports* 4(4): 291-312.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank two anonymous referees for their constructive comments. Any remaining errors belong to the author.

Athens Journal of Sports - Volume 12, Issue 4, December 2025 – Pages 229-254

Insight of the "300 Million" Strategy with the Integrated Critical Realism Conceptual Framework

*By Jingfan Zhou**

Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics kept its promise of "Engaging 300 million individuals in winter sports". However, less is known about how Beijing achieved this ambitious goal and whether this legacy could be sustained after the Games. With the integrated conceptual model combining Critical Realism (CR) and the "Three-Source" Theory, this paper analyzed the efficiency and effectiveness of the "300 Million" strategy's execution from the dimension of ideal and social reality. By adopting a qualitative approach with triangulation, we carefully examined how the three essential mechanisms impact the legacy delivery process and its relevant social sustainability before and after the Games. The findings indicate that the pre-game legacy benefits extend beyond the key stakeholders of Beijing 2022 to include the general public. However, the long-term leverage effects remain uncertain due to evolving conditions. Additionally, our results support the notion that the successes within the Chinese sports system provide adaptive lessons. For extension, this study suggests initiating an ice-breaking effort to establish bilateral pathways to ensure the successful transfer of legacy and sustain the enthusiasm of winter sports participation in the post-Games period. We anticipate that this study will bring significant inspiration to IOC`s Knowledge and Games Learning (IKL) program, while providing some references to international collaboration in terms of improving social sustainability and stimulating regional development.

Keywords: *Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics; integrated conceptual model; social sustainability; Critical Realism; Knowledge and Games Learning*

Introduction

The Winter Olympics has developed over more than a century, facing new challenges such as concerns over human rights, discrimination, and their effects on social sustainability. It is important to learn from the past of the Olympic movement regardless of the geographical and cultural distances among host nations. China impressed the world by hosting another splendid Olympics after the Beijing 2008, and 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics and keeping its promise of "Engaging 300 million individuals in winter sports". Besides curiosity about the number, many researchers have turned their eyes to the strategies, programs, and legacy delivery mechanisms behind them.

At the material and artefactual level, the "Two Implementation Outlines and Three Plans", consisted of "Implementation Outline of `Encouraging 300 Million Chinese to Engage in Winter Sports` (2018-2022)", "Implementation Outline for Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics and Paralympics", "Work and Service Plan for Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics and Paralympics", "Technology Support Service Plan for Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics and Paralympics" and "Anti-doping Work Plan for

*Post-doc, Law School, China University of Political Science and Law, China.

Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics and Paralympics", provide guidelines to the 7 years preparation work. At the same time, 29 crucial official sports policy documents at national and provincial levels have been published to guarantee the progressive accomplishment of the "300 Million" goal.

Different from the understanding of influential international media, the "300 Million" goal has been specified as encouraging 50 million people to directly engage in ice and snow sports for sports competitions, fitness, and recreation. Meanwhile, the "300 Million" also involves large amounts of people indirectly engaging in winter sports, such as people who participate in winter tourism festivals, work in the related industry, and watch ice and snow sports events (Winter Sports Development Plan (2016-2025) 2016).

With Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound (SMART) goals, the Chinese government gave a strategic hard push to the "300 Million" program in the preparation phase of Beijing 2022 and invested large amounts of human, financial, and material resources into education and infrastructure (GAS 2016). To reach this ambitious goal, China released the geographic strategy "promoting ice and snow sports from north to south, east and west". The strategy highlighted the leading power of winter sports development in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region while emphasizing the importance of the training base in the three northeastern provinces. Besides, China also put weight on expanding the talent pools in Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, and other northwest and north China regions, which could inspire the coordinative development between north and south in terms of the dynamic growth of ice and snow sports (Winter Sports Development Plan (2016-2025) 2016).

Another essential strategy targeting maintaining winter sports enthusiasm is "promoting ice and snow sports on campuses". Until the end of 2020, China planned to establish 2000 primary and secondary schools integrating ice and snow sports into their normal curriculum. This number will reach 5000 by 2025. Besides figure skating, ice hockey, and alpine skiing, several Chinese traditional ice and snow sports, such as sled, ice skating, ice dragon boat, and ice soccer, have been prioritized in developing mass sports.

Although we have diagnosed the three crucial mechanisms in Study 1, less is known about the legacy process and deep mechanism. In order to answer the research question "How did Beijing 2022 motivate 300 million people to engage in winter sports?", we applied the integrated conceptual framework to close the aforementioned research gaps and inspect the legacy delivery process from the Pre-Games to the After-Games period.

Literature Review

Prior Research on the Topic Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics

Primarily, we searched in Scopus and CNKI to review the preceding literature on the topic of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics. In Scopus, there were 40 documents related to the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics. Most studies were in the branches of medicine, engineering, environmental science, and social science, written in English

by Chinese scholars between 2015 and 2024. Medical achievement, technology advancement, and environmental sustainability have been addressed in the preceding investigations, while only Ainsworth and Sallis (2022) inspected the Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games` leverage on the mass sports participation of Chinese youth.

In CNKI, there were 3290 Investigations on the subject the Beijing 2022. The mainstream research is located in the branch of applied research, society development, and technical research written in Chinese by domestic academia between 2015 to 2024. The amount of publication increased fast from 2020 to 2022. There was an obvious decrease in 2023 and a quick bounce back in 2024 reached 1132 articles. National image, international communication, opening and closing ceremonies, security, and strategy analysis were the main focus of the prior studies. At the same time, there is a trend of conducting research on media and social media with the assistance of big data technology. Only 10 articles are closely related to winter sports participation, and the main discussions were in the area of physical education, while fewer investigations highlighted methodology.

Despite the large difference in the publication volume in Scopus and CNKI, most articles were issued in 2022. The events and technology-driven pattern has been diagnosed along with the influence of publication date and place. Moreover, the studies from Western scholars, especially on the mass participation legacy of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics remained minor.

Moreover, there has been a growing number of prior research on Beijing 2022`s "300 million" goals since 2019. Applied research and society development were the main research directions, where physical education is the niche that received the most research interest. However, the mass sports legacy delivery process still needs to be addressed. Most of the preceding research lacks the conceptual framework and quantitative data for an international comparison study.

Definition of Sustainable Winter Sports Participation Legacy

The concept of sustainability emerged in the 1960s due to environmental degradation concerns (McKenzie 2004). It was set as a goal for governments when the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) proposed that economic growth could be harmless to the environment (Adams 2006, Opp 2017). Then this concept evolved into one concept with three major policy dimensions: environment, economics, and social well-being (Opp 2017, Paehlke 2013); in 1970. Social sustainability, which has been recognized as one of the three pillars of sustainability (The other two pillars were: economic and environmental sustainability), received relatively less research attention (McKenzie 2004, Polèse & Stren 2001). The mainstream former investigations on social sustainability addressed it from the perspective of improving quality of life, social integration, etc.

In the context of SME, sports participation legacy, which could be used as one of the crucial indicators of social sustainability, has been studied often. Although Gratton & Preuss (2008) provided a comprehensive concept of legacy as `planned and unplanned, positive and negative, intangible and tangible structures created through a sports event that remain after the event`, the complexity and diversity of winter sports activities (Brownill et al. 2013, Byers et al. 2019) made it difficult for scholars to

define and measure winter sports participation legacy. Should we count on the number of visits to ski resorts and ice rinks? Or the length of time spent at the spot and the type of winter sports activities should also be taken into consideration? Moreover, the majority of prior research concerning sports participation legacy focuses on the outcomes (For example: the increased numbers of people engaging), rather than the methods, instruments and mechanisms.

Methods

This study inspects the attitude-changing, motivation, and demographic features of Chinese who participated in winter sports activities and highlights the applicable knowledge stemmed from the three crucial mechanisms "Beneficial sports policy and economic progression", "Provision of facilities accompanying the integration of sport and education", and "Cooperative stakeholders` alliance strengthened by media power and technology".

Following the conceptual model developed in this research project, we engaged triangulation, and the Qualitative Quantitative Mixed Method to study the legacy delivery process at the `ideal layer` and `social layer`. More specifically, we applied document analysis, big data analysis methods, survey, and interview to examine the change in Chinese netizens` attitudes and consumption behaviors concerning winter sports participation from 2015 to 2024.

Big-data-based research enables academia to tailor the facts and truth according to their value assessment, entrusted theories, and demands. However, pioneering researchers, such as McFarland (2015), have revealed that the application of the found data and standard statistical processes tends to create many statistically significant effects for what may be a non-representative subpopulation. Moreover, the increasing social and political polarization could facilitate cognitive manipulation based on big data and challenge the fundamental value of science and truth.

Regarding the characteristics of Chinese winter sports development and the bias created by big data analysis methods, we also conducted surveys and interviews in the "Big Health Industry" to improve the accuracy, authenticity, and objectivity of the data. The survey and interview with a small sample size, selecting a part from a whole, addressed the importance of scientific sampling and offered additional inferences to improve public health and life qualities through winter sports participation.

Data Collection and Selection

The cumulative data from the telephone survey conducted by GAS and NBS does not depict the changes during the seven years. Therefore, we collected longitudinal data from the official website and policy documents of GAS and CWSF, the Olympic World Library, the IOC official website, NBS, International winter sports industry reports, Statista, and other confidential resources.

The cumulative data from the official survey and prior investigations haven`t provided an in-depth view of the legacy delivery process and the internal mechanisms that determine the sustainability of this legacy after the Games. Therefore, we

collected empirical and secondary data from 2015 to 2024, covering the official timeframe from the Pre-Games to After-Games legacy. For document and big data analysis, secondary data have been retrieved from the official website and policy documents of GAS and CWSF, the Olympic World Library, Scopus, CNKI, Statista, and so on. In contrast, we collected empirical data through 3 expert interviews and 60 questionnaires. The interviews and surveys aim to scrutinize the collective features, priority settings, and winter sports participation patterns of people working or studying in Chinese education, sports, and medicine who have practiced or experienced winter sports during the past 9 years.

Different indicators have been selected based on the requirements of the integrated conceptual framework and the following criteria:

Relevance: The indicators must be relevant to the research question, which is to inspect the critical mechanisms of the mass participation legacy of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics.

Availability: The indicators must be available from 2015 to 2024.

Reliability: The indicators must be valid measures of winter sports participation.

Data Analysis

Firstly, we independently examined each category of variables and performed descriptive analysis and thematic analysis. Then, we compared the tendencies and features of Chinese ice and snow sports engagement that have been identified by applying big-data technology and the traditional social science research method. During the process, we launched regression analysis to inspect the attitude and behavior changes before and after the Beijing 2022 around Chinese winter sports participation. Meanwhile, we engaged the Pearson r test to examine the impact of different variables on mass participation. All cut-off values followed Thomas et al.'s (2005) guidelines for small sample sizes, with statistical significance set at the 0.05 level.

Results

For the secondary data analysis, 44 documents and relative data sets have been inspected. To investigate how different stakeholders and Chinese society interacted with the winter sports policy for Beijing 2022, We collected and analyzed empirical data through 3 interviews and 60 questionnaires following the same scientific sampling concept and design.

It is worth noticing that the results of our interview and survey demonstrate the same features as the official survey conducted by the General Administration of Sport of China (GAS) and the National Bureau of Statistics of China (NBS). The interviews collected the opinions of decision-makers and senior managers on the social sustainability of Beijing 2022`s sports participation legacy and the answer rate of our survey is 58.33%, where people in the Chinese education and medicine industry gave more attention to the topics (With the answer rate of 63.33% and 66.67%). The

attention distribution pattern and high answer speed of each survey (5 minutes on average, 3 times faster than expected) demonstrated the same pattern and features as we figured out through big data analysis methods. In addition, the empirical data provide more precise information about the attitude and behavior changes at ideal and social layers, fulfilling the information gaps created by media bias, population bias, and activity bias (McFarland & McFarland 2015).

Inspect Sports Policy and Economic Progression at Ideal and Social Layers

From the dimension of social reality, BOCWOG submitted the final report to the IOC in 2023 indicating that the participation rate of Chinese women is higher than men at indoor skating or skiing centers. Most Chinese participants used to experience ice sports (Wu et al. 2023), while China has been considered as one of the biggest beginners` markets at the global level with a strong policy-driven feature and significant events' leverage effects. The majority of participants were in the age group of 18-30. At the same time, the 46 million young Chinese under the age of 18 (IOC 2023), were the new power to leverage the winter sports consumption. Regarding the participation frequency, most of the interviewees (38.43% of the total) participated in winter sports 1 to 2 times per year (GAS 2022). Furthermore, 85.21% of interviewees held a positive attitude towards the holding of Beijing 2022, while 57.04% of people were satisfied with the current atmosphere and supply in support of winter sports activities (GAS 2022). However, Xinhua News, China Ski Industry, White Book, and some foreign scholars expressed their concerns about the Chinese ski business in terms of the learning process influenced by the one-off consumption pattern (Vanat 2022) and some popular fast fashion products in the Chinese winter sports market, represented by the 2-4 hours skiing package (Bin et al. 2023).

In contrast, our survey, targeting people in the "Big Health Industry" with all ages and educational backgrounds, revealed that most of them participated in winter sports during their stay at university since 2020. Skating, skiing, and snowboarding were the top 3 sports, chosen by the participants aged from 19 to 36. It is worth noticing that ice sports remained the major winter sports despite snow sports grew popularity. Despite the gender differences, the tendencies to experience diverse winter sports were the same (See Table 1).

Table 1. *Gender Difference in Relation to Sports Selection*

	Ice skating	**Skiing**	**Snow-boarding**	**Curling**	**Ice Hockey**	**Others**
Men	7	11	3	0	1	1
Women	14	9	3	0	0	1

After the hosting of Beijing 2022, BOCWOG issued new strategies and plans guiding the post-games legacy. Without the hard push from the government, maintaining and increasing mass participation largely depends on the power of the market and society. The commercial report from CHNCI first reported that 57.35 million Chinese directly engaged in ice and snow sports in 2024 (CHNCI, 2024). The

behavior adjustments started from the changes in public opinions, aesthetic sense, and value assessment.

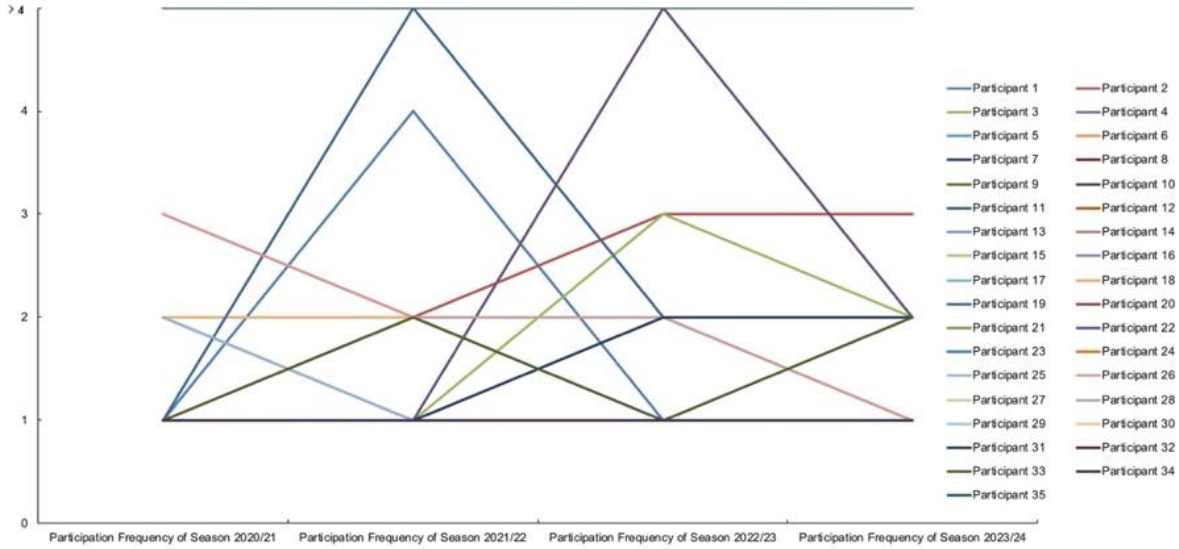
Table 2 displays that 74.29% of the participants felt happy when they first heard the "300 Million" goal, while 34.29% expressed their surprise about the target setting. After Beijing achieved the goal, the ratio of happiness increased, and the number of people feeling surprised decreased, while the most emotional changes were found in the group with bachelor's or master's degrees.

Table 2. *Participants` Reaction of Hearing the "300 Million" Goal*

First Hearing the "300 Million" Goal							
Emotion / Age	**Happiness**	**Sadness**	**Disgust**	**Fear**	**Surprise**	**Anger**	**Others**
Kindergarten	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Primary School	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Secondary Vocational School	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
High School	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tertiary and Higher Education School	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bachelor	13	0	0	0	5	0	2
Master	6	0	0	0	3	0	0
PhD	7	0	0	0	3	0	0
Post-doc	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Fellow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Noticed the Achievement of the "300 Million" Goal							
Kindergarten	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Primary School	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Secondary Vocational School	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
High School	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tertiary and Higher Education School	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bachelor	14	0	0	0	3	0	2
Master	7	0	0	0	1	0	1
PhD	7	0	0	0	3	0	0
Post-doc	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fellow	0	0	0	0	3	0	0

Corresponding to the opinions` change, Figure 1 displays the actions taken by Chinese winter sports consumers. The target groups participated in ice and snow sports activities 2 times per season on average, and the enthusiasts practiced the selected sports more than 4 times each season. More important, our survey identified no significant changes in behavior in terms of participation frequency, before and after the host of Beijing 2022 among the target groups working or studying in the Chinese education, sports, and medicine industry. And the target groups in the Chinese "Big Health Industry" have comparatively higher levels of continuity after the hosting of Beijing 2022.

Figure 1. *Participation Frequency per Season Two Years before and after the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics and Paralympics*



Furthermore, we identified that at the ideal reality level, the pre-game legacy benefits not only the crucial domestic stakeholders of Beijing 2022, such as Chinese national authorities, host cities, social organizations, public institutions, and enterprises, but also the international stakeholders following IOC TOP program and IOC`s Knowledge and Games Learning (IKL) program (See Table 3).

Table 3. *Stakeholders` Role and Perspectives for the Realization of the "300 Million" Goal*

Stakeholder	**Role and Function**	**Perspective and Reflects to the Sports Policy and Regulations**
General Administration of Sport and Sub-Organizations	Formulate strategies, goals and overall plans for the development of winter sports, build a national training team for ice and snow events and provide strong support in terms of talent, funds and materials.	Reflect and evaluate, formulate and revise relevant policies and regulations.
National Development and Reform Commission and Sub-	Special inspections to meet the energy supply needs of the Winter Olympics and promote the resolution of related issues. Report and issue a	Actively cooperate, supervise and complete relevant tasks in

Organizations	policy document on building a higher level of public service system for national fitness, propose to strengthen the construction of infrastructure related to winter sports, and support the construction of the Ice and Snow Silk Road.	accordance with the division of labor of the Beijing Winter Olympic Organizing Committee.
Education Ministry and Sub-Organizations	Jointly formulate policies and actively promote education-related activities such as ice and snow sports entering campuses, and provide policy, talent and funding support for the popularization of winter sports.	Co-lead the Winter Olympic-related talent training work with the sports authorities. The overall response is positive.
Industry and Information Ministry and Sub-Organizations	Strengthen communication with the Sports Bureau, promote the formation of the ice and snow industry alliance. Highlight the leading role of 5G applications to integrate scientific and technological elements into the Winter Olympics and Paralympics.	Co-lead the Winter Olympic-related science and technology and information work with the sports authorities. The overall response is positive.
Civil Affairs Ministry and Sub-Organizations	Formulate relevant policies and standards with other ministries and commissions. Promote mass winter sports. Improve the government's mechanism for purchasing public services from social forces.	The overall response is positive.
Finance Ministry and Sub-Organizations	Include eligible winter sports venues and facilities in the scope of free or low-cost opening subsidies for public sports venues; encourage financial institutions to expand financial services in the field of mass winter sports for reducing risks and guaranteeing sustainable business; encourage social capital to increase investment to mass winter sports.	The overall response is positive.
Personnel/ Human Resource Ministry and Sub-Organizations	Provide support to the Winter Olympics and Paralympics in terms of human resources.	The overall response is positive.
Land and Resources Ministry and Sub-Organizations	Cooperate in providing service and supports to sports infrastructure and facilities related to major sports events, such as the Winter Olympics and Paralympics.	The overall response is positive.
Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development and Sub-Organizations	Ensure the success of the Winter Olympics and Paralympics throughout 360-degree monitoring process, ensure safe production during the Winter Olympics, participate in the work of improving urban environment and ensuring the smooth operation of transportation systems for the Winter Olympics and Paralympics.	The overall response is positive.
Water Resources Ministry and Sub-Organizations	Coordinate and guarantee the water supply for the Winter Olympics.	The overall response is positive.
Agriculture Ministry and Sub-Organizations	Ensure the quality and safety of agricultural products in the Game hosting and training areas. Combine prevention and control to ensure the quality of agricultural products, reduce risks, and avoid foodborne doping.	The overall response is positive.
Culture Ministry and Sub-Organizations	Provide guidance and services related to the Winter Olympics and Paralympics` culture and	The overall response is positive.

	tourism, create branded effects, and enable the development benefitting more people.	
People's Bank of China and Sub-Organizations	Provide financial service that guarantees the sufficient supply to the Games, and stimulate the development of ice and snow sports industry.	The overall response is positive.
General Administration of Customs and Sub-Organizations	Serve the Beijing Winter Olympics and Paralympics effectively. Ensure smooth customs clearance.	The overall response is positive.
State Administration of Taxation and Sub-Organizations	Carry out various forms of publicity and provided guidance of tax and Winter Olympics related tax policies. Besides, there is a "Winter Olympics Tax Service Hotline" offering online services, dealing with consultant in English with the remote support of a multilingual service platform.	The policy fully supports and the service fully guarantees.
State Administration for Industry and Commerce and Sub-Organizations	Take the preparation of the Winter Olympics as an opportunity to accelerate the development of the winter sports and related industries, implement the new developing concept, continuously expand high-level opening up, and actively build a new development pattern of dual circulation (Domestic and international).	Active response and comprehensive guarantee.
State Forestry Administration and Sub-Organizations	Lead the development and application of green and low-carbon technologies, together with the OC. Be responsible to safe working environment, and cooperate in forestry ecological construction.	The response is positive and the results are obvious.
National Tourism Administration and Sub-Organizations	Focus on the development of young people, guide public to participate in ice and snow sports, promote the training programs and recreational projects, organize events/ festivals to meet the diverse and multi-level demands of public (Led by market, Guide by government).	Active response, and the feedback from various regions is different.
China Insurance Regulatory Commission and Sub-Organizations	Encourage insurance companies to develop winter sports specific insurance. Guide enterprises, schools, and individuals to purchase liability insurance and other types of insurances related to sports injuries.	Active response, and the feedback from various regions is different.
Labor and Social Security and Sub-Organizations	Cultivate various talents for the Winter Olympics and Paralympics, and related industries. Strengthen the interconnection of the "Four Ye" (Manufacturing, Enterprise, Business start-up, and Employment) to increase employment and income. Innovate training ideas and enhance job competencies. Continuously improve services and pensions & social security system.	Active response, and the feedback from various regions is different.
Communist Youth League of China	Promote ice and snow sports through "Sharing Winter Olympics" actions. Leverage "Protect the Mother River" environment protection acts, assisting the Winter Olympics.	Active response, and the feedback from various regions is different.
All China Women's Federation	Promote women's development and gender equality. Protect women's rights through the promotion and dissemination of winter sports.	The survey report of commercial platforms such as Tmall shows that women have made significant contributions to China's ice and snow sports and related

		consumption.
The China Disabled Persons' Federation	Promote the development of Parasports and protect the human rights of disabled people through the promotion and dissemination of winter sports.	Active response, and the feedback from various regions is different.
IOC and Stakeholders from Olympic Partners Programme	Provide essential guidelines and resources based on Olympic charters and host city contract.	Different stakeholders have different feedback based on their real contribution and benefits from the activities.
Stakeholders from IOC`s IKL Programme	According the actual situation of Beijing 2022, IKM developed a top-level design for all kinds of talents. IOC takes main responsibility to the knowledge management and knowledge transfer to Organizing Committee (OCOG) and the OGKM integrated into the Games from the Games planning stage to the after Games legacy stage.	Different stakeholders have different feedback based on their real contribution and benefits from the activities.

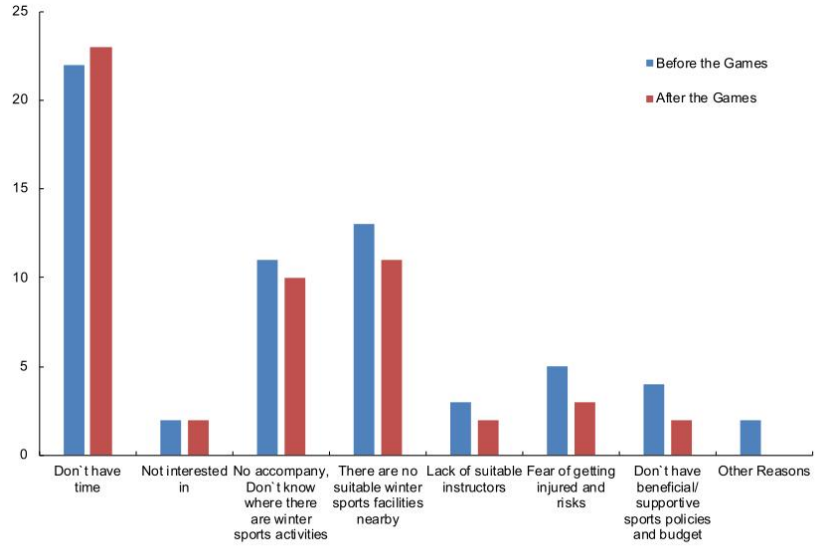
For the Post-Games consumption tendency, we interviewed leaders and experts at the decision-making level and management level for the sustainability and legacy of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics. An expert from GAS shared his personal view on the changing of winter sports participation after the Games, saying "After the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics, the development of ice and snow sports will not increase rapidly in a straight line, nor decrease fast... While the development of competitive sports and mass sports tend to reach a balance… Some factors contribute to the fluctuation of ice and snow sports development… Economic development is the foundation, of course… Through the development and examination of the 2 Olympics, the amount of 300 million people involved in ice and snow sports won`t decrease." A professor in the physical education and training area from one of the main partner universities of BOCWOG remarked that the high-risk nature and some traditional senses have been the main barriers preventing Chinese consumers from directly participating in ice and snow sports.

Some leading scholars examined whether Beijing 2022 stimulated Chinese customers' needs for winter sports facilities, equipment, and services. For instance, the results of expert interviews and commercial surveys confirmed the efficient and temporary leverage of the demands in the Pre-Games period. At the same time, the previous investigations examined that time availability, economic factors, and the living value assessment significantly influence Chinese winter sports enthusiasm after the Games. Moreover, cultural norms, consumption structures, and educational programs can either facilitate or hinder the adoption of winter sports as part of Chinese culture and national identity (Han & Zhao 2024).

In line with the mainstream voice, our outcomes also indicate that the choices and consumption patterns have been shaped by sports policy and related strategic goals expanding winter sports throughout China. Despite the comparatively higher levels of participation and continuity, we diagnosed that lack of time, suitable facilities in the range, and socioeconomic conditions prevent Chinese customers from recruiting and

retaining in winter sports. And there is a correlation between each barrier before and after achieving Beijing 2022`s "300 Million" goals (See Figure 2).

Figure 2. *Barriers Deter Chinese Winter Sports Participation before and after the Achievement of the "300 Million" Goal*



Note. In the regression analysis, the r= 0.99, p= 0.01< 0.05, the coefficients= 1.73

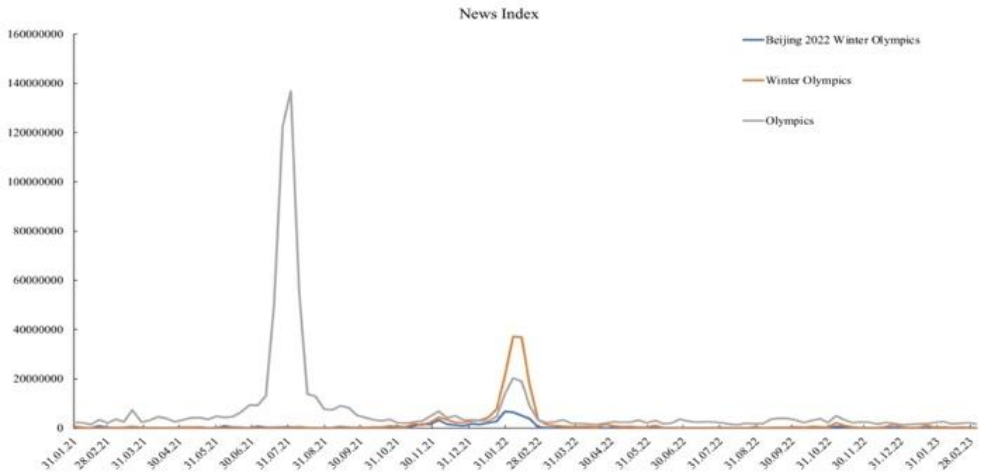
In short, our results indicate that the sports policy benefits not only the crucial stakeholders of Beijing 2022 but also the general public, while the long-term leverage effects are unpredictable due to changing socioeconomic conditions and the market equilibrium.

Impact of Winter Sports Education, Facilities and Events

Beijing 2022 fully mobilized all sectors of society to participate in the Games and took advantage of establishing training bases inside schools and universities, providing professional and international talent training, and deepening collaboration through the evolution of education and IOC`s Knowledge and Games Learning (IKL) program (Fourteenth Five-Year Plan for Sports Development 2021).

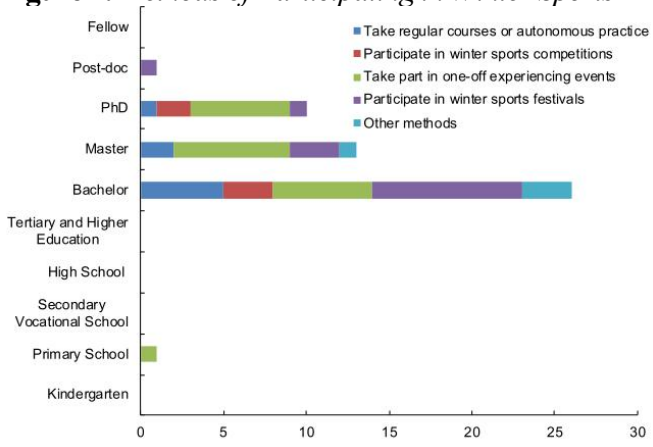
For the short-term leverage, we identified that the "festival effect" and "demonstration effect" heavily impact public opinions and Chinese winter sports development. Figure 3 displays a strong correlation between the Olympic Games schedule and the concentration of public attention.

Figure 3. *Change of Public Attention on the Topic One Year before and after the Games*



According to our survey, the majority of participants attended winter sports festivals and took part in one-off experience, while master's and bachelor`s students took more diverse methods to engage in winter sports, including committing to regular courses and autonomous practice and competing for excellence (See Figure 4).

Figure 4. *Methods of Participating in Winter Sports*



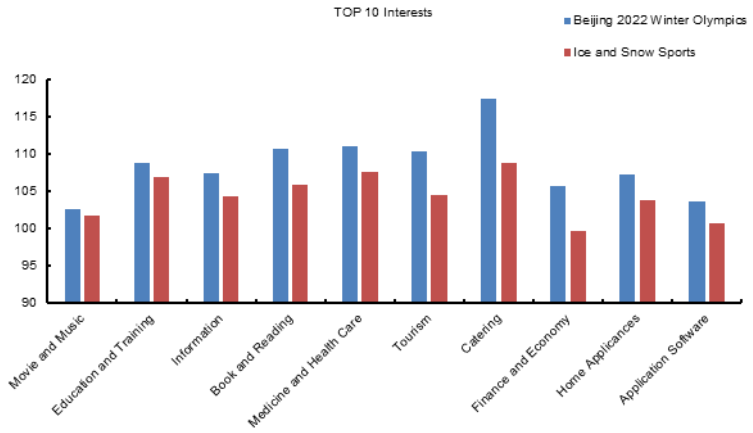
For the continuous engagement, many universities, schools, and other types of stakeholders organize science tours, educational events, industrial forums, academic conferences, exhibitions, and cultural events in the famous winter sports facilities, especially those in competition zones (BOCWOG 2022b) to inspire young people, their families, and celebrities. We verified that ice and snow sports kept catching Chinese attention after the Beijing 2022 not only in the province that undertook the mission to develop winter sports, but also in other cities, such as Henan, Hubei and Shandong (See Figure 5).

Figure 5. *Distribution of Chinese Netizens Interested in Ice and Snow Sports*

The spreading of Chinese winter stimulated the construction of commercial ice rinks, indoor skiing areas, and the application of ski simulators. The stakeholders cooperate to build public and commercial winter sports facilities with domestic or international standards. there are non-profit venues with low access barriers, leisure facilities with various qualities owned by profit-making companies, as well as high-end facilities funded by different types of organizations for training and competition. At the same time, the Chinese government also facilitated winter sports development by offering educational and training opportunities, deduction in taxation and operating costs, and support in finance and technology (National Construction Plan for Ice and Snow Sports Venues (2016-2022) 2016). Accompanying the construction of winter sports venues, the Beijing 2022 advanced the infrastructure and public services in the areas of telecommunications, accommodation, catering, medical care, education, etc. (BOCWOG & Beijing Sports University 2022).

The supply of sports facilities should meet public demands. Our results of document and big data analysis reveal that Catering, Medicine & Health Care, and Education & Training were the main concerns influencing the consistent Chinese winter sports participation (See Figure 6). Whilst recreational motivation, fitness and well-being intention, and hobby and lifestyle ranked as the Top 3 motivations according to the official survey from GAS and NBS (GAS 2022)

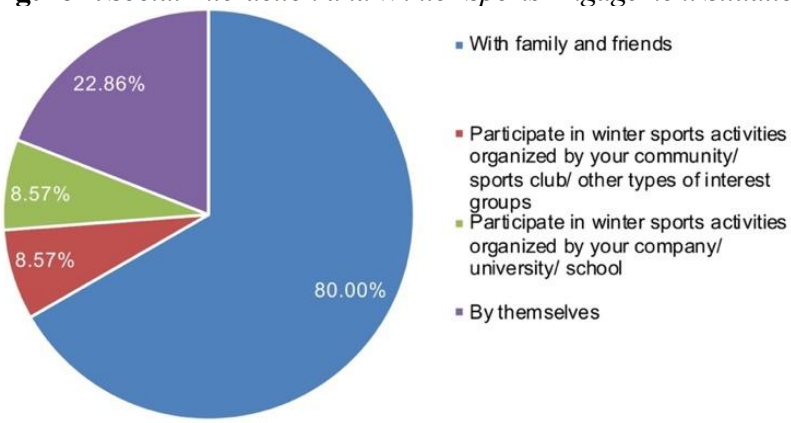
Figure 6. *Top 10 Motivation Drives Chinese Winter Sports Participation (Post-Games)*



Note. TGI reflects consumer attitudes, habits, motivations and behaviors.

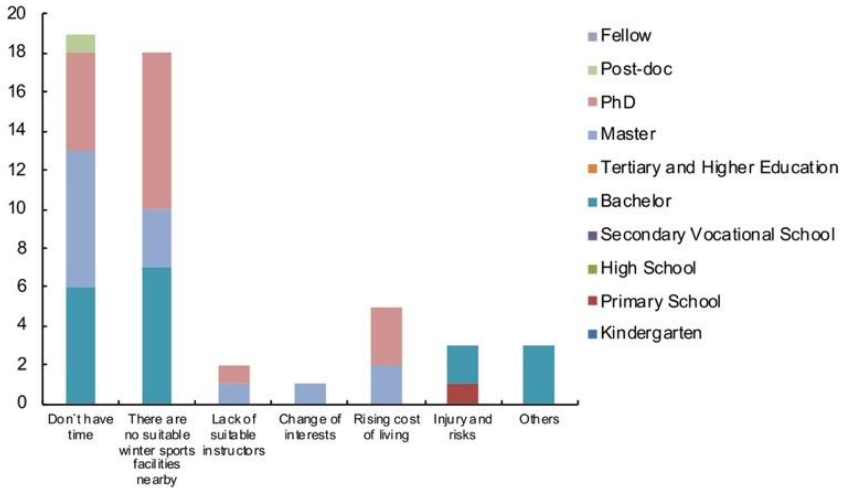
In contrast, our survey strengthened the argument that most Chinese engaged in winter sports for happiness, well-rounded development, and well-being. 80% of participants prefer to go ice and snow sports with family and friends, while about 22.86% of respondents used to practice the sports by themselves (see Figure 7). Most Chinese women were motivated by their family and friends, while the percentage of autonomous engagement was higher among the men.

Figure 7. *Social Interaction and Winter Sports Engagement Situation in China*



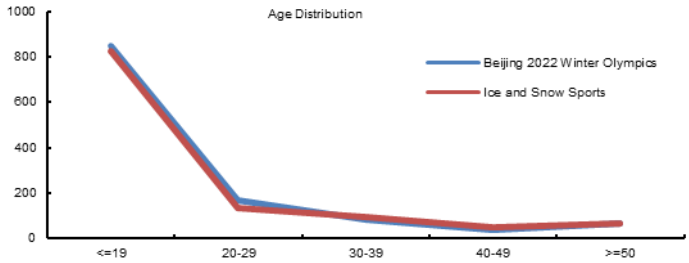
In the post-Games phase, we identified that the decrease in winter sports participation frequency is corresponding to the individual time, resources availability, and the conditions of sports facilities (see Figure 8). Besides, the most changes took place among the enthusiasts with bachelor`s and master`s degrees, where the Chinese 00s and Generation Z lead this fashion.

Figure 8. *Reasons Behind the Frequency Change after Achieving the "300 Million" Goal*



As the target group of winter sports consumption, 00s and Generation Z caught more public attention. Big data analysis revealed that Chinese young generations hold a more positive attitude towards winter sports participation after the Games (See Figure 9).

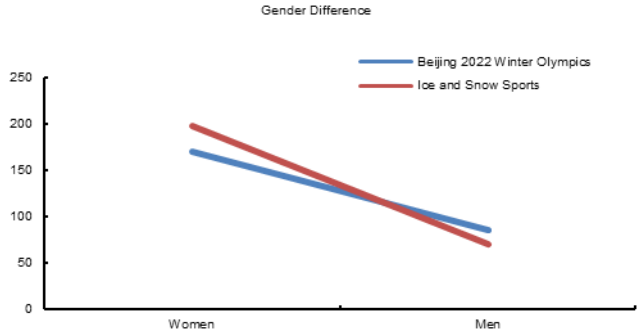
Figure 9. *Chinese Netizens Interests on 2022 Beijing Olympics and Winter Sports Categorized by Age*



Note. TGI reflects consumer attitudes, habits, motivations and behaviors.

Regarding the gender difference, Chinese women netizens show more interest in winter sports and the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics than men (See Figure 10). This consumption tendency has also been confirmed by several international and domestic commercial reports on Chinese ski market.

Figure 10. *Chinese Netizens Interests on 2022 Beijing Olympics and Winter Sports Categorized by Gender*



Note. TGI reflects consumer attitudes, habits, motivations and behaviors.

4. 1 Media and Social Media Forge the Stakeholders` Alliance

The host cities, such as Beijing, actively explore the "winter sports +" mode and drive the systematic upgrade of the ecological environment, sports tourism, winter sports culture and technology etc. The Beijing 2022 also incubated new sponsorship models closely related to branding and media presence, such as the "Joint Exclusive". PetroChina and Sinopec reached an internal agreement and became the official oil and gas partner for the Winter Olympics, together. Good initial progress in the attraction of foreign investment and introduction of technologies were achieved in the process (BOCWOG 2020).

The majority of stakeholders took Beijing 2022 as an opportunity to gain or maintain market shares, accelerate their organizations' development, and take social responsibility through organizing educational programs and sports events at winter sports spots. The knowledge management and transfer programs strengthened the stakeholders` alliance covering the scope of all three sectors, through the share of a common vision, the communication in the supply chain, as well as the engagement of diverse cooperation partners. Know-hows offered expertise through IOC`s knowledge transfer and management programs in the area of competition organizing, track building, and Games services, etc. While international experts and foreign talents helped to establish relations with organizations in Russia, Finland, and other countries (BOCWOG 2019). With their contribution, BOCWOG selected 2,878 National Technical Officers (NTOs), built more than 322 snow sports specialists and 140 ice sports specialists, and trained 1,700 experts for the Game devoted to comfortable accommodation, secured transport logistics, and medical service. At the same time, BOCWOG has created numerous job positions and recruited 36 domestic and international experts, who have been working across its 10 departments.

In cooperation with sports policy and the official knowledge management and transfer programs, media and social media provide open platforms for communication and negotiation between decision-makers and society. To have an insight view of the social demands, we use sentiment analysis assisted by the Baidu index to inspect Chinese news on the topics of the Beijing 2022, Winter Olympics, and Olympic Games. The preferences of celebrities and the government have investigated.

Table 4 demonstrated that from the Pre-Games period to the After-Games period (More specifically, from Season 2015/16 to Season 2023/24) Chinese netizens pay more attention to the specific event- Beijing 2022 than the Winter Olympics in general. Compared with Summer Olympics, Winter Olympics received less public attention. The reason was that most provinces in China have no winter sports tradition and culture.

Table 4. *Search Index on the Winter Sports Participation Related Topics from 2015 to 2024*

Keywords	Overall Daily Search Index Average	Daily Search Index Average (Mobile Client)
Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics	21,307	18,266
Winter Olympics	12,296	9,765
Olympics	38,236	24,429

Note. The Season has been divided based on the fiscal year of Chinese ice and snow sports industry, which begins from 01. May of the same year and ends on 30. Apr. the next year.

For the mass participation legacy after the Games, our research highlighted that social media (Especially short video and vertical App), social networks, and E-commerce platforms empower the promotion of Skisport in China and strengthen the stakeholders` alliance (See Figure 11). Compared with the Pre-Games legacy, driven by sports policy, the After-Games winter sports participation is most likely to depend on the power of the market and society. The most popular platforms Chinese used to share their skiing experience, techniques, and tourism information are Xiaohongshu, Wechat, and Douying/Tiktok, according to big data analysis (Analysys 2024).

Figure 11. *Main Channels that Chinese Enthusiasts Applied to Capture the Skiing Related Information*

Source. Insight of Chinese Skisport`s Development 2024 (Analysys, 2024)

Discussion

The Double-Edged Swords: Beneficial Sports Policy and Resource Concentration

China has successfully increased the winter sports participation rate by age through "promoting ice and snow sports on campuses" and "promoting ice and snow sports from north to south, east and west" programs, which strengthened the foundation of mass participation by creating 835 model schools and 2,062 winter sports featured schools (BOCWOG 2022b). According to an external evaluation from Statista Research Department, the Chinese government and various stakeholders have poured around 38.5 billion U.S. dollars into the Beijing 2022, where infrastructure construction work took the biggest share (Statista Research Department 2023). The mass participation leverage highlighted efficient and sufficient sports policy and supply in the Pre-Game phase and the hosting time.

From the supply dimension, the Beijing 2022 organizers closely collaborated with stakeholders making great efforts to guarantee the success of the event and stimulate the host city's development. From the demand perspective, the general public has generally responded positively to the "300 Million" goal and related programs. However, the results also demonstrate an obvious gap between supply and demand regarding changes of sports policy and tangible social demands in the post-Games period.

Chinese central government is more likely to give power to the market and society for the winter sports engagement accompanying the further development of the winter sports industry after the successful hosting of Beijing 2022. Without the hard push of government, some tangible social demands may decrease due to unpredictable market conditions, consumers` preferences, and time/resource management strategy.

Thus, it can be summarized that the dialectic nature of beneficial sports policy, in coordination with the centralized resource allocation method, act as a double-edged sword for the long-term leverage of winter sports participation.

Sports Facilities and High-Tech to Tackle the Growing Wealth Gap

The mainstream reports and research supported the argument that the success of Beijing 2022 satisfied people's expectations for a better life by improving infrastructure and promoting winter sports education. The national education system was the primary implementation pathway for increasing winter sports participation among young people, featuring thousands of schools and universities in urban or rural areas, and providing direct communication platforms, financial resources (Chen et al. 2022), and training facilities. Besides the training bases inside schools and universities, there were indoor and outdoor commercial ice rinks and snow resorts across China. In coordination with regional development strategy, social and economic advancement, and the vision of stakeholders, different winter sports facilities choose either a profit or non-profit model.

The mainstream reports and research supported the argument that the success of Beijing 2022 satisfied people's expectations for a better life by improving

infrastructure and promoting winter sports education. The national education system was the primary implementation pathway for increasing winter sports participation among young people, featuring thousands of schools and universities in urban or rural areas, and providing direct communication platforms, financial resources (Chen et al. 2022), and training facilities. Besides the training bases inside schools and universities, there were indoor and outdoor commercial ice rinks and snow resorts across China. In coordination with regional development strategy, social and economic advancement, and the vision of stakeholders, different winter sports facilities choose either a profit or non-profit model.

The non-profit model has been represented by the three northeast provinces, including He Longjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning, which have a long tradition of winter sports. Despite the advantages of public funding, they faced the common challenge of rejuvenating old industrial areas. For future development, multi-channel investment and social support have been encouraged to stimulate winter sports tourism and high-tech equipment manufacturing. The profit model grew popular in some Tier 1 Chinese cities, such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou prioritizing the preeminent and high-end development of winter sports. With the dual-complementary modes, China obtains the great potential to maintain winter sports participation and create new socially sustainable legacies after Beijing 2022.

Besides the integration of winter sports and education, the combination of tourism and high-tech also facilitates the engagement of winter sports. Yanqing district of Beijing actively explores the "winter sports +" mode and drives the interconnected development of ecology, education, technology and other sectors. Moreover, the guesthouse industry witnessed rapid and orderly growth, creating a large number of jobs. More importantly, knowledge is the driving force that enables young people to close the wealth gaps. BOCWOG has worked closely with the IOC Olympic Games Knowledge Management team to use digital technologies and information platforms for Games knowledge management, staff training, and education (BOCWOG 2022a). These actions leave a rich legacy of volunteering and Chinese winter sports expertise after the Games.

However, several field studies indicated that there is a shortage of skiing resorts approach Western standards, despite the Beijing 2022 accelerated construction of ice and snow sports venues and the upgrade of related infrastructure. Some studies criticized that most ski areas were badly equipped and could only satisfy the needs of beginners (Vanat 2022). Thus, GAS in cooperation with the National Development and Reform Commission and the other two national-level governing bodies issued the Winter Sports Development Plan (2016-2025) (Winter Sports Development Plan (2016-2025) 2016) addressing the standardization of winter sports facilities` construction, service provision, license, and training program, and event and equipment management.

Meanwhile, winter sports education faced some challenges due to the dialectic relationship between mass and elite sports. The "Top-down" resource allocation methods and the public sector dominant legacy delivery process have unbeatable advantages in the Pre-Game period to increase winter sports engagement, especially in combat against COVID-19 (Liu et al. 2022). However, fewer studies have measured the Chinese people`s demands of winter sports in the Post-Games period, despite

leaders and experts claiming that the total number of winter sports participants kept growing during the interviews.

Regarding the official plans and reports from different provinces, we identified a pattern of the localization of the stakeholders, and the decentralization of winter sports resources, represented by the training camps and winter sports curriculum in southern cities. Moreover, some local governments of non-host cities, for example, Jiangsu, Hubei, and Tianjin put weight on multi-source funding, inter-regional collaboration, and youth/ leisure sports development; while the 3 northeastern provinces kept their elite sports orientation and stimulated the regional development with winter sports tourism and events hosting.

Coopetition among Stakeholders and Their Strategic Communication

China has the world's fastest-growing consumer market and its largest manufacturer (Armour 2022, Boykoff 2024), which served as the base of the autonomous development of Chinese winter sports industry. Meanwhile, government guidance and resource distribution plan remain the dominate powers in the development process. In the post-game period, long-term strategic plans, such as Winter Sports Development Plan (2016-2025) continually contribute to the enhancement of winter sports participation. From the SMART goals setting to the execution protocols at the central or provincial level, Beijing 2022 left various experiences in creating social sustainability benefitting from multi-layer collaboration among organizations in the public sector, private sector, and the third sector.

The platform provided by international sports mega-events attracted diverse stakeholders working together through upper and lower linkage, internal and external collaboration, expert support, and joint advancement (BOCWOG 2022b). Several Chinese enterprises, like Alibaba and China Mengniu Dairy Company, increased their global influence and competition advantages by committing to the IOC's TOP program and joining the elite network (IOC 2024).

Besides, the stakeholders` alliance and the balance of interests guaranteed the delivery of the winter sports participation legacy, while the coopetition relationship among companies in the same branches facilitates or deters individual engagement in winter sports. For example, winter sports participation is highly dependent on facilities and equipment. No matter whether services are government-purchased services or private-purchased, the 4Ps (Referring to price, product, place, and promotion) impact the tangibility of the mass participation legacy. After the Games, some stakeholders, such as venue and technology providers, continued to invest in winter sports. In contrast, other stakeholders turned their focus on different projects and opportunities. At the same time, the power and relations among stakeholders changed along with enterprises` sustainable development strategies, innovation capacities, and vulnerabilities.

Media and social media provided a broad platform for the communication and negotiation among different stakeholders and the Games host while enabling the observation and comments from the domestic and international public. We figured out a phenomenon of attitude polarization towards the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics in both domestic and international media and social media. Chinese scholars in communication and information branches, represented by Han S. and Hou H. (2022),

remarked that mainstream media delivered positive messages about Chinese people`s support of Beijing 2022. However, Hou H. (Hou 2022) identified that foreign netizens have more negative sentiment toward the Beijing Winter Olympics corresponding to non-Olympic issues, such as China's territorial issues and other sensitive topics.

Moreover, our findings support the argument that the lessons we learn from the success embedded in the Chinese sports system are empirical, repeatable, and transferable.

Limitation, Conclusion and Future Research

This paper represents one of the evolving investigations that has taken a mixed research approach analyzing the efficiency and effectiveness of the "300 Million" strategy`s execution with an integrated conceptual model. With the combination of Critical Realism (CR) and the "Three-Source" Theory, we managed to inspect the critical mechanisms from the dimension of ideal and social reality by systematically analyzing a selected set of qualitative and quantitative data in alignment with triangulation, which employed document analysis, expert interview, survey, and sentiment analysis.

The research on ideal reality interprets stakeholders` roles and perspectives on realizing the political promise of "Creating a winter sports market with the involvement of more than 300 million people". The investigation of social reality, reflecting deep connections and generative mechanisms, will enable us to transfer winter sports participation-related knowledge among different stakeholders and institutional structures. While our findings further validate the adaptability and interconnected impact of the "300 Million" success. However, the data availability is still a discussion in this study. The current document analysis and sentiment analysis provide sufficient facts and evidence at the Macro level, especially in the Game-hosting time and post-Games period. However, less is known about the legacy delivery process in the Pre-Games period and the attitude changes before and after the Games at the meso and micro level.

In the continual pursuit of an in-depth study of Beijing 2022`s "300 Million" legacy and mechanism, we identified three general laws that could either enhance or decrease winter sports participation. The three laws involve "The Double-Edged Swords: Beneficial Sports Policy and Resource Concentration", "Sports Facilities and High-tech to Tackle the Growing Wealth Gap", and "Coopetition among Stakeholders and Their Strategic Communication".

Regarding the general laws working in any circumstances, we recommend an ice-breaking attempt to develop bilateral paths (Profitable and Non-profit) to facilitate the legacy delivery and to maintain the heat of winter sports development after the Games.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s). And there is non-financial interest that has arisen from the direct applications of your research.

Acknowledgment

This work is part of Jingfan Zhou`s PhD research project, supervised by Prof. Athanasios Pappous.

Funding

This work was partially supported by a scholarship under the State Scholarship Fund (#202109110054) from China Scholarship Council (CSC) for the PhD programme "Science and culture of wellness and lifestyle".

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study is available on request from the corresponding author.

References

Adams WM (2006) *The future of sustainability: Re-thinking environment and development in the twenty-first century*. https://policycommons.net/artifacts/1369044/the-future-of-sustainability/1983216/.

Ainsworth BE, Sallis JF (2022) The Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics: An opportunity to promote physical activity and winter sports in Chinese youth. *Journal of Sport and Health Science*, *11*(1), 3–5. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jshs.2021.09.005.

Analysys (2024) *Tendency Analysis of Chinese Skiing Sports*. https://www.analysys.cn/article/detail/20021175.

Armour (2022) *USA Today*. https://unibo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com.

Bin W, Wu B, Chen Y (2023) *China Ski Industry White Book*.

BOCWOG (2019) *Brief case study on Beijing 2022's progress with information, knowledge and learning*. https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/IOC/What-We-Do/celebrate-olympic-games/OGKM-Behind%20The%20Scenes/OGKM - Newsletter/2020-06/Case-study-Beijing-2022.pdf.

BOCWOG (2020) *Sustainability plan: Beijing 2022 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games*. https://library.olympics.com/Default/doc/SYRACUSE/353573/sustainability-plan-beijing-2022-olympic-and-paralympic-winter-games-beijing-organising-committ ee-fo.

BOCWOG (2022a) *Beijing 2022 factsheet Information, Knowledge and Games Learning (IKL)*. IOC. https://stillmed.olympics.com/media/Documents/Olympic-Games/Factsheets/Information-Knowledge-and-Games-Learning.pdf.

BOCWOG (2022b) *Sustainability for the future: Beijing 2022 pre-Games sustainability report*. Beijing Organising Committee for the 2022 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. https://library.olympics.com/Default/doc/SYRACUSE/1447512/sustainability-for-the-future-beijing-2022-pre-games-sustainability-report-beijing-organising-commit.

BOCWOG, Beijing Sports University (2022). *Legacy case studies: Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games Beijing 2022*. https://library.olympics.com/Default/doc/SYRACUSE/1568409/legacy-case-studies-olympic-and-paralympic-winter-games-beijing-2022-beijin g-organising-committee-fo.

Boykoff J (2024) Framing the Games: US Media Coverage of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics. *Communication & Sport*, *12*(1), 19–39. https://doi.org/10.1177/21674795221122938.

Brownill S, Keivani R, Pereira G (2013) Olympic legacies and city development strategies in London and Rio; beyond the carnival mask? *International Journal of Urban Sustainable Development*, *5*(2), 111–131.

Byers T, Hayday E, Pappous A (2019) A new conceptualization of mega sports event legacy delivery: Wicked problems and critical realist solution. *Sport Management Review*, *23*(2), 171–182. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2019.04.001

Chen S, Xing X, Chalip L (2022) Planning and implementation of event leveraging strategy: China's legacy pledge to motivate 300 million people to be involved in winter sport. *Sport Management Review*, *25*(5), 771–790. https://doi.org/10.1080/14413523.2021.1987737.

CHNCI (2024) *The Analysis of Value Chain in Chinese Ice and Snow Sports Industry*. https://www.163.com/dy/article/JGV2PBS605198SOQ.html.

Fourteenth Five-Year Plan for Sports Development (2021) https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/2021-10/26/content_5644891.htm.

GAS (2016) *Plan for Popularising Mass Winter Sports (2016-2020)*. https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-11/25/content_5137611.htm.

GAS (2022) *Survey results and essential outputs of "engaging 300 million people in winter sports."* https://www.sport.gov.cn/n20001280/n20001265/n20067533/c23922073/content.html.

Gratton C, Preuss H (2008) Maximizing Olympic Impacts by Building Up Legacies. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, *25*(14), 1922–1938. https://doi.org/10.1080/09523360802439023.

Han E, Zhao L (2024) Naturalized Athletes and Racialized National Identity in China. *Journal of Contemporary China*, *33*(145), 52–64. https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2023.2179391.

Hou H (2022) *Research on Public Opinion on Twitter of 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics*. 1785–1790. https://doi.org/10.2991/aebmr.k.220405.299.

Hou H, Shi H (2022) Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics in the Perspective of Chinese and Foreign Media A Corpus-Based Study of Critical Discourse Analysis. *BCP Business & Management*, *22*, 121–129. https://doi.org/10.54691/bcpbm.v22i.1218.

IOC (2023). *Final report highlights legacy of Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022*. https://olympics.com/ioc/news/final-report-highlights-legacy-of-olympic-winter-games-beijing-2022.

IOC (2024) *Olympic Partner Programme*. https://olympics.com/ioc/partners.

Liu J, Lou J, Wang Y, Zhang J (2022) Risk management strategies for the 2022 Olympic Winter Games: The Beijing scheme. *Journal of Sport and Health Science*, *11*(5), 545–547. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jshs.2022.02.006.

McFarland DA, McFarland HR (2015) Big Data and the danger of being precisely inaccurate. *Big Data & Society*, *2*(2), 2053951715602495. https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951715602495.

McKenzie S (2004) *Social sustainability: Towards some definitions*. *Journal Article*.

National Construction Plan for Ice and Snow Sports Venues (2016-2022) (2016) http://f.mnr.gov.cn/201905/t20190520_2412029.html.

Opp SM (2017) The forgotten pillar: A definition for the measurement of social sustainability in American cities. *Local Environment*, *22*(3), 286–305. https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2016.1195800.

Paehlke RC (2013) Sustainable development and urban life in North America. *Chapter*, *11* (Journal Article).

Polèse M, Stren R (2001) The Social Sustainability of Cities: Diversity and the Management of Change. *Canadian Public Policy/Analyse de Politiques*, *27*(3), 381–382. https://doi.org/10.2307/3552480.

Statista Research Department (2023) *Winter Olympics Beijing 2022 spending* [Dataset]. https://www.statista.com/statistics/1287800/winter-olympics-2022-beijing-cost-breakdown/.

Thomas J, Nelson J, Silverman S (2005) *Research Methods in Physical Activity-5th Edition* (5th edition). Human Kinetics.

Vanat L (2022) *2022 International Report on Snow & Mountain Tourism*. https://www.vanat.ch/RM-world-report-2022.pdf.

Winter Sports Development Plan (2016-2025) (2016) https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-11/25/content_5137611.htm.

Wu P, Zhu X, Yang S, Huang J (2023) The influence of the Beijing Winter Olympic games on the demand for winter sports: An empirical analysis based on the Baidu Index. *Heliyon*, *9*(10). Scopus. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e20426.