



# Mapping the Scientific Research on Sport Governance: Insights from Bibliometric Analysis

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## Abstract

The current study aims to highlight the current trends in the literature on sport governance by applying a bibliometric review of papers on sport governance topics published in the Web of Science database. This study reviews 230 Web of Science-indexed journal articles on sport governance and analyzed the data using bibliometric analytic tools such as thematic mapping and co-citation analysis. The findings reveal a notable increase in research on sport governance over time. Over the past three decades, diverse topics within sport governance have been explored, with a significant emphasis on national sport organizations, corruption, gender, leadership, volunteer boards, and collaborative governance. The study identifies gender dynamics and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) as emerging key research areas. The results not only contribute to our understanding of current sport governance literature but also point towards potential future research directions. These include the development of a comprehensive framework, exploration of outcome-related governance principles, and the application of governance principles to local and non-European sport organizations and systems.

Key words: sport governance, sport policy, bibliometric analysis, trend analysis

## Introduction

Corruption, doping scandals, inter-organizational conflicts, and gender equity issues persist within numerous international, national, and local governing bodies in sport. Unsurprisingly, many sport governing bodies (SGBs) have fallen short of achieving their anticipated outcomes in terms of effectiveness, social responsibility, equality, and organizational resilience due to governance-related issues. These issues include an inequitable governance structure, improper

decision-making procedures, and leadership challenges (Parent & Hoye, 2018).

In response to these governance issues in sport, scholars have delved into various topics within sport governance, formulating principles and guidelines to enhance governance for better or good governance (Parent & Hoye, 2018; Thompson et al., 2023). Traditionally, sport governance is defined as a systematic process aiming to achieve strategic goals and objectives of sport organizations through monitoring, directing, managing, and controlling activities (Slack & Parent, 2006). As Cho et al. (2023) suggested, sport governance can be seen from a variety of perspectives, such as a goal-oriented managerial action (Slack &

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Parent, 2006), an exercise of granted power and authority (Hums et al., 2023), a system of compliance with regulations and law (Sawyer et al., 2008), and a system open to internal and external dynamics (Hums et al., 2023). The concept of sport governance has progressed from focusing on the internal process and mechanism to considering its wider contexts and interactions with various stakeholders (Hums et al., 2023). This emerging trend is supported by more sport governance literature that directly and indirectly covers traditional sport sociology topics. The current study also employed this broadened concept of sport governance.

Despite a growing number of research studies on sport governance, only a limited number of review studies exist that scrutinize research topics and trends in the sport governance literature. Notably, to our knowledge, there is no published bibliometric review on sport governance. Compared to other review methods (e.g., scoping review), bibliometric analysis could provide a more comprehensive and objective review on a given research field while proving quantifiable measurements of research impacts (Donthu et al., 2021). Therefore, the current study seeks to review the sport governance literature, explore research topics, and propose future research ideas in sport governance.

The exploration of literature on sport governance could be significantly enhanced through the introduction of review studies within this domain. Despite the pivotal role of good governance in shaping the sport industry, only three noteworthy review papers have systematically delved into research trends and synthesized meaningful topical areas in sport governance (Dowling et al., 2018; Parent & Hoye, 2018; Thompson et al., 2023).

Dowling et al. (2018) examined sport governance research published between 1980 and 2016 using a scoping review method. Guided by Henry and Lee's three notions of governance (i.e., organizational, systematic, and political governance), their scoping review identified sport governance-related topics, research contexts, and social issues in the literature.

Their study found that the vast majority of sport governance research has explored issues in systemic governance that are "concerned with the competition, cooperation and mutual adjustment between organizations in business and/or policy systems" (Henry & Lee, 2004, p. 24), while substantial studies explored organizational governance that is concerned with "normative, ethically-informed standards of managerial behavior" (Henry & Lee, 2004, p. 24) or socially acceptable norms and values of sport organizations (Dowling et al., 2018). To a lesser extent, fewer studies investigated political governance (i.e., how governments or governing bodies in sport steer the behavior of organizations; Henry & Lee, 2004) and explored such topics as changing relationships between state and sport, roles of governmental agencies and governing bodies on sport, and governmental involvement in sport (Dowling et al., 2018). In addition, their study identified popular topical areas in sport governance research, including sport for development (SfD), sport policy, law, partnerships, organizational change, and corporate social responsibility (CSR). They also found sport governance research often addresses some key social issues surrounding governance, such as gender, corruption, doping, and disability issues in sport (Dowling et al., 2018).

Parent and Hoye (2018) conducted a systematic review of the sport governance literature to understand the influence of governance principles and guidelines on sport organizations' practices and performance. Analyzing 19 documents published between 2004 and 2018, their study identified key governance principles explored in the literature. These included membership-related aspects (e.g., board diversity, composition, size, and ownership structures), inter-organizational linkages (e.g., partnerships), regulatory structures impacting sport organizations' governance, decision-making issues (e.g., accountability, transparency, procedural fairness, and decision-making protocols), shared leadership (e.g., collaboration between CEO and board members), and

the board's strategic focus (Parent & Hoye, 2018).

In a more recent examination, Thompson et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review of 73 documents published between 2002 and 2019 to delve into the contemporary landscape of governance principles in sport. This comprehensive study identified 258 governance principles, categorized into four groups: governance structure, process, outcome, and context. Notably, a majority of the explored principles focused on process-related topics, encompassing accountability, autonomy, board processes, democracy and decision-making processes, integrity, operation, stakeholder engagement, sustainability, and transparency. To a lesser extent, studies in sport governance delved into structure-related principles (e.g., board structure and composition, constitution and by-laws, organizational structure, and sport structure), outcome-related principles (e.g., CSR, effectiveness, efficiency, equality and inclusivity, and organizational resilience), and context-specific governance responsibilities such as bidding processes (Thompson et al., 2023).

While prior review papers offer valuable insights into the current status and research trends in sport governance literature, it's important to note that all three studies employed systematic review or scoping review approaches, potentially introducing bias. To address this, the present study adopted a bibliometric analysis approach for a more comprehensive and objective analysis of sport governance literature (Donthu et al., 2021). This approach enables a nuanced exploration of the current status, research themes, and potential future research directions in this topical area. Specifically, the study aims to answer two key research questions: (1) Which research topics or governance principles have been discussed in the literature over the last three decades, and (2) what are the research gaps for future studies in this research domain?

## Method

### Methodology: Bibliometric Analysis

The present study employed a bibliometric analysis approach utilizing the Bibliometrix R package (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). This methodology combines quantitative and qualitative techniques applied to bibliographic documents, focusing on the fundamental theoretical and empirical contributions within a specific research field or topical area (Mao et al., 2015). It proves highly effective in generating representative summaries of key findings, employing various indicators such as the total number of papers and citations, cites per paper, and the h-index to gauge the literature's performance and influence (Alonso et al., 2009).

Furthermore, this method enables a comprehensive understanding of a research area, facilitating the mapping of its boundaries and, consequently, the identification of future research ideas (Donthu et al., 2020; Tandon et al., 2021). Thematic mapping and factorial analyses were applied to explore the conceptual structures of the sport governance literature, while co-citation network analysis was employed to investigate the intellectual structure within the literature (Donthu et al., 2021).

### Bibliographic Data

Conducted as a bibliometric study, the research utilized the literature review available in a WoS database. The research strategy involved a Boolean operator search operation, incorporating the following three terms; "sport(s) governance," "governance issues in sport(s)," and "governance in sport(s)." The initial search produced 344 publications as of December 2023. However, this figure encompassed various publication types, including book chapters, editorial materials, book reviews, proceeding papers, and corrections. Consequently, the study narrowed its focus to journal

articles, excluding other publication types (i.e., 69 book chapters, 17 editorial materials, 12 review articles, 7 books, 7 book reviews, 6 proceeding papers, and 1 correction). The current study aimed to focus on peer-reviewed journal articles within this field to increase the reliability of the results obtained because research papers, instead of books, reviews, and proceedings papers, can be seen as ‘certifiable knowledge’ (Garcia-Lillo et al., 2017). This refined approach aimed to concentrate on the most representative and empirical research pieces within the WoS database, resulting in a reduced number of publications to 230 from 94 distinct sources. The characteristics of the bibliometric dataset used in this study are detailed in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive characteristics of the bibliometric dataset

Description	Results
Main Information About the Data	
Timespan	1995 - 2023
Sources (Journals)	94
Documents	230
Annual Growth Rate %	12.64
Document Average Age	4.99
Average citations per doc	12.75
References	10922
Document Contents	
Keywords Plus (ID)	384
Author's Keywords (DE)	755
AUTHORS	
Authors	366
Authors of single-authored docs	70
Authors Collaboration	
Single-authored docs	72
Co-Authors per Doc	2.2
International co-authorships %	30.43
Document Types	
Article	212
Article; early access	18

## Data Analysis

As mentioned above, several bibliometric analytic approaches were utilized in this study. Firstly,

performance analysis was conducted to report the descriptive aspects of the bibliometric data, such as the number of publications or citations of the documents in the dataset, and to sort the documents by authors and journals (i.e., performance by authors and journals). Secondly, scientific mapping was conducted to capture hidden patterns in the conceptual and intellectual structure of the given bibliometric dataset and their evolution over time (Donthu et al., 2021). In the bibliometric analysis, the conceptual structure denotes to the links emerging between different concepts or keywords, while the intellectual structure refers to the relationships between meaningful nodes, such as documents, authors, and journals. Regarding the conceptual structure, thematic mapping was conducted to identify the most relevant topics through co-word occurrence by plotting conceptual themes using two dimensions of centrality (i.e., relevance degree) and density (i.e., development degree) on a bi-dimensional matrix (Donthu et al., 2021). In addition, factorial analysis using corresponding analysis was conducted to identify the number of factors representing the relationship between several keywords. Regarding the intellectual structure, co-citation analysis was conducted to measure the similarity of co-cited authors to explore the field's knowledge base by coupling key authors in this particular research field. In the co-citation network, the node size indicates the frequency of the co-citation (i.e., the larger the node, the higher the number of co-citations). In addition, historiographic analysis was conducted to plot the evolution of the citations of the most influential documents over the years (1995-2023).

## Results

### Performance Analysis

This study reveals a gradual increase in the number of papers on sport governance over the past decade, with an annual growth rate of 12.64%. The first empirical paper in this domain was published in 1995,

yet the topic did not capture researchers’ attention until 2011. Table 2 provides a chronological overview of total publications each year from 1995 to 2023, indicating a progression from one document in 1995 to 28 documents in 2023. Notably, the year 2022 emerged as the most productive, with 31 publications. It is essential to note that this study focused on excluding review papers and book chapters, specifically incorporating documents indexed in the WoS database.

**Table 2.** Publication per year (1995-2023)

Year	Articles	Year	Articles	Year	Articles
1995	1	2010	3	2017	14
2003	2	2011	1	2018	22
2005	1	2012	8	2019	18
2006	1	2013	8	2020	21
2007	2	2014	9	2021	25
2008	1	2015	15	2022	31
2009	5	2016	14	2023	28

### Leading Journals in Sport Governance

Table 3 presents the journal distribution of articles on sport governance from 1995 to 2023. A total of 230 journal articles were identified across 94 scientific journals. Applying Bradford’s Law (Bradford, 1985), four journals fell within the core zone, namely the International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics

(IJSPP) with 38 articles, European Sport Management Quarterly (ESMQ) with 15 articles, Sport in Society (SIS) with 14 articles, and Journal of Sport Management (JSM) with 13 articles. Collectively, these core journals amassed 1,321 citations, constituting 45.1% of the total citations.

In evaluating research quality, the H-index has gained widespread acceptance as it considers both the quantity and quality of a set of publications from authors (Hirsch, 2005). According to the H-index, the top five journals in this research topic are IJSPP (H-index = 14), JSM (8), ESMQ (7), Managing Sport and Leisure (MSL; 6), and SIS (6). Table 3 provides details on the H-index, total citations, number of publications, and the year of first publication for each journal.

### Productive Researchers in Sport Governance

In the realm of sport governance, a total of 366 researchers have contributed, with an average of 2.2 co-authors per document and 0.63 publications per author. Lotka’s Law (1926) highlights 301 (82.2%) occasional authors with a single publication, while those with more than seven publications are identified as core contributors (n = 5; 1.3%). Table 4 presents the 10 most productive or cited researchers, accounting for 77 publications and 1,373 citations, constituting 17.3% of

**Table 3.** Most relevant sources and their impact

Sources/Journals	h_index	g_index	m_index	TC	NP	PY_start
International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics	14	25	0.933	673	38	2009
Journal of Sport Management	8	13	0.276	344	13	1995
European Sport Management Quarterly	7	14	0.7	211	15	2014
Managing Sport and Leisure	6	8	0.75	74	10	2016
Sport in Society	6	9	0.857	93	14	2017
International Review for the Sociology of Sport	4	7	0.333	134	7	2012
Sport Management Review	4	5	0.364	185	5	2013
European Journal for Sport and Society	3	4	0.333	26	4	2015
International Journal of the History of Sport	3	5	0.3	26	6	2014
International Sports Law Journal	3	7	0.3	49	7	2014

Note: Four boldfaced journals are classified as core sources by Bradford’s Law. TC = Total citations; NP = Number of publications; PY = Publication year

**Table 4.** Most relevant authors and their impact

Authors	<i>h</i> index	<i>g</i> index	<i>m</i> index	TC	NP	PY_start
Shilbury D	9	18	0.529	364	18	2007
Ferkins L	7	9	0.5	266	9	2010
O'boyle I	7	9	0.875	125	9	2016
Garcia B	5	6	0.333	81	6	2009
Geeraert A	5	5	0.455	166	5	2013
Fahlen J	4	7	0.444	140	7	2015
Harris S	4	7	0.5	65	7	2016
Meier He	4	5	0.364	38	5	2013
Mcleod J	3	5	1	31	6	2021
Stenling C	3	5	0.3	97	5	2014

Note: Five boldfaced authors are classified as core contributors by Lotka's Law.

TC = Total citations; NP = Number of publications; PY = Publication year

total publications and 16.5% of total citations. Shilbury was the most productive and highly-cited researcher, with 18 total publications (*h*-index of 9 and 364 total citations). Other notable productive and well-cited researchers included Ferkins (9 publications; *h*-index score of 8; 266 total citations), O'boyle (9 publications; *h*-index score of 9; 125 citations), Garcia (6 publications; *h*-index score of 5; 81 citations), and Geeraert (5 publications; *h*-index score of 5; 166 citations).

### Most Cited Documents

Table 5 outlines the top ten most cited publications,

amassing a total of 859 citations, representing 29.3% of the overall citations in the collection. The leading article in Table 5, with 214 citations, discusses the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Consensus Statement on harassment and abuse in sport (Mountjoy et al., 2016). The second article, with 85 citations, assesses 35 Olympic sport governing bodies in terms of self-governance quality, i.e., good governance (Geeraert et al., 2014). The third article identifies four elements (capable people, a frame of reference, facilitative board processes, and facilitative regional relationships) essential for a strategically able board for national sport organizations (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2012). The fourth paper deliberates on whether e-sport qualifies as one of the Olympic-level sports governed by Olympic sport organizations (Parry, 2019). Lastly, the fifth paper explores sport governance practices through the lived experience of one informant with rich governance experience (Shilbury et al., 2013).

Five additional publications delved into various aspects, including the professionalization of sport federations (Nagel et al., 2015), global sport organizations and their governance (Forster, 2006), gender composition in national sport governing boards (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008), the board structure of national sport governing bodies (Taylor & O'Sullivan, 2009), and sport policy in Sweden (Fahlén & Stenling, 2016).

**Table 5.** Most global cited documents

Paper	DOI	Total Citations	TC per Year	Normalized TC
Mountjoy M, 2016, Br J Sports Med	10.1136/bjsports-2016-096121	214	26.75	6.05
Geeraert A, 2014, Int J Sport Policy Polit	10.1080/19406940.2013.825874	85	8.50	3.49
Ferkins L, 2012, J Sport Manage	10.1123/jsm.26.1.67	80	6.67	2.83
Parry J, 2019, Sport Ethics Philos	10.1080/17511321.2018.1489419	72	14.40	4.68
Shilbury D, 2013, Sport Manag Rev	10.1016/j.smr.2012.12.001	71	6.45	2.93
Nagel S., 2015, Eur Sport Manag Q	10.1080/16184742.2015.1062990	70	7.78	3.12
Forster J, 2006, Corp Gov-Int J Bus Soc	10.1108/14720700610649481	68	3.78	1.00
Claringbould I, 2008, Sex Roles	10.1007/s11199-007-9351-9	68	4.25	1.00
Taylor M, 2009, Corp Gov	10.1111/j.1467-8683.2009.00767.x	68	4.53	1.88
Fahlén J, 2016, Int J Sport Policy Polit	10.1080/19406940.2015.1063530	63	7.88	1.78

## Keywords

In light of issues with Keyword Plus, where numerous documents lacked KeywordPlus terms, author keywords ( $N = 755$ ) were employed to identify prevalent keywords and research trends (Table 6). Unsurprisingly, ‘sport governance’ emerged as the most frequently used keyword (appeared 94 times), followed by ‘governance’ (50), ‘sport’ (40), and ‘sport policy’ (13). Notable keywords also included corruption (10), gender (10), good governance (9), leadership (8), institutional theory (6), collaborative governance (5), globalization (5), and match-fixing (5). A supplementary trend analysis indicated that author-provided keywords such as corruption, gender, and leadership have become more recent and frequently used topics in this domain.

According to Thomson et al.’s (2023) governance principles categories (i.e., structure, process, outcome and context), author keywords mostly belonged to the process category (e.g., autonomy and integrity), followed by the structure category (e.g., collaborative governance, power, and leadership), the context category (e.g., football, national sport organizations, Olympic, and India) and, to a lesser extent, the outcome context category (e.g., good governance). It should be noted that

keywords can be misread and potentially misclassified into an incorrect category due to their nature.

## Conceptual Structure

The present study employed thematic mapping to explore the conceptual structure within the sport governance literature. A thematic map was constructed using author keywords, categorizing them into four themes: motor, basic, niche, and emerging/declining themes (Figure 1). Motor themes, characterized by high density and centrality, featured two significant clusters: Cluster 1 – encompassing sport governance, policy, football, NSOs, and corruption; and Cluster 2 – covering gender, leadership, boards, collaborative governance, and diversity. Additionally, several notable clusters included Cluster 3 - match-fixing, institutionalization, and sport betting; Cluster 4 – corporate governance, board structure, and directors; Cluster 5 – governmentality; and Cluster 6 – globalization. Basic themes, marked by high centrality and low density, included one larger cluster (Cluster 1 – Governance, Olympic, and institutional theory) and a few notable clusters: Cluster 2 – good governance and Cluster 3 – integrity. Niche themes, with high density and low centrality, comprised four notable clusters: Cluster 1 –

**Table 6.** Most frequent author keywords

Words	Occurrences	Words	Occurrences
sport governance	94	globalization	5
governance	50	match-fixing	5
sport	40	policy	5
sport policy	13	politics	5
football	12	autonomy	4
national sport organizations	11	corporate governance	4
corruption	10	critical mass	4
gender	10	diversity	4
good governance	9	India	4
leadership	8	integrity	4
Olympic	8	national sport	4
organizations	8	power	4
boards	6	sport management	4
institutional theory	6	trust	4
collaborative governance	5		

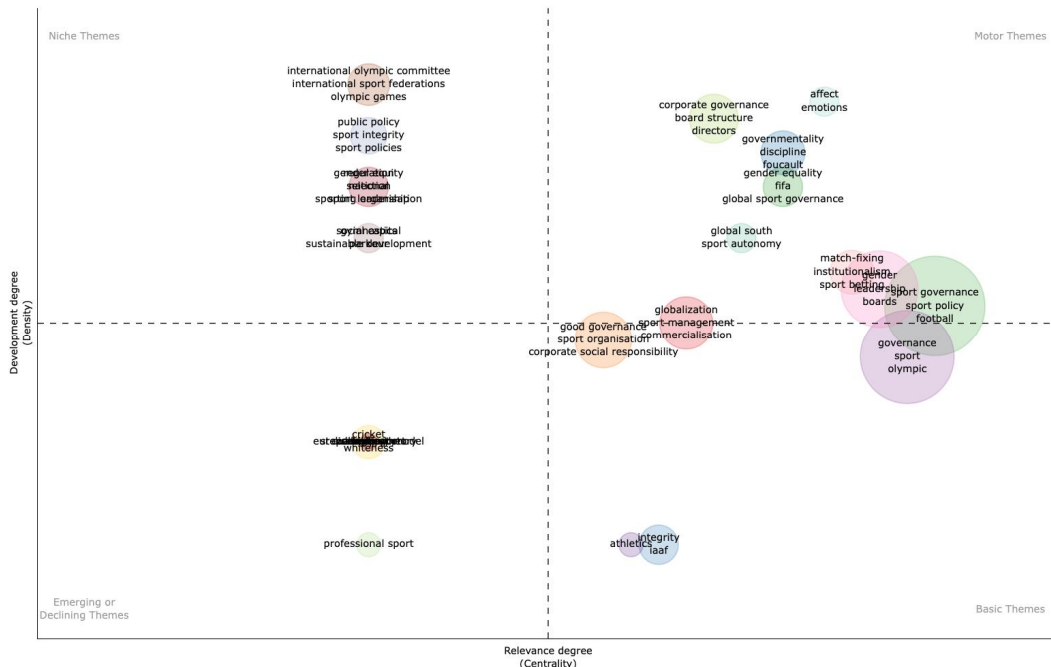


Figure 1. Thematic map

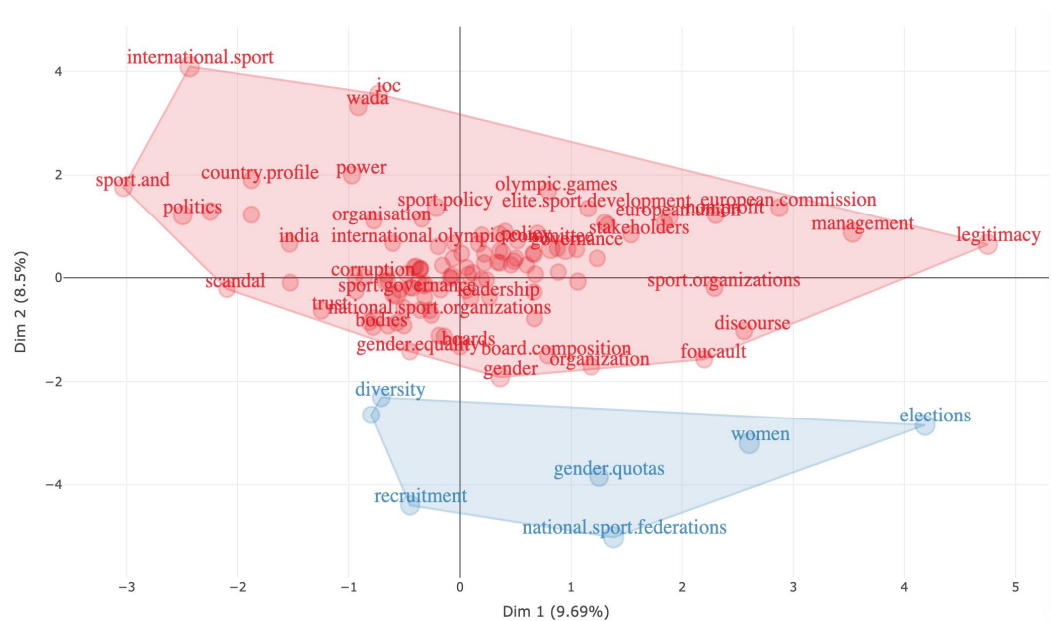


Figure 2. Factorial analysis: Correspondence analysis

IOC, ISF, and Olympic games; Cluster 2 – public policy and sport integrity; Cluster 3 – regulation; and Cluster 4 – gymnastics. Lastly, emerging themes featured two small clusters with keywords such as cricket, whiteness,

and professional sport (Figure 1).

To complement the thematic mapping results, factorial analysis was conducted, revealing two clusters of topics (Figure 2). The larger cluster demonstrated



the prevalence of popular keywords in sport governance, including ‘corruption,’ ‘leadership,’ ‘IOC,’ and ‘sport policy.’ In contrast, the smaller cluster encompassed keywords related to gender equity and diversity, such as ‘gender quotas,’ ‘diversity,’ and ‘women.’

According to Thomson et al.’s (2023) governance principles categories (i.e., structure, process, outcome and context), authors’ keywords could be categorized into structure-related principles (e.g., power, boards, women, directors, and policy), process-related principles (e.g., politics, management, dynamics, and culture), outcome-related principles (e.g., performance, impact, equality, and board performance), and context-related keywords (e.g., football, and UK).

### Intellectual Structures

The co-citation analysis results were visually presented to outline the intellectual structure of sport governance research, revealing two distinct clusters of co-citation networks (Figure 3). The first cluster, positioned on the right, encompasses works emphasizing the role and influence of board membership and involvement in sport governance, as

evidenced by studies like Hoye (2007) and Ferkins et al. (2005, 2009). On the left, the second cluster comprises works focusing on gender dynamics in sport governance, including studies by Adriaanse & Schofield (2013) and Claringbould & Knoppers (2008, 2012). These findings align with the earlier results obtained from factorial analysis.

Furthermore, historiographic mapping was conducted to construct a chronological network showcasing the most cited articles in the bibliographic dataset (Garfield, 2004). Figure 4 illustrates the 17 most cited references in the historiographic network. Similar to the co-citation analysis, influential works such as Claringbould and Knoppers’ study (2008) on gender dynamics in sport governance, Shilbury et al.’s exploration (2013) of federated structures and collaborative governance theory, and Chappelet’s examination (2018) on the regulation of international sport emerged as key references that significantly impacted subsequent and more recent studies in the field of sport governance.

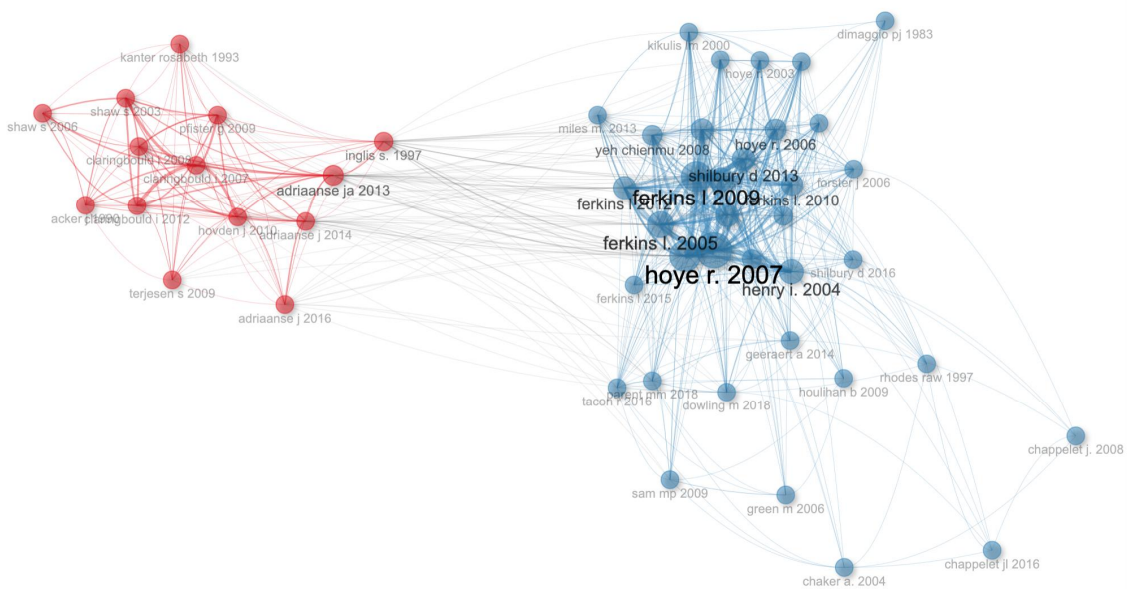


Figure 3. Co-citation network

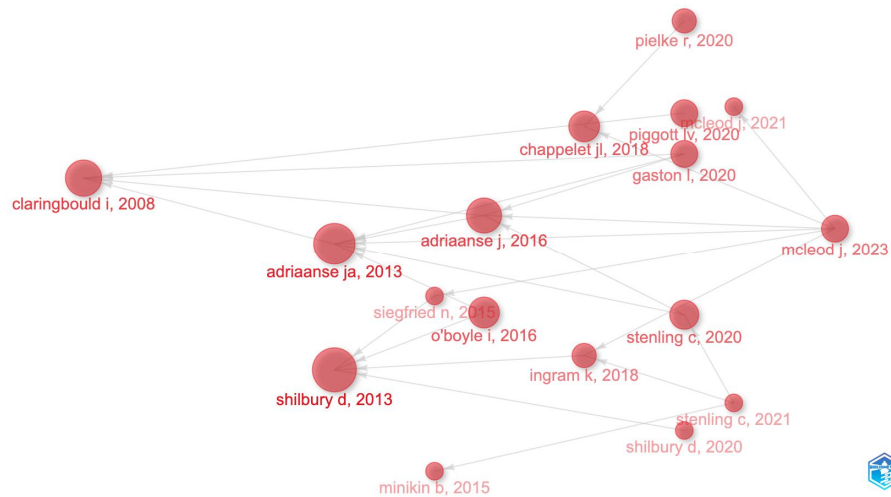


Figure 4. Historiograph

## Discussion

This study conducted a bibliometric review of sport governance research published in academic journals from 1995 to 2023 using the WoS database. The number of publications, frequently studied keywords and topics, citation structure, and h-index were considered. The results showed that research on sport governance has been progressively increasing over the past few decades, with a stronger publication record in the last decade. Overall, the majority of the published journal articles have focused on governance principles and practices in sport, while one of the major research domains is on gender dynamics in sport governance.

As mentioned above, this study found that there is a slow but steady growth in the number of publications per year on sport governance, especially in the last decade. While there were only sporadic studies in the 1990s and 2000s, the last nine years have seen a meaningful increase in publications. The increase in publications indicates a growing interest in the importance of good governance in sport. In the last three decades, IJSP has been the primary source of scholarly articles, followed by ESMQ, SIS, and JSM, hinting at the prevalence of European influences in this research domain. However, the examination of core authors also

suggests active research activities in Australasia.

This study also identified the most influential journal articles in this field. The top ten most cited articles covered such topics as sport policy on harassment and abuse (Mountjoy et al., 2016), good governance in international sport organizations (Geeraert et al., 2014), strategically able board (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2012), Olympic sport inclusion rules and esports (Parry, 2019), federated governance model (Shilbury et al., 2013), professionalization processes in sport organizations (Nagel et al., 2015), global sport organizations and their governance (Forster, 2006), gender dynamics in sport governance (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008), board structure for national sport governing bodies (Taylor & O'Sullivan, 2009), and sport policy in Sweden (Fahlén & Stenling, 2016), indicating diverse research topics in sport governance research.

As identified through thematic mapping and factorial analysis, the conceptual structure of sport governance research is highly complex and diverse in terms of research topics and contexts. The results of thematic mapping suggest that core topics in sport governance (i.e., motor themes) include such topics as governmentality, instrumentality, board structure and composition, global sport governance, match-fixing, and

sport betting. However, there are other niche and emerging topics in sport governance, such as gender equity, sustainable development and governance for emerging sports. Factorial analysis somewhat corroborates the results of thematic mapping as there is a distinct group of topics on diversity and gender-related procedural issues (e.g., elections and recruitment) for national sport federations (e.g., Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013, 2014).

As recognized by thematic mapping, sport governance as it relates to sport policy, board leadership, gender, football and Olympic were the common topics in the literature, given the strategic influence of board governance (e.g., Ferkins et al., 2009), the prevalence of gender inequity in sport leadership (e.g., Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008), and the contextual importance and spillover effects of football and Olympic (e.g., Geeraert et al., 2014; Pielke et al., 2020) in the context of sport governance. Other key topics and contexts identified in the literature included match-fixing, sport betting, globalization, commercialization, CSR, and sustainable development. Sport integrity is one of the critical guiding principles in sport governance and, thus, sport governance often focuses on ways to curb match-fixing, corruption, and unregulated sport gambling to enhance sport integrity (e.g., Gardiner et al., 2017; McNamee, 2013; Sam et al., 2023; Tak et al., 2018). For example, Sam et al. (2023) call for establishing integrity systems and governance to address a wide array of issues, including doping, match-fixing, harassment, bullying, exploitation, and abuse, suggesting the importance of sport integrity in the sport governance literature. While the majority of sport governance centers around non-profit or governmental sport organizations, some studies explored governance in commercialized sport organizations (e.g., Gammelsæter, 2010) or governance in the age of changing societal processes, such as commercialization, professionalization and globalization (e.g., Clausen et al., 2018). Also, sport organizations face increasing pressures to maintain

profitability while making positive social contributions and behaving in socially acceptable ways. Consequently, sport governance researchers have explored sport governance as it relates to CSR and sustainability (e.g., Breitbarth et al., 2015; Chatzigianni, 2018).

Lastly, the intellectual structure of sport governance research was explored using co-citation analysis and historiographic mapping. Co-citation analysis resulted in two distinct clusters: voluntary board on sport governance (e.g., Hoye, 2007) and gender dynamics in sport governance (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013). Historiographic mapping identified several seminal studies in this research area, such as studies on gender dynamics (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013; Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008), the federated government model (Shilbury et al., 2013), and the regulation of international sport (Chappelet, 2018).

Of the two clusters based on co-citation analysis, the literature in the 'voluntary board on sport governance' cluster mainly focuses on concepts, perspectives and governance principles on voluntary boards in sport organizations, given that board governance is critically related to strategic direction and decision-making of a given sport organization. Earlier studies in this area focused on the relationships between board governance and organizational effectiveness, such as to what extent board governance models, board compositions and board members influence organizational success (e.g., Ferkins et al., 2005; O'Boyle & Shilbury, 2016). Other related studies in this domain include collaborative sport governance (Shilbury et al., 2016), continuity and change in governance and decision-making (Kikulis, 2000), modernization on sport governance (Tacon & Walters, 2016) and structural issues regarding the quality of the self-governance (Geeraert et al., 2014). On the other hand, the literature on 'gender dynamics' focused on the status of gender equity and equality in sport leadership (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013), gender equity policies in national governing bodies (Shaw & Penney, 2003), gender diversity in sport governance

globally (Adriaanse, 2016) and gender order and power relations in sport leadership (Hovden, 2006). Given the current societal pressure on sport organizations concerning diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), there will be a greater number of forthcoming DEI-related studies in the sport governance literature.

Upon examining most recent studies in the sport governance literature, it seems that the above-mentioned two intellectual clusters are still relevant and important topical groups in the sport governance literature. For example, Stenling et al. (2023) explored nomination committees' role in shaping potential in national sport organizations' board composition processes. McLeod et al. (2023) conducted a cross-country comparative analysis of diversity and board size in national sport federations, while Lesch et al. (2023) explored women's representation and organizational characteristics in sport governance. Similarly, Pape & Schoch (2023) investigated whether meso-level fields of strategic action influence sport organizations' actions on gender equality.

As reviewed above, diverse concepts and governance principles have been studied under the umbrella of sport governance. Notable publications in 2023 include such topics as governance design archetype (Parent et al., 2023), self-governance (Lehtonen et al., 2023), environmental policy and practice (Chatzigianni & Mallen, 2023), women representation (Lesch et al., 2023), and regulatory schemes and legal aspects (Cho et al., 2023). However, the current study found some noticeable research gaps in the sport governance literature. Further exploration is called for developing a comprehensive framework in sport governance as there is a lack of a consistent theoretical approach or conceptualization of governance principles (Parent & Hoye, 2018). Guided by Thompson et al.'s (2023) four different aspects linked to governance (i.e., structure, process, outcome, and context), the current study suggests that sport governance studies have focused on structure and process-related research topics such as voluntary board structure and composition, sport

structure, autonomy, and governmentality while paid relatively smaller attention to outcome and context-related research topics. However, the results of the current study also identified that one of the outcome-related governance principles, namely (gender) equality and inclusivity, is getting greater attention from scholars in the field. Also, it was observed that there is a lack of empirical work in this research field, and thus, future studies should incorporate either qualitative or quantitative methodologies and scientific methods (e.g., Thompson et al., 2023).

Consistent with Geeraert's claimed knowledge gaps in the literature, including "conceptual vagueness, unclear implementation rationale and unclear impact of good governance strategies" (Geeraert, 2021, p. 3), the current study also found that the concept of sport governance has been broadened over time and, thus, this change comes with conceptual vagueness. While the current study identified various studies and topics regarding the process (implementation) and outcome (impact) of governance strategies, the study also noticed the limited use of theoretical underpinnings and performance indicators. This collective issue is somewhat related to or escalated by the lack of efforts in quantifying good governance in sport (Girginov, 2023), given that many studies on sport governance extensively rely on case studies or anecdotal evidence to support assertions. Thus, future studies consider such issues in sport governance research.

Lastly, much of the literature focused on national and international levels and European sport governing bodies, and thus, future studies should consider studying sport governance at the regional or local levels and non-European contexts (Thomson et al., 2023).

## Conclusion

Bibliometric analysis could provide the potential to explore the research trends and popular issues and identify possible areas of future research endeavors. This study has several theoretical and practical

implications. First, the study provides an overview of how the sport governance literature (i.e., journal articles excluding review papers) has evolved over the last three decades since 1995. Secondly, this study helps researchers to identify relevant sources and recent topics to focus on. Lastly, the current study provides research gaps in this field that sport governance research could benefit from.

### Author Contribution

Conceptualization: C Park  
 Data curation: C Park  
 Formal analysis: C Park  
 Methodology: D Won  
 Writing - original draft: C Park  
 Writing - review & editing: D Won  
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