

# THE PROBLEMATIC COMPLIANCE OF INTERNATIONAL SPORTS ORGANISATIONS WITH DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

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## Abstract

### RESEARCH QUESTION

Democratic governance in sport means something but not always the same to everybody. It earns some interest among scientists in the field of sport governance but also in the field of European sporting policies, as evidenced by a growing development of studies and reports considering it as a cornerstone for "good" organisational governance leading sports organisations to protect the integrity, ethics and autonomy of sport. However, a consensual conceptualisation of democratic governance in sport seems not to exist. For instance, according to the Governance in Sport Working Group, democracy refers to the election of the representatives of a sport organisation by its members, the disclosure of voting procedures and results, fixed terms of office and fairness and transparency in elections. The Council of Europe handles democracy as the existence of clear election rules and accessible to members. The IOC goes further considering that these rules have to be fair and transparent. Moreover, a limited number of studies have stressed the complexity of the concept and questioned its dimensions (e.g. representation, participation, consultation and competition) and indicators of measurement. This lack of operationalisation raises the question in which manner and the extent to which the governance of international sports organisation can effectively be considered as democratic. A first contribution by Mrkonjic (2010) shows how difficult it is to measure democratic governance in an organisation such as the WADA. According to this, this contribution aims to provide a list of indicators of democracy for sports organisations and on this basis, test in which manner a selected number of sports organisations comply with democratic governance.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In order to provide indicators of democracy for sports organisations, this contribution assumes that three different theoretical backgrounds have to be taken into consideration. A first focus is put on a normative approach of sport governance notably developed by Hoye & Cuskelly (2007) which is essentially based on applying corporate governance principles to sports organisations and refers to "the norms or values for the just means of allocation of resources, and profits or losses and for the conduct of processes involved in the management and direction of organisations in the sports business" (Henry & Lee, 2004). "Democracy" is one of the principles that are put forward by this approach. In order to enhance the understanding of this principle, this contribution also presents the main studies in comparative political science (e.g. Alvarez & al., 1996) and "good" governance studies that attempt to measure the levels of democracy of political regimes.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology is based on a conceptualisation-measurement-aggregation model (Munck & Verkuilen, 2002) which has its roots in comparative political science and is mainly used to compare States or political regimes. However, this contribution assumes that it can also be used in order to compare sports organisations. A first section aims to work on democratic governance by a process of deconstruction into a concept, dimensions and indicators of measurement on the basis of a review of the literature on sport governance and political studies. In a second section, I present three major international sports federations, FIBA, FIFA and IAAF and one regulatory body, WADA on the basis of a review of their official communication (e.g. statutes, membership lists and reports). On the basis of the indicators revealed in theory, a third section is devoted to a Democracy compliance test of the selected sports organisations.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that, despite some similarities, the selected sports federations and the regulatory body follow different conceptions of democracy. For instance, the election of the President of FIBA is based on a geographic constraint (zones). According to the its Statutes, it is not allowed to elect for two consecutive mandates a representative of the same zone (FIBA General Statutes, art. 14.2.1), which is not the case for FIFA. The contribution concludes with a discussion on the challenges of providing a list of indicators of democracy giving sports organisations the opportunity to measure to what extent their governance can be considered as democratic.

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