The meaning of democracy in an era of good governance: Views of representation and their implications for board composition

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Abstract

Contemporary sport governance contexts are marked by a trend towards efficiency-based board composition and an increasing use of instruments aimed to (re)shape boards. Yet, democratic governance is integral to many countries' sport systems, and research tells us that representation still matters in sport governance. Considering this, the aim with this paper is to provide researchers and practitioners with a vocabulary to understand and address issues of representation in board composition. The paper builds on interviews with nomination committee representatives of 62 Swedish national sport federations (NSFs). The analysis provides insights into the meaning and implications of four distinct views of representation, along with an interpretation of potential responses to board-shaping instruments engendered by these views.

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Keywords

During the past 15 years or so, revelations of sport governance practices of morally and ethically questionable or outright appalling character have raised serious doubts concerning whether sport really is equipped to govern itself. Possibly partly due to a genuine concern among these actors around the state of affairs within sport, and most likely partly due to a worry of being judged as "guilty by association," external stakeholders such as government agencies and commercial partners have put increasing pressure on sport to "get its house in order," governance-wise (e.g. Parent and Hoye, 2018).

As a result, ideas and practices under the umbrella term "good governance" have swept across the globe. As with many organizational ideas that have become fashionable in sport, good governance has its origins in the private sector (e.g. Tacon and Walters, 2016; Taylor and O'Sullivan, 2009; Walters and Tacon, 2018). As a movement of sorts, it is therefore underpinned by market-oriented ideals that are manifested in principles and guidelines that aim to ensure the efficient and ethically sound governance of sport organizations. These include, for example, new guidelines around board size and composition, where the trend is a move towards decreasing board size and the substitution of internally elected representatives for appointed and external directors, thus constructing boards that "take effective decisions that further the organization's goals" (Sport England, 2016: 11). Faced with the almost tidal-wave proportion of advocacy for and adoption of efficiency-based "good governance" principles, it is easy to forget that in many countries, multilevel and federative democratic governance has been and still is the institutionalized governing practice (Scheerder et al., 2016).

A key function of democratic governance systems is *representation*, whereby a few are mandated to make decisions on behalf of the many. In sport, member-elected governing boards epitomize this solution to the unavoidable problem of scale (i.e. the large number of represented parties makes direct democracy practically impossible) that arise in most democratic systems (e.g. Thibault et al., 2010). A classic understanding of representation is that it involves "the making present in some sense of something which is nevertheless *not* present literally or in fact" (Pitkin, 1972: 8–9), where "something" usually refers to the interests of those represented. In turn, answers to the question of how the representation of interests should be ensured in boards and other elected and nonelected organs (e.g. committees and councils) is reflective of different *views of representation* (i.e. ideas around how the absent is to be made present). Notably, these views implicate widely differing consequences in terms of what is considered "adequate" board composition from a representational perspective.

Given the intimate connection between representation and power in governance, remarkably little attention has been given to this topic (see Kihl and Schull, 2020, and Thibault et al., 2010, for important exceptions). This is not to say that representation has not been ascribed significance in sport governance research, including in studies carried out in countries whose systems are moving towards appointed, independent

boards (e.g. Bradbury and O'Boyle, 2015; Ferkins and Shilbury, 2015; Hassan and O'Boyle, 2017; McLeod et al., 2021; Tacon and Walters, 2016; Taylor and O'Sullivan, 2009; Walters and Tacon, 2018). As a matter of fact, even though neither Ferkins and Shilbury (2015) nor Tacon and Walters (2016) focused initially on representation, it "pushed itself to the fore" (Tacon and Walters, 2016: 377) in terms of key tensions concerning the safeguarding of member interests in board composition and behavior, leading both these studies to call for research that unpacks the complexities around sport-governing boards' representative role.

Purpose and significance

In general, although the literature on sport governance establishes that boards' representational function carries weight, it gives less insight into the range of meanings of representation, the possible implications of various views of representation for what is considered "adequate" board composition from a representational point of view, and the ways such views may shape responses to "good governance" tools that aim to transform board composition. The purpose of this paper is to explore these issues via a conceptualization of views of representation in the context of board composition in democratic governance systems.

Exploring and conceptualizing views of representation vis-à-vis board composition is significant because each distinct view envisions a particular nature of the represented, the representative, and the relationship between the two that carries with it implications for the achievement of key democratic elements such as responsiveness, mandate, and accountability (Castoglione and Warren, 2006). Furthermore, because such views are both institutionally shaped and shaping, they have constitutive effects in terms of how key elements such as "constituency," "interests," and the proper mechanisms for achieving representation come to be understood in the future (Castoglione and Warren, 2006; Hayward, 2009; Phillips, 2020).

For these reasons, disentangling what researchers and practitioners actually mean when they talk about representation is a necessary first step in addressing problems related to representation in sport. This is because unless we understand the variety of views of representation that may underpin representative practices, we can neither properly evaluate democratic governance nor help alleviate continuing representational problems such as gender-skewed boards (e.g. Evans and Pfister, 2021) or the crowding out of democratic practices by processes of professionalization (e.g. Sam, 2009). More fundamentally, lacking a vocabulary around representation arguably makes it difficult to even understand and formulate problems associated with representation. Thus, before attempting to ascertain "the most appropriate board structure" (Taylor and O'Sullivan, 2009: 682) for sport governing bodies, we need to understand what representation means in the sport governance context. This implies switching from determining "an acceptable level of stakeholder representation" (Taylor and O'Sullivan, 2009: 682) to attempting to understand the various forms representation may take in the context of board composition.

Although representation in sport is a long-standing phenomenon in many countries, the need for understanding views of representation in relation to sport governance is particularly acute at this time. This is due not only to the general erosion of democratic practices created by professionalization practices (e.g. Sam, 2009), but more specifically to the recent adoption of governance instruments that are explicitly aimed at transforming

board composition. Chief among these instruments are various forms of quotas to ensure a critical mass of representation of various social categories, such as gender (e.g. Valiente, 2020) or age (e.g. NOC, 2021).

Although not always taken into consideration, quotas are underpinned by a particular view of representation (i.e. a "standing for" view). Depending on the prevailing view of representation in receiving organizations, responses to them may range from skepticism to plaudits, but not on the bases of their interference/alignment with meritocratic ideals, but on *democratic* grounds. Because of their constitutive nature, quotas inevitably raise questions around and (re)shape the perceived nature of the represented and the representative and the proper relationship between the two.

Within our overall aim, we make three contributions to the literature on sport governance and board composition. First, by applying established theories of representation to an interview material that was collected in a larger project concerned with National Sport Federations (NSFs) board nomination committees' (NCs) work with putting together a board proposal (a "ticket") to be voted on at the general assembly, we distinguish between four distinct views of representation and their implication for what is "adequate" board composition from a representational point of view. As such, the paper provides a conceptualization and language that we argue is essential to be able to address issues of representation as well as tensions between representation and professionalization in a more nuanced way.

Second, we interpret and hypothesize the implications that each of these views might have in terms of understandings of and responses to board quotas. The insights developed concerning these aspects are informative for considerations around quota construction, adoption, and implementation. They also point to the significance of understanding, developing, and conveying a "programme theory" (i.e. a conceptualization of the aim of the quota as well as how it is meant to work and why) of instruments used to shape board composition.

Third, following recent theorizing of representation as socially constructed and constitutive (e.g. Castoglione and Warren, 2006; Hayward, 2009; Phillips, 1995, 2020), we discuss the constitutive nature of representational practices, including the adoption of regulatory instruments such as quotas. We thereby draw attention to why it is important to be mindful of the views of representation that underpin current practices as well as shed light on some of the consequences that may follow from uninformed conduct in the context of representation via board composition.

Literature review

As stated in the introduction, an explicit understanding of representation in formal governing systems is a rare occurrence in sport governance research. However, two streams of research that have developed rather separately motivate our focus because they deal with topics and offer findings that can be viewed through a representational lens. The first stream deals with sport organizations', particularly NSFs', responses to processes, structures, and instruments of professionalization in the context of governance. The second is concerned with mapping, explaining, and critiquing the continuing problem with gender skewedness in sport organization boards.

Representation versus professionalization

The first group of studies of relevance for our study shares a concern with tensions between professionalization and representation in the composition and operation of sport organization boards (Bradbury and O'Boyle, 2015; Hassan and O'Boyle, 2017; McLeod et al., 2021; O'Boyle and Shilbury, 2016; Sam, 2009; Tacon and Walters, 2016; Walters and Tacon, 2018). However, although these studies agree on their diagnosis of persisting tensions between these two ideals in the face of increasing pressures for more "modern" governance, they appear to disagree on the understanding of whether representation constitutes an obstacle for, or a victim of, professionalization.

In particular, some researchers argue that sport governance needs to be "streamlined," which includes the installation of "a smaller board of directors who would be appointed on merit and not merely on a representative basis" (Hassan and O'Boyle, 2017: 746). From these studies' perspective, federative structures create board parochialism, inefficiency in decision making, and a lack of strategic capability. Lingering representational concerns among practitioners thus ultimately constitute an obstacle to a form of governance that is perceived to be more appropriate for a professionalized sport environment (e.g. Bradbury and O'Boyle, 2015; Hassan and O'Boyle, 2017; O'Boyle and Shilbury, 2016).

At face value, professionalization of governance, including its focus on merit-based (as opposed to representative) recruitment, is appealing, and it may appear as a self-evident solution in an increasingly business-like sporting context. However, arguments for a move towards professionalized (i.e. independent, merit-based) boards are rooted in a view of governing tasks as technical and oriented towards achieving recognizable results. In that sense, they overlook that sport governance is essentially a political and value-laden affair in which various interests and values need to be constructed, represented, considered, absorbed, mediated, and prioritized (Lohmann, 2007). Arguably, for those practitioners who oppose the dismantling of representational practices, this elemental nature of governance has an intrinsic value—it is part and parcel of what makes governance "good," to use contemporary terminology.

This perspective is, at least implicitly, recognized by a line of inquiry that draws attention to the mechanisms by which pressures for professionalization that emanate from sport organizations' institutional environments impact the way sport governance is structured, and which foundational values and roles are ascribed to governing boards. The in-depth and processual studies by Richard Tacon and colleagues (e.g. Tacon and Walters, 2016; Walters and Tacon, 2018) are illustrative in this regard in that they demonstrate how "modernization," although introduced under promises of democratic and civic renewal, drives centralization and undercuts representative practices through the introduction of codes for good governance. For researchers who take this more critical approach, processes of professionalization do not represent a normative ideal or panacea for governance in a changed sporting environment, but transformations that create a "democratic deficit" (Sam, 2009: 509) in sport.

Their diverging normative evaluation of the situation at hand aside (i.e. professionalization vs. representation as problematic), the aforementioned studies clearly show that

representation continues to matter in the context of sport governance, but they lack a conceptually nuanced understanding of what is actually meant by representation.

Gender and sport governance

The second of stream of research that motivates our focus is concerned with the underrepresentation of social categories, particularly women, in governance functions. Studies by Hovden (2000), for example, represent early work in this line of inquiry that seeks to shed light on the exclusionary mechanisms that contribute to male dominance in sport organization boards. By now there is a significant body of empirical and theoretical literature on gender (in)equity in sport governance, but a recent review by Evans and Pfister (2021) demonstrates that in sport practice, progress has been slow, with sport organization boards remaining a predominantly male preserve (see also Knoppers et al., 2021, and Piggott, 2021).

Importantly, the thrust of work on this topic is implicitly or explicitly underpinned by the view that underrepresentation of women in sport governance is problematic for individual and social justice reasons. That is, although a "business case" (i.e. a utilitarian argument) is occasionally advanced (e.g. Adriaanse and Schofield, 2014), the underrepresentation of women on boards is framed as problematic because it implies that women—as individuals and collectively—lack access to positions of power and thereby equal opportunity to shape social life (see Hoeber and Shaw, 2019). However, despite this interconnection with democratic concerns, and even though it clearly deals with issues of representation, this body of work, too, has yet to incorporate conceptualizations of various forms of representation in the context of formal governing systems. Consequently, the representational meanings and implications of, for example, gender equity policies (e.g. quotas) are largely missing in this otherwise important stream of research.

In contrast to the studies referenced in the preceding, Kihl and Schull (2020), Thibault et al. (2010), and Valiente (2020) are unique in providing a more fine-grained understanding of the meaning and implications of representation in the context of sport governance. In particular, focusing on representation per se, Kihl and Schull (2020) and Valiente (2020) both draw attention to the constitutive effects of representational structures and practices. Valiente does so by showing how gender quotas not only increase the representation of women on board, but also stimulate awareness of gender inequality issues more broadly. Similarly, Kihl and Schull (2020) demonstrate how the rule-based inclusion of athlete representatives on councils fostered motivation act as representatives for this group as a whole.

Valiente (2020) and Kihl and Schull (2020, see also Thibault et al. 2010) are not focused on the more foundational issue of which representational views are at work in the context of elected sport-governing bodies. Nonetheless, these studies are insightful from the perspective of democratizing sport, but by virtue of their focus on two different social categories, they also illustrate two of potentially numerous representational categories that may come into play in considerations around board composition (see also Stenling et al., 2020).

Theoretical framework

Representation takes place in a wide variety of contexts, but our focus is limited to views of representation that bear relevance for discussions around board composition. Our aim in this section is therefore not to give a full account of representation as a subfield of political science but rather to explain some fundamental elements of the concept of representation, along with two distinct views of representation that are instrumental in unpacking different ways of thinking about representation in the context of board composition: the "standing for" and "acting for" views.

Fundamental elements of representation

In her classical work, Pitkin (1972) suggested that representation is invariably about the substitution of an individual or collective for another individual or collective in a particular context, thereby making possible that "something not literally present is considered as present in a nonliteral sense" (Pitkin, 1972: 9). Conventionally, the object of representation, the "something" in Pitkin's definition, is understood to be the interests of the represented. Different understandings of how these interests are to be "made present" in turn represent distinct views of representation that carry with them specific understandings and expectations on the (proper) nature of the relationship between the represented and the representative.

"Standing for" versus "acting for" accounts of representation

Subsequent to explaining why formal features of authorization and accountability (e.g. elections) are necessary but insufficient for adequate representation, Pitkin (1972) distinguished between representation as "standing for" and "acting for" the object of representation. Although elaborated over time, this distinction remains important in empirical and normative work on representation, presumably because applying or favoring one view over the other has great implications for the way one conceives of the most appropriate means to achieve the "making present" of the object of representation.

Representation as "standing for," also termed *descriptive representation*, draws attention to questions around who the representative is or is like, thus positioning representatives as "indicative proxies" of the represented (Pettit, 2009: 82). According to this view, good representation is achieved by representatives mirroring the characteristics of the represented so that they resemble who or what they actually are (e.g. in terms of gender, ethnicity, religion, or age). Pitkin was skeptical of the "standing for" view of representation because she considered it to reduce the function of representation to *information gathering* about the interests of the represented via the representative. Advocates of descriptive representation, she claimed, (wrongly) presume that the interests of the represented will be the same as those of their mirror-image "proxy," and that the representative therefore will think, talk, and act in the way that the represented would have, had they been present. She saw this as problematic because of the difficulty of creating true resemblance and because ideas around which characteristics are politically relevant to "mirror" vary over time and contexts. However, the main reason she felt the "standing

for" view was inadequate was that she perceived it as leaving no room for representation as an *activity*.

To capture this element of representation, Pitkin (1972) instead turned to what she called an "acting for" view of representation, which draws attention to what a representative *does* and to the proper conduct of representation, thus presenting avenues for evaluating and giving guidance on how representatives ought to behave to "make present the absent." From this perspective, representation is not achieved by representatives being a good indicator of the represented on selected characteristics, but by them acting in the interest of the representative, and *in a manner responsive* to them (see, e.g. Pettit, 2009, for an elaborate description of this). For Pitkin, then, "In the realm of action, the representative's characteristics are relevant only insofar as they affect what he [or she] does" (1972: 142) because "the represented thing or person is present in the action rather than in the characteristics of the actor" (Pitkin, 1972: 142).

Later theorists (e.g. Iris Young, and Anne Phillips) have taken issue with Pitkin's dismissal of descriptive representation, advocating strongly for a "politics of presence" (Phillips, 1995) to address structural inequalities in political systems. The underlying argument for this reimagining of descriptive representation is that what the representative *is* indeed does affect what they *do*. Therefore, marginalized and disadvantaged groups should be represented by individuals who share their experiences and perspectives. This is important not only from the perspective of being an authentic and symbolically relevant spokesperson, but also for being the best participant in deliberative processes (Hayward, 2009). It follows that defenders of descriptive representation are in favor of devising instruments, such as quotas, "to ensure, or at least make it highly likely, that people disadvantaged by structural inequalities will be represented by people who share their positions in extant hierarchies" (Hayward, 2009: 114).

Representation as constituted and constitutive

It is increasingly recognized that representation is a socially constructed and constitutive phenomenon that goes beyond "making present" predetermined interests. Whereas traditional "standing for" and "acting for" accounts indicate distinctly different relationships between the representative and the represented, these more recent understandings underscore that regardless of which view is taken, neither the representative, the object of representation, nor the relationship between the two are pre-given. Rather, because of its fundamentally relational nature, these key elements of representation come into being through institutionally embedded representative processes (e.g. Castoglione and Warren, 2006; Hayward, 2009; Phillips, 2020). There is thus no pre-existing answer to the question of on whose behalf representatives "stand" or "act"—the constituency itself is formed through representative processes. Likewise, there are no fixed interests, values, or identities that are simply there to be indicated through composition or collected and responded to in representative acts. This insight is significant because it means that the ways in which actors understand representation is both molded through historical and contemporary representative processes and constitutive of future understandings of what good representation is; that is, what an appropriate representative is or does, the proper boundaries and characteristics of a constituency along with the nature of their interests,

values, and identities, and ultimately what can and ought to be done to shape representation through institutional arrangements (e.g. quotas).

Methods

This paper emerged in the context of a project that focused on Swedish NSF NCs' work with putting together a board ticket for consideration at NSF general assemblies. In particular, the project examined the range of criteria at play in board composition processes and the process by which NCs pursue their work. Swedish sport is not only governed through bottom-up democratic practices, but the system itself forms the basis for considering sport participation as a school of democracy and for elected representatives of sport organizations to have a legitimate say in public policy processes (Fahlén and Stenling, 2016).

In Swedish sport, membership structures connect more than 3,000,000 individual members to approximately 20,000 clubs, and clubs to regional federations and NSFs. The latter category contains 72 organizations that together form the national umbrella organization The Swedish Sports Confederation (Fahlén and Stenling, 2016). At all levels, Swedish sport organizations take the form of voluntary associations, with an elected board being the highest decision-making body between general assemblies. Boards are composed through the work of NCs that present a ticket for vote at the general assembly, and the NC itself is also elected by and answers to the general assembly. It is very rare for the NCs' propositions to be voted down, and they therefore conduct an essential gatekeeping function in terms of who gets to hold formal positions of power in Swedish sport (Stenling et al., 2020, 2021).

For this reason, our project drew on interviews with representatives of 62 of Swedish sports' 72 NSFs. Interviews dealt with questions around NCs' working processes (Stenling et al., 2021) and the criteria NCs use as they compose their board proposition (Stenling et al., 2020). Through these interviews, we learned that Swedish NCs operate under a very low degree of formalization, both in terms of their working processes and the criteria they apply. At the time of data collection, there had been talks about introducing a mandatory gender quota for NSFs (and such a quota was, in fact, coming into effect in June 2021), and we solicited interviewees' perspective on this issue.

Through our work with the project, it also became clear to us that not only are there tensions between professionalization and representation, but there are also several and distinct ways in which representation is envisioned in the context of board composition. It also became clear that these were not properly captured by the broad distinction between "merit" and representation that is available in the sport governance literature. We therefore revisited our material with an eye towards using it to illustrate the range of views of representation that might be applicable to board composition in sport.

Notably, our aim was neither to examine which view was held by which NC, nor to map how views were distributed numerically across the Swedish NSF population. Rather, by building on established theories of representation, we sought to use our material to conceptualize the range of representational views at play in the context of sport, thus providing ground for elemental but, in our perspective, overlooked aspects in discussions around board composition and the instruments used to shape boards.

In practical terms, we pursued our analysis in three steps that were each carried out collectively by the first and second author. First, we read through our material, sorting out all raw data that in one way or another dealt with representation. Second, we applied the distinction between "standing for" and "acting for" views of representation as an à priori conceptual framework, assigning segments of data to each of these two views. Once this step was completed, we realized that there were important nuances within the broad views of "standing for" and "acting for," particularly with regards to how board constituency was constructed by these member organization NCs. In a third step, we therefore inductively constructed concepts that capture these nuances by distinguishing between the membership and society as two different types of constituencies, resulting in four distinct views of representation. In the following, these will be presented and illustrated with quotes, along with our interpretation of what each of the views might imply in terms of responses to instruments introduced to regulate board composition. For reasons of anonymity, each interviewee was assigned a number, instead of the name of the NSF to which they belonged.

Analysis: views of representation and their implications

In the following, we explain and discuss the results from our analysis. First, we describe how each view of representation is distinct, in terms of the boundaries and characteristics of the constituency it calls into being and the relationship envisioned between the represented and representative. For each view, we also interpret what it might imply in terms of responses to instruments that are introduced to transform board composition.

"Standing for" views of representation

Standing for membership. Following the traditional understanding of descriptive representation (Pitkin, 1972), the standing-for-membership conceptualization of representation judges individual board members' representativeness based on who/what they *are*, and for the board as a whole to be considered representative, it should mirror internal NSF groups. Such groups may be of social (e.g. by gender, age, ethnicity, or social class) or other (e.g. by geography, urban/rural, club size, or competitive level) character. An adequate board proportionally mirrors these characteristics of the membership base. As an illustration, the interviewee from NSF 29 stated that their board was not quite representative because it did not mirror the gender proportionality of their membership: "We're coming close to 50/50 in terms of males and females in our membership body, but this is not yet reflected in our board composition." Similarly, the NSF 42 interviewee stated that: "Our sport attracts about an equal amount of girls and boys, and we've got a lot of players with an immigrant background …. so we need to put together a board that represents all these characteristics." Although the characteristics used to describe the nature of the membership base may vary between organizations, according to this view, what matters is the proportionality of various groups within the membership base and how they are reflected ("indicated," to use Pettit's [2009] terminology) in the board composition.

Let us now imagine that these organizations become subjected to a governance instrument that creates an *over*representation of a category vis-à-vis its proportion in the membership base—say, a mandatory gender quota. Because of the view of representation with which the NSF operates, such an instrument likely would be resisted, not because it undermines a meritocratic ideal but because it would be conceived of as *undemocratic*. By implication, NSFs holding this view may very well acknowledge the importance of gender parity but favor attending to it through transformations of the membership base. Reflecting on the looming introduction of a 60/40 gender quota in Swedish sport, Interviewee 34 illustrated this line of reasoning:

> A mandatory quota would be disastrous. Say that the membership base is 75–25 in its division between women and men; then, my board ought to reflect that, rather than 60–40. Take the Swedish Equestrian Federation, for example. They've got like a 90–10 membership base, so they should have, like, one male board member, and now they're going to say that they need to have three!? (NSF 34)

Importantly, this notion might work both ways, so that a quota perhaps would be welcomed on democratic grounds because it could help shape boards so that they reflect the membership base (e.g. by alleviating problems of gender-biased boards in NSFs with gender-proportionate membership bases).

Standing for society. The second variant of a "standing for" view of representation that we identified shares with the first a judgement of board members' representativeness based on who/what they *are*. However, distinct from the preceding view, this variant implies seeking to construct a board that mirrors the proportionality of various *societal* (as opposed to membership) groups. Furthermore, whereas the standing-for-membership view includes indicators in terms of both social categories and other bases of division (e.g. level of the sport or club size), this view is related solely to groups of a social character (e.g. gender, ethnicity, and social class). Interviewee 47 espoused this view when they stated:

> [It is important that the board] reflects how society looks. … so, for example, if there's a 20% proportion of individuals with an immigrant background in society, we should aim for that, so that we don't get a skewed representation in either direction.

In a similar vein, the representative from NSF 13 said that even though it would not reflect their current membership base, "they would much like to see a 50/50 gender board, and more board members with an immigrant background." It is well-known from research that organized sport participation patterns usually are skewed in relation to the make-up of society, and this bias may be rather pronounced within specific sports (e.g. Wilson, 2002). In that sense, this view may entail envisioning a rather different form of descriptive representation than the standing-for-membership view. Consider that the population in most countries has close to a 50/50 gender division, but—as pointed out by Interviewee 34 with regards to equestrianism—NSFs have up to a 100/0 gender-skewed membership base. Therefore, the very meaning and implications of what a representative

board looks like, from a descriptive standpoint, may differ significantly between the standing-for-membership and standing-for-society views of representation. Arguably, therefore, NSFs that operate with the standing-for-society view may welcome instruments intended to change their board composition because the instruments would help shape their boards to become more reflective of society, in turn driving changes to the membership base. (Note, however, that instruments may be resisted on other grounds.) Interviewee 46 provided a glimpse into this "programme theory" of how changes in membership patterns may be attained through transformations in board composition:

> [When composing our board], we try and be forward-thinking and consider what type of membership base we would like in the future and what types of people we would like to attract to our sport, rather than the characteristics of our membership group today. I mean, this is a major problem for Swedish sport today—it's stuck in its own machinery and its own structures—so if we're going to succeed in broadening participation, making participation more equal, and all that, we can't dig ourselves deeper into the hole we're in today—we need to think about the members that we would like in the future and how can we attract them to our board.

Beyond demonstrating that a standing-for-society view is distinct from a standing-for-membership view in terms of the imagined constituency, the previous quote introduces a temporal dimension allowing those who take this view to use ideas around representation to advance more fundamental questions related to equal access to sport and to sport's representativeness of society.

"Acting for" views of representation

Acting for the membership. The first acting-for view of representation that we identified is similar to the first standing-for view in the sense that the imagined constituency is the organization's membership. However, according to this view, the interests that the individual board members and the board as a whole *embody* are less important than the interests they advance and safeguard in the board's strategic and operational work. Thus, board members' representativeness is judged based on their degree of responsiveness towards internal NSF groups, and the board as a whole should be responsive to the sport as a whole. In the words of the interviewee from NSF 5, the board "should look after the interests of all regions and clubs in Sweden." Assembling a representative board then becomes a question of identifying individuals who are careful about "having an ear to the ground" for a board that, through communication with the membership, develops an understanding of the members' varying interests and channels them into the board for deliberations. Addressing the individual board member level, Interviewee 19 illustrated this focus on *doing* rather than indicating when they said the following:

> [We look for board members] who are responsive towards what it is that the movement wants, who don't have a lot of prestige around what *they* want. … individuals who are open to and receptive towards emerging events and developments within the movement.

What types of responses towards board transformative instruments could be generated by this view of how representation is achieved through board composition? Hypothetically, because representation is thought to be realized through the board's actions, instruments representing a standing-for view might be resisted on *representational grounds* if they are conceived of as undermining individual or board-level responsiveness vis-à-vis the membership. For example, doubts may be raised if the NC feels coerced to put forth a candidate who is descriptively aligned but who is perceived as lacking responsive capacity. Notably, this assumes that the view is understood and applied in the "standard" sense—meaning that individuals/boards indicated as coming from descriptive categories are considered representative by virtue of having been recruited from that category. Following more recent understandings of the importance of "the politics of presence" (Phillips, 1995), transformative instruments may be welcomed because they help promote candidates who share experiences of marginalization (e.g. women or ethnic minorities) and therefore are better placed to bring such perspectives into deliberative board-internal processes.

Acting for society. Similar to how we identified two distinct versions of descriptive representation views (standing for membership and standing for society), we also identified two acting-for views, with the second one being acting for society. This view also values the board's responsiveness over its descriptive character, but it differs from the first in that it envisions society and its various social groups—rather than the membership—as the proper "constituency." The interviewee from NSF 24 illustrated this when they said that board members should understand and work to achieve equal access to their sport "regardless of ethnicity, religion, economic and social status, and so on." From this perspective, an adequate board can understand and moderate societal groups' interests and act accordingly in board processes. Interviewee 8's reasoning regarding their NSF's NC committee work to assemble an ideal board, from a representational perspective, exemplifies this view:

> [Our current board] includes a director who has run amazing immigrant integration projects. She's not an immigrant herself, but [she's] norm-breaking in the way she works and the way she analyses sport. … As a NC, we can't just nominate someone for the colour of their skin or ethnicity. … there needs to be a drive towards working towards a good [inclusive] sport setting.

As with the acting-for membership account, unless descriptive-type instruments are accompanied by explanations of and justifications for how it is meant to work (e.g. the relationship between standing-for and acting-for), this view might engender an interpretation of such instruments as intervening with basic notions of and practices through which adequate representation can be achieved best.

Concluding discussion

With this paper, we have sought to contribute to scientific and sport practice considerations of sport organization boards' composition. We have done so by providing a hitherto

missing account of the range of meanings of representation that may apply in a board composition setting as well as of the potential responses to instruments meant to transform a board's composition.

Previous research has demonstrated the significance of representation issues vis-à-vis board composition, showing persistent tensions between professionalization and democracy under new "good governance" frameworks (e.g. Bradbury and O'Boyle, 2015; Ferkins and Shilbury, 2015; Hassan and O'Boyle, 2017; O'Boyle and Shilbury, 2016; Stenling et al., 2020; Tacon and Walters, 2016; Walters and Tacon, 2018). It has also provided extensive examination of, and explanations for, the continuing male dominance on boards (e.g. Adriaanse and Schofield, 2014; Evans and Pfister, 2021; Hoeber and Shaw, 2019; Hovden, 2000; Knoppers et al., 2021; Piggott, 2021). Our first contribution vis-à-vis this body of work is our account of four sport-relevant views of representation that can be categorized under Pitkin's (1972) classic distinction between "standing for" and "acting for" views of representation: standing for membership, standing for society, acting for membership, and acting for society. It should be kept in mind that the distinction between these views is analytical. In practice, multiple views of representation might co-exist for individual board roles and the board as a whole. But then again, this raises the question of how the board should interpret their representative role and deal with the tensions that may come from unclear or multiple representative mandates.

Such tensions may arise because each of the identified views have distinct implications for what would be considered adequate board composition from a representational perspective, not least in how they envision a board's constituency and the proper nature of its relationship to the board. Beyond what was outlined in the Analysis section, our account makes clear an important dimension that the distinction between standing-for and acting-for views of representation does not fully capture. This dimension relates to two separate understandings regarding for whom sport organizations exist.

In an inward- and backward-oriented understanding, sport organizations are understood to exist for the current membership body, as envisioned in the standing-for-membership and acting-for-membership views. In this understanding, sport organizations should be governed by boards that are elected by, consist of, work for, and answer to the membership *as it currently stands*. In an outward- and forward-oriented understanding, sport organizations are understood to exist for the broader society, as in the standing-for-society and acting-for-society views. In this understanding, sport organizations should still be governed by a board that is elected by, consists of, works for, and answers to members. However, the membership is understood in terms of "who we would like to be" rather than "who we are," thus invoking ideas around how the interests looked after in boards (through descriptive and/ or substantive representation) ought to reflect those within society, rather than within the sport organization.

These and other insights offered in this paper provide researchers and practitioners with an analytical vocabulary to help them ask and answer fundamental questions regarding what is actually meant by representation in the context of board composition and the varying ways in which representation can be evaluated and advanced. This is pertinent for research and discussions on the driving forces behind and resistance to the increasing professionalization of sport governance but also for framing and addressing the problem of boards being skewed in terms of the descriptive social categories that they represent.

In a contemporary context characterized by increasing pressure for good governance measures, such as instruments meant to transform board composition in various ways (e.g. Parent and Hoye, 2018), our second contribution comes from our interpretation of what different views of representation may imply in terms of responses to such instruments. Here, our work is instructive for discussions on whether instruments should be adopted, on what grounds, and how their implementation should be pursued and framed. On this, our analysis, above all, points to the need for instruments to have an underlying, representation-based "theory," meaning a developed idea and argumentative discourse for how the instrument is meant to work and why, and to the importance of board-composition researchers to take an interest in such ideas.

Having such a theory and discourse may be particularly important for instruments underpinned by a descriptive view of representation, such as quotas. This is because such instruments' legitimacy may be enhanced by lines of argumentation being developed concerning the relationship between descriptive (standing for) and substantive (acting for) representation and concerning the groups whose descriptive representation should be increased through quotas. Deliberations on this latter issue may be informed by, for example, Phillip's (1995) notion (see also, for example, Phillips, 2020) of discerning which underrepresentations matter by considering whether belonging to a particular social category or group is linked to historical and/or contemporary patterns of inequality. As an illustration, drawing on these ideas would elucidate the difference—in representational, democratic, and social justice terms—between adopting a 40/60 board gender quota in an organization that is dominated by male members versus one that is dominated by female members. In the former, such a quota would increase descriptive representation within a male-dominated organization of a group that, both at a societal level and in sport, continues to be subordinated by overall gendered patterns of power and influence.

Our third contribution comes from our consideration of representation as socially constructed and constitutive (e.g. Castoglione and Warren, 2006; Hayward, 2009; Phillips, 2020), which is demonstrated, not least, in the range of views of representation that appear to co-exist in the context of sport. With this perspective, we wish to highlight that the views we have described, insofar as they are inscribed in practice, will shape current and future understandings of representatives, the objects of representation, and the proper relationship between the two.

For example, acting-for views of representation create expectations regarding mechanisms of responsiveness. The interests of the represented may be solicited by developing such mechanisms, but they may also be (re)shaped, in turn contributing to the construction of the constituency itself (Castoglione and Warren, 2006). On the other hand, standing-for views of representation may nurture "whataboutism" and a call for representation for ever more groups to be called into being, considered, and secured, such as through quotas (e.g. Phillips, 2020). The propensity for such constitutive effects again highlights the importance of developing a theory underpinning the "programming" of representation in board-composition processes that explain, for example, why gender-parity measures are legitimate but quotas for other social categories or groups perhaps are not.

As alluded to throughout this final section, the analysis provided in this paper has several implications for sport policy makers and governance practitioners. For the

former, the analysis highlights that the previously identified distinction between skills-based and representative boards is simply to crude. Concerning representation alone, any rule that regulates board composition introduces a specific view of representation that involves, albeit implicitly, normative claims around which constituencies are to be brought in to being, how interests are to be understood and safeguarded, as well as the envisioned constitutive mechanisms of board composition as inward- and backward-oriented or outward- and forward-oriented. To create a board composition rule is therefore to make a judgement that is all but value neutral.

Articulating and deliberating on the "theories" and associated normative underpinnings of board composition rules is especially significant since boards are limited representative spaces in terms of how many individuals they include. Particularly with modernization-driven reductions in board size, rules that "reserve" seats may easily crowd out the descriptive representation of other categories. Alternatively, attempts to safeguard the descriptive representation of several categories through multiple quotas may lead to a fragmentation of marginalized groups' voices. Thus, whereas instruments such as quotas bear the potential to redistribute power and influence, their use must be thought through, their intended interrelation with substantive representation articulated.

Espousing the view/s of representation that underpin board composition is also important to aid the governance practitioners tasked with preparing board tickets. This is because a proper theorization around board rules and their underpinning value-rankings arguably will help NCs (or their equivalents) to understand their democratic function and the representative objectives they are set to pursue in their work. It will also help them "communicate representation" (e.g. explain the type of candidate they are looking for and why) as they interact with members throughout the nomination process. Likewise, enunciating the views of representation that underpin board composition will help boards and their individual members understand the representative expectations placed on them, both in terms of the nature of their representative mandate/s and their implications for what constitute "good" representative practices in (deliberations) and outside (responsive practices) of the boardroom.

In their review of how governance principles affect sport governance practice, Parent and Hoye (2018: 21) concluded that for "sport organizations to improve their governance and researchers to understand which principles and guidelines are central to improved governance and performance," there is "a clear need for both the international sport community and researchers to develop an agreed set of governance principles." At the most general level, the aim of this paper has been to provide an alternative perspective to this approach. By focusing on a previously underconceptualized but significant aspect of sport governance, we instead call for sport-governance research and practice to be sensitive to contextual nuances, and mindful of the meanings and implications of the "good" in good governance.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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