

## Article

# A Systematic Review of the Development of Sport Policy Research (2000–2020)

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**Abstract:** Since the 1990s, sport policy research has gradually attracted increasing academic attention as a reflection of contemporary society at a particular time. This study adopted four types of theory proposed by Houlihan (2014) to analyze the research development of sport policy. It conducted a systematic review and yielded 100 policy articles related to elite sports, physical education, and sport for all. The scope of the research data was identified from 2000 to 2020 with collation from 24 international Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) journals, which specialized in policy and sport-related studies of social science to look forward to a comprehensive report. The four major findings were as follows: first, this study pointed to evidence that nearly half the research on the topic aimed at meso-level analyses of organizations; second, it demonstrated governance theory, the Sports Policy Factors Leading to International Sporting Success (SPLISS) model, the advocacy coalition Framework (ACF), and network-related theories played a pivotal role in focusing on policy backgrounds and dynamic relationships within organizations; third, it identified some studies highlighted in the policy texts themselves, or discourse about them, and, thereby, were grouped into the fifth type; finally, the paper suggested that attention has been brought to policy formation and implementation rather than policy evaluation, which has made a contribution to the development of their own operating mechanisms.

**Keywords:** systematic review; sport policy; elite sport; physical education; sport for all



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## 1. Introduction

With the rapid change in international society, the development of sport has been regarded as one of the most important policies for countries in the globalization process. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has incorporated “Physical Education and Sport” as one of the pivotal themes in social and human sciences [1,2]. Healthy citizens represent the greatest assets for a country and play a crucial role in national competitiveness. Besides physical and mental health, sports improve the culture, atmosphere, and well-being of society. Physical strength is seen as a national power, and the quality of national health is closely interrelated with economic, medical, cultural, educational, and social achievements. As a result, sport plays the role of being a bridge for cross-community relations, which seems quite self-evident, and every country undoubtedly reinforces the role of sport policy within society [3].

Dye defined “public policy” as whatever a government chooses to do or not to do [4]. It refers to the actions accepted or proposed to achieve a specific situation or goal for the government. However, policy analyses prompt the government to improve decision quality, organizational performance, and international competitiveness to be more promising and effective [5]. In this way, policy analyses clarify the parameters of related problems and improve policy formulation and implementation. Meanwhile, they endeavor to provide insight to gain an understanding of how policies influence society. Until the 1970s, many

institutions, such as The Policy Studies Organization and Evaluation Research Society, devoted themselves to undertaking policy analyses. The trend included the publications of relevant journals, namely Policy Studies Journal and Policy Sciences, to lead to the vigorous development of policy analyses. Since the 1980s, there has been a new giant step forward in that interdisciplinary institutions were gradually formed, such as the Association for Public Policy and Management, which publishes the Journal of Policy Analysis and Management annually [6]. This development also appeared in the domain of sport. Sport policy belongs to public policy, which applies to government agencies, private enterprises, and social organizations [7]. The basis of sport policy is that it meets the citizens' needs and tries to innovate sport development for a whole country. Besides sport-related fields, there is the tendency of sport to feature frequently used tools to achieve non-sport goals in the social policy field (e.g., crime reduction and increasing social cohesion) [8]. In terms of different levels of theoretical perspectives, sport-related analyses inform the policy-making process and the role of organizations in achieving holistic sport development more sufficiently in the current trend [9].

However, analyses aiming at sport policy were relatively few from 2001 to 2011 in international journals [10–12]. On the contrary, regarding the Project Report of the National Science and Technology Council [NSTC], Taiwan, Shih, Chang, and Ni noted that 23 approved projects related to sport policy were ranked at the top of the total studies published from 2001 to 2010 [12]. The NSTC Projects stand for the directions of basic guidelines and principles for the government to promote science and technology [13]. This shows that sport policy research has its importance and necessity. Additionally, the literature related to policy analyses covers a wide range of foci, such as policy processes, policy outcomes, and sports institutions. The scale varies from different levels based on different research variables in sport policy issues. Take elite sports for example, with a notable increase in national funding for elite sports in many countries, such as Australia, the pressure about pursuing sports performance was also simultaneously intensified. The international trend to explore the similarities of elite sport policies in order to pursue success has received considerable attention [14], but its complexity and the richness of different components in different countries cannot purely rely on an exclusively quantitative approach for further clarification [15]. In this way, it is necessary to require a qualitative approach to complement policy performance variables. As a result, theories are usually chosen as frameworks to make sense of the sport policy process more deeply. Doing so is not possible without theorizing [16] (p.11). Henry and Ko proposed that macro-, meso-, and micro-levels should be adopted in sport policy studies to provide various angles for analyzing sport policy [17]. Common theories utilized for analyzing the interplays within organizations consist of governance theory or the advocacy coalition framework (ACF). The Sports Policy Factors Leading to International Sporting Success (SPLISS) model is especially used to investigate the factors to achieve sport success in elite sport. Additionally, Houlihan identified how different theoretical orientations were conducted in the literature related to sport policy [16]. Such studies shed new light on the overview of the application of theory, but most current reference has utilized theories to analyze only individual cases so far, and it lacks a comprehensive finding.

In the era of the information explosion and the rapid development of the Internet, it is prone to attaining vague results due to the lack of clear judgment. Considering this, evidence-based education has obtained much attention. Systematic reviews play an essential role in providing comprehensive and reliable information for better decisions based on impartial views. Systematic reviews have been initially traced back to the medical field to provide explicit clinical evidence and later evolved in other fields. According to Munn et al., systematic reviews possess such characteristics as uncovering international evidence, confirming current practice, and informing areas for future study [18]. It refers to collecting, reviewing, and compiling piles of literature to provide decision-makers with more valuable information for reference [19]. Therefore, it can be seen that systematic reviews can avoid prejudice by the authors and enable comprehensive but dependable

information via rigorous procedures compared to traditional narrative reviews. Nevertheless, systematic reviews are often confused with meta-analyses, which are derived from the medical field. Meta-analyses summarize the results of several studies statistically [20]. In this way, meta-analyses can provide more precise estimates of the effect or results from the coupling of all relevant studies rather than those from individual ones.

Systematic reviews represent the explicit process of collating data and meta-analyses as a statistical tool utilized within the process. As a result, previous studies using systematic reviews also include meta-analyses. This study sought to realize the comprehensive finding of topics and theories utilized in international sport policy research. A systematic review is an option for this study. The development of elite sport has gradually become as a significant interest area for governments from the mid-1990s onwards [21]. Related studies have grown rapidly in elite sport development since 2000 [22]. Aside from elite sport, physical education, and sport for all are pivotal policy directions for a country. Systematic reviews require a long-term time period to find out general trends, and the entire research can be traced back to a 20-year period since 2000.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Research Protocol

This study investigated the current international academic trends of sport policy concerning involved topics and utilized theories. A systematic review was conducted to collate related sport policy literature, elite sport, sport for all, and physical education, to endeavor to gain a comprehensive understanding of international research development. Based on the systematic review design proposed by Ko's work [23], this review proceeded through the following three main phases.

#### Phase 1: Planning the review

This has to be prepared beforehand for the search. There are three steps to follow in this phase to form explicit search guidelines.

##### Step 1: Developing a review panel

A systematic review needs to analyze the volume of literature, and, under such circumstances, it requires specifically explicit criteria. Through discussion among members of the review panel, it reaches a consensus of included and excluded standards and helps reduce disputes. The four members of the review panel included two professors who have expertise in sport policy, together with two postgraduate students studying in this field.

##### Step 2: Mapping the study field

In order to comprehend the content of this study, the members need to map the field of study by reading the relevant literature related to sport policy regarding sport for all, elite sport, and physical education, as well as the utilized theories.

##### Step 3: Forming a review protocol

In order to obtain the complete source of literature, a review protocol was developed after the discussion of the review panel, and the four criteria are as follows: (1) The included literature must be written in English. (2) The literature was related to sport policy, including sport for all, elite sport, and physical education. (3) The literature was published between 2000 and 2020. (4) The literature must contain full texts identified through searching titles, abstracts, and keywords.

#### Phase 2: Conducting a review

##### Step 1: Identifying research

In this step, the review panel further determines the details of the review protocol, including keywords and databases. After the panel discussion, the seven key terms included policy, politics, government, administration, physical education, elite sport, and sport for all. In order to increase the relevance and reduce the volumes, the panel decided to combine keywords as strings instead of using a single one. The 12 detailed search strings were identified as "policy AND physical education", "policy AND elite sport", "policy AND sport for all", "politics AND physical education", "politics AND elite sport", "politics AND sport for all", "government AND physical education", "government AND

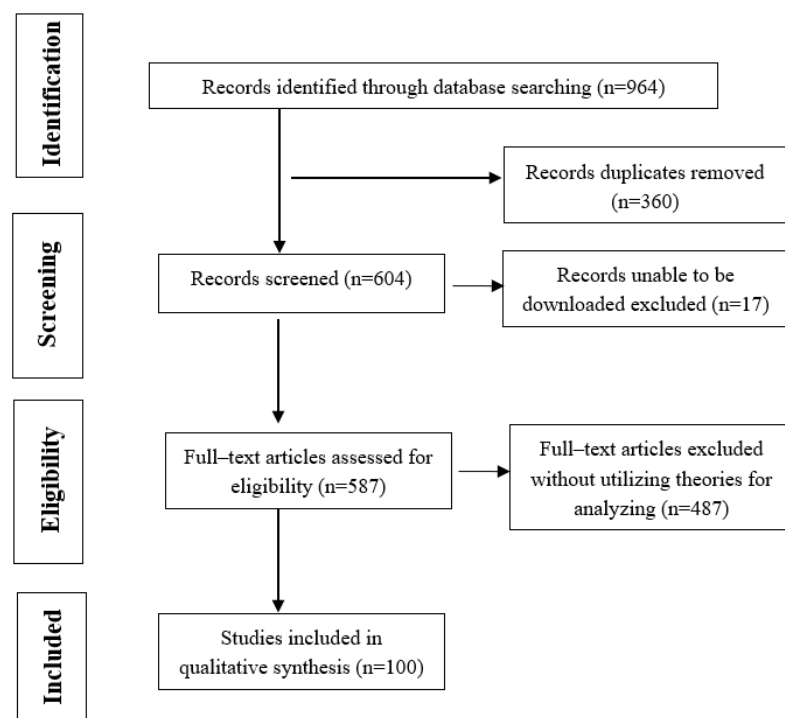
elite sport”, “government AND sport for all”, “administration AND physical education”, “administration AND elite sport”, and “administration AND sport for all”. In addition, the panel chose 24 SSCI electronic journals after the discussion for finding reliable data relevant to the study. Different search dates may influence the outcome. The whole duration of the search was from January 2021 to April 2021.

#### Step 2: Evaluating studies

In between, the researchers were responsible for screening all the titles, abstracts, and full texts. If there were any questions, they would be discussed with the other member of the review panel, the professors, to make the final decision about whether it is to be included or not.

#### Step 3: Extracting data

According to Liberati et al. [20] and Wang and Yeh [24], the PRISMA statement (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Statement), a four-phase flow diagram, focuses on ways in which transparency can be ensured. The PRISMA was considered the standard procedure for data extraction. Therefore, it was employed in this step. The process includes four phases: identification, screening, eligibility, and included studies. Detailed information is revealed in the following Figure 1 and Table 1.



**Figure 1.** The flow diagram of literature searching and screening. Source: Derived from Liberati et al. (2009) [20].

**Table 1.** The search results in SSCI journals.

Electronic Journal	Numbers	Date
Communication & Sport	0	31 January 2021
European Journal for Sport and Society	3	31 January 2021
European Physical Education Review	4	31 January 2021
European Sport Management Quarterly	13	3 February 2021
International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics	33	20 February 2021
International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship	0	28 February 2021
International Review for the Sociology of Sport	10	1 March 2021
Journal of Hospitality Leisure Sport & Tourism Education	0	1 March 2021

Table 1. Cont.

Electronic Journal	Numbers	Date
Journal of Policy Research in Tourism Leisure and Events	1	3 March 2021
Journal of Sport and Social Issues	1	3 March 2021
Journal of Sport Management	3	9 March 2021
Journal of Sports Economics	0	9 March 2021
Kinesiology	0	9 March 2021
Leisure Sciences	1	12 March 2021
Leisure Studies	1	12 March 2021
Public Policy and Administration	1	12 March 2021
Quest	2	12 March 2021
Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport	0	23 March 2021
Sociology of Sport Journal	3	23 March 2021
Sport History Review	0	30 March 2021
Sport in Society	8	1 April 2021
Sport Management Review	1	3 April 2021
Sport, Education and Society	11	3 April 2021
The International Journal of the History of Sport	4	4 April 2021
Total	100	

#### Step 4: Conducting data synthesis

This study aims to realize the current distribution situation of theories utilized and topics addressed in the sport policy literature. Thus, based on the theory types proposed by Houlihan [16], the researchers read the abstract first to check its classification. After that, the researchers read the entire article to finally synthesize and classify the data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research and summarize it specifically in phase 3.

#### Phase 3: Reporting and dissemination

This is the last phase of the study, the final result of the data after reviewing and collating is revealed detailed in discussion section.

### 2.2. Research Trustworthiness

Whereas reliability and validity have always been crucial topics in quantitative studies, those in qualitative ones have been in question [25]. From the angle of hermeneutics, “trustworthiness” replaces reliability and validity to stand for a criterion that qualitative researchers reflect on whether they achieve the standard or not. It comprises dependability, transferability, credibility, and confirmability [26]. This study followed the methods below to increase trustworthiness. Audit trail: As Kao and Huang argued that the audit trail allows researchers to describe the logic and records of the research clearly to increase dependability [27]. A systematic review requires a reproducible process and rigorous steps from start to finish to minimize bias that may affect the result. Each step was performed diligently, and the information was precisely scrutinized based on specific criteria. Therefore, the systematic review adopted in the study supports this notion. Peer debriefing: According to Wang and Wang, peer debriefing refers to acquiring great insight via professional interaction among peers [25]. In other words, the peers obtain an evidence-based consensus in describing and interpreting a specific theme after a full discussion. Whether in defining the search strategies or classifying the studies, members of the review panel play an important role in completing peer debriefing. Forming a review panel is considered a requirement of a systematic review. All the information is expected to associate logically and effectively through regular panel meetings rather than out of the author’s imagination [27].

### 2.3. Research Scopes and Limitations

This study adopted a systematic review to synthesize the data to identify the current situation in which theories have been utilized and topics in sport policy study. Taking the previous literature for reference, it was found that they defined at least 20 years for the

period in most research to realize the long-term trend. As a result, in order to acquire the complete and latest studies, the scope of the data was identified from 2000 to 2020 and the studies were collated from 24 international Social Science Citation Index (SSCI, Web of Science) journals, which specialized in policy and sport-related reference of social science to look forward to a comprehensive report. Some limitations were acknowledged in this study. Data may be incomplete because only electronic databases were included rather than paper-published ones. This method may result in ignoring some literature published in the early period.

### 3. Results

The nature of policy analysis is quite diversified, especially in different kinds of sport policy. A good theory provides an effective method for investigating the sport policy process and making sense of inner phenomena and incidents. In total, 100 studies are reviewed systematically, 11 of which employed more than one theory, and 113 theories are chosen in the whole process. As stated previously, this study adopted four types of theory proposed by Houlihan [16] to analyze the research development of sport policy from 2000 to 2020. The final result shows that the study is classified into five, different from the original four types, and the findings regarding the situation of sport policy in these two decades are identified as follows.

Type 1: Macro-scale theories as an overall perspective

In Table 2, a body of research ( $n = 17$ ) is identified in Type 1, which consists of 18 used theories. It usually adopts a macro-level approach to interpret the world. Such theory describes the distribution of power in society and/or the relationship between states and society. This point of view trends toward the political, sociale, and economic perspective to explain the world.

**Table 2.** Results of sport policy studies employed macro-level theories.

Policy Type	Theory	Included Papers	Number
Elite sport	1. Confucianism	Park, Lim, and Bretherton (2012) * [28]	1
	2. Governance	Barker–Rucht, Schubring, Aarresola, Kerr, Grahn, and McMahon (2018) [29]; Horton (2015) [30]	2
	3. International relations theory	Houlihan and Zheng (2015) [31]; Méndez (2020) [32]	2
	4. Neoliberalism	Black (2017) [33]; Sturm and Rinehart (2019)	2
	5. Neo-pluralism	Green (2005) * [34]	1
	6. Southern theory	Henne and Pape (2018) [35]	1
Physical education	1. Neoliberalism	Evans and Davies (2014) [36]; Macdonald (2011) [37]; Powell (2015) [38]	3
	2. Racialization	Dowling and Flintoff (2018) [39]	1
Sport for all Non-specified	1. Feminism	Devine (2016) [40]; Devin (2018) [41]	2
	2. Neo-corporatism	Meier and Fuchs (2014) * [39]	1
	3. New public management	McSweeney and Safai (2020) * [42]	1
	4. Public entrepreneurship	McSweeney and Safai (2020) * [42]	1
Total			18

\* refers to studies applied more than one theory.

#### Feminism

Feminism theory is considered a powerful tool to examine gender and sex equality. The finding shows that two studies use feminism in research on sport and physical education policy and practice. Regarding sport citizenship in light of feminist theory, Devine examined sex equality from the examples from Great Britain and the European Union (EU). It indicates that sport for all represents the sport preference of both sexes most accurately [40]. Interestingly, it appears that it may not reach gender equality as the decision-making is androcentric in competitive performance sport. Devine claimed that sport councils in the UK may not fulfill the legal gender requirement [41]. The finding shows that male prefer-

ences in sport disproportionately receive grants, whereas female preferences in sports are underfunded. The frame of funding distribution still needs reconsideration to effectively respect the sport preferences of both genders.

#### Governance

A body of research ( $n = 2$ ) centers the analyses on the political and socio-economic conditions, surveying the governance of sport policy in the historical background and globalization process. Barker-Ruchti et al. compared how athlete governance development is influenced by historical, sociopolitical, and financial conditions in Australia, Finland, Germany, New Zealand, Sweden, and Switzerland [29]. It shows that athlete governance is complex and full of country-specific characteristics. Despite some stable aspects, such as the global importance of sport success and government positions, others change quickly to influence the governance according to their qualifications. A thorough understanding of the historical, economic, political, and organizational backgrounds may help develop suitable athlete governance. That is, the “one-size-fits-all” models are considered. Additionally, success in international sporting events has chronically defined national identity, psychology, and international status. In the fifth stage of sportization, from the 1960s to the present, non-Western countries have gradually occupied an important position. Horton investigated the Australian elite development and the Olympics and reflected its impact through the sportization–globalization process [30].

#### International relations theory

Two studies ( $n = 2$ ) utilized international relations theory at the macro-level. Houlihan and Zheng evaluated the objectives of small states that participate in international sport and strategies that small states endeavor to maximize their abilities [31]. According to the findings, if the increasing numbers of well-developed sports in the small states attract the traditional sport powers, they may lose the sport niche positions they need to maintain their competitive advantages. Small states may develop sport more based on the overwhelming expense from sport powers. Sufficient evidence shows that small states are good at operating among major powers to reach both sport and non-sport achievement. Méndez examined the cases of China–Taiwan, and Kosovo–Serbia to conclude that the national recognition in international elite sport relies on their capacity of imposing political power on the related international sport and political organizations, such as the United Nations, the International Olympic Committee, and the International Sports Federations. The development of soft power strategies does not seem crucial [32].

#### Neoliberalism

Instead of the term “globalization”, neoliberalism has appeared to replace the status of contemporary economic reconstruction form. A total of five studies ( $n = 5$ ) using neoliberalism highlight the growing intensification of public–private partnerships, two of which belong to elite sport and the others belong to physical education. For example, regarding elite sport, Black explored the process of the ongoing Canadian ongoing pursuit of hosting a series of Sport Mega-Events (SMEs) to reflect that neoliberalism has reinforced the salience of public–private partnerships to embrace the continuous experiences and improve such soft power [33]. It has shaped its reliable global image as added value. Another three studies on physical education (PE) focus on how neoliberalism facilitates the possibility of privatization to improve a comprehensive, high-quality, and equitable quality of physical education. Outsourcing is seen as a potential and tendency issue, but there is the necessity to request further research to demonstrate how to interrogate inner elements and suffer the outside pressure because it may not meet the best interests of teachers and students [36–38].

#### Others

In addition to what was mentioned above, new public management (NPM), public entrepreneurship, and Southern theory belong to this type. These theories, albeit used rarely, offer profound realizations from different angles. For example, new public management and public entrepreneurship advocate for integrating successful private–sector approaches in the public sector to solve public affairs. This study consisted of two macro-scale theories

to cause the numbers of included papers and theories to not be the same [42]. As a challenge to the gradual situations of Northern supremacy, Southern theory provides critical attention to how the Global North forms global knowledge and ignores global knowledge from other parts of the world. From this viewpoint, Henne and Pape explained how the Northern worldview profoundly shapes gender-related sport policy and chronically ignore that Northern ideologies may negatively influence Pacific communities [35]. Furthermore, some macro-scale theories were only adopted once in this study but offered different entry points for more thorough analyses [28,34,39,43].

Type 2: Meso-level theories explaining the phenomenon within societies

Houlihan's second meaning of theory involves a meso-level analysis and emphasizes the interplay among sub-systems/policy communities [16]. It is primarily interested in how actors and the internal relationship influence the final decision in the whole policy-making process. It provides a way to explain a particular inner social phenomenon. This part accounts for the majority of the results. A body of research ( $n = 50$ ) is identified in Type 2. It consists of 55 used theories, meaning nearly 50 percent (55/113), and some studies relate to more than one theory. The detailed results are revealed in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Results of sport policy studies employed meso-level theories.

Policy Type	Theory	Included Papers	Number
Elite sport	1. Advocacy coalition framework	Green (2005) * [34]; Green and Houlihan (2004) [44]; Hu (2019) [45]; Yiamaz (2018)	4
	2. Clientelism	Enjorlas and Waldahl (2007) *	1
	3. Corporatism	Enjorlas and Waldahl (2007) *	1
	4. Game models	Hanstad and Skille (2008); Lake (2010) [46]	2
	5. Habermas's deliberate democracy theory	Kihl, Kikulis, and Thibault (2007)	1
	6. Governance	Grix (2009) [47]; Ma and Kurscheidt (2019);	2
	7. Institutional theory/Neo-institutionalism	Strittmatter (2016); Strittmatter and Skille (2017)	2
	8. Matland's model of conflict and ambiguity	O'Gorman (2011)	1
	9. Multiple streams framework	Camargo, Piggan, and Mezzadri (2020) [48]; Salisbury (2017) [49]; Sotiriadou and Brouwers (2012) [50]; Zheng and Liu (2020) [51]	4
	10. Network theory/Policy network theory/Actor theory/Policy community	Enjorlas and Waldahl (2007) *; Harris and Houlihan (2016); Kerr and Obel (2018) [52]; Lucidarme, Babiak, and Willem * (2018); Hong (2012); Viollet, Scelles, and Ferrand (2020) [53]	6
Physical education	1. Advocacy coalition framework	Houlihan and Green (2006) * [54]; Phillipot (2013) [55]	2
	2. Bernstein's conceptual tool	Kårhus (2016)	1
	3. Foucault's idea	Garratt and Kumar (2019) [56]	1
	4. Multiple streams	Houlihan and Green (2006) * [54]; Reid and Thorburn (2011) [57]; Uhlenbrock and Meier (2020) [58]	3
	5. Network theory/Policy network theory/Actor theory/Policy community	Chen and Chen (2017)	1
	6. Notion of policy as process	Stylianou, Hogan, and Enright (2019) [59]	1
	7. Punctuated equilibrium theory	Lindsey (2020) [60]	1



Table 3. Cont.

Policy Type	Theory	Included Papers	Number
Sport for all	1. Advocacy coalition framework	Fahlén and Skille (2017) [61]; Skille (2008) * [62]	2
	2. Elitism	Tan (2020) *	1
	3. Governance	Bergsard, Borodulin, Fahlén, Høyer-Kruse, and Iverson (2019) [63]; Fahlén, Eliasson, and Wickman (2015) [64]; Skille (2008) * [62]	3
	4. Multiple constituency evaluation model	Suomi (2004)	1
	5. Network theory/Policy network theory/Actor theory	Dobbels, Voets, Marlier, De Waegeneer, and Willem (2018) [65]	1
Multi-type	1. Advocacy coalition framework	Green (2007) [66]	1
	2. Governance	Green (2009) [67]	1
Non-specified	1. Advocacy coalition framework	Houlihan (2005) * [11]	1
	2. Governance	Byron and Chepyator-Thomson (2015); Grix (2010) [68]; Grix and Phillpots (2011) [69]; Fahlén and Steling (2016) [70]; Meier and Fuchs (2014) [43]; Phillpots, Grix, and Quarmby (2010) [71]	6
	3. Institutional theory/Neo-institutionalism	Sam (2005)	1
	4. Multiple streams	Houlihan (2005) * [11]	1
	5. Policy network theory	Thomas and Guett (2014) [72]	1
	6. Strategic relation approach	Girginov (2001)	1
Total			55

\* refers to studies employed more than one theory.

#### Advocacy coalition framework

As an alternative to conventional policy implementations, the advocacy coalition framework (ACF) offers more thorough explanations than conventional top-down or bottom-up models. Based on the pursuit of policy-oriented faiths and values, the coordination among subsystems through the intervention of brokers produces the basis of the policy. A total of ten studies ( $n = 10$ ) adopts the advocacy coalition framework, four of which relate to elite sport to examine the issues with policy changes. Green and Houlihan investigated the key change sources of elite policy in the UK and Canada [44]. Green discussed the development of elite sport policy in Australia, Canada, and the UK. It highlights the concern to pursue excessive sporting excellence on the international stage [66]. Hu proposed the policy change and the following termination of the Tsinghua system [45]. Yilmaz et al. articulated the sports regulation and players' agents of the FIFA sports policy in the socio-cultural dimension [73]. Some studies integrating more than one theory provide a theoretical framework for sport development analyses [11,62], and some analyze the sport policy change comparatively among countries through multi-angles [34,54]. Such results are consistent with the assumptions of the ACF that the core bases of government programs are unlikely to be significantly revised as long as the principal subsystem advocacies remain in power. Even though the study proves that it has to recognize the ACF has its merits, it may have a certain explanation shortage. For example, it lacks complete articulation for national power which weakens the ACF capacity [44].

The others ( $n = 3$ ) belong to the realms of physical education and sport for all, respectively. Houlihan and Green applied the advocacy coalition framework and multiple streams to explore four possible sources of physical education policy change, such as values, beliefs, and ideas changes, interest group lobbying, changes in organizational infrastructure and patterns of resource dependency, and the influence of key individuals [54]. Phillpots explored the policymaking process regarding physical education (PE) and school sport

(PESS) through school sport partnerships (SSP) to understand the interplay between policy brokers and interest groups [55]. Fahlén and Skille investigated how Indigenous sport (Sami people) is affected by political coalitions, social structure, and institutions in Norway and Sweden [61].

Studies integrating different theories ( $n = 4$ ) to address this topic more effectively are common as well. In addition to what has been mentioned above [54], Houlihan examined a set of theoretical analytic frameworks, such as the advocacy coalition framework, stage model, institutional analysis, and multiple streams, to develop a suggested modified version of the advocacy coalition framework [11]. Green integrated state theory and the advocacy coalition framework to explain the elite sport policy development about dominant actors more nuancedly in the UK, Australia, and Canada [34]. Skille explored how voluntary sport clubs at the grassroots level conduct the implantation of sport policy with the perspective of the advocacy coalition framework and governance theory [62].

#### Governance

A body of research ( $n = 12$ ) focuses on the application of governance theory. The largest body of studies introduces the dynamic relationship among governing bodies and institutions for public services and how they impact sport policy [62,63,67,68]. Most of the studies that adopted governance theory ( $n = 9$ ) in this systematic review target the UK and other European countries, while the others ( $n = 3$ ) focus on China, Kenya, and Australia. With regard to the UK, Grix explored how the development and the disputed program of the UK sport policy impact athletic governance negatively [47]. Greater emphasis is needed to emphasize central coordination compared to the old public administration in the UK [62]. Despite the emergence of governance theory in pursuit of power decentralization, the reality may not be so ideal. Phillpots, Grex, and Quarmby proposed that hierarchical management appears to be a preferred policy tool in the sport sector. The decentered approach fails to sufficiently dominate and deliver the works of Country Sport Partnerships (CSPs) and grassroots organizations [71]. Grix and Phillpots argued that the power among sport policy sectors remains asymmetrical. Regarding other countries [69], Fahlén and Steling provided an overall view of the priorities and development of sport policy in different periods in Sweden [70]. Bergsard et al. investigated the similarities and differences among the national structures for managing sport facilities in four Nordic countries [55]. Byron and Chepyator-Thomson indicated that the influence of British colorism has led Kenya to purposely disengage from the original Indigenous systems to maintain the social order. Sport in Kenya is influenced by political undertones while politicians modify the related environment through the official regulatory organizations [74]. Some situations existed where funding allocations are inadequate, mismanaged, or ill-dispatched with the policy priorities. Deficient development in talent identification needs to improve. Excellent performance in athletics promotes international prestige and creates opportunities for foreign investments and consumption in Kenya and, therefore, boost sport tourism.

#### Multiple streams framework

A set of studies underpinned by the multiple streams framework ( $n = 8$ ), one providing an overview of the framework for analysis [11] and the others ( $n = 7$ ) examining how the internal incidents interact and advocate the policy change. The primary strength of the multiple streams framework is recognizing the fluid and non-linear characteristics of the policy process and involving a vast range of internal factors and actors for consideration. A body of theories ( $n = 4$ ) examines the historical background of bids for sport mega-events [49,51] and the policy direction after the failure of the Olympic Games [50]. Zheng and Liu concluded that the 2020 Olympic Games positively affected the traumatized Japan after the 2011 earthquake [51]. Sotiriadou and Brouwers identified that Australia is facing stronger connections between community sport and elite sport [50]. Camargo, Piggini, and Mezzadri stated that there is a lack of long-term planning in Brazilian elite sport through the lens of scrutinizing the funding policy in preparation for hosting the Olympic Games [48]. Another body of research ( $n = 3$ ) focuses on the field of physical education and examines the reasons leading to failure [57], as well as significant influences [54] in the formulation

process. In addition, it also emphasizes the process of collaboration among public–private partnerships [58], for instance, the promotion of the Quality Physical Education Guideline.

#### Network theory/Policy network theory/Actor theory/Policy community

A set of studies ( $n = 8$ ) utilizes network-related theory to explore the structure and inner interaction to influence the formulation of sport policy during the process (Table 4) [65,72]. Of note, specific object-oriented policies, such as those for the disadvantaged and the disabled, are included as well. Among this research, one study utilizes actor-network theory to focus on the dynamics and engagement of key actors during the process and emphasize the constitution, expansion, and stabilization of the actors' network [53]. The other used the concept of actor theory to analyze the Paralympic classification system [52].

#### Others

The other part of the studies employed theories aside from those mentioned above, which are fewer and more dispersed. For example, the punctuated equilibrium theory believes that considerable stability tends to be maintained in a political system to deal with policy issues in the process. Such stability is the result of intermittent change rather than long-term equilibrium. Lindsey examined the policy continuity and change in Physical Education and School Sport (PESS) in England [60]. Tan discussed the sport for all policy change in China through the utilization of elitism and linked policy change indicators [75]. Other theories, such as deliberative democratic theory, multiple constituency evaluation model, clientelism, and corporatism are classified in Type 2 as well to offer different viewpoints to analyze the policy-making process.

#### Type 3: Awareness of specific problems

As mentioned above, the third meaning of theory employed in policy research centers on analyzing specific problems or aspects during the whole policy process. In addition, it focuses on the importance of policy learning and transfer. This systematic review identified nine studies that belong to Type 3 and consist of 10 of the 113 used theories, or approximately 8%.

**Table 4.** Results of sport policy studies employed theories concerning the analysis of specific problems.

Policy Type	Theory	Included Papers	Number
Elite sport	1. Foucault's governmentality	Piggin, Jackson and Lewis (2009) [76]	1
	2. Institutional theory/Neo-institutionalism	Vos, Breesch, Késenne, Van Hoecke, Vanreusel, and Scheerder (2011) * [77]	1
	3. Path dependency	Houlihan (2009) [78]; Park, Lim, and Bretherton (2012) [28]	2
	4. Resource dependence theory	Giannoulakis, Papadimitriou, Alexandris, and Brgoch (2017) [79]; Vos, Breesch, Késenne, Van Hoecke, Vanreusel, and Scheerder (2011) * [77]; Vos, Wicker, Breuer, and Scheerder (2013) [80]	3
Sport for all	1. Institutional theory/Neo-institutionalism	Skille (2009) [81]	1
Multi-type	1. Path dependency	Green and Collins (2008) [82]	1
Non-specified	1. Institutional theory/Neo-institutionalism	Houlihan (2005) * [11]	1
Total			10

\* refers to studies applied more than one theory.

#### Path dependency

Path dependency ( $n = 3$ ) is a representative theory chosen to describe sports development, especially emphasizing that policy choices made in specific situations may be influenced by past decisions and actions, even if the circumstances are no more relevant or essential. Houlihan argued that "sport is a reasonably accurate reflection of the prevailing ideology found within a particular state at a particular time" [83] (p. 17). The conception of

path dependency provides a point of view regarding how a country would have faced the high risk of the government being unwilling to bear changing a long-term policy trajectory in the past. In other words, the difficulty of altering the chronic negative influences on individuals or organizations is imaginable.

Green and Collins adopted path dependency theory to explain the policy development in countries with different social, cultural, and political contexts [82]. The victory to be chosen as the host of the 2000 Olympics in 1993 resulted in profound influence. Increasingly centralized organizations formed the policy direction in Australia. Recurrent focuses on funding attribution of elite sport seem to be the leading priority in Australia. Even though more certain targeted citizens, such as the youth, women, and the elderly, receive greater attention in the policy development, it had a significant limitation regarding changing the funding of elite sport. Interestingly, the policy direction of Finland stands contrary to Australia. As a social democratic country, Finland has gone through a series of social service reforms since the late 1960s, especially regarding high-level welfare expenses. As a result, greater attention was drawn to public health, and the allocated funding for elite sport remained low. The perspective of path dependency theory provides persuasive evidence to explain the policy development in Finland and Australia. In sum, the concepts of “politics determine policies” and “policies determine politics” need to be reconsidered in terms of their implications. Houlihan observed that more evidence has been displayed in policy learning and transfer among states, such as doping in sport and elite success [78]. Similar policy frameworks and policy agendas used in different countries may result from having shared economic problems and social development. If attributed to globalization, it still lacks convincing proof.

Similar to the situation in Australia, Park, Lim, and Bretherton probed into the elite sporting success in South Korea, which has suffered lasting colonial effects from Japan [35]. Such historical background to build national pride urged elite sporting success instead of academic progress. The goal of pursuing gold medals prioritizes students’ focus on training over learning. Aside from the maladaptation to the later life, after retirement, it may boost the athletes’ physical and sexual abuse, scarification of educational rights, and uneven power relationships between coaches and athletes.

#### Institutional theory/Neo-institutionalism

Similar to path dependency theory, one main direction of the conception of institutional theory/neo-institutionalism is confined to historical development. A set of studies ( $n = 3$ ) employed institution-related theory explains how sport policy is impacted by the past ideas or the original institutions in the process. The conception of institutions is characterized as long-term stability and having difficulty being changed. The induction of change usually remains sudden instead of gradual. It is associated with the legitimacy that results from collective social acceptance. Skille utilized institutionalism to explain how isomorphism occurs in the policy process in Norway and wonders if the logic of social policy is consistent with the conception expressed in state policy [81]. Coercive isomorphism pertains to one type of new institutionalism that places pressure on organizations to reinforce a tendency of taking on attributes of other organizations so that organizations appear increasingly homogeneous. Vos et al. argued that the effect on voluntary sport clubs in Flanders resulting from the government exerting coercive pressure through the funding appears rather small [77].

#### Resource dependency theory

Pfeffer and Salancik proposed resource dependence theory (RDT), which has been widely used to explain how to reduce environmental interdependence and uncertainty within organizations [84]. In addition, it has been widely adopted to examine the relationship between the government and non-profit organizations. A body of studies ( $n = 3$ ) adopts resource dependency theory to understand the interactions among interest groups, especially on the topic of financial structures and funding origins. For example, Vos et al. discussed the relationship between the adopted subsidy conditions depending on government funding relationship in Flanders [77]. The result shows that the coercive pressure

on voluntary clubs from the government seems to have its limitations. Sport clubs are regarded as potential instruments to achieve policy goals, but the effect does not seem to be optimistic. Furthermore, Vos et al. compared the income structures of voluntary sport clubs between Germany and Flanders in Belgium. Even though the public subsidy seems important, it makes up little of the total income in both areas [80]. They greatly rely on the third sector revenue and its members, and, therefore, such clubs possess great decision-making autonomy in view of resource dependency theory. Besides the financial structures, the strategies taken to deal with the crisis were seen as another trend. Faced with the financial crisis in Greece, the National Sport Federation ought to diversify its funding sources, such as seeking donations and sponsorship. These main strategies related to supporting the athlete's training and operational costs lower the expense costs and, thereby, help them survive such a grave hardship, but it directly impacts the elite performance at the Olympics [79].

Type 4: Two or more variables with a proposition

Another set of studies ( $n = 23$ ) belongs to Type 4, which consists of 23 theories. This type of theoretical basis is used to identify the discussion of the relationship between two or more variables within a connected or logical proposition (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Results of sport policy studies concerning two or more variables with a proposition.

Policy Type	Theory	Included Papers	Number
Elite sport	1. Compliance theory	Tan, Bairner, and Chen (2018)	1
	2. Green and Houlihan's four key policy elements	Park, Tan, and Park (2016)	1
	3. Organization resources and first-order capabilities (ORFOC)	Truyens, De Bosscher, and Sortiriadou (2016) [85]	1
	4. Sports policy factors leading to international sporting success model (SPLISS)	De Bosscher (2018) [86]; De Bosscher, Knop, Van Bottenburg, and Shibli (2006); De Bosscher, Shibli, and Ch. Weber (2019) [87]; De Bosscher, Shibli, Van Bottenburg, De Knop, and Tuyens (2010) [22]; De Bosscher, Shilbury, Theeboom, Van Hoecke, and De Knop (2011) * [88]; Henry, Dowling, Ko, and Brown (2020) [89]; Liston, Gregg, and Lowther (2013) [3]; Padadimitriou and Alexandris (2018) [90]; Patatas, De Bosscher, and Legg (2018) [91]; Sotiriadou, Gowthorp, and De Bosscher (2014) [14]; Tuyens, De Bosscher, Heyndel, and Westerbeek (2014) [92]; Valenti, Scelles, and Morrow (2020) [15]	12
	5. Stakeholder theory	Chen and Lin (2020)	1
	6. System–resource model	De Bosscher, Shilbury, Theeboom, Van Hoecke, and De Knop (2011) * [88]	1 *
Physical education	1. Policy network theory	Penney, Petrie, and Fellows (2015)	1
	2. Whitehead's conceptualization of physical literacy	Scott, Hill, Barwood, and Penney (2020) [93]	1
Sport for all	1. Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model	Hoekman, Breedveld, and Kraaykamp (2017) [94]	1
	2. Community theory	Skille (2015) [95]	1
	3. Hogwood, Peters, and Jung's policy change indicators	Tan (2020) *	1 *
Non-specified	1. Convergence	Houlihan (2012)	1
Total			23

\* refers to studies applied more than one theory

### Sports policy factors leading to international sporting success model (SPLISS)

Comparative research across nations has received considerable academic attention, particularly in elite sport studies, which endeavor to understand the factors that lead to sport success among nations. The identification of such criteria remains ambiguous. Of note, there is a noticeable increase in the study that applies the SPLISS model [22]. It gains detailed insights into critical factors and their relationships to compare the development of elite sport policies in different nations. The SPLISS model incorporates nine conceptual dimensions and the internal relationship “pillars” of financial support, the organization and structure of sport policies, the foundation and participation for sports development, talent identification and development systems, athletic careers and retirement support, training facilities, coach training and development, international/national competitions, and scientific research. Due to the mature development of the SPLISS model, a body of relevant studies ( $n = 13$ ) has burgeoned on the topic in this decade.

This set of studies consists of two major parts. One adopts the SPLISS model to endeavor to advance the framework. For example, De Bosscher et al. developed 103 critical sport factors to assess the effectiveness of elite sport evaluation in Flanders objectively [88]. De Bosscher collected more detailed data from 15 countries and modifies the SPLISS model further and reduces it to 96 critical sport factors to provide deeper insights into elite sport systems and their relationship with elite sport policies and success [86]. Truyens et al. provided an overview of critical organizational resources which differ among different nations [92]. Truyens et al. further organized the organizational resources and first-order capabilities framework (ORFOC) to analyze and list the resources and organizational practices. Complementary qualitative and quantitative research remains necessary [85].

The other adopts the SPLISS model to probe into sporting success from different perspectives of the various “pillars.” Sotiriadou, Gowthorp, and De Bosscher indicated that cultural factors are important in the policymaking process and influence the interrelation among coaches, talented athletes, and identification [14]. Specialized elite coaches highly influence sporting success [3,15]. Padadimitriou and Alexandris concluded that austerity in Greece indeed had a direct negative impact on its elite sport systems instead of Olympic success [90]. In addition to different dimensions, different populations are another orientation as well, such as explaining that approaches aimed at able-bodied athletes do not apply to para-sports. This approach attempts to assist policymakers in being aware of the difference and facilitates the effectiveness of para-sport systems as a whole [91]. De Bosscher, Shibli, and Ch. Weber applied the SPLISS 2.0 model to suggest that the prioritization of elite sport funding among sampled nations may not be an efficient strategy [87]. The more diversified their funding is, the better they perform in elite sport.

Some scholars believe in adding the organizational climate and culture for necessity as the 10th dimension for sport success [92]. To achieve competitive advantages, the resource configuration varies based on organizational differences. Additional research on the interplay among sport environmental conditions and resources contributes to better explanations of sport success. Nonetheless, there exist critiques of the SPLISS approach on the opposite side. Henry et al. argued that such an approach at best still needs to recognize its limitations for explaining the relationship between causes and outcomes in elite sport while it is inappropriate at worst [89].

### Others

In addition to SPLISS and its extension model, the rest classified into this type consists of ten theories. Different theories provide different angles to analyze the sport policy, especially emphasizing the relationship and interplays among the study focuses. For example, Hoekman, Breedveld, and Kraaykamp adopted a socio-ecological model to survey the relationship between sport policy, youth participation, and socioeconomic status [94]. Skille examined the policy relationship between the State and local sport clubs (LSC) in Norway through the lens of community theory [95]. Scott et al. applied Whitehead’s conceptualization to identify if physical literacy is linked between Australia Curriculum for Health and Physical Education (AC: HPE) and Australian Physical Education Framework [93].

Aside from those stated previously, there are a few studies left, *inter alia*, which cannot be classified appropriately into the original four types because they do not belong to the discussion about policy processes or agendas themselves. This reveals the fifth meaning of theory in sport policy research in this study, and the explanation is given as follows.

#### Type 5: Unclassifiable sport policy studies

A body of studies ( $n = 7$ ) emphasizes the policy context and discourse analysis rather than policy formation or specific cases. Such research probes to analyze the policy contexts in a structured way to understand the internal true meanings (Table 6). Philosophy science is therefore classified as the fifth type. Foucault's related theories play an essential role and are frequently utilized in this regard. For example, Piggin, Jackson and Lewis utilized Foucault's games of truth theory for proving the real transparency of sport policy in New Zealand [76]. Garratt and Kumar borrowed Foucauldian ideas to understand the contemporary nature of the Act and the linked discourses in England and Wales better [56]. In physical education, discourse analysis on the curriculum belongs to this type [96].

**Table 6.** Results of unclassifiable sport policy studies.

Policy Type	Theory	Included Papers	Number
Elite sport	1. Games of truth	Piggin, Jackson and Lewis (2009)	1
	2. Management as discourse	Hu and Henry (2017)	1
	3. Morphogenetic approach	Lusted (2018)	1
Physical education	1. Meme	Griggs (2018)	1
	2. Plowright's four hierarchy of artefact	Penney (2020)	1
	3. Swedish curriculum theory	Janemalm, Quennerstedt, and Barker (2019) [96]	1
Sport for all	1. Markula and Silk's conceptual model	Dowling (2020) [97]	1
Total			7

## 4. Discussion

This study sought to understand the development of sport policy research. Having given the emphasis on sport, studies concerning sport policy become increasingly crucial. Sport policy development is mainly affected by domestic and international political, social, and economic conditions, among other factors. Houlihan claimed that "sport is a reasonably accurate reflection of the prevailing ideology found within a particular state" [83] (p. 17). A good theoretical perspective plays such a role in providing a richer insight into realistic situations. Based on Houlihan, adopted theories are categorized into four types [16]. The first one applies macro-scale theories as an overall perspective to describe states. The second type explains the phenomenon within societies, primarily referring to meso-level organizations. The third one is aware of specific problems in the policy process or the implications on policy learning and transfer. The last meaning explains two or more variables with a proposition.

A total of 100 studies are reviewed systematically in this process, 11 of which employed more than one theory as the perspective to analyze sport policy. Therefore, 113 theories are identified in these 100 studies for the analyses. The majority of studies are about elite sport, approximately accounting for 53% (60/113), physical education for 19% (21/113), sport for all for 11% (13/113), and the rest for 17% (19/113). Whether the research belongs to the field of elite sport, physical education, or sport for all, the development of related policy has always been the focal point of research in several countries. It is clear that there is something in common among the development of these three kinds of sport policy research. The frequently chosen theories within sport policy studies account for more than half, including governance ( $n = 14$ ), the advocacy coalition framework ( $n = 10$ ), network-related theory ( $n = 10$ ), and multiple streams framework ( $n = 8$ ), aiming at particular

policies. Governance theory characterizes the rise and decline of power within sports organizations and the interplays concerning communications and pursuing interests that dominate the research focus. The investigation using the advocacy coalition framework focuses on the interplays among advocacy coalitions constituted by members who pursue the core belief, to determine the final policy decisions. The relevant study using a multiple streams framework discusses the policy changes from the perspectives of problem streams, politics streams, and policies streams. The convergence of these three streams may urge the possibilities for policy changes. These theories belong to the meaning of Type 2. It expresses the particular atmosphere and internal relationships in the respective policy contexts from different angles. In addition, the study exploiting path dependency ( $n = 3$ ) and resource dependency ( $n = 3$ ) provides another angle on how past choices are constrained by present decisions. These two theories belong to Type 3. Therefore, these theories mentioned above contribute to the development of the three types of sport policy research from meso-level perspectives, which has received attention in the past two decades.

For elite sport, the study using the above-mentioned theories emphasizes the investigation of the comprehensive development of elite sport policies in a single country and union. The research objects incorporate traditional powers achieving great sport performance, such as the UK, Australia, France, and China. For example, for Australia and most of its people, international sporting contests have long been a key marker of national identity and psyche. Horton explored the policy shifts that influence the development of the Australia Sport Commission and its structure and administration [30]. Sotiriadou and Brouwers adopted the multiple streams theory to explore the environment before and after the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. It shows that the Australian government plays an increasingly crucial role as it heads towards the era in which there will be stronger connections between elite sport and community sport [50]. Yilmaz addressed the engagement of actors initiated by a national sport federation during the formation of sport policy in France [73]. On the other hand, only a few studies aim at the policy development of specific sport, such as the termination of the Chinese diving system [45], the Lawn Tennis Association [LTA] [46], or UK Athletics [UKA] [47]. Regarding the issues of physical education, ten studies involve such theories to investigate detailed policy backgrounds, internal dynamic interplays, and difficulties to deliver more reliable information of policy change processes, especially aiming at particular policies. Taking the policy implementation of the sporting schools in Australia [59], for instance, it can be seen that policymakers tend to underestimate the intricacies of policy implementation. The divergent understanding of the need for policy contexts by stakeholders, as well as ambiguous policy aims and implementation, means reducing efficiency.

The launch of physical education and school sport [PESS] as a pivotal policy in the UK has raised scholarly attention. Phillpots proposed that the central development of the PESS policy results from the lobbying by the advocacy coalition led by the Youth Sport Trust (YST) [55]. On the other hand, Lindsey utilized punctuated equilibrium theory to explain the PESS policy continuation since 2010 [60]. The significant modifications in the PESS policy are increasingly aligned with health-related goals. The confluence of important external events and dramatic rises in media and political interests causes vital points to influence the policy. Such studies supplement a more thorough understanding of the detailed policy context. Regarding the trend of policy reference on sport for all, the objects have been almost entirely concentrated on the Nordic countries, including Denmark, France, Norway, Sweden, and Finland. These five countries possess their own economic and social structures and share the Nordic model to varying extents. Due to the profound influence of the implementation of social democracy in Nordic countries, it advocates the measures of redistributing income and regulating the economy in a better line with the public interest. Therefore, urging social welfare becomes an important goal. The findings show that the trend of research consists of two parts and the objects focus on sports organizations at different levels that take full responsibility for implementation and communication, especially at the grassroots level.



Firstly, it examines the local-level mechanisms and responsibilities at different policy phases. For example, Skille discussed the capability of implementation in Norwegian local sport clubs and concludes that they may share the same policy community with the governmental policy to take the correct action [95]. Dowling argued that the mechanism of voluntary sport clubs in Norway is inappropriate to provide youth refugees with meaningful physical activities in order to promote sport for all [97]. Secondly, the principal part of the study further explores the relationships and cooperation between the government and local-level sport organizations taking the local-level sport organizations as the point of departure. The used theories here include governance and network-related theory to explain the formal and informal contacts and power relationships of the participants. For example, Fahlén et al. argued that each sport organization in Sweden in the chain transmits the responsibility for policy development and demand for self-regulation down to the following organization [45,64]. It finally leads sport clubs to take on the full responsibility of meeting the national goals, which may not be accepted. Only one study focused on sport facilities, even though such a measure plays a principal role in the planning of a sport for all policy [63]. It indicates that scholars pay more attention to detailed sub-policy contents than comprehensive analyses.

However, there exist some different trends in these three kinds of sport policy references besides having something in common. For elite sport, the SPLISS model plays a distinct role in analyzing the factors of sporting success in the past ten years. According to the findings, the emergence of the SPLISS model discusses the factors that influence elite sport success through specific and fixed elements within the framework, in which financial and coaching aspects attract the focal attention. There is a study that challenges this model and questions its credibility despite the emergence of abundant references using the SPLISS model in the past ten years. In addition, the comparative studies based on theories about governance, path dependency, and network theory in multiple countries form a branch line in elite sport references [29,32,90]. The study on physical education has appeared in the recent decade, and the main objects are Australia and New Zealand in Oceania and the United Kingdom in Europe. The principal noticeable trend that is different from other two types of sport policy research attempts to embrace the global pervasiveness of neoliberalism, which belongs to Type 1. Neoliberalism as an approach urges people to be responsible for choosing their education, lifestyle, work, and health. The principal belief of neoliberalism is to support free marketing to pursue more effective and efficient results. The confluence of neoliberalism in physical education centers on delivering the goods and services produced by providers external to schools. According to Evans and Davies, the privatization of physical education policy may be driven by political ideology [36]. Therefore, it should prompt the reflection on policy agendas and the legitimacy of education reform, while taking the influence of neoliberalism into effect. The orientation of physical education specialists and the correct allocation of resources should be the core aspects to reconsider [37,38].

Much of the studies mentioned above are based on different national, political, and economic backgrounds, reflecting the scholarly interests and seeking diversified dimensions within sport policy development. Despite the common and different trends in these three types of sport policy, it is worth noting that the study relates to the analyses of the formation phases of policy agendas and implementation while less attention has been paid to the follow-up evaluation.

## 5. Conclusions

This study contributed to the research development of sport literature. It employed a systematic review to identify sport policy development from 2000 to 2020, including elite sport, physical education, and sport for all. Based on the theory meanings proposed by Houlihan [16], the first type usually applies an overall perspective to describe the states. The second type explains phenomena within societies, primarily referring to meso-level organizations. The third type is aware of specific problems in the policy process or the

implication of policy learning and transfer. The last meaning explains two or more variables with a proposition. Through the criteria developed within a standard process in search of these three kinds of sport policy, it identified 100 studies consisting of 113 used theories. Studies concerning elite sport accounted for the majority, while that about sport accounted for the least. Nearly half of the theories adopted in the research were categorized into the second type, focusing on meso-level actors and interactions within organizations. In these three types of studies, the advocacy coalition framework (ACF), network-related theories, and governance theory as mainstream theories all played pivotal roles in offering different analyses among the three kinds of sport policy studies. These theories, belonging to Type 2, provided different insights into dynamic interactions between policy agents, interest groups, and current environments that compete to influence the policy decision process for policy analyses. The research exploiting path dependency ( $n = 3$ ) and resource dependency ( $n = 3$ ), belonging to Type 3, offers another key angle on how past choices constrain present decisions. For elite sport, the study using the above-mentioned theories emphasized the investigation of elite sport policies and their comprehensive development in a single country and union. The research objects are related to traditional powers that achieve sporting success. As in the field of sport for all, the research objects concentrated on the Nordic countries, which are profoundly influenced by the implementation of social democracy. It showed the main responsibilities to implement the policy of sport for all through grassroots sport organizations. Only one study focused on sport facilities, even though such measures played a principal role in the planning of a sport for all policy. It indicated that scholars pay greater attention to detailed sub-policy contents besides comprehensive analyses.

In addition to something in common, there existed some different trends among these three kinds of sport policy study. For elite sport, the emergence of the Sports Policy Factors Leading to International Sporting Success [SPLISS] model in the recent decade played a pivotal role. The burgeoning of related study indicated that international attention to achieving elite sporting success has remained considerable. It shows the ambition of states to realize the exact reasons. Regarding the research on physical education, it has appeared in the recent decade. The noticeable trend attempted to embrace the global pervasiveness of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism, belonging to Type 1, was used to explain the possibilities of free marketing and pursuing more effective and efficient results. Despite the common and different trends in these three types of sport policy, it is worth noting the study related to the analyses of the formation phases of policy agendas and implementation while less attention has been paid to the follow-up evaluation. In addition, few studies highlighted the policy texts themselves and the surrounding discourse, and do not belong to the four types mentioned above. Therefore, they are grouped into the fifth type.

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