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**Ten years after the BIBGIS: towards a Better Measure of International Sport Federation Governance**

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## **Abstract**

The first governance assessment tool for international sport organisations based on indicators was published in 2013. It was called BIBGIS (Basic Indicators for Better Governance in International Sport). A few similar tools followed. Ten years later, this paper focuses on how indicator-based tools for evaluating international sport organisation governance can be improved. We draw on documents published by the relevant research projects to briefly describe the main sport federation governance assessment tools and then examine more closely the tool developed by the Association of Summer Olympic International Sport Federations' (ASOIF) Governance Task Force (GTF). We analyse criticisms of the tool and outline possible solutions. This article does not follow the traditional structure of a scientific paper. It is not based on a theory of governance (none is widely accepted) but it tries to propose solutions to the criticisms made by several scholars of these indicator based tools. Criticisms primarily focus on the drawbacks of using indicators and therefore apply to all indicator-based assessment methods. We provide constructive suggestions for improving governance assessment tools, especially the GTF tool and procedure. Such reviews encourage sport federations to improve their governance, but we conclude that better governance does not necessarily improve a federation's overall performance. Governance assessments should not be confused with performance assessments.

**Keywords:** governance principles, indicators, assessment tools, ASOIF-GTF, sport autonomy

## Introduction

The concept of governance first raised its head in the sports world at the start of the twenty-first century, when a seemingly constant stream of scandals rocked national and international sport organisations, and when governments and other stakeholders such as sponsors, broadcasters and NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations) started to question the lack of control enjoyed by the non-profit sport organisations aka as their self-governance. Many observers attributed these scandals to 'bad governance' within the organisations affected, which included the IOC (in 1999), FIFA, World Athletics, IBU (International Biathlon Union), IBA (International Boxing Association) and many other bodies. Thus, in February 2001 the European Olympic Committees (EOC) and the International Automobile Federation, which the European Union had told to reform its monopolistic and opaque governance, held a conference on governance called 'The Rules of the Games.' Jacques Rogge, who used the event to launch his bid for the IOC presidency, told the conference: 'Because sports is based on ethics and fair competition, the governance of sport should fulfil the highest standards in terms of transparency, democracy and accountability.' (FIA, 2001, p. 2).

Following this conference (and Rogge's election as IOC president), numerous sport organisations, (inter-)governmental bodies, and academics began defining sets of governance principles for sport, generally presented in the form of lists, some of which were quite long. More than 30 such lists were published over the next twelve years (Chappelet & Mrkonjic, 2013), and by 2022 Thomson et al. were able to identify 258 'unique governance principles.' This profusion of principles may result from the lack of consensus on what the politically attractive but very vague notion of governance means in the case of non-profit sports clubs and federations (Girginov, 2022). Governance can be the way organisations are managed, controlled, and regulated (Bevir, 2011). It may also be confined to organisational mechanisms (Charreaux, 2005) or expanded to include 'activities of social, political and administrative actors that can be seen as purposeful efforts to guide, steer, control or manage sectors of society' (Kooiman, 1993, p. 2). The difficulty in establishing a universally accepted definition of governance may be due to its multidimensional (organisational, political, and systemic, Henry & Lee, 2004) and multi-level nature (Pérez, 2003; see Chappelet, 2018, for an example of Pérez's model applied to sport organisations).

Beyond theoretical considerations, the lack of a widely agreed definition of governance makes it more difficult to assess the concept and its principles. Nevertheless, several research projects have attempted to identify indicators that can be combined into practical tools for measuring governance. Parent and Hoye (2018) and Thomson et al. (2022, p. 13) recommend 'using "principles" as the overarching term, with "indicators" reserved for operationalizing the principles and making claims about the quality of governance in sports organisations.' However, only a few sets of indicators are currently available for measuring international sport federation (IF) governance. The following section describes the four most commonly quoted research-based sets of indicators. The authors do not know other sets, nor other governance evaluation methods for international sport organisations if any.

After using information contained in documents relating to the relevant research projects to provide brief descriptions of these four research projects and measurement tools based (section 1), we examine in more detail the tool developed by the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations' Government Task Force (ASOIF GTF). Although this tool has been applied more widely

than any other since 2016 (section 2) and is becoming an ‘industry standard’, it is not perfect (see the criticisms raised by several authors in section 3). The question raised in this paper is how and to what extent it can be improved? Hence, section 3 of this paper draws on research on the use of indicators in management to identify possible criticisms of the ASOIF’s tool and looks at how these criticisms can be used to improve the tool, so it better assesses international sport organisation governance. Other governance assessment tools, to which the same criticisms apply, could also benefit from these potential improvements. The conclusion outlines the limitations of governance assessments, the contribution made by the article and possible avenues for further research in this area.

### **Four Tools for Measuring IF Governance**

We describe the four tools in the order in which they were first reported in the academic literature (see Table 1).

The Basic Indicators for Better Governance in International Sport (**BIBGIS**) is a set of 63 indicators measuring seven dimensions of governance — Organisational Transparency, Reporting Transparency, Stakeholders’ Representation, Democratic Process, Control Mechanisms, Sport Integrity and Solidarity — with nine indicators for each dimension (Chappelet & Mrkonjic, 2013). The BIBGIS’s authors, two researchers at the University of Lausanne’s Swiss Graduate School of Public Administration (IDHEAP), based their choice of indicators on 30 sets of governance principles they had identified in the literature. All 63 indicators have equal weight. To date, the BIBGIS have been applied just twice: once by their authors, who used data from the academic literature and the media to benchmark the IOC’s and FIFA’s governance in 2012 (when developing the BIBGIS) and once as part of a doctoral research project (unpublished dissertation) assessing the governance of 27 European sport federations (see [https://serval.unil.ch/resource/serval:BIB\\_7BDD210D3643.P001/REF](https://serval.unil.ch/resource/serval:BIB_7BDD210D3643.P001/REF) ).

Support the Implementation of Good Governance in Sport (**SIGGS**) was a European Commission Erasmus+ project for sport. Involving a consortium of 12 partners from nine countries led by the EOC (Zintz & Gérard, 2019), SIGGS was the continuation of an earlier EOC-led Erasmus+ project called Sport for Good Governance (S4GG, [www.s4gg.eu](http://www.s4gg.eu)). SIGGS was aimed at all organisations (national and international) within the Olympic Movement and explicitly referred to the IOC’s Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance of the Olympic and Sports Movement (BUPs), adopted in 2009. The IOC subsequently made the BUPs obligatory for all organisations within the Olympic movement by including them in its Code of Ethics, which is an integral part of the Olympic Charter (IOC, 2022: article 11). It has since reaffirmed its commitment to the BUPs via recommendation 27 of Olympic Agenda 2020 and Recommendation 14 of Olympic Agenda 2020+5, adopted in 2014 and 2020, respectively. The BUPs have been revised in 2022 and are available on the IOC’s website (<https://stillmed.olympics.com/media/Documents/Beyond-the-Games/Integrity/Bonne-Gouvernance-EN.pdf>). The BUPs’ seven chapters describe more than 100 items that could be considered indicators, but they are difficult to measure, as many of them are expressed as recommendations (e.g., ‘you should consider an age limit’) rather than as imperatives (‘you must have an age limit’). SIGGS assesses four dimensions of governance via 61 equally weighted indicators: Integrity (13 indicators), Autonomy and Accountability (21 indicators), Transparency and Democracy

(13 indicators) and Participation and Inclusivity (14 indicators). The SIGGS consortium tested its evaluation tool on several European Olympic committees (see: <https://www.siggs.eu/home.html>).

The Action for Good Governance in Sport (AGGIS) project involved a consortium of nine partners from seven countries led by the NGO Play The Game (PTG) (Alm, 2013). It resulted in an evaluation tool called the Sports Governance Observer (**SGO**), which the consortium applied to all the summer and winter Olympic IFs in 2015 (Geeraert, 2015, 2019). After making several improvements to the original tool, PTG tested a new version of the SGO on five large IFs (FIFA, FINA, IAAF, IHF, ITF) in 2018 (Geeraert, 2018a). This new version of the SGO comprised 57 equally weighted indicators (rather than 36 indicators for the original version) measuring four dimensions of governance: Transparency and Public Communication (11 indicators), Democratic Process (13 indicators), Internal Accountability and Control (19 indicators) and Societal Responsibility (14 indicators). Evaluators awarded each IF a score of between 1 and 5 based on responses provided by the IF or on data obtained from the IF's website (see: <https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/sport/library/documents/eusf2013-1-2-wkshp2-5b-danish-institute.pdf>, which lists 58 indicators (11+14+14+19) and uses slightly different names for the four dimensions to Geeraert, 2018a).

The ASOIF's Governance Task Force, set up in 2016, first published its governance assessment tool in 2017. This tool, also known as the **ASOIF GTF**, measures five dimensions of governance — Transparency, Integrity, Democracy, Development and Control Mechanisms — with 10 equally weighted indicators for each dimension. Each indicator is scored on a scale of 0 to 4. The ASOIF has applied the GTF on four occasions (2017, 2018, 2020, 2022) and published the results of each survey (see: [www.asoif.com/governance-task-force](http://www.asoif.com/governance-task-force)).

Table 1 summarises the main characteristics of the four governance evaluation tools described above, whose indicators assess means (inputs) not results (outputs or outcomes). Acronyms are defined in the text above.

Table 1 highlights similarities and differences between the four tools. For example, all four tools include the 'Transparency' and 'Democracy' dimensions, and all four measure the 'Accountability' dimension either explicitly (SIGGS and SGO) or implicitly via the 'Control Mechanisms' dimension (BIBGIS and GTF; also Chappelet, 2011). Transparency, democracy and accountability are the most frequently identified dimensions of governance (Thomson et al., 2022). Differences in the number of dimensions each tool measures reflect the large number of principles described in the literature.

The popularity of the New Public Management movement has accentuated the trend for measuring sport organisation performance, notably in countries such as Australia (ASC, 2012), Great Britain (UK Sport, 2016), and Belgium (Geeraert, 2018b). National sport agencies in these countries have developed their own governance assessment tools, often with an eye on justifying government subsidies, which is not a consideration for IFs. National sport organisations wishing to assess their governance can also use the National Sports Governance Observer, which comprises 274 yes-no indicators divided into three groups, labelled basic, intermediate and advanced (Geeraert, 2018c). Pielke et al. (2020) applied this tool to national governing bodies in the United States. Another national-level assessment tool, called Open Data for Sports Governance (OD4SG), is being developed in 2023 under an Erasmus+ project.

**Table 1****Main Tools for Evaluating International Sport Organisation Governance**

<i>Tool</i>	BIBGIS	SIGGS	SGO	GTF
<i>Project leader</i>	IDHEAP	EOC	PTG	ASOIF
<i>First published</i>	January 2013	June 2017 (S4GG in January 2014)	October 2015, November 2018	April 2017
<i>Number of dimensions</i>	7	4	4	5
<i>Dimensions</i>	Organisational Transparency, Reporting Transparency, Stakeholders' Representation, Democratic Process, Control Mechanisms, Sport Integrity, Solidarity	Integrity, Autonomy and Accountability, Transparency and Democracy, Participation and Inclusivity	Transparency, Democratic Processes, Internal Accountability and Control, Societal Responsibility	Transparency, Integrity, Democracy, Development, Control Mechanisms
<i>Number of indicators</i>	63 (7 x 9)	61 (13+21+13+14)	57 (11+14+19+14)	50 (5 x 10)
<i>Number of applications</i>	2 (to IOC and FIFA, and to 27 European federations)	1 (to 7 NOCs)	2 (to 35 IFs and then to 5-6 IFs)	4 (to 28-33 IFs)

**The GTF Assessment Tool and its Application*****The GTF's Indicators***

An ASOIF working group consisting of representatives of the IFs, the IOC and academics<sup>1</sup> began drawing up the GTF indicators in 2016 at the IOC's request. ASOIF is the association of all international sport federations (IFs) whose sport is on the programme of the Olympic summer games. Its members have very different assets and staff numbers. FIFA (Fédération internationale de football association) is the largest. Medium and small size federations are also ASOIF members. All ASOIF members have English as (one of) their official language and their headquarters are in Europe, implying that the Western view of governance is prevalent in the IFs' staff. The IFs governing "additional sports" at the Olympics (present for one edition) are associated members of ASOIF. Inspired by the BIBGIS (Butler, 2016), the GTF assesses the Transparency, Integrity, Democracy, Development and Control Mechanisms dimensions of governance via five groups of ten highly measurable indicators. The first and final dimensions come from corporate governance; the other three dimensions are specific to sport and to public sector democratic governance (Bévir, 2010; Henry & Lee, 2004). This is consistent with the fact that IFs occupy an intermediate position between the public (regulator) and commercial (corporate) sectors. Table 2 lists the ten questions/indicators for the Transparency dimension (see Appendix 1 for the 40 indicators for the other four dimensions). The ASOIF has asked its members (and,

<sup>1</sup> One of the authors is a member of the GTF.

as of 2018, its associate members responsible for sports on the Tokyo 2020+1 and Paris 2024 Olympic Games programmes) to complete the GTF on four occasions.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 2**

Indicators for the Transparency Dimension (ASOIF, 2022, p. 28)

	Please indicate the extent to which your IF puts the following information into the public domain (i.e., via official website):
2.1	Statutes, rules and regulations
2.2	Explanation of organisational structure including staff, elected officials, committee structures and other relevant decision-making groups
2.3	Vision, mission, values and strategic objectives
2.4	A list of all national member federations with basic information for each
2.5	Details of elected officials with biographical info
2.6	Annual activity report, including institutional information, and main event reports
2.7	Annual financial reports following external audit
2.8	Allowances and financial benefits of elected officials and senior executives
2.9	General Assembly agenda with relevant documents (before) and minutes (after) with procedure for members to add items to agenda
2.10	A summary of reports/decisions taken during Executive Board and Commission meetings and all other important decisions of IF

### **Measurement Procedure**

The GTF is a self-report procedure in which IFs indicate to what extent and how they comply with 50 indicators listed on a questionnaire (sent end 2016, end 2017, end 2019 and end 2021). IFs score each indicator on five-point scales from 0 to 4 (0 = indicator not fulfilled at all; 1 = indicator partially fulfilled; 2 = indicator fulfilled; 3 = indicator well-fulfilled according to published rules/procedures; 4 = indicator totally fulfilled in a state-of-the-art way). Each question includes an predefined scale to help IFs choose their responses (see Table 3). An independent expert moderates the IFs' scores (raising or lowering them when appropriate), using information the IF provides with the questionnaire and, if necessary, asking the IF for clarification. For more on the crucial role of "independent experts" in general and of the ASOIF's expert in particular, see Jack (2022).

The ASOIF sends every IF that completes the questionnaire (almost all the IFs contacted) its final scores for each indicator. The total (composite) score for the five dimensions (out of a maximum score of 50 x 4 = 200) is computed by the GTF. Scores for the indicators are not weighted. For example, the results for indicator 2.7 (see Table 2) in 2022 showed that almost all the Olympic Summer IFs that completed the questionnaire publish audited financial reports (giving various amounts of detail), as the mean score for the 32 IFs (out of 33) that answered this question was 3.4 out of 4.

Table 3 illustrates the format followed by the 50 questions/response scales in the paper questionnaire sent to the IFs (ASOIF, 2021, p. 4). Chapter 1 ('Background') of the questionnaire also includes general questions concerning subjects such as compliance with the World Anti-Doping Code

<sup>2</sup> Only the ASOIF's full members completed the GTF indicators for the 2017 review.



and the Olympic Charter and the IF’s staff size and legal status (all but four of the summer Olympic IFs are registered as non-profit associations in the country they are based<sup>3</sup>).

**Table 3**

Question 2.7: Annual financial reports following external audit (transparency dimension)

Possible responses (predefined scale)	No	Some financial information published on IF website	Publication of externally audited financial reports on IF website	Publication of audited financial reports, easy to find on IF website	Publication of audited financial reports for at least the last three years, easy to find on IF website, extra data, management letter
Self-assessed score	0	1	2	3	4
Evidence for the self-assessed score (URL, article of statutes, etc.)	<i>To be provided by the IF</i>	<i>To be provided by the IF</i>	<i>To be provided by the IF</i>	<i>To be provided by the IF</i>	<i>To be provided by the IF</i>

The ASOIF published a final report after each review (ASOIF, 2016, 2017, 2020, 2022). The reports for 2016 and 2017 did not show the scores obtained by each IF; the reports for 2020 and 2022 gave clusters of scores for the IFs. Each IF also receives its own scores for each indicator and dimension, and for the computed total. The aim of reporting the results in this way is to encourage each IF to improve, not to identify the IFs with the highest or lowest scores (‘naming and shaming’). Indeed, direct comparisons between IFs would be meaningless, as they vary greatly in terms of their capacities (staff and revenues) to apply governance principles (see below).

Overall, the governance of Olympic IFs has improved over the six years since the ASOIF began conducting its reviews. Only eight ASOIF members scored more than 122 points out of 200 in the first review, in 2017, whereas all 28 ASOIF members scored more than 130 points in the fourth review, in 2022 (120 points for associate members, except for the World Dance Sport Federation<sup>4</sup>). The AIBA (since renamed the International Boxing Association) did not take part in the third and fourth reviews because it was going through an extremely difficult period, including in its governance. The IF for karate did not take part in the third review but did complete the questionnaire in 2022, although it was no longer an associate member of the ASOIF, having been removed from the programme for Paris 2024.

<sup>3</sup>The four exceptions are: the International Surfing Association (ISA), which is a charity under section 501(c)(3) of the US Internal Revenue Code; the International Tennis Federation and World Rugby, which are companies limited by shares; and World Sailing, which is a company limited by guarantee.

<sup>4</sup> The World Dance Sport Federation, whose score was just over the mean of 100 points, governs breaking, which was added to the programme for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games in 2020.

In the name of transparency, the ASOIF publishes all documents relating to this project on its website ([www.asoif.com/governance-task-force](http://www.asoif.com/governance-task-force)). The IFs' appreciation of this process's importance appears to be increasing, as indicated by the involvement of an IF's CEO (or equivalent) or its specialist governance unit (17 summer IFs have set up governance units since the beginning of the twenty-first century; ASOIF, 2022: 12). The ASOIF created a Governance Support and Monitoring Unit in 2019 to provide its members with examples of best governance practices for each indicator (documents are available on the GTF webpage).

Results of the four reviews conducted since 2017 can be compared because the GTF's 50 indicators have remained almost identical over this period (except for slight changes in wording a three indicators replacing less useful ones). Overall, the IFs' governance appears to have improved from one review to the next, as the mean governance score (after mediation) increased from 104 points in 2017 to 121 points in 2018, 141 points in 2020 and 156 points in 2022. In 2022, seven IFs achieved scores close to the maximum score, that is between 175 and 189 points out of 200. These IFs are, in alphabetical order: Badminton World Federation, FIFA, International Equestrian Federation, International Tennis Federation, Union Cycliste Internationale, World Athletics, and World Rugby. Three new indicators were introduced for 2022 to cover governance issues that did not arise during the first three reviews (e.g.: 6.4 Implementation of a risk management programme in the IF) and replaced three less useful indicators (ASOIF, 2022, p. 54).

### ***Comments on the IFs' GTF governance scores***

Every ASOIF review has shown the presence of three main groups of IFs: A (high scores), B (medium scores) and C (low scores). A graph of each IF's ranking (on the abscissa) and the percentage of indicators it fulfils (ordinate) gives an S-shaped curve that is typical of all organisations adopting innovations (Rogers, 1962) —in this case governance — suggesting that group A represents the so-called 'early adopters', group B the 'late adopters' and group C the 'medium of the road' adopters. SGO scores show a similar curve (Geeraert, 2015, p. 9).

The last three reviews included an initial chapter (entitled 'Background') containing questions about the number of people an IF employs (staff) and its average annual revenue. The ASOIF's members form a highly disparate group in these respects. IFs with large staffs and large annual revenues tend to have high governance scores, although this is also the case for some medium-sized IFs, such as the Badminton World Federation, World Taekwondo and World Triathlon. This trend increased between the two most recent reviews (ASOIF, 2022, p. 9). The 2022 review provides detailed statistics on IFs' staff numbers (full-time equivalents at the end of 2021) and average annual revenues for the period 2016-2021 (ASOIF, 2022, pp. 24-25), and on these two parameters' substantial impacts on governance scores (ASOIF, 2022, pp. 26-27).

In addition, IFs that have introduced limits on their elected officials' terms of office obtained higher scores than those that have not done this (ASOIF, 2022, p. 40). Twenty-seven IFs out of 33 had imposed such limits in 2022, compared with 22 out of 31 IFs two years earlier. At the same time, this was the Democracy indicator (# 4.6, see Appendix 1) with the lowest mean score (ASOIF, 2022, p. 32), so it is clearly a point to improve to increase the total score. In addition, the ASOIF's successive reviews include the lowest and highest scores for each dimension, which helps the IFs to decide where they should focus their efforts for improving their own governance. The Parliamentary Assembly of the

Council of Europe has welcomed the ASOIF and Olympic IFs' efforts in this domain (Council of Europe, 2018, point 10).

Other organisations to have used all or part of the GTF tool include the Association of International Olympic Winter Sports Federations (AIOWF), which published the results of the GTF-based assessments it conducted four times (last in 2022). The Association of IOC Recognised International Sports Federations (ARISF) and Alliance of Independent recognised Members of Sport (AIMS), both of which were components of the Global Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF) until it was disbanded (GAISF, 2019), have used 20 of the GTF's 50 indicators. Moreover, in 2020, Working Group 3 (Optimising the processes of compliance with good governance principles to mitigate the risk of corruption) of the International Partnership Against Corruption in Sport (IPACS) (IPACS, 2020), selected the GTF's indicators to assess sport governance. These indicators are thus becoming an 'industry standard' for non-profit sport organisations.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2018, point 18) has called for a set of governance indicators drawn up in conjunction with an internationally recognised standardisation body such as the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO). If this were to happen, the ISO would consult the parties concerned (the IFs), as did the ASOIF. This consultation process would undoubtedly produce a similar consensus to the GTF indicators.

Despite its value in encouraging IFs to improve their governance, the GTF has limits. The following section examines these limits and possible solutions for overcoming them.

### **Criticisms of and Possible Improvements to the GTF and Other Governance Assessment Tools**

These criticisms can be divided into two categories: those inherent to using indicators to measure an organisation's performance and those specific to the procedure conducted by the ASOIF since 2016. Similar criticisms can be levelled at other indicator-based tools: 'They are all flawed' (Geeraert, 2022, p. 152).

#### ***Criticisms of Indicators in General***

Indicators do not provide objective measures of reality, in whatever field they are used; they are subjective proxies that provide imperfect measures of this reality. Nevertheless, both the academic literature and the World Bank recognise their utility for evaluating the governance of organisations, whether they are in the public-sector, the commercial sector or, like sport organisations, the tertiary sector (Kaufmann et al., 2008). For example, the World Bank conducts annual assessments of the quality of governance in over 200 countries by compiling a complex set of Worldwide Governance Indicators.

Calls for governance indicators to be based on theoretical criteria (e.g., Geeraert, 2022, p. 155) have arisen in response to the fact that researchers have often based their choices of indicators on their personal preferences. Nevertheless, these choices still tend to be guided by the numerous governance principles drawn up since the beginning of the twenty-first century (e.g., listed by Chappelet & Mrkonjic, 2013). What is more, no adequate theory of governance has yet been

formulated, even though several authors have put forward proposals (Parent & Hoye, 2018). Despite the lack of a firm theoretical framework, researchers, including Kaufmann and Kraay (2011), have described four criteria that indicators must satisfy: they must be valid, reliable, legitimate and functional.

Validity refers to an indicator's ability to measure what it is intended to measure (Geeraert, 2021; Thomas, 2010). In the case of governance, the lack of a theoretical consensus on what the concept exactly means restricts the validity of indicators (Girginov, 2022).

Reliability refers to an indicator's ability to give consistent results even when applied by different people and/or in different situations (Geeraert 2021; Safarty 2015). Pielke et al. (2020) is one of only a very few studies to have tested this criterion, as it assessed the governance of 11 American federations on the basis of evaluations conducted by people outside these federations. Overall, the NSGO indicators used in this study showed satisfactory reliability (Pearson's correlation = 0.84; Spearman's rho = 0.76), but reliability was notably higher when these indicators were used to assess lower performing organisations than when they were used to evaluate the best federations.

The consequences of reliability issues can be reduced by carefully designing the results presentation strategy, which is the fifth step in the process of constructing governance indicators (Geeraert, 2021; Kaufmann et al., 2011; Nardo et al., 2005). Indeed, it is essential to bear in mind that 'the instrument should be regarded as a barometer rather than a dogmatic tool that provides the ultimate assessment of good governance' (Geeraert, 2022, p. 161). This observation further highlights why indicators should not be used to 'name and shame.'

Legitimacy refers to an indicator's acceptability to the organisations it is used to evaluate. The more legitimate an indicator, the easier it is to apply. The ASOIF GTF's indicators have good legitimacy because the task force that chose them included four representatives of the IFs. In addition, the IPACS' Working Group 3 drew up 'benchmark guidelines' in the form of 'meta-data sheets' for each of the 50 GTF indicators before using them to measure sport organisation governance (see [www.ipacs.sport/good-governance-task](http://www.ipacs.sport/good-governance-task)). According to Geeraert (2018, p. 36), these guidelines further increased the GTF indicators' legitimacy.

Functionality refers to whether an indicator is practical and usable (Geeraert, 2022, p. 160). Devising sets of indicators usually involves making compromises between the validity and reliability criteria, on the one hand, and the functionality criterion, on the other hand (Barthélémy, 2021). For example, including large numbers of indicators may increase a tool's validity and reliability but reduce its functionality. Indeed, tools must be as parsimonious as possible (Girginov, 2022) in order to reduce the time needed to collect data, which is an important aspect of a tool's usability. In the case of the NSGO, Pielke et al. (2020) estimated that a triple evaluation (necessary in terms of reliability) of America's 47 sport federations would require five full-time staff for an entire year!

### ***Criticisms of the ASOIF-GTF Procedure***

The GTF indicators have proved to be practical and usable (and therefore functional) on four occasions. Because they require IFs to answer just 50 questions, they do not take too long to measure

or moderate. Although the first version of the tool ‘lacked clarity in places’ (ASOIF, 2017, p. 7), the continuous improvement process has resulted in a set of indicators that now meet the requirement for clarity and parsimony (Girginov, 2022, p. 11).

One way of improving the ASOIF’s governance assessment procedure would be to use several independent experts including some belonging to public organisations and other stakeholders to moderate the IFs’ self-reported scores (rather than just a single expert appointed by the ASOIF). Even better would be to conduct a ‘public evaluation’ involving representatives of athletes and their entourage or the media, as Girginov (2022, p. 11) suggested. Other possible improvements include introducing a margin of error for each indicator (plus or minus 0 to 0.5 points) and perhaps increasing their number (within the limits of clarity and parsimony). Conversely, it may be possible to reduce the number of indicators by using exploratory data analysis to determine which indicators are truly important and which indicators could be eliminated without losing too much information (for an example of how factor analyses can be used in the field of sport organisations, see Terrien et al.’s (2021) classification of French sport federations). Exploratory data analysis could also be used to test the validity of the current dimensions of governance, which are subjective constructs (Pielke et al., 2020). Determining more objective dimensions is particularly important, as doing so would clarify the links between the scores for different dimensions, which are not perfectly correlated (Pielke et al., 2020). Therefore, a single composite index score can mask very different realities, a fact Girginov (2022, p. 12) highlighted when he asked: ‘How is [it] then possible for an IF to score high on democracy and transparency and low on control mechanism and development simultaneously?’

Some of the GTF’s 50 indicators are clearly more important than others. Indicator 2.7, for example, is undoubtedly more important to adequate governance than indicator 2.9 (see Table 2). Moreover, the GTF’s five dimensions and 50 indicators may not be independent (e.g., democracy and control mechanisms go together), so it might be possible to divide the indicators into two or even three lists (‘must haves and nice to haves’ or ‘basic, intermediate, advanced,’ as in the NSGO; Geeraert, 2018c) without separating them into ‘dimensions’. This would be particularly useful for small IFs and national federations, as ‘one-size-does-not-fit-all’ (Parent, 2022, p. 3). On the other hand, weighting the indicators would be very subjective and premature without a much better theoretical framework for the concept of governance (Nardo et al, 2005, p. 31). Attributing equal weight to all of a tool’s indicators is currently the approach’s least important limitation (Geeraert, 2022, p. 161) unless some indicators could be directly linked to the organisation’s aims.

Selectively eliminating the least telling indicators would make room for additional indicators measuring new governance concerns, without exceeding the total of 50 indicators, a number that has proven its operational feasibility (parsimony criterion, Girginov, 2022). The revised GTF used for the fourth ASOIF review took a first step in this direction by replacing three less useful indicators with three new indicators (ASOIF, 2022, p. 54). Indeed, opening the list to new indicators is consistent with the evolving nature of governance and the need for IFs to adapt their governance from year to year, rather than seeking an eternally valid ‘good governance.’ Possible additions to the GTF include indicators measuring whether an IF has developed a safeguarding programme or an online version of its sport, as recommended by the IOC (ASOIF, 2022, p. 48). Adding new indicators would also ensure the GTF tool remained ‘challenging’, especially for IFs whose scores are close to the maximum 200 points.

Girginov (2022, p. 86) criticised the fact that the GTF does not measure an IF’s organisational culture, because—according to Girginov—improvements in governance begin with changes to the values underlying this culture. A similar criticism can be levelled at all the other governance assessment tools currently available. Nevertheless, it would be useful to incorporate the cultural component of governance, as the importance of some indicators may vary according to the organisation and country in question. For example, perspectives on term limits, which are often linked to age limits, may differ between countries due to differences in the value cultures attach to age versus youth. Indeed, Hofstede (1984) found links between organisational culture and country culture. The culture underlying the GTF indicators (and other governance indicators) is predominantly European, especially Anglo-American. That being said, IFs have gradually imposed this culture on the world of sport through their statutes and rules. Moreover, it would be difficult to include indicators for measuring organisational culture without creating different versions of the GTF tool for each cultural region, which would go against the GTF’s aim of providing a single international standard for measuring sport organisation governance.

An IF’s leader’s/president’s attitude/stance has a profound impact on an IF’s organisational culture (see Chappelet et al., 2020, for a discussion of the Union Cycliste Internationale, which changed its president four times in 20 years). To measure the impact of an IF’s leaders, it would be necessary to create indicators for measuring the leadership’s desire to govern better, rather than just to ‘fulfil the indicators/tick the boxes.’ This cultural aspect of governance is, of course, very difficult to assess and could be quite subjective.

As noted in section 2, all four ASOIF reviews have shown that the IFs with the highest revenues and largest staff also obtain the highest governance scores, (ASOIF, 2022, p. 9). Future governance reviews could incorporate the impact of this parameter by reporting scores according to revenue or staff size (ASOIF, 2022, p. 27), as outlined in Table 4.

**Table 4**  
Model for Publishing IFs’ Final Scores According to their Staff Size

IF score → IF staff size ↓	>170	150-169	<150
0-9 (XS)			
10-19 (S)			
20-49 (M)			
50-119 (L)			
>120 (XL)	FIFA		

Evaluations of IF governance can improve our understanding of the determinants of effective governance and reveal other key factors in addition to organisation size or revenues. Indeed, the data collected should allow researchers to test theories concerning the impacts of different factors on effective governance and the consequences of improving governance (Coppedge et al., 2011; Gisselquist, 2012).

Results could also be reported according to the ASOIF’s Olympic revenue distribution categories (category A: WA, FIG, FINA; category B, etc.). Because these funds are the main source of income for most IFs (ASOIF, 2019, p. 36), the ASOIF could use this fact to promote better governance

by integrating governance scores into the criteria it uses to determine the sum it redistributes to each IF.

Problems within a national federation can easily sully an IF's reputation, as occurred in gymnastics when a sexual abuse scandal within USA Gymnastics<sup>5</sup> threatened to damage the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG). The FIG reacted by creating a Gymnastics Ethics Foundation in 2019. IFs should try and prevent such problems occurring by setting up governance training and evaluation programs for their national federations. The 2022 version of the GTF included an indicator on this issue (#4.8: Do you provide support to help enhance the governance of IF member associations?). More indicators could be added to better evaluate these programmes, their funding, and the risks national federations pose to their IF. Yeh and Krieger (2019) published a rare case study of the implications of World Athletics' governance reforms for its national federations, and Cho et al. (2022) examined Olympic IFs' strategies for managing compliance by national federations. National Olympic committees and public sport bodies (e.g., in Australia, Great Britain and Italy) have also started taking an interest in their national federations' governance.

## Conclusion

This article briefly presents the four main indicator-based tools for evaluating international sport organisation governance that have been developed since the beginning of the twenty-first century. It then provides a detailed description of the ASOIF's GTF tool, which has been applied on several occasions to IFs for Olympic summer and winter sports and to other IFs (members of the GAISF). While recognising the limitations of indicator-based methods, we draw on the ASOIF's experience in this field and new ideas inspired by the academic literature and the authors' practical experiences of assessing governance to suggest possible improvements to governance indicators and the assessment process. Indeed, although the GTF evaluation tool is now well established and has proven its utility to IFs and their associations, there is scope for reviewing its indicators and for more clearly explaining its scores and limitations before applying it again, notably for the fifth ASOIF governance review, planned for 2024.<sup>6</sup> Such a practical implication is the main contribution of this article.

Clearly, external evaluations of IFs' governance impinge on their traditional self-rule and lead to a standardised form of meta-governance coordinated by outside bodies, notably the IOC and national governments, which consider 'modern' governance<sup>7</sup> (often referred to as 'good' governance) a prerequisite for continuing to respect sport's long-prized autonomy (Chappelet, 2015; Girginov, 2022). We would argue that a reduction in IFs' autonomy – for instance of freely establishing its

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<sup>5</sup> A scandal over a US Gymnastics team doctor who had sexually abused gymnasts for more than 20 years led to the bankruptcy and then complete restructuring of USA Gymnastics. The United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee was severely criticised, including from the US Congress, for the way it handled the case.

<sup>6</sup> For this fifth review (in 2024), the GTF decided at the beginning of 2023 to define 10 new indicators to assess new governance issues which have emerged since 2016. These 10 new indicators will allow for the creation of a new dimension focused on the IFs' organisational management and will allow to keep the 50 existing indicators for the sake of comparisons with the four previous reviews.

<sup>7</sup> Adjective used by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2018).

sporting rules such as term limits – is an acceptable price to pay for improved governance and image of world sport.

An underlying premise of (repeatedly) evaluating an organisation's governance is that increases in governance scores actually reflect improved governance practices. But is this the case? Or has 'having good governance become a superficial, box-ticking exercise to obtain funding or to illustrate an organisation's compliance to accepted norms' (Parent & Hoye, 2018, p. 20) without leading to real change? For example, FIFA obtained the second highest governance scores on the SGO (Geeraert, 2015) at a time when it was going through a major governance crisis. Also in football, the United States Soccer Federation (USSF) obtained a good transparency score because it publishes its financial reports (Pielke et al., 2019), but these reports did not mention the payment of large bonuses to USSF leaders and board members.

Finally, there is the question of whether governance reforms impact an IF's performance and the development of its sport. The GTF indicators do not provide any data on this issue as they target only inputs, not outputs or outcomes. This is also the case for the other governance assessment codes and tools analysed by Girginov (2022). In fact, most governance codes created by sport organisations (and by companies, see Zattoni & Cuomo, 2008) were motivated by the desire to increase an organisation's legitimacy, rather than a real desire for change. Consequently, most governance principles do not impact an organisation's performance. After conducting a systematic review of sport organisations, Parent and Hoye (2018) noted: 'Although the link between board structure and organisational performance has been empirically found, the link between other governance principles and organisational performance remains lacking.' Havaris and Danylchuk (2007) made a similar remark about Canadian sport federations ten years earlier: 'In this assessment of the effectiveness of the SFAF [Sport Funding Accountability Framework], it was deemed that it has not had a tremendous effect on NSO [National Sport Organisation] development since its implementation, but has had some influence.' They continued: 'the SFAF has generated a tendency towards accountancy rather than accountability.' Will this also be the case for sport organisation governance assessment tools? Many other approaches to assess the performance of (sport) organisations exist and it is not sure that the current governance reforms will impact on the performance of the national and international sport organisations.



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## Appendix 1 – GTF Indicators 2021-2022 (ASOIF, 2022. p. 28-36)

**Transparency:** see Table 2

### **Integrity:**

- 3.1 Has a unit or officer in charge of ensuring the IF abides by the IOC Code of Ethics and/or the IF's own Code of Ethics.
- 3.2 Has a unit or officer in charge of ensuring the IF abides by the World Anti-Doping Code.
- 3.3 Complies with the Olympic Movement Code on the Prevention of the Manipulation of Competitions.
- 3.4 Conflict of interest policy identifying actual, potential and perceived conflicts with exclusion of members with an actual conflict from decision-making.
- 3.5 Establish confidential reporting mechanisms for 'whistle blowers' with protection scheme for individuals coming forward.
- 3.6 Provide for appropriate investigation of threats to sport integrity (competition manipulation, gambling-related or other).
- 3.7 Make public decisions of disciplinary bodies and related sanctions, as well as pending cases, to the extent permitted by regulations.
- 3.8 Appropriate gender balance in Executive Board or equivalent.
- 3.9 Programmes or policies in place to foster greater diversity of backgrounds in composition of Executive Board and committees.
- 3.10 Programmes or policies in place regarding safeguarding from harassment and abuse.

### **Democracy:**

- 4.1 Election of the President and a majority of members of all executive bodies.
- 4.2 Clear policies/rules on campaigning to ensure election candidates can campaign on balanced footing including opportunity for candidates to present their visions/programmes.
- 4.3 Election process with secret ballot under a clear procedure/regulation.
- 4.4 Make public all open positions for elections and non-staff appointments including the process for candidates and full details of the roles, job descriptions, application deadlines and assessment.
- 4.5 Establishment and publication of eligibility rules for candidates for election, together with due diligence assessment.
- 4.6 Term limits for elected officials.
- 4.7 Provide for the representation of key stakeholders (e.g. 'active' athletes as defined in the Olympic Charter) in governing bodies.
- 4.8 Provide support to help enhance the governance of IF member associations.
- 4.9 Actively monitor the governance compliance of IF member associations with Statutes, Code of Ethics and other rules.
- 4.10 Ensuring equal opportunities for members to participate in General Assemblies.

### **Development:**

- 5.1 Clear policy and process in place to determine transparent allocation of resources in declared development objectives.

- 5.2 Information published on redistribution/support activity for main stakeholders, including financial figures.
- 5.3 Monitoring/audit process of the use of distributed funds.
- 5.4 Respect principles of sustainable development and regard for the environment.
- 5.5 Existence of social responsibility policy and participation programmes targeting hard-to-reach areas.
- 5.6 Education programmes (topics other than integrity) and assistance to coaches, judges, referees and athletes.
- 5.7 Put in place integrity awareness/education programmes.
- 5.8 Legacy programmes to assist communities in which events are hosted.
- 5.9 Anti-discrimination policies covering a range of characteristics.
- 5.10 IF dedicates appropriate resources to the Paralympic/disability discipline(s) in the sport (Note: for sports that have no Paralympic or disability discipline, the mean score for the rest of the questionnaire will be awarded for this question).

**Control mechanisms:**

- 6.1 Establish an internal ethics committee with independent representation.
- 6.2 Establish an internal audit committee that is independent from the IF decision-making body.
- 6.3 Adopt policies and processes for internal financial controls (e.g. budgeting, separation of duties, dual approvals for payments, IFRS/GAAP audit standard).
- 6.4 Implement a risk management programme.
- 6.5 Adopt policies and procedures which comply with competition law/anti-trust legislation in eligibility of athletes and sanctioning of events.
- 6.6 Observe open tenders for major commercial and procurement contracts (other than events).
- 6.7 Decisions made can be challenged through internal appeal mechanisms with a final right of appeal to Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).
- 6.8 Due diligence and effective risk management in bidding requirements, presentation, assessment and allocation of main events.
- 6.9 Awarding of main events follows an open and transparent process.
- 6.10 Compliant with applicable laws regarding data protection (such as General Data Protection Regulation) and takes measures to ensure IT security.