

AGGIS: Transparency

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Introduction

During their meeting on 5-6 June 2012, the EU Expert Group on Good Governance (XG GG) concluded that 'transparency' is, next to 'democracy' and 'accountability', one of the top level topics concerning good governance in international sport federations.

In this paper we give meaning to the concept of 'transparency'. We focus on the different approaches that are visible in the good governance and transparency literature. From this theoretical perspective, we look at the specific context of International Sport Federations (IFs).

Defining transparency

Transparency has been trumpeted as the key to good governance (Grimmelikhuijsen 2012: 17). Transparency will lead to an open culture, that will benefit us all (Hood 2006). The focus in transparency literature is on governments. Government failures are blamed on a 'culture of secrecy' (Roberts 2006). Transparency can be conceived as an intrinsic value of democratic, accountable organizations - and thus a value in itself - or it can be seen as a means to achieve other important goals, such as less corruption. (Grimmelikhuijsen 2012: 52).

In this paper, we consider transparency as an aspect of good governance of sports federations, and thus a value in itself. However, it is not 'the more, the better'. As we further define transparency, it can be argued that overloading external actors with a high number of inaccurate reports might be conceived as less transparent than providing less, but accurate content. Not more, but the way it is offered is important (Grimmelikhuijsen 2012: 58).

Definitions on transparency are often quite broad and linked to government transparency. Most definitions are about the extent to which an organization/institution reveals relevant information about its own decisions processes, procedures, functioning and performance (e.g. Curtin & Meijer 2006). Grimmelikhuijsen (2012: 55) defines transparency as 'the availability of information about an organization or actor allowing external actors to monitor the internal workings or performance of that organization.'

Approaches to transparency

Grimmelikhuijsen (2012) distinguishes three strands of literature when it comes to approaches to transparency: the optimists, the pessimists and the skeptics.

- The optimists describe highly positive connotations of transparency (e.g. Brin 1998, Oliver 2004). It helps holding organization accountable and stimulates a culture of openness (Grimmelikhuijsen 2012: 70). Due to optimists, any negative or perverse effect can be mitigated by proper implementation. Transparency is ultimately something good (Hood 2006).

- On the other hand, the pessimist approach states that perverse effects are inherent. More transparency leads to increased just and unjust blaming – the so-called ‘blame games’ (Hood 2007, Worthy 2010). Transparency is overrated; for transparency to work, it needs receptors capable of processing it (Heald 2006). However, information can be too complex. Or, the real proceedings of negotiations are pushed to other, less transparent levels (Stasavage 2006). In short, transparency can lead to misinformation, information overload and increased unjust blaming (Grimmelikhuijsen 2012: 71).
- Finally, the skeptics argue there is no effect of transparency. The importance of transparency is overstated (Grimmelikhuijsen 2012: 73).

Operationalizing transparency

Dimensions of transparency

Information is a central element of this definition, at which Grimmelikhuijsen (2012) distinguishes three characteristics: (a) the completeness of information, (b) the colouring of information and (c) the usability of information, including its timeliness. In the case of real time transparency, there is continuous surveillance by external actors, while with retrospective transparency, information on policies of proceedings is released afterwards in a reporting cycle.

Objects of transparency

Linked to the ‘internal workings’ component of the definition, Grimmelikhuijsen (2012: 64) differentiates among three sorts of internal workings, leading to three types of transparency: (a) decision making transparency, which is about the openness about steps taken for a decision, (b) policy transparency, which is focused on transparency about the content of policies/ measures/ decisions and (c) policy outcome transparency: provisions and timeliness of information about policy effects.

When operationalizing transparency in sports federations, choices have to be made about which of the nine junctions between dimensions and objects are most relevant.

Table 1 (based on Grimmelikhuijsen 2012: 66)

		Dimensions of transparency		
		Completeness	Colour	Usability
Objects of transparency	Decision making	Complete information on the process	Reflecting all values and opinions in the process	Timely and understandable information on the process
	Content	All relevant information is available	Reflecting negative and positive sights	Timely and understandable information on the content
	Outcomes	All data about outcomes are available	Effects are determined objectively	Timely and understandable information on the outcomes

The debate on transparency in IF's

A quick analysis of the concept of transparency in good governance codes, rules or principles of five IFs (see Appendix 1) shows that IFs:

- Mainly speak about 'key aspects of communication';
- Set very general guidelines for this communication ('making public all information about its organization and leaders');
- See transparency as the disclosure of information on procedures, particularly in the areas of decision making process and finance;
- Sometimes provide no further description of transparency.

At the one hand, such an approach of the IFs, i.e. firmly focused on their own autonomy, contains the danger of permissiveness and, as a consequence, (too) little transparency. Actors in and around IFs seem not always to define and interpret the concept of transparency in the same way. While IFs do not always show their need for transparency and lack clear transparency rules, other actors, including EU, media and critical citizens, seem increasingly aware of value transparency and want to draw clearer guidelines. At the same time, such an approach, i.e. focused on the realization of transparency and on 'open' and - accordingly - corruption-free organizations, contains the danger of too much "faith" in transparency. Transparency can become a goal instead of a means, while more transparency does not automatically lead towards better performing organizations.

Key questions

With regard to transparency in IFs, the concept has to be clear – what do we mean exactly by transparency? – as well as the approach to implementation. The following questions therefore have to be answered:

- What is/are the main object(s) of transparency? Process, content and/or outcomes? Which of these objects are most relevant for IF's?
- When is the transparency level seen as adequate, with regard to completeness, color and usability?
- In which areas and to what extent does the IF have to be actively transparent, by providing information itself? And on which terrains is passive transparency – in which information is only disclosed on demand – adequate (Grimmelikhuijsen 2012: 48)?
- Are context-specific codes needed or are standardized codes for all IF's recommended?

Appendix 1: Transparency in IFs

International and European sports associations	Title	Transparency
European Olympic Committees & Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile	Statement of Good governance principles	How a governing body communicates with its members is a key indicator of the quality of its governance processes. Key aspects of communications include: a clear statement of the governing body's approach to governance and the articulation of its responsibilities to members; regular communication with members on policy decisions, elections and other matters (executive, legislative, judicial, commercial); two-way communication. Providing channels for communication of feedback from the membership. The governing body shall regularly report formally to its membership about its activities, including a summary of the governing body's finances and financial activities.
Union Cycliste Internationale	UCI Rules of Good governance	To respect its policy of transparency, the UCI is committed to making public all information about its organisation and leaders . Detailed information on the UCI's structure (election procedure, decision-making process and, in greater detail, its constitution and regulations) are available, either on request or on its website. Information is given on the persons occupying leading positions within UCI bodies and their biographies are available. Their involvement in any other body (sports organizations and commercial companies) is also clearly stipulated, as well as their date of election (or reelection) and their term of office.
International Olympic Committee	Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance of the Olympic and Sports Movement	Transparency and communication : Financial information should be disclosed gradually and in appropriate form to members, stakeholders and the public. Disclosure of financial information should be done on an annual basis. The financial statements of sports organisations should be presented in a consistent way in order to be easily understood.
European Team Sports Association	Good governance by sports federations	-
Union of European Football Associations	Good governance and autonomy	-

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