**Table 1: Summary of comparative sport policy challenges, limitations and strategies**

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| **Issue** | **Description** | **Example Authors** | **Strategies** |
| **Philosophical assumptions** | The need to explicitly articulate the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin comparative studies in order to ensure scholars do not talk past one another. | Øyen 1990, Henry *et al.* 2005, Landman and Carvalho 2017. | Explicit articulation of ontological and epistemological assumptions and recognise limits of knowledge claims. |
| **Purpose/goals** | The need to clarify the overall purpose and intent of comparative analysis (i.e. descriptive, classification, hypothesis and predictive) recognising that each of these purposes has its own advantages and disadvantages and unique set of challenges and limitations that need to be overcome. | Øyen 1990, Dogan and Pélassy 1990, Henry *et al.* 2005, Landman and Carvalho 2017. | Acknowledge and recognise the limitations of each comparative approach: Descriptive accounts avoid over description; classification avoid reducing variables to meaningless categories; hypothesis and prediction should clearly delineate relationship between variables. |
| **Unit of Analysis** | The decision of whether to focus on macro, meso or micro level policy related concerns and the assumption that the nation state is the most appropriate level in which to make comparisons | Øyen 1990, Baistow 2000, Dogan and Pélassy 1990, Hantrais 2009, Jowell 1998, Kohn 1987, Mills *et al.* 2006, Ragin 2014. | Clearly articulate and justify choice of unit of analysis. Recognise the limitations of this methodological decision. |
| **Selecting Countries (sample)** | Deciding on how many countries to compare (i.e. small-N or large N type comparative studies) with either one, few, or many cases. | Ebbinghaus 2005, Henry *et al.* 2005, Hantrais 2009, Jowell 1998, Landman and Carvalho 2017, Lijphart 1971, Ragin 2006, 2014. | Acknowledge methodological trade-off. Strike balance between too few and too many countries. More countries is not necessarily better |
| **Construct Equivalence** | Ensuring that the instruments employed measure the same (i.e. equivalent) constructs across selected cases. | Øyen 1990, 2004, Baistow 2000, Hantrais 2009, Jowell 1998, Landman and Carvalho 2017, Mills *et al.* 2006, Schuster 2007. | Always translate and pilot test comparative instruments using native speakers. |
| **Sample Equivalence** | Deciding on which countries to include and why. Often due to practical and historical reasons case selection are often subject to ‘selection bias’ i.e. the selection of cases based on a positive outcome resulting in false inferences | Øyen 1990, Ebbinghaus 2005, Hantrais 2009, Jowell 1998, Kohn 1987, Schuster 2007. | Explicit articulation of case selection/sample strategy to avoid selection bias and illusion of random sampling. |
| **Functional Equivalence** | The issue of ensuring that data (particularly secondary data) collected is standardized and contextualised (if this is possible) to allow for meaningful comparisons. | Øyen 2004, Dogan and Pélassy 1990, Ebbinghaus 2005, Hantrais 2009, Jowell, 1998, Landman and Carvalho 2017, Schuster 2007. | Ideally standardise all data sets. Avoid using secondary data (where possible) or at least acknowledge limitations of inferences that can be made. |
| **Data collection – access and analysis** | The methodological trade-off between selecting variables that sufficiently capture the phenomenon in question versus the number of cases and the feasibility and practicality of data collection. | Øyen 1990, Ebbinghaus 2005, Landman and Carvalho 2017, Lijphart 1971. | Avoid using too many variables in instruments to avoid becoming meaningless  Identify researcher or research team and develop agreed operational protocols. |
| **Data output – presentation and dissemination** | A series of practical issues relating to the reliability and validity of data (e.g., ensuring standardised protocol, issues of time-lag, and limitations of using single point data) and the willingness of stakeholders to share sensitive information. | Øyen 1990, Hantrais 2009, Landman and Carvalho 2017, Schuster 2007. | Use multiple data collection strategies.  Keep period from data collection to publication as short as possible. |
| **Data output (interpretation/ generalisation)** | A number of issues surrounding how data is interpreted and findings are presented and disseminated, to which audiences, and how (if at all) this information is used by decision-makers to inform sport policy in practice. | Øyen 1990, Hantrais 2009, Landman and Carvalho 2017, Schuster 2007. | Avoid oversimplifying presentation of data and acknowledge study limitations to the lay audience. Consider the balance between the demands of cross comparative research audience for generalisable outcomes, and the trade-offs with useful and usable local data for individual countries. |

Adapted from: Øyen (1990, 2004), Dowling *et al.* (2018), Hantrais (2008), Jowell (1998), Landman and Carvalho 2017, Mills *et al.* (2006), Schuster (2007).

**Table 2: Philosophical assumptions and methodological approaches of comparative elite sport policy studies**

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| **Issue**  **Study characteristics/**  **strategies** | **Green and Houlihan (2005)** | **Bergsgard *et al.* (2007)** | **Houlihan and Green (2008)** | **De Bosscher *et al.* (2008)** | **Andersen and Ronglan (2012)** | **De Bosscher *et al.* (2015)** |
| **Philosophical assumptions** | Post-positivism  Critical Realism | Post-positivism  Epistemology not explicitly stated | Post-positivism  Critical Realism | Positivism  Realism | Post-positivism  Epistemology not explicitly stated | Positivism  Realism |
| **Purpose/goals** | To analyse the process of elite sport policy change in three countries (UK, Canada and Australia) | To identify the characteristics of sport policy in four countries (Canada, England, Germany and Norway) | To examine elite sport policy development in nine countries (China, Japan, Singapore, Germany, France, Poland, Norway, New Zealand, and the United States) | To benchmark the sport policy factors leading to international sporting success in six countries – experimental pilot study | To examine the similarities and differences of elite sport development in four Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark) | To better understand which (and how) sport policies lead to international sporting success in 13 nations and 3 regions. |
| **Unit of Analysis** | Meso and macro level – not possible to separate them. | Meso and macro level – not possible to separate them. | Meso and macro level – not possible to separate them. | Meso – as this is the only level in control of decision/ policy makers – causal modelling | Meso and macro – not appropriate to separate them – focuses on inter-organizational arrangements | Meso – as this is the only level in control of decision/policy makers – causal modelling |
| **Selecting Countries (sample)** | Most Similar System Design (MSSD) – selected by researchers    Small-*N* – 3 countries | Most Similar System Design (MSSD) – selected by researchers  Small-*N* – 4 countries | Most Similar System Design (MSSD) – selected by researchers  Small-*N* – 9 countries | Not explicitly stated – pragmatically selected by researchers  Small-*N* – 6 countries | Most Similar System Design (MSSD) – geographical based  Small-*N* – 4 countries | Not explicitly stated – any nation interested invited to participate  Small-*N* – 15 countries and 3 regions |
| **Construct Equivalence** | English only – construct equivalent assumed  Semi-structured interviews and document analysis carried out by two co-authors  Advocacy Coalition Framework employed | Not explicitly discussed  Literature review, document analysis, and 22 semi-structured interviews  Analytical framework employed – multiple dimensions: welfare regimes, institutionalism, the advocacy coalition framework, and network analysis | Not explicitly discussed  Analytical review in response to Green and Houlihan’s (2005) findings by 16 co-authors  Analytical framework employed | Translated into five languages (English, French, Dutch, Norwegian, and Italian)  Mixed methods – inventory and surveys  Econometric and rationalist approach employed | Not explicitly discussed.  Semi-structured interviews and document analysis (historical and policy documentation)  Institutional entrepreneurship perspective employed | Translated into 12 languages  Mixed methods – inventory and surveys  Econometric and rationalist approach employed |
| **Sample Equivalence** | Explicit statement of sample inclusion criteria: sporting culture, elite sport structures, interest group activity and mature economy | Explicit statement of sample inclusion criteria: economic development, wealth, and population | Explicit statement of sample inclusion criteria: history of Olympic success, government involvement and different socio-demographic characteristics | Sample based upon pre-existing research groups and invited nations. | Geographical sample. Countries similar in terms of size, socio-economic and political institutions, and strong welfare states | Any nation interested was invited to participate. Sample represented 8.5% of world population and 10% global wealth. 23% of total medals at London 2012 |
| **Functional Equivalence** | No measures evident from review | No measures evident from review | No measures evident from review | European Social Survey (2002) used to measure participation.  Triangulation of data instruments used | No measures evident from review | Used International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) and Eurobarometer (EB) surveys to standardize sport participation  Data excluded if deemed non-equivalent |
| **Data collection – access and analysis** | Four policy areas: facility development, full-time athlete support, coaching and sport science, and competition | Focuses on analytical dimensions of welfare/state systems, structure, executive-legislative relations, and coalitions. | Four policy areas: facilities, full-time athletes, coaching and sport science, and competition | Nine policy areas (pillars)  105 critical success factors  Established modus operandi | No specific areas identified – institutional theory constructs employed (e.g., legitimacy, isomorphism, organisational field etc) | Nine policy areas (pillars)  96 critical success factors and 750 sub-factors  Established modus operandi |
| **Data output – presentation and dissemination** | 2 year data collection period  Data collected by authors | 1 year data collection period  Data collected by authors | No empirical data collected | 2 year data collection period  Data collected by local researchers | Empirical data derived from a number of studies – data collection period(s) not explicitly stated.  Data collected by local researchers | 3 year data collection period  Data collected by 58 researchers and 22 policy makers |
| **Data output - interpretation/ generalization** | General conclusion statements  Acknowledged non-representativeness of sample | General conclusion statements – commercialisation and governmentalisation. | General conclusion statements  Acknowledged non-representativeness of sample but firmer conclusions could be drawn | Data presented as a scoring system and presented in a series of graphs and tables  Data excluded if findings were insufficient | General conclusion statements – similar pressures to converge but different underlying patterns of domestic adaptation | Data presented as a scoring system and presented in a series of graphs and tables  Data excluded if findings were insufficient |