The Social Construction of the Long-Term Athlete Development Framework

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This article examines the social construction of the Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) framework (Balyi et al., 2005; 2014) and the Canadian Sport for Life Leadership Team (now Sport for Life), the group responsible for the creation, development and promotion of LTAD. In particular, the study draws upon Schneider and Ingram's theory of social construction and policy design and empirical data collected from the leadership team and senior civil servants to trace the socio-political developments that have led to the emergence and development of the LTAD framework and the leadership team within Canadian sport. The analysis focuses on the role of government (via Sport Canada) and how the LTAD framework and the leadership team emerged from and attempted to influence the Canadian sport policy process. The findings reveal how the adoption of the LTAD framework can, in part, be explained by the socio-political developments or 'politicking' that occurred within and around the creation, development and dissemination of the framework itself. More broadly, the study explains how the LTAD framework has become an increasingly orthodox conception of the athlete development process despite the absence of scientific research to support many of its claims.

Keywords: Long Term Athlete Development, Social Constructionism, Not-for-Profit Sport, Athlete Development

1. **Introduction**

The Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) framework (Balyi, Way, Norris, Cardinal, & Higgs, 2005; Balyi, Way, & Higgs, 2014) has received considerable attention by policy makers, sport administrators, and practitioners in Canada despite limited scrutiny from the academic community. Commonly accredited as the brain-child of the Hungarian born, Canadian residing sport scientist Istvan Balyi (Banack, Bloom, & Falcão, 2012; Ford et al., 2011; Norris, 2010), the LTAD framework is a multi-stage competition, training, and recovery athlete development pathway. According to Balyi, the framework was developed out of a growing dissatisfaction with the superimposition of adult training and competition structures primarily on children aged 6-16 (Balyi & Hamilton, 1997; Balyi & Way, 1995). This dissatisfaction led Balyi and colleagues to conduct small-scale physiological, periodization, and motor learning research to support several of their own theses, which fundamentally questioned traditional approaches to athlete development. Balyi and colleagues published their research throughout the 1990s and early 2000s across a number of coaching outlets (e.g., Balyi, 1990, 1995, 1996; Balyi & Way, 1995; Robertson & Way, 2005) and in recent years the LTAD framework has been published as a textbook (Balyi et al., 2014).

Within Canada, the LTAD framework has been endorsed by policy makers, sport administrators, and practitioners who have begun to adopt and implement the LTAD framework as part of their strategic and organizational planning. The adoption and implementation of the LTAD framework has been led and supported by the Canadian Sport for Life Leadership team (CS4LLT) – a group of practitioners and academics from across Canada (now Sport for Life). This group of knowledge-based professionals have a broad range of experiences from across a variety of sectors including sport, education, health, and recreation and primarily provide LTAD-related support and guidance to a wide variety of

stakeholders (see Dowling & Washington, 2017). Of particular note within the Canadian sporting context has been the formal adoption of the LTAD framework by Sport Canada – the federal government agency responsible for overseeing and delivering governments objectives in sport – and the incorporation of many of the underlying principles of LTAD into the Canadian Sport Policy (CSP2; Canadian Heritage, 2012). As a result, many sport organizations have adopted and implemented the LTAD framework within their organization and strategic planning resulting in the production of sport-specific LTAD plans. All National Sport Organizations (NSOs), the governing bodies primarily responsible for organizing and delivering national team programs and setting the rules and regulations of their respective sport, for example, are now required through federal funding agreements (via Sport Canada) to incorporate LTAD principles within their strategic and operational processes in order to be eligible for federal funding.

What can be drawn from the above discussion is that the LTAD framework has, at the very least, become an increasingly popular conception of the athlete development process with (albeit anecdotal) evidence to suggest that it has been able to influence and infiltrate the highest levels of decision-making within sport in Canada. In spite of this recognition, however, the LTAD framework still remains considerably under-researched, with only a handful of scholars having questioned the framework or its underlying principles (e.g., Banack et al., 2012; Black & Holt, 2009; Collins & Bailey, 2013; Ford et al., 2011; Lang & Light, 2010). Furthermore, of these select LTAD related studies, many of them have questioned specific elements of the framework (e.g., Ford et al., 2011; Llyod & Oliver, 2012) or focused on sport-specific issues surrounding the adoption of implementation (e.g., Black & Holt, 2009; Lang & Light, 2010). The shortcoming of these previous studies is that they overlook or ignore the original intended objective of the LTAD framework which stemmed from pragmatism and an inherent desire to offer useful guidelines to sport practitioners in

order to overcome systematic shortcomings and maximize athlete potential. It is for this

reason that herein we use the terminology framework rather than model, with some scholars,

perhaps erroneously, assuming that LTAD is a model of athlete development that can be

empirically tested (e.g., Ford et al., 2011). We disagree with this as a starting point for

discussion and rather view the LTAD framework as a socially constructed and continually

evolving conception (or depiction) of the athlete development process that is underpinned by

a series of loosely connected principles (specialization, periodization etc).

In viewing the LTAD framework in this manner (i.e. a socially constructed depiction

of the athlete development process used to overcome systemic shortcomings), the above

discussion brings to the forefront a number of questions such as how, then, has the LTAD

framework become an increasingly orthodox conception of the athlete development process

despite the absence of scientific research to support many of its claims? In particular, what

developments occurred within Canadian sport that have facilitated the widespread adoption

of the LTAD framework both domestically and abroad? Furthermore, it is apparent from the

above discussion that many sports organizations both within Canada and internationally are

now under substantial pressures, often through governmental agreements (via Sport Canada

or equivalents), to comply with the principles as dictated by the LTAD framework. It follows

that if sport organizations are increasingly required to undertake such substantial changes to

their operations to align themselves with the LTAD framework, then more research is

required to understand this phenomenon.

The purpose of this present study, therefore, is to examine how the LTAD framework

was socially constructed by Balyi and colleagues within Canada from its original conception

in 1990 to its adoption by federal government in 2009 and its (albeit partial) incorporation

into the Canadian Sport Policy 2 (CSP2) in 2012. In particular, our analysis focuses on the

role of federal government (via Sport Canada) in the creation, development and promotion of

the LTAD framework and how the framework and the leadership team emerged from and influenced the Canadian sport policy process. To this end, we draw upon the theoretical insights of Schneider and Ingram's theory of social construction and policy design and empirical evidence from firsthand accounts of the leadership team and senior Sport Canada officials who were responsible for federal government adopting the LTAD framework within Canada at the time. It is through these accounts that we argue the adoption of the LTAD framework, both domestically and abroad, can largely be explained by the socio-political developments or the so-called *politicking* that occurred within and around the creation, development, and dissemination of the framework itself. It is argued, therefore, that it is only possible to understand how the LTAD framework has become an increasingly orthodox conception when situated within the broader socio-political context in which it emerged. It is for this reason that we discuss both the development of the LTAD framework and the CS4LLT concurrently as it is impossible to understand the development of one without the other.

Consequently, we make the following threefold contributions to the sport management/policy literature: First, we offer Ingram and Schneider's theory of social construction as an alternative theory of policy change to examine how the design of sport policy has led to the emergence of the LTAD framework within Canada and abroad. In particular, we contend that many policy scholars have overlooked the social construction perspective as a useful meso-level approach to explain sport policy processes (Houlihan, 2012). Second, the study offers a detailed account of how the LTAD framework, as an increasingly popular conception of athlete development, has emerged and developed within the Canadian sport context. We therefore contribute to the ongoing debate surrounding the LTAD framework (e.g., Black & Holt, 2009; Collins & Bailey, 2013; Ford et al., 2011; Lang & Light, 2010) by filling an important research gap in explaining how and why the LTAD

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framework has gained prominence within Canada and abroad in spite of support from the academic community. Third and finally, we provide an empirical contribution in that the study documents the evolution of a newly emerging organizational entity (Sport for Life) within Canadian sport and therefore responds to Thibault and Harvey's (2013) call for more research that examines contemporary developments within the Canadian sporting context.

This paper is structured as follows: First, we outline the philosophical tradition in which our research is located and theoretical perspective that is adopted herein. Next, we outline the methodological approach and empirical data collected to support our analysis. This is followed by an examination of the major socio-political developments that led to the emergence and development of the LTAD framework and the leadership team within Canadian sport between 1990 and 2012. The conclusion section then considers the implications for our findings for sport practitioners and administrators and identifies areas for future research.

2. Theoretical Background

This study is informed by the theory of social construction and policy design developed by Schneider and Ingram (Schneider & Ingram, 1988, 1993; Ingram & Schneider, 1990, 1991). The theory was developed to explain ongoing dilemmas such as why policies are perpetuated despite not solving social problems or creating equality amongst citizens. More specifically, it seeks to explain 'why some groups are advantaged more than others independently of traditional notions of political power and how policy designs can reinforce such advantages' (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, p. 334). The perspective has been applied to a variety of policy domains, most apparently social welfare, health, criminal justice and immigration (Pierce et al., 2014) but has yet to be applied a sport context. Soss (2005), for example, examined how policy design constructed citizenship for clients of the US welfare system. In particular, Soss provides a detailed account of the experiences of clients from two separate welfare programs

– Social Security Disability Disability Insurance and Aid to Families with Dependent Children. The study focuses on the processes of how welfare policies influence individual political orientation and reveals how US social welfare policy designs resulted in different client experiences, beliefs and actions. In a similar manner, we employ Schneider and Ingram's theory of social construction and policy change as a heuristic to explain how the sport policy process has led to the enablement and support for the LTAD framework within the Canadian sport context. The strength of the perspective is that it can explain the fundamental policy dilemma of who gets what, when, and how (Lasswell, 1936). In particular, it draws attention to the importance of policy design, the socially constructed, path-dependent, cyclical nature of policy-making, and why some social groups continue to be more advantaged than others as a result of the policy making process.

Central to Ingram and Schneider's social construction of policy design theory is the notion that policy-making is socially constructed. The social constructivist tradition (or social constructionism) emphasizes the importance of how individuals and groups contribute to the construction of social reality (Burger & Luckman, 1991). For social constructivists, knowledge is created (or constructed) through interaction rather than being observable and discoverable. It is for this reason it is that social constructionism often associated with an anti-foundational ontological perspective. Schneider and Ingram define social construction as 'the varying ways in which realities are shaped' (Schnieder & Ingram, 1997, p. 73). For Ingram and Schneider, social constructions are central features of the policy-making process. These social constructions, in turn, 'influence the political agenda, the selection of policy tools, as well as the rationales that legitimate policy choices' (Ingram & Schneider, 1993, p. 334). According to Ingram and Schneider (1993), 'the social construction of target populations refers to the cultural characterizations or popular images of the persons or groups who's behaviour and well-being are affected by policy' (p. 334). Target populations are

therefore groups of people who receive benefits and burdens as a result of the policy design process (Ingram, Schneider, & deLeon, 2007).

Ingram and Schneider's (1993) theory of policy change emphasizes the importance of policy design in defining social problems, shaping the rules of engagement and institutionalizes the relationships between state and non-state actors, and the future dynamic of the policy process. Policy design, according to Ingram and Schneider is the content of public policy in the text of policies, the practices through which policies are conveyed and the consequences of those associated practice (Schneider & Ingram, 1997). Their perspective indicates that 'policy create politics' through a feed-forward effect in that the past-policy design is likely to determine how politicians and decision-makers define social problems, socially construct certain target populations, and allocate appropriate resources to them. For Schneider and Ingram (1993), 'policy designs usually reproduce the prevailing institutional culture, power relationships, and social constructions, but at times depart from this pattern and introduce change' (p. 97). See Figure 1 for an overview of Schneider and Ingram's theory of social construction and policy design.

insert Figure 1 (Schneider and Ingram's theory of social construction and policy design) about here

The theory of social construction of policy design is underpinned by a number of assumptions that also underpin the present study (see Pierce et al. (2014) for a full elaboration of the assumptions of theory of social construction and policy design). First, individual actors cannot process all information and therefore rely upon heuristics to make sense of a given social problem. Actors in turn employ these heuristics in order to filter information in a biased manner resulting in the tendency for individuals to utilize information that is consistent with their pre-existing beliefs. Second, social problems are not neutral or objective phenomenon to be found or observed but rather they are socially constructed interpretations

by actors which are in turn mediated through their own beliefs and values. Defining social problem is therefore 'fundamentally a political exercise' (Ingram et al., 2014, p. 94) whereby actors 'struggle to gain acceptance of particular constructions and their consequences' (Ingram et al., 2014, p. 95). Third, these social constructions can be generalizable but are perceived and evaluated differently within different contexts. It is for this reason that Schneider and Ingram argue reality is *socially bounded* in that social constructions are found in objective conditions. It is in this sense we seek to explain how the LTAD framework was socially constructed within the social and institutional arrangements of the Canadian sport policy context.

The adoption of a social construction perspective in general focuses our attention towards the LTAD framework as a socially constructed version of reality created through a series of interactions that, in turn, has been adopted, interpreted, and utilized by decision-makers and politicians within Canada. In this manner, we utilize social constructionism as a general ontological perspective and Ingram and Schneider's theory of social construction of policy design as a specific theoretical lens in which to explain the emergence and development of the LTAD framework within the Canadian sport policy context.

3. Methods

The analysis below draws upon empirical data collected as part of a much larger investigation that examined the role of the CS4LLT within Canadian sport. More specifically, the larger study investigated the role the CS4LLT within Canadian sport policy, the relationship between the CS4LLT and Sport Canada, and the leadership team's influence on NSOs (reference omitted for review purposes). The larger investigation adopted a holistic, single-case study research design (Yin, 2013) to examine the leadership team. A case study approach is 'an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between the

phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident' (Yin, 2013, p. 16). Case study research is increasingly prevalent within sport management and is becoming one of the most commonly used methodological approaches within the field (Andrew, Pedersen, & McEvoy, 2011). The strength of this approach lies in its ability to explain contemporary phenomenon whereby the 'real-life' causal links are complex and unclear (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2013).

3.1 Sampling and Procedure

Primary data were collected using semi-structured interviews with the entire CS4LLT (n=17) and senior Sport Canada officials (n=5). Informants were purposely selected on the basis of having in-depth knowledge of the creation and adoption of the LTAD framework from the initiation of the generic LTAD framework in 2004 to its formal adoption by government (via Sport Canada) in 2009. All interview data used herein were conducted between January and September 2013, most of which took place at the Canadian Sport for Life (CS4L) National Summit held in Gatineau, Ottawa (28th January - 1st February, 2013). Interviews ranged between 31 and 125 minutes in length and were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. In order to ensure confidentiality, participants were assigned a generic job role (i.e., senior official or CS4LLT member) and a randomly allocated number (e.g., 'Senior Sport Canada Official #18). Consistent with Yin's (2013) approach, a range of secondary sources were also collected, these include organizational and policy documentation (i.e., CS4LLT, Federal Sport Policy and Sport Canada produced documentation), Canadian Sport for Life National Summit attendance data (2006-present), and observation of a series of workshops, conferences, mini-summits and CS4LLT-related meetings over a three year period (2011-2014). Secondary sources were not thematically analysed but were used during the early stages of the research process to ensure that the primary researcher was fully-immersed in the research context and then later on to triangulate and verify the primary data and findings

during the latter stages of the research process (Patton, 2002). The interview process produced a total of 824 double-spaced pages of transcript deemed appropriate for further analysis.

3.2 Data analysis

The data analysis process followed a modified version of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2013) analytical approach. All data were collected and analyzed by the first author and all codes and themes were discussed and verified in conjunction with the second author. Consistent with Miles et al.'s (2013) approach, data collection and analysis occurred concurrently with all interviews read and then re-read to ensure full immersion. Data were initially analyzed through an inductive coding process to produce first-order codes from raw data (e.g., '*we published the generic LTAD booklet in Ireland*' = LTAD promotion abroad (first order code)). This was followed by a higher-order pattern matching process in order reduce the data (e.g., LTAD promotion abroad – the Origins of LTAD). First-order and higher-order codes were subject to an iterative axial coding process whereby codes were constantly refined throughout the collection and analysis process. Coding in this manner thus required multiple rounds of analysis.

4. Findings

This section traces the key socio-political developments that led to the emergence and development of the LTAD framework and the leadership team (now Sport for Life) within Canadian sport between 1990 and 2012. In particular, we focus on how the LTAD framework and leadership team emerged from and subsequently attempted to influence the Canadian sport policy process. The emphasis on the policy process is important for two reasons – one theoretical and one empirical. First, Schneider and Ingram's theory of social construction emphasizes the importance of policy design in determining subsequent politics. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the emergence and development of the LTAD framework within

this broader changing political context. Second, a number of scholars (e.g., Banack et al., 2012; Black & Holt, 2009, Lang & Light, 2010) have indicated, and CS4LLT documentation would suggest, that the LTAD framework emerged out of the Canadian sport policy process. As will become apparent, there were a number of developments that occurred as a result of the policy process that would enable stakeholders to engage directly with government and led to the support, promotion and adoption of the LTAD framework across Canada. The analysis is mostly presented in a chronological manner and is divided into four over-lapping time periods: The origins of LTAD (1990-2004), LTAD and the Canadian sport policy process (2002-2004), LTAD in the inter-policy period (2004-2012) and LTAD and the CSP2 renewal process (2009-2012). See Table 1 for an overview of the findings.

******insert table 1 (overview of key themes and codes) about here***

4.1 The Origins of LTAD (1990-2004)

The earliest known formal publication of the LTAD framework was produced in 1990 (Balyi, 1990) with Balyi and colleagues subsequently publishing a series of 12 LTAD-related articles in non-peer reviewed outlets such as *Faster Higher Stronger* and *BC Coach Perspective* throughout the 1990s (e.g., Balyi, 1990, 1995, 1996; Balyi & Way, 1995; Robertson & Way, 2005). In examining the origins of LTAD framework, it is apparent that the LTAD framework as an idea is (and still remains) theoretically unoriginal. Ford et al. (2011) supports this contention by stating that 'the LTAD model is not novel' (p. 390). Furthermore, not only have scholars critiqued the LTAD framework for a general lack of scientific evidence to support many of its claims (e.g., Black & Holt, 2009; Ford et al., 2011; Lang & Light, 2010; Norris, 2010), but of the limited scientific research of which the framework is based, much of it has been around for some time (cf. Sanderson, 1989) and in various alternative athlete development framework forms pre-dating Balyi's framework (see Bruner et al., 2009 for further elaboration on this point).

The respondents interviewed further supported the above contention, for example, one Sport Canada official stated that LTAD is 'nothing new. It's not different to what existed, it was just better organized' (Senior Sport Canada Official #19 07/26/13). Even CS4LLT members admitted that,

> At the beginning it was really a few guys who wrote a paper…they just glued together a bunch of long-term athlete development studies and made it accessible. Nothing revolutionary but they made it accessible. They spoke about it in the language that people understood (CS4LLT Member #4 01/30/13).

Even in spite of its theoretical unoriginality and limited academic critique to date, LTAD's innovation resides in its practicality and political attractiveness. Collins and Bailey (2013, p. 186) refer to it as the 'pervasive and persuasive[ness]' of these second-hand approaches to talent development. In support of Collins and Bailey's remarks, our data suggests that the frameworks' success can, in part, be explained by the inherent attractiveness and appeal of the framework itself, but also due to the efforts of key individuals to promote, sell, and simplify the framework in its formative years (i.e. 1990s/early 2000s).

4.1.1 Initial promotion and development of LTAD by key individuals

The role of key individuals such as Istvan Balyi and Richard Way as well as early support from key decision-makers from within government (namely Lane McAdam, Dan Smith and Francis Drouin and Phil Schlote) should be recognized as critical to the promotion of the LTAD framework within its formative years. Istvan Balyi, in particular, had spent many years prior to the formation of the leadership team, developing and promoting the principles of the LTAD framework. As one senior Sport Canada official recalled, 'the concept of LTAD had been around in various forms for many years, but never really kind of formalized as a kind of national driven process and template' (Senior Sport Canada Official #21 02/05/13). In emulating the long-term systematic approach to athlete development that characterized the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc models, Istvan originally conceived the LTAD framework in the mid-1980s whilst working as a sport science and fitness director for the Canadian Alpine

Ski team.

In 1994, Istvan Balyi then became a resident sport scientist at the National Coaching

Institute in Victoria, British Columbia, where he continues to work to this day. It was whilst

in Victoria that Istvan Balyi met and began collaborating with Richard Way (e.g., Balyi &

Way, 1995). Richard Way in the formative years of the LTAD framework's development was

primarily responsible for the simplification of Balyi's otherwise academically presented

ideas, as well the translation and promotion of LTAD within government (via Sport Canada).

As Richard recalled,

> He [Istvan Balyi] would bring me stuff and I couldn't understand most of it, way over
> my head, and so I kept saying, 'Can you write it down and can you make it simpler?'
> Then a relationship evolved with Istvan and where he would bring stuff and he would
> write it down, and then I would draw pictures to try and sort it out. It kind of worked
> that way. I would do these different figures and graphics and you see some of them
> remaining like in the back of the Canadian Sport for Life document where I was the
> guy trying to draw what Istvan was explaining. (Richard Way, personal
> communication, January 31, 2013)

Richard Way and Istvan Balyi would work together for a number of years in British

Columbia with Richard Way holding a number of senior sport roles within the province. It

was during this time that the pair formulated and refined what can essentially be described as

a simplified (i.e. user-friendly) version of Balyi's original LTAD framework. Furthermore, it

was also during this period that Balyi and colleagues started to formally test some their ideas

in practical settings. For example, Balyi and colleagues helped design and implement Alpine

Canada's Alpine Integration Model; the first edition of which was formally published in 1999

and can claim to be the first sport-specific LTAD framework ever produced (Alpine Canada,

n.d.).

Richard Way was also critical to the promotion of the LTAD framework in its

formative years in that he was able to articulate (i.e., translate into governmental terms) the

benefits of the LTAD framework to senior Sport Canada officials. Richard Way had spent

many years working as a senior civil servant, during which he built up a number of personal

and professional connections within and around federal-Provincial/Territorial (F-P/T) governments. It would be in the latter years of LTAD/CS4LLT's emergence (i.e., post-2004) that Richard Way would take a more central role as the CS4LLT lead coordinator. Yet despite these critical developments and Balyi and Way's initial attempts to publish and practically test their ideas surrounding LTAD throughout the 1990s, support for the LTAD framework throughout Canada in the 1990-2000 period can be generally characterized as being confined to the interest of a select few sport scientists and high performance coaches primarily within the borders of British Columbia. In particular, initial interest in the LTAD framework stemmed from coaches wanting to find better ways to systematically produce athletes at the highest levels of competition. It would not be until the turn of the century that interest in the LTAD framework began to materialize nationally, beginning not in Canada but overseas in Ireland and the United Kingdom.

4.1.2 Initial promotion and development of LTAD abroad

In August 2003, Pat Duffy, the then Director of Ireland's National Coaching Training Centre, invited Istvan Balyi to give a presentation at the 7th National Irish Sports Forum. As Istvan recalled,

> Pat [Duffy] found me in the Internet and asked me to come over to Ireland for the Irish sports forum and give a presentation on LTAD, and it seems to be the right place, and the right time, the right people, because Ireland started to buzz about LTAD (Istvan Balyi, personal communication, January 30, 2013).

One of the direct outcomes of Istvan's presentation to the Irish Sport Forum was that he and colleagues were contracted by Ireland's National Coaching Training Centre to produce a generic LTAD for Ireland (Duffy, Balyi, Aboud, & Gregg, 2003). The production of the Irish LTAD framework took over two years and involved major consultations with stakeholders across the country. It was during this time that Balyi and colleagues were also contracted by Sports Coach UK (now UK Coaching) to develop LTAD coaching materials, as well as to create LTAD sport- specific frameworks for Irish Rugby and British Swimming.

It would be only after LTAD had been tried and tested abroad (between 2002 and 2004) that it would begin to gain greater interest and traction domestically, most notably greater interest and traction within Sport Canada. As a CS4LLT member recalled, 'What happened is we published the generic LTAD booklet in Ireland, and Sport Canada got a copy of it and they became very much interested in the possibilities of the document' (CS4LLT Member #9 02/15/13). Sport Canada officials echoed this perspective,

> Istvan and Richard had done work in other countries and had been positively received and I think a lot of Canadian sport leaders saw that if this is being embraced by other countries and these are Canadians [who] are doing this, are we [Sport Canada] missing the boat by not being on board here? (Senior Sport Canada Official #18 07/22/13)

Similarly, 'In some ways we [Sport Canada] got involved a little bit after the fact, so Istvan and Richard and some others had been very busy going out around the world, going to do work in the UK and Ireland and all kinds of places selling LTAD' (Sport Canada Official #22 01/17/13). Evident from the above accounts, and rather ironically, the work of Balyi and colleagues overseas between 2002 and 2004 should be recognized as an important and necessary step towards the adoption of the LTAD framework within Canada. Thus without the selling, promotion, and demonstration of the LTAD framework abroad, it would have been unlikely that the framework would have been adopted and endorsed by Sport Canada in 2004.

4.2 Policy design: LTAD and the Canadian Sport Policy Process (2002-2004)

The creation of Canadian Sport Policy 1 (CSP1, 2002-2012; Canadian Heritage, 2002) stems from a two-year consultation and drafting process that began in January 2000 and culminated in April 2002 with the endorsement of all 14 governmental jurisdictions during the Federal-P/T Ministers' Conference held in Iqaluit, Nunavut (Canadian Heritage, 2002). Most notably, CSP1 signified the first ever Canadian Sport Policy with bi-lateral agreements with all provinces and territories developing a shared vision for sport in Canada

to create:

> a dynamic and leading-edge sporting environment that enables all Canadians to experience and enjoy involvement in sport to the extent of their abilities and interests and, for increasing numbers, to perform consistently and successfully at the highest levels of competition. (Canadian Heritage, 2002, p. 4)

The broader outcome of the CSP1 process for the Canadian sport community at large was an unprecedented political commitment by government during this period towards a common vision for sport in Canada. This political commitment translated into a 34% (C$81,310,000) increase in F-P/T government sport and physical activity budgets between April 2002 and March 2005, with a further 97% increase (C$171,000,000) by 2009 (Sutcliffe Group, 2010).

In tracing LTAD-related developments within the CSP1 process, it should be noted that despite Balyi and colleagues' efforts in publishing LTAD-related material for over ten years prior to the publication of CSP1, the LTAD framework was not directly mentioned within the document nor was it mentioned in the F-P/T actions plan that supplemented it. When asked about whether LTAD emerged from CSP1, a leadership member responded, 'I think technically it didn't. I think not from the policy, but from the F-P/T agreements that followed' (CS4LLT Member #5 01/29/13). Similarly, another CS4LLT member observed, 'CSP1 didn't mention long-term athlete development at all because it was created before. It was created in 2002 or it was adopted in 2002, endorsed in 2002, created in 2002 and long-term athlete development wasn't supported by Sport Canada till 2005' (CS4LLT Member #13 01/29/13).

Nonetheless, the genesis of the LTAD framework, at least in policy terms, can arguably be traced back to CSP1's excellence goal, which stated that by 2012 'Canadian athletes and teams are *systematically achieving* [emphasis added] world-class results at the highest levels of competition through fair and ethical means' (Canadian Heritage, 2002, p. 4). This need for systematic athlete development was also identified as a political priority within CSP1, which directly called 'for a systematic, analytical, and collaborative approach to the

development of high performance athletes' (Canadian Heritage, 2002, p. 9), and 'greater attention […] devoted to a systematic approach to ensure the development of a constant stream of world-class athletes, coaches and officials' (Canadian Heritage, 2002, p. 17). The emergence of the LTAD framework can therefore be partly explained by the recognition of government officials and key stakeholders within the policy process who recognized the need to systematically produce high performance athletes.

The recognition of a need for a systematic approach to athlete development was reinforced by a F-P/T Excellence Working Group #4 that was formed after the publication of CSP1 in order to carry out the specific actions of the F-P/T action plans. The group was mandated to i) establish athletic performance targets, ii) develop initiatives to enhance athlete development, and iii) evaluate the role of Canadian Sport Centres in achieving the goals of CSP1 (Brisson, 2004). Of particular note, Richard Way was one of the nine members who formed the working group as a provincial government representative at the time. The efforts of the group culminated in the publication of the Brisson Report in 2004 (Brisson, 2004). Amongst other recommendations, the report (and by extension the excellence working group) considered the system wide adoption of the LTAD framework as a priority for Canadian high performance sport, and in doing so, 'recommended that the entire sport system take a Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) approach' (Brisson, 2004, p. v). The recommendations of the Brisson Report would be a critical step towards F-P/T Sport Ministers endorsing and adopting the LTAD framework later that year.

The consultation processes that occurred in the lead up to the creation of CSP1 as well as the bi-lateral discussions that followed clearly identified a need for a more systemic approach to athlete development in Canada in order to achieve CSP1's objectives – most notably with regards to the high performance sport and integration pillars. As one Sport Canada official stated:

> I think the Canadian Sport Policy process proved that there was an appetite to have a truly Canadian, integrated system…There was a series of priorities identified and governments and the sport community identified those to actually work on and move forward to try and advance the broad goals of the policy, and it had very specific deliverables against that, and every year there would be an update on the kinds of activities that would be prioritized by governments and those within the sport community. So it was a way to ensure that the policy was more than just words on a page, but it actually had measureable goals and specific activities to advance those goals. (Senior Sport Canada Official #21 02/05/13)

Furthermore, not only did CSP1 identify a need and create an 'appetite' for more systematic approaches to athlete development in Canada, but the process also enabled Sport Canada the political latitude to rationalize and justify its initial investment in LTAD/CS4LLT. As one CS4LLT member remarked:

> It was the creation of the first Canadian Sport Policy that gave the latitude to Sport Canada to advance certain projects that they wanted to see advanced that they couldn't previously because there was no sport policy and mechanism to allow them to do that, right? There wasn't a permissive policy climate. CSP1 gave a permissive enough policy climate to allow people at Sport Canada and other groups probably in the PT government to support some things that they couldn't support previously and it was in part that support that kind of led to this flowering. All of a sudden there was money and support for LTAD. (CS4LLT Member #13 01/29/13)

This increased political latitude in decision-making was also supported by political turnover that occurred around the same time, 'We had the Canadian Sport Policy [CSP1], we had a new minister who was pretty activist. We had some leadership that was willing to take the risk…those people aligned to, and lent towards the decision to move this process forward' (Senior Sport Canada Official #21 02/05/13). The product of these factors (i.e., the creation of a new policy, the identified need for a systematic approach to athlete development, a newly elected and activist government) along with the ongoing work by Balyi and colleagues identified previously was the creation of a socio-political environment by which the LTAD framework and the leadership could emerge and develop within Canada.

4.3 Feeding-forward: LTAD during the inter-policy period (2004-2012)

The inter-policy period was critical to the emergence and development of the LTAD framework for a number of reasons. Most notably, in addition to enacting the CSP1 F-P/T

action plans, the period witnessed a number of LTAD-related intergovernmental developments, the initiation of LTAD/CS4LLT-related work by Sport Canada, and the resurgence and restructuring of what was then called the LTAD Expert group. Much of these developments occurred as a direct result of the discussions and decisions made within the CSP1 process that would determine the politics within the inter-policy period. Schneider and Ingram refer to this as the feed-forward effective of policy design.

4.3.1 Feeding forward: Intergovernmental developments (2004-2006)

On the 29th April 2004, F-P/T Sport Ministers, the provincial, territorial, federal minsters responsible for sport, met in Québec City to discuss *inter alia* the formal adoption and dissemination of LTAD across Canada. The Québec conference had three major outcomes relevant to the emergence and development of LTAD. The first major outcome was a bi-laterally agreed commitment to adopt and implement LTAD across Canada. In this manner, not only was the Québec conference an integral step for the 'buy-in' of government ministers in general, but it also signified a political commitment and willingness on behalf of two levels of governments within Canada to develop LTAD across the country. Second, minsters also agreed to provide the necessary funding, through Sport Canada, to produce a generic LTAD framework to serve as a template to assist NSOs, and provincial/territorial sport organizations, and provincial/territorial governments in developing LTAD appropriate programming. This initial investment by ministers would eventually lead to the publication of the Long-Term Athlete Development resource document a year later (Balyi et al., 2005) – a document that remains the seminal resource document outlining the fundamental principles of LTAD to this day (see below). The third and final outcome of the Québec conference, and as a direct result of the decision to create a generic LTAD framework, was the formation of the then called 'LTAD Expert Group' which was contracted by government. The group initially consisted of four members (Istvan Balyi, Richard Way, Charles Cardinal, and

Stephen Norris) who would meet in Ottawa later that year with the sole purpose of producing a generic LTAD document for Canada.

In August the following year, Sport Ministers met again at the F-P/T Sport Ministers Conference, this time hosted in Regina to coincide with the Canada Games. At the Regina conference, ministers agreed to proceed forward with LTAD implementation by initiating the development of sport-specific LTAD frameworks across all sports. To support this process, ministers also agreed it was necessary to produce an LTAD implementation and communication strategy, with particular emphasis placed on the importance of physical literacy and establishing links with health (Canadian Heritage, 2009). These plans were intended to be supplementary to the F-P/TPCA (2007-2012) document that was also being drafted around the same time.

In order to realize the decisions made at the Regina conference, deputy ministers met on 23rd November 2006 to discuss, amongst other elements, the implementation of LTAD. In addition to the approval of the implementation and communication plans that had now been drafted, deputy ministers approved the formation of an F-P/T 'LTAD Working Team' in order to oversee the implementation of LTAD across Canada. The group was initially comprised of members from New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba, Québec, and Sport Canada's LTAD lead (F-P/TSC Working Group, 2007). The team was tasked with developing a project charter and work plan, identifying LTAD jurisdictional leads, and overseeing the production of sport specific LTAD frameworks (F-P/TSC Working Group, 2007). The LTAD Management Team continues to oversee the ongoing process of LTAD implementation.

4.3.2 Feeding-forward: LTAD-related Sport Canada developments (2004-2006)

As a direct result of the decisions made by Sport Ministers at the Québec and Regina conferences, a number of more specific LTAD/CS4LLT-related developments occurred.

These developments included the hosting of the first LTAD workshop, the publication of the seminal resource document (Balyi et al., 2005), and the production of sport-specific LTAD plans. In June 2005, Sport Canada hosted an LTAD Workshop in Ottawa to discuss the specific dissemination of LTAD across the 56 NSOs funded by Sport Canada. This workshop was an attempt by Sport Canada to elicit 'buy-in' from the sport community regarding the importance of LTAD, and also provided an opportunity for Sport Canada to elicit ideas on how to effectively implement LTAD across Canada.

Two months following the LTAD workshop, the newly formed LTAD Expert Group produced a 66-page 'consultation paper' (Balyi et al., 2005, p. 7) entitled *Canadian Sport for Life: Long-Term Athlete Development Model*. The document was published through the Calgary Canadian Sport Centre, with the two-fold intention of generating debate and discussion around athlete development and to provide a necessary template for the development of sport specific LTAD frameworks. With regards to the former, the 2005 resource document 'was compiled as a basic 'pop science' resource and guide, as well as a deliberate 'lightening rod' or catalyst to inspire (or even incense) discussion and action' (Norris, 2010, p. 380). According to a member of the then LTAD Expert Group, this deliberate attempt to generate debate

> was necessary to overcome an obvious inertia to change in the Canadian system, particularly at a time when there was increasing recognition and vocalization of various challenges or negative consequences (i.e., high dropout rates from organized activities and sports, increasing obesity. (Norris, 2010, p. 380)

Evident from the above account, the then LTAD Expert Group's intentions with publishing the 2005 resource document were far more pragmatic and political than just providing an outline of the LTAD framework to sport organizations. Rather, the publication of the LTAD resource document was critical to the advancement of the LTAD framework for a number of reasons. First, it provided a simplified and digestible overview of LTAD principles that could be read and understood by just about anybody – a notable departure from Balyi's previously

published physiologist, periodization and coach-centric works. Second, the document clearly

articulated (at least in the view of the LTAD Expert Group) a clear picture of the current

problems with Canadian sport, or what the document describes as the apparent 'shortcomings

and consequences' (Balyi et al., 2005, p. 17) of the current Canadian sport system. This

articulation would lead the LTAD Expert Group to re-label the LTAD generic framework

Canadian Sport for Life as a more encompassing and broader term than LTAD. Third, and as

intended, the document generated substantial interest and notoriety, which in turn resulted in

the LTAD Expert Group and the LTAD framework gaining greater visibility and interest

within and beyond the Canadian sport community. Thus, the publication of the 2005 resource

document can therefore be viewed as a key focusing (Kingdon, 1984) event within the

development and promotion of LTAD within Canada.

As a direct result of the publication of a generic framework and the decisions made at

the Québec and Regina conferences, Sport Canada began the process of funding NSOs to

produce LTAD sport specific frameworks in late 2006. NSOs were allocated between

C$70,000-120,000 based on the complexity of the sport over a period of three to four years.

Sports such as Athletics and Gymnastics, for example, were given more funding to

accommodate the complexity of the multi-disciplinary nature of these sports. To ensure the

effective implementation of sport specific frameworks, NSOs underwent the process in four

groups or so-called waves, which were determined by Sport Canada based on a combination

of readiness factors and more pragmatic budget/human resource considerations (Sport

Canada Official, personal communication, August 8, 2013). The decision to produce LTAD

frameworks in waves was therefore based on a two-fold rationale,

> At the front end, there wouldn't have been enough of an expert group to deal with 50
> something organizations all at once, from another perspective, there weren't 50
> organizations that wanted to jump on this change, or could have if they wanted to,
> because of the capacity issues. So organizations were kind of introduced in waves
> over several years. (Sport Canada Official #22 01/17/13)

The first sport-specific LTAD frameworks were completed in 2007, with all sports funded by Sport Canada having produced an LTAD framework by early 2013. LTAD sport specific frameworks were produced in both English and French, and were made publically available. See Table 2 for an overview of the development of NSO LTAD sport specific frameworks between 2006 and 2010.

   insert table 2 (LTAD sport-specific plan development (2006-2010)) about here

4.4 LTAD's consolidation period (2007-2009)

The intermediate years of the inter-policy period (i.e., 2007-2009) can be described as a relatively stable period in the emergence and development of LTAD and the leadership team. By 2007, LTAD/CS4LLT now had full F-P/T government support, Sport Canada was continuing to oversee the production of sport-specific LTAD frameworks, and the LTAD Expert Group continued to publish a number of supplementary LTAD-related documents. Evidence of this consolidation period can be seen through Sport Canada's publication of its five-year LTAD strategic plan entitled *Long-Term Athlete Development Strategic Framework* in 2009 (Canadian Heritage, 2009). The strategic plan identified two overarching priorities: 'the full implementation of sport-specific LTAD frameworks and the broadening of the base of people who can speak to and actively engage on LTAD related initiatives' (Canadian Heritage, 2009, p. 4).

Sport Canada's LTAD strategic framework was particularly noteworthy for the development of the LTAD framework as it outlined 'a high-level approach for the continued implementation of LTAD related activities by Sport Canada' (Canadian Heritage, 2009, p. 2), and in doing so, explicitly identified Sport Canada's contribution to the implementation, integration, and alignment of LTAD. Furthermore, the strategic framework also signified Sport Canada's formal and public support of the LTAD framework over the next five years; a formal commitment that had been notably absent – at least publically – over the previous five

years. Sport Canada formally approved the strategic framework in 2010 around the same time as Canada was preparing to host the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic Games.

To summarize the above discussion regarding LTAD/CS4LLT and the inter-policy period, the developments during this period were critical to the advancement of LTAD and the leadership team. With the CSP1 as a necessary foundation, the inter-governmental developments during the formative years (i.e., 2004-2006) were critical in gathering support and momentum for LTAD and the leadership team politically. As a direct consequence of the CSP1 and the decisions made by Sport Ministers at the Québec and Regina conferences, Sport Canada was authorized to contract Balyi and colleagues to produce the LTAD generic framework and to undergo (i.e., fund and oversee) the development of sport-specific LTAD plans. Simultaneous to these governmental-developments, the leadership team were actively publishing and promoting LTAD both domestically and internationally. The ultimate outcome of the above developments during the inter-policy period was a relatively well-established but still ongoing process of LTAD alignment and implementation across all levels of delivery (albeit with varying levels of interest and uptake).

4.5 LTAD and the CSP2 renewal process (2009-2012)

In order to ensure an effective transition from CSP1 to its successor policy (CSP2), F-P/T ministers agreed in August 2009 to review the progress of CSP1, determine the interest and merit of a new policy, and (if appropriate) undergo the work needed to produce a successor policy (Canadian Heritage, 2012). These three elements and the actions that stemmed from them will collectively be referred to as the Canadian Sport Policy Renewal (CSPR) process. Overseen by the F-P/TSC, the CSPR process occurred over three-year period (i.e., 2009-2012) and involved extensive consultation between government and the sport community.

4.5.1 CS4LLT's involvement and LTAD's influence within the CSPR process and CSP2

The LTAD framework was not only discussed throughout the CSPR process but the CS4LLT

was also extensively involved in the renewal process. To elaborate on the former, the LTAD framework was considered by many as a key-contributing factor towards the success of CSP1. For example, an independent social research consultant company (Sutcliffe Group Inc.) was contracted during the initial stages of the renewal process to conduct an evaluation of CSP1. The Sutcliffe evaluation highlighted, amongst other elements, LTAD's contribution to achieving CSP1's goals, most notably its contribution to the objectives of the capacity pillar (see Sutcliffe Group, 2010, pp. 31-34). Moreover, in evaluating the overall impact of CSP1, the evaluation stated that 'perhaps the most significant outcome of the Policy [CSP1] in terms of impact on the sport system in Canada is the development of the Canadian Sport for Life [LTAD] model' (Sutcliffe Group, 2010, p. 6).

Furthermore, not only did the evaluation highlight the contribution of the LTAD framework to Canadian sport over the previous decade, but also recommended that LTAD had an important role to play in achieving the objectives of any policy over the subsequent decade. For example, whilst discussing the limitation of CSP1's strong distinction between the participation and excellence pillars, the report indicated that 'the stages of the LTAD model did not obviously mesh with the participation/excellence dichotomy of the Policy, yet provided a more acceptable approach to the description of how Canadians participate in sport' (Sutcliffe Group, 2010, p. 55). As a consequence, the evaluation recommended that 'terminology from the Canadian Sport for Life [LTAD] model should be used instead of the terms 'Participation' and 'Excellence' when emphasizing engaging people in sport participation and work towards excellence' (Sutcliffe Group, 2010, p. 7).

Similar sentiments were echoed in the initial consultation process that followed after the Sutcliffe evaluation during the summer of 2010. From July to September 2010, Sport Canada and the Sport Matters Group conducted an initial national sport community engagement and consultation process through a series of meetings, workshops, and surveys.

Rather than attempting to identify concrete policy recommendations per se, the intention of this initial consultation process was to assess 'the overall successfulness and impact of the CSP [CSP1], and explore issues and ideas related to the creation of a successor policy' (Sport Matters/Sport Canada, 2010, p. 1). More specifically, these initial consultations attempted to gather feedback regarding seven pre-determined questions (e.g., is there a desire for a pan-Canadian sport policy post-2012? Would the four goals of the existing CSP be appropriate for the new policy?). This process culminated in a jointly produced report entitled *Canadian Sport Policy Renewal: Summary of Findings from the National Sport Community Engagement and Consultation Process* that was submitted to Public Policy Forum for discussion at the national CSPR conference held in Ottawa, October 14th 2010 (Sport Matters/Sport Canada, 2010). The initial consultation report (and by extension the initial CSPR consultation process) identified and discussed LTAD within five of the seven questions that were put forward to the sport community at large. Most notably, LTAD was apparent within discussions regarding whether or not the new policy should use the existing four pillars identified in CSP1. The report stated,

> many participants in these discussions were interested in exploring how the [LTAD] framework and model could be integrated into a renewed CSP. Some proposed that [LTAD] language and terminology could be used in the new policy. Others proposed that [LTAD] could perhaps be used to frame the existing four goals. And others explored how [LTAD] related to specific goals such as participation, excellence, and interaction, or could be used to combined one or more of these goals (Sport Canada/Sport Matters, 2010, p. 18).

What can also be drawn from the above discussion besides the LTAD framework's prominence in the initial CSPR discussions is that some ambiguity and ambivalence existed throughout these initial discussions regarding precisely how LTAD would contribute to the new policy. This initial uncertainty would later manifest itself in the political debates surrounding LTAD that would follow in the later stages of the CSPR process. Nonetheless, the Sport Canada/Sport Matters report was broadly consistent with the Sutcliffe evaluation in

that it acknowledged LTAD as a positive, albeit unexpected, outcome of, and major contributing factor towards, the relative success of CSP1.

The interest and momentum that LTAD had gathered during the initial stages of the renewal process continued into the more formal and extensive consultation process that occurred during the spring and summer of 2011 (i.e., April-August). It was during these later stages in particular that the CS4LLT became directly and indirectly involved in the renewal process. For example, as part of the national consultation process, four national consultation workshops were held in Vancouver, Calgary, Ottawa, and Montréal throughout June 2011. Apparent from the attendance lists of these workshops, CS4LLT members were present at every major national consultation meeting during CSPR's formal consultation process.

Furthermore, a select few members of the CS4LLT were also directly involved in the formulation of more formal written responses to the drafting of the new policy. For example, Richard Way produced a two-page discussion paper in October 2011 as a response to the initial drafting of the CSP2 document (Way, 2011). The discussion paper argued that the initial CSP2 draft 'neglects to leverage key initiatives occurring presently in Canadian sport, including but not exclusive to Canadian Sport for Life' (Way, 2011, p. 1) and consequently called for a greater attention to, and incorporation of, the LTAD principles into the new policy. In a similar vein, the CS4LLT also collectively produced its own seven-page response to the February CSP2 draft in March 2012 (CS4L, 2012). The response had two major recommendations: the incorporation of the LTAD framework and a more action-orientated policy.

Taken collectively and to summarize the above discussion, these examples (i.e., attendance and written responses) suggest that the CS4LLT, or at least a sub-set of the leadership team, were actively involved in attempting to influence the CSPR process. This finding was also supported by those interviewed who suggested a degree of policy

attentiveness by a select few members of the CS4LLT, 'Richard in particular was obviously very concerned that the new Canadian sport policy will formally recognize LTAD and ideally recognize it as a fundamental organizing principle of Canadian sport' (CS4LLT Member #13 01/29/13).

insert table 3 (key events in the development of LTAD/CS4LLT) about here

5. **Discussion and Conclusion**

This article traced the social construction of the Long-Term Athlete Development framework and the Canadian Sport for Life Leadership team from its original conception to its adoption by federal government in 2009 and its (albeit partial) incorporation into the Canadian Sport Policy 2 (CSP2) in 2012 (summarized in table 3). In particular, we have argued that the LTAD framework can be understood as socially constructed depiction of the athlete development process used to overcome supposed systemic shortcomings within Canadian sport. What can be drawn from the above account, and to return to the tenants of Schneider and Ingram's theory of social construction and policy design more explicitly, the creation of CSP1 and the inter-governmental processes that followed would be critical to defining problems (e.g., the need for systematic athlete development), establishing the rules of the game regarding the overall priorities of the Canadian sport (namely the four pillars of excellence, participation, capacity, integration), and sending implicit messages to stakeholders within sport about they should engage with government in order to receive federal funding.

For Schneider and Ingram (2007: 97), "policy designs thus structure the subsequent opportunities for participation, allocate material resources, and send messages that shape the political orientations and participation patterns" (Schneider and Ingram, 2007, p. 97). The structuring and outcomes of the CSP1 process combined with broader institutional developments such as the successful bid to host for the Vancouver Olympic Winter Games

and an increasing political willingness to support sport in general would lead to a permissive climate by which the leadership team and the LTAD framework could emerge. More specifically, it is evident from the above discussion that the politicking which occurred both during and after this political process would pave the way for a series of inter-governmental and LTAD-related developments that would result in the formation of the LTAD expert group. This group would then, in turn, refine Istvan Balyi's ideas into the generic LTAD framework that would be eventually be published in 2005 and formally adopted by Sport Canada in 2009. The emergence and development of the LTAD framework within Canadian sport therefore lends further support for the argument that policy creates politics in that the creation of Canada's first bi-laterally agreed sport policy would be integral to its adoption by federal government and many sport organizations across Canada (see Figure 2).

insert figure 2 (The social construction of the long-term athlete development framework) about here

As a final consideration, Schneider and Ingram emphasize the importance of policy in constructing opportunities to particular groups who are allocated benefits or burdens depending on their political power and positive or negative social construction. It is therefore appropriate to consider who are the winners and losers of the Canadian sport policy process in general and the adoption and implementation of the LTAD framework specifically. It should be noted that there was little evidence from our data to suggest that certain groups have necessarily been advantaged or disadvantaged from the social construction of either the CSP process or the LTAD framework. This can be interpreted to suggest that Ingram and Schneider's framework may not fully account for the developments that are occurring within Canadian sport. Perhaps more likely is that this is indicative of a study design limitation in that we only utilized viewpoints of LTAD experts and government officials and not broader

stakeholders who may be advantaged or disadvantaged from the policy process in general and widespread adoption of the LTAD framework specifically.

Nonetheless, it is apparent from the data that government (via Sport Canada) has heavily supported the emergence and development of the LTAD framework, in part, because it has recognized it as an appropriate policy tool by which it can achieve its own objectives. What can be drawn from the ongoing adoption and implementation of the LTAD framework across sport organizations supported by federal funding is that it has been increasingly employed as means by which to control Canadian sport organizations in an attempt to rationalize Canadian sport to achieve objectives as determined by the state. It is therefore appropriate to question which social group(s) does the adoption of the LTAD framework really benefit? The framework was originally intended and adopted for the sole purpose of producing high performance success despite the increasing rhetoric of participation. Given the longstanding tensions between high performance and participation objectives within Canada (Thibault & Harvery, 2013) is the adoption of the LTAD framework simply reinforcing pre-existing stereotypes and long-held beliefs within government and sport in general regarding the importance and prioritization of high performance sport over other sporting and wider social objectives? Finally, although the widespread adoption of the LTAD framework might lead to the benefit of a commonplace language for coaches and practitioners (Black & Holt, 2009), it is important to consider whether this may lead to the marginalizing of other equally valuable (even better research) depictions of the athlete development process and therefore delimit the ability of practitioners and academics from thinking otherwise.

In turning to the contributions of this study, we offer Ingram and Schneider's theory of social construction as an alternative meso-level approach to understand policy change. In particular, we contend that many policy scholars have overlooked the social construction

perspective as a useful meso-level approach to explain sport policy processes with many previous studies adopting well-travelled theories such as the Multiple Streams and the Advocacy Coalition Framework (Houlihan, 2012). In addition, this study has provided a detailed account of how the LTAD framework, as an increasingly popular conception of athlete development, has emerged and developed within the Canadian sport context. We therefore contribute to the ongoing debate surrounding the LTAD framework (e.g., Black & Holt, 2009; Collins & Bailey, 2013; Ford et al., 2011; Lang & Light, 2010) by filling an important research gap in explaining how and why the LTAD framework has gained prominence within Canada and abroad in spite of support from the academic community. Third and finally, we have also provided an empirical contribution in that the study documents the evolution of a newly emerging organizational entity (Sport for Life) within Canadian sport and therefore responds to Thibault and Harvey's (2013) call for more research that examines contemporary developments within the Canadian sporting context – particularly as they relate to governmental involvement in sport.

In regards to managerial/practitioner contributions, this study provides account of how the LTAD framework was created and adopted by federal government and subsequently by many sports organizations internationally. It also provides a detailed insight into the governmental and sporting community or politicking that occurred between 1990 and 2012 that would eventually lead to the adoption and implementation of the LTAD framework across Canada. In offering some potential avenues for future research, it is evident that more research is required to examine the role and influence of these non-traditional sport groups/organizations such as the CS4LLT. With regards to the LTAD model specifically, the athlete development model continues to be severely under-researched (Ford et al., 2011) with more empirical research needed to test its underlying principles – however, part of LTAD framework's success is perhaps due to the fact that it is difficult (if not impossible) to fully

test it empirically. Moreover, to date, there still remains a paucity of research that has examined the implications of adopting LTAD from a sport management/policy perspective. Under the likely assumption that LTAD continues to be adopted by governments and sport organizations, perhaps even more of a pressing concern than attempts to empirically test the framework itself is the need for sport management/policy scholars to examine the extent to which LTAD is influencing sport organizations. Many sport organizations are now attempting to align their strategic planning and organizational processes with LTAD (see 'Shaping the ideal NSO' resource document for example) which, if taken seriously, may have fundamental implications for the way sports are organized and delivered in the future.

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Table 1: Overview of key themes and codes

Theme	Sub-Theme	Raw Data (Examples)
Origins of LTAD (1990-2004)	Initial promotion and development of LTAD by key individuals	At the beginning it was really a few guys who wrote a paper…they just glued together a bunch of long-term athlete development studies and made it accessible. Nothing revolutionary but they made it accessible. They spoke about it in the language that people understood (CS4LLT Member #4 01/30/13). "From 1995 to 2000, LTAD practically was a physiological model, a high-performance model" (CS4LLT Member #9 02/15/13).
	Initial promotion and development of LTAD abroad	Istvan and Richard had done work in other countries and had been positively received and I think a lot of Canadian sport leaders saw that if this is being embraced by other countries and these are Canadians [who] are doing this, are we [Sport Canada] missing the boat by not being on board here? (Senior Sport Canada Official #18 07/22/13).
LTAD and CSP (2002-2004)	Systematic approach to athlete development	"when we started the project at Sport Canada, it was really focused on high performance athlete development" (Senior Sport Canada Official #18 07/22/13). "I think that when Sport Canada started to fund it, they were looking much more for the elite athlete development pathway to meet the need for a more systematic approach to Canadian high performance sport" (CS4LLT Member #5 01/29/13).
	"Permissive climate"	It was the creation of the first Canadian Sport Policy that gave the latitude to Sport Canada to advance certain projects that they wanted to see advanced that they couldn't previously[…]All of a sudden there was money and support for LTAD. (CS4LLT Member #13 01/29/13).
LTAD and the inter-policy period (2004-2012)	Intergovernmental developments (2004-2006)	"it didn't take long for us to realize that this really was a comprehensive system model that spoke to much more than developing Olympic athletes" (Senior Sport Canada Official #21 02/05/13).
	LTAD-related Sport Canada developments (2004-2006)	At the front end, there wouldn't have been enough of an expert group to deal with 50 something organizations all at once, from another perspective, there weren't 50 organizations that wanted to jump on this change, or could have if they wanted to, because of the capacity issues. So organizations were kind of introduced in waves over several years. (Sport Canada Official #22 01/17/13).
	LTAD's consolidation period (2007-2009)	The biggest evolution is [CS4L's] partnerships between sectors I think So first one, NSOs only and then we've gone from that to having health education, we have really drilled down lots of community groups here. say that's a major one (CS4LLT Member #2 01/30/13).
LTAD and the CSP renewal process (2009-2012)	CS4LLT's involvement and LTAD's influence within the CSPR process and CSP2	Richard in particular was obviously very concerned that the new Canadian sport policy will formally recognize LTAD and ideally recognize it as a fundamental organizing principle of Canadian sport' (CS4LLT Member #13 01/29/13). "CSP2 really has CS4L in its DNA. It's foundational" (CS4LLT Member #13 01/29/13).

Table 2: LTAD sport-specific plan development by National Sport Organizations

Summer Sports			
Wave 1	**Wave 2**	**Wave 3**	**Wave 4**
2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Athletics	Archery	Badminton	Cricket
Baseball	Basketball	Bowling	Fencing
Boccia	Football	Boxing	Goalball
Cycling	Taekwondo	Field Hockey	Lawnbowls
Diving	Wrestling	Karate	Shooting
Equine	Yachting	Lacrosse	Sport Parachuting*
Golf		Racquetball	Table Tennis
Gymnastics		Squash	
Judo		Waterpolo	
Rowing		Weightlifting	
Rugby			
Soccer			
Softball			
Swimming			
Tennis			
Triathlon			
Volleyball			
Waterski			
Wheelchair Rugby			
Winter Sports			
Wave 1	**Wave 2**	**Wave 3**	**Wave 4****
2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Alpine Ski	Ringette	Hockey	Broom-Ball
Biathlon	Figure Skating		
Cross-Country			
Curling			
Freestyle-Ski			
Snowboard			
Speed Skating			

Source: Sport Canada Official Personal Communication (08/10/13)

* Sport Parachuting is no longer SFAF- eligible/funded

** Ski Jumping is receiving project funding, but has not been supported to develop a LTAD framework

Table 3: Key events in the development of LTAD/CS4LLT within Canada

2002	Apr	**Canadian Sport Policy (CSP1) document published**
2003	Jul	Vancouver wins bid to host XXI Olympic Winter Games
		SFAF (III) implemented (summer and winter)
	Aug	Istvan Balyi presents LTAD to the 7th Irish Sports Forum
2004	Jan	Brisson Report published – recommends system-wide LTAD adoption
	Apr	F-PT Sport Minister's Conference held in Québec City discuss LTAD
		F-P/T Sport Ministers adopt LTAD/development of generic LTAD Framework*
		Four LTAD experts contracted to develop generic LTAD model
		First meeting of the LTAD Expert Group in Ottawa
2005	Jun	Sport Canada hosts workshop on LTAD
	Aug	F-P/T Ministers direct officials to proceed with sport-specific LTAD work**
		'First Wave' of NSOs begin to work on LTAD frameworks
		Canadian Sport for Life Resource 1.0 published (LTAD Generic Framework)
		Coaching for LTAD (Sports Coach UK/Sport England) published
2006		**No Accidental Champions v1 published**
	Jan	First CS4L workshop, 147 delegates attend
		SFAF (III) updated for winter sports (valid until 2010)
	Oct	Physical Literacy + ABCs Roundtable held in Ottawa
	Nov	Deputies direct formation of F-P/T CS4L working group/ jurisdiction leads
2007		First NSO frameworks completed
	Jan	Second CS4L workshop; 169 delegates attend
		Physical Literacy Concept published
	May	F-P/TSC CS4L Management Team formed
		CS4L: A Sport Parents' Guide published
		Female Athlete Perspective Guide published
2008	Jan	Third CS4L workshop; 233 delegates attend
		P/T Sport Organisations begin to implement frameworks
		Linking Sport for Life with management values published
		Developing Physical Literacy published
2009		Sport Canada LTAD Strategic Framework (2009-2014) published
	Jan	Fourth CS4L workshop; 401 delegates attend
	Apr	SFAF (IV) for summer sport implemented
	Aug	Alberta Parks forms ad hoc CS4L committee to discuss CS4L-recreation
	Nov	**Role of Monitoring Growth in LTAD published**
2010		Sport Canada LTAD Strategic Framework approved
		F-P/T LTAD Strategic Framework developed
	Feb	Vancouver hosts the XXI Olympic Winter Games
	Apr	Fifth CS4L workshop; 393 delegates attend
		Provincial/Territorial CS4L Implementation Guide's published
		Partnering Recreation With Sport Through CS4L published
		SFAF (IV) for winter sports implemented
2011		52 NSOs' LTAD frameworks completed
	Jan	B2ten partners with Canadian Sport for Life
		LTAD Expert Group renamed CS4L Leadership Team (CS4LLT)
		12 new members added to the CS4LLT
		Sixth CS4L workshop; 423 delegates attend

	May	CS4L joins Facebook
	Jun	*Active for Life* launched
	Jul	New CS4L website launched
		No Accidental Champions v2 document published
	Aug	CS4L sends first tweet from Twitter
		CS4L launches its own blog
	Oct	First provincial CS4L Workshop held in British Columbia
2012	Jan	CS4L workshops renamed CS4L Summit (6th workshop); 508 delegates
		Minister of State (Sport) Bal Gosal attends at CS4L Summit
		Moving Forward: Collaboration 2010-2013 document published
		Active Engaging Women in sport document published
		CAC/CS4L guide for parents document published
		Special Report: CS4L Disability Athletes document published
		First World Long-Term Athlete Development Symposium
		First set of members join the Internal Sport for Life Society (IS4LS)
		Canadian Sport Policy Renewal (CSP2) draft published
		CS4L releases response to CSP2 draft
	Apr	SFAFV for summer sports implemented – first inclusion of LTAD elements
	Jun	**Canadian Sport Policy (CSP2.0) published**
	Sep	CS4L hosts its first Mini-Summit to support LTAD implementation
2013		All 55 NSOs complete LTAD frameworks
		43 Mini-Summits held across Canada (approximately 1,000 attend)
	Jan	Second CS4L Summit (7th workshop); 454 delegates
		CPRA/CS4L co-host a community collaboration workshop
		CS4L: Five Year Activation Strategy published
		Building Enhanced Collaboration: Recreation & Sport published
		Sleep, Recovery, and Human Performance published
		Becoming a CS4L Community (draft) published
	Apr	IS4LS hosts first 'International Physical Literacy Conference'
		Physical Literacy Assessment for Youth (PLAY) tools published
	May	CS4LLT invited by UNESCO to speak at the fifth MINEPS conference
		How is my Sport Doing with LTAD in Para Disciplines published
	Jun	**Shaping the Ideal NSO: LTAD Implementation (2012-2017) published**
		Three additional members added to CS4L Leadership Team
	Sep	**Long-Term Athlete Development textbook published**
		Becoming a CS4L Community 2.0 published
		Hamilton hosts first provincial Physical Literacy Summit (400+ attend)
	Nov	Coaching Association of Canada/CS4L co-host LTAD workshop
2014	Jan	Third CS4L Summit (8th workshop); 530 delegates
		Second World Long-Term Athlete Development Symposium
		Canadian Sport for Life Resource 2.0 published
		Mental Fitness for Long-Term Athlete Development published
		CS4LLT announces launch of 'Learn to Play' project (C$2 million)
		Bal Gosal (Sport Minister) announces C$614,000 investment into CS4LLT

Source: Balyi et al. (2005), Sport Canada (2009, n.d.), CS4L (2010, 2012, 2013, n.d.)