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Assessing Governance Outcomes: The Relationship of Good Governance Dimensions and Primary Stakeholder Perceptions of Fairness, Trust, and Legitimacy in Sport Federations

Master's Thesis

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Meaning
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
CI	Confidence Interval
GG	Good Governance
MRU	Mykolas Romeris University
NSO	National Sport Organization
SD	Standard Deviation
NSA	National Sport Agency

INTRODUCTION

Relevance of the topic

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the concept of governance, and more specifically good governance, has gained increased significance in the sporting world. International bodies, governmental institutions, and academic researchers have embraced and actively promoted good governance principles throughout the sporting world, targeting organizations at different levels (J.-L. Chappelet, 2018; Geeraert & Van Eekeren, 2021; Girginov, 2023; Thompson et al., 2023). Sport federations are routinely evaluated, ranked, and funded based on their governance compliance scores. Yet beneath this apparent consensus lies a critical question that remains somewhat unanswered: does good governance implementation actually "work"?

This question is not merely academic. Sport organizations, some particularly small, operating with limited resources, volunteer boards and competing priorities, invest significant effort in governance compliance, at least on paper. They adopt policies, restructure boards, implement transparency measures, and submit to external assessments. But what do they receive in return? The normative case for good governance is well established; the empirical case remains elusive (J.-L. Chappelet, 2018; Parent & Hoye, 2018).

Existing research on the topic

The concept entered the world of sport in the late 2000s through a wave of policy initiatives, from the IOC's Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance (IOC, 2008; 2022) to EU expert recommendations (Expert Group on Good Governance in Sport, 2013), the Play the Game framework (Geeraert, 2013) and assessment tools such as the Sports Governance Observer (Geeraert, 2018; Girginov, 2023). What these initiatives share is captured by Geeraert (2021, p. 3): good governance works as a normative framework, a benchmark for judging structures, processes and outcomes, and a prescriptive standard at the same time. Section 1.1 returns to these initiatives and to the full definition in detail.

Within this normative framework, Geeraert in the AGGIS and Sports Governance Observer (Geeraert, 2013, 2015, 2018), offers four broad dimensions to integrate good governance principles: transparency, democratic processes, internal accountability and control, and societal responsibility. According to Geeraert (2018), implementing these four dimensions produces, as outcomes, perceptions of fairness, legitimacy and trust, which in turn improve policy effectiveness through stakeholder participation and reduce the likelihood of power imbalances and unethical conduct. This, however, remains largely empirically untested.

Across contemporary sport governance evaluation frameworks, there is a clear methodological convergence toward self-assessment instruments and checklist-based compliance tools completed by the board, senior management, or executive leadership of sport organizations, or by external evaluators. The assessment tools and processes primarily rely on structured questionnaires, indicator matrices, and compliance checklists based on internally reported governance documentation, policies, and practices (Thompson et al., 2023).

Governance compliance is measured through predefined, often binary or ordinal, indicators that assess the formal existence of governance mechanisms rather than their behavioral effectiveness, resulting in largely document-based, declarative data validated by boards or executive teams. Although some frameworks incorporate moderation, peer review, or external audits, the foundational input remains self-reported and aligned with standardized benchmarks. This system, as currently constructed, leads to misleading results, manipulation and/or inconsistency between paper and reality (Geeraert, 2025).

Scientific novelty of the research

Good governance is typically assessed in terms of compliance with specified rules and norms. For this assessment, external auditors and organizational boards and leadership respond to questionnaires of one sort or another. This creates a self-referential system: compliance = "good" governance, regardless of actual outcomes. Furthermore, it typically does not take into account the range of stakeholders that make up the sport organizations. This research proposes an exploratory test of outcomes of good governance as evidenced in increased stakeholder perception of trust, legitimacy and justice. These outcomes can be seen as beneficial results for an organization, among other ways improving policy effectiveness through stakeholder participation, and reducing the likelihood of power imbalances and unethical conduct (Geeraert, 2018). In this way it hopes to contribute to complement current assessment frameworks and an understanding of the benefits to sport organizations of practicing good governance.

Object of the study

The object of the study is the outcomes of the practice of good governance in Lithuanian sport organizations in terms of stakeholder perceptions of fairness, trust, and legitimacy.

Problem and research question

Good governance has become a central concern for sport organizations, often in response to recurrent legitimacy crises. Prevailing governance assessment frameworks typically rely on self-reported, rules-based compliance checklists completed by boards and senior executives. Its strength is in measuring compliance. Its limitation is in measuring the outcome of this compliance and including primary stakeholders who are those most directly affected by organizational governance. In that order of ideas, can good governance practices be evidenced in stakeholder perceptions of fairness, trust and legitimacy thereby complementing existing frameworks?

Research hypotheses

- H1: Federations with higher governance compliance are expected to show higher stakeholder trust.
- H2: Federations with higher governance compliance are expected to show higher perceived justice.
- H3: Federations with higher governance compliance are expected to show higher perceived legitimacy

Aim of the study

To assess the relationship of governance practices in Lithuanian sport organizations and primary stakeholders' perceptions of fairness (justice), trust, and legitimacy.

Objectives of the study

1. To analyze the approaches and limitations of good governance assessment frameworks in sport organizations.
2. To justify, through stakeholder theory, the inclusion of primary stakeholders as appropriate evaluators of governance quality, thereby providing a theoretical foundation for complementing compliance-based assessment approaches.
3. To establish the theoretical linkages between governance implementation and stakeholder perceptions of organizational justice, trust, and legitimacy as outcome-based indicators of governance quality.

4. To measure primary stakeholders' perceptions of organizational justice, trust, and legitimacy within the Lithuanian National Sport Federations using validated instruments.
5. To examine the relationship between good governance compliance scores and primary stakeholders' perceptions of fairness, trust, and legitimacy.

A short word of thanks belongs here to Prof. Dr. Agota Giedrė Raišienė for her guidance in shaping the methodology of this study, and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tomas Butvilas for his advice on the design and statistical approach for the analysis of the results. Their input made this a better thesis.

1. THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

1.1. Good Governance in Sport Organizations

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the concept of governance, and more specifically good governance, has gained increased significance in the sporting world. Despite an initially uneven and fragmented adoption process, it has now become a central pillar in the management of sport organizations (J.-L. Chappelet, 2018; Geeraert & Van Eekeren, 2021; Girginov, 2023; Thompson et al., 2023). This shift reflects a broader response to recurrent legitimacy crises, governance failures, and declining public trust in sport organizations, particularly in contexts where public funding and societal expectations are high. International bodies as well as governmental institutions have embraced and actively promoted good governance principles and frameworks throughout the sporting world, targeting organizations at different levels and a broad range of stakeholders (Geeraert, 2019; Girginov, 2023; Pielke et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 2023).

The concept of governance can be traced to the corporate world, where it emerged in response to corporate failures and scandals, focusing on how organizations are managed to ensure accountability to both internal and external stakeholders (Geeraert, 2013). Sport organizations, however, exhibit distinct structural and institutional characteristics that distinguish them from their corporate counterparts (Chappelet, 2018; Parent et al., 2021; Girginov, 2023; Thompson et al., 2023). These differences are particularly evident in the way the sport system is designed, as boards of directors are typically voluntary and democratically elected by member associations. For example, in international federations, national federations vote for the executive board, while at the national level, regional members elect the governing body.

In addition, sports organizations are characterized by a close and often structural dependency on the public sector, as many sports organizations worldwide rely heavily on public funding derived from taxpayer money (Corkery & Schoenberg, 2021). These specific characteristics shape the environment in which sport organizations operate and have led governance frameworks in sport to incorporate principles addressing not only corporate governance concerns but also those related to the public and voluntary sectors. Consequently, such structural differences challenge the direct transfer of corporate governance models to sport organizations and suggest the need for governance frameworks that reflect the hybrid public–voluntary nature of the sport sector.

In the late 2000s, the concept entered the sport environment and was institutionalized through key international and European policy initiatives, including the International Olympic Committee's Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance (IOC, 2008; 2022), European Union expert reports on good governance in sport (Expert Group on Good Governance in Sport, 2013), the Play the Game "Action for Good Governance in International Sports Organizations" framework (Geeraert, 2013), and the development of formal assessment tools such as the Sports Governance Observer (Geeraert, 2018; Girginov, 2023).

Within this context, Geeraert (2021) defines good governance in sport as:

> "a normative framework that allows for judging structures, processes and/or policy content and outcomes. The qualifying prefix 'good' indeed implies that good governance frameworks are both employed as a benchmark for evaluating governance and as a prescriptive standard for governance." (Geeraert, 2021, p.3)

1.1.1. The Four Dimensions of Good Governance

This dual function of good governance highlights an inherent tension between evaluating governance performance and actively shaping organizational behavior, complicating both implementation and measurement in practice. To address this complexity numerous authors have explored the core values and guiding ideas underpinning good governance in sport; and despite variations in terminology, the dominant concept across frameworks is that of "principles" (Thompson et al., 2023). This principles-based orientation is reflected in applied governance frameworks, such as the UK Code for Sport Governance (Sport England & UK Sport, 2016), which presents governance as a set of standards and operational requirements intended to regulate sport organizations effectively.

However, the proliferation of governance principles has resulted in a lack of consensus regarding a standardized set of sport governance principles and how to measure them. Thompson et al. (2023) identified 258 distinct governance principles across academic and grey literature, with only a limited number of studies grounding these principles in systematic theoretical frameworks (L. Chappelet & Mrkonjic, 2013; Zintz & Gérard, 2019). Rather than strengthening governance practice, this proliferation of principles risks diluting analytical clarity and undermining managerial efforts for effective implementation and compliance mechanisms. Nevertheless, certain foundational principles dominate the good governance discourse, particularly transparency, accountability, and democracy, followed by responsibility, integrity, and solidarity (Thompson et al., 2023).

One of the most influential frameworks was proposed by Geeraert in the Sports Governance Observer (Geeraert, 2015). This proposal has significantly influenced quantitative governance assessment approaches alongside frameworks such as BIBGIS (L. Chappelet & Mrkonjic, 2013) and SIGGS (Zintz & Gérard, 2019).

In the Sports Governance Observer, good governance is conceptualized through four mutually constitutive dimensions: transparency, democratic processes, internal accountability and control, and societal responsibility.

- Transparency refers to the reporting of an organization's internal workings, enabling external monitoring.
- Democratic processes involve free and fair elections, stakeholder participation in decision-making, and open internal debate.
- Internal accountability and control concern both the separation of powers and the existence of rules and procedures ensuring compliance with internal norms.
- Societal responsibility refers to the deliberate use of organizational capacity to generate positive impacts for stakeholders and society at large (Geeraert, 2015).

1.1.2. Governance Assessment Frameworks: Approaches and Limitations

Governance assessment frameworks have been developed to operationalize these dimensions and principles and evaluate the level of compliance of sport organizations with established codes of good governance. These tools address the practical challenge of translating normative principles into measurable indicators and verification mechanisms. While their scope and applicability vary, some frameworks are designed for international sport federations, while others are adapted to national or local contexts shaped by specific governmental policies (Thompson et al., 2023; Chappelet & Mrkonjic, 2019).

Kaufmann and Kray (2008) distinguish between the kinds of indicators and the sources of information, and they identify two dimensions; what is measured (rules vs. outcomes) and whose views are used (experts vs. surveys). On the types of outcomes, rules-based indicators capture “rules on the books” and tend to be clear and easier to track, although they are often subjective and have weak or delayed links to real outcomes. On the other side, outcome-based indicators capture how those rules work in practice, reflecting real and direct experiences by those involved, although these are harder to link to specific reforms or policies. Both are imperfect but complementary. Turning to information sources, they argue that expert assessments tend to be cheaper, easier to make, and more suitable for technical topics; while surveys capture the views of those who experience governance and have stronger domestic political credibility.

Geeraert (2018) acknowledged this key distinction in the elaboration of the sport governance observer between rules-based and outcome-based indicators. In spite of this acknowledgement, across the contemporary sport governance evaluation frameworks there is a clear methodological convergence toward self-assessment instruments and checklist-based compliance tools completed by the board, senior management, or executive leadership of sport organizations, without including survey-type sources from broader individuals and groups.

Frameworks such as the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF) Governance Task Force, the Sports Governance Observer / National Sports Governance Observer, the UK Code for Sports Governance, the Sport Integrity Global Alliance Global Sport Governance Indicators (SIGGS), and the Sport Integrity Global Alliance Sport Integrity Rating System (SIRVS) primarily rely on structured questionnaires, indicator matrices, and compliance checklists based on internally reported governance documentation, policies, and practices. Governance compliance is measured through predefined, often binary or ordinal, indicators that assess the formal existence of governance mechanisms rather than their behavioral effectiveness, resulting in largely document-based, declarative data. Although some frameworks incorporate moderation, peer review, or external audits, the foundational input remains self-reported and aligned with standardized benchmarks (J.-L. Chappelet & Mrkonjic, 2019). While this approach supports comparability and accountability, it privileges the perspectives of the Board, with limited justification for excluding the perceptions of those stakeholders who are most directly affected by governance decisions.

The strengths and limitations of existing frameworks depend on the types of indicators they prioritize and the method they use. Checklist-based governance assessment approaches have been effective in strengthening formal compliance and assessing rule-heavy dimensions such as transparency. They remain limited in their ability to capture governance compliance overall and less suited to evaluating outcome-based dimensions like social responsibility, which are closely linked to organizational interactions, routines, informal norms and behaviors. This is particularly important given that the purpose of good governance extends beyond procedural compliance and lies in the outcomes it is expected to generate for organizations and their stakeholders.

As Kaufmann and Kraay (2008) recognized, there are limitations, errors and subjectivity inherent in all types of indicators and assessments. They are imperfect approximations of what is intended to measure. This makes a case for holistic approaches that bring together different types of data sources.

1.1.3. Effects of Good Governance Implementation

Good governance frameworks in sport have been developed as a response and countermeasure to increased scandals, corruption, mismanagement and loss of legitimacy (J.-L. Chappelet & Mrkonjic, 2019). At the same time, complying with the principles of good governance has been theorized to deliver instrumental benefits and outcomes for sport organizations. Board-related governance principles: proper composition, independence, and shared leadership have a demonstrated positive link to financial and organizational performance. The most significant theoretical gap concerns the relationship between governance, outcomes and expected benefits. Systematic reviews have not revealed evidence for the link between the implementation of good governance and expected outcomes (Parent & Hoye, 2018; Thompson et al., 2023). This underscores the need for further evaluation of the effects of good governance in sport organizations, including the perspectives of other stakeholder groups outside of the board members (Claringbould et al., 2021; Heres, 2021; Tacon & Walters, 2021; Van Eekeren, 2021).

Complying with good governance principles can also produce several unintended and sometimes adverse consequences for sport organizations such as generating significant administrative burden, placing heavy workloads on staff and volunteers alike. In addition, compliance can turn into a tick-box exercise in which organizations fulfill requirements to secure funding or legitimacy without generating genuine change and embedding its values into their culture. Mandatory board diversity requirements, for example, may trigger us–them divisions between established members and newcomers, deteriorating rather than improving internal relations (Dowling et al., 2025). Also, externally imposed standards can constrain an organization's flexibility and innovative capacity, shifting to accountability toward regulators rather than the organization's own mission.

It is for these reasons that good governance assessment requires complementary attention to internal organizational dynamics and the perceptions of stakeholders who experience governance processes in practice.

1.2. Stakeholder Perceptions as Governance Outcomes

To understand how good governance generates benefits for sport organizations, this paper draws on four complementary theoretical perspectives that showcase the pathways by which good governance practices translate into organizational outcomes through stakeholder perceptions.
Building on this understanding of governance as both internalized and outcome-oriented processes, Geeraert (2018) outlines the intended effects of implementing good governance in sport organizations. According to the author, the implementation of the four dimensions (transparency, democratic processes, internal accountability and control and societal responsibility) contributes to perceptions of fairness, legitimacy and trust, improving policy effectiveness through stakeholder participation, and reducing the likelihood of power imbalances and unethical conduct. Taking this affirmation as a point of departure, it is essential to evaluate how the different affected groups within an organization perceive an environment of trust, fairness and legitimacy. This matters because an organization can comply formally (e.g. policies, published documents) while still being experienced as unfair, untrustworthy, or illegitimate by those most affected. Most of the benefits of good governance operate through stakeholder perceptions. As examples, stakeholder cooperation requires stakeholders to perceive the organization as trustworthy, resource acquisition from funders requires funders to perceive the organization as legitimate and accountable, volunteer and staff engagement requires collaborators to perceive the organization as fair, and risk mitigation requires a culture of integrity that the organization stakeholders have internalised. If governance produces outcomes through perceptions, then measuring governance without measuring perceptions is measuring inputs without measuring outputs.

What follows is a conceptual introduction to the key theoretical elements explored in this thesis.

1.2.1. Stakeholder Theory and the Primary Stakeholder

A stakeholder is broadly defined as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives" (Freeman, 1984: 46). This inclusive and broad scope inherently expands the field of relevant evaluators of good governance beyond internal leadership of the sport organization (Agle et al., 1999; Donaldson & Preston, 1995)

Stakeholder theory provides the theoretical justification for moving beyond boards and executives to identify the relevant evaluators of governance quality because it suggests an organization's overall success is directly linked to satisfying the needs, goals, and motivations of the groups and individuals with whom the organization interacts (Friedman et al., 2004). In practice, this means that managers behave as if all stakeholders' interests matter in their own right, even when no direct benefit to the organization is immediately visible (Donaldson & Preston, 1995).

Sport federations operate within complex stakeholder ecosystems. Governance decisions affect multiple groups differently, making stakeholder classification and inclusion a methodological and theoretical challenge for governance assessment. The most relevant stakeholders in a sport organization, often referred to as primary or definitive stakeholders, are identified as those groups whose continuous involvement is critical for the organization's survival and those who possess the core attributes of salience: power, legitimacy, and urgency (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2015; Naraine et al., 2016).

Based on the work of Parent and her colleagues, the most important stakeholders for sport organizations are often determined by their context (e.g., whether the organization is a nonprofit sport organization or an event organizing committee), the size of the event (international vs. domestic), and the organizational life cycle stage (planning vs. implementation) (Parent et al., 2018). In the nonprofit sport context, the following can be identified as the most prominent or primary stakeholders:

1. Legal Members/Owners (The Core Governing Stakeholders): The legal members or owners are considered the core or primary stakeholders. In the case of a National Sports organizations (NSO), the legal members-as-owners (regional stakeholders) are considered definitive stakeholders because they possess power and legitimacy and are urgent in relation to the NSO's strategic aspirations (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2015). The same relations applies to international sport organizations such as International Sport Federations. The concept of the "stakeowner" (Fassin, 2012) specifically characterizes these legal members as the genuine stakeholders with a legitimate stake.

2. Board, Management and Staff (Internal Operational Stakeholders): Internal stakeholders are generally defined as the individuals responsible for the operations and/or strategic direction of the

organization, including Board and committee members, paid staff, contractors, and consultants (Thompson & Parent, 2024).

3. Government Bodies (Coercive/Funding Stakeholders): Government stakeholders at various levels (national, regional, municipal) are consistently identified as highly relevant due to their regulatory role, resources, and power, especially in international events and the high funding dependence sport organizations have with these stakeholders (Naraine et al., 2016).

4. Athletes, Coaches, Referees, and Volunteers: In National Sport organizations, volunteers, athletes, referees and coaches remain relevant and centralized stakeholders because they provide necessary resources (human capital) and are essential groups within the sport's routine operations and competitions (Parent et al., 2018).

5. Sponsors and Local Businesses: Sponsors (local, national, and international) and local businesses are also consistently highly salient due to their importance in providing financial and material resources. For domestic sports events, local businesses, sponsors, and community-based stakeholders emerge as highly connected and powerful stakeholders (Parent et al., 2018; Naraine et al., 2016).

The stakeholders most significantly impacted by the principles of good governance in sport organizations are primarily the internal legal members, the governing body itself (Board, Management, and staff), and athletes, coaches and referees, although the degree of impact varies based on the type of stakeholder and the governance principle applied. Governance reforms clarify who the organization ultimately serves and who the board is accountable to. They define the board's responsibilities toward members, strengthen legal and ethical duties, and require decisions to be more transparent and closely monitored (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2015; Parent et al., 2018). In practice, these changes have concrete effects on people inside the organization. Board members and staff face increased legal obligations, more formalised roles, and heavier workloads, particularly during periods of organizational change (Thompson & Parent, 2024). Athletes, as direct participants in sport delivery, are similarly bound by governance outcomes through representation mechanisms, disciplinary systems, health and safety protections, and rights-based policies, reinforcing their status as core stakeholders within governance assessments (Geeraert, 2018).

By contrast, external stakeholders, such as governments, funders, communities, and sponsors, are primarily affected indirectly through funding conditions, regulatory oversight, or event-specific dependencies rather than through continuous governance obligations. While these actors may exert influence through coercive or resource-based power, their exposure to governance principles is episodic and context-dependent (Kristiansen et al., 2016; Naraine et al., 2016; Parent et al., 2018). Consequently, prioritizing primary stakeholders in governance assessment is theoretically justified, as they bear the strongest accountability relationships, experience the most direct governance impacts, and are structurally embedded in decision-making and implementation processes. As for the literature review made, there were no studies found accounting for stakeholder groups' perceptions on good governance compliance in sport federations.

Having answered, through stakeholder theory, the question of who the proper evaluator of good governance quality is, the next question is what these stakeholders should evaluate. Following Geeraert's logic, the implementation of good governance dimensions and principles leads to perceptions of trust, fairness and legitimacy. The following subsections explore each of these constructs based on organizational justice theory, organizational trust theory and legitimacy theory.

1.2.2. Organizational Justice: Stakeholder Perceptions of Fairness

Fairness (or justice), refers to an individual's perception that a decision, outcome, or process is equitable, impartial, and appropriate (Husted & Folger, 2004). This perception involves judgments of balance (compare a given action or outcome to the actions or outcomes of others) and correctness (consistent, accurate, clear, and compatible with current values) (Cojuharenco & Patient, 2013; Husted & Folger, 2004). Perceptions of fairness, often referred to as organizational justice, focus on how fairly people believe they are treated within organizations, typically by reflecting on the question: "Was that fair?" (Cojuharenco & Patient, 2013).

Organizational justice theory provides a direct explanation of how governance arrangements become meaningful to stakeholders: people judge organizations based on (a) procedural fairness (how decisions are made), (b) distributive fairness (how benefits and burdens are allocated), and (c) interactional/informational fairness (how respectfully people are treated and how well decisions are explained) (Colquitt, 2001; Greenberg, 1990; Whisenant et al., 2015). When governance reforms strengthen participation, clarity of roles, checks and balances, and transparent communication, they primarily operate through these justice perceptions, because stakeholders evaluate governance by asking: Was the process fair? Was I respected? Were reasons given?.

1.2.3. Organizational Trust: Stakeholder Confidence in Governing Bodies

Trust can be understood as a willingness to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations about others' intentions or behavior (Rousseau et al., 1998). In organizational and ethical settings, trust goes further by involving reliance on others to voluntarily act responsibly and make morally sound decisions grounded in ethical principles, whether among individuals, groups, or institutions (Greenwood & Van Buren Iii, 2010).

In the context of sport, good governance can be viewed as the effort of a governing body (the trustee) to earn the trust of its stakeholders (the trustors, such as athletes, teams, or fans). Based on the Integrative Model of Organizational Trust by Mayer et al. 1995, trust would be then the willingness to be vulnerable to this governing body (Mayer et al., 1995). The quality of governance is assessed by stakeholders based on the three factors of trustworthiness: Ability (Competence), Integrity (Honesty and Fairness) and Benevolence (Stakeholder Goodwill) (Schoorman et al., 2007). In this setting, transparency and accountability mechanisms support trust only as far as stakeholders interpret them as credible signals that decision-makers are competent, honest, and constrained by fair procedures (Greenwood & Van Buren Iii, 2010; Jepsen & Rousseau, 2022; Kramer, 2010; Rothstein, 2013; Rothstein & Stolle, 2008). This helps explain why transparency indicators are easy to measure through documentation, yet trust outcomes vary across stakeholder groups: the same practice can be interpreted as genuine openness or as symbolic compliance depending on how stakeholders experience decision-making and communication (Greenwood & Van Buren Iii, 2010; Harris & Wicks, 2010).

1.2.4. Organizational Legitimacy: Acceptance of Governance Authority

Legitimacy can be described as the broad belief that an entity's actions are acceptable, appropriate, and justified within a socially constructed framework of norms, values, beliefs, and shared understandings (Suchman, 1995). A modern view understands legitimacy not as something an organization possesses, but as an evaluation made by individuals at the micro level and by groups or institutions at the macro level (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). This evaluation represents one type of social judgment, alongside reputation and status, that audiences use to assess organizations (Bitektine, 2011).

In the context of sport and sport organizations, this is especially relevant, since authority rests not only on legal structures but also on democratic traditions, volunteer norms, and public expectations linked to public funding (Bitektine, 2011; Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Lock et al., 2015; Suchman, 1995). When stakeholders perceive decision-making as fair and transparent, they are more likely to accept outcomes, even unfavorable ones, because procedures are seen as rightful. Conversely, repeated experiences of unfairness, exclusion, or unclear decision-making can undermine legitimacy even when formal compliance is high, thereby reproducing the very legitimacy crises that good governance reforms aim to address (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Lock et al., 2015).

1.3. Theoretical Model: Linking Governance Dimensions to Stakeholder Perception

As previously stated, based on Geeraert (2018) Good governance framework which identifies 4 key dimensions of good governance that are: Transparency, Democratic Processes, Internal accountability and control and Societal responsibility. He also argues that the expectation of the compliance and implementation of these good governance practices is far beyond formal compliance and it lies on the expected effects upon sport organizations as increased trust, fairness and legitimacy. Nonetheless, the framework developed falls short in assessing those expected effects.

Following Geeraert's logic, and Integrating trust, justice and legitimacy theories, with empirical findings on governance structures, the study by Stucky & Čingienė (2026) proposes that good governance produces two interconnected primary effects. First, good governance shapes board structure and quality, which, as Parent and Hoye (2018) found, has an established empirical link to organizational performance through its influence on organizational capabilities such as leadership quality and strategic decision-making. Second, good governance fosters stakeholder perceptions of trust, legitimacy, and justice, which function as mediating environmental conditions that enable or constrain broader organizational operations. These two pathways are connected: board structure and quality also influences stakeholder perceptions, as the individuals who compose the board and their characteristics shape whether stakeholders perceive the organization as trustworthy, legitimate, and fair.

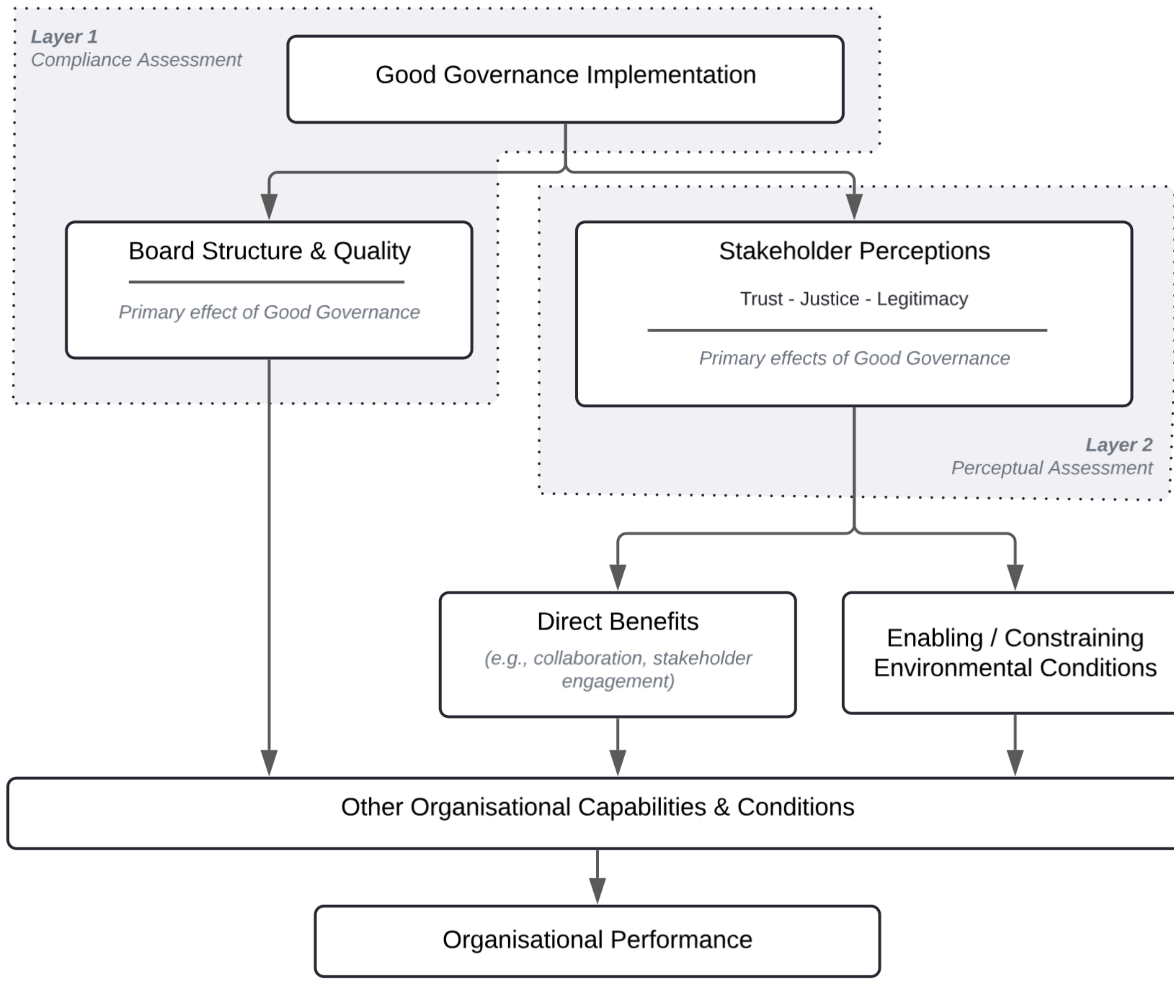

Figure 1: Proposed conceptual model: Governance, stakeholder perceptions, and organizational performance, created by author in (Stucky & Čingienė, 2026).

This framework explains why formal compliance is insufficient: if stakeholders do not actually perceive increased trust, legitimacy, and fairness, the enabling conditions for effective organizational functioning are diminished, regardless of what governance structures exist on paper. At the same time, it recognises that positive perceptions alone do not guarantee performance outcomes, they create a favourable environment in which other organizational capabilities, such as competent leadership and sound strategic decision-making, can operate more effectively. Notably, current governance assessment approaches already capture the first pathway, board composition and structure are standard compliance indicators, but largely fail to measure the second. This gap is precisely what the proposed perceptual assessment layer aims to address.

The following subsection develops three hypotheses, organized by perceptual constructs, and linking good governance compliance to those perceptual outcomes.

1.3.1 Trust and Good governance

Governance compliance refers to the extent to which an organization adheres to the principles of good governance, including transparency, internal democracy, accountability, and social responsibility. Trust and perceived trustworthiness are key elements of stakeholder-organization relationships in sport governance (Geeraert, 2025). Trust, conceptualised by Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) as a willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of another party, depends on stakeholders' assessment of the organization's ability, benevolence, and integrity. Governance compliance directly addresses each of these dimensions. Transparency and accountability supply the informational and structural conditions through which stakeholders can verify the organization as a whole, as well as the board and executives' ability and integrity, evaluating whether processes and regulations are respected and decisions are made on defensible grounds, whether leadership has the competence and credentials for the positions they hold, and whether the organizational operations are in line with its mission and values. Democratic processes signal benevolence by enabling participation and consideration of stakeholder interests in decision-making, demonstrating that the organization cares about those it represents and integrity, allowing open debates, elections and fair procedures and outcomes. Social responsibility practices reinforce both benevolence and ability, showing that the organization acts beyond the self-interest of its leaders and is competent enough to deliver value to all stakeholders in line with its mission.

Empirical evidence of these links can be found in the literature across multiple sectors. Positive relationships between governance dimensions and trust have been documented in education (Ehren et al., 2020; Meriç & Öz, 2025), restaurant industry (Yan et al., 2022), public administration (Lee & Li, 2021), social organizations (Pinto et al., 2024), banking (Bugandwa et al., 2021) and other corporate and organizational settings (Peifer & Newman, 2020; Schnackenberg et al., 2021; Tomlinson & Schnackenberg, 2022). While we found no studies specifically linking governance compliance to trust in sports organizations, the findings across other domains provide grounds for hypothesising a similar relationship in sport federations.

If trust only exists when an organization is perceived as trustworthy by its stakeholders, the overall cumulative effect of higher compliance with good governance principles would influence how stakeholders view and perceive the organization, resulting in higher trust, while those with lower compliance would face lower perceived trustworthiness and risk losing stakeholder support. On this basis, we expect:

H1: Federations with higher governance compliance are expected to show higher stakeholder trust.

1.3.2 Justice and Good Governance

In this thesis, we have analyzed fairness through the lens of Colquitt's (2001) organizational justice. Within Colquitt's view, justice refers to how an organization conducts itself and operates, encompassing processes, distribution, interpersonal treatment and informational disclosure. Likewise, in good governance literature, fairness is closely related to these justice subconstructs. Its importance as a good governance outcome has been expressed in terms of participation, respectful open debate and competition (Geeraert, 2018), which maps into the procedural and interpersonal justice logics; fair decision making and distribution among all stakeholders equally, linked to distributive justice, or the acknowledgement of the contrary, unfair procedures and awarding of events and benefits, as a precursor for scandals and crisis (Geeraert, 2015). Finally transparency principles and disclosure of information, decisions and operations, are connected to informational justice. In essence, good governance allows stakeholders to participate and influence decision making, with transparent and accountability measures enforcing correctness and maintaining the organizational mission and all stakeholder groups at the center, irrespective of the favourability of any particular outcome.

Scholars have found positive links between good governance practices and justice, as well as the positive effect that justice perceptions with building trust and enhancing legitimacy as positive by products (Bujold et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2022).

Good governance practices collectively show an organization's commitment to treating its stakeholders fairly and respectfully, with clear procedures and outcomes, irrespective of power, favoritism, or personal interests. By contrast, where governance compliance is low, decisions appear arbitrary, processes opaque, and stakeholder treatment inconsistent, conditions that the procedural justice literature consistently associates with perceptions of unfairness (Unterhitzenberger & Moeller, 2021; Geeraert, 2015). On this basis:

H2: Federations with higher governance compliance are expected to show higher perceived justice.

1.3.3 Legitimacy and Good Governance

Perceived legitimacy sits at the core of good governance studies and interests. Geeraert (2015) explains how the rise of good governance initiatives in sport was promoted by the major legitimacy crises faced by sports organizations. He frames the legitimacy crisis based on Zaum's (2013) output legitimacy, procedural legitimacy, and structural legitimacy. Output legitimacy, in line with Suchman's pragmatic legitimacy, is based on what stakeholders receive from the organization and whether it meets their expectations. Procedural legitimacy, in line with Suchman's moral legitimacy, is based on the perception that the organization acts in line with accepted norms and procedures to address corruption. Finally, structural legitimacy, encompassed in Suchman's cognitive legitimacy, applies to the appropriateness of the organization to exist and fulfil the mission it is expected to carry out. Challenges to this form of legitimacy can be seen in attempts by stakeholder groups to break ranks and create a competition setting outside the rules and domain of the organization (e.g., private leagues of different sports like the football Super League)(Geeraert, 2015).

As would be expected, good governance dimensions contribute directly to the perceptions of legitimacy. Transparency allows stakeholders to evaluate organizational workings and results against their expectations and values. Democratic processes bring stakeholders into the equation, making them part of the decision-making and more willing to accept and perceive that the organizational strategy and actions bring them the expected value. Internal accountability makes sure that processes and regulations are respected and verifiable, minimizing unethical conduct and unfair or unclear decision-making situations. Participation is implicit in democratic processes and internal accountability, and contributes to perceived fairness in spite of favourable or unfavourable outcomes. Finally, participation and social responsibility place stakeholders at the centre of organizational workings, encouraging them to do things right and in line with stakeholder interests, and preventing them from needing to go outside of the organization to replace it because it is not working or fulfilling its mission. Empirical evidence of these links can be found in the literature as well. The link between good governance dimensions and legitimacy has been studied and found positively supported by academics in different settings (Budiana, 2025; Bunea & Nørbech, 2025; L. Chappelet & Mrkonjic, 2013; De Fine Licht et al., 2014; del-Castillo-Feito et al., 2022; Geeraert, 2015; Hirschl & Hudson, 2024; Jacobs & Kaufmann, 2021; Lim & Zhang, 2025).

Since legitimacy only exists in as much as an organization is perceived as legitimate by its stakeholders, the overall cumulative effect of higher compliance with good governance principles would influence how stakeholders view and perceive the organization, resulting in higher legitimacy, while those with lower compliance would face lower perceived legitimacy and be in danger of being challenged or disempowered. On this basis, we expect:

H3: Federations with higher governance compliance are expected to show higher perceived legitimacy.

Stated positively, we will test the hypotheses that higher compliance of good governance principles will translate into higher levels of perceptual measures of trust, fairness and legitimacy. We argue that an assessment of stakeholder perceptions in sport federations will provide a valuable complement in the assessment of good governance in sport organizations, focusing on how primary stakeholders perceive fairness, trust and legitimacy in governance implementation.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design and Strategy

2.1.1 Contextual setting

This study was conducted within the context of Lithuanian national sport federations, which operate as nonprofit, member-based organizations inside a publicly regulated sport system. These federations are shaped by democratic governance structures, a reliance on volunteer leadership, and a heavy dependence on public funding. Those features make them a good setting for studying good governance, as other work has shown (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2025; Geeraert, 2018; Kartakoullis et al., 2015).

Governance research in sport has grown a lot over the past two decades. A systematic review by Thompson et al. (2023) identified 73 academic records published between 2002 and 2019, with a clear rise after 2015. Most of that research looks at national and international sport organizations and is heavily European, with a strong concentration of studies from Germany, Denmark, Switzerland and Belgium. The authors also point out that much of the literature stays conceptual rather than empirical, which is exactly why applied, context-specific governance research is still needed.

In Lithuania, the implementation of good governance principles has been studied, though only to a limited degree. Čingienė et al. (2015) assessed eight strategic Lithuanian sport federations using an adapted version of the AGGIS instrument developed by Play the Game and the Danish Institute for Sport Studies. Working from survey data given by senior federation representatives such as presidents and general secretaries, they found wide variation in governance implementation across organizations. Democratic governance came out as the strongest dimension, rated excellent overall, while transparency, public communication and social responsibility were consistently the weakest areas (Čingienė et al., 2015).

Beyond formal structures, stakeholder perspectives have received little attention in the Lithuanian context. Grigaliūnaitė and Eimontas (2018) argued that good governance in sport should account for the interests and involvement of different stakeholder groups, athletes in particular. Their analysis suggests that more athlete participation in decision-making can improve policy acceptance, organizational awareness and the quality of decisions, partly by bringing specialized knowledge into the room. The same authors flag a broader challenge: federations struggle to identify, classify and meaningfully involve their many stakeholder groups, including coaches, officials, employees and others affected by governance decisions.

So the existing research points to real variation in how Lithuanian sport federations implement good governance, and scholars have explicitly called for more empirical work that looks at the issue from a broader, more inclusive angle (Grigaliūnaitė & Eimontas, 2018). Lithuania is a useful empirical setting for this. Its sport governance system broadly lines up with European norms, yet it remains underrepresented in research that puts formal governance assessment and stakeholder perception side by side.

This research has been done within the scope of a cooperation agreement Nr. S-2026/5 between the author of the thesis and the Lithuanian National Sport Agency (Nacionalinė Sporto Agentūra) that was signed on May 21, 2026.

2.1.2 Theoretical rationale and model

Through a comparative study of four Lithuanian sport federations, this work explored the hypothesis that federations with higher governance compliance receive higher stakeholder evaluations of trust, justice and legitimacy. The study does not claim to prove causality. It sets out to provide initial exploratory evidence of a relationship we consider relevant and consistent with theoretical expectations, and to explore how stakeholder perceptions can complement traditional good governance assessments.

2.1.3 Research question and hypotheses

The overall research question asked whether sport organizations with higher good governance scores receive higher stakeholder evaluations of trust, justice and legitimacy. This broke down into three specific hypotheses, which are best read as exploratory propositions or guiding hypotheses rather than strict confirmatory tests:

- **H1:** Federations with higher governance compliance show higher stakeholder trust.
- **H2:** Federations with higher governance compliance show higher perceived justice.
- **H3:** Federations with higher governance compliance show higher perceived legitimacy.

2.1.4 Methodological assumptions and research strategy

This was a small-N exploratory study. It built a governance profile for each of the four federations and a stakeholder perception profile covering trust, justice and legitimacy. A quantitative approach was used, drawing on survey data and a governance checklist, in a cross-sectional design that combined primary survey data with secondary governance indicators.

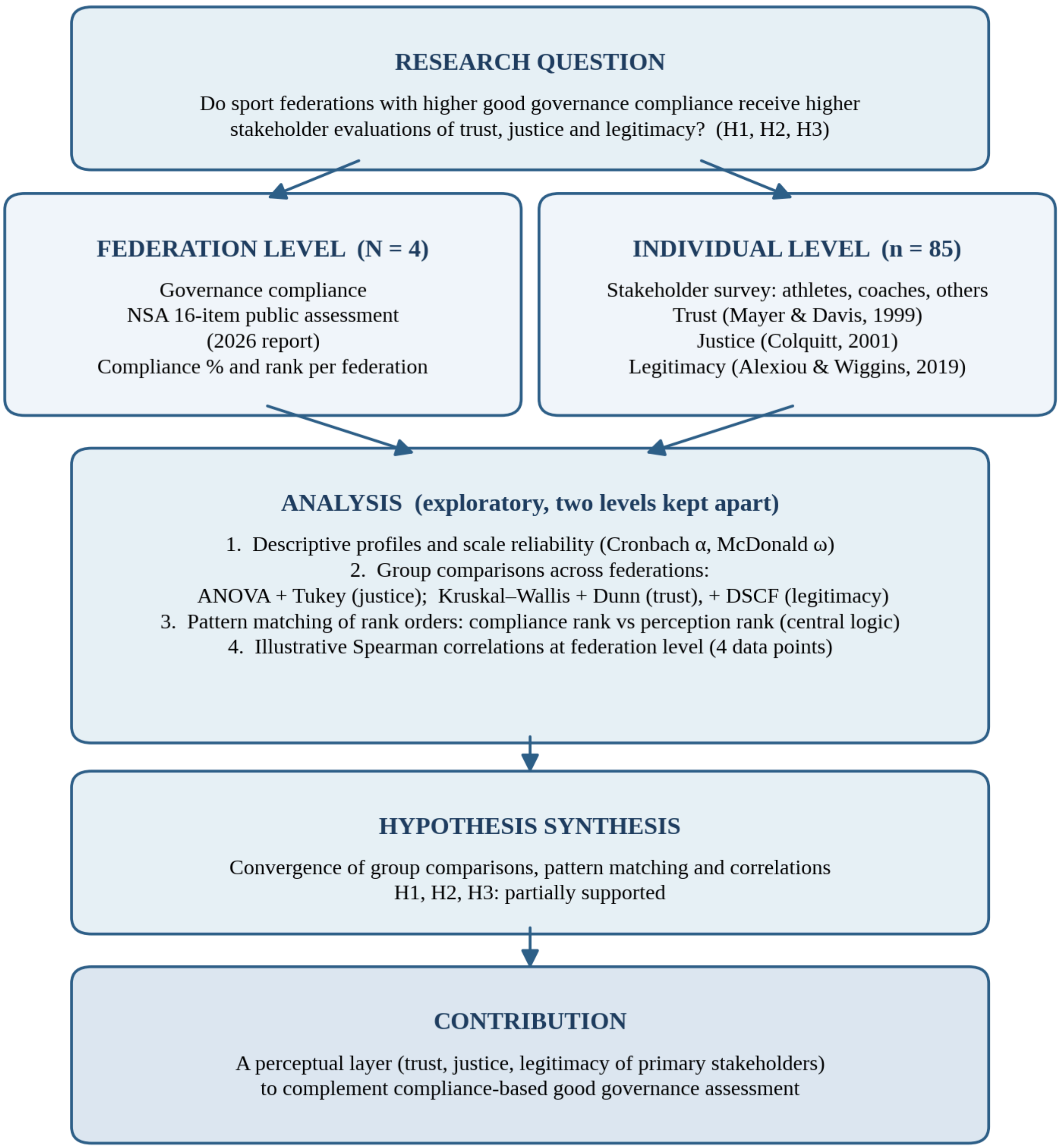

Figure 2: Research design and logic of the study (compiled by the author).

2.2. Research Instruments and Measures

2.2.1 Governance

Good governance was assessed using an adapted benchmarking instrument based on the Sports Governance Observer (SGO) 2018 and the ACTION project. The national instrument was developed by the National Sports Agency and validated with SGO and ACTION project experts. It is a 16-item yes/no checklist covering four dimensions of governance: transparency, democratic processes, internal accountability and control, and societal responsibility (Botwina et al., 2022; Geeraert, 2018). Because it is built on the SGO framework, it allows comparison with more traditional governance assessments. Importantly, the evaluations were produced by the agency and are publicly accessible, so the governance data in this study is secondary rather than coded by the researcher.

2.2.2 Stakeholder perceptions

Stakeholder perceptions were measured with a survey that brought together validated scales for trust, organizational justice and legitimacy. These three constructs were chosen because prior literature identifies them as key intended outcomes of good governance in sport organizations. Before finalising the survey, a cross-analysis was done to check how each scale related to the governance principles, so the constructs weren't selected arbitrarily.

A practical issue shaped the final instrument. Stacking the three full scales produced 52 items, which is long. On methodological advice from the university, the survey was shortened to protect response quality, since long surveys tend to produce rushed answers and higher drop-off. The trimming was not random. The original scales come from the corporate world and are mostly written for employees, so some items read awkwardly when applied to athletes, coaches or referees. Items were dropped per subcategory based on how well they worked in a sport context, and the wording was lightly adapted where needed, for example changing "organization" to "federation," without altering the meaning of any item. These kinds of minor adaptations are supported by other studies. A floor of three items per perceptual subcategory was kept throughout, so that Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega could still be computed and the scales would remain valid. The original and adapted item lists are provided in the annex.

Trust. Organizational trust was assessed using a composite subset of items drawn from Mayer and Davis (1999). Together these capture key dimensions of organizational trust, including generalized trust, integrity, benevolence and competence. All items used a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), with higher scores meaning higher perceived trust. The final list was reduced to 12 items: 3 for competence, 3 for integrity, 3 for benevolence and 3 for general trust (Mayer & Davis, 1999).

Justice. Organizational justice was assessed using Colquitt's Organizational Justice Scale (COJS). The full scale has 20 items across four subscales: distributive, procedural, interpersonal and informational justice. These reflect how stakeholders judge decision-making processes, the allocation of outcomes, and interpersonal treatment within the organization. All items used a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (to a small extent / low degree) to 5 (to a large extent / high degree), with higher scores meaning higher perceived justice (Baka, 2018; Díaz-Gracia et al., 2014; Enoksen, 2015; Magnavita et al., 2022). The final list was reduced to 12 items, 3 per justice dimension.

Legitimacy. Organizational legitimacy was assessed using the individual legitimacy perceptions scale of Alexiou and Wiggins (2019), based on Suchman's (1995) conceptualization. The scale covers three dimensions: pragmatic, moral and cognitive legitimacy. Pragmatic legitimacy captures perceptions of the value the organization provides, moral legitimacy reflects evaluations of ethical conduct and adherence to social norms, and cognitive legitimacy reflects the extent to which the organization is seen as comprehensible, necessary and taken-for-granted. Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree); the original instrument used a 7-point scale, which was standardized to 5 points for consistency with the trust and justice measures (see Limitations). The final list was reduced to 9 items, 3 per dimension. It is worth noting that the moral and cognitive subscales each had only three items in the original, so neither was trimmed here. Alexiou and Wiggins (2019) caution against combining the three dimensions into a single composite, recommending instead that they be modelled as separate reflective constructs. In this initial analysis, legitimacy was nonetheless examined as an aggregate score to provide an overall picture of stakeholder perceptions; disaggregated analysis of the three dimensions is reserved for future work. This aggregation is also acknowledged as a limitation (see Section 4.6).

2.2.3 Translation

The shortened survey was reviewed by experts in the field and translated into Lithuanian by experts familiar with both sport and the language. Minor wording adaptations were allowed where needed to keep the items relevant to the sport context, following good practice in cross-contextual sport management research (Lock et al., 2015).

2.3. Research Sample

2.3.1 Federations

The four federations were selected in coordination with the NSA, which had already carried out the governance evaluations. The aim was a balanced set: two Olympic and two non-Olympic federations, covering four different sports. Governance scores did not drive the selection. In the end, participation came down to which federations were willing to take part voluntarily, and four agreed. A collaboration agreement was signed between the author and the NSA, and each federation was informed about the study and consented to participate. The federations are kept anonymous and referred to as Federation A, B, C and D.

2.3.2 Stakeholders

Stakeholder participants were selected based on their status within the federation. Following stakeholder theory, primary stakeholders are those whose continuous involvement is essential to how the organization functions and who are directly affected by governance decisions. The relevant groups here were athletes, coaches, referees and members. Board members, senior management and employees were excluded from the sample, because of their position as internal stakeholders, and to avoid reinforcing the self-assessment bias that governance evaluation frameworks tend to carry (Thompson & Parent, 2024). The Board and senior management were, however, informed about the study and asked to approve running the survey with their stakeholders.

In the final survey, the role variable was collapsed into three categories: athletes, coaches, and others. The "others" group covered referees and member representatives. This was done because athletes and coaches made up the large majority of respondents, and splitting "others" further would have left groups too small to analyze meaningfully.

All participants had to be at least 18 years of age, ensuring legal capacity to give informed consent and reflecting the adult governance environment under study. The applied inclusion criterion was at least one year of involvement in federation events, so that participants had enough experience to judge governance practices in a meaningful way.

The original plan included a target aim for a balanced gender distribution. The gender distribution came out at 54 men and 31 women rather than a 50/50 split.

2.4 Data Collection

2.4.1 Governance data

Governance data was not coded by the researcher. The national sports agency had already evaluated the federations using its adapted SGO/ACTION self-assessment instrument, and these evaluations are publicly accessible (Lithuanian Sports Agency, 2025, 2026). Each governance requirement is coded dichotomously based on documentary evidence meeting minimum compliance criteria, and the results are aggregated into compliance scores at the principle and dimension levels.

The most recent evaluation available was published in 2026, reflecting compliance information that federations self-reported for the year 2025. The NSA reports data with a one-year lag, so the figures submitted for a given year appear in the funding disclosure published the following year (Lithuanian Sports Agency, 2025, 2026). The 2026 report therefore covers 2025 compliance, and the 2025 report covers 2024 compliance. The 2025 compliance data was used for the governance ranking that feeds the pattern matching. The 2024 data was used only as a minor year-on-year comparison.

2.4.2 Stakeholder data

Stakeholder data was collected through a self-administered, structured online questionnaire sent to eligible stakeholders of the four federations. An online format fits prior organizational and sport management research, since it reaches dispersed stakeholder groups efficiently while keeping responses anonymous and standardized (Biscaia et al., 2018; Lock et al., 2015; Maiolo & Zuffo, 2018).

The questionnaire was distributed through the federations' official email channels using apklausa.lt, a Lithuanian survey provider chosen so the platform would feel familiar to respondents. The survey opened with an information page that explained the study, set out the voluntary nature of participation and the confidentiality conditions, and confirmed informed consent before any questions appeared. It stayed open for about five weeks, from 14 April to 24 May 2026, and two reminders were sent to lift the response count, a strategy other studies recommend (Enoksen, 2015; Lock et al., 2015). No incentives were offered, to avoid response bias (Maiolo & Zuffo, 2018). The questionnaire was identical for all stakeholder groups, with only minor wording adaptations to keep it relevant to each group's role, which keeps perceptions comparable across categories while holding measurement consistent (Biscaia et al., 2018; Lock et al., 2015).

The final sample was 85 respondents, distributed across the four federations as 14, 16, 20 and 35.

2.5. Data Analysis

The analysis sits at two different levels, and that shaped every choice made here. Governance compliance is a federation-level variable, and there are only four federations, so just four governance data points. Stakeholder perceptions are individual-level, with $n = 85$. With only four governance observations, predictive techniques like multiple regression are not feasible, and the mismatch in levels rules out treating governance as a predictor in any modelling sense. So the analysis used four strategies that fit the data: descriptive comparison, group comparison, pattern matching, and illustrative rank correlations. All analyses were run in jamovi (version 2.7.30).

Governance profile. For each federation, the number of principles fulfilled and the percentage of compliance were reported, along with the resulting rank. This allowed comparison between federations and fed the later pattern matching.

Sample balance check. Before comparing perceptions, chi-square tests checked whether the four federations differed demographically by role, experience and gender, with Cramér's V as the effect size. Role came out balanced (non-significant), experience differed significantly ($p = .001$), and gender was marginal ($p = .052$).

Reliability. Internal consistency for each perception scale was checked with both Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega, reported because the scales have subfactors and had been shortened. Reliability was good for trust, justice and legitimacy overall and at the subdimension level. The one exception was cognitive legitimacy ($\alpha = .682$), which came out weak. Since cognitive legitimacy kept all of its original items, this weakness is not a product of the item reduction. With reliability otherwise acceptable, composite scores were created for each construct by averaging the items.

Perception profiles. Composite scores were computed per respondent, then summarized per federation with the mean, standard deviation, median and 95% confidence interval for each construct. Shapiro–Wilk tests checked normality per federation and construct, which guided the choice of comparison test.

Group comparison. To test whether perceptions differed across the four federations, assumptions were checked per construct with Shapiro–Wilk for normality and Levene's test for homogeneity of variance. The omnibus test was then matched to the data. Justice met the assumptions, so a one-way ANOVA was used. Trust violated normality, so the Kruskal–Wallis test was used. Legitimacy violated both assumptions, so Kruskal–Wallis was used there as well. Effect sizes were η^2 for the ANOVA and ε^2 for the Kruskal–Wallis tests. Post-hoc pairwise comparisons followed: Tukey HSD for justice, Dunn's test with Bonferroni correction for trust, and the Dwass–Steel–Critchlow–Fligner test for legitimacy, given its unequal variances. In general terms the pairing is fixed: Tukey HSD follows the one-way ANOVA, Dunn's test with Bonferroni correction follows Kruskal–Wallis, and DSCF is the non-parametric pairwise procedure used where group variances are unequal (Games-Howell would follow a Welch ANOVA, which was not needed here). Post-hoc comparisons were only run where the omnibus test was significant.

Demographic sensitivity check. Because experience and gender weren't perfectly balanced across federations, a sensitivity check confirmed that perception differences were not simply demographics in disguise. Perceptions were compared across the three experience bands (1–3, 4–7 and 8+ years) with Kruskal–Wallis and ε^2, and across gender with the Mann–Whitney U test and rank-biserial r. Role was excluded here, since it was already shown to be balanced.

Pattern matching. This was the central analytic logic. The federations were ranked on governance compliance and ranked again on each perception construct, and the two rank orders were compared hypothesis by hypothesis. This tested whether the most compliant federation also showed the highest trust, justice and legitimacy, and whether the least compliant showed the lowest. This does not prove causality, but it gives meaningful exploratory evidence.

Illustrative rank correlations. Spearman's ρ was calculated between federation-level governance and each perception construct, alongside the correlations among the three perceptions. With only four federations, these correlations are descriptive and illustrative only, not confirmatory hypothesis tests, and were interpreted cautiously.

Hypothesis synthesis. The final evaluation combined the group comparison, the pattern matching and the Spearman results into a single convergence read per hypothesis, rather than introducing a new test.

2.6. Reliability, Validity and Ethics

Formal authorization was obtained from each federation's Board and senior management before any data was collected. Following approval, the questionnaire link was distributed electronically through official federation email channels (Maiolo & Zuffo, 2018; Lock et al., 2015). Management never had access to individual responses, and no identifiable information was collected, which limits social desirability bias and any sense of pressure to answer a particular way.

The questionnaire opened with an information page covering the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the confidentiality conditions and the estimated completion time, and participants had to confirm informed consent before continuing. This follows established organizational survey protocols in governance, trust and legitimacy research (Maiolo & Zuffo, 2018; Enoksen, 2015). The survey was identical across groups with only minor wording adaptations for role relevance, and the translation followed an expert forward-translation and review procedure.

Data was collected anonymously and stored securely in line with data protection regulations, with access to raw data restricted to the researcher. Once the survey closed, responses were screened for completeness, and partially completed questionnaires were excluded where key sections were missing, in keeping with good practice in organizational perception studies (Lock et al., 2015; Biscaia et al., 2018; Enoksen, 2015).

The findings are interpreted as exploratory and comparative rather than predictive. This is an ethical commitment as much as a methodological one: not to claim more than the design and data allow. At the same time, the results lay the groundwork for a larger and deeper research agenda, and on a practical level they give the federations useful input as they reflect on their governance practices and stakeholder relationships.

2.7 Methodological limitations

A few limitations should be acknowledged. The study covers only four federations, all within a single national and cultural context, which limits how far the findings generalise. Working inside one country means stakeholders largely share a cultural background, and results could look different in international bodies whose stakeholder groups span many cultures.

The sample is also small, around 14 to 35 respondents per federation, which constrains the statistical power of the group comparisons and is the main reason the analysis stays exploratory. The level-of-analysis gap matters too: with only four governance data points, the link between governance and perceptions can be examined through pattern matching and illustrative correlation, but not modelled predictively.

The cross-sectional design captures perceptions at a single moment. Because views on governance can shift as organizations change, longitudinal work would be needed to get at causal relationships or how perceptions move over time.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

This is an exploratory small-N comparative study to assess the influence of governance implementation on primary stakeholders' perceptions of fairness (justice), trust, and legitimacy. This chapter presents the empirical findings of the study and discusses them in relation to the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 1 and the methodological approach described in Chapter 2. The chapter is structured around the empirical research model and the three guiding hypotheses (H1, H2, H3) as exploratory propositions, arguing that federations with higher compliance scores are expected to have higher stakeholder perceptions of trust, justice and legitimacy. This chapter will start with a descriptive analysis of the sample composition and reliability tests for the perceptual scales. Then it will continue with governance and perceptual profiles per federation, followed by the comparative analysis between federations and sensitivity checks, and finalizing with pattern matching and hypothesis testing.

3.1. Logic and Level of Analysis

Before presenting the findings, an important methodological clarification is necessary. Governance compliance was measured at the federation level, producing only four independent observations (n = 4), one per national sport federation. Stakeholder perceptions of trust, justice, and legitimacy were measured at the individual level (n = 85). This mismatch in levels of analysis means that classical predictive techniques such as multiple regression are not appropriate, and the analytical strategy was adjusted to reflect what the data can realistically support: descriptive comparison, group comparison, pattern matching, and illustrative rank correlations.

3.2. Sample Composition

A total of 85 stakeholders from Lithuanian sport federations completed the survey, distributed unevenly across the four federations (n = 14, 16, 20, 35). Three demographic variables were recorded for each respondent: role (athlete, coach, other), years of involvement (1–3, 4–7, 8+), and gender. Because demographic differences across federations could undermine the federation-level comparison, the composition of each federation was examined before the main analyses.

Table 1. Demographic composition by federation (% within federation)

Federation	**n**	**Role (Athlete / Coach / Other)**			**Years of Involvement (1–3 / 4–7 / 8+ yrs)**			**Gender (M / F)**	
		Athlete	Coach	Other	1–3 yrs	4–7 yrs	8+ yrs	M	F
Federation A	20	65%	30%	5%	0%	20%	80%	65%	35%
Federation B	16	43.8%	50%	6.3%	18.8%	31.3%	50%	37.5%	62.5%
Federation C	14	50%	42.9%	7.1%	21.4%	35.7%	42.9%	85.7%	14.3%
Federation D	35	40%	51.4%	**8.6%**	**2.9%**	**2.9%**	**94.3%**	65.7%	34.3%
Total	**85**	**48.2%**	**44.7%**	**7.1%**	**8.2%**	**17.6%**	**74.1%**	**63.5%**	**36.5%**

Compiled by the author.

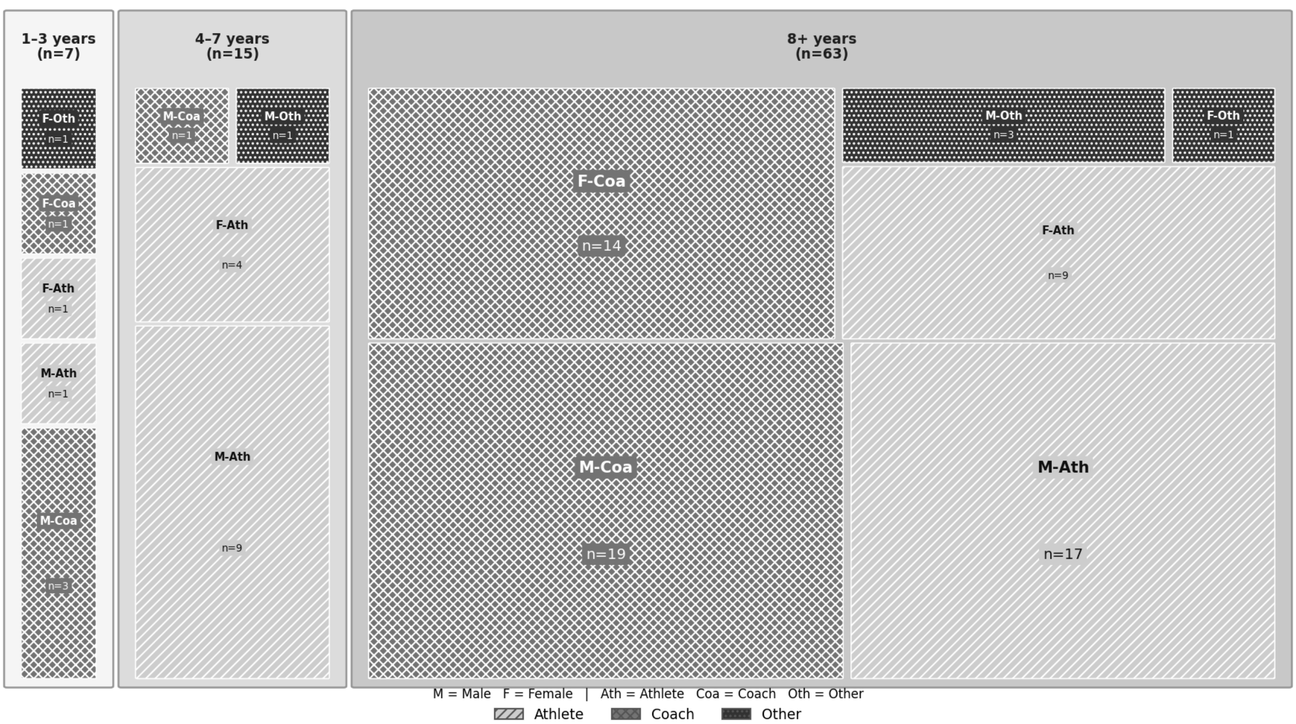

Figure 3: Demographic composition by groups

Chi-square tests were used to check whether the four federations differed in their demographic composition. Role was similar across federations ($\chi^2(6) = 3.41$, $p = .755$, Cramer's $V = 0.14$), with comparable shares of athletes, coaches, and others. Years of involvement differed clearly ($\chi^2(6) = 21.8$, $p = .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.36$): Federation D was mostly long-tenured respondents (94.3% with 8+ years), while Federations B and C were more mixed. Gender just missed significance ($\chi^2(3) = 7.74$, $p = .052$, Cramer's $V = 0.30$), but the medium effect size shows a real pattern with Federation B being mostly female, while the others mostly male.

These differences, especially the concentration of long-tenured respondents in Federation D, mean that some of the perception differences between federations could be linked to who answered the survey, not only to governance compliance. This is checked in Section 3.6.3 and noted in the limitations.

3.3. Reliability of the Perception Scales

Before composite scores were calculated for the three perception constructs, the internal consistency of each scale was assessed. This step was necessary to justify averaging the items belonging to each construct into a single score per respondent. From the measurement instrument, trust was composed of 12 items, justice was also composed of 12 items and legitimacy was composed of 9 items.

To check whether each scale measured its perception consistently, two reliability coefficients were calculated: Cronbach's α and McDonald's ω. The decision to use both scales was made because all three scales in this study contain distinct subfactors: Trust (benevolence, integrity, competence, general trust), Justice (procedural, distributive, interpersonal, informational), and Legitimacy (moral, pragmatic, cognitive), and because the original scales were shortened, so the equal-contribution assumption for Cronbach's α may not hold. McDonald's ω does not rely on this assumption, making it better suited to scales with subfactors and modified item sets. Calculating both allowed us to check whether α was giving an accurate picture or potentially a misleading one.

The results showed strong reliability across all three scales. Trust had $\alpha = .900$ and $\omega = .913$, Justice had $\alpha = .932$ and $\omega = .935$, and Legitimacy had $\alpha = .895$ and $\omega = .902$. The two coefficients were nearly identical for all three scales, with differences of less than .02 in each case. This close agreement suggests that despite having subfactors and being shortened from their original versions, the items within each scale are contributing fairly equally to the overall construct.

Table 2. Internal consistency of perception scales

Construct	No. of items	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω	Interpretation
Trust	*12*	*0.900*	*0.913*	*Excellent*
Justice	*12*	*0.932*	*0.935*	*Excellent*
Legitimacy	*9*	*0.895*	*0.902*	*Excellent*

Compiled by the author.

All values are well above the commonly accepted minimum of .70, indicating that all three scales are reliable measures suitable for use in further analysis.

All subcategories of trust, justice and legitimacy were also tested for internal consistency. All of them scored above 0.8, except for Trust benevolence ($\alpha = .776$ and $\omega = .792$), trust general ($\alpha = .460$ and $\omega = .474$ - although this one was the only one with 2 inverted items within it) and cognitive legitimacy ($\alpha = .682$ and $\omega = .772$) which maintain the 3 original items with no reduction. Regarding cognitive legitimacy a plausible explanation could be based on the structure of the sport system, quasi monopolistic, where there is no competition or clear alternative that it might be confusing for stakeholders to answer. Although there was no subcategory analysis, it is noted as a limitation and as a recommendation for future research to examine the structure of these constructs within sport governance contexts. The full reliability table for all subcategories is presented in Annex 3.1.

3.4. Governance Compliance Profile of the Four Federations

Governance compliance was operationalized through a 16-item yes/no checklist from the National Sport Agency (NSA) adapted assessment tool (Annex 3.2). For each federation, the number of principles fulfilled and the corresponding percentage compliance were calculated. The NSA publicly discloses federation funding and compliance data annually; the 2025 report reflects information submitted by federations for the year 2024, and the 2026 report reflects information submitted for 2025 (Lithuanian Sports Agency, 2025, 2026). The results are presented in Table 3 and Figure 3.

Table 3. Governance compliance scores by federation

Federation	Principles fulfilled in 2024	2025 report (2024 compliance data)	Principles fulfilled in 2025	2026 report (2025 compliance data)	Rank 2026
Federation B	*14/16*	*88%*	*15/16*	*94%*	*2*
Federation C	*14/16*	*88%*	*14/16*	*88%*	*3*
Federation A	*16/16*	*100%*	*16/16*	*100%*	*1*
Federation D	*11/16*	*69%*	*11/16*	*69%*	*4*

Compiled by the author.

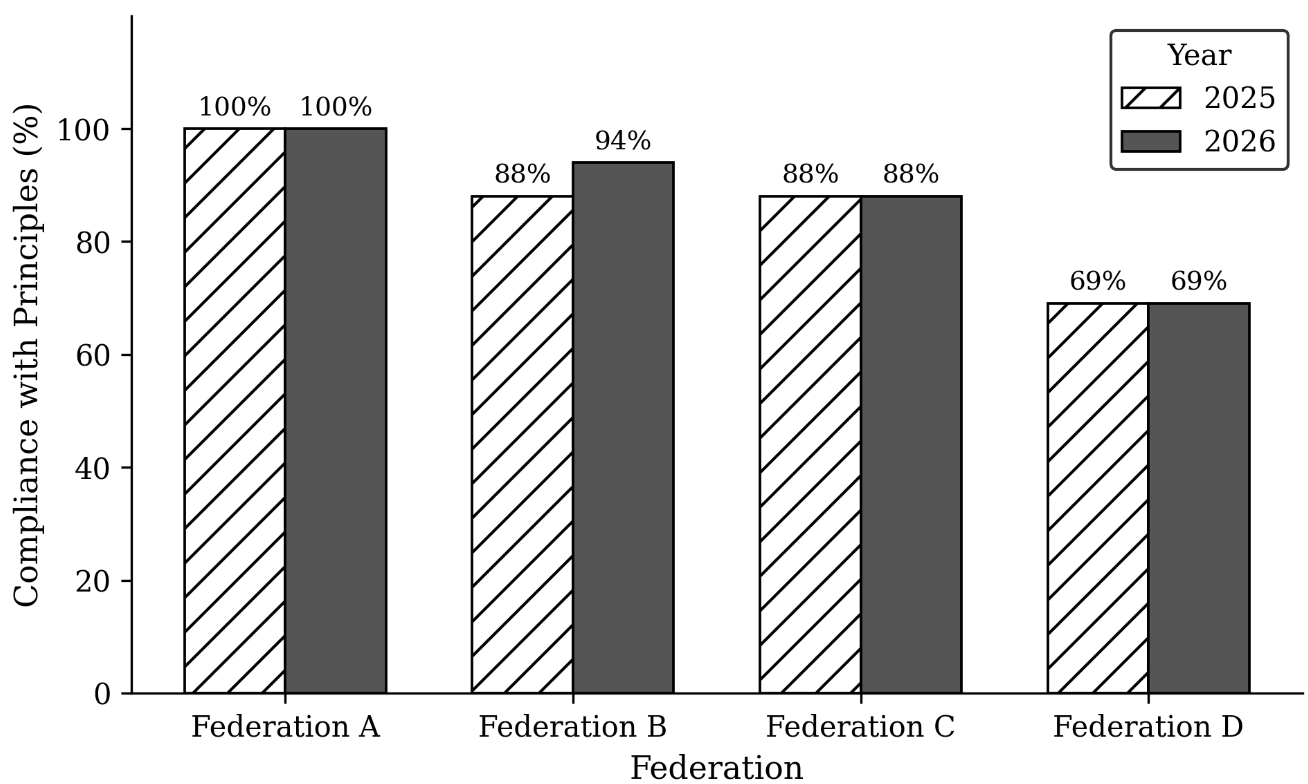

Figure 4: Governance compliance by federation

Federation A achieved full compliance in both years, ranking first across all four federations, while Federation D recorded the lowest scores in both 2025 and 2026, falling notably below the others at 69%. Federations B and C were closely matched at 88% in 2025; Federation B improved by one additional principle in 2026 to reach 94%, while Federation C remained unchanged. The results reveal a clear gap between three federations with compliance consistently above 85% and one federation below 70%.

Examining the specific principles not met offers further insight. Federations B and C both failed to comply with the 40% gender balance requirement in the governing body, a principle directly linked to representation and inclusive governance. Federation C's additional non-compliance concerned youth representation (under 35) within the governing body, linked as well with participation. Federation D did not meet either of these principles, and additionally failed to comply with requirements on athlete representation in the governing body, policies preventing sexual harassment, and rules against discrimination in sport. These latter principles are particularly relevant to athlete welfare and will be revisited in the discussion in relation to the survey findings.

Across all four federations, non-compliance was concentrated in principles related to democratic participation, representation of key stakeholder groups, and social responsibility.

3.5. Stakeholder Perception Profiles by Federation

Composite scores for trust, justice, and legitimacy were calculated for each respondent as the mean of the items belonging to each construct. Federation-level descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, median, and 95% confidence interval of the mean) are reported below.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for trust, justice and legitimacy by federation

Federation	n	Trust M (SD) [95% CI]	Justice M (SD) [95% CI]	Legitimacy M (SD) [95% CI]
Federation B	*16*	*3.93 (0.475) [3.67, 4.18]*	*4.05 (0.630) [3.72, 4.39]*	*4.06 (0.437) [3.83, 4.30]*
Federation C	*14*	*4.17 (0.563) [3.84, 4.49]*	*4.27 (0.638) [3.90, 4.64]*	*4.42 (0.733) [4.00, 4.84]*
Federation A	*20*	*4.12 (0.462) [3.90, 4.34]*	*3.91 (0.637) [3.61, 4.21]*	*4.44 (0.401) [4.25, 4.63]*
Federation D	*35*	*3.68 (0.679) [3.45, 3.91]*	*3.68 (0.692) [3.44, 3.92]*	*4.01 (0.696) [3.77, 4.25]*

Federation	n	Trust M (SD) [95% CI]	Justice M (SD) [95% CI]	Legitimacy M (SD) [95% CI]
TOTAL	*85*	*3.91 (0.607)*	*3.90 (0.683)*	*4.19 (0.625)*

Compiled by the author.

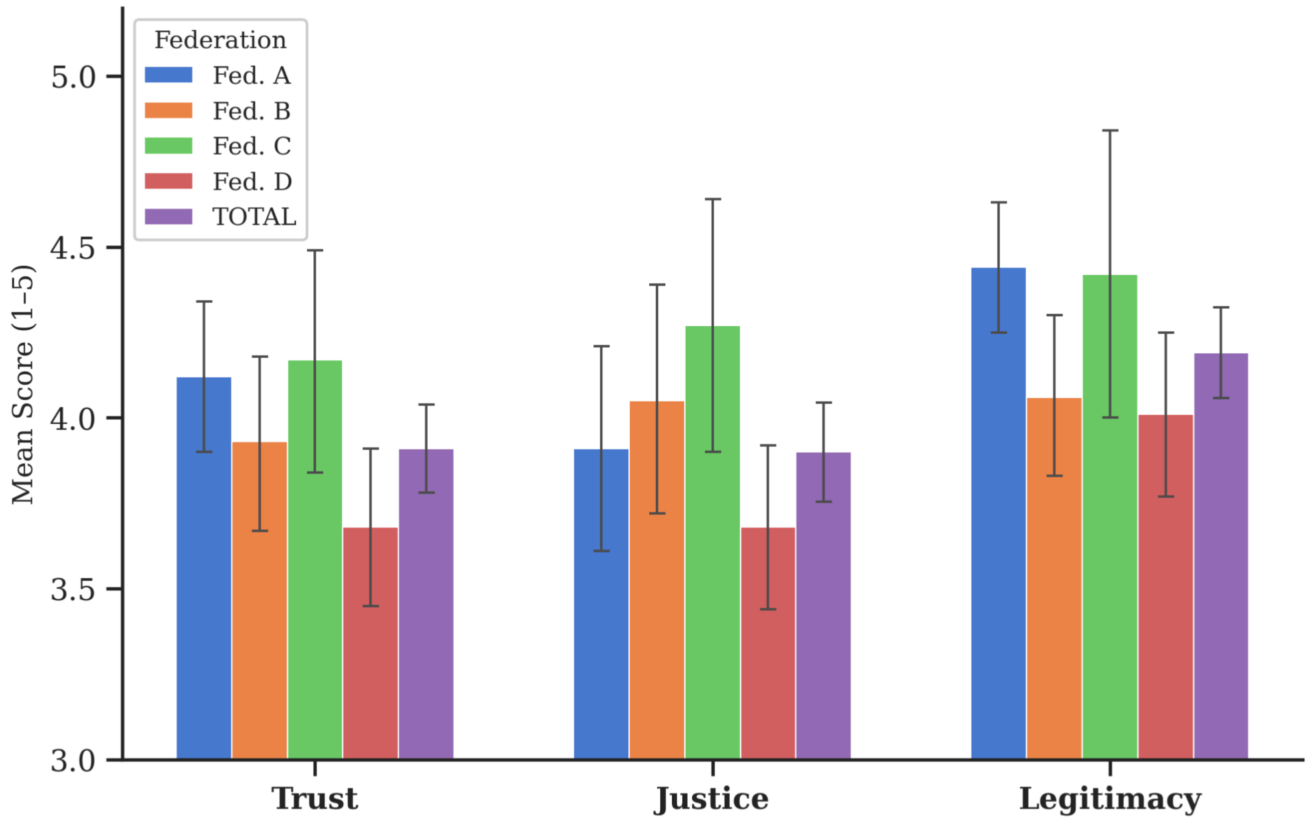

Figure 5: Mean perception scores by federation

Federation-level means and confidence intervals are presented in Table 4 and Figure 5. Across all four federations, legitimacy was consistently the highest-rated dimension, followed closely by trust and justice, a pattern that holds at the total sample level as well (Trust M = 3.91, Justice M = 3.90, Legitimacy M = 4.19).

Federation C reported the highest mean scores for trust and justice, and ranked second in legitimacy, only 0.02 points behind Federation A. Federation A recorded the highest legitimacy score and the second highest trust score; its standard deviations for both were among the smallest across all federations, suggesting more consistent responses within that group. Its justice score (3.91) was the only value below 4.00 among the top three federations, placing it third on that dimension. Federation B clustered closely around the total sample mean across all three dimensions, reflecting a broadly average perception profile. Federation D recorded the lowest means across all three constructs and was the only federation to fall below the total sample average on every dimension.

Regarding variability, Federation C showed the widest confidence interval for legitimacy [4.00, 4.84], indicating greater dispersion in responses, while Federation A's narrower intervals suggest more homogeneous perceptions. Federation D's larger standard deviations across all three dimensions also point to considerable within-group variation despite its lower means. It should be noted that group sizes are unequal, Federation D ($n = 35$) is notably larger than the others, which should be kept in mind when comparing means and interpreting confidence interval widths.

Finally, Shapiro-Wilk tests indicated that normality could not be assumed for Federation D on trust ($p = .030$) and Federation C on legitimacy ($p = .004$). This is considered in the selection of inferential tests in the following section.

3.6. Comparison of Perceptions Across Federations

To examine whether stakeholder perceptions differ significantly across the four federations, group comparisons were conducted separately for each construct. Normality was evaluated using the Shapiro-Wilk test and homogeneity of variance using Levene's test.

3.6.1 Choice of test and assumption checks

For justice, both assumptions were met (Shapiro-Wilk: $W = 0.973$, $p = .070$; Levene's: $F(3, 81) = 0.215$, $p = .886$), and a one-way ANOVA was used. For trust, normality was violated ($W = 0.963$, $p = .016$), though homogeneity of variance was met ($F(3, 81) = 1.13$, $p = .340$). For legitimacy, both assumptions were violated ($W = 0.962$, $p = .014$; $F(3, 81) = 4.28$, $p = .007$). Kruskal-Wallis tests were therefore used for trust and legitimacy.

It should also be noted that group sizes are unequal and relatively small for some federations (ranging from $n = 14$ to $n = 35$), which further supports the use of non-parametric tests where assumptions were not met.

For post-hoc comparisons, Dunn's test was applied following the Kruskal-Wallis test for trust, given that homogeneity of variance was met. For legitimacy, where homogeneity was also violated, the Dwass-Steel-Critchlow-Fligner (DSCF) test was used instead, as it does not assume equal variances.

Table 5. Assumption checks for group-comparison tests

Variable	Shapiro-Wilk W	Shapiro-Wilk p	Normality	Levene's F (3,81)	Levene's p	Homogeneity	Test used
Trust	0.963	.016	**Violated**	1.13	.340	**Met**	**Kruskal-Wallis**
Justice	0.973	.070	**Met**	0.215	.886	**Met**	**One-way ANOVA**
Legitimacy	0.962	.014	**Violated**	4.28	.007	**Violated**	**Kruskal-Wallis**

Compiled by the author.

3.6.2 Results of group comparisons

All three group comparisons returned significant p-values (Trust: $p = .039$; Justice: $p = .034$; Legitimacy: $p = .027$), indicating that at least one federation differs from the others on each construct. Effect sizes were small to medium across all three ($\varepsilon^2 = 0.100$ for trust, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.109$ for legitimacy), which should be interpreted cautiously given the limited sample size and unequal group sizes, statistical power is constrained, and these results may not be fully reliable.

Table 6. Group comparisons of stakeholder perceptions across the four federations

Construct	Test	Statistic	df	p-value	Effect size	Interpretation
Trust	*KW*	*H = 8.36*	*3*	*.039*	$\varepsilon^2 = 0.100$	*Small–medium*
Justice	*ANOVA*	*F = 3.02*	*3, 81*	*.034*	$\eta^2 = 0.10$	*Small–medium*
Legitimacy	*KW*	*H = 9.16*	*3*	*.027*	$\varepsilon^2 = 0.109$	*Small–medium*

Compiled by the author.

Post-hoc comparisons tell a more nuanced story. For justice, the only statistically significant pairwise difference was between Federation C and Federation D ($p = .031$), with Federation C scoring notably higher. This is the clearest and most robust finding across all comparisons. For trust, no pairwise comparison survived Bonferroni correction, though the C vs D contrast approached significance ($p = .088$), consistent with the pattern seen in justice. For legitimacy, no individual pair reached significance after correction; the closest contrast was B vs A ($p = .075$). The full pairwise comparison table, with all federation pairs and their corrected p-values for each construct, is in Annex 3.2.

Taken together, the results suggest that where differences exist, they are primarily driven by Federation D scoring lower than the others, most visibly in relation to Federation C, rather than by broad variation across all four federations. The non-significant post-hoc results for trust and legitimacy, despite significant comparison tests, are likely a reflection of limited statistical power rather than a true absence of differences, and the effect sizes suggest these differences are not negligible.

3.6.3 Demographic sensitivity check

Because Section 3.2 showed that years of involvement and, to a lesser extent, gender were unevenly distributed across federations, a sensitivity check was conducted to assess whether stakeholder perceptions might be driven by these demographic characteristics rather than by federation membership (and, by extension, governance compliance). The following figure 5 shows the differences between demographic groups perceptions.

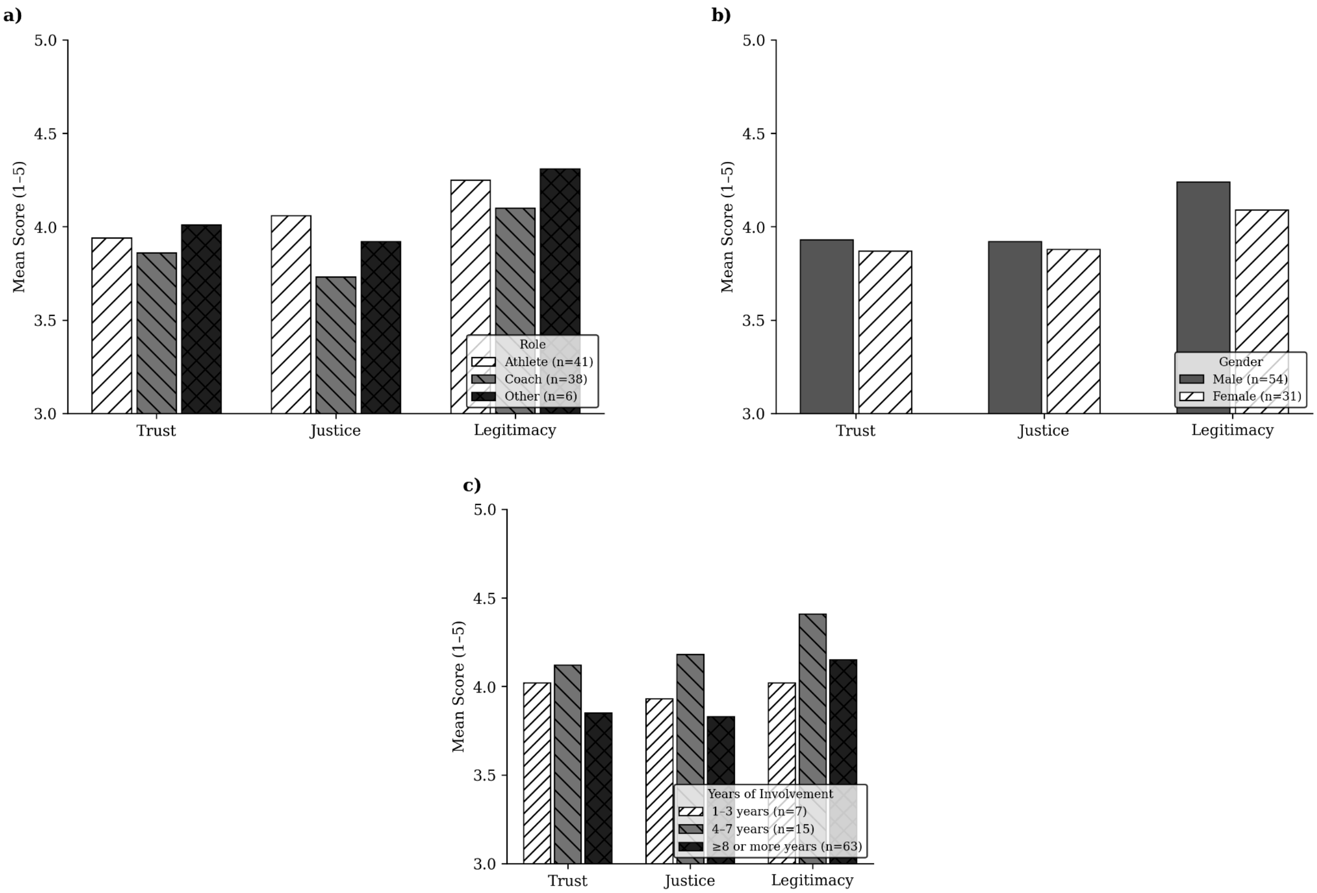

Figure 6: Mean perceptions of trust, justice, and legitimacy by demographic subgroup. *Panel a) compares scores by role (athlete, n = 41; coach, n = 38; other, n = 6); panel b) by gender (male, n = 54; female, n = 31); panel c) by years of involvement in the federation (1–3 years, n = 7; 4–7 years, n = 15; ≥8 years, n = 63).*

For each demographic variable, perception scores for trust, justice, and legitimacy were compared across categories using non-parametric tests, which are robust to the unequal group sizes and ceiling effects observed in the data. Role was excluded from this check because Section 3.2 showed it was comparably distributed across federations. A supplementary Kruskal–Wallis check on role (Annex 3.2) likewise found no significant differences, $\chi^2(2) = 4.26$, $p = .119$, so no pairwise comparisons were needed.

Table 7. Perception scores by demographic group (sensitivity check)

Demographic	**Test**	**Trust (p, ε^2)**	**Justice (p, ε^2)**	**Legitimacy (p, ε^2)**
Experience (1–3 / 4–7 / 8+)	*Kruskal–Wallis*	$p = .253$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.033$	$p = .214$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.037$	$p = .383$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.023$

Demographic	Test	Trust (p, ε²)	Justice (p, ε²)	Legitimacy (p, ε²)
Gender (M / F)	*Mann–Whitney U*	*p = .880, r = -0.020*	*p = .967, r = -0.006*	*p = .325, r = -0.129*

Compiled by the author.

Years of involvement showed no statistically significant association with any of the three perception outcomes. All Kruskal–Wallis tests returned p-values well above the conventional .05 threshold, and effect sizes were very small (ε^2 ranging from 0.023 to 0.037), indicating that respondents with 1–3, 4–7, and 8 or more years of involvement reported broadly similar perceptions of trust, justice, and legitimacy within their federations.

Gender likewise showed no significant differences. Mann–Whitney U tests revealed near-identical distributions between male ($n = 54$) and female ($n = 31$) respondents for trust ($p = .880$) and justice ($p = .967$), with rank-biserial correlations close to zero. Legitimacy showed a slightly larger but still non-significant gender gap ($p = .325$, $r = -0.129$), with female respondents scoring marginally lower on average.

Taken together, neither experience nor gender showed a statistically significant association with stakeholder perceptions. This indicates that the federation-level differences reported in Section 3.6 are unlikely to be explained by demographic composition alone and can be interpreted as reflecting genuine federation-level differences in perceived governance.

3.7. Pattern Matching: Governance Compliance vs. Stakeholder Perceptions

Pattern matching is the central analytical logic of this study. The rank order of federations on governance compliance is compared with the rank order on each perception construct. Full alignment of rankings constitutes exploratory support for the corresponding hypothesis; partial alignment is treated as a substantive finding rather than a failure, since deviations may reveal contextual factors that shape perceptions independently of formal governance quality.

Table 8. Rank-order comparison of governance compliance and stakeholder perceptions

Federation	Governance Rank [value 2026*]	Trust Rank [mean]	Justice Rank [mean]	Legitimacy Rank [mean]
Federation A	1 [100%]	2 [4.12]	3 [3.91]	1 [4.44]
Federation B	2 [94%]	3 [3.93]	2 [4.05]	3 [4.06]
Federation C	3 [88%]	1 [4.17]	1 [4.27]	2 [4.42]
Federation D	4 [69%]	4 [3.68]	4 [3.68]	4 [4.01]

** 2026 report (2025 compliance data). Compiled by the author.*

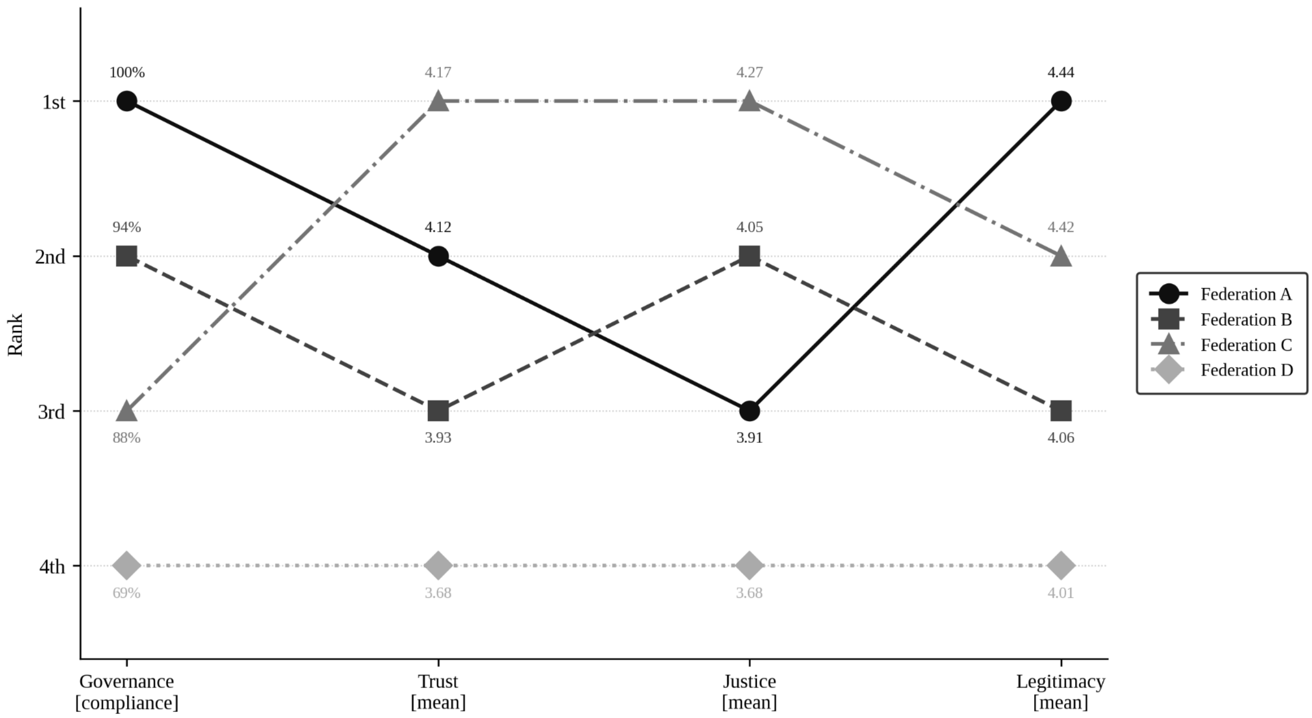

Figure 7: Visual pattern matching (compliance vs. perceptions). Rank comparison of governance compliance and stakeholder perceptions (trust, justice, legitimacy) across four federations. Rank 1 = highest; values show compliance percentage or mean score on a 1–5 scale.

Across all three perception constructs, the pattern is one of partial rather than full alignment with governance compliance. One feature, however, is consistent across the entire table: Federation D occupies the lowest position on every measure: governance compliance, trust, justice, and legitimacy. The misalignment is concentrated entirely in the top three federations, where the rank order of perceptions does not mirror the rank order of governance compliance. Each hypothesis is discussed in turn below.

H1 — Governance compliance and trust. The trust ranking only partially follows the governance ranking. Federation D fits the predicted pattern at the bottom (governance rank 4, trust rank 4, mean = 3.68), and the spread between the highest and lowest trust scores is modest (4.17 vs. 3.68). However, the top of the ranking does not align: Federation C, third on governance compliance (88%), recorded the highest trust score (4.17), while Federation A, the top-ranked federation on governance (100%), placed second on trust (4.12). Federation B, ranked second on governance, placed third on trust. H1 is therefore only partially supported. The deviation suggests that trust, while broadly tracking governance quality at the lower end, is not driven by compliance scores alone among the better-governed federations. Factors such as recent sporting success, the visibility of federation leadership, or the quality of communication with stakeholders may explain why Federation C generates higher trust than its governance ranking would predict.

H2 — Governance compliance and justice. The justice ranking shows the same broad pattern as trust. Federation D again anchors the bottom (mean = 3.68), consistent with the hypothesis, but Federation C once more outperforms its governance position, scoring highest on perceived justice (4.27) despite ranking third on compliance. Federation B sits in second place on both governance and justice, which is the only top-three alignment in the table. Federation A, the governance leader, ranked only third on justice (3.91). H2 is therefore also only partially supported. The fact that Federation C leads on both trust and justice, despite being ranked third on governance, points to something distinctive about how its stakeholders experience the federation's decision-making processes. Perceived fairness may depend more on the lived experience of how rules are applied, communicated, and explained than on the formal governance structures captured by the compliance index.

H3 — Governance compliance and legitimacy. Legitimacy shows the strongest alignment with governance compliance of the three constructs. Federation A ranks first on both governance and legitimacy (mean = 4.44), and Federation D ranks last on both (mean = 4.01). The middle of the ranking, however, is reversed: Federation C (governance rank 3) placed second on legitimacy (4.42), while Federation B (governance rank 2) placed third (4.06). It is also worth noting that the absolute spread between the highest and lowest legitimacy scores is the narrowest of the three constructs (4.44 vs. 4.01), indicating that all four federations are perceived as broadly legitimate by their stakeholders. H3 receives the clearest, though still partial, support of the three hypotheses: the top and bottom of the governance ranking are correctly identified by stakeholder perceptions of legitimacy, even if the middle order is inverted.

Summary of pattern-matching findings. None of the three perception constructs aligned fully with the governance compliance ranking. The most consistent result across all three is the position of Federation D, which scored lowest on every measure and provides clean support for the lower end of all three hypotheses. The most consistent anomaly is Federation C, which ranked third on governance compliance but first on both trust and justice, and second on legitimacy. This recurring deviation suggests that Federation C benefits from contextual factors, possibly sporting performance, leadership visibility, or stakeholder engagement practices, that elevate its perceptual scores beyond what its formal governance compliance would predict. Conversely, Federation A leads on governance and legitimacy but does not lead on trust or justice, indicating that high compliance with formal governance standards does not automatically translate into stakeholder perceptions of fair process or trustworthy actors.

One caveat on the legitimacy result. The scores used here are aggregate legitimacy, a single mean that rolls pragmatic, moral and cognitive legitimacy into one number. Alexiou and Wiggins (2019), whose scale this is, actually advise against that. They recommend keeping the three dimensions separate and modelling them as distinct constructs. They were aggregated anyway for this first exploratory approach, because the goal was an overall read on how stakeholders perceive each federation, not a fine-grained breakdown. So the alignment described above sits at the composite level only. It's possible the picture shifts once the dimensions are split apart, since a federation could score high on the value it provides (pragmatic) but lower on perceived ethical conduct (moral), and the composite would hide that. The disaggregated analysis is left for future work, and the aggregation itself is flagged as a limitation in Section 4.6.

3.8. Federation-level Rank Correlations

Due to the small number of federations (n = 4), Spearman rank correlations are reported only as descriptive and illustrative indicators of alignment between governance compliance and stakeholder perceptions. They are interpreted cautiously and are not treated as confirmatory hypothesis tests.

Table 9. Spearman rank correlations between governance compliance and mean perception scores

Pair	Spearman's ρ	Direction	Note
Governance × Trust	0.400	Positive	Illustrative only; n = 4

Pair	Spearman's ρ	Direction	Note
Governance × Justice	0.200	Positive	Illustrative only; n = 4
Governance × Legitimacy	0.800	Positive	Illustrative only; n = 4

Compiled by the author.

All three associations point in the expected positive direction, but their descriptive magnitude varies considerably. The strongest association is observed between governance compliance and legitimacy ($\rho = 0.800$), echoing the visual pattern in Figure 7, where the legitimacy curve tracked governance most closely at both ends of the ranking. The association between governance and trust is moderate ($\rho = 0.400$), and the association between governance and justice is weak ($\rho = 0.200$). This ordering, legitimacy strongest, trust moderate, justice weakest, mirrors the pattern-matching results and reinforces the observation that perceived justice is the construct least tightly aligned with formal governance compliance at the federation level.

Looking beyond the governance pairings, the broader correlation matrix (see complementary output) also showed strong descriptive associations between legitimacy and trust ($\rho = 0.800$) and between trust and justice ($\rho = 0.800$). This suggests, descriptively, that legitimacy may sit at the centre of the perceptual network observed among these stakeholders: it links most strongly to governance compliance on one side and to trust on the other. Trust and justice, in turn, appear closely connected to one another. These patterns are presented as exploratory observations and as possible directions for future research with larger samples capable of supporting inferential testing.

Given $n = 4$, the ρ values above must be interpreted with caution. No inferential conclusions can be drawn, confidence intervals around these estimates would be extremely wide, and a single federation moving up or down by one rank position would substantially alter the coefficients. The correlations are therefore best analyzed as a numerical summary of the patterns already established through pattern matching in Section 3.7, rather than as independent evidence for or against the study's hypotheses.

3.9. Summary of Hypothesis Evaluation

The following table summarizes the evaluation of each hypothesis on the basis of the three converging lines of evidence: group comparison results, pattern matching of rankings, and illustrative Spearman correlations.

Table 10. Summary of hypothesis evaluation

Hypothesis	Group comparison	Pattern matching	Spearman (illustr.)	Conclusion
H1: governance x trust	Supports ($p = .039$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.100$); no post-hoc pair survived correction	Partial; Federation D aligns at the bottom, Federation C deviates at the top	$\rho = 0.40$ (positive, moderate)	Partially supported
H2: governance x justice	Supports ($p = .034$); C > D significant after correction	Partial; Federation D aligns at the bottom, Federation C deviates at the top	$\rho = 0.20$ (positive, weak)	Partially supported
H3: governance x legitimacy	Supports ($p = .027$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.109$); no post-hoc pair survived correction	Partial; top and bottom align, middle is reversed	$\rho = 0.80$ (positive, strong)	Partially supported

Compiled by the author.

All three hypotheses point in the expected direction, but none is fully supported. The group comparisons tests are significant for every construct, yet only one pairwise contrast (C > D on justice) survives correction, likely because of limited statistical power.

H3 (legitimacy) shows the clearest alignment with governance compliance, with the strongest descriptive correlation ($\rho = 0.80$). H1 (trust) shows a moderate link, and H2 (justice) the weakest descriptive link despite producing the strongest single pairwise finding.

A recurring deviation across all three hypotheses is Federation C, which consistently outperforms its governance rank. This suggests that factors beyond formal governance compliance help shape stakeholder perceptions.

4. DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings in relation to the theoretical framework and prior empirical research, and reflects on what the results mean both conceptually and for the practice of national sport federation governance.

4.1. Interpretation of the Findings

Good governance theory has long theorized that applying its principles brings benefits both for the organization and for the wider population. As Thompson et al. (2023) and Parent and Hoye (2018) point out, that expectation has not been matched by strong empirical support, and only a small number of studies have grounded these principles in measurable outcomes. The model proposed in this thesis suggests one reason why that link has been hard to find. It argues that there is an intermediate step between good governance and organizational results. The primary outcomes of applying good governance are the improvement in the quality and structure of the executive bodies, and the perception of trust, justice and legitimacy on the part of stakeholders. These perceptions then work as facilitators or inhibitors of the organization's further development. If governance produces its effects partly through perceptions, then measuring compliance without measuring perceptions captures the inputs but not the outputs.

The three hypotheses tested here followed from that model: federations with higher governance compliance were expected to show higher perceived trust, justice and legitimacy. Given the number of federations, the sample size and the results obtained, what we found amounts to partial support. All three group comparisons were significant (trust $p = .039$, justice $p = .034$, legitimacy $p = .027$), and the federation with the lowest compliance, Federation D at 69%, was also the lowest scoring federation on all three constructs. But only one pairwise contrast survived correction, C scoring higher than D on justice ($p = .031$), so the evidence that can be defended statistically is narrow and the rest is best read as descriptive. It is also worth noting that the three best complying federations are very close on compliance (94%, 88% and 100%), and they are not clearly separated on perceptions either, which is consistent with the idea that small differences in compliance are not enough, on their own, to produce clear differences in how stakeholders perceive the federation.

The sensitivity check addresses one important concern. It is possible that Federation D did not score lower on trust, justice and legitimacy because of anything to do with governance. Rather, it could be argued that it just happened to have more experienced, long-tenured respondents, and that type of individuals tend to rate things more critically or have had longer interactions with the federation over time to make them more distrustful. If that is true, you are measuring the sample, not the federation. However, when checking whether years of involvement or gender actually predicted how someone rated their federation, you find they did not. So you cannot easily explain the gaps between federations by pointing at who answered. But there is an honest caveat to the problem that does not go away. Federation D is both the lowest scoring federation and the one with the most long-tenured respondents. With only four federations, those two things are stuck together. You cannot run a model that holds one constant and isolates the other. So the sensitivity check makes the federation-level reading more credible. It does not make it unquestionable.

The most informative result is not that compliance and perception aligned perfectly, but that they do not. The fully compliant federation (A, 100%) was only third on justice, and an 88% federation (C) led both trust and justice. In other words, compliance and perception came apart in both directions even when differences were not significant, meaning subtle changes in sample size could have reordered federations in a different arrangement, still, some federations perceptions outperformed their compliance score, while others underperformed it. This is the central point of the study. If stakeholder perceptions simply repeated the compliance score, there would be no reason to measure them, you could read the checklist and stop. The fact that they diverge is exactly what shows that perceptions carry information the checklist does not, and that they are worth measuring alongside it.

4.2. Comparison with Prior Research

Comparing these findings with previous research is not straightforward, because no earlier study has examined directly the relationship between good governance compliance and stakeholder perceptions of trust, justice and legitimacy in sport federations. What the literature offers instead is each part of the relationship studied separately, and mostly outside sport. The present study sits at the meeting point of those separate lines of work.

For trust, positive relationships between governance dimensions and trust have been documented in education, public administration, banking and corporate settings, with transparency and social responsibility standing out as the conditions through which stakeholders judge an organization trustworthiness (Bugandwa et al., 2021; Peifer & Newman, 2020; Schnackenberg et al., 2021; Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016; Yan et al., 2022). Our result points in the same direction but is weaker, with a moderate descriptive correlation ($\rho = .40$) and no pairwise contrast surviving correction.

For justice, scholars have reported positive links between good governance practices and perceived justice (Bujold et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2022), and our one robust finding, C scoring higher than D on justice, is consistent with that, although the aggregate association was the weakest of the three ($\rho = .20$).

For legitimacy, the link between governance and legitimacy has been supported across several settings (Budiana, 2025; Bunea & Nørbech, 2025; del-Castillo-Feito et al., 2022; Hirschl & Hudson, 2024; Jacobs & Kaufmann, 2021; Lim & Zhang, 2025; Overman et al., 2021), and at the theoretical level Geeraert (2015, 2018) places fairness, legitimacy and trust among the intended outcomes of good governance in sport. Our legitimacy result was the closest of the three to the compliance ranking, but as discussed below, that closeness is fragile and probably reflects something other than compliance.

Following the principle that comparisons should take into account the conditions of the studies being compared, it is worth noting that most of the supporting evidence above comes from banks, public agencies, schools and firms, not from sport federations. Sport federations differ from these in ways that could weaken the governance to perception link rather than strengthen it. A federation is generally the only organization of its kind, and subordinate organizations and individuals are required to adhere to their authority and rulings, so stakeholders cannot easily compare it with an alternative or leave it (Geeraert, 2025). Also, attachment to the sport, role in the community, staff behaviour and the weight stakeholders give to sporting results, especially recent ones, may also matter more for how they perceive the federation than its governance efforts do (Lock et al., 2015, p. 14). Seen this way, the weaker links found here are not necessarily a disappointment. They may say something about sport specifically, namely that in this context formal governance compliance competes with other factors of importance in determining what stakeholders actually experience.

A final interesting detail when analysing good governance-perceptions relations, is that researchers and scholars link specific dimensions of good governance with categories and even sub categories of them. For example, transparency and trust (Lee & Li, 2021; Tomlinson & Schnackenberg, 2022), transparency and trust subcategories of ability, benevolence and integrity positively related (Schnackenberg et al., 2021), social responsibility and trust (Bugandwa et al., 2021; Peifer & Newman, 2020; Yan et al., 2022), transparency and legitimacy (Budiana, 2025), accountability and legitimacy (Overman et al., 2021), democracy and legitimacy (Hirschl & Hudson, 2024), accountability and trust (Ehren et al., 2020), transparency and distributive justice (Bujold et al., 2022) or transparency and procedural justice (Liu et al., 2020). On top of that, even the interaction between those perceptual categories like justice and trust (Solinas-Saunders et al., 2024) are also suggested in the correlation ($\rho =$

.80). Overall, this suggests a deeper look at the relationship between the specific dimensions of good governance and perceptual constructs and their sub categories, and on how specific compliance in specific principles of good governance could have a differential effect in those perceptions. While this was outside of the scope of the present study, it does provide a line for future research that could add value to analysis of good governance frameworks and indicators, as well as interesting strategic information for sport organizations on where specifically they could direct improvement efforts based on their specific situations and results.

4.3. Federations that Deviate from the Expected Pattern

The clearest way to look at the results is federation by federation, looking first at the one that fits the expected pattern and then at the ones that do not.

Federation D fits. It had the lowest compliance (69%, against more than 85% for the others) and the lowest score on all three perceptions. This is the part of all three hypothesis that holds at the lower end, and it is also where the only robust statistical result sits, C scoring higher than D on justice. The content of D's non-compliance is worth looking at here, but carefully. D failed five principles, while C failed two. The two that they share, the gender balance requirement and youth representation in the governing body, cannot explain why C is perceived as more just than D, because both federations fail them. What is left, the principles that D fails and C does not, are exactly the ones on athlete representation, prevention of sexual harassment, and protection against discrimination, those are, principles largely connected to fair and respectful treatment. It is at least consistent that the federation missing these is also the one perceived as least just. This is the closest the study comes to matching the content of a specific non-compliance with a perception. It has to stay an interpretation, not a mechanism. We cannot show that stakeholders were aware of these failures or were responding to them, and C scoring highest on justice while still failing the shared representation principles shows that compliance with those rules is in any case neither necessary nor sufficient for a sense of justice.

Federations C and A do not fit the expectations, and it is the most interesting case in the study. Federation C, ranked third on compliance (88%), scored highest on both trust and justice and second on legitimacy. This is the clearest sign in the data that, above a certain level of compliance, something other than the compliance score alone is shaping perceptions. What that something is, the study cannot determine, because it was not measured. Plausible candidates are recent sporting success, the visibility and tenure of the leadership, the way the federation communicates with its members, or its size and degree of professionalization. These are offered as questions for future research, not as explanations we can support here. Two honest cautions belong with C. It had the smallest group ($n = 14$), and it had the widest confidence interval on legitimacy [4.00, 4.84], meaning the most internal disagreement among its respondents. So C is at once the most suggestive case and the least stable estimate, and both things should be acknowledged.

Following on Federation A, is a different case but still useful. It complied fully and was rated highest on legitimacy, but it was only third on justice, the one dimension below 4.00 among the top three federations. This seems minor but is an important point, that full compliance did not translate into top-rated perceptions. It supports the idea, that an overall compliance figure can hide differences between one perception and another, and that being fully compliant on paper does not guarantee being perceived as fair, trustworthy and legitimate.

Two further points cut across all three federations. The first concerns legitimacy. Every federation was rated highly on legitimacy, including Federation D at 69% compliance (4.01), and the spread between the highest and lowest legitimacy scores was the narrowest of the three constructs. This complicates rather than confirms the idea that compliance drives legitimacy. If even the worst governed federation is seen as highly legitimate, then legitimacy may be coming from somewhere other than governance, most likely the federation's position as the only body of its kind in the country. Stakeholders have nowhere else to go, so they grant a baseline legitimacy regardless of governance quality. This is close to Suchman's (1995) cognitive legitimacy, the taken for granted kind, and it is already part of the framework of this thesis. From this perspective, the apparently strong association between compliance and legitimacy ($\rho = .80$) does not straightforwardly indicate a strong governance–legitimacy relationship. It rests on a dimension that is high for everyone, and with only four federations, one reordering would substantially alter the correlation coefficient. Further support for this comes from the measurement instrument level. Of all the subscales, the cognitive legitimacy items were the only legitimacy ones with weak internal consistency ($\alpha = .682$), even though they were the only ones that remain exactly as in the original scales, with no reduction in items, and the likely reason, as noted in the Results, is that the quasi-monopolistic structure of the sport system gives respondents no clear alternative to compare against, which makes the taken for granted, "could anyone else do this" type of questions hard to answer. That the most monopoly-sensitive part of legitimacy is also the most complicated to measure fits the perspective that legitimacy here can be artificially elevated by the federation's position rather than earned through good governance.

The second point is about façade compliance. It may be that some federations meet the documentary and bureaucratic side of the principles without a real internal change in how they operate, their culture, or how their stakeholders experience them. This idea, that an organization can show high formal compliance while falling short on substance, is recognised in the literature on tick box compliance, where organizations meet the requirements to secure funding or legitimacy without a genuine change in how they operate or what they value (Dowling et al., 2025). The data is consistent with a limited version of this. Façade compliance, if present, might still produce a federation unearned legitimacy, because legitimacy is the perception furthest from day to day experience and the easiest to grant by default, especially under the sport structure of national federations. It would be much harder to fake trust or justice, which depend on what stakeholders actually live through.

4.4. Theoretical Contribution

The contribution of this study is more conceptual and methodological than statistical. With four federations and 85 respondents, it cannot establish effects. What it offers is a working way of looking at governance quality that adds a perceptual layer on top of the compliance checklist, and a first, exploratory look at what that layer shows. There is at least some ground for calling it workable. The three perception scales were internally consistent (Cronbach's α between .895 and .932, with McDonald's ω almost identical), so even after shortening the original instruments, the items held together well enough to be averaged into usable construct scores. The layer, in other words, was measurable and produced interpretable variation between federations.

The value of this proposed layer rests on a simple observation. Compliance tells you what a federation has put in place on paper. It cannot, on its own, tell you whether a fully compliant federation is genuinely well governed or only compliant on paper, like for example federation A, because those two look identical on the checklist. The only way to tell them apart is to ask the stakeholders. The perceptual layer is therefore not a second measure of the same thing, it is what lets you separate substance from paperwork.

This also answers a fair objection. If the whole point of measuring perceptions is that they can diverge from compliance, then what is the ideal situation, and would a federation that is first in everything not simply be doing well? The answer is that two different things are being said at two different levels. At the level of measurement, you measure both because they can disagree, and have their own errors and limitations (Kaufmann & Kraay, 2008). If perception always equaled compliance, the second instrument would become irrelevant, and you could rely on the formal compliance alone. The possibility of disagreement is what gives the perceptual layer its place. At a managerial level, the profile you actually want is both high and in agreement, that is, strong compliance matched by strong perceptions that are genuinely earned. A rough analogy is a thesis examination that requires both a written submission and an oral defense. The written thesis can meet every formal criterion and yet the candidate may fail to defend it convincingly under questioning, or the opposite, a great candidate may submit a document with structural weaknesses. Neither measure alone is sufficient; the ideal is both strong, and in agreement. The possibility of divergence is exactly what justifies requiring two.

A simple and useful way to picture this is a two by two matrix, with compliance on one axis and perception on the other. The following is offered as a way to organize the thinking, not as a finding from the data.

Table 11. Compliance and perception alignment matrix (compiled by the author)

	High perception	Low perception
High compliance	Substantive and aligned, the ultimate goal	Façade or disconnected, what the perceptual layer is there to catch
Low compliance	Culture ahead of the paperwork, or stakeholders unaware of the governance gaps	Genuinely struggling, low on both

The two mismatched cells: high compliance with low perception, and low compliance with high perception, can only be identified with both measurements. Without perceptions, federations can only be ranked vertically; as more or less compliant, and the possibility of misalignment never surfaces.

Where the four federations fall in this picture is descriptive only, and the non-significant differences mean the placements should be read loosely. Federation A, fully compliant, sits in the aligned cell for legitimacy but drifts towards the dissociated side on justice and trust, the two perceptions where its full compliance did not translate into a top score. It is the clearest sign that compliance can run ahead of a particular perception, construct by construct. Federation C, not top on compliance but top on perception, sits in the low compliance, high perception cell, the overperformer whose stakeholders perceive more than its formal rank would predict. Federation D, low on compliance and low on trust and justice, sits in the struggling cell. Federation B is middling on both. It is worth noting that no federation sits cleanly in the aligned corner, high and matched across all three perceptions.

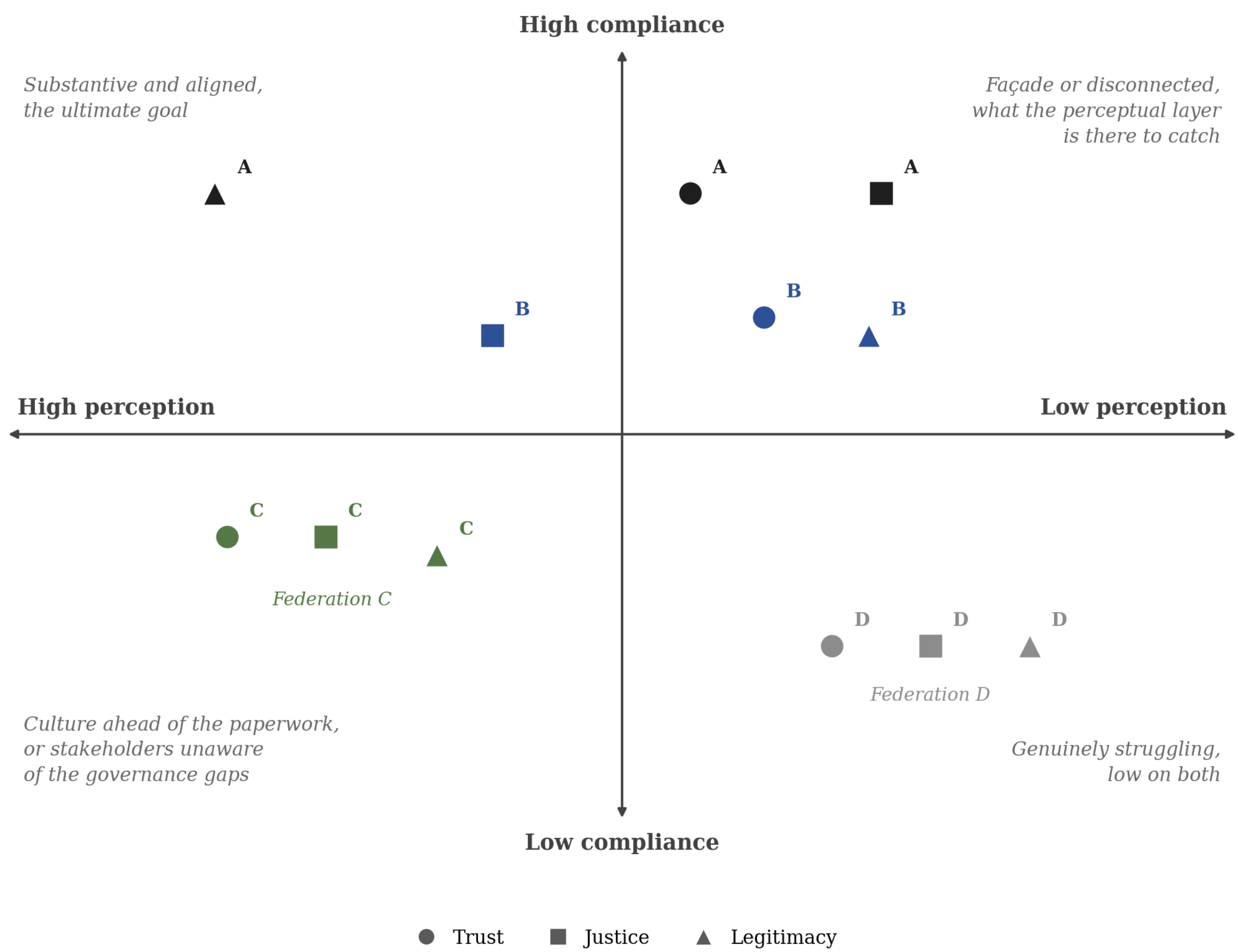

Figure 8. Compliance and perception alignment matrix with the four federations placed descriptively (compiled by the author).

Of course this exercise is just illustrative, it doesn't actually portray the quality or current situation of the federations, and compliance based on ranking is not ideal since you could have more than one federation with the same compliance score/rank. Numerical axes could render more useful but then the question is about the quadrant's thresholds. Nonetheless it could be an interesting structure for government and funding bodies to categorize organizations.

A second contribution is to show, in a small way, why an overall compliance percentage is a blunt instrument for this purpose. The study measured general constructs: overall compliance, and general trust, justice and legitimacy. But each of these has subdimensions. Governance covers transparency, democratic processes, accountability and social responsibility. Trust, following Mayer et al. (1995), rests on ability, benevolence and integrity. Justice, following Colquitt (2001), has procedural, distributive, interpersonal and informational forms. Legitimacy, following Suchman (1995), has pragmatic, moral and cognitive forms. These subdimensions are not equally visible to stakeholders, and they probably connect to different perceptions. Transparency principles, for instance, plausibly relate more to trust and to informational justice than to anything else. A federation can earn its compliance points on the parts that stakeholders never see, such as internal financial controls, and still feel opaque to them. So a single overall percentage mixes visible and invisible principles together, and that mixing is one reason compliance and perception do not align cleanly. The same logic applies on the perception side: an overall legitimacy score hides which kind of legitimacy is moving, and as argued above, the cognitive, monopoly-driven kind may be inflating the total. The lesson is the same for the governance measure and for the perception measure, that totals hide content, and the interesting relationships live at the level of the subdimensions. Disaggregating them is one of the clearest directions this study points to for future research.

Finally, the perceptions themselves appear to be connected to one another. The descriptive correlations were strong between legitimacy and trust ($\rho = .80$) and between trust and justice ($\rho = .80$), which fits the literature suggesting that a sense of justice can raise or lower trust, and that both feed into legitimacy (Solinas-Saunders et al., 2024). How these three perceptions influence one another is itself a question worth studying, and it was outside the scope of this work.

4.5. Practical Implications

For sport federations navigating increasing governance demands with limited resources, governance frameworks have often been experienced as externally imposed obligations, enforced coercively and punitively, with compliance treated as a prerequisite for funding or recognition rather than as a source of organizational value. This understandably fosters a defensive orientation, where governance is reduced to a bureaucratic exercise rather than a meaningful organizational practice. The present study offers an alternative perspective. While governance frameworks were originally designed to prevent misconduct, corruption, and mismanagement, aims that remain important, though not guaranteed by compliance alone, their value need not be understood in purely preventive terms. Good governance also fosters the trust, legitimacy, and fairness perceptions that create a favorable environment for effective organizational operations. These perceptions do not guarantee performance outcomes on their own; they interact with other organizational capabilities and conditions. However, understanding governance as a source of enabling conditions, both structural, through board quality, and perceptual, through stakeholder trust, legitimacy, and fairness, rather than merely a regulatory burden, may help federations move from reluctant compliance toward a more purposeful engagement with governance reform.

From an external perspective, the main practical implication follows directly from the central finding. Because the checklist and the perceptions did not coincide, federations and the bodies that oversee them should monitor stakeholder perceptions alongside formal compliance, rather than treating a high compliance score as evidence that all is well. A compliance figure and a perceptual score answer different questions, and a federation can score well on one while doing poorly on the other.

In practice this means building simple stakeholder feedback mechanisms into governance, and evaluating good governance efforts against perceived outcomes, not only against compliance scores. It also means paying attention to whether stakeholders are even aware of the governance structures that exist, since a principle that is met but invisible cannot shape how the federation is perceived. Finally, the results are a reminder that compliance is a floor and not a ceiling. Reaching full compliance, as Federation A did, did not guarantee the strongest perceptions across the board, so federations that already comply fully should keep asking whether their stakeholders actually experience the fairness, trustworthiness and legitimacy that the rules are meant to produce.

4.6. Limitations and Methodological Reflections

This study has several constraints and limitations worth acknowledging, as they contribute to understanding the present thesis and are illustrative for future work in the field.

The main constraint is structural, and it shaped the whole analysis. Governance compliance sits at the federation level, and there are only four federations, while perceptions sit at the individual level, with 85 respondents. These are two different levels of analysis, and the mismatch rules out individual-level regression and limits the statistical inference that can be drawn. The 85 respondents are also spread unevenly across federations (n = 14, 16, 20, 35). The small per-federation groups limit statistical power, and the unbalanced design means one federation weighs more heavily than the others in any pooled estimate. It is worth noting that Federation D makes up the largest share of the sample, so the group comparisons should be read with that in mind. This is the main reason the study should be read as exploratory, and why its contribution lies in the design and the instrument rather than in statistical inference. With only four federations, the rank correlations in particular are illustrative only.

The measurement also carries its own limitations. Governance compliance is captured through a binary 16-item checklist, a shorter adaptation of larger assessment frameworks with broader scope and more principles. That simplification can leave out principles that might be valuable for the assessment and for comparison against stakeholder perceptions. The same applies to the perceptual instrument, which was adapted and shortened from validated scales. This can overlook specific questions that would add value, and even though the reliability tests passed, there is always a risk in that kind of simplification.

A further limitation concerns how the legitimacy scale was treated analytically. Alexiou and Wiggins (2019) caution against combining their three dimensions: pragmatic, moral and cognitive, into a single composite, recommending instead that each be modelled as a separate reflective construct, since the dimensions can vary independently across organizations and contexts. In this initial analysis legitimacy was nonetheless examined as an aggregate score to give an overall picture of stakeholder perceptions; disaggregated analysis of the three dimensions is left for future work, and the aggregation should be read with this caveat in mind. A similar consideration arguably applies to the multidimensional trust and justice scales, whose subdimensions were likewise combined here, even if their authors did not explicitly advise against aggregation. Wording, and the translation into the sport context and the Lithuanian language, could also have affected how the questions were understood and hurt the results. Further pilot testing and validation would help develop the instrument.

One more point on measurement concerns the response scales. The original instruments differ in this respect: the trust and justice scales use a 5-point Likert scale, whereas the legitimacy scale of Alexiou and Wiggins (2019) uses a 7-point scale. For consistency and ease of response, all items were standardized to a 5-point scale. This harmonization simplified the questionnaire for participants, but it came at the cost of compressing the legitimacy scale from its original 7-point format, which may have reduced its capacity to capture finer variation in perceptions. Given the strong convergence toward the top of the scale observed in the results, the opposite approach, standardizing all items to a 7-point scale, may have been preferable, as a wider range could better capture variability in perceptions. This is worth considering in future applications of the instrument.

The design is also cross-sectional, meaning the data were collected at a single point in time. So the direction of any relationship cannot be established. We can see where compliance and perception line up or come apart, but not which one moves the other, or whether either moves at all over time.

Connected to this is the matter of unmeasured factors. The study compared federations on governance compliance, but compliance is not the only thing that differs between them. Sporting success, the visibility and tenure of the leadership, the size and degree of professionalization, the way each federation communicates with its members, none of these were measured, and any of them could shape perceptions alongside governance or instead of it. This is part of why a deviation like Federation C, which led on trust and justice despite ranking third on compliance, cannot be pinned on governance alone. These factors stay uncontrolled here, and separating them out is a task for future, larger designs.

The data collection process brings its own limits. The questionnaire was distributed through each federation's official channels, with reminders. That route reaches people, but it also shapes who answers. Respondents were likely the more involved or more enthusiastic members of each stakeholder community, the ones who open federation emails and bother to reply. This self-selection probably feeds the mild ceiling effect seen in the perception data, and it limits how far the findings extend to less-engaged stakeholders.

Recency bias is worth flagging on its own, because perceptions are emotional and tied to the moment they are captured. The timing and context of when someone answers can shift their response: before or after an event, a good or bad result, a crucial decision, recent good news, an international success or an internal scandal. Any of these can nudge perceptions at a single measurement point. Connected to this is a broader contextual point. The findings reflect sport governance in Lithuania, at one moment, and may not transfer directly to other national systems or other periods.

There are also demographic limits. Years of involvement differed significantly across federations, with Federation D made up mostly of long-tenured respondents, and gender composition showed a borderline but non-trivial difference. The sensitivity check in Section 3.6.3 looked at whether these characteristics drive perceptions and found they do not, but the uneven composition is still a structural feature of the dataset, and it limits how cleanly any federation difference can be pinned on governance compliance alone. The set of demographics collected was also limited. Age, for one, was never asked, which closes off analyses that would have been useful. A principle like under-35 representation on the board points directly at age, but without the respondents' ages there is no way to connect that principle to how younger and older stakeholders actually perceive the federation. Adding age, and other demographics, in future work would open up that kind of analysis and add value to the results.

Tied to this is the question of which stakeholders were included at all. The study leaned on athletes, coaches and a small "other" category. But the stakeholder community around a federation is wider than that. Member representatives, referees, board members, administrative staff, volunteers, and even parents in youth sport all sit in different positions relative to the governing body, and they likely see its governance differently. Bringing these groups in more deliberately would give a broader and more balanced picture of how a federation is actually perceived, and would let future work compare perceptions across stakeholder types rather than treating the membership as one block.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Good governance assessment frameworks in sport converge on compliance checklists filled in by boards, executives or external auditors. They confirm that rules and structures exist on paper, but they say little about the outcomes those rules are meant to produce, and they leave out most of the stakeholder groups governance is supposed to serve. This is the gap the thesis set out to address.
2. Stakeholder theory justifies treating primary stakeholders, athletes and coaches above all, as legitimate evaluators of governance quality. They are the ones governance decisions land on, which makes their judgment a missing data source rather than a nice extra, and it provides the theoretical foundation for complementing compliance-based assessment.
3. The literature supports linking governance implementation to three outcome perceptions, trust, justice and legitimacy, each through its own theoretical mechanism. Together they form a usable set of outcome-based indicators of governance quality.
4. The perceptions proved measurable in the field. The shortened validated scales held together well (Cronbach's α between .895 and .932, McDonald's ω nearly identical), and the composite scores produced interpretable variation across the four federations.
5. The relationship between compliance and perceptions is real but partial. All three perceptions differed significantly across federations and the least compliant federation scored lowest on all three, yet the rankings only partly aligned: legitimacy tracked compliance most closely (ρ = .80), trust moderately (ρ = .40), justice weakly (ρ = .20), and the federation at 88% compliance led on trust and justice. H1, H2 and H3 were therefore only partially supported.
6. On the aim of the study: compliance and perception can be misaligned, so stakeholder perceptions carry information that compliance checklists do not capture. This supports adding a perceptual layer to good governance assessment. What that layer cannot yet do, resting on four federations and a small uneven sample, is tell genuine good governance from paper compliance on its own; that requires larger samples, other methods and further research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The first recommendation is for the federations, the recommendation is to look at good governance in a different light, as something positive and strategic rather than a burden imposed from outside. Governance is usually lived as an obligation tied to funding. It does not have to be. If a federation measures how its actions are perceived by its stakeholders, it can adjust to get better results, because when stakeholders are on the organization's side, strategic work and development flow much more easily. This shift, from formal compliance to a strategic practice aimed at improving the federation's own activities and performance, also helps a federation see where it actually needs to improve, beyond simply meeting a bureaucratic requirement.

For athletes, coaches and the other stakeholders, the recommendation is to take a more active part in the federation's operational processes. This starts with something as simple as giving an opinion, answering a survey, raising your voice. Feedback on what the federation is doing well, or on what it could do better, carries real weight in the wider scheme. It is this kind of input that can redirect and recalibrate the federation's strategic action, for the benefit of the stakeholders themselves and of everyone else. They are the primary members, and they are the ones with the power to change how the organization operates from the inside when its actions are not fair, appropriate or valuable.

For the National Sport Agency, adding a perceptual layer to how it evaluates governance, instead of checking formal compliance alone, is an interesting next step. The reason is straightforward. Public money flows to the federations to support sport for the population, and the agency is the body that channels it. That makes the federations the intermediary, but the final accountability sits with the citizens whose resources are being spent. Verifying only that the rules are formally in place, without confirming that they actually reach and benefit the people, leaves the picture incomplete. You can see that a federation ticked the boxes. You cannot see, from the boxes alone, whether stakeholders experience any of it. A perceptual layer is what closes that gap, and it lets the agency qualify governance efforts by their real impact rather than by paperwork.

The last set of recommendations is for academics and future research. This study is exploratory and small, and it opens more questions than it can answer. Four directions stand out:

- **Disaggregate the model:** Match the subdimensions of governance against the subcategories of trust, justice and legitimacy, and study how they relate at a deeper level. Specific principles from specific governance dimensions may affect specific perception subcategories in different ways and with different weight. That is interesting not only descriptively, but strategically, since it shows where the effort to improve should actually be placed.

- **Longitudinal approach:** This study was cross-sectional, so it captured perceptions at a single moment, with all the limitations that come with that. A longitudinal design would show the long-term impact of good governance policies, how perceptions evolve, positively or negatively, and the effect one construct has on another over time, including whether gains hold up under adverse events.
- **Scale:** Because this was a first, exploratory look, a larger study with more federations and more participants is needed to validate the findings.
- **Contexts:** Run the study in different countries, and at different levels of the sport structure. The closeness or distance between primary stakeholders and the governing body is not the same in a club as in a national federation, and different again in an international one. Those distances, along with the specific country context and cultural connection, may shift the results.

LIST OF THE AUTHOR'S SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS AND CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS DERIVED FROM THIS THESIS

1. Stucky, L. B., & Čingienė, V. (2026). *A critical review of good governance outcomes: The case for stakeholder-centered assessment* [Manuscript submitted for publication]. Presented at Mokslinės Minties Šventė 2026 (Festival of Scientific Thought), Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius.
2. Stucky, L. B., & Čingienė, V. (2026). *Stakeholder perceptions as key complements in the assessment of good governance of sport organizations* [Conference presentation and manuscript submitted for publication]. 20th Prof. Vladas Gronskas International Scientific Conference, Vilnius University Kaunas Faculty, Kaunas, May 8, 2026.
3. Stucky, L. B., & Čingienė, V. (2026). *The influence of good governance dimensions on primary stakeholder perceptions of fairness, trust, and legitimacy in sport federations* [Conference presentation]. 2nd Student Scientific Conference "Thesis and Toffee," Mykolas Romeris University and Kaunas University of Technology, May 23, 2026.
4. Stucky, L. B., & Čingienė, V. (2026). *Assessing governance outcomes: The influence of objective good governance dimensions on primary stakeholder perceptions of fairness, trust, and legitimacy in sport federations* [Abstract accepted for presentation]. 34th EASM European Sport Management Conference, European Association for Sport Management, Thessaloniki, Greece, September 15, 2026.
5. Stucky, L. B., Čingienė, V., & Raišienė, A. G. (2026). *The new structured survey instrument to measure the influence of good governance dimensions on primary stakeholder perceptions in sport federations* [Abstract submitted for presentation]. SOCIN 2026 – Scientific Conference on Social Innovation, European Reform University Alliance (ERUA) & SWPS University Faculty of Social Sciences, Warsaw, Poland, October 21–23, 2026.

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SUMMARY (LITHUANIAN)

Geras valdymas sporte paprastai vertinamas pagal atitikties kontrolinius sąrašus, kuriuos pildo valdybos ir vadovai. Toks vertinimas parodo, ar taisyklės ir struktūros egzistuoja dokumentuose, tačiau mažai pasako apie rezultatus, kuriuos tos taisyklės turėtų duoti, ir neįtraukia suinteresuotųjų šalių, kurias valdymo sprendimai veikia tiesiogiai. Šiame darbe tiriama, ar federacijų atitiktis gero valdymo principams atsispindi pirminių suinteresuotųjų šalių suvokiamame pasitikėjime, teisingume ir legitimume.

Atlikta žvalgomoji keturių Lietuvos nacionalinių sporto federacijų lyginamoji studija. Valdymo atitikties duomenys paimti iš viešai skelbiamo Nacionalinės sporto agentūros 16 punktų vertinimo. Suinteresuotųjų šalių suvokimas matuotas 85 respondentų (sportininkų, trenerių ir kitų) apklausa, parengta pagal sutrumpintas validuotas Mayer ir Davis (1999), Colquitt (2001) bei Alexiou ir Wiggins (2019) skales. Analizė apėmė grupių palyginimus, federacijų rangų atitikimo analizę ir iliustracines Spearman koreliacijas.

Visos trys suvokimo dimensijos tarp federacijų skyrėsi statistiškai reikšmingai, o mažiausios atitikties federacija visose dimensijose įvertinta žemiausiai. Vis dėlto rangai sutapo tik iš dalies: legitimumas atitiktį atitiko stipriausiai ($\rho = 0,80$), pasitikėjimas vidutiniškai ($\rho = 0,40$), teisingumas silpniausiai ($\rho = 0,20$). Federacija su 88 proc. atitiktimi pirmavo pagal pasitikėjimą ir teisingumą, o visiškai atitinkanti federacija pirmavo tik pagal legitimumą. Hipotezės patvirtintos iš dalies. Pagrindinė išvada: formali atitiktis ir suinteresuotųjų šalių patirtis gali nesutapti, todėl gero valdymo vertinimą tikslinga papildyti suvokimo matavimo sluoksniu.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: geras valdymas, sporto federacijos, suinteresuotųjų šalių suvokimas, organizacinis pasitikėjimas, organizacinis teisingumas, legitimumas.

SUMMARY (ENGLISH)

Good governance in sport is usually assessed through compliance checklists filled in by boards and executives. That shows whether the right rules and structures exist on paper. It says little about the outcomes those rules are meant to produce, and it leaves out the stakeholders most directly affected by governance decisions. This thesis asks whether good governance compliance is reflected in primary stakeholder perceptions of trust, justice and legitimacy, the outcomes the literature itself names as the intended effects of good governance.

The study is an exploratory comparison of four Lithuanian national sport federations. Governance compliance was taken from the National Sports Agency's public 16-item assessment. Stakeholder perceptions were measured with a survey of 85 athletes, coaches and other primary stakeholders, built from shortened validated scales for trust (Mayer & Davis, 1999), organizational justice (Colquitt, 2001) and legitimacy (Alexiou & Wiggins, 2019). The analysis combined group comparisons, pattern matching of federation rankings, and illustrative Spearman correlations.

All three perceptions differed significantly across federations, and the least compliant federation scored lowest on every construct. Beyond that, the rankings only partially lined up. Legitimacy tracked compliance most closely ($\rho = .80$), trust moderately ($\rho = .40$) and justice weakly ($\rho = .20$). A federation at 88% compliance led on trust and justice, while the fully compliant federation led only on legitimacy. So all three hypotheses were only partially supported. The central conclusion is that compliance and perception can come apart in both directions, which means stakeholder perceptions carry information that compliance checklists do not capture. The thesis proposes adding a perceptual layer to governance assessment, with practical implications for federations and for the National Sports Agency.

Keywords: good governance, sport federations, stakeholder perceptions, organizational trust, organizational justice, legitimacy.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1. Survey Instrument (Questionnaire)

Title: Stakeholder Perceptions in Sport Federation Governance

Language of administration: Lithuanian

Note: Each item is presented in English (the adapted source instrument) followed by the Lithuanian translation administered to respondents.

TRUST | Source: Mayer & Davis (1999)
Response scale: 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

#	English	Lithuanian / Lietuvių
Competence (Items 1–3)		
1	The Federation management is very capable of performing its job.	Federacijos vadovybė puikiai atlieka savo pareigas.
2	The Federation management has much knowledge about the work that needs to be done.	Federacijos vadovybė puikiai išmano, kokie darbai turi būti atlikti.
3	I feel very confident about The Federation management's skills.	Visiškai pasitikiu aukščiausiosios federacijos kompetencijomis.
Benevolence (Items 4–6)		
4	My needs and desires are very important to the Federation management.	Federacijos vadovybei mano poreikiai ir pageidavimai yra labai svarbūs.
5	The Federation management would not knowingly do anything to hurt me.	Federacijos vadovybė sąmoningai nepadarytų nieko, kas man pakenktų.
6	The Federation management will go out of its way to help me.	Federacijos vadovybė dės visas pastangas, kad man padėtų.
Integrity (Items 7–9)		
7	I never have to wonder whether The Federation management will stick to its word.	Man niekada netenka abejoti, ar federacijos vadovybė laikysis savo žodžio.
8	The Federation management tries hard to be fair in dealings with others.	Federacijos vadovybė stengiasi elgtis sąžiningai bendraudama su kitais.
9	I like The Federation management's values.	Man patinka federacijos vadovybės vertybės.

Intention to Act / General Trust (Items 10–12)		
10	If I had my way, I wouldn't let The Federation management have any influence over issues that are important to me.	Jei galėčiau spręsti pats, neleisčiau federacijos vadovybei daryti jokios įtakos man svarbiems klausimams.
11	I really wish I had a good way to keep an eye on the Federation management.	Labai norėčiau turėti galimybę ir priemones stebėti federacijos vadovybę.
12	I would be comfortable giving the Federation management a task or problem which was critical to me, even if I could not monitor their actions.	Būčiau ramus patikėjęs federacijos vadovybei spręsti man labai svarbų klausimą ar problemą, net jei negalėčiau stebėti jų veiksmų.

FAIRNESS (Organizational Justice) | Source: Colquitt (2001)

Response scale: 5-point Likert scale (1 = To a small extent, 5 = To a large extent)

#	English	Lithuanian / Lietuvių
Procedural Justice (Items 13–15)		
	The following items refer to the processes used by the federation to arrive at decisions that affect you. To what extent:	*Toliau pateikti klausimai susiję su procedūromis, kurios buvo taikomos siekiant jūsų rezultato. Kokiu mastu:*
13	Have the federation's procedures been applied consistently?	Ar procedūros buvo taikomos nuosekliai?
14	Have the federation's procedures been free of bias?	Ar procedūros buvo nešališkos?
15	Have the federation's procedures been based on accurate information?	Ar procedūros buvo pagrįstos tikslia informacija?
Distributive Justice (Items 16–18)		
	The following items refer to the outcomes or decisions you receive from the federation. To what extent:	*Šie punktai susiję su jūsų pasiektu rezultatu. Kokiu mastu:*
16	Does the outcome you received reflect the effort you have put into your work?	Ar jūsų rezultatas atspindi pastangas, kurias įdėjote į savo darbą?
17	Is the outcome you received appropriate to what you have accomplished?	Ar jūsų rezultatas atitinka atliktą darbą?
18	Is the outcome you received justified, given your performance?	Ar jūsų rezultatas yra pagrįstas, atsižvelgiant į jūsų darbo rezultatus?
Interpersonal Justice (Items 19–21)		
	The following items refer to the authority figure who enacted the procedure. To what extent:	*Toliau pateikti klausimai susiję su procedūrą vykdžiusiu pareigūnu. Kokiu mastu:*

19	Has (he/she) treated you in a polite manner?	Ar (jis/ji) elgėsi su jumis mandagiai?
20	Has (he/she) treated you with respect?	Ar (jis/ji) elgėsi su jumis pagarbiai?
21	Has (he/she) refrained from improper remarks or comments?	Ar (jis/ji) susilaikė nuo netinkamų pastabų ar komentarų?
Informational Justice (Items 22–24)		
	The following items refer to the authority figure who enacted the procedure. To what extent:	*Šie klausimai susiję su procedūrą vykdžiusiu pareigūnu. Kokiu mastu:*
22	Has (he/she) been candid in (his/her) communications with you?	Ar (jis/ji) bendravo su jumis atvirai?
23	Were (his/her) explanations regarding the procedures reasonable?	Ar (jo/jos) paaiškinimai apie procedūras buvo pagrįsti?
24	Has (he/she) communicated details in a timely manner?	Ar (jis/ji) laiku pranešė apie visas detales?

LEGITIMACY | Source: Alexiou & Wiggins (2019)

Response scale: 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

#	English	Lithuanian / Lietuvių
Pragmatic Legitimacy (Items 25–27)		
25	In general, this federation creates value for its stakeholders.	Apskritai, federacija kuria vertę savo suinteresuotosioms grupėms.
26	The policies of this federation cater to the interests of its stakeholders.	Federacijos politika atitinka suinteresuotųjų grupių interesus.
27	I believe the activities of this federation benefit their immediate stakeholders.	Tikiu, kad federacijos veikla teikia naudą tiesioginėms suinteresuotosioms grupėms.
Moral Legitimacy (Items 28–30)		
28	The general public would approve of this federation's policies and procedures.	Visuomenė pritartų federacijos politikai ir procedūroms.
29	The way this federation operates promotes the common good.	Federacijos veiklos būdas skatina bendrąjį gėrį.
30	If more federations adopted policies and procedures like this one, the world would be a better place.	Jei daugiau federacijų taikytų tokią politiką ir procedūras, pasaulis taptų geresne vieta.
Cognitive Legitimacy (Items 31–33)		
31	I believe that this federation is necessary.	Manau, kad federacija yra būtina.
32	In general, this federation provides an essential function.	Apskritai, federacija vaidina svarbų vaidmenį.

33	It is difficult to imagine a world in which this federation did not exist.	Sunku įsivaizduoti pasaulį, kuriame nebūtų šios federacijos.

ANNEX 2. Governance Compliance Coding Scheme

Good Governance Principles (GGP) Implemented by National Sport Agency (Nacionalinė Sporto Agentūra)

No.	Good Governance Indicator	GG Dimension
1	Agendas and minutes of the General Assembly (or another supreme body, such as a conference, congress, convention, assembly, etc.) for the last three years, holding all or part of the powers of the General Assembly, are published on the applicant's website.	**Transparency**
2	The applicant's internal documents establish clear procedures for managing conflicts of interest (operational, financial, public procurement) and for recusal from decision-making for employees and members of governing bodies.	**Internal Accountability & Control**
3	At least one young person (up to and including 35 years of age) holds a position within the applicant's governing bodies.	**Democratic Processes**
4	The applicant's website publishes key information about members of governing bodies (start and end dates of terms of office, number and duration of previous terms, education, positions held in other organizations).	**Transparency**
5	At least four meetings of the applicant's collegiate governing body were held during the last 12 months prior to the submission of the application.	**Democratic Processes**
6	The applicant's internal rules clearly define the responsibilities and governance competences/functions of members of governing bodies.	**Internal Accountability & Control**
7	Minutes and decisions (or extracts thereof) of all meetings of collegiate governing bodies and committees held during the last 12 months prior to the application submission date are published on the applicant's website, except for information prohibited from disclosure by law.	**Transparency**
8	The applicant has approved internal procedures for impartial handling of complaints and conflicts, including an integrated procedure for handling confidential reports.	**Internal Accountability & Control**
9	The applicant's website publishes, for the last three years prior to the submission of the high-performance sport programme, annual financial statements, activity reports, audit opinions and annual reports, in accordance with Article 101 of the Law on Associations of the Republic of Lithuania.	**Transparency**
10	The applicant has approved and implements a specific programme/plan aimed at the prevention of doping and the prohibition of manipulation of sports competitions.	**Social Responsibility**
11	An elite athlete or a representative of elite athletes holds a position within the applicant's governing bodies.	**Democratic Processes**
12	The applicant has approved internal rules defining specific actions aimed at preventing and combating sexual harassment in sport.	**Social Responsibility**
13	The applicant has approved internal rules defining objectives and specific actions aimed at preventing and combating discrimination in sport.	**Social Responsibility**
14	The applicant has approved internal rules defining objectives and specific actions aimed at promoting the protection of natural resources.	**Social Responsibility**
15	The composition of the applicant's governing bodies is gender-balanced, with representatives of each gender accounting for at least 40% of the total membership.	**Democratic Processes**

No.	Good Governance Indicator	GG Dimension
16	In the current year, the applicant has concluded an employment or sports activity contract (with remuneration) with at least one coach working with the relevant age-group national team(s).	**Internal Accountability & Control**

Coding method: Each indicator was coded as **1 (compliant)** or **0 (non-compliant)** based on publicly available documentation for each federation. Indicators marked with "—" were not assigned to a GG dimension in the original programme criteria.

ANNEX 3. Additional Statistical Outputs

Annex 3.1. Internal consistency of the Trust, Justice, and Legitimacy scales and their subcategories (N = 85).

Construct	Subconstruct	Items (n)	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω
Trust	**Overall**	**12**	**.900**	**.913**
	Competence	3	.875	.882
	Benevolence	3	.776	.792
	Integrity	3	.801	.814
	General / Intention to act	3	*.460*	*.474*
Justice	**Overall**	**12**	**.932**	**.935**
	Procedural	3	.805	.819
	Distributive	3	.912	.914
	Interpersonal	3	.837	.863
	Informational	3	.871	.876
Legitimacy	**Overall**	**9**	**.895**	**.902**
	Pragmatic	3	.854	.857
	Moral	3	.906	.914
	Cognitive	3	*.682*	.772

Note. α = Cronbach's alpha; ω = McDonald's omega. Values ≥ .70 are generally considered acceptable; values < .70 are italicised.

Annex 3.2: Post-hoc Pairwise Comparisons from Omnibus Tests

Annex 3.2a. Pairwise comparisons following the significant omnibus tests by federation (federations masked as A–D). Post-hoc comparisons are reported only where the omnibus test was significant; the non-significant supplementary checks (years of involvement, gender, role) are summarised omnibus-only in Annex 3.2b.

Outcome	Omnibus test	Post-hoc test	Group 1	Group 2	Statistic	Statistic type	*p*	*p (Bonferroni)*
Trust	Kruskal–Wallis $\chi^2(3) = 8.36$, $p = .039$, $\varepsilon^2 = .100$	Dunn's test	A	B	0.99	z	.321	1.000
Trust		Dunn's test	A	C	-0.41	z	.683	1.000
Trust		Dunn's test	A	D	2.25	z	.025	.148
Trust		Dunn's test	B	C	-1.30	z	.194	1.000
Trust		Dunn's test	B	D	0.98	z	.325	1.000
Trust		Dunn's test	C	D	2.44	z	.015	.088
Justice	One-way ANOVA $F(3, 81) = 3.02$, $p = .034$, $\eta^2 = .10$	Tukey HSD	A	B	-0.14	Mean difference	.922	—

Justice		Tukey HSD	A	C	-0.35	Mean difference	.415	—
Justice		Tukey HSD	A	D	0.23	Mean difference	.596	—
Justice		Tukey HSD	B	C	-0.22	Mean difference	.808	—
Justice		Tukey HSD	B	D	0.37	Mean difference	.251	—
Justice		Tukey HSD	C	D	0.59	Mean difference	**.031**	—
Legitimacy	Kruskal–Wallis $\chi^2(3) = 9.16$, $p = .027$, $\varepsilon^2 = .109$	DSCF	A	B	-3.41	W	.075	—
Legitimacy		DSCF	A	C	0.75	W	.952	—
Legitimacy		DSCF	A	D	-3.06	W	.135	—
Legitimacy		DSCF	B	C	2.60	W	.255	—
Legitimacy		DSCF	B	D	0.22	W	.999	—
Legitimacy		DSCF	C	D	-2.89	W	.172	—

Note. Dunn z and Tukey mean differences are computed as Group 1 minus Group 2; DSCF W follows the jamovi output convention. For Dunn's test, the uncorrected p and the Bonferroni-corrected p (6 comparisons) are both shown; only the corrected value should be interpreted. Tukey HSD and DSCF control the familywise error internally, so no additional correction is applied. The only significant pairwise difference is justice, C vs D ($p = .031$), shown in bold.

Annex 3.2b. Summary of all omnibus tests, the assumption basis for each test choice, and the post-hoc decision. Post-hoc tests were run only where the omnibus test was significant.

Comparison	**Outcome**	**Test choice (assumption basis)**	**Omnibus result**	**Effect size**	**Significant**	**Post-hoc decision**
By federation	Trust	Normality violated (Shapiro–Wilk $p = .016$) → Kruskal–Wallis	$\chi^2(3) = 8.36$, $p = .039$	$\varepsilon^2 = .100$	Yes	Dunn's test with Bonferroni correction
By federation	Justice	Normality met ($p = .070$), variances equal (Levene $p =$	$F(3, 81) = 3.02$, $p = .034$	$\eta^2 = .10$	Yes	Tukey HSD

		.886) → one-way ANOVA				
By federation	Legitimacy	Normality violated (p = .014) and variances unequal (Levene p = .007) → Kruskal–Wallis	$\chi^2(3)$ = 9.16, p = .027	ε^2 = .109	Yes	DSCF (robust to unequal variances)
By years of involvement	Trust	Sensitivity check, unequal group sizes (7/15/63) → Kruskal–Wallis	$\chi^2(2)$ = 2.75, p = .253	ε^2 = .033	No	None (omnibus not significant)
By years of involvement	Justice	Same	$\chi^2(2)$ = 3.08, p = .214	ε^2 = .037	No	None
By years of involvement	Legitimacy	Same	$\chi^2(2)$ = 1.92, p = .383	ε^2 = .023	No	None
By gender	Trust	Two groups → Mann–Whitney U	U = 854, p = .880	r = −.020	No	n/a (two groups)
By gender	Justice	Same	U = 842, p = .967	r = −.006	No	n/a
By gender	Legitimacy	Same	U = 945, p = .325	r = −.129	No	n/a
By role (supplementary)	Justice	Small “Other” group (n = 6), normality violated for athletes (p = .007) → Kruskal–Wallis	$\chi^2(2)$ = 4.26, p = .119	ε^2 = .051	No	None (omnibus not significant)