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It's never simple! People, power and relationships in the United Kingdom Olympic sport policy system. A commentary

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on insights from the United Kingdom [UK], this commentary highlights the complexity of the Olympic sport policy process and proposes a novel conceptual approach that situates people at the forefront of the analysis. Informed by process sociology, the approach demonstrates the importance of understanding complexity as the consequence of interdependent relationships that bind people together. Extracts from interviews undertaken with nine senior National Governing Body employees, who are responsible for implementing Olympic sport policy, are drawn on to inform and illuminate the proposed approach. Their extracts showcase that conversations and dialogue, often undertaken in the context of meetings, are central to the policy process. Managing emotions, navigating opacity, deep personal involvement and associated personal wellbeing impacts are all features of the Olympic sport policy process not readily accounted for in the extant literature or practice. The process, increasingly games like, never wholly represents the actions of any one group or individual as they navigate choices constrained by the interlacing of many relationships over time. We therefore conclude that it may be conceptually better to now describe the organisation of Olympic sport in the UK as a figuration of people rather than as a "system".

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Introduction

Evidence from four nations [Australia, the UK, China and Japan] has revealed that sporting obscurity at an Olympic Games, followed by a period of national soul searching, has been the catalyst for renewing the system of Olympic sport in each country (M. Green & Oakley, 2001; Stewart, 2004; Yamamoto, 2012; Zheng et al., 2018). Each of these nations also hosted a subsequent Olympic Games [2000: Australia, 2008: China, 2012: UK, 2020/2021: Japan] which further bolstered the political momentum to invest significant financial resources into Olympic sports. Being competitive and successful at the pinnacle of international sport, which is often measured by the quantity of medals won, has now become mostly dependent on enacting a policy process led by central government agencies and supported by individual sports organisations.

In the UK, the policy response over the past 25 years has seen a marked change in the medal table standings at the summer Olympic Games, from 36th in 1996 [Atlanta] to 4th in 2021 [Tokyo]. A series of deliberate policy changes that support a more systematic and scientific approach to developing athletic performance reflects what Konzelmann and Fovargue-Davies (2016) describe as a modernisation of Olympic sport policy. However, the unintended consequences of this modernisation and the adoption of policies that reward success predicated solely on winning medals have been called into question. Most notably, this reflects the costs incurred by athletes, coaches and other staff on their mental and physical wellbeing. Increasingly, the necessity to redefine success as

more than just medals and finding more sustainable ways to win are being prioritised (Bishop, 2020; Bostock et al., 2018; Green & Houlihan, 2006; Grix, 2009; Houlihan & Green, 2009).

This paper provides a commentary on how the development and implementation of policies for Olympic sport might be better understood when people, and the relationships between them, are at the forefront of the analysis. Our reasoning for this rests on the observation that previous sports policy research has tended to draw on publicly available documents as the main source of evidence on which to construct and inform subsequent findings. Rarely has previous research positioned the thoughts and opinions of people as the focus of the process. Furthermore, where individuals have been the source of primary data, this has often been subsequently presented as illustrating and reflecting that of the organisations they represent. This reifies organisations, it positions them as concrete "things" and insufficiently recognises that it is people who make decisions, write policy documents and talk to other people inside their own and other organisations. It is our aim to argue that the Olympic sport policy process involves many different types of interactions between people, and these are important to research and analyse in their own right. Our approach therefore goes "behind the scenes" and "inside the organisations" to uncover the dynamics of the personal interactions and relationships that inform the ongoing development of Olympic sport policy in the UK.

Complex systems and Olympic Sports

The study of complex systems provides a useful reference point for studying Olympic sport policy. Indeed, Olympic sport in the UK is commonly referred to as a “system” (e.g., UK Sport, 2019). Boehnert et al. (2018) identified 16 features common to complex systems which capture their dynamic, co-adaptive, and self-organising characteristics. Furthermore, they illustrate how control and power within complex systems are distributed amongst many actors who each possess varying amounts of power and influence at different points in time. There are strengths in taking a systems perspective to develop a better understanding of Olympic sport policy, but it is not without its limitations.

Some complexity theories struggle to contend with the paradox that the Olympic sport policy process, whilst intentionally being a rational and planned managerialist process, is also influenced by unforeseen and unintentional events that can disrupt the balance of the system. Within many models, individuals are depicted as situated separately to the social groupings of which they are a constituent part. Equally, concepts of emergence, self-organisation and unpredictability insufficiently appreciate the complexity of human relationships which can be the cause of these disruptive events. Furthermore, whilst research often explicitly acknowledges that the past informs the present, methodologically there is a tendency to reduce changes in the system to periodic moments that occur at critical times. Instead of this approach, we contend that social systems are dynamic and continually in motion (Quilley & Loyal, 2005), albeit recognising that there are periods when changes in the system are more noticeable and significant.

We also argue that many of the characteristics of complex systems are better understood as the observable outcomes of the decisions and actions taken by mutually interdependent people. Once the analysis becomes more focused on *people*, the nature of their policy-related discussions and conversations reflect how these people create networks that are constituted by relationships of uneven power. Whilst accepting that the Olympic sport policy process is an example of a complex system, it is also necessary to analyse the “deeply rooted and dynamic human figurations” (Bloyce & Smith, 2009, p. 155) that *are* the system. It is this position that subsequently draws us into a process sociological approach.

Process sociology: An outline

Process sociology is a term used to describe the field of sociological theory and empirical analysis initially developed by Norbert Elias and which has been widely recognised for making a significant contribution to the sociological study of sport (Bloyce & Smith, 2009; Dunning, 1999; Giulianotti, 2015; Newton, 1999; Murphy, Sheard and Waddington, 2000). In relation to elite sport, Bloyce and Smith (2009) have developed an informative process sociological approach that draws on publicly available documents to analyse the emergence of elite sports systems in several countries. In doing so, they argue that elite sport systems are becoming increasingly similar whilst also retaining differences that are specific to the culture of each country. This observation applies to the ideas which

Elias developed in analysing the consequences of countries becoming more inter-connected through the influence of globalising processes. Our intention in this commentary is to extend this process sociological analysis further by exploring the deeper insights that are potentially revealed by researching the experiences of individuals working within a single nation’s elite Olympic sport system.

First and foremost, Elias argued that dualisms such as “agency” and “structure” or “individual” and “society”, are unhelpful in understanding human experiences. To overcome this, Elias developed the concept of figurations. For Elias, individuals are mutually orientated, and their actions, thoughts and beliefs are continuously formed through their interdependence with each other. Within groups of people, and indeed within a society of people, this degree of interdependence is revealed in the complex patterns which are created by the relationships between them. It is these patterns which Elias refers to as “figurations” which can be defined as fluid networks of people that are structured by the chains of interdependency which connect and bind people together. As organisations and groups grow and develop, the chains of interdependence lengthen and become increasingly interwoven. This denser interweaving of relationships also means that for each person the picture of the relationships that affect their lives becomes less clear to them (Mennell, 1977). Elias applied this concept to explore the reasons why individuals in Western societies have, at least from the middle-ages onwards, concurrently tempered the volatility of their emotions, demonstrated a heightened sensitivity towards physical violence, and learnt to acquire more refined standards of personal conduct, especially in relation to the natural functions of their bodies. Elias referred to this as a civilising process, not in a moral or philosophical sense, but as a specific change in how individuals regulate and manage their emotions and behaviour in order to navigate their interdependence with others.

Power is also integral to figurations, but importantly power is not a possession, nor does it necessarily have an origin in material conditions such as that between an employer and employee. Elias power is polymorphous and inherent in every relationship, for example, a newborn baby has considerable power over their parents. Elias therefore views power in terms of a balance and a ratio that changes as the nature of relationships change. Power is therefore always asymmetrical and unevenly distributed, and never absolute or fixed. In explaining this concept of power, Elias described a series of “games models” (Elias, 1978, pp. 70–103) to illustrate his thinking.

Elias begins his illustration of game models by focusing on the least complex form of his model which is a game played by two people. In this model even when one person has considerably more power than the other they never have absolute power, the weaker person still has some power to which the stronger person needs to orientate their decision-making and actions. Power is relative, and consequently a question of the balance of power between people. Furthermore, where the strength of one person over another is considerable it also enables the person with more power not only to exert a high degree of control over the other person but also simultaneously to exert control over the direction of the game. This,

as Elias indicates, does not mean that control over someone else and control over the game are independent of each other. On the contrary, they are two elements of the same game, and if the balance of power between the two people were to become less uneven it would also diminish the opportunity for either person to control the direction of the game.

Elias extends his analysis by considering what happens when more people become involved in a game. In this multi-person model, because there are more players, each of whom has at least some power to influence the game, no one person can formulate a clear and unambiguous picture about the direction of the game. In this scenario Elias argues that the game becomes increasingly opaque to every person, it is not just that no one player can control how the game develops but also that no person can use their judgement to accurately predict where the game is heading. It is also impossible to say whether anyone could have played a better game because the possible iterations of how the game might have unfolded are so great that, in the moment, people feel compelled to move in particular ways which when looking back they might not have otherwise chosen (Moore, 2021). In developing our analysis, we intend to demonstrate that the Olympic sport policy process is an example of a complex multi-person game. Furthermore, we shall also focus on the sites where these games are played, and in this endeavour, the study by Wilbert Vree (1999) regarding how the organisation and conduct of meetings has changed over time is invaluable.

The manners and etiquette of meetings

In the context of the UK Olympic sport system, meetings are now a ubiquitous feature. Due to steadily increasing government investment, and the development of the Olympic sport movement, the number of people and organisations involved in the process has grown significantly. This has not only created more complexity, but also with greater specialisation of roles and functions, the interdependence and need to co-ordinate and manage work through meetings have increased. Attempts to manage the partially blind policy process have led individuals and groups to introduce more layers of bureaucracy to provide assurance and governance concerning the use of public money. As in many other parts of society, the people involved in Olympic sport will spend a considerable amount of time preparing for, deliberating in, or processing the outputs of meetings. Meetings are sites where individuals with more influence can potentially steer the development and implementation of policies in a particular direction. Consequently, focusing on what happens in meetings is an important aspect in understanding the complexity of the Olympic sport policy process at a micro level.

In his study, Van Vree draws on the theory of civilising processes to trace the long-term development of the rules, customs and etiquette associated with meetings in Western societies. Van Vree illustrates that in comparison to the past, meetings have become more professional and standardised. The use of agendas, the appointment of a chairperson and secretary, the process of turn-taking and defining the types of behaviour which are acceptable or unacceptable within meetings are examples of the way that modern meetings have developed. Van Vree goes further than this and illustrates that meetings increasingly require participants to deploy the skills of cunning foresight, reflection and calculation to persuade others of their arguments and to facilitate negotiation when disagreements arise. Simultaneously, this requires individuals to become more attuned to the actions and emotions of others as well as more stringently regulating their own emotions. The etiquette, customs and conduct of modern meetings are therefore not just learnt by individuals but are the consequence of historical changes in societies that have influenced the way in which individuals manage their emotions. What Van Vree uncovers in researching the history of meetings is further evidence to support the theory of a long-term civilising process.

Meetings, as Van Vree also describes, have become one of the main forums through which decisions are made within organisations and between organisations. They are an important element of social life, and for many individuals, their work is dominated by their attendance and participation in meetings both in-person and increasingly in virtual meetings (Sandler & Thedvall, 2017). It is also the case, as Sandler and Thedvall (2017) continue to observe, that the function and conduct of meetings has largely been ignored and not taken seriously by academic research. In working towards our objective of developing a more relational and people focused understanding of the Olympic sport policy process, studying the environment of meetings cannot be ignored.

The empirical evidence that supports our commentary is part of a larger longitudinal mixed methods study examining the implementation of Olympic sport policy in the UK. One of the methods involved conducting 27 semi-structured interviews with nine senior figures employed by the National Governing Bodies [NGBs]. Three interviews were conducted with each of the nine individuals spanning a period of 3 years [2020–2023]. These took place every 9 months, and they elicited a total of 30 hours of recorded conversation. Interview participants were recruited via snowball sampling and were drawn from NGBs intentionally chosen for their contrasting organisational and sport characteristics.

Table 1 provides a brief description of the size and history of the NGBs from which the interview participants were drawn. Identifying details of the organisations and the individuals have been intentionally removed to avoid deductive disclosure. The

Table 1. Profile of interview participants' NGBs *.

| | Age of NGB | Number of years since the Olympic inclusion of men | Number of years since the Olympic inclusion of women | Number of Employees |
|--------|------------|--|--|---------------------|
| NGB #1 | ~150 yrs | ~120 yrs | <50 yrs | ~100 |
| NGB #2 | <10 yrs | <20 | <20 | <10 |
| NGB #3 | 10-20 yrs | ~120 yrs | <50 yrs | 70-80 |
| NGB #4 | 20-30 yrs | ~120 yrs | ~100 yrs | ~100 |

*information taken from NGB websites.

Table 2. Interview participant professional roles.

| PROFESSIONAL ROLE | Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or equivalent | Performance Director or equivalent | Talent Pathway Lead or equivalent (i.e., those responsible for athlete development below senior level) |
|-------------------|---|------------------------------------|--|
| Participant Count | 2 | 3 | 4 |

professional role of the interview participants are detailed in [Table 2](#).

These recorded conversations provided a rich seam of data that contributed to the wider analysis of the Olympic sport policy process. Specifically, they illuminated the perspective of individuals whose roles and responsibilities are integral to the enactment of the policy process. They are at the forefront of the policy process, it occupies their time, thinking and relationships with others. A particularly striking, and unanticipated aspect of the discussions, was the impact of the policy process on their personal wellbeing. The original intent of the conversations was to understand their role in the policy process and how interrelationships with others influenced their decision-making, but what transpired were conversations where individuals openly discussed how the policy process impacted their health. This further highlights how the voices of the people within the process are important and their opinions matter, what they say deserves to be heard and should be reflected in any analysis of how the policy process operates.

People, power and wellbeing

In the following part of the commentary, we aim to substantiate our arguments by drawing on illustrative quotes from the interview participants. First, we explain how meetings are an under-explored component of the policy process. Furthermore, there are different types of *meetings*, and these can be situated on a continuum from the formal to the informal. Second, the *balance of power* and the influence of some individuals on the outcome of meetings and therefore the direction of the policy process is significant. Finally, the combination of interpersonal relationships, self-regulation and the necessity to influence across multiple groups contribute to a working context which takes a significant toll on the mental and physical *wellbeing* of individuals.

Meetings

All the interview participants identified different types of meetings as part of their work, both inside their organisation and with individuals from other organisations. The types of meetings they spoke about ranged from the very formalised, such as Annual General Meetings [AGMs] and Board meetings to more informal meetings that provided an opportunity for less prescriptive and structured discussions.

What became evident was the extent to which some of the individuals interviewed pre-planned meetings, particularly those that were more formal. For example, a Performance Director described how they:

... do a stakeholder map and work out who are the ones that I need to get to. And then I spend time building relationships and

establishing connections. So, they get a real understanding, ... all the work is done outside of those meetings, not in it. And you get them to a point whereby they're on your side or not, but then you know what you've got to do when you take papers into the meeting.
- Performance Director

Another CEO explained a similar type of approach to meetings:

I'll tend to sort of pre-empt discussion by picking up the phone or meeting up [in-person] ...

These two examples provide an insight into the foresight, planning and calculation typical of modern meeting behaviour. The element of pre-planning, relationship building to secure support, and knowing what to expect are all components of a skilled approach. As the roles, committees and mechanisms required in sports governance increasingly become more formalised through the introduction of standardised processes, individuals continue to further adapt their ways of working to influence others (Tacon & Walters, 2016). Spontaneity and acting in the moment become secondary to a rational and calculating process designed to influence meetings in a particular direction.

Whilst the examples mostly reflect situations within quite formalised meeting environments, Olympic sport policy cannot simply be viewed as a product of these settings. Outside of formalised meetings, other less formal social connections and communications all form part of the process through which discussions are entered into and decisions subsequently made.

As a Performance Director noted:

... you know, a couple of good friends, both of whom happen to be immersed in sport, know the system, know the people ... those telephone conversations, as you drive at 7 pm on a Thursday evening, or whatever, you share ... problems and challenges ... So there are definitely people who spring to mind that I go and speak to ...

In addition, a CEO also spoke about the importance of discussions with their peers in different contexts:

I would say some of the other Chief Execs we sort of share and shout, and talk and whatever else fairly regularly and [Name] does a brilliant job with the sort of forum that exists and it meets quarterly at least but picks up specific issues and things around it ...

Another CEO indicated that they had a great relationship with the Chair of the organisation they worked for, and they spoke to each other "all the time", and that their conversations were not then just limited to Board meetings.

Relationships between individuals therefore do not just exist within the context of formalised meetings, but also occur within other types of informal meetings and conversations that may afford opportunities for more spontaneity. However, it is the more formalised meetings that are officially recorded and become publicly available and therefore what researchers might rely on in the future. Yet these documents do not entirely capture the ongoing, continuous dialogue that takes place between individuals, and consequently they only provide

researchers with a limited understanding of what occurred and why.

Some of the interview participants also described meetings as part of a wider game which they were involved in. Discussing what they perceived to be barriers to their own progression, one interview participant explained their feeling that *“if you want to climb the ladder, you have to play the game”*.

Another interview participant expanded on this idea further with respect to their personal and organisational objectives:

You could sit here and kind of explain this romantic notion of where everybody's empowered and you know, the bureaucracy is reduced and you have the autonomy to excel [in your role]. But you know, is that realistic? The world is a bit like this, and you just need to excel at navigating; play the game and work within it – Performance Director

Expanding on their description of the game, the same Performance Director gave an example of how they saw an opportunity to organise a meeting with the aim of securing investment into their sport:

... we had one meeting as a sport where we managed to sort of manipulate a meeting in the investment process, so that we could actually meet face to face and talk about what we could and what we wanted to do. And I've no doubt that, you know, whilst it perhaps didn't achieve quite the outcome we wanted, I had no doubt that their understanding of who we are, what we wanted to do was, you know, 100 fold greater through our meeting, and then through reading the entirety of our submission. – Performance Director

With varying degrees of consciousness and intent, all individuals are motivated to secure certain outcomes from their relationships with others. As previously outlined, when the number of people involved in a game increases it becomes more and more challenging for any individual to control the course of the game. Therefore, where there is competition for limited resources, tactics and strategies are employed to jostle for position and build alliances.

Balances of power

Whilst no individual can be said to be in control of the game, some individuals are perceived to be able to exert more influence on the direction of the process than others. Amongst the interview participants, this was attributable more than any other factor to their established position within the Olympic sport system which reflected their personal achievements, charisma or their role within the hierarchical structures of the organisation they work for. As one interview participant recognised, their length of tenure and their relationships with others in the Olympic sport system made it easier for them to exert influence. In their words:

It is that ability to influence whether that's an influencing for your benefit or influencing for your sport's benefit. The number of stakeholders that you now have to work with is just getting more and more. No question. There's no doubt that the way you are, where you've worked with people for longer periods of time, you have a respect for each other and a positive working relationship. There's no doubt it clearly works in your favour. – CEO

Conversely, other interview participants conveyed the feeling of being an outsider, whether this was because they were new

to a role, had different personal qualities or worked within a sport which has less tradition of being an Olympic event.

As an interview participant described:

I think I do feel quite isolated. Because I, you know, talk to [another CEO]. And because he's been embedded in the system in lots of different governing bodies. And, you know, for years, he goes, “Oh, yeah, just pick up the phone to that person”. I'm going “who's that, never even heard of them?”- CEO

Another interview participant commented on the impact of established members of the Olympic sport system and, consequently, the extent to which they adapted their own behaviour accordingly:

I come from outside the [Olympic] bubble and this is really strange, because it's what we've always done [as a sport]...I'm always shocked to hear people complaining like ‘oh, we really want to win medals, but oh, now you want us to do that, but also include diversity and we need to be serving all different people’. I mean, like what have you been doing? I don't understand. It frustrates me. But I sit on this Performance Director group and go into these meetings, and I sit there quiet because I really have a lot of respect for the achievements of the people in that group ... - Performance Director

These feelings and perceptions of being an outsider and seeing others as more established have also been explored by Elias, they are another dimension to process sociology. In developing his ideas regarding established and outsider relationships, which drew on data gathered from analysing relationships between people on a post-war housing estate, Elias argued that being an outsider was more than a label. Instead, individuals develop a sense of being an outsider, which also contributes to their identity and influences their relationships with others. Furthermore, their perception of being an outsider also contributes to diminishing the degree of power they perceive they have in comparison to more established individuals. Extending these ideas to the Olympic sport policy process, it is arguable that how individuals perceive their status is related to the degree of power and influence they have. For example, for those who feel like an outsider it can undermine their confidence to participate in, and contribute to, discussions and conversations in meetings.

Wellbeing

The preceding analysis leads us towards discussing the wellbeing of those working within the Olympic sport policy system. Whilst there is a great deal of attention paid to athlete wellbeing, and more recently coaches, research on the wellbeing of those who are further behind the scenes and less visible to the public is less well developed. When research about sports policy is often focused on the function of organisations and inadequately addresses the role of individuals, this is unlikely to change. It is arguably only when Olympic sport policy is reconceptualised as a social and relational process that a deeper layer of understanding about the human impact can be brought to the fore. The following extracts from the interview transcripts serve to illustrate this.

Speaking about their experiences of leading an NGB through the COVID-19 pandemic, one CEO alludes to the tensions between looking after themselves, their staff and the

people who constitute the sport [athletes, coaches, volunteers, etc.]:

... I still do feel quite mentally knackered as a result of it ... and I know that I'm saying to my staff look after yourself and do all this. But I'm not, you know, I think I've had three days off in the last 12 months. And because, well, if I have some time off, it just means that there's just more to do. - CEO

Like other vocations, the decision to work within Olympic sport is a highly personal choice and this impacts how individuals approach their working lives.

I was very close to burning out. I worked 73 days without a day, a full day off ... and I was just like, I just can't do this I'm making myself unwell. And that was a real conflict there. Because I loved the job. I love what I'm doing. - Performance Director

Another Performance Director applies this reflection to the wider Olympic sport workforce:

I think we are at greater risk of it being all-consuming in an unhealthy way. Rather than if you've got your sport is your leisure activity and [here] your work is your work. - Performance Director

It is not just the relations and personal qualities which are impacting on the wellbeing of individuals. Navigating the interwoven and at times competing bureaucratic and management processes that are in essence relationships between people also contribute. As one CEO recognises:

throw in the [investment] process which is incredibly time consuming as I've said, then it just adds more pressure and stress ... I saw at pre-Christmas in the team, they were burnt out, if we hadn't stopped I'd have to make them stop for the two weeks because they were just shot, absolutely shot ... every other sport that I've spoken to were all in the same place - CEO

Within Olympic sport policy, understanding the wellbeing of the people involved needs to be approached both systemically and individually. In recent years, several notable societal movements and events have impacted on Olympic sport. Within a relatively rapid succession, world events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war and transformational movements such as #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo have irrevocably impacted the context for Olympic sport. In addition, a series of exposé documentaries relating to malpractice, abuse and cheating in sport released since 2020 have drawn attention to Olympic sport as a site for public enquiry and scrutiny. The impact of this on the individuals within the Olympic sport policy process is worthy of further and deeper exploration.

Conclusion

We have argued that the Olympic sport policy process is an example of a complex system, but when examined through existing "complex system" approaches the influence of people and relationships is insufficiently recognised. In this commentary, we intend to demonstrate the importance of understanding how Olympic sport policy is developed, implemented and subsequently reviewed through the interdependent relationships between numerous people. These relationships develop within and impact upon the many meetings, interactions and discussions which take place. Rather than referring to an Olympic sports policy "system", we advocate that it is better

conceptualised as a policy "figuration". Reconceptualising in this way brings to the fore how the interactions between people are fundamental and an appreciation that decisions and actions in Olympic sport are layered with the influence of power imbalances and personal emotions.

In the UK case, sporting obscurity at an Olympic Games [1996] followed by winning the London bid for the Olympic Games [2005] and hosting it [2012] has seen a period of sustained investment into Olympic sport. With more money, more employed staff, more specialisms and the inclusion of a wider range of sports in the Olympics, over the past 25 years, the interdependencies of working in the Olympic sport policy figuration have become denser and consequently more complex.

As the actions and interactions of the thousands of people shape the UK Olympic sport policy figuration, so they are also shaped and impacted by the process. Managing emotions, navigating relations, the opacity of decision-making processes and the challenge of influencing change are all experienced mentally and physically by individuals. In this respect, our analysis adds an additional layer of understanding with respect to the human cost of working in Olympic sport which to date has been a mostly absent feature of sports policy research.

Our use of data from a wider study also shows the potential of what this focus on people may offer. For example, the interweaving of individuals creates a working context whereby the history, relationships and conversations behind published policies and decisions are generally hidden and invisible, but these should and need to be revealed. The experiences of interviewees also highlight a far more emotive process with an open acceptance that policy decisions are impacted by individual influence. Finally, this commentary demonstrates how sociology can address the oversimplification of complex processes and relationships, thus painting a fuller picture upon which to act in practice (Moore, 2021). Perhaps, this could even provide the grounding for a conceptual framework that helps to develop a trans-disciplinary understanding of how policy for Olympic sport is enacted. Finding an approach that more explicitly investigates the fluidity of the interdependent relations between people would help explain both the dynamism of the policy figuration and the impact it has on people's lives.

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