

Regions and Provincial Sport Organizations in Ontario, Canada: A Case Study

Dante Losardo, Master of Arts

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Faculty Of Applied Health Sciences, Brock University
St. Catharines, Ontario

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Abstract¹

Canada is a large country with a complex political landscape that has evolved over time. Regionalism has been vital in shaping Canada's political and economic development since its inception. Although the implications of regionalism are widely discussed in fields such as economic geography and rural development, little discussion of regions and regionalism (in Canada or abroad) has taken place related to sport policy and management. To date, much of the work in sport management in Canada has been focused on sport at either the national, or community level. As a result of this, much of the established literature to date does not touch upon provincial sport organizations (PSOs), particularly in relation to the understanding of regions and the spaces that fundamentally constitute these organizations. To address this gap, I analyzed how regions are understood and managed by actors within the field. The purpose of this study was to investigate the theoretical and practical implications of regions within sport governance in Ontario, Canada. This research answers the following key questions: 1) how do PSO-affiliated actors understand and construct regions? and 2) how do institutional pressures impact the management of regions within PSOs in Ontario? To answer these questions, an instrumental case study methodology was used to explore these questions within the province of Ontario. Data were collected through document analysis of organizational strategic plans and semi-structured interviews with decision-makers within PSOs. Thematic analysis (TA) was utilized in the analysis of data for this thesis. The dual frameworks of institutional theory and theories of space were utilized as the theoretical backdrop for analysis. Through analysis, three themes were identified in relation to how PSO-affiliated actors understand and construct regions: Recognition of the Province as a Region; Regions are Informally Constructed; and Regions are

¹ Key words: Sport Governance, Institutional Theory, Space, Provincial Sport Organizations (PSOs), Regions.

Formally Structured. This research highlights that regions are understood and managed differently by actors within PSOs, and that institutional pressures (coercive, normative, mimetic) impact organizations differently and ultimately contribute to this understanding and management. This work contributes to the sport management literature through an exploration of how space is constructed, understood, and managed by actors within an institutionalized environment.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Acknowledgments	4
List of Tables	1
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Research Context and Literature Review	4
The Canadian Sport Governance System.....	4
Key Developments in Canadian Sport Policy	6
<i>Canadian Sport Policy (CSP 2002).....</i>	9
<i>Physical Activity and Sport Act (PASA)</i>	10
<i>The Canadian Sport Policy 2.0 (CSP 2012)</i>	11
Provincial Sport Organizations.....	12
The Geography of Sport	15
Regionalism and Sport Participation	17
Purpose and Research Questions	20
Chapter 3: Theoretical Frameworks.....	22
Institutional Theory	22
Theorizing Space within Sport Institutions	28
<i>The Production of Space</i>	28
<i>Space in Sport Management and Policy</i>	31
Chapter 4: Methodological Approach	35
The Case	36
Data Collection	37
<i>Document Analysis</i>	38
<i>Semi-Structured Interviews</i>	40
Thematic Analysis.....	43
Positionality Statement	47
Chapter 5: Findings	51
Recognition of the Province as a Region	51
Regions are Informally Constructed	53
<i>Informal Organization</i>	53
<i>Access to Space & Facilities</i>	55
<i>Implications of Travel</i>	57
<i>Informal Regional Support – Funding, Events, and Hubs</i>	59
Regions are Formally Structured.....	61
<i>Institutionalized Regional Organization.....</i>	61
<i>Regional Politics</i>	65

Chapter 6: Discussion	67
How Actors Understand and Construct Regions.....	67
<i>Creating and Understanding Space</i>	<i>67</i>
<i>Space and Politics</i>	<i>74</i>
How Institutional Pressures Impact the Management of Regions	79
<i>Organizational Fields, Legitimacy, and Institutional Pressures</i>	<i>79</i>
Chapter 7: Implications, Limitations, and Future Directions	86
Theoretical and Practical Implications	86
Limitations	88
Future Directions.....	89
Conclusion	90
Literature Cited.....	92
Appendix A: Interview Guide Provincial Sport Organizations:	108
Appendix B: Sample Letter of Invitation	110
Appendix C: Consent Form	111

List of Tables

Table 1: PSO Strategic Planning Documents Page 40

Table 2: Interview Participant Information Page 48

Chapter 1: Introduction

Canada is a large country with a complex political landscape that has evolved over time. Regionalism has been vital in shaping Canada's political and economic development since its inception (Bakvis & Tanguay, 2020). According to Conteh (2012), “[t]he Canadian economy is a classic example of an industrialized country that underwent significant adjustments over the last 20 years, as evidenced in processes of regional economic development” (Conteh, 2012, p. 466). The concept of regions and regionalism in Canada can be traced back to the country's early history. The country's large territory, diverse geography, and distinct cultural communities have driven the development of regional identities and interests. Cochrane and Perrella (2012) define a region broadly as “any spatial unit that surrounds an individual” (p. 834). While there is no true consensus among scholars about what causes regional differences to occur, there is consensus that “the country is divided in politically consequential ways along regional lines” (Cochrane & Perrella, 2012, p. 1). Regional differences are likely to be caused by different factors in different regions and it is unlikely that a single explanation (culture, economic structure, institutions) can explain these differences (Cochrane & Perrella, 2012).

During the early years of Canadian Confederation, regionalism was mainly driven by economic interests as the country relied heavily on primary resources, and each region had its own unique economic strengths (Harris, 2015). However, Canada's regionalism has transformed in recent years due to globalization and the growing significance of the knowledge-based economy, resulting in the emergence of new regionalism (Vodden et al., 2019; Young, 2010). New regionalism can be classified as “both a process of region-building and a package of policies that has several aims, from enhanced territorial control and democratic governance to fostering regional cooperation, integration, and identity” (Daniels et al., 2019, p. 30). This new

approach emphasizes collaboration and cooperation between various levels of government, and between the public and private sectors (Söderbaum, 2003). Although the implications of regionalism are widely discussed in fields such as economic geography and rural development, little discussion of regions and regionalism (in Canada or abroad) has taken place related to sport policy and management (Rich, Nelson et al., 2024). In the context of leisure studies, Rich (2021, 2023) advanced discussions of regional interdependencies as a way of understanding the movement of people and the role of tourism and community sport events in rural community development. These investigations illustrate the utility of concepts associated with new regionalism in the context of sport.

As sport in Canada is governed through a multi-level governance system (Thibault & Harvey, 2013), regionalism is a relevant consideration in this context. Indeed, increased collaboration between levels of institutions in the governance of sport allowed for the transition from a fragmented, regionalized sport infrastructure to a more centralized, formalized, and legitimate sporting structure both nationally and provincially (Barnes et al., 2007). Although the *Canadian Sport Policy* explicitly recognizes that its implementation will vary based on “relevance to jurisdictional mandate and priorities” (Government of Canada, 2012, p. 3), few scholars in Canada (or abroad) have interrogated the implications of regionalism for sport governance and policy implementation. In this thesis, I specifically examine this intersection.

For this project, I have situated theories of space (Lefebvre, 1991) and institutionalism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) within a constructivist paradigm as I sought to address the dearth of research focused on regionalism in sport policy implementation. Crotty (1998) defined constructivism as “the view that all knowledge and therefore all meaningful reality as such is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human

beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42). From a constructivist perspective, institutional theory can be seen as a framework that can help to explain how actors within organizations create and maintain their own social and cultural realities (Greenwood et al., 2008; 2017). In the field of sport management, this perspective recognizes that sport organizations, and their programs, are socially constructed by the norms, expectations, and values of their internal and external stakeholders (Hoye et al., 2015). This institutional framework, when viewed alongside the theoretical framework of space, has helped to provide a lens to explore how regions are understood within PSOs, and how institutional pressures impact the management of regions within PSOs in Ontario.

To date, much of the work in sport management in Canada has been focused on sport at either the national, or community level. As a result, much of the literature to date does not focus on provincial sport organizations (PSOs). To address this, I focus this project on PSOs and their understanding of regions and the spaces in which they are fundamentally constituted. Doing so allowed me to develop insights that will contribute to the discussion of regionalism, space, governance, and sport policy in Canada.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the theoretical and practical implications of regions within sport governance in Ontario, Canada. Specifically, the research questions that guided this study are:

- (1) how do PSO-affiliated actors understand and construct regions?
- (2) how do institutional pressures impact the management of regions within PSOs in Ontario?

Chapter 2: Research Context and Literature Review

This literature review is organized in two main sections. In the first section, I focus on providing a background of governance and policy in the Canadian sport system. By taking this approach, I am establishing groundwork for comprehending the systems that regulate the management of PSOs and their associated actors. In the second section of this literature review, I examine the geographies of sport and lay a foundation for understanding the importance that understanding geographical concepts will play in the exploration of the way regions are managed within PSOs in Ontario. Understanding these concepts and the role that institutionalization plays in the governance of the Canadian sport system will help to set the base of exploration to which the theoretical framework will be applied within this project.

The Canadian Sport Governance System

In Canada, the sport system is made up of many organizations structured within a multi-level governance framework. Each of these organizations, at the National, Provincial/Territorial, and Community levels, plays a role in developing and delivering sporting opportunities to the general population. At the federal level of the Canadian sport system, the federal government oversees and regulates sport through Sport Canada. The overarching goal of Sport Canada is to provide “leadership and funding to help ensure a strong Canadian sport system which enables Canadians to progress from early sport experiences to high performance excellence” (Government of Canada, 2020, para. 2). The Government of Canada is the single largest investor in the amateur sport system in the country and therefore holds great influence and an important role in the development of sport policy and programming (Government of Canada, 2022b). Sport Canada provides funding through three major programs: The Athlete Assistance Program (AAP), the Sport Support Program (SSP), and the Hosting Program.

Through those funding programs, Sport Canada “provides financial assistance to our high-performance athletes, advance[s] the objectives of the Canadian Sport Policy, and help[s] Canadian organizations host sport events that create opportunities for Canadians to compete at the national and international level” (Government of Canada, 2020).

Additionally, at the national level, organizations such as National Sport Organizations (NSOs), National Multisport Service Organizations (MSOs), and Canadian Sport Centers and Institutes operate to deliver sport opportunities to Canadian across regional boundaries. NSOs are non-profit organizations and serve an important role within this system as they are “the national governing bodies for [a] given sport in Canada” (Government of Canada, 2022a, para. 1). At the provincial/territorial level, PSOs report to their national governing body, oversee all aspects of individual sports, and offer programs for people of all ages and competition levels within their provincial jurisdiction (Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming and Ministry of Sport, 2023). Lastly, at the community level, Community Sport Organizations (CSOs) deal with the organization and delivery of sport opportunities. Clubs, teams, and other community organizations are typically affiliated with their relevant PSO. Overall, these organizations all play a role in delivering sport opportunities within the greater Canadian sport delivery system.

Prior to the establishment of sport-focused policy and the national sport governance structure that is currently in place, sport in Canada operated within a highly regionalized structure, like much of Canadian industry in the early days of confederation prior to industrialization and urbanization (Morrow & Wamsley, 2013). Within this structure, CSOs existed within regionalized clusters across the provinces and territories and delivered sporting opportunities outside of a formalized hierarchical sporting structure. However, through the development of formalized policies and systems, and advancements in technological innovations

that further connected parts of the nation, the modern nationalized approach to sport governance (which includes NSOs, PSOs, and CSOs working in a hierarchal structure) led to the current centralized sporting structure (Comeau, 2013). Within this new structure, legitimacy has been considered a key outcome and is ensured through the implementation of various mechanisms (e.g., strategic plans) which hold organizations accountable to maintain their status within the organizational fields in which they are situated. These mechanisms include formalized government recognition (of PSOs, sport clubs, etc.), stakeholder involvement in the decision-making process, adherence to policies and regulations (set by governments, Sport Canada, NSOs, etc.) and compliance and evaluation mechanisms (formalized within the *Canadian Sport Policy 2.0 2012*, and various NSO/PSO strategic plans). For example, in Ontario, to attain formal recognition, PSOs must meet a list of requirements to become the recognized governing body for their sport. These requirements (e.g., obtaining annual endorsement from Sport Canada-funded NSO, being registered as a not-for-profit, having effective governance structures in place, etc.) are set by the provincial government through the *Ontario Sport Recognition Policy* (Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming and Ministry of Sport, 2023). These measures are designed to work together to promote transparency, accountability, and effective governance within the (relatively) new centralized Canadian sport system. In short, these changes and policy developments led to the institutionalization of sport in Canada.

Key Developments in Canadian Sport Policy

Starting in the late 1950s, the Canadian government began taking a more active role in the sport system. In 1961, the government passed Bill C-131, which provided legislation that encouraged fitness and amateur sports. This led to grants being provided to provincial governments to promote fitness programs and improve athletic performance in international

competitions (Thibault & Harvey, 2013). As time went on, government involvement increased, especially in the late 1960s and 1970s. In 1968, a task force was established to evaluate the state of amateur and professional sports and examine the role of national and international sport organizations in promoting and developing Canadian sports. In 1969, the task force published a report with recommendations that were eventually implemented by the Ministry of National Health and Welfare through *A Proposed Sports Policy for Canadians* (Thibault & Harvey, 2013).

During the early 1970s, various independent organizations (e.g., Coaching Association of Canada, ParticipACTION) were established to provide aid to NSOs (Thibault & Harvey, 2013). Moving into the 1980s, the Canadian sport system saw a growth in organization and bureaucracy, with most NSOs and some PSOs hiring more paid administrative and technical staff (Kikulis et al., 1992). This resulted in the professionalization and bureaucratization of sport organizations, with the creation and implementation of structures, policies, and systems (Thibault & Harvey, 2013). In the 1990s, the increased bureaucratization and professionalization of sport organizations led to changes in governance in which paid executives took on greater responsibilities for the development of policies and strategies for their sport in shared leadership with volunteer executives (Kikulis et al., 1992; Thibault & Harvey, 2013). These shifts marked the early moves towards institutionalization within sport as organizations aligned themselves with the prevailing norms and practices in the broader industry, governmental regulations, and societal expectations. This alignment with the institutional norms of the environment in which they operate helped organizations gain legitimacy, credibility, and recognition, which in turn led to enhanced funding opportunities, partnerships, and public support.

In the 1990s, Canadian Sport Centres (training centres for athletes) were created out of the need to improve support for athletes. To date, there are seven centres/institutes serving different regions across the country: Atlantic Canada, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Calgary, and British Columbia/Pacific (Government of Canada, 2021). These sport centers provide regionalized hubs for elite athletes to gather, and train within their sports. They are strategically located in different regions of the country to promote more equitable access and support for athletes and sport organizations in those areas. The development of sport centres is an example of regionalism in sport policy as they involve fostering collaboration and partnerships among regional stakeholders, including sport organizations, governments, and community groups, to function effectively and align with specific objectives and strategies for enhancing sport participation and performance in each region. The establishment of sport centers is a concrete action taken within the *Canadian Sport Policy* to aid in the implementation of region-specific programs and sport development opportunities.

In 1998, a report titled *Sport in Canada: Leadership, Partnership and Accountability. Everybody's Business* was published (House of Commons Canada, 1998). This report and the “favourable social, economic, and political contexts that gave rise to its publication were precursors to the most extensive pan-Canadian consultation process ever conducted involving all stakeholders in the system” (Thibault & Harvey, 2013, p. 25). The report and the events that followed set the foundation for the development of the original *Canadian Sport Policy* in 2002, and the *Physical Activity and Sport Act (PASA)* in 2003 (Thibault & Harvey, 2013). Following the creation of the first Sport Policy, Sport Canada continued to develop and revise their policies

from the mid-2000s to the early 2010s. This would ultimately lead to the creation of the *2012 Canadian Sport Policy* that would help to govern sport in Canada for the following decade².

Canadian Sport Policy (CSP 2002)

The Canadian Sport Policy process was initiated in January of 2000 and unfolded over the span of two years to present a powerful vision for sport in Canada. This policy document represented the shared vision and goals of 14 governmental jurisdictions and served as the official policy from 2002-2012. *The Canadian Sport Policy* was “a landmark achievement not only for sport but also in the context of federal-provincial/territorial relations and joint policy development” (Goss Gilroy, 2021, p. 4).

Outlined within this original sport policy are four directly stated goals. These goals included: Enhanced Participation, Enhanced Excellence, Enhanced Capacity, and Enhanced Interaction (Government of Canada, 2002). The Sport Policy “buil[t] upon the *National Recreation Statement* (1987) and other existing federal-provincial/territorial government agreements that responded to the realities of their day and to sport trends and challenges that emerged from time to time” (Government of Canada, 2002, p. 3). By learning from past experiences, policymakers aimed to create innovative approaches to incorporate previous agreements into the future within this policy. Outlined within the policy is a requirement for all government levels to collaborate with their respective sport communities to set objectives for increasing participation and enhancing high-performance sport (Government of Canada, 2002). The first iteration of sport policy in 2002 was viewed more as a policy aimed primarily toward governments, and governmental organizations, than a policy for the sport sector (Goss Gilroy,

² We are currently awaiting the publication of the third iteration of the *Canadian Sport Policy*. While it is not currently available, it very likely will be by the time this research is published.

2021). According to the evaluation report for the initial *CSP*, three out of the four policy objectives (excellence, capacity, and interaction) were achieved, but goals related to participation were not achieved. For example, the evaluation report stated that “while 87% of the excellence goals were met or in progress, only 50% of the participation goals were met or in progress” (Langlois & Ménard, 2013, p. 8). Based on these findings, it was suggested that sport participation should be a priority of the next policy, and that additional resources should be committed to halt the decline in participation.

Physical Activity and Sport Act (PASA)

PASA outlined the objectives set by the federal government for sport. Through the introduction of this policy (in 2003), sport governance was split into two pillars, Participation and Excellence. The first pillar (participation) targets all Canadians and seeks to encourage participation in physical activity by the public. Within this first pillar, the government set three objectives: “to promote physical activity as a fundamental element of health and well-being; to encourage all Canadians to improve their health by integrating physical activity into their daily lives; and to assist in reducing barriers faced by all Canadians that prevent them from being active” (Government of Canada, 2003, p. 2). The second pillar (excellence) targets elite athletes and outlined objectives to build capacity and “support the pursuit of excellence in sport” (Ménard, 2020, p. 3). Within this pillar, the two objectives listed are: “to increase participation in the practice of sport and support the pursuit of excellence in sport, and to build capacity in the Canadian sport system” (Government of Canada, 2003, p. 2). While participation is listed as part of a key pillar of the *PASA*, there is a disconnect in its implementation as there is only one formal policy (i.e., *Sport Canada’s Policy on Aboriginal Peoples’ Participation in Sport, 2005*) that is directly concerned with sport participation (Donnelly, 2013). The fact that there is no formal

policy in place that specifically addresses participation indicates that “the federal government was more concerned with excellence than with participation, and may help to account, in part, for the relatively low levels of sport participation in Canada” (Donnelly, 2013, p. 177).

The Canadian Sport Policy 2.0 (CSP 2012)

After the success of the initial sport policy that lasted from 2002-2012, a new iteration of the policy was created and passed to guide sport forward for the next decade (i.e., 2012-2022). The current *CSP 2012* “provides a framework for intergovernmental cooperation in sport in Canada” (Ménard, 2020, p. 2). Within this policy, five broad overall goals were set to further the vision set forth by the *CSP 2012*. These goals were set in five key areas of Canadian sport: Introduction to Sport, Recreational Sport, Competitive Sport, High-Performance Sport, and Sport for Development (Government of Canada, 2012). Within each of these areas, a specific goal and several policy objectives were set. For example, within the Introduction to Sport section the policy goal is outlined as “Canadians have the fundamental skills, knowledge and attitudes to participate in organized and unorganized sport” (Government of Canada, 2012, p. 9). Another important consideration included within this policy was attention to building upon the success of the Vancouver 2010 Olympics and the Own the Podium Program (OTP). This updated sport policy was ambitious and broad in scope, calling for “partnerships between and among sport organizations, municipalities/local governments, and educational institutions [to] align and leverage athlete, coach, and officials’ development” (Government of Canada, 2012, p. 13). The emphasis on collaboration “encourages the consideration of the power, legitimacy and urgency of the key stakeholders upholding this system” (Thibault & Babiak, 2013, p. 148). As a result of this focus, this policy document has served as an integral roadmap to give general direction to the key stakeholders within the Canadian Sport system. The life span of this plan was set to span

from 2012-2022. At the time of this writing (June 2024), the updated sport policy is in the approval process.

In February 2021, an evaluation of the *CSP 2012* was published. This evaluation found that the *CSP 2012* had successfully expanded beyond the scope of the 2002 sport policy and that “sport in Canada at the national and provincial/territorial levels has generally become aligned with the goals and objectives of *CSP 2012*” (Goss Gilroy, 2021, p. 9). Evaluation documents show that while the initiatives implemented by Sport Canada led to “positive outcomes for participation and excellence in sport” (Ménard, 2020, p. 8), based on the objectives set out in the policy, the outcomes associated with the participation pillar are less successful than those within the excellence pillar. The outcomes related to excellence can be displayed concretely through the improved medal counts at major events due to the increased funding through the OTP program (Ménard, 2020). Outcomes related to sport participation, however, are more difficult to measure. As such, understanding changes in population-level sport participation (e.g., including unstructured and informal sport participation) is notoriously difficult. In a 2023 paper, Parent and Jurbala critically reflected on the *CSP 2012*’s implementation and monitoring process in a multi-level, multi-sectoral context, providing recommendations for future research and policymakers regarding sport policy implementation and monitoring. Their analysis highlighted the key challenges of implementing a national sports policy in a complex, multi-level, multi-sectoral governance context (Parent & Jurbala, 2023).

Provincial Sport Organizations

In Canada, amateur sport is a shared federal, provincial and territorial responsibility. The roles and responsibilities between the federal government and provinces/territories are outlined in the *National Recreation Statement* (1987) and other relevant government agreements that

address specific jurisdictional issues (Government of Canada, 2012). PSOs play an important role by linking the community sport sector to the national sport system. Within this system, PSOs “serve as conduits for the knowledge and resources developed at both the provincial/territorial and national levels for their sport” (Goss Gilroy, 2021, p. 2). Additionally, formal bilateral agreements between Sport Canada and regional governments that outline region-specific objectives exist and help provide a link between the different levels of the sport governance system (Thibault & Harvey, 2013). These agreements are primarily designed around meeting objectives related to increasing sport participation.

At the provincial level, sport is governed by PSOs who generally oversee one or a few sports in their respective province/territory. In Canada, PSOs are non-profits that are formally recognized by their respective NSOs and by the appropriate provincial government body. Within the Province of Ontario, PSOs must receive recognition from a Sport Canada-funded NSO in their sport and the Government of Ontario Ministry responsible for Sport. By promoting participation in recreational and competitive sport programs within their regions, and developing their respective sports, recognized PSOs contribute significantly to the sport system. PSOs are autonomous organizations that oversee the development of their respective sports, offer a competitive pathway for athlete development, choose provincial teams, hire/train coaches, officials, and volunteers, hold provincial championships, and make sure they adhere to the rules set by their NSO (Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming and Ministry of Sport, 2023). In Ontario, the *Ontario Sport Recognition Policy* (Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming and Ministry of Sport, 2023) identifies and recognizes organizations that can partner with the government to ensure sport programming in Ontario is safe, high quality, and following national standards. To be recognized as a PSO, an organization must meet a variety of requirements. In

addition to recognition by the Ministry and their NSO, Ontario PSOs must be a registered not-for-profit, have an elected board of directors, have effective governance structures in place, and have policies outlined to address a multitude of different situations (e.g., code of conduct, discipline, dispute resolution, harassment, etc.; Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming and Ministry of Sport, 2023). In Ontario, "recognition status is a prerequisite to apply for funding under applicable ministry funding programs" (Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming and Ministry of Sport, 2023, para. 12).

Research on PSOs in Canada is relatively sparse. Despite their importance in multi-level governance structures, few scholars have interrogated the intricate dynamics and impact that these organizations have within the sporting landscape. To date, work by Edwards and colleagues (2009), is one of the few publications to explore PSOs within an institutional framework. In this paper, the authors explore factors that contribute to institutional pressures within PSOs (Edwards et al., 2009). Through this work, the authors found that "criteria and reporting requirements and the geographic location of Alberta PSOs are factors that contribute to the presence of institutional pressures faced by APSOs [Alberta PSOs] and result from a reliance on funding from the ASRPWF (Alberta Sports, Recreation Parks and Wildlife Foundation)" (Edwards et al., 2009, p. 141). The role that geography played in this study is of interest as the location of the PSO had an impact on the operations, structure, and program decisions faced by the organization. The results showed that the geographic locations of the APSOs (and the brown bag lunches seminars) operated as institutional pressures within this context (Edwards et al., 2009). Further examination of the geographies of provincial sport and the roles that they play in the governance of PSOs in Canada is warranted and has the potential to have implications within the field of institutional theory within sport.

The Geography of Sport

The way sports are practiced and enjoyed in Canada is influenced by a variety of factors such as climate, landscape, population, and culture. The subfield of sport geography delves into the complex interplay between the geographical features and human factors that influence access to sport, and sport participation (Bale, 2003). Geographers examine key ideas such as space, place, and scale to understand how they influence the interactions between humans and their environment, as well as the distribution and patterns of various phenomena (Campbell, 2018). Geographical approaches, therefore, can provide a deep understanding of the complex dynamics between sports and their broader context, while shedding light on the multifaceted ways in which they shape and are shaped by the world around us. Despite the clear links between geography and sport governance, the degree to which Canadian sport has been studied using theories of space and place is remarkably minimal.

Early studies in sports and geography highlighted the importance of ‘sportscares’ (the physical environment of a sports field or stadium) in culture, society, and place (e.g., Wagner, 1981; Vinokur, 1988; Springwood, 1996). John Bale’s work (1982, 1994) also contributed to the understanding of sportscares and of the relationship between geography and sports settings. Raitz’s (1995) edited book further built upon this scholarship by exploring the impact of sports landscapes on participation and involvement which led to a major advancement within the field. One of the few explorations of sportscares within a Canadian context was published by O’Reilly and colleagues (2015). In their work, the authors examined “sport participation from an environmental perspective by considering the dynamic role of the sportscape (built form and supporting infrastructure) in enabling, facilitating and promoting youth sport participation” (O’Reilly et al., 2015, p. 1). In their study, the authors revealed that the geography of sport is not

just about the location of sports venues, but also the types of sports infrastructure available. The authors noted that to gain a deeper understanding of sports participation, it is crucial to evaluate the quality and capacity of the sportscape, as well as other supporting structures and facilitators (O'Reilly et al., 2015).

While these works have all contributed to the establishment and growth of the field, it is arguably the work of John Bale (2003) in his text *Sport Geography* that is considered the pivotal work within the field of geography in sport. Within this work, Bale (2003) established the connections between important geographic concepts and principles within a historical and modern sport context. Among these principles are the concepts of space, globalization, diffusion, regional analysis, location, social welfare, place, and geographical imaginaries (Bale, 2003).

More recently, work in sport geography has focused on advancing more critical paradigms as researchers from the field of sport sociology have integrated geographical and spatial analyses into their work. Within this field, researchers have focused on issues such as gender relations and equity (van Ingen, 2003; Jeanes et al., 2021), emotional geographies (van Ingen, 2011; Giardina, 2021), and the creation of space for women in sport (Pavlidis, 2018). van Ingen's (2003; 2004) work was some of the first to take an interdisciplinary approach to examine gender within a spatial and geographical context. This work has been instrumental as it demonstrated the relevance and value of Lefebvre's (1991) work on the production of space and the examination of sports spaces within a gendered context.

Recent work within sport policy has built upon the foundational ideas established by van Ingen (2003, 2004). Jeanes and colleagues (2021) built upon van Ingen's work by critically exploring gender relations within an Australian football and netball CSO that aimed to promote women's participation and address gender inequity. Within this work, the researchers utilized

spatial and feminist theory to examine the club's efforts to change gender relations. Within their findings, they found that men embodying dominant forms of masculinity continue to be privileged within the club environment despite the club's efforts (Jeanes et al., 2021). The findings suggest that policies promoting gender equity in sports should focus on enforcing changes in club environments in addition to increasing women's participation (Jeanes et al., 2021). This study has interesting implications for space as the findings show that "opening up spaces for women and enabling them to be present ... is not sufficient to disrupt the dominant gender relations and to effect gender equity with community sports clubs" (Jeanes et al., 2021, p. 562). Overall, the study highlights the usefulness of spatial analyses in illuminating the ways micro-level spatial practices preserve dominant gender relations specifically, as well as the broader implications of the power and politics of space within sport organizations.

Regionalism and Sport Participation

Within Canada, there are different ways in which regions are traditionally established and defined. One way of looking at regions is by classifying each province or territory as its own region. However, the more widely accepted method by geographers is the collapsing of the 10 provinces into five regions: Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, the Prairies, and British Columbia (Schwartz, 1974). A region can be defined as "a cohesive area that is homogeneous in selected defining criteria and is distinguished from neighbouring areas or regions by those criteria" (Britannica, 2019). Regions are therefore developed by selecting certain features that are deemed important for a specific problem while ignoring other features that are deemed irrelevant. For this paper, I will use this approach and focus on the region of Ontario and the sub-regions within it as this is the area in which PSOs operate and are concerned with. A sub-provincial region is a territorial administrative division that exists within a larger province (e.g.,

Southern Ontario, Northern Ontario, etc.). Sub-provincial regions are an intermediate level of governance, positioned between the provincial level and the municipal or community level. For example, the Niagara Region has the jurisdiction to manage specific services (police, public health, social assistance, etc.), but does not have jurisdiction in over parks, sport, and recreation facilities and services within municipalities (Rich, Sharpe, et al., 2024).

Examining how actors within PSOs understand these sub-provincial regions will be the primary focus of the proposed study. When examining regions and sub-regions it is important to remember that people belong to multiple communities at the same time (Cochrane & Perrella, 2012). As such, when researching regions, “regional boundaries should be conceptualized as concentric units that begin from smaller, more proximate units of analysis and move outwards to larger, less proximate units of analysis” (Cochrane & Perrella, 2012, p. 834). Considering sub-regions within the larger regional boundaries will allow for a greater contextual understanding of individual effects within organizations that lead to the formation of regional governance structures and policy. The changing of sub-regional boundaries within the province (e.g., the amalgamation of cities; Miljan & Spicer, 2015) is a consideration explored within other fields (such as political geographies) that has the potential to be relevant within a sporting context.

Within the regionalism literature to date, not much work has been done pertaining to how space is constructed and utilized by actors within any field. An article by Grundel (2020) is one of the few to examine space (and spatial logics), as they explore these topics in relation to contemporary region-building processes in a Scandinavian context. This paper explores how certain spatial logics support modern region-building processes and become institutionalized in specific regional settings, affecting how spaces and citizens are treated in regional planning and policy (Grundel, 2020). Despite this work, the discussion surrounding space within regionalism

is still almost non-existent. This work seeks to begin to change that by further exploring the ways in which space is constructed and utilized by actors within a regional context.

In Canada, the way sport is practiced has changed over time due to shifts in population distribution and changing economic landscapes. Historically, sport participation was decidedly regional and originated from local communities and cultural customs (e.g., lacrosse in Indigenous communities; Government of Canada, 2022b). As the geographies of where people lived changed and as the country became more urbanized, sport also became more organized and commercialized. Professional leagues and national governing bodies were developed, resulting in the formalization of the sporting landscape and the emergence of sports hubs and clusters in different regions of the country (Thibault & Harvey, 2013). In other fields, such as rural development, numerous initiatives have also embraced the concept of a central (regional) hub to provide enhanced services, stimulate growth, and bolster communities (Bosworth & Saleminck, 2022).

Additionally, as the demographics of regions have changed, the prevalence of certain sports has also shifted. While traditional Canadian sports such as hockey and curling still hold a strong appeal in many communities, other sports have seen exponential growth in communities across Canada. Nationally and globally, sport participation patterns are continually evolving, driven by cultural diversity, changing preferences, and innovative opportunities that cater to the varied interests and passions of citizens. PSOs play a crucial role in fostering these patterns while working together with other organizations (NSOs, CSOs, etc.) to promote thriving and inclusive sport landscapes within the province.

While not much research in this field has been done to date, recent work by Rich, Moore et al. (2022), has looked at sport participation patterns within an Ontario PSO (Row Ontario)

using a spatial analysis methodology. Using regional analysis, the authors demonstrated in their findings that women and girls “represented the majority of participants within the PSO and highlight an opportunity to use participant-centred approaches for sport development to grow women and girls’ participation” (Rich, Moore et al., 2022, p. 1). Understanding participation patterns is important as “sport participation is impacted by the social, cultural, and demographic conditions of a region, [and] greater insights into these factors will assist sport organizations in understanding the populations they serve” (Rich, Moore et al., 2022, p. 1).

The way that sport is currently organized in Canada has important implications for governance, participation, and policy. The availability and accessibility of sports facilities and programs vary depending on the region, with rural and remote areas often struggling with issues related to funding, infrastructure, and transportation (Rich & Misener, 2019). Due to these challenges, governing bodies and policymakers may overlook or ignore rural communities and focus more on the governance of sporting opportunities in major urban centres. Understanding how regions fit within the geography of sport in Canada is a crucial part of this project and will be important to academics, as well as practitioners and policymakers working to promote participation, governance, and policy that are responsive to the needs and interests of all Canadians.

Purpose and Research Questions

Through this study, I investigate the theoretical and practical implications of regions within sport governance in Canada. To do this I have drawn upon institutional theory and theories of space to better understand the work of PSOs (and their management practices) and the role of regions within the current governance structure of Canadian Sport.

My research questions are as follows:

(1) how do PSO-affiliated actors understand and construct regions?

(2) how do institutional pressures impact the management of regions within PSOs in Ontario?

By answering the above questions in this research, I shed light on Ontario's regional differences in sport governance. Regions are relevant to sport governance as they provide a localized context in which to view it. As each region within a country has its own unique characteristics, understanding the contextual elements at play is essential for designing sport policy, programs, and initiatives that are tailored to the specific needs and interests of local populations. In the Canadian sport system, regions, and regional organizations (such as PSOs) are responsible for implementing policies (their own and those passed down from other levels) and translating them into concrete actions and initiatives. As such, this research contributes to the theoretical and practical implications of regions for sport policy implementation.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Frameworks

Within the following section, I will delve into two interconnected theoretical frameworks, Institutional Theory and Theories of Space, to shed light on the intricate dynamics that shape organizations and the spaces they inhabit. Institutional theory, which has its roots in sociology and organizational studies, looks at how institutions, which are made up of norms, laws, and shared beliefs, are influenced and constrained by their surrounding institutional environments. Understanding how institutions exert their influence and the impact this has on organizational behaviour and practices is essential for understanding how organizations develop, function, and change within their field (Jupille & Carporaso, 2022). Theories of space (which are often developed in fields of geography, urban planning, etc.) explain how physical and social spaces are created, experienced, and given meaning. Within an institutional environment, the spatial context in which organizations operate can impact the internal and external pressures faced by the organization and ultimately influence their operations, interactions, and outcomes. By integrating these two theoretical perspectives within this paper, I provide a nuanced understanding of the complex interactions between institutional factors and space and examine how these interactions may have implications for sport governance in Canada.

Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory is a sociological and organizational theory that seeks to understand how organizations and individuals are influenced and shaped by the broader social and cultural norms, rules, and values of the institutions in which they are embedded. According to Scott (1995), “Institutions are social structures that have attained a high degree of resilience. [They] are composed of cultural-cognitive, normative, and regulative elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life” (p.48) These

institutions can include governments, regulatory bodies, professional associations, cultural norms, and other societal structures. The theory explores how these institutions impact the behaviour, decision-making, and practices of organizations, even when those actions may not be entirely rational or efficient (David et al., 2019).

Foundational to the institutional theory literature in organizational theory was the seminal article *The Iron Cage Revisited* by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). Within this work, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) built upon Max Weber's concept of the *iron cage* and examined how organizations in the same field tend to become structurally similar over time. Their theory of institutional isomorphism proposed that organizations adopt comparable structures, practices, and procedures due to pressures from their institutional environments (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). These pressures lead to organizations converging and becoming more alike, creating an 'iron cage' of institutional structures and practices that restrict individual agency and limit organizational diversity. This article contributed to the field of institutional theory by providing an important foundation for research on the dynamics of institutional change and the social forces that influence organizations.

In sport, early studies focusing on institutionalism examined phenomena surrounding how institutional arrangement influenced the structure and behaviour of sport organizations with some emphasis on how organizations responded to institutional pressures (Robertson, et al., 2022). While the field of sport management has grown and changed, scholars utilizing institutional theory are still troubled with a central issue: "Why and with what consequences do organizations exhibit particular organizational arrangements that defy traditional rational explanations" (Greenwood et al., 2008 p. 31). Due to this central question, institutional theory is an appropriate framework for the exploration of PSOs and the ways in which regions are

understood. Understanding how regions are understood and how institutional pressures (from both above and below) are influenced by the spaces in which sport organizations operate will be crucial in the exploration of the stated research questions.

To date, the study of institutionalization in a sporting context has been a prevalent topic within academic research. Early studies in sport examined how institutional arrangements influenced the structure, design, and behaviour of sport organizations at the national level (Robertson et al., 2022). Within these studies, authors (e.g., Kikulis et al, 1992; Slack & Hinings, 1994; Amis et al., 2002) examined how Canadian NSOs navigated their environments, and how they responded to change (in structure and systems) and institutional pressures (Robertson et al., 2022). The base of knowledge that exists at the national sport level is crucial to the current understanding of the sport system in Canada, and the greater study of organizational change in sport globally. Recent works utilizing institutional theory in sport management have built upon the concepts discussed by these early authors and have begun to explore concepts such as legitimacy, pressures, and fields.

For this project, I explored the role of institutional fields, pressures, and legitimacy to examine how regions are understood by actors within PSOs, and how the relationships PSOs have with each other, sport organizations at the national level (NSOs, Sport Canada, etc.), and organizations at the community level, impact these understandings. According to institutional theory, organizations operate within a specific field and adhere to the values, beliefs, and standards that are deemed acceptable within that field. These accepted values are seen as legitimate, and organizations within the field adopt them as appropriate (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Understanding fields is crucial in understanding institutional theory.

Within the field of organizational theory, authors such as Zietsma et al. (2016), have examined institutional fields as a cornerstone of institutional theory and discussed the implications of field types and conditions for isomorphism, agency, and field change. Understanding institutional fields is key due to the idea that organizations that exist within the same field over time begin to share similar characteristics and become like-minded (McLeod et al., 2021; Moreau, 2021). Fields can be viewed as the institutional environments in which an actor operates. Organizational fields are defined by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) as “those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resources and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products” (p. 148). Organizational fields are complex spaces where institutional actors follow common rules and shared norms related to important matters for the field and the organizations within it and as a result, fields shape the reasoning that guides people's actions (Rich, Nelson et al., 2024; Kitchin & Howe, 2013). Common languages, understandings, and ideologies can help to distinguish and describe the boundaries of an organizational field (Washington & Patterson, 2011). In the discipline of organizational theory, work by Wooten and Hoffman (2016) studied the complexity and continued evolution of organizational fields within the institutional literature, through a discussion of the past, present, and future of this construct.

Within this understanding of fields, it is possible to state that PSOs exist within the same fields as their NSOs (their governing bodies) and CSOs that deliver sport programming across different regions under the guidance of the PSO. Based on the multi-level governance structure of Canadian sport, PSOs sit at the middle stage of the organizational field within the Canadian

sport landscape and therefore are subject to be influenced by pressures from both the organizations above and below them.

Understanding isomorphism and legitimacy within organizational fields will be key to understanding how institutional pressures impact regional differences in sport governance. Within institutional theory, the idea of organizations having similarities or sharing important traits is known as isomorphism. Isomorphism is defined by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) as a “constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions” (p. 149). According to Heugens and Lander (2009), organizations tend to become more alike over time as they adopt similar ways of organizing to attempt to gain legitimacy in their industry. Deephouse et al., (2017) defined organizational legitimacy as “the perceived appropriateness of an organization to a social system in terms of rules, values, norms, and definitions” (p. 32). As organizations become legitimized, structures and values become set and adopted by organizations within an organizational field (Dacin et al., 2002). This legitimized similar set of values contributes to organizations becoming isomorphic. Isomorphism has been explored extensively within the area of sport through an institutional theory approach (e.g., Slack & Hinings, 1994; O’Brien & Slack, 2003; Skille, 2004; Greenwood et al., 2008).

Legitimacy is achieved when new practices gain value beyond their technical requirements. As these practices become more widely adopted, they reach a threshold where adoption provides legitimacy rather than improved performance. Organizations then assume that the value is valid, even if its implementation doesn't directly benefit the organization, and only improves an organization's perception within the field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Within fields, change is enacted through institutional pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). DiMaggio and Powell outlined three types of isomorphic pressures that can lead to organizations showing increased similarity. These pressures include coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures. These pressures determine the fundamental process of how change happens within institutions. Coercive pressures are the product of politics and power relationships. Often, it results from “both formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in the society within which organizations function” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 150). Secondly, normative pressures are the practices and structures commonly accepted as the appropriate way of doing things in a particular field (Greenwood et al., 2008). Normative pressures refer to the phenomenon of individuals or organizations changing their behaviour to gain approval from the wider community (Baum & Rowley, 2017). Lastly, organizations tend to imitate successful or legitimate entities during times of uncertainty, which are understood as mimetic pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Based on the current literature within sport as outlined by Robertson et al (2022) in their scoping review, organizations can exhibit and experience all three types of isomorphic pressures to some degree simultaneously, and that these pressures can impact key functions of their institutional structures and logics.

Understanding fields (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Wooten & Hoffman, 2016), pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 1995; Greenwood, 2008), and legitimacy (Dacin et al., 2002; Deephouse et al., 2017) is important for this project. As PSOs are considered members of the same organizational field, they are all subject to similar pressures and changes. As regionalism has changed within the province, and the country, PSOs have been forced to adapt and change accordingly. Moving from the old regional form of sport governance to a new legitimized

professional structure constitutes change. In the context of this change, this exploration into how institutional factors (e.g., change, legitimacy, pressures, etc.) impact organizational understanding of regions will be an important novel contribution to the fields of sport geography and institutionalism in sport.

Theorizing Space within Sport Institutions

Within this section, I will outline the theoretical framework of space and situate it within institutional theory. Understanding how space is understood and constructed by institutional actors within a regionalized environment is important to understand as I explore my research questions. The production of space and how it is created, challenged, and changed through social and political processes has been explored through a variety of disciplines to date. Within the following section, I summarize the main ideas in the literature on this topic and create a theoretical framework that will guide the direction of this thesis research.

The Production of Space

Space can be defined as the “built environments that emerge from organizational activities, objects, arrangements, and social practices” (Stephenson et al., 2020, p. 797). However, space is not limited to a physical location as it also encompasses the social connections and power dynamics that shape it (Harvey, 2001). Through the study of the production of space, researchers can explore the complex interplay between social dynamics, political systems, and economic forces, which all converge in ways to help shape the built environments that we inhabit. Another geographical term that is important to understand here is the concept of ‘place’ and how it differs from our understanding of ‘space’. The term ‘place’ refers to a specific location, which could be a physical environment, a building, or a significant locality. It can also describe a particular region or location, at any geographic scale based on context (National

Geographic Society, 2023). Some theorize space as an abstract concept that alone has no substantial meaning, while place refers to how people are aware of or attracted to a certain piece of space and can be viewed as a location created by human experiences (Tuan, 1977).

Henri Lefebvre was one of the pioneers of spatial research and his book *The Production of Space* (1991) is considered a foundational piece within the field. Within this work, Lefebvre (1991) argued that space is not a neutral or natural entity but is shaped by social, historical, economic, and political processes and that it reflects the interests, power relations, and social struggles of different groups. The social production of space emphasizes the active role that social processes play in shaping the way that spaces are designed and used.

Lefebvre (1991) posited that the social production of space is driven by three interconnected processes. These processes included: spatial practices (physical space), representations of space (conceived space), and spaces of representation (discursive/lived space). Spatial practices refer to the everyday activities and interactions that shape and transform space (such as building, inhabiting, and moving through environments), representations of space involve the ways in which space is conceptualized, imagined, and symbolically constructed, and spaces of representation refer to the physical spaces that embody and communicate specific social, cultural, or political meanings (Lefebvre, 1991). The concept of spaces of representation (lived space) is the most abstract of Lefebvre's three concepts as it refers to the social construction of space through the experiences of those who interact with it (Lefebvre, 1991).

Out of the three spatial processes, Lefebvre stated that representations of space are the most dominant form. However, within this understanding, social space is made up of all three spatial processes. To comprehend space from a Lefebvrian perspective, it is crucial to recognize that space is both the “medium and outcome of social relations” (van Ingen, 2003, p. 204).

Through the exploration of space as a dimension of social relations, geographers have shown how space can often work to conceal how power materializes and is truly represented (van Ingen, 2003).

Within sport, organizational actors play a role in shaping not only the physical environment in which they operate (through policy implementation, the building and management of facilities, etc.), but also the social environments in which sports are played and enjoyed. Therefore, PSOs are actively involved in the production of space. A way in which actors within sport institutions help to produce space is through their role in the regulation and management of sports activities. Governmental agencies, as well as NSOs and PSOs, are responsible for setting rules and regulations that govern sport clubs and sport competitions within their jurisdiction. These rules can impact how sports spaces are used, who has access to them, and the social meanings that are attached to them as sport (and participation) are impacted by the social, cultural, and demographic conditions of a region (Rich, Nicholson, et al., 2022). These rules can also impact how CSOs are governed, structured, and how they operate within these spaces due to the specific policies and rules that are passed down through governing bodies. For example, rules set by NSOs trickle down to PSOs (and later CSOs) and impact the organizational structure of these organizations. Within the current sport system in Ontario, many rules and regulations have become formalized and legitimized through sport policies and procedures (as well as guidelines that govern things such as diversity, inclusivity, safety, competitions, etc.) due to the requirements placed on organizations by Sport Canada, NSOs, and provincial and national governmental organizations. For example, at a small scale, rules and regulations related to space govern the size and dimensions of a ski hill required for competition. At a larger scale, space can be formalized as regions within organizational structures (e.g., the

division of regions governed within the sport of hockey by multiple organizations at the PSO level). Overall, rules are instrumental in constructing space as they define the framework within which sports are organized, operated, and experienced, which in turn influences the development, integrity, and accessibility of sport opportunity.

Space in Sport Management and Policy

In sport management research to date, Lefebvre's ideas on the social production of space have been used to analyze a variety of issues, such as the use of public space for sporting events (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006; Smith, 2014), and the construction of sports facilities (Gratton & Henry, 2001). Another growing area of inquiry is the politics of sport-related spatial planning, where scholars have explored how different interests compete for control over space and the implications this has for the inclusion or exclusion of certain groups (Spaaij, 2015). The theoretical framework of space allows researchers to analyze how social interactions, power dynamics, and cultural practices impact the physical and symbolic spaces people occupy in sport contexts. It posits that space is not a static or impartial entity, but rather a result of social, economic, and political influences (Lefebvre, 1991).

Within sport, researchers have also begun discussing space through a lens of spatial justice. To date, space and spatial justice have been theorized in various disciplines, including geography, urban planning, and sociology. Spatial justice concerns the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities across different spaces and communities (Soja, 2009). Scholars involved in the study of the production of space in sport have highlighted the influence of power in shaping spatial relations as the distribution of power and resources across different communities and groups can create inequalities within a space. Spatial justice aims to ensure fairness and equal distribution of resources, opportunities, and access to spaces for all regions,

communities, and groups (Soja, 2009). As recreational spaces are often shaped by cultural norms (Carr & Williams, 1993), traditional groups associated with the space in question receive the power and privilege associated with that space (Bevan et al., 2023). Unlike other frameworks, spatial justice goes beyond looking at material resources as it seeks to encompass intangible elements like social and cultural capital as it recognizes that inequalities and injustices are not solely determined by access to physical resources but are also shaped by social and cultural factors (Soja, 2009).

Sport organizations are central to the development of the physical and social landscape within Canada as they are often responsible for creating spaces that foster community interaction, economic development, and cultural identity. While in some cases sport organizations provide access to inclusive and equitable spaces and programming, there is still much work to be done to address spatial injustices. Rural communities are often disadvantaged, in comparison to urban centres, due to systemic barriers to participation such as lack of access to safe and reliable public sport spaces, facilities, and public systems of transit (Button et al., 2020). Barriers to participation and physical activity for adults in rural and urban Canadian contexts were explored in a 2021 study by Pelletier and colleagues. Within this study the authors found that “[f]or rural residents, the most reported barriers were lack of facility access (28.7%) and lack of support to be active (26%).” They also noted that “[s]eventy-one percent of rural residents reported at least one social or built environmental barrier compared with 44.5% of urban residents” (Pelletier et al., p.3).

Furthermore, Rich and Misener (2019) discussed how sport policy systems in Canada may not account for the circumstances in which rural sport organizations operate, and as a result, the resources and support afforded through governance frameworks may not be accessible or

relevant to them. While many constraints (e.g., location, distance to programming, access to facilities) exist that tend to disadvantage rural participants (especially women), scholars have argued for place-based or participant-centred models of sport development. In one study, Rich and colleagues explored how a “collaborative approach to crafting a program (stand-up paddle boarding in a rural Australian location) ... ensured the constraints experienced by the women productively informed the development and delivery of a sustainable participation opportunity” (Rich, Nicholson, et al., 2022, p. 1). In this case, the space (rural, with flat water beach conditions) was not seen as a restriction or constraint as the physical location of participants actively facilitated their engagement in stand-up paddle boarding (Rich, Nicholson, et al., 2022).

Due to the relatively recent introduction of this framework, spatial justice has not been used extensively within the fields of sport governance and policy. However, recently Jeanes and colleagues (2022) and Bevan and colleagues (2023) used the concept of spatial justice in different contexts in Australian Sport, and Asefi and Nosrati (2020) utilized spatial justice to explore the distribution of built outdoor sports facilities in Iran. Jeanes et al. (2022) investigated the exclusion of informal sports from community sport systems in Australia. The authors drew on concepts of spatial justice and Lefebvre’s theories of spatial production and contended that the marginalization of informal sports runs counter to Australian policy goals. The authors emphasized the need for action to address spatial injustice within community sports. They argued that this is crucial to leverage the potential benefits of informal sports participation for promoting public health and social policy priorities (Jeanes et al., 2022). Importantly, this work highlights the utility of spatial justice for sport policy and governance research.

Bevan et al. (2023) utilized a spatial justice framework to examine the development of a women's football team within an ethnographic methodological approach. The authors revealed

that despite more investment in women's sports and increasing interest from female players, women's teams still encounter a lot of spatial inequalities (e.g., access to space) that limited their participation. Gender equity in sports policy often overlooks spatial justice issues, but this study highlights the need to address spatial injustice to achieve gender equity in sports participation. To conclude, the paper emphasized the importance of prioritizing spatial justice in promoting and supporting women's participation in sports (Bevan et al., 2023).

Future work utilizing spatial justice in the context of sport has the potential to broaden our understanding of various areas including facility planning, participation and access, sport development, events, governance, policy, and social impacts. Through this thesis, I contribute to the discussions of space, spatial justice, and geography of sport by studying how regions are understood by PSOs, while also furthering the utilization of spatial theories within the area of sport governance research.

Chapter 4: Methodological Approach

For this study, I used an instrumental case study approach to explore how regions are understood within PSOs, and how institutional pressures impact the management of regions within PSOs in Ontario. An instrumental case study is used in instances where a particular case is examined primarily to provide insight into an issue or phenomenon (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). In an instrumental case study, the case plays a supporting role in the exploration and understanding of something else. Stake (2005) stated, “the case is still looked at in-depth, its contexts scrutinized, and its ordinary activities detailed, but all because this helps to pursue the external interest” (p. 445). This choice of methodology is relevant and effective in this circumstance as I used the Province of Ontario, Canada as the site to explore a greater phenomenon. The case in this situation was used as a vehicle to explore the phenomenon of how regions are understood by actors associated with PSOs. A case study is an appropriate methodological choice here as it allowed for an in-depth exploration of situations and issues in the specific context.

Within case studies, the focus of the study is on an individual unit, which is referred to as a functioning specific or bounded system (Stake, 2008; Baxter & Jack, 2008). The pivotal facet in defining a study as a case study is the choice of the “individual unit of study and the setting of its boundaries” (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 301). For my study, the case is the province of Ontario. Within this case, the participants are made up of institutional actors associated with PSOs who operate in the province of Ontario. In doing so, I utilize the perspective of these actors as an analytical entry point to the organizational field of amateur sport in Ontario and I discuss regions at the sub-provincial level (e.g., Northern Ontario, Southern Ontario, etc.). Actors within these organizations who understand governance and the internal and external regional and institutional

factors that influence it were invited to participate in data collection. The data collected within this case was bounded geographically (the Province of Ontario). Binding the case geographically is appropriate as the Province of Ontario has its own spatial boundaries and political structures that contextualize sport governance.

The Case

The case utilized for examination within this thesis is the Province of Ontario. Specifically, I focused on PSOs within the organizational field of amateur sport at the provincial level. Situated in Central Canada, Ontario is one of the thirteen Canadian provinces/territories. It has the highest population of all the provinces, accounting for 38.3 percent of the country's population. It is the second-largest province by land area, after Quebec. The 2021 census lists Ontario with a population of 14,223,942, with most of the population living within the largest population centres in the southern part of the province (Statistics Canada, 2023). Within the province of Ontario, there are 64 recognized PSOs³ (Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming and Ministry of Sport, 2024). Due to the size of the province, the large number of PSOs, and the presence of diverse sub-regions that PSOs must navigate, Ontario is a highly relevant case to study for this project.

In Ontario, PSOs are self-governing organizations that are responsible for developing their respective sports within the regions that they serve. These non-profit organizations have the primary function of fostering the development of athletes, coaches, and officials (Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming and Ministry of Sport, 2024). To receive recognition as a PSO, organizations must receive an annual letter of endorsement from a Sport Canada-funded NSO confirming that the PSO is recognized as the governing body for the sport within the province

³ This includes single sport and multi-sport organizations recognized by the sport recognition policy.

(Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming and Ministry of Sport, 2023). “The *Sport Recognition Policy* sets out mandatory requirements that all PSOs must meet to be recognized by the province of Ontario” (Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming and Ministry of Sport, 2023, para. 3). Most PSOs within Ontario serve as the primary organization that oversees the sport throughout the entire province. While many PSOs break their memberships up into regions or oversee regional organizations, the only sport with multiple recognized PSOs within the province is hockey (Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming and Ministry of Sport, 2023). Hockey in Ontario is overseen by three regional men’s organizations and a dedicated women’s organization: Hockey Eastern Ontario, Hockey North-Western Ontario, Ontario Hockey Federation, and the Ontario Women’s Hockey Association. Within these organizations, the Ontario Hockey Federation is further divided regionally. The existence of these regional organizations is evidence of the relevance of regions for sport governance at the provincial level.

Data Collection

Often, researchers using a case study methodology will use multiple data collection methods to improve the quality and comprehensiveness of the data collected (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This approach enables researchers to gain diverse perspectives, examine the context of their work, and develop a holistic understanding of the case being investigated. Baxter and Jack (2008) further explained that “each data source is one piece of the “puzzle,” with each piece contributing to the researcher’s understanding of the whole phenomenon” (p. 554). This approach adds strength to a study by combining different types of data to gain a better understanding of the case through a convergence of information. Within this project, I collected data through document analysis and semi-structured interviews. While document analysis helped to set the foundation for the project through the exploration of the organizational field and the

policies and procedures that exist to guide the organizations within it, interviews provided insights into the perspectives of individual actors within PSOs and their understandings of regions as well as the institutional pressures that influence their work.

Document Analysis

To begin the data collection process, an online search of Ontario PSO strategic plans was conducted. Document analysis occurred first in the process to help form a foundation of information that could help to guide the direction of the subsequent interviews. Document analysis is especially applicable to qualitative case studies as they are intensive studies that seek to produce rich descriptions of a single phenomenon, organization, or program (Stake, 1995). All types of documents, including non-technical literature, can help the researcher uncover “meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem” (Merriam, 1998, p. 118). Documents were identified and collected within this data collection phase through a thorough search of Ontario PSO websites. As per the *Ontario Sport Recognition Policy*, PSOs must provide public access to their strategic plans and other policies through their official websites. PSO websites were identified through the master list provided on the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Gaming, and the Ministry of Sport website⁴. While it would have been ideal to collect documents from each of the 64 PSOs during this phase of the data collection process, only 39 of the registered PSOs had strategic plan documents that were available on their website. For organizations that had multiple strategic plans available online, only the most up-to-date one was examined. Additionally, if an organization did not have a current strategic plan posted, the most recent one available on their website was chosen for examination. The examination of strategic plans occurred in line with the collection of data

⁴ The ministry that oversees sport in Ontario changed in June 2024. There is currently (1) The Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming, and (2) The Ministry of Sport.

through semi-structured interviews. Out of the organizations interviewed for this project, all 12 had available strategic plan documents that were reviewed prior to the interview stage.

Reviewing an organizations strategic plan documents directly prior to interviewing the relevant affiliated actor helped to guide the discussion as I was able to ask relevant probing questions based on information available in the strategic plan. All additional strategic plan documents that were available online were subsequently coded and analysed using NVivo to determine if and how regions, and sub-regions were reflected within strategic planning documents.

Table 1

PSO Strategic Planning Documents

PSO	Strategic Plan Years	Number of Pages
Alpine Ontario	2023-2028	26
Athletics Ontario	2022-2027	21
Badminton Ontario	2021-2024	12
Basketball Ontario	2021-2026	11
Boxing Ontario	2020-2024	18
Cross Country Ski Ontario	2023-2028	13
Dive Ontario	2020-2024	20
Field Hockey Ontario	2021-2026	21
Football Ontario	2022-2025	13
Freestyle Ontario	2021-2025	99
Golf Ontario	2023-2026	9
Gymnastics Ontario	2024	1
Hockey Eastern Ontario	2022-2027	1
Hockey Northeastern Ontario	2016-2021	1
Judo Ontario	2021-2024	18
Ontario Cerebral Palsy Sports Association	2020-2024	11
ON PARA	2020-2023	13
Ontario Curling	2022-2026	10
Ontario Cycling	2022-2025	20
Ontario Fencing	No Date Identified	8
Ontario Lacrosse	No Date Identified	2
Ontario Lawn Bowls Association	2022-2025	8
Ontario Sailing	2022-2026	10
Ontario Shooting	2014-2019	12
Ontario Soccer	2022-2026	8
Ontario Tennis	2022-2025	5
Ontario Volleyball	N.d.-2025	3

Ontario Weightlifting	2020-2024	13
Ontario Women's Hockey	2016-2020	4
Ontario Wrestling	2020-2026	19
Ontario Equestrian	2016-2020	2
Ringette Ontario	No Date Identified	3
Row Ontario	2020-2027	2
Rugby Ontario	2022-2025	22
Skate Ontario	2023-2027	6
Softball Ontario	2020-2023	13
Squash Ontario	2023-2027	1
Swim Ontario	2021-2028	4
WUSHU Ontario	2017-2019	3

Integrating document analysis, combined with semi-structured interviews, helped to add a degree of richness to the collected data by providing multiple perspectives and sources of information and ultimately lead to increased credibility in the study's findings.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Subsequently, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with PSO-affiliated actors. Interviews were conducted virtually (via Microsoft Teams) and lasted between approximately 35 and 67 minutes. Semi-structured interviews are a well-established research method within qualitative research. This type of interview follows a systematic order to ask participants a set of predetermined, open-ended questions. A major benefit of this interview method is the flexibility that is available for the interviewer to probe and diverge from the script as the need arises (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). For this project, no specific demographics of participants were sought as they were recruited based on their role (e.g., executive director, technical director, senior managers) within their organizations. However, any individual with an understanding of sport governance within their organization, regardless of role was deemed eligible and were invited to participate in interviews.

Recruitment. To begin recruitment at this stage of this project, representatives of PSOs were invited by email to participate through the publicly available contact information on the PSO websites. Included in these emails were a brief overview of the project as well as the letter of invitation and consent. The specific language used to recruit participants stated that I was seeking to speak to a representative from within their organization who understands their organization's efforts to develop sport participation opportunities in different regions of the province. If an organization had more than one possible participant, an interview was requested with the individual who has the greatest knowledge of regional governance processes. To collect a rich sample of participants, each of the 64 PSOs received an invitation to participate in this project. In total, approximately 70 individuals associated with PSOs were contacted through publicly available emails. More than one person was contacted at approximately six organizations as they had several contacts listed that appeared to be a good point of contact for this project (e.g., an executive director, and a director of regional development). To help ensure a robust and diverse sample, a limit of two participants per sport/organization was set. No strict guidelines were set prior to recruitment regarding any specific requirements (e.g., time spent at the organization); outside of participants having knowledge of governance structures and how regions are understood by their organization.

This preference to interview participants from organizations of varied sizes and reach within the province was important as limiting the data collection to just the major sports (i.e., hockey, soccer, etc.) would not allow for a holistic representation of Ontario PSOs. Organizations of different sizes may have different understandings of regionalism based on their reach and the areas that they serve. For example, larger organizations may display more characteristics of regional differentiation based on their membership size, while smaller

organizations may display fewer characteristics due to their smaller participant base and more concentrated operating area.

For this project, participants were also recruited through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling was required as a robust sample was not collected through the initial recruitment phase. Participants who responded to the invitation were asked to forward the recruitment material (i.e., letter of information and consent) to other individuals, either within their organization or within another Ontario PSO, who may fit the study criteria and be interested in participating. Incorporating snowball sampling techniques allowed me to connect with participants who were not reached through the initial recruitment phase of the project. Three participants were recruited through snowball sampling. As I relied upon publicly available contact information for the first round of recruitment there is the possibility that potential interviewees were missed for a variety of reasons. The preference for participants within this project were those currently employed/affiliated with a PSO. For this project, all participants were currently employed within a recognized Ontario PSO, except for the representative from PSO 1 who was a former executive director who had recently left that role (but was still identified as an appropriate contact by the PSO). In total, 12 actors from Ontario PSOs were interviewed as a part of this project.

Table 2

Interview Participant information

PSO Number	Pseudonym	Role	Interview Length
PSO 1	Bill	Former Executive Director	60:11 minutes
PSO 2	Jim	Executive Director	36:07 minutes
PSO 3	Arnold	Manager	67:20 minutes
PSO 4	Sarah	Executive Director	51:33 minutes
PSO 5	Amanda	Executive Director	57:27 minutes
PSO 6	Ron	Executive Director	55:04 minutes
PSO 7	Peter	CEO	66:15 minutes
PSO 8	Tina	Executive Director	35:45 minutes
PSO 9	Ken	Executive Director	59:06 minutes

PSO 10	Clark	President/CEO	53:48 minutes
PSO 11	James	CEO	48:52 minutes
PSO 12	Susan	Executive Director	59:43 minutes

During the interview process, participants were asked questions on sport governance structures and policy initiatives within their organizations. For this project, the sample consisted of 12 actors from Ontario PSOs that ranged in size from 10 to over 600 member clubs and were all headquartered in Southern Ontario (except one). Having a participant base of this size has allowed me to gather diverse perspectives on how regions are understood by actors within PSOs, and how institutional pressures impact the management of regions within these PSOs in Ontario. This interview guide (see Appendix A) was developed by identifying the main goals of the research project and integrating information from the established literature to ground the questions in the theoretical framework and help ensure that the information gathered was relevant and useful for this work. Outlining the broad themes associated with this project (e.g., regions, governance, pressures) helped to shape the way that questions were written, and the order in which they were asked in the interview process to ensure a logical flow. Additional probes were later developed to supplement many of the interview questions to delve deeper and better understand the information that was being gathered through the data collection process. Data were then be analyzed using thematic analysis.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) is an analysis method that can be employed to help identify and analyze patterns or themes that are present within a set of qualitative data. This analytical process involves carefully examining and categorizing collected data to reveal recurring patterns, meanings, or concepts that are relevant to the research question or objective (Braun et al., 2016). A benefit of conducting research utilizing a case study methodology is the flexibility that is

allowed in selecting an approach to analysis. Through TA, researchers can produce nuanced, complex, interpretative analyses (Braun et al., 2016). As TA is not tied to a specific theoretical framework, researchers have the flexibility to apply this type of analysis to any sample or data set without methodological stipulations (Braun et al., 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2006). TA fits well within the constructivist paradigm in which I operated within this study. In a constructivist approach to qualitative research, meaning and experiences are produced socially, and knowledge is constructed through (shared) experiences (Burr, 1995; Crotty, 1998). TA differs from other forms of analysis (such as content or discourse analysis) as it aims to uncover the underlying themes and concepts that provide insight into the research question, rather than simply describing or counting the occurrences of specific categories.

Although flexibility is considered a strength of TA, there are also potential limitations and pitfalls that a researcher must be aware of when utilizing this form of analysis. The theoretical flexibility of TA has the potential to lead to epistemological confusion if done poorly (Braun et al., 2016). To help create an effective and meaningful analysis within this project, I followed a “rigorous, deliberative, and reflexive process for doing TA, that keeps “quality” as a foregrounded concern” (Braun et al., 2016, p. 202).

For this project, I followed the six-phase process outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006). These six phases occurred simultaneously for data collected through both document analysis and semi-structured interviews. The first phase of this model involved familiarization with the data. At this opening stage, researchers begin by transcribing, reading, and re-reading the data collected. This is done to allow the researcher to become immersed in the data that they have collected. Following the initial transcription, I read through the data and took notes on initial patterns and ideas that were present (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Positionality and reflexivity were

incorporated within this phase of the process to help identify potential assumptions and biases held by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2019). As per Meyer and Willis (2018), “reflection and reflexive practice are critical, introspective analytic processes that lead to a deeper understanding of experiences” (p. 1). For this project, reflexive journaling was an important part of this process as journaling prior to interviewing, after interviewing, and during the initial data reviewal stages allowed me to best understand my positionality and uncover important details within the data that may otherwise have been missed. The reflexive process was also engaged through discussions with my supervisor, who served as a critical friend (Smith & McGannon, 2018) throughout the analysis process.

Following the familiarization phase, I engaged in the initial coding phase of the process. NVIVO software was utilized for this phase of the project to assist with the identification and organization of data. Within this phase, I began to reduce the data by identifying and assigning codes to specific segments of text that capture relevant information or concepts. In TA, codes are used to identify a specific aspect of the data, whether it's semantic content or latent, that the analyst finds interesting. They refer to the fundamental segment or element of the raw data or information that can be evaluated in a meaningful way concerning the phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At this stage of the project, codes such as *organizational priorities*, *resource development*, *geographic presence*, and *access to space* were created to help capture the relevant information from the raw data.

Directly following the initial coding phase, the theme development phase occurred. Within this third phase, I reviewed, clustered, and organized the related codes together to form the initial themes. These themes represented the patterns or topics that began to emerge from the data that provided insight into the research questions and objectives (Braun et al, 2016).

Within the second and third stages, an inductive approach to coding and theme development took place (Braun et al, 2016). Inductive theme development in TA means that the themes are directly derived from the data, rather than being predetermined by existing theories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While institutional theory and the production of space informed my analysis, the process was ultimately inductive as I did not code based on predetermined concepts or ideas. This approach allowed for a bottom-up analysis where patterns, concepts, and meanings in the qualitative data itself were used to develop the themes. At this stage, examples of initial themes were named *PSOs as Intermediaries in the Organizational Field* and *PSOs Use of Regions*.

The next phase of the process included reviewing the themes that were identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Within this phase, I checked to ensure that the themes work with the coded extracts and the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The point of this is to ensure that the data were accurately represented and that the themes reflected the information present within the data and were useful in answering the proposed research questions (Braun et al, 2016).

Following this phase, the fifth phase of TA commenced, in which I began defining and naming the themes. Within this phase, a continuous analysis occurred to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story that the analysis was telling (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is at this point that I “generate[d] clear definitions and names for each theme” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). For this project, themes were named based on key terminology established through a review of the collected data. A final theme that came from this phase of my analysis of the data was that *Regions are Informally Constructed*.

Lastly, the final phase of the TA process included writing up or producing the report. This phase was the final opportunity for analysis to occur (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Within this phase,

I selected relevant and compelling examples from the data to work into my final paper.

Throughout the analysis portion of this project, I employed an iterative process as I moved through the analysis of the data. Through an iterative process (multiple rounds of revisiting the data), I was able to identify connections within and between data sources and gained a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the data that were collected (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009).

Overall, this approach to analysis was effective as by identifying themes that exist within the data, I was able to present a strong and nuanced understanding of how regions are understood within PSOs, and how institutional pressures impact the management of regions within PSOs in Ontario. Presenting the results, accompanied by direct quotations from the data collected, has helped to effectively substantiate, and explain the themes constructed through the thematic analysis.

Positionality Statement

As a part of this project, it was important that I considered my positionality as it had an influence over every aspect of the process. My thoughts, knowledge, values, and beliefs had the potential to influence everything, including the questions that I asked participants, the data that I collected, and the process that I used for analysis (Rowe, 2014). Positionality “describes an individual’s worldview and the position they adopt about a research task and its social and political context” (Holmes, 2020, p.1). A researcher's worldview is shaped and influenced by many factors which can include religion, gender, sexuality, politics, location, ethnicity, race, social class, and status. Examining my own positionality as a part of this process allowed me to establish my position within the research.

Reflexivity is a key component of understanding one's positionality and is a necessary process that should be undertaken in successful, reliable research (Rich & Misener, 2017). A

reflexive approach, and continuous self-reflection, are both “necessary prerequisites and an ongoing process for the researcher to be able to identify, construct, critique, and articulate their positionality” (Holmes, 2020, p. 2). In qualitative research, the researcher is a part of the data collection process. By engaging in reflexive practices, a researcher can show that they are integral parts of the process, and shift part of the focus away from the participants towards themselves. To generalize, “reflexivity is the concept that researchers should acknowledge and disclose their selves in their research, seeking to understand their part in it, or influence on it” (Holmes, 2020, p. 2).

A key component in constructing positionality is the determination of whether the researcher is seen (by themselves and others) as an insider or outsider within the area of study (Holmes, 2020; Rich & Misener, 2017). To start this process, I developed a positionality statement using a reflexivity tool developed by Jacobson and Mustafa (2019). As a part of this statement, I acknowledged that I am a straight, white, cis-gendered man, who is not considered disabled and not a newcomer to Canada. However, acknowledging my settler status as a non-Indigenous person of European descent has important implications on my worldview, particularly as it pertains to land, and its division and uses. Due to the system in which I grew up and was educated, I have a Eurocentric worldview when it comes to many things, including my relationship with space, and my place within it. Although my ancestors are not native to the space in which I currently occupy, I still have a relationship with land due to systems put in place by colonial forces, and this influences the way I understand space and place.

As a person who was born into an upper-middle-class family and grew up in an urban/suburban setting, I had the privilege of participating in a wide range of activities that included sport and recreation at the grassroots/provincial level throughout my childhood. In my

adult life, I have also worked in a variety of industries within, and outside of sport, and these experiences have contributed towards and impacted my worldview. Within sport, I have worked for a variety of organizations in Canada and abroad. My first experience working within sport was my undergraduate internship in which I went overseas to work with the Botswana Olympic Committee. Prior to this opportunity, my desire had been to work within professional sport in North America, however, the experience of working and living within a space that differed quite drastically from what I had known and was accustomed, to cause me to reflect on my experiences to date and alter my way of thinking about what area of sport I wanted to contribute to in the future. Following this opportunity, my jobs within sport have focused on helping to coordinate and deliver sport opportunities to underrepresented groups within a Canadian urban setting (Toronto). My roles working at the Jane/Finch Community Centre, and at the Toronto Inner-City Rugby Foundation (TIRF) have helped to further cement my interest in the non-profit sector. Working in this field has helped me to better understand the inequities that certain populations within an urban setting face to engage in sport participation. While within these roles, I gained a good understanding of the areas that were served and not served within the Toronto sporting community. My work with TIRF allowed me to become familiar with the other clubs that operate within the sport of rugby in Ontario and has resulted in an understanding of Rugby Ontario's practices and the overall regions that are served. This has helped to shape my understanding of the issues faced by organizations within this organizational field as it pertains to issues of space (e.g., access to playing fields, training areas, transportation between sites, etc.) and the ways that organizations have structured themselves to be able to operate effectively and meet the needs of their participants. Understanding how geographies of sport and sport policy have impacted me as a suburban/urban, upper-middle-class man helped to provide insights into

some areas of the system. Due to my background, I had some insights into suburban/urban sport systems and aspects that may work or be lacking.

Throughout this research process, I read as much as I could to understand new issues as they came up so that I could meaningfully engage with participants and become a positive agent of change through this work. Additionally, to help mitigate biases throughout the process, reflexive journaling and debriefs with a critical friend (my supervisor, Dr. Kyle Rich) occurred periodically during the data collection and analysis phases. Having access to a critical friend (Smith & McGannon, 2018) that is an expert within this field of study, and who brings different lived experiences to the table as a gay man with extensive experience living and working in rural communities, was invaluable to helping me think reflexively and explore multiple perspectives throughout this project.

Ensuring consistent reflection and reflexivity on positionality and transparency in reporting was key to helping identify power imbalances that exist within the research project and sport system in general. This is especially important to note within the constructivist paradigm as knowledge is co-constructed through engagement with participants, and engagement with policy and documentation (Lian, 2019). While integrating this type of reflexivity into my work was a new and unfamiliar process, I was excited for this challenge and was confident that I would be able to show my commitment to the work, and ultimately help co-construct new knowledge within this area of study.

Chapter 5: Findings

Thematic analysis is an effective research method used to “identify and interpret patterns or themes in a data set” (Naeem et al., 2023, pg. 2) to uncover new insights and understanding. Through the use of thematic analysis, I identified three main themes, composed of several sub-themes, in relation to PSOs and how they understand, construct, and manage regions in the province of Ontario, and how institutional pressures impact the management of these regions. The findings indicate that the Ontario sport governance landscape is influenced by regional dynamics and that pressures impact how policy is implemented and managed. These pressures come from all directions and PSOs not only have to react to policy coming from their governing organizations (NSO, Government, Sport Canada, etc.) but also from municipalities and school boards that influence sport participation at the regional/community level.

This section is laid out following three main themes: 1) Recognition of the Province as a Region, 2) Regions are Informally Constructed, and 3) Regions are Formally Structured. While regions are not necessarily formally articulated in the strategic documents and policies of all PSOs, they are understood and utilized by practitioners as they have gained legitimacy as an institutional norm. Within these themes, I have outlined the different ways in which actors understand, construct, and manage regions and how these understandings are impacted by institutional pressures. These themes are explained below using quotations from the semi-structured interviews and the documents that were analyzed as a part of this case study.

Recognition of the Province as a Region

The first theme that I identified through reviewing the data, reflects how actors recognize the province of Ontario as a region without further classifications or divisions. The theme describes how organizations employ a whole province model and do not formally or informally

place classifications upon their member clubs/organizations based on where they are located geographically.

Within this type of whole province understanding of regions, PSO-affiliated actors tend to view their participants or member clubs as more or less equal, regardless of where they are located or the size of their organization. When asked about how they distinguish and about the distribution of resources within their sport, Sarah from PSO 4 said:

Yeah. So, I mean again, it's, like, you know, votes at the AGM are distributed by the number of [participants]. So, the bigger clubs get a few more votes than the smaller clubs, but other than that, it's yeah, that's pretty much it. Like if we have a coaching grant that we get, it's generally evenly spread across the clubs.

Meanwhile Ken responded “No, we’re just Ontario” when asked if they formally distinguished regions within the province.

While most of the sports interviewed for this project had some sort of club system in place that governed the grassroots level of sport, some still operated outside of a formal club-based organization system. This is particularly relevant to consider when looking at spatial organization as solo participants can come from any area of the province without being formally affiliated with a CSO and still compete in recognized events. This type of organization is evidenced through the operations of PSO 5.

Yeah. So, [our sports] interesting because it's not like a traditional sports system, which is something that I've been I've been struggling with since I came from traditional sport. So, it's not necessarily a club-based sport. So, you don't necessarily have to belong to a club or have a coach in order to compete.

This focus on a whole province understanding of regions was also articulated through the strategic planning documents of PSOs. Outlined within the strategic plan of Softball Ontario is the goal of promoting participation and having “people playing softball at any level, anywhere in Ontario” (Softball Ontario, 2019, p. 1).

Fundamentally, all PSOs must consider the whole province understanding of governance in some way as their mandates all center around governing sport within the Province of Ontario. While some organizations further breakdown the province of Ontario into formal and informal districts, or sub-regional areas, there is a clearly articulated concern within the organizational field that governance of sport happens at a whole province level. This understanding and utilization of space is intertwined throughout the data and is evident regardless of how actors within PSOs choose to manage regions within their organizations.

Regions are Informally Constructed

The second theme that I identified through my analysis is that regions are informally constructed by actors. When discussing regional organization, and the ways in which PSOs did so, it became clear that actors from these organizations understand geography and space even if their organization doesn't formally organize using regions within their sport.

Informal Organization

A way that participants informally understand and utilize regions is through an understanding of where their member clubs are and the resources that they require to provide more equitable access to participation opportunities within their sport. A specific example of this was described by Tina, the Executive Director from PSO 8.

Yeah, I mean, we try, I would say we're weakest in Western Ontario and it that's our biggest [sport discipline] group and they are probably the most detached from us. We

need to do a better job with them. It's definitely weighted more sort of like, you know, Durham all the way over to Ottawa area and that's kind of the biggest weighting of our concentration. We do have [participants] up north. We try to do as much as we can. It's challenging because the cost, but we try to do as much as we can up there, or we bring them down and compensate them for coming down to take training but we, you know, we're a provincial body, right? So, we try to we try to accommodate and do as much as we can for everybody, but I would say if we had a weakness, it's kind of London West and we need to do a better job.

This acknowledgement of specific regions, that are not formally grounded within a regional or district structure, demonstrates a clear example of the ways that actors are aware of different regions within the province, even if they are not formally recognized in their policy and programming.

Also included in this informal understanding is how actors considered the organization of such a large area, and the impact that distance has when it comes to travel. Due to the sheer size of the province, and the distance between major population centers outside of Southern Ontario, actors felt a need to be conscious of where they chose to host events to ensure that they were being equitable in the delivery of competitive opportunities. For example, when asked about if they formally utilize regions in their organization, Peter from PSO 7 said:

Yeah. That we don't formally, but we do recognize that we've got regions and so we will attempt for instance to hold events sometimes out East, sometimes out West, sometimes Central and Toronto area, and that's just to you know help with the burden of travel, if you're always having, you know, if we held every event in Ottawa, then all the folks in Windsor driving a long way to Ottawa every time. We do tend to hold a majority of

events in the GTA (Greater Toronto Area) simply because the majority of our membership is around kind of the Golden Horseshoe area.

Informal regional considerations were also referenced within the strategic plans of PSOs. For example, within the strategic plan of Field Hockey Ontario is the recognition that they need to “increase the base to allow for more programming and regional programming outside of the GTA” (Field Hockey Ontario, 2021, p. 10). Having a reliance on the GTA (or generally urban areas) as a participant base is something that several participants also touched on in interviews.

Bill from PSO 1 explained how, in the past, there seemed to be a favoritism towards hosting events in the GTA due to the population base of participants in the region, but that it is an active priority to work on expanding their reach.

The GTA was always the easiest kind of like geographic part of the province to be able to focus on. And so, you know, having tournaments, especially during the season where you know I turned into or league structures, cause Leagues would mean you know you're participating like on a Saturday or on a Wednesday evening. When you expect students at any point during the year to travel to Ottawa, Windsor, or Sudbury during that time frame its really difficult. So, there was always this kind of like sense of favoritism around the GTA. Its warranted just because the sheer population base, but over the course of time we looked to make that less of a barrier by offering those communities to host events, or at least have events or leagues or tournaments hosted.

Access to Space & Facilities

Access to facilities to participate outside of these areas is a problem faced by many sports as smaller communities often don't have the resources to build sport specific infrastructures

outside of rinks and soccer fields. When asked about the greatest challenges facing their sport, Peter from PSO 7 said:

So, the biggest challenge in our sport is the lack of facilities, particularly indoor facilities. Uh, there are from an outdoor facility perspective, there's lots of outdoor [facilities] around the province. However, a significant number of them are in very, very poor state of repair, and some of them are actually dangerous and so some of the communities have actually shut them down and don't allow people to train on them and they're not, they're not really repairing them because it's quite costly to repair them. And unfortunately, again, because these communities are made up of, you know, a lot of lower income families, they don't get a lot of support for some municipalities, you know, the municipalities will put in an ice rink for the hockey fans, which costs significantly more than a [facility for our sport] and significantly more to maintain and upgrade it, than they will for a, for [facility for our sport].

Access to space was a major challenge identified by participants within the province of Ontario and was a common theme explored through the interviews. Due to a lack of functional sport specific space to participate within the province, clubs are forced to either utilize non-sport specific spaces within their communities or travel great distances to access appropriate infrastructure. When asked about where people are training and participating due to this lack of access, Peter further noted that CSOs are “hoping they have a dirt track somewhere in their little town or traveling hours to get to a track that might have a synthetic surface that they can train upon.” Use of non-traditional sport space was also noted by Peter: “two years ago, one of the [CSOs], rented the old Sears building that had been closed down and was training in there and leveraging that area as well.”

Implications of Travel

The implications of travel requirements were quite prevalent throughout the data and actor's understandings of regions, with several actors discussing how the perceptions of some locations (and the travel to them) impacted the areas of the province in which they would host events. Geography was specifically identified as a challenge or a barrier for many organizations and was something that they were actively trying to address to overcome with their participant bases. When asked about how they utilize participation data to make decisions Bill from PSO 1 stated:

We, through the little bit of research that we did, what we a lot of times found is that people's decisions were centered around - funny enough - geography. So, if you were hosting a championship in the Soo [Sault Ste. Marie], numbers would drop drastically. Now people would say like why are you going to Soo? We're like, well, like the Soo is a couple hours further than Ottawa and nobody has any issues and driving to a championship in Ottawa or any issues to driving to Windsor well, but it's more in gas money like it's like another \$25 in gas money... Well, you don't know is when you get there, you have 3 dedicated facilities that are within 5 minutes of your hotel ... But like the foods also cheaper there, right? Like you have all these things that they that they do, but it's like, people don't take in consideration. So, it's always like trying to educate people. But again, we were trying to be inclusive, right?

Education around geography and the reasoning behind where they hosted provincial events was a consideration that PSOs are informally working on in collaboration with their member clubs. However, an aversion to travel was not something that is shared by PSOs across the province. Several of the PSO-affiliated actors noted that travel is an accepted necessity by portions of their

member base due to the availability of acceptable facilities to host provincial events. When asked about any potential challenges or push back regarding the hosting of events within the province Peter noted:

Oh, our members are quite used to traveling simply because of the lack of facilities, they've had to travel and right now our two best facilities. We have three main facilities in the province. One is in Ottawa, one is in [Toronto], which, while it doesn't have a major stadium it could hold at least the provincial level [championship] and also another one in London.

This acceptance of travel between regions is something that is also shared by some the sports that are traditionally reliant on natural environments or natural infrastructure (hills, canals, etc.) for participation. Sports that operate outside of built indoor/outdoor facilities also seemed to have less of a reluctance to travel for events. An example of this is shown within the data from the interview with Susan from PSO 12. Within this interview, Susan noted that part of the appeal of their sport is the difference in the field of play from location to location.

[Our sport] is a bit different from other sports, like a hockey rink is a hockey rink, right? And so... to go to a hockey rink in Whistler compared to like going to one in Kenora, right you know, but because our field of play is different everywhere you go, I think that's a really unique thing about the sport, right? It's not like a swimming pool, like, OK, where do you wanna go? Oh yeah, let's go to Toronto. It's way more fun to be in Toronto. I don't wanna be stuck in Thunder Bay...or in Kapuskasing, but each [of] the [facilities for our sport] have a completely different flavor. How many people remember the names of [a sport location]? Do you ever remember the name of the lane that you swam? And I was in lane four in like Lindsay ON, you know what I mean at that pool? Whereas people

will say, Oh my god, my favorite [course name] in Ottawa. Like I remember crashing on that hill. Or oh Massaro's heartbreak at [course] like it's so crazy. Or, you know, like people have there's a tie to the to the location and to the course and to the fact that it's always different. Your field of play is always different.

Informal Regional Support – Funding, Events, and Hubs

Another way in which informal regional considerations came into play was in relation to meeting ministry requirements for applying for funding opportunities. When asked about the role that regions or geography more broadly played in the management of their organization, Ken from PSO 9 said that:

If anything, we use the governments North, South, East, West to say that we're actually touching the whole province when we do some grants, sometimes they're asking you to touch all four regions of the province, but we don't internally - no we don't have a regional base structure or district-based structure like I know I know soccer does.

This informal understanding of the space is also evident within organizations looking to ensure that regional diversity is maintained, and that all areas of the province were being provided opportunities to be involved collaborating with the PSO in the hosting of events. Amanda from PSO 5 specifically noted that regional diversity was a major consideration for them as they entered their role.

So, when we offer an event in those disciplines, one of the things that I spearheaded was taking events back in house. So, then we were able to control the regional diversity. So, we were able to say, ok, we need an event out East, and we need an event north and southwest and central. So where are those locations? And then partnering with clubs in those areas to help us put the events on because of the volunteer base that they have as

well as their knowledge on the ground. So, it was a very different philosophy because when I came in, it was mostly a professional event. Organizers who ran their events in the same location every year and there was no diversity.

Partnering with clubs in certain strategic areas/regions of the province to deliver competitive and participation opportunities was another consideration that was touched on by actors within PSOs. Specifically, participants discussed the creation of informal regional hubs centered around strategic locations to help in the delivery of training and sport opportunities in previously underserved regions of the province. When asked about if regions, or geography more broadly, has implications for the distribution of resources, Amanda also touched on the way that their organization is changing in the creation of regional hubs.

We're trying to right now what we're trying to do is work with Sault Ste. Marie to create a Northern Ontario hub. That's a goal for us next year where we can then actually service some of those athletes up there and we're hoping our target is like 20 athletes, 10 of them to attend our event, three coaches that we're gonna mentor. So, we can start to build the sport up north because they have an incredible [sport] community. So, we're trying to start to look at hubs, but not so much where we're controlling the hubs, but we're partnering with people and helping them to develop the hub. That, then is a network down to us, so we can give those athletes opportunities to either compete or come in for like a weekend and train. So that's what we're doing instead is kind of looking at these performance partners or performance hubs.

The creation of informal regional hubs in which sport participation will be focused is only one of the ways in which actors have looked to change the ways that their organization creates and manages the space in which they operate. While in this case it is still classified as informal

organization as it is not strategically recognized through policy or planning documents, that kind of change demonstrates one of the ways in which organizational actors can challenge the current regional organization system, or taken-for-granted norms, within the institutional environment in which they operate.

Regions are Formally Structured

The third and final theme describes the formal division of the province, to the extent that these understandings are reflected within their strategic planning documents and by-laws. Within this utilization of regions, actors described how PSOs formally identify regions of Ontario, and recognize clubs within districts or divisions. Outlined within the strategic plans of these organizations are generally goals set in relation to facilitating sport development while working within their regional model. A good example of this can be found within the strategic plan of the Ontario Tennis Association as they have formally set goals within a regional structure. Included within their strategic goals is the mission to “encourage and support volunteerism at the provincial, regional and local levels, fostering diversity and inclusion” (Ontario Tennis Association, 2022, p. 5). The acknowledgement of regions within a strategic planning document shows ways in which actors set different goals for different regions of the province.

Institutionalized Regional Organization

Actors from organizations that formally articulate regions, described established complex governance structures that help to govern these sub-provincial areas. An example of this type of formal division is evidenced by James from PSO 11:

So yes, they are articulated in our bylaws. We established five regions: North, South, East, West and Central, and within those five regions there are districts, and the districts have boundaries and historically the boundaries have been set up mostly around single or

multi-jurisdictional municipalities that have dividers on getting permits to play on fields, so that's kind of historically how it was set up.

James further elaborated on their regional governance structures through a comparison to the breakdown of the non-sport political organization:

Our regions are districts. Our geographical ways of dividing up areas of the province for the delivery of sport, and then within those regions there, as I said, there's districts that become the members of ours, and they're the voting Members, and they're the ones that represent the best interest or are supposed to represent the best interests of their members, which are the clubs and the clubs that are supposed to represent the best interests of their members, which are the participants, the players, the coaches, referees that joined their clubs. So, it's I always describe it as. It's not any different than politics. The federal governments, [our NSO], the provincial Government, [the PSO], the municipal government, they're all the districts and then the homes that live in all the districts are the clubs and the people live in those homes are the participants of our game. It's very similar to just general politics and life.

The regional district structure used by these organizations is one that has become institutionalized with the field as many organizations continue to use this method of organization as it is simply how things were historically done. This is evidenced in the interview with Ron from PSO 6 as they talked about their regional division structure.

There are four divisions that we categorize like Northern Ontario Division, Southern Ontario Division, National Capital Division, which is the Ottawa region, and then Lake Superior Division, which is everything kind of Thunder Bay. And at West, yeah, those are still in place. I can't say when they were formed, but they be in there from time

immemorial. But largely it's simple for [our sport] because there's no new [participation locations] being created. So essentially, they had a map and the [participation locations] kind of gravitated around, you know, populations largely. So, the divisions really formed around those. With the [sport locations] in mind.

These regional divisions were primarily created for the purpose of helping to organize competition between clubs. This is noted by Clark from PSO 10 who stated: "It's strictly competition. Districts exist for one reason and one reason only." This type of organization however is now being reconsidered and challenged by some organizations as it no longer necessarily the most efficient way to organize for PSOs. When asked about the purpose of regions within their organization, Ron noted how regions historically were used and that there is discussion about their current use.

So, you know, I think it's a good debate that I'm going to have with people is like whether this should exist still this format, but it's historically there and it does serve a purpose largely just for scheduling and managing kind of smaller items that you know you can stay a little bit more focused.

Additionally, Jim from PSO 2 noted the purpose of regions for their organization:

So, it's funny enough, it's actually one of those topics we're going through now as to why they exist. I know it was basically it was just done on a very old system. It was done many, many, many years ago, in which they just looked at. At that time, there weren't as many clubs, so they just had it based on clubs running in a competition and senior competition. That's how it was done originally, and now how it's been looked at is based on distance.

As organizations contemplate the purpose of regions (and districts) as a means of organization for competitions, several organizations have made moves that have resulted in change.

What we're seeing now is we're seeing a consolidation of districts within the within the boundaries. So, when I came on board back in 2015, we had 21 districts. We now have 18, so we merged 4 out of the five of the North. We have three in the Toronto area that are merging to become one, so we'll be down to 15 districts, and we have a goal to get down to 50% to consolidate because we're finding that municipalities have consolidated as well. So... It's an evolution of those, but yes, it's all clearly documented within that. And then within the districts, they have their own bylaws, and they have their own boundaries and areas for their clubs to operate within those boundaries (James, PSO 11)

The changing and consolidation of regions was a consideration also noted by Clark from PSO 10, however for different reasons than those previously noted by James above.

Yeah, they have. I mean we used to go 12 regions. We found it to be inequitable. I mean, one of the reasons was Niagara. Niagara's a very small area compared to Peel. So, as things change, we look at it. So within, you know most of it has to do with as the organization grows trying to make competition more accessible, more realistic.

This changing of boundaries is seen as something organic and as something that should be happening as "geographics are changing and evolving all the time. Just like in municipal politics, where suddenly two or three municipalities come together and form one, and the boundaries are changed so it's organic, it's constantly changing all the time" (James, PSO 11).

Regional Politics

Within a formal regional governance structure, participants described how regional boards and directors can have an impact on policy and the implementation of sport development opportunities. These regional organizations are often granted autonomy to make decisions for their geographic area and serve on the PSO board of directors. As noted by Susan from PSO 12, these regional areas have a lot of power within the system as “the four chairs of the boards of the districts make up the majority of the voting members of our Board of Directors, so the four district chairs could, based on the current makeup, shift policy completely.”

While they don't formally organize regionally at their current organization, Amanda from PSO 5 commented on their experience at a different PSO that operated under a regional board structure. They expressed gratitude that they no longer worked within a formal district structure as they say the existence of regional boards as a detriment to the overall function of the PSO.

So, you've got a volunteer sitting on the board, not necessarily looking at the whole province, only focusing on their little region. And then anything they come up with, but that doesn't work in my region and I'm like okay, but this is a board decision. This is not like the conversations we're having or for the whole province, because you're on the board and the board has the fiduciary responsibility for the entire province, not just Western region, or southern region or, you know, central. So, I found it incredibly difficult to get any work done. Incredibly difficult to get any kind of agreement or alignment, not a lot of forethought or expansion outside of their region. It was always about me, me, me so and I understand that because that's what they saw themselves as advocate for their role. It just wasn't productive from an execution of the operation side.

This idea of regions acting as a hinderance to operations is an important consideration as sport within the province continues to develop and evolve, along with the role of regions therein.

Collectively, the themes identified within this section outline the ways in which PSOs function within the organizational field of amateur sport and how pressures impact their active construction of space through the management of regions in Ontario. These themes will be further explored within the context of the existing literature in the discussion section below.

Chapter 6: Discussion

This thesis project had two research questions, the first question being: How do PSO-affiliated actors understand and construct regions? and the second question being: How do institutional pressures impact the management of regions within PSOs in Ontario? Utilizing institutional theory and the production of space as a foundation, the findings are discussed in this section and the contribution of this thesis to existing literature is identified.

How Actors Understand and Construct Regions

When speaking with actors from PSOs about how they understand and construct regions within their organizations, it was shown that organizations understand regions in different ways. Thematic analysis showed that there are three main ways (recognition of the province as a region, regions are informally constructed, and regions are formally structured) in which regions are understood by actors and that the creation of regional boundaries is not arbitrary. How these boundaries were decided is the product of a complex interplay between social dynamics, political systems, and economic forces. Within a Lefebvrian understanding, the production of space is driven by three interconnected processes. These processes included: spatial practices (physical space), representations of space (conceived space), and spaces of representation (discursive/lived space; Lefebvre, 1991). Here, I draw specifically upon these three processes to discuss how actors understand and construct regions, before elaborating on their implications for institutional structures and political power in sport governance processes.

Creating and Understanding Space

In their role within the institutional landscape, PSO-affiliated actors find, create, and use space in different ways. The first way in which they do so is through the production of spatial practices (physical space). Spatial practices refer to the everyday activities and interactions that

shape and transform space (such as building, inhabiting, and moving through environments). Spatial practice is space that can be empirically mapped and, as a result, it is spatial practice that has received the most attention from sport geographers. van Ingen (2003) described spatial practice as “bounded space that includes, for example, a specific site or location such as a stadium, gymnasium, playing field or region” (pp. 202-203). Within a Lefebvrian understanding, however, spatial practice extends beyond the physical objects or material places that we occupy and includes our everyday routines.

Within the data, physical space is referred to and considered by actors in different contexts. An example of this can be seen within the data as Susan from PSO 12 mentions the use of and attachment to physical locations in which their sport occurs. As noted by van Ingen (2003), “movement and physical activity are obvious forms of spatial practice” (p. 203). The ways in which the bodies of participants interact with and utilize physical space for sport is an important consideration. The differences in the physical spaces for sport from place to place as mentioned by Susan is an interesting consideration here as participants are drawn to different features and interact differently with their surroundings since “your field of play is always different.” Interactions with spaces differed from sport to sport, as participants from sports that operated outside of built indoor and outdoor facilities tended to have less of a reluctance to travel across regions, as going to specific natural participation locations (lakes, hills, canals, etc.) often in more rural locations was seen as a feature. Sports that relied upon built facilities for participation locations tended to be more averse to travel and had stronger spatial connection to hosting events in more urban, populous areas. How participants move throughout and interact with these different spaces is a clear example of spatial practice. Actors from within PSOs play a role in the creation of space in this way by selecting different memorable locations for sport

participation and providing opportunities for events and competition to occur. By creating and managing these opportunities, actors play a role in constructing space. While this thesis does not delve into the exploration of gender, sexuality, and race within a spatial context as van Ingen's (2003) work calls for, it does build upon her work (and that of Lefebvre) by looking beyond just the physical landscape and examining how actors and sport participants interact and create social space within their sport environments.

Additionally, spatial practices can be seen through the quote by Peter from PSO 7 in which they touch on how lack of maintenance has led to the deterioration of fields and facilities which their sport relies on as places to participate. This lack of maintenance on their facilities, while those in other sports (hockey and soccer) continue to be built and maintained is a contentious topic as it has begun to limit access to sport spaces for their members. Due to the lack of facilities that are being maintained, organizational actors have had to adapt and utilize spaces that are traditionally non-sport specific. This focus upon physical spaces to participate, and their locations across the province builds upon work done within the field of sport geography (Bale, 1994; 2003) as it explores the ways in which actors understand and utilize physical spaces within their roles. The locations of physical sporting spaces within the province historically played a major role in how PSO-affiliated actors constructed their regional structures, and most likely will continue to do so. Due to the deteriorating and changing nature of physical spaces, the ways in which participants access and interact with these locations that sport occurs within the modern landscape of sport is an interesting consideration that bears further exploration by sport scholars.

Secondly, representations of space involve the ways in which space is conceptualized, imagined, and symbolically constructed (Lefebvre, 1991). This refers to the conceived spaces

produced by institutional actors. These spaces are characterized by maps, plans, and other formal, often bureaucratic, designs that reflect the dominant ideology and serve the interests of those in power (Lefebvre, 1991; Bevan et al., 2023). Institutional theory provides a framework for understanding how these representations of space become institutionalized. Institutions, through their rules, norms, and routines, shape and reinforce the conceived spaces by embedding these representations into organizational practices and societal norms. For instance, the historical setting of boundaries for sport, as noted by Jim, Ron, and James, which constitute regions/divisions, exemplifies Lefebvre's concept of representations of space. These boundaries have been institutionalized through formal regulations and have become ingrained in the organizational structure and cultural practices of sport organizations.

In the context of PSOs, representations of space are evident in how these organizations map out region regional boundaries and host competitions. By doing so, they create a structured and regulated environment that facilitates the administration and development of sports within the province. This involves an understanding of geography and demographics, which they use to allocate resources, and host competition, programming, and events. For instance, PSO-affiliated actors develop strategic plans that include goals around prioritizing the development of sport in certain regions or meeting specific goals around delivering sporting opportunities across the province. While these plans may not directly formally discuss regional planning decisions, they may speak generally about embedding the values and objectives of the organization within a spatial frame.

Within the Province as a Region understanding, representations of space manifested in different ways. Within my research, I found that actors who utilize this regional understanding govern, promote equity, and meet their strategic goals by providing opportunities for their

members throughout the province regardless of their size or geographic location. Within strategic planning documents, actors who articulated this view of regional organization prioritized setting goals around meeting the needs of all Ontarians (e.g. Softball Ontario's goal of "people playing softball at any level, anywhere in Ontario"). It is important to note here that all PSOs are inherently concerned with governing at a whole province level, regardless of if they formally organize regionally or not, as it is their mandate first and foremost as identified and institutionalized in the sport recognition policy. The lack of setting further boundaries can still be understood as a representation of space, as the boundary of the province is still the product of social dynamics and political systems. This understanding of regions is supported within the regionalism literature as the province of Ontario is widely considered its own region within Canada by scholars within the field (Cochrane & Perrella, 2012; Schwartz, 1974). My analysis builds upon the regionalism literature in sport (Rich, Nelson et al., 2024) by identifying the different ways that provincial actors within an institutionalized environment understand and utilize regional boundaries and divides within a provincial context.

Representations of space are also present within the theme of informal understanding and construction of regions. For example, by identifying certain areas as hubs for specific sports, or by organizing high-profile events in particular regions, actors within PSOs shaped how these spaces are perceived and experienced by their members and the public. Moreover, actors utilize representations of space to promote regional identities and foster a sense of community. Within organizations that utilized a formal regional governance structure, the ways in which they broke down the province is often institutionalized. In these cases, this method of organization has been in place for several decades or as noted by Ron "from time immemorial" and has been looked

upon as a norm by actors within this organization. This historic understanding of regions falls in line with understandings perpetuated within 'old regionalism' structures (Vodden et al., 2019).

However, my analysis also suggests that modern actors within these organizations have begun to challenge these norms to help modernize their operations and better meet the needs of their participants as populations grow, shift, and change. This is evidenced within the data through the consolidation of districts within PSO 11. James noted that the way that they organize their district structure is consolidating "because we're finding that municipalities are consolidated as well." This way of constructing and managing space is supported by the literature as representations of space are not static. This finding also aligns with what is understood within the field of new regionalism as "new regionalism accepts that boundaries are open, fuzzy, or elastic. What defines the extent of the region varies with the issue we're trying to address or the characteristic we are considering" (Young, 2010, p. 3). These representations are continually being adapted in response to feedback from governing bodies, members, changes in policy, and shifts in the broader socio-economic landscape. PSO-affiliated actors continue to navigate these tensions to meet their internal strategic goals while also meeting the needs of diverse populations across the province. The findings from this thesis contribute to the sport governance literature by demonstrating how ideas from new regionalism (Daniels et al., 2019; Young, 2010) can be applied to amateur sport to understand how regions are understood, and space is constructed. The data demonstrates that PSO-affiliated actors have begun to challenge the ways in which regions have been historically used and are contributing to the changing role of regions within policy. This negotiation process reflects Lefebvre's idea that space is a product of social relations and is continually reproduced through interactions between different actors (Lefebvre, 1991) and contributes to our understanding of how social and political structures at the regional level have

implications for sport organizations within multi-level governance systems (e.g., Thibault & Harvey, 2013; Rich, Nelson et al., 2024; Parent & Jubala, 2023).

Lastly, Lefebvre (1991) discussed spaces of representation (lived space) as the unconscious, non-verbal direct relation of humans to space. Grounded in the imagination, it is essentially subjective, providing a passive experience where the outer physical space resonates with the inner imagination. Within a given area, certain specific locations can become focal points due to their position and status within the representational space of the community of people who use that area (Lefebvre, 1991). Lived space is “the terrain of social struggle, counter-discourses and resistance. It also remains a space that is never fully knowable” (van Ingen, 2003, p. 204). Within my analysis, lived space was discussed and considered in different ways. The first way in which lived space was discussed is evident through the interview with Susan as she discussed the spatial experiences of participants within a sport environment. The experience of crashing on a hill during a race can be seen as an example of spaces of representation as it reflects the lived experience of people who utilize space, the struggle of the groups involved, and the discursive way that meaning is ascribed to the sport environment. The lived experiences of participants were discussed by Bevan et al. (2023) as they explored gender equity in sport policy in an Australian context. The authors examined the experiences of a women’s football club, who encountered inequalities in accessing sporting spaces that were traditionally utilized by men. Understanding the lived experiences of participants from different groups in terms of access and interaction with space has the potential to help organizations build and foster equitable sporting environments in line with strategic policy goals related to increasing participation in sport.

Lived space is also evident through the ways in which politics influenced how regions are understood, structured, and constructed by actors within PSOs. Within the data, the experiences

of actors influenced the ways in which they perceived the use of regions and the spaces within them. An example of this is evidenced through the political representation of regions within sport, as noted by James as he compared their changing regional boundaries to those within municipal politics. The parallels between regional boundaries in sports and those in politics can be seen as a reflection of the experiences of individuals residing in these areas. In a study by Jeanes et al. (2021), the concept of lived space was employed to investigate the accessibility to and utilization of space within a gendered, spatial justice framework. The authors emphasized the value of spatial analyses in shedding light on how micro-level spatial practices uphold prevailing gender dynamics and the broader impact of power and politics in spatial arrangements within sports organizations. While the following thesis does not directly tackle gender relations, it aligns with this research by demonstrating that power and politics are influential in shaping the understanding and construction of space by stakeholders within sports organizations. This contributes to sport governance literature by highlighting the intricate role of power dynamics and political influences in shaping perceptions of space within sports organizations.

Overall, the data shows that PSO actors understand and create space within planning processes, allocating resources, and delivering opportunities that reflect and reinforce their organizational goals and values.

Space and Politics

The production of space is inherently political, as it dictates who has the authority to shape, control, and define spaces. According to Lefebvre's (1991) theory, space is not just a passive backdrop for social activities but is actively shaped and contested through power dynamics. Various actors, including governments, corporations, community groups, and individuals, possess different kinds of power that impact the creation of space. This influence is

evident in planning decisions, laws/policy, design, and resource allocation, all of which reflect the interests and priorities of dominant groups. My research illustrates how space is understood and constructed by actors within PSOs, and the political implications it has within the organizational field.

Power dynamics in the production of space can lead to the inclusion or exclusion of certain groups, the prioritization of specific activities, and the development of spaces that serve ideological or political purposes. The concept of spatial justice concerns the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities across different spaces and communities (Soja, 2009). Spatial justice aims to ensure fairness and equal distribution of resources, opportunities, and access to spaces for all regions, communities, and groups (Soja, 2009). Access to spaces to participate (particularly within rural or northern areas of the province) was a barrier that several actors discussed. Peter from PSO 7 stated that a lack of (particularly indoor) facilities for their sport was their “biggest challenge.” He further noted that while municipalities would often support some sports such as hockey, their sport did not receive the same level of priority and that due to this, facilities across regions of the province had fallen into a state of disrepair. My analysis builds on the work by Rich and Misener (2019) as it illustrates another dynamic of their argument surrounding the complexities associated with community sport development in rural Canada. While the authors’ work focused primarily upon people, and the level of competition in these communities, the findings from this thesis speak further to issues related to access of facilities and the ability of communities to maintain and upkeep them.

Creating equitable opportunities and fostering regional diversity was a consideration within the data as Amanda touched on how she spearheaded a movement to bring events back in house at the PSO in an effort to control the regional diversity and provide opportunity to areas

that previously did not host events. Recently, scholars (Jeanes et al., 2022; Bevan et al., 2023; Asefi & Nosrati., 2020) have begun to utilize spatial justice frameworks to examine sport in different contexts. This work further builds upon the spatial justice work done in the field of sport management by examining how PSO-affiliated actors construct and understand spaces in relation to idea of equity and accessibility. Bringing events back in-house is one of the ways in which actors are thinking about working towards equity in relation to space and is a concrete example of how they are actively working to reflect principles of spatial justice within their governance practices.

Furthermore, power influences the symbolic and representational aspects of space. This symbolic shaping of space reinforces existing power structures and social hierarchies. Nevertheless, power in the production of space is not absolute; it is constantly negotiated and contested (Lefebvre, 1991). Actors within organizations resist and challenge dominant spatial practices by reclaiming and reimagining spaces to reflect their own identities and needs. This was evidenced within my analysis in the ways that PSO actors discussed hosting events and championships around the province. Space, and the distances between places to participate in sport played a major role in the decisions of these actors. This is evidenced within the data as Bill stated, “we found that people's decisions were centred around - funny enough – geography.” The hosting of events was a contentious topic discussed throughout the interviews as PSO-affiliated actors noted how responses from their participants impacted which cities and regions within the province hosted major competitions. The data shows that actors struggled to find ways to educate their members on the reasons for hosting events in different regional areas. These findings show that the production of space is a dynamic and ongoing process shaped by struggles over power and representation. Essentially, the social production of space reflects broader social

power relations, where space itself becomes a battleground for competing interests and visions of society. This work contributes to this discussion around the construction of space as it reflects the differing values of groups that exist within the same field. This struggle between PSO actors, and their constituent CSOs (and their members) over where events should be held is reflective of the space literature (Lefebvre 1991; van Ingen, 2003, 2011) as it demonstrates a way in which space is constructed through a constant negotiation between groups within the field.

A resistance to travel was not something seen by all organizations, however. Sports that relied less upon built infrastructure (such as stadiums, rinks, etc.) and more on the natural environment (e.g. ski hills, canals, trails, etc.) saw a much greater acceptance to travel by their members. Sports that relied heavily upon the natural environment, where the conditions are ever changing, for space to participate saw travel to different (often more rural or remote) regions as positive, instead of a barrier. Furthermore, some sports almost exclusively relied upon rural areas for sport participation spaces as the locales (lakes, rivers, hills, mountains), or infrastructure (parking for large vehicles/trailers, etc.) needed to participate may not exist within urban settings. Understandings of space is therefore nuanced and reflective of different sporting cultures and practices.

This acceptance of rural regions as viable area for sport participation can be understood in relation to sportscares (Bale, 1982, 1994; Raitz, 1995; O'Reilly et al., 2015). O'Reilly and colleagues (2015) examined "sport participation from an environmental perspective by considering the dynamic role of the sportscape (built form and supporting infrastructure) in enabling, facilitating and promoting youth sport participation" (p. 1). This thesis builds upon and supports these findings as my data illustrates that there are considerations (beyond just where facilities are located) that factor into how people in in diverse contexts have access to sport

participation. This work shows that it is not just about the location of sports venues, but also the types of supporting infrastructure available to be utilized by practitioners and participants. Work by Jeanes and colleagues (2022) focused upon how informal sport is excluded within community sport systems, and how this exclusion ran counter to policy goals. The creation of spaces for informal or unstructured sport opportunities is a way in which governments and sport organizations can help to increase access to participation. Governments (federal, provincial, municipal) and actors within sport governing bodies (Sport Canada, NSOs, PSOs) have the power to create and construct these sport spaces and their larger sportscares through the implementation of policy focused on the building and maintenance of facilities. However, in the current landscape, inaction by these groups in power to equitably provide support to a diverse group of sport organizations in different regions continues to contribute to a system that is fundamentally unfair and unbalanced.

Within a formalized regional governance structure, that utilizes set boundaries and complex governance structures, regional actors maintain a great deal of power and can influence and shift provincial-level sport priorities. The data shows that these regional actors have agency to make decisions for their own areas in which they govern, while also sitting on the board for the PSO that governs across the province (as noted by Amanda). Due to this structure, regional actors (particularly those from larger, more influential regions) have the ability to advocate for policy and processes that reflect the needs of their regions, even if it is to the detriment of provincial goals. These findings align with the literature that has identified the problematics of representational roles on governing boards (e.g., see Strittmatter et al., 2024 who discussed youth representatives) by illustrating how these dynamics can play out in the context of regional representation.

A struggle for power was discussed by several participants as they found that there was a lack of alignment, between regional boards and actors from within PSOs. Policy developed and created by these actors has the potential to impact the operations of PSOs and the way that sport policy is implemented within a multi-level structure. Therefore, my analysis adds to the limited literature that has analyzed the impact of regional-level organizations in Canadian amateur sport (Edwards et al., 2009), as well as the dynamics of the relationships between actors at various levels of multi-level governance frameworks in Canadian amateur sport (Thibault & Harvey, 2013; Parent & Jurbala, 2023).

How Institutional Pressures Impact the Management of Regions

Institutional theory posits that values are not just adopted but internalized within an organizational field due to various pressures and are a prerequisite for an organization to gain legitimacy (Dacin et al., 2002). The above literature review identified three distinct pressures that shape taken-for-granted beliefs within institutions: normative, mimetic, and coercive (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The following section briefly describes how these pressures were evident in my analysis and the implications they have for the management of regions within amateur sport in Ontario.

Organizational Fields, Legitimacy, and Institutional Pressures

The concept of the organizational field is central to institutional theory. The organizational field shapes the behaviours and values that are considered legitimate for its actors. As actors and organizations normalize the belief and value systems of their organizational field, they conform to the established norms and logics that underpin decision-making in the field. This concept suggests that organizations within a field share fundamental characteristics and values, leading to their legitimacy within the field. According to sports scholars (e.g., Cousens & Slack,

2005; Rich, Nelson et al., 2024; Robertson et al., 2022), it is important to understand the concept of organizational fields as it allows researchers to study groups of organizations that are connected through shared meaning, governance systems, and relationship patterns.

Within organizational fields, pressures have a direct impact on how organizations operate. Through my analysis, multiple examples of pressures were evident. Within an institutional context, coercive pressures refer to the pressure exerted on the organizational field through political or power relations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). While this may appear as stringent governmental or regulatory pressures, coercive pressure can come from any entity with the power to penalize organizations for noncompliance with their requests or requirements (Washington & Patterson, 2011). When examining change within PSOs actors identified several rules and regulations that played a role in shaping the way in which their organization was required to change and adapt. An example of a coercive pressure that is evidenced through the data is that PSO-affiliated actors (e.g., Ken, PSO 9) utilize the governments definition of regions (north, east, south, west) in order to show that they are touching all areas of the province, even though they do not utilize a formal regional structure. This pressure is exerted on the PSO through the multi-level governance system by the provincial government as a prerequisite to receiving grants and funding.

The data also showed that PSOs often struggle with the realities of different pressures and the impact is seen on participation in different regions. This is evidenced in Ron's (PSO 6) description of how their organization drew their regional boundaries. Ron noted that their sport was regionally organized in a particular way as "there's no new [participation locations] being created ... [participation locations] historically gravitated around, populations." Due to this historic organization, areas of the province away from these population centres lack access to

facilities and spaces in which to participate in this sport. As no new locations to participate are being created, organizations are forced to conform and structure in this specific way. This inequality in terms of access for participants outside of these population centres aligns with the rural health and recreation literature. For example, Pelletier et al. (2012) identified that lack of facility access and support to be active were barriers to physical activity felt by adults in rural and urban Canada.

Access to facilities is also explored within the literature on spatial justice (e.g., Asefi & Nosrati's, 2020 study on the distribution of outdoor facilities). This thesis contributes to the literature on spatial justice in sport as the data demonstrates multiple pressures that have contributed to inequality within planning and management of regions within sport governance. A lack of investment in facilities (building and maintenance of them) from different levels of government is a barrier noted by participants (e.g. Peter, PSO 7) that contributes to the declining access to sport specific spaces to participate in areas of the province. Additionally, even within areas that have built infrastructure, there is still competition for access to the limited spaces available. Inequality in access for groups not historically associated with spaces is a problem noted by Bevan et al (2023) and identified as something that must be addressed to meet policy goals surrounding sport participation. Actors must work around this reality in the delivery of sporting opportunities in different areas of the province. The use of non-traditional sport space is a clear example of a way in which actors within certain regions of the province have adapted to this reality. This is shown within the data as a CSO had been forced to utilize "the old Sears building" within their town as an accessible indoor space to train and participate. These findings contribute to discussions of spatial justice and inequality by showing another context in which access to space is impacted by policy pressures (e.g., Bevan et al., 2023), and how sport

organizations adapt to create and manage spaces in which to continue to participate despite the challenges faced.

Additionally, normative pressures are also enacted within the organizational field in many ways. Actors identified multiple ways in which information, and ways of doing things were passed down over time within their organizations. The data shows that the how actors chose to construct and manage regions was often done in the early founding times of their organizations and continued to be used by future leaders as it had gained legitimacy. The institutionalization of regional organization is an example of this as it is a taken for granted assumption within many organizations with several of the current actors not even aware of when the regional boundaries were formed. Ron speaks on this within the data as he says, “they’ve been there from time immemorial.” This contributes to the sport institutionalism literature (e.g., Slack & Hinings, 1994; O’Brien & Slack, 2003; Skille, 2004; Greenwood et al., 2008) as it provides an example of both institutionalized legitimacy within a previously unexplored context (Canadian provincial sport).

Normative pressures are often linked to the professionalization of an industry, as schools, accrediting agencies, and other influential entities have a say in determining the values that new entrants into the field consider important (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 1987). While pressures are often top-down (e.g., from NSOs) within the field, they are not always exerted this way. Within multi-level governance frameworks, pressures can move in different directions. PSOs level actors are capable of showing agency through the creation and management of policy and the challenging of institutionalized organizational structures that are adopted by other organizations within the field. Within the data, this agency is evidenced in how actors are challenging historical norms that stemmed from normative pressures faced by external governing

bodies, such as the provincial government. The historic way of organizing around distance between participant groups is no longer necessarily the most efficient way for PSOs to organize. PSOs are also pressured to change the ways in which they organize regionally as their CSOs are impacted by changing demographics and politics within regions. In the data, James discussed this change as something “organic,” and noted that in consolidating their regions/districts, they are just following the lead of changing boundaries in municipal politics. In fields outside of sport, regional boundaries are drawn along politically relevant lines. The changing of municipal boundaries through amalgamation (Miljan & Spicer, 2015), is an example of how governments can wield their power to enact change. Within Ontario, my analysis showed that actors within PSOs felt pressures from provincial and municipal governments, and how they are changing (and amalgamating) their regional boundaries to reflect the way in which governments organize within the province.

Lastly, organizations may be influenced by mimetic pressures. Mimetic pressures come from the pressure to imitate what others do as finding optimal solutions to complex problems is often quite difficult. The creation of regional hubs was discussed by participants within this project as a way for PSOs to deliver sporting opportunities to different regions of the province away from their southern and most populous regions. One participant specifically noted that they were seeking to create a northern hub (in Sault Ste. Marie) to provide training opportunities and better serve the needs of their participants in that region. In Canada, the idea of sport hubs is not new as seven regional hubs were established to support high performance athletes across the nation. As the creation of sport hubs is outlined within official policy in the organizational field of amateur sport, the creation of additional hubs within sub-regions of the province can be understood as the product of mimetic pressure.

In other fields, such as rural development, numerous initiatives have also embraced the concept of a central hub to provide enhanced services, stimulate business growth, and bolster local communities (Bosworth & Salemink, 2022). The creation of a regional hub in this instance is an act of collaboration between the PSO, a regional municipality, and a CSO. This multi-level collaboration is important to note as a key function of any hub is to connect people, places, and organizations to promote development (Bosworth & Salemink, 2022). This type of collaboration between various levels of government, the public sector, and the private sector is a key consideration within the new regionalism literature (Söderbaum, 2003). Cities have always been economic and cultural hubs and the implementation of hubs across smaller towns and rural regions often seeks to create a substitute for the economies of scale and critical mass that are found in urban centres (Bosworth & Salemink, 2022). My work contributes to the literature by discussing hubs in the context of sport and how PSOs can contribute to the creation and management of regional hubs as a way to solve problems in delivering programming in diverse contexts.

The interaction between geographical space, legitimacy, institutional pressures, and fields offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how sports are organized at the provincial level. Geographical space includes both physical and symbolic landscapes, and it influences how regional boundaries are defined and managed. Legitimacy is gained by aligning with regional identities and societal norms, which helps sports organizations gain acceptance and credibility. Various institutional pressures, such as coercive, normative, and mimetic forces, influence how these regions are structured and governed. The broader institutional field, which includes regional sports entities and stakeholders, further impacts the dynamics of regional sports organization. This analysis highlights the crucial role of geographical dynamics and institutional

influences in shaping regional sports and provides valuable insights into the evolution and function of provincial sport systems.

Chapter 7: Implications, Limitations, and Future Directions

Theoretical and Practical Implications

My thesis explored how regions are understood by actors within PSOs, and how institutional pressures impact the management of regions within these PSOs in Ontario. Through the collection and analysis of data in this project, I have contributed to the knowledge base within current sport research in Canada by providing nuanced insights into the intersection of regional dynamics and institutional influences. This thesis research has shed light on the implications of regions for sport governance within the province of Ontario and the institution of amateur sport in Canada more broadly. The themes (recognition of the province as a region, regions are informally constructed, and regions are formally structured) reveal the complexity and variability in how regions are conceptualized by different actors within PSOs. This understanding underscores the necessity for sport governance frameworks that are adaptable to diverse regional interpretations and needs. It highlights the importance of context-specific strategies for the effective governance and management of sports at the provincial level.

Secondly, the study illuminates the contribution that a spatial and institutional lens can bring to understanding institutional pressures in shaping the operations and strategies of PSOs related to regions. These pressures, which include regulatory requirements, funding mandates, and broader societal expectations, influence how regions are managed within the organizations. The awareness of these pressures can help PSOs navigate them more strategically, potentially leading to enhanced organizational adaptability, resilience, and performance. It also suggests that policymakers should consider the multi-faceted nature of these pressures when designing regulations and policy that impacts the management of sport within the province and its various (sub)regions.

Moreover, this research contributes to the theoretical understanding of organizational fields in sport governance. This research has implications for the study of sport development and policy implementation as they are closely related to governance and the findings from my research are implicated in our scholarly understanding of these processes. By examining the interactions between regions and institutional pressures, the study offers empirical evidence that enriches the broader discourse on organizational field dynamics. This can inform future research on sport governance, encouraging scholars to further investigate the interplay between regional contexts and institutional forces in other settings and contexts.

From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest several actionable recommendations for PSOs. Firstly, PSOs should prioritize the development of flexible governance structures. These structures need to be adaptable to the varied and evolving ways in which different regions are understood and managed. A flexible governance structure allows for tailored approaches that can address each region's unique needs and characteristics, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all strategy. Moreover, the flexibility in governance should extend to the decision-making processes within PSOs. By incorporating local insights, PSOs can ensure that policies and initiatives are more relevant and effective. This adaptability can help PSOs respond more swiftly to changes in regional dynamics, such as changing demographics, or emerging challenges.

In addition, fostering strong communication channels between central and regional partners is critical. This ensures that information flows smoothly and that regional perspectives are adequately represented in higher-level strategic planning. Encouraging a culture of collaboration and continuous feedback can further enhance the ability of PSOs to implement responsive and region-specific governance practices. PSOs should seek to engage in continuous dialogue with regional stakeholders to ensure that their policies and practices are relevant and

responsive to local needs. This engagement has the potential to foster a collaborative environment where stakeholders feel valued and heard, leading to greater buy-in and support for organizational initiatives, which in time could lead to improved governance processes, particularly within boards that adopt regional representation models.

A third suggestion is, PSOs should allocate resources strategically to address regional disparities and address inequalities related to access to sport participation opportunities. This may involve directing funds and support to regions with greater needs or potential, ensuring that all areas can develop and thrive. Through doing this organizations have the ability to create a more equitable environment, in line with their organizational goals, and work to address issues that stem from spatial injustices across regions within the province.

Overall, the findings from this work build upon the current knowledge within the geography of sport and sport governance literature and will be useful for practitioners, researchers, and policymakers in this field. Findings from this research will be useful for scholars and practitioners in highly regionalized contexts, such as Canada. The insights into how the social production of space impacts the construction of regions has a definitive impact in helping to better understand regional governance structures and ultimately determining how diverse groups of citizens might be better served across varying regions through the existing sport system.

Limitations

Due to the time constraints of a two-year graduate program, and the challenges associated with participant recruitment, a sample size of 12 organizational actors, and 39 strategic planning documents was achieved. While this number of participants and documents still amounted to an adequate sample from which to draw findings, a more robust sample in terms of location and

type of document analyzed may have allowed for a greater representation of organizations across the province. Further, the narrow geographic spread of where PSO-affiliated actors and organizations were located (primarily within southern Ontario and the GTA) may have resulted in a skewed representation of how organizations within the field construct and manage regions and the space in which they operate.

In a more flexible situation, in which time and project scope would not be an issue, collecting the perspectives of a greater number of PSO-affiliated actors (from more of the 64 recognized PSOs) would have helped to provide stronger insights into how PSO-affiliated actors understand and construct regions, and how institutional pressures impact the management of regions within Ontario.

Future Directions

My research addressed sport governance within the province of Ontario, specifically answering questions related to how actors within PSOs understand and construct regions. The themes identified throughout this work help to showcase some of the ways in which space is understood by actors within sport organizations and how regions are implicated within the institution of amateur sport. Given that this thesis had a narrow focus on provincial sport within the province of Ontario, there are several research opportunities available to further explore these ideas within different contexts.

Future research in this area could seek to expand upon this work, and explore how actors within PSOs in other provinces, construct and manage regions. Additionally, a comparative analysis between provinces on a national scale has the potential to have interesting implications for how actors within the field of amateur sport understand space and how different regional policy frameworks impact the management of regions therein. The lack of understanding of how

actors within PSOs actively construct and manage sport within a regional structure constitutes an important gap in the field of sport management in Canada.

Additionally, further discussion around how actors and participants from different sports interact with and utilize space within a regional context has the potential to lead to meaningful discussions. Determining the factors that influence where events and participation opportunities are hosted for different sports could assist practitioners and policy makers in determining the best ways to increase participation in underserved areas of the province and ultimately lead to a more just and equitable sporting environment for Canadians in different regional contexts.

Lastly, there are still unanswered questions that fell outside of the overall scope of this research project. For example, by focusing more on a spatial justice lens through the collection and analysis of the data, future researchers have the potential to explore key issues around inequality and inequity within a Canadian context and its relation to geographies of sport. Better understanding spatial inequities related to access (due to race, gender, sexuality, etc.) has the potential to make a lasting impact and greatly contribute to the sport management literature and practice in Canada. Future work that focuses on how certain groups struggle for power within an institutionalized spatial context has the potential to have important implications for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore how regions are understood by actors within PSOs and how institutional pressures impact the management of these regions within Ontario. Through detailed data collection within an instrumental case study methodology, and thematic analysis, this research has contributed to the knowledge base of sport governance in Canada, shedding light on the nuanced interplay between regional dynamics and institutional influences. The findings of

this study underscore the complexity inherent in the conceptualization of regions by actors within PSOs. This complexity highlights the necessity for governance frameworks that are not only flexible but also contextually responsive to regions' diverse needs and interpretations. Recognizing and accommodating this regional heterogeneity is essential for developing more effective and inclusive sport governance policies and practices.

Additionally, the study illustrated the impact of institutional pressures on the operations and strategic management of PSOs. These pressures, encompassing regulatory, financial, and societal expectations, shape how regions are managed within these organizations. An awareness and strategic navigation of these pressures are crucial for enhancing the management and performance of PSOs. This research enriches the theoretical discourse on organizational fields in sport governance by providing empirical evidence of the interactions between regional contexts and institutional structures. The insights gained from this study can inform future research and encourage a deeper investigation into the dynamics of sport governance across different settings and sports.

In conclusion, this study offers important insights into the understanding and management of regions within Ontario's PSOs, underscoring the pivotal role of institutional pressures within organizational fields. By integrating these insights, PSOs can enhance their governance practices, thereby fostering more effective sport development and organizational success. This research not only contributes to the academic understanding of sport governance but also provides practical guidance for improving equity and access to sport for all Canadians, in Ontario and beyond.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide Provincial Sport Organizations:

1. Please describe for me your organization and your role within the organization
 - a. How long have you been in that role? Have you had others?
 - b. Do you have experiences with other roles/organizations in sport?
2. Where is your organization based, and how long have you lived/worked in your municipality?
 - a. How would you describe the region in which you work?
 - b. How is the region different from your municipality?
3. What do sport development efforts look like in your organization?
 - a. What are the main goals or objectives of your organization?
 - b. Who is responsible for mass participation outcomes?
 - c. How important is the promotion of sport participation at your organization?
 - d. Who are your target or demographic groups?
 - e. How (if at all) has this changed over time?
4. What are the most important/prevalent drivers of change in your organization?
 - a. Probe for internal and external
 - b. Can you give an example of how and why change has occurred?
5. How would you describe your familiarity with sport policy?
 - a. In Ontario? In Canada?
 - b. How does policy shape the work you do in your organization?
 - c. How has policy changed and what impact have these changes had?
6. Are there specific policies or political decisions more broadly that have changed your role or the way your organization operates?
 - a. Who makes them? How important are they in shaping your day-to-day activities?
 - b. What policies are most important for increasing sport participation?
 - i. Probe for Municipal, Provincial, Federal Governments
 - c. What would your organization need to increase sport participation?
 - d. What recommendation would you make to a policy maker who wanted to increase sport participation?
7. Who are the easiest and most difficult demographics to connect with?

8. How does your organization recognize or distinguish between different kinds of member clubs?
 - a. Probe for competition, capacity, geography, etc.
 - b. How formal are these distinctions?
9. Does your organization formally distinguish different regions of the province?
 - a. How?
 - b. Are regions formally articulated in policy?
 - c. What are the resource implications?
10. How are regions and/or regional boundaries decided?
 - a. Who makes decisions?
 - b. Do boundaries change?
11. How would you describe the purpose of regions for your organization?
 - a. What do regions “do”?
 - b. Who is most and least invested in regions?
12. How are regions reflected in the organizational structure of your organization?
13. How are regions reflected in the policy and decision-making of your organization?
 - a. Can you give an example?
14. How are resources reflected in the way you allocate and assign resources in your organization?
 - a. How are these assignments made?
15. Is there anything else I should know that may not have been discussed in the interview questions?

Extra Notes

- Let the participant know when we are nearing the end of the allotted interview time (60 minutes). Allow the participant to decide whether to continue the interview.
- Thank the participant and ask if it would be okay to follow-up with them, should a second, shorter interview be necessary for clarity of concepts already discussed.

Appendix B: Sample Letter of Invitation



Faculty of Applied Health Sciences
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies

Letter of Invitation and Consent Form

Niagara Region
1812 Sir Isaac Brock Way
St. Catharines, ON
L2S 3A1 Canada

brocku.ca

Date: September 27, 2023

Project Title: Regional Policy and Sport Participation

Principal Investigator: Dr. Kyle Rich - krich@brocku.ca
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, Brock University
Phone Number: (613) 857-6462

Research Assistant: Dante Losardo - dl12nf@brocku.ca
Department of Sport Management, Brock University

Co-Investigator: Ann Pegoraro - pegoraro@uoguelph.ca
Gordon S. Lang School of Business and Economics, University of Guelph

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled Regional Policy and Sport Participation. Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to take part in an interview regarding your experiences with sport development efforts taking place within your organization. The expected duration of the interview is approximately 60 minutes.

The research will assist in gaining a deeper understanding of regional differences in sport development and policy implementation. Findings will be useful for policymakers as they will provide insights into how diverse groups of citizens might be better served through the sport system. Findings will also support advocacy for a more just and equitable system that provides accessible sport participation opportunities for all Canadians.

Please see the attached letter for a full explanation of the project and your rights as a participant. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Brock University Research Ethics Officer (905 688-5550 ext 3035, reb@brocku.ca).

If you are interested in participating in this project, or have any questions, please contact Dante or Kyle to arrange a time for an interview (see above for contact information).

Thank you,

Dante Losardo

Appendix C: Consent Form

INVITATION

You are invited to participate in a research project. The focus of this project is to gain a more in depth understanding of how policy flows through the sport system and to examine how regional and/or jurisdictional differences impact sport policy implementation. More specifically, the research is seeking to:

- (1) understand how regions are understood by sport practitioners
- (2) understand the regional impacts of sports policy on sport participation
- (3) to understand how institutional factors impact regional differences in sport participation policy implementation.

WHAT'S INVOLVED

As a participant, you will be asked to participate in an interview regarding your experiences of how sport development efforts take place within your organization. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes and will be audio and video recorded. There will be potential for a follow-up interview should more information be needed.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS

The potential benefits of involvement in the project include contributing to a deeper understanding of regional differences in sport development and policy implementation. Findings will be useful for policy makers as they will provide insights into how diverse groups of citizens might be better served through the sport system. Findings will also support advocacy for a more just and equitable system that provides accessible sport participation opportunities for all Canadians.

There are possible social risks involved with participation in this project. During the interview, questions will be asked regarding the organization you represent as well as other partners involved. The answers given may reflect the reputation of certain organizations, however, participants are not required to answer all questions, and they are able to withdraw some or all of their participation at any time. Data will remain confidential and any excerpts from conversations will only be associated with pseudonyms.

There is inherent risks in sending data electronically, albeit small, if you are interested in the security policy of the MS Teams platform see: <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/blog/2020/04/06/microsofts-commitment-privacy-security-microsoft-teams/>

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information you provide will be kept confidential. Your name will not appear in any report resulting from this study; however, de-identified quotations may be used. Participants will be identified in the results by pseudonyms. The identifiers that will be included in the results are

solely a pseudonym name and the sport you are associated with (e.g., John, Basketball). Participant's names will not be disclosed, and the organization will only be described using indicators such as basketball club in a mid-sized urban centre. Data collected during this study will be stored on Brock University's technology (MS Teams) and will be password protected. Access to this data will be restricted to the investigator and research assistants. Data will be retained for seven years after which, all files will be deleted.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time and may do so without any penalty. Should you decide to withdraw all or part of your data following the interview, you can do so by contacting Kyle at the email address listed above. All data can be withdrawn to the extent possible.

PUBLICATION OF RESULTS

Findings will be presented at academic conferences and published in academic journals. Participants are instructed to reach out to the primary investigator (Kyle) should you wish to receive copies of these publications. You can also be provided with a summary of the complete research project including findings and implications.

CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please feel free to contact the principal investigator using the contact information above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University (22-014-RICH).

If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca.

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

CONSENT STATEMENT

I agree to participate in this study described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time.

Please note you will be asked to confirm your consent to participate at the beginning of our interview.