

Chapter 9

Ireland

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9.1 Introduction

Sport in Ireland is popular and widespread. The level of participation and attendance is high (46 %, ISM 2011), but there is some evidence of a lack of engagement in certain sectors, verified by an increasing proportion of the population being classified as obese or overweight (Green 2012). Ireland¹ is a small country in terms of population – the Republic has a population of 4.58 million according to the Central Statistics Office (CSO 2013) while Northern Ireland has a population of 1.81 million (NISRA 2013), yet there is a wide variety of sports organizations and bodies reflecting diverse sports participation.

The evolution of Ireland's sports system stems from the development of modern codified sport in Britain during the second half of the nineteenth century (Cronin 1999). Cronin asserts that in many larger Irish towns, sports clubs for soccer, rugby, and hockey emerged, and they formed leagues and conducted cup competitions. The process of codification was taken further in 1884 with the foundation of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), a specifically Irish sporting body to promote the wider Gaelic revival, i.e., the promotion of the Irish language and culture as well as the “native” Irish games. At that time, Irish culture was being steadily eroded by emigration and desperate poverty (GAA 2013). Around that time also, a number of formal organizations emerged – the Irish Football Association (IFA) was formed in 1890, the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) in 1879, and the Irish Amateur Athletic (IAA) Association in 1885.

¹ Since 1921, under the Government of Ireland Act 1920, the island of Ireland consists of the Republic of Ireland (26 counties) and Northern Ireland (6 counties) which is part of the United Kingdom.

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The more popular team sports in Ireland in terms of participation are soccer (Association football), Gaelic football, rugby union, and hockey (field) while the more popular individual sports include swimming, tennis, boxing, and golf. Few sports in Ireland are fully professional (rugby union and golf being exceptions), and the sports infrastructure (while improving) is less developed than that of other countries such as England, Spain, France, and Holland. Since the formation of the current government in 2011, oversight for sport policy is under the remit of the Minister for Transport, within the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTAS).

9.2 Sport System and the Structure of Organized Sport

9.2.1 *Core Principles and the Overall Structure of Sport in Ireland*

The core principles underpinning sport in Ireland are shaped by government policy in conjunction with the Sport National Governing Bodies (NGBs). From the government perspective, the emphasis is on sports for all participation, with a view to promoting health and personal well-being. This is to be facilitated by the design and provision of a sports infrastructure which meets the needs of key stakeholders. From the NGB's perspective, the core principles are to promote active participation in their sport, to raise the profile of their game(s), and to make efficient use of their resources and capabilities. A number of NGBs provide education and up-skilling programs/seminars for officers and members that focus on coaching standards, levels, and qualifications; child protection principles and practice; health and safety requirements; and governance and financial management.

The community-based club is at the bottom of the organized sport pyramid in Ireland. This entity provides an introduction for the majority of children to sporting activity and allows them to continue their interest and practice into adulthood. These clubs usually rely on volunteers, with parents often acting as club administrators, coaches, match referees, team managers, mentors, etc. In some cases, professional (paid) coaches are employed to develop and enhance members' talents, skills, practice, and competencies. Members of these clubs attend training on a weekly basis (usually in the evenings) and participate in competitions at weekends. All community-based sports clubs operate in association with and are governed by their respective NGB, either at provincial or national level.

Sports participation is also promoted and facilitated in the Irish school (primary and secondary) system. Many sports such as Gaelic games, rugby union, soccer, hockey, cricket, basketball, badminton, netball, and tennis are organized and available.² Pupils progress their school sports activities by engaging in after-school coaching, training, and practice sessions (evenings 4–6 pm) during the week and by participating

²There are a variety of school ownership arrangements in Ireland which include the government (state schools) and independent bodies/agencies, mainly religious orders/denominations.

in school competitions midweek (Wednesdays) or during weekends. Sports NGBs provide differing levels of support to school sport such as the provision of sports equipment and funding; special programs and personnel to assist student coaching, training, and mentoring; and administrative supports to oversee schools' provincial and national competitions.

There are 64 Sports' National Governing Bodies in Ireland which are supported in their operations by the Irish government and the Irish Sports Council (ISC). The GAA is the largest body in terms of membership – it currently has 2,550 clubs in Ireland and a further 350 clubs overseas (GAA 2011). It is organized on a county basis, and each County Board reports to the Provincial Council which in turn reports to Central Council in Croke Park. A similar organization structure is used by other NGBs (Irish Hockey Association, Irish Rugby Football Union, Football Association of Ireland) but with less emphasis on the county level. Many NGB local competitions (League and Cup) are organized using the county and provincial structure as a feeder to national level.

Several sports bodies operate on an All-Ireland basis with a single National Governing Body (NGB) – Irish Rugby Football Union (rugby union), Gaelic Athletic Association (Gaelic games), Irish Hockey Association (field hockey), and the Golfing Union of Ireland³ (golf) – while others have separate organizing bodies for the Republic of Ireland (ROI) and Northern Ireland (NI). These include the Football Association of Ireland and the Irish Football Association (soccer) and Netball Ireland and Netball Northern Ireland (netball).

9.2.2 *Organization of Sport*

The organization of individual sports is primarily promoted and facilitated through each of Ireland's 64 National Governing Bodies (NGBs), in conjunction with local community-based clubs, schools (state/private; primary/second level), higher education institutions (HEIs), and other key stakeholders. Other bodies involved in sport organization at national nongovernment level (see Fig. 9.1) include the Olympic Council of Ireland (OCI), Paralympics Ireland (PI), Special Olympics Ireland, and Colleges and Universities Sports Association of Ireland (CUSAI).

Community-based clubs offer membership through annual subscriptions or fees which entitle members avail of the club's facilities and services (coaching, training, fitness, psychology, medical, etc.) and to participate in competitions. These are primarily nongovernmental entities; however, they receive state grants and funding to assist them promote and engage in their sports activities and increase local participation. A number of private sports clubs offer health, fitness, and leisure services which supplement the activities of athletes (professional and nonprofessional).

The regional element of the nongovernmental sports structure is normally an administrative entity, i.e., the provincial council of the NGB. These regional entities govern the sport within a designated geographical area and are overseen by and

³There are separate NGBs for men's and women's golf in Ireland – Golfing Union of Ireland (GUI) and the Ladies Golf Union (ILGU).

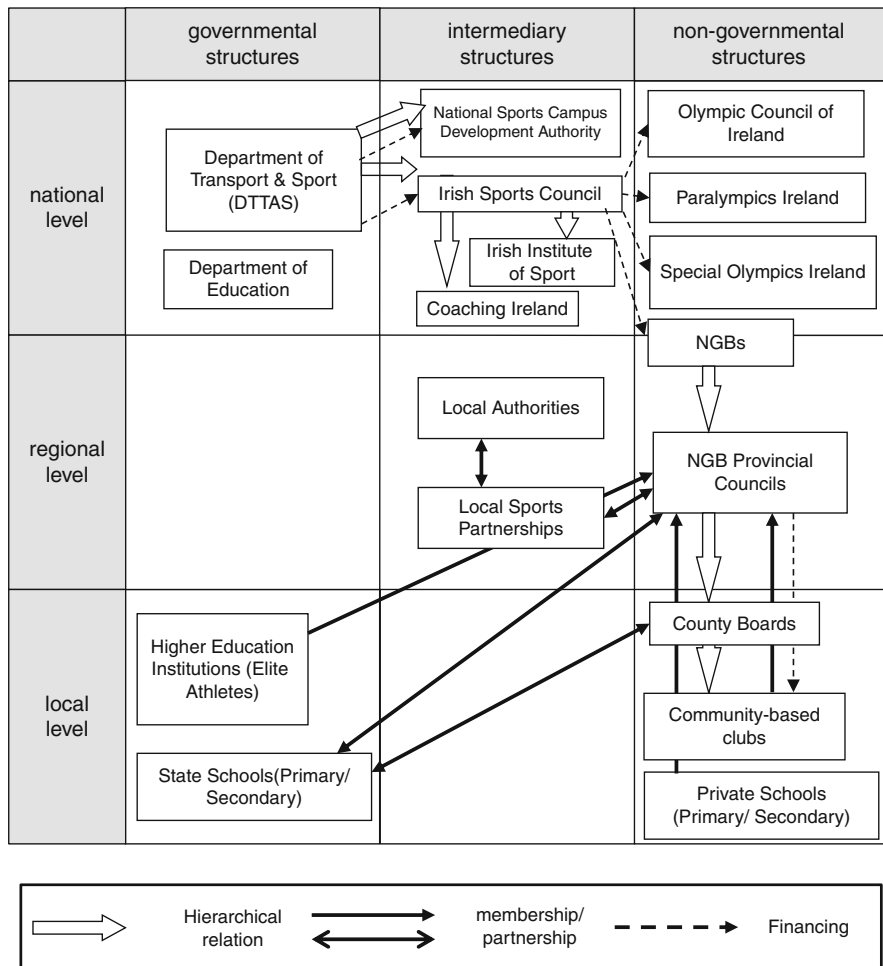


Fig. 9.1 Framework of Ireland’s sport structure. Note: *NGB* National Governing Bodies

report to the national body. Many domestic competitions (leagues/cups) operate on a provincial⁴ basis, eventually feeding into the national competition.

At national level, government oversight on sport is exercised through the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTAS). The department operates in conjunction with various agencies, primarily the Irish Sports Council (ISC) and the National Sports Campus Development Authority (NSCSA), to ensure that participation in sport increases, that participants’ performance standards are enhanced, and that Ireland’s sporting infrastructure and facilities meet the needs of all stakeholders.

⁴There are four provinces in Ireland: Ulster (includes six Northern Ireland counties), Munster, Leinster, and Connaught.

To assist the government achieve its sports policy targets, two regional bodies are pertinent – Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) and Local Authorities. LSPs were introduced to create a sustainable structure for all Irish people to become involved in sport at a level of their choosing, regardless of background, gender, or ability. These partnerships work in conjunction with Local Authorities (County and City Councils) to identify sporting needs (infrastructural or activity based).

The majority of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Ireland (universities, Institutes of Technology, teacher training colleges, etc.) are state funded and operate at local level. To facilitate elite athlete development, many HEIs offer sports scholarship programs which allow students combine third-level study with sporting ambitions. In some cases, these scholarship programs are funded by the respective institutions, while in others they are partially funded by various NGBs. An integrated Physical Education and School Sport (PESS) curriculum is offered across Irish schools, some of which offer a wide variety of sports, while others often limit the focus to a few, prioritized sports aligned with dedicated coaches or physical education sport. Many Irish second-level schools are renowned for particular team sports – rugby union, Gaelic games, soccer, badminton, and netball (Bradley et al. 2013).

9.2.3 Governmental Levels of Responsibility

Two units within the DTTAS –*Sports Capital Division and the Sport Policy and Campus*– are involved in designing and coordinating sport policy on behalf of the Irish government. The former oversees the funding and administration of the sport capital programs, while the latter is responsible for liaising with key agencies, organizations, and bodies (including the Irish Sports Council) in implementing government sports policy.

The Irish Sports Council is central to developing sporting talent and ability while at the same time driving sports participation in conjunction with the following bodies – governmental (1–5) and nongovernmental (6–11):

1. Local Authorities provide sports facilities and coordinate the efforts of national and local agencies to develop community facilities.
2. Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) promote the development of sport at local level and provide leadership, coordination, and direction.
3. Irish Institute of Sport (IIS) works with NGBs and elite athletes providing access to the most up-to-date supports needed to compete at the highest levels.
4. Coaching Ireland (formerly the National Coaching and Training Centre) works with each NGB to fully establish and deliver the Coach Development Model (LISPA).
5. National Sports Campus Development Authority (NSCDA) has responsibility for the development of Ireland’s main national sports facilities and the national sports campus at Abbotstown, Co. Dublin.
6. National Governing Bodies of Sport’s (NGBs) role is to develop and promote their sport and service the needs of members.
7. Local sports clubs provide individuals with an opportunity to participate in individual and team sports.

8. Private sector is involved in the management of certain recreational facilities (health and fitness clubs) which can increase participation in sport.
9. Olympic Council of Ireland (OCI) coordinates and manages Team Ireland's athlete performance, operations planning, and management at each Olympiad/
10. Paralympic Ireland (PI) is responsible for preparing and managing the Irish team at the Paralympic Games.
11. Special Olympics Ireland provides opportunities for individuals with learning disabilities engage in sport in their local community and to participate in high-quality sport and development activities.

Apart from DTTAS and the Department of Education, a number of other government departments are involved in sport policy design and implementation. These include the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government; the Department of Health; the Department of Children and Youth Affairs; and the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

The regional manifestation of sports policy and development is evident in Local Authorities' engagement in planning and developing recreational sports facilities, the management of public facilities, and by the activities of Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs). There are 31 LSPs in Ireland, and their main role is to facilitate club development, volunteer training, and enhanced planning for and participation in sport at local level.

9.2.4 NGOs' Levels of Responsibility

In Ireland, Sport National Governing Bodies (NGBs) are the key delivery agencies for the Irish Sports Council's (ISC) strategic priorities. Together with their member clubs and affiliates, NGBs are responsible for the following:

1. *Organize and administer most of the organized sport in Ireland* – this includes national and international competitions. The leading national sports body (GAA) organizes national league and cup competitions at county, provincial, and national level. The Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU), the Football Association of Ireland (FAI), the Irish Hockey Association (IHA), and the other NGBs organize and manage local league and cup competitions, which embrace all levels of sport from primary school children to adults.
2. *Train and deploy coaches* – this involves partnering with Coaching Ireland (CI) in designing and enhancing coaching standards and requirements. While some sports have internationally recognized standards (FAI, IRFU, IHA, etc.), the GAA has worked closely in devising standards and qualifications for accrediting current and aspiring coaches in soccer, hurling, and camogie. Each NGB is also responsible for the training and development of referees and match officials.
3. *Organize representative level sport* – NGBs participating in international competitions facilitate and manage the hosting of competitions. For example, the IRFU organizes and hosts the RBS Six Nations, Rabo Direct Pro 12, and Heineken Cup matches in Ireland. The Football Association of Ireland (FAI)

organizes international qualifiers for European and World Cup competitions. Similarly, qualifying competitions and events in other sports (golf, tennis, hockey, cricket, etc.) are hosted by the respective NGB.

4. *Provide sporting opportunities and pathways* – NGBs are responsible for leading aspiring elite athletes from local sport to national and international competition. The close association between the ISC and NGBs facilitates the identification of young sporting talent, affords opportunities to nurture them, and ensures that they have effective supports (sport and non-sporting) to allow them achieve their goals. Many NGBs collaborate with higher education institutions (HEI) in identifying and supporting talented youngsters by way of sports grants and scholarships.

The Federation of Irish Sport was formed in 2002 by the national governing bodies (NGBs) mainly to represent the NGB viewpoint on key issues, particularly in negotiations (mainly funding) with the Irish government. The Federation is more akin to a lobbying organization and ensures that sport in Ireland has an independent voice (Federation of Irish Sport 2013).

9.3 Financing of Sport

9.3.1 Policy of Financing Sport

As illustrated in Fig. 9.1, sport in Ireland is mainly financed by government by way of grants and subsidies drawing on central funds including the National Lottery. There is a capital and current program. All funding is primarily channeled directly through the Sports Capital Program or indirectly through Local Authorities and the Irish Sports Council (ISC) by way of annual grants and awards. The Sports Capital Program grants are awarded based on applications submitted to the DTTAS. The awards are made on a case-by-case basis drawing on each applicant's documentation and the extent to which the organization can provide its own funding as part of the project. Current funding is directed towards the high-performance (HP) program and the development of NGB capacity and activities (core funding). Irish NGBs fund their sporting endeavors and operations through various revenue streams (commercial sponsorship and gate receipts) and initiatives (events, functions, lotteries, etc.).

The chief purpose of high-performance (HP) program is to ensure that aspiring elite athletes have sufficient financial support to allow them to improve their performance and achieve consistent success at world level (win medals). Under the current international carding system, elite athletes are expected to meet published performance criteria and show progression over a number of years within each senior level carding category in order to retain their funding.

Given Ireland's economic downturn (2007 onwards), there has been restrictions on government funding for sport. For 2013, EUR 6.8 million (EUR 7.2 M in 2012) will be invested in 19 HP sports programs, in OCI and PI, with a further EUR 1.8 million allocated to support 87 athletes under the International Carding Scheme. Fourteen aspiring Irish golfers will also be supported under the Team Ireland Golfing Trust.

The NGB government grants (core funding) cover cost of administration, participation programs, coach development, hosting events, implementing strategic plans, and the employment of professional staff. The amount awarded to 59 NGBs for 2013 totaled EUR 10.8 million (EUR 11 M in 2012). In addition to these awards, EUR 0.58 million (EUR 0.62 M in 2012) has been awarded to the Women in Sport (WIS) program for activities in conjunction with 22 Sport NGBs. The three leading NGBs (Football Association of Ireland, Gaelic Athletic Association, and the Irish Rugby Football Union) have been given EUR 7.6 million (EUR 8.0 M in 2012) to promote further participation (particularly in disadvantaged areas) in their sports. A further EUR 0.25 million has been awarded to the FAI and the IRFU through the WIS program.

Sport financing by NGBs is mainly for elite player development, event organization, player welfare and wages,⁵ and administration costs. These bodies must also set aside sums to cover depreciation, amortization of goodwill, and the like. The Indecon Report (2010) estimated NGB expenditure for 2008 was EUR 224.9 million. The principal expenditure categories (*amounts in brackets*) listed include specific competition/sport event expenditure (EUR 58.7 M), coaching and training expenses (EUR 30.9 M), and wages and salaries (EUR 27.4 M). It is interesting to note that during 2012, total spending by the IRFU amounted to EUR 59.4 million, while the GAA incurred expenditure of EUR 43.7 million. The GAA spent the larger sums on games development (EUR 9.9 M), match day costs (EUR 9.6 M), and county and provincial distributions (EUR 8.8 M). Unsurprisingly, the main costs incurred by the IRFU were professional game costs (EUR 31.5 M) – this amounts to over one half of its total expenditure. Expenditure by the IRFU on domestic and local rugby during 2012 was EUR 9.3 million, while EUR 4.5 million was spent on administration and overheads.

The principal revenue sources for NGBs include government grants (high performance, WIS, etc.) and subsidies, sponsorship (commercial), and gate receipts from representative matches. The Indecon Report (2010) estimates that NGB's Income for that year amounted to EUR 210.5 million. The larger income categories were entry fees and admissions (EUR 81.1 M); sport council grant income (EUR 32.8 M); and specific competition/sport event-related income (EUR 30.3 M). According to the most recent GAA and IRFU Annual Reports (2013), total revenue earned for the GAA amounted to EUR 52.8 million while the IRFU earned EUR 67.2 million during 2012. For the GAA the major sources of revenue in 2012 were gate receipts (EUR 26.8 M), commercial revenue (EUR 17.6 M), and state funding (EUR 3.1 M) while the IRFU gained a large proportion of its revenue from representative matches (EUR 63 M).

Several NGBs encourage and seek corporate donations from individuals and corporate players – such donations are tax deductible. The Government Sports Capital Programme provides grants for facilities enhancement, and these funds must be matched. Consequently, the funding of grass roots sport is largely driven by individual sports NGBs in conjunction with community-based clubs. Many local clubs organize special fund-raising activities or host annual events to improve the financial fortunes of local sport.

⁵ While sport (competitive and leisure) is largely offered on an amateur basis in Ireland, it is essential to note that many sports NGBs employ full-time paid professionals in addition to volunteers to improve the management and organization of their activities and services.

9.3.2 *Financing of Sport Facilities*

Funding from the Sports Capital Program (SCP⁶) has provided an enhanced range of sports facilities at national, regional, and local level. The DTTAS operates two grant programs – the Sports Capital Program and the Local Authority Swimming Pool Program. *The Sports Capital Program* aims to foster an integrated and planned approach to developing sports and physical recreation facilities throughout the country. It assists voluntary and community organizations, sports’ national governing bodies (NGBs), Local Authorities, and in some cases Vocational Education Committees (VECs) and schools to develop high-quality, safe, well-designed, sustainable facilities in appropriate locations and to provide suitable equipment to help maximize participation in sport and physical recreation (DTTAS 2012). *The Local Authority Swimming Pool Program* provides grant aid from the Exchequer to Local Authorities and bodies towards the cost of providing new swimming pools or refurbishing existing pools.

The quality of Ireland’s sports facilities has improved over the last 10 years due largely to initiatives by various sport organizations and in other cases a combined government and sports body effort. Ireland now boasts of two world-class stadia. Croke Park (the home of the GAA) is the fourth largest stadium in Europe with capacity for 82,300 spectators. The Croke Park redevelopment was part funded by the state (25 %), the remainder was provided by the GAA. The Aviva Stadium (formerly Lansdowne Road, used by the FAI and IRFU) has been redeveloped to a 50,000 all-seated stadium. Other sports facilities (*the majority in the Dublin area*) have been redeveloped to meet the coaching and competition needs of the following sports – aquatics, athletics, badminton, basketball, boxing, cricket, golf, hockey, judo, rowing, and tennis. Under the National Sports Facilities Strategy 2012–2015, efforts are now directed at the provision of quality sports facilities at national, regional, and local level which are fit for purpose, are accessible to all, and meet the needs of the recreational and elite athletes. In recent years, a number of municipal multisport facilities have been developed and funded by the DTTAS. These combine a range of indoor and outdoor sports, fitness, and recreational facilities in one location.

9.3.3 *Voluntary Engagement*

Volunteering in sport is deeply rooted in the history of sport in Ireland, mainly through Gaelic games organized by the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). While there is no official definition of a sport volunteer in Ireland, recent studies (Delaney and Fahey 2005; Irish Sport Monitor (ISM) 2011) reveal that approximately 15 % of adults volunteer in sports. Delaney and Fahy (2005) assert that volunteering is higher among males (18 %) than females (12 %), which equates to 420,000

⁶ Due to the economic downturn in Ireland, the Government’s SCP was suspended between 2008 and 2011.

Table 9.1 Volunteering across sports (in percentage)

		Male	Female	All
1	GAA football	24	18	21
2	Soccer	22	13	17
3	GAA hurling	19	11	15
4	Swimming	2	9	6
5	Camogie	3	6	4
6	Golf	4	3	4
7	Basketball	2	5	4
8	Rugby	3	2	3
9	Athletics	2	4	3
10	Ladies Gaelic football	1	4	2
11	Other	18	25	22

Source: Delaney and Fahey (2005)

volunteers, 250,000 men and 170,000 women. The ISM (2011) report suggests that a larger proportion of volunteers are engaged in team sports (11 %) compared with 4 % involved in individual sports. The more common volunteering activities are providing transport, coaching, acting as a club official, and being an event organizer and kit maintenance. Table 9.1 lists the more popular sports which attract volunteers drawing on a study completed by the Economic Social Research Institute (Delaney and Fahey 2005).

Given its extensive parish club network and cultural remit and roots, it is no surprise that the GAA attracts the highest proportion (42 %) of volunteers – GAA football and hurling⁷ (36 %) and camogie⁸ and ladies football (6 %). Soccer as the most widely played team sport in Ireland is listed second, as it has an extensive community-based club structure.

The 2005 ESRI report puts the economic value for sports volunteering at EUR 26.7 million per annum (GHK 2010). The figures provided by the Indecon Report (2010) give a different picture – it estimates that almost 270,000 people participate in some form of sport-related voluntary activity in Ireland. On an annual basis, it is estimated that approximately 37.2 million volunteer hours are spent on sport-related activities. According to the Indecon research, the annual value of volunteering in sport in Ireland ranges between a lower-bound estimate of EUR 322 million annually and an upper-bound estimate of EUR 582 million annually.

Ireland has an evolving infrastructure to promote and support volunteering that includes Volunteering Ireland, a volunteer development agency which supports organizations in building their capacity for effective volunteer involvement. In addition, Volunteer Centers Ireland is the national network of local volunteer centers providing a brokerage service, linking volunteers with opportunities throughout the country.

⁷Hurling is a traditional team sport in Ireland which is played with a stick (camán) and ball (sliotar). It has been described as a form of aerial hockey – www.gaa.ie.

⁸Camogie is team game played by women using a stick and ball. It is very similar to hurling.

9.4 Sports Policy

Little or no attention was given to sport policy in Ireland until the late 1990s. The lack of government involvement lies partly in financial conservatism of the major political parties at the time and partly in the sophistication and geographical coverage of the GAA organization, but primarily in the lack of need for government intervention. According to Houlihan (1997), the Irish government encouraged the GAA and the National Athletics and Cycling Association (NACA) to organize the sporting life of the country with extremely modest finance and without significant interference. The first strategy plan for sport in Ireland entitled “Targeting Sporting Change in Ireland 1997–2006” was published in 1997 by the Department of Education which sought to bring all elements of sport together in a cohesive way for the benefit of all those involved in sport – participants, coaches, leaders, administrators, and other stakeholders. Strategic goals to be achieved by 2006 were set out along with core principles underpinning its development. The Irish Sports Council (ISC) was established in 1999 as the lead body to coordinate and monitor government initiatives and actions.

The Irish Sports Council’s vision is one where sport contributes to enhancing the quality of Irish life and everyone is encouraged and valued in sport; young people see sport participation as an integral and enjoyable part of their busy lives; individuals can develop their sporting abilities and enhance their enjoyment, limited only by their talent and commitment; and Irish sportsmen and women achieve consistent world-class performance, fairly (Irish Sports Council 2011). To complete its remit, the ISC comprises eight major divisions – Anti-doping, Corporate Services, High Performance, Irish Institute of Sport, Local Sports Partnerships, National Governing Bodies, National Trails Office, and Research.

Under Section 25 of the Irish Sports Council Act 1999, the Council is obliged to prepare a 3-year strategy statement, the most recent one being for the period 2012–2014. According to this statement, the ISC will continue to focus on the following key areas: (a) advancing the participation strategy, (b) developing the capacity of the National Governing Body sector, and (c) sustaining the high-performance system.

In the following paragraphs, three main areas of national sports policy are outlined.

9.4.1 *Elite Sport Development: High Performance*

The contribution of various players within the Irish Education system (second-level school authorities, teachers, coaches, etc.) to the development of certain sports and the identification of young sporting talent particularly in Gaelic football, hurling, rugby union, athletics, basketball, and netball have been considerable (Bourke 2011). This, to some extent, has been facilitated by inputs from various NGBs to enhance the sporting prowess of young players. However, for other aspiring elite athletes (swimming, golf, soccer, and the like), young talent identification and development occurs outside formal schooling and within community-based clubs.

These clubs (like secondary school sport) operate largely on a voluntary basis, and in recent years better supports (financial and otherwise) have been made available by respective sports NGBs.

The normal route to elite sports development is through the pertinent NGB which in various cases is assisted by higher education institutions (HEIs) either through elite athlete academies (EAA) or by way of sports scholarships. It must be noted that many of Ireland's elite athletes have opted to pursue their sporting career dreams abroad. This occurs mainly in soccer as young players are offered trials at UK Premiership clubs (Manchester United, Liverpool, Arsenal, and the like). Many leading North American and UK universities have facilitated international student athlete mobility out of Ireland by way of sports scholarships, particularly for aspiring elite athletes pursuing golf, swimming, tennis, and women's soccer. The role of the Colleges and Universities Sports Association of Ireland (CUSAI) in promoting semi-elite sports development and performance is worth noting. CUSAI as FISU's national affiliate coordinates the participation of Irish third-level athletes at the biennial World University Games, World University Championships, and the European Universities Sports Championships. Tennis Ireland operates the only Sports Academy in Ireland in conjunction with Dublin City University. There are plans for a National Soccer Academy, but these are currently on hold.

For those athletes who wish to enhance their performance in the local setting, the Irish Sports Council (ISC) High-Performance Unit offers supports (sporting and non-sporting) in conjunction with the relevant NGB. Under the ISC International Carding System, EUR 1.7 million has been awarded to elite athletes for 2013. The awards are in the following designated sports – athletics, badminton, boxing, canoeing, clay pigeon shooting, cycling, judo, pentathlon, triathlon, rowing, sailing, swimming, and water sports – and are also given to athletes competing in Paralympic athletics and swimming, Irish Wheelchair Sport, and Cerebral Palsy Sport. In addition to supporting sports for Olympic/Paralympic medals, the ISC also invests in the high-performance programs of Cricket Ireland, the Golfing Union of Ireland, the Irish Ladies Golfing Union, and Women's Rugby.

9.4.2 Women in Sport (WIS) Initiative

The “Women in Sport Initiative” was launched by the Irish Sports Council in 2005 and sets out to address the differences that exist between women's and men's interaction with sport, with patterns of volunteering being an area of analysis. The overarching objectives of the Women in Sport (WIS) program are to raise overall physical activity levels among women and to support women's roles within sports organizations.

The financial allocations to the Women in Sport (WIS) program have increased over the years from EUR 750,000 in 2005 to EUR 2.2 million in 2008 (Irish Sports Council 2011). Most of this funding is targeted towards programs rolled out by Sport National Governing Bodies and Local Sports Partnerships as delivery agents for the Irish Sports Council.

9.4.3 Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs)

Local Sports Partnerships were introduced in 2004 by the Irish Sports Council, and their primary aim is to increase participation in sport and to ensure better use and coordination of resources and activities at local level. They offer services not previously available or which would not be provided by other agencies or organizations, due mainly to cost constraints.

The role of LSPs is to (i) provide information using appropriate strategies (forums, directories, databases) to assist local planning; (ii) offer education and training opportunities at local level targeting volunteers, providing access to sport-specific courses through the national governing bodies (NGBs); and (iii) strategic planning for local areas through the appointment of professional administrators, securing related support services and increasing the impact of national programs at local level.

LSP membership draws on statutory bodies, organizations, and groups operating in local areas with a responsibility for or interest in sports development. The involvement of Vocational Education Committees (VECs), City and County councils, the Health Service Executive, universities, colleges, Institutes of Technology, commercial companies, sports' clubs, and NGBs is expected.

While LSPs are funded by the ISC, they are expected to generate 50 % of their operational funding. For 2013, Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) have been awarded EUR 5.1 million. This is a decrease on the 2012 figure of EUR 5.5 million. There are two types of LSP grant aid: (a) core funding to be used for staff costs and developing partnerships and local initiatives and (b) program funding designed towards high-priority, targeted initiatives identified and promoted by the LSP.

LSPs are considered to be successful as documented in the annual reviews. The major outcomes are the improved quality of information available on sports services and facilities at local level and the increased engagement by various parties in training and organization development programs – particularly those offered by the ISC and certain NGBs.

9.5 Sport Participation

The ISC's Irish Sport Monitor (ISM) project is designed to measure and monitor physical and social participation in sport and other forms of exercise among a representative sample of the Irish⁹ population aged 16 and over. The survey uses large sample sizes to ensure robustness in the estimates both at overall level and for key social demographic subgroups.

⁹The ISM data gathered refers to the Republic of Ireland only.

Table 9.2 More popular sports participation: male and female

Sports	Males (%)		Sports	Females (%)	
	2011	2009		2011	2009
Soccer	12	11	Exercise	13	7
Exercise	10	5	Swimming	11	9
Running	9	4	Dancing	5	3
Swimming	9	6	Running	5	2
Cycling	4	4	Cycling	3	2
Golf	8	8	Yoga	2	1
Gaelic football	4	4	Golf	2	1
Hurling	3	2	Gaelic football	2	1
Weights	3	1	Tennis	1	1

For the purpose of the ISM project, sport is defined as any physical activities that are undertaken for exercise, recreation, or sport, excluding walking (ISM 2011). The ISM Project is designed to monitor changes in participation in sport and physical exercise over a period of years. Sports' participation data is gathered using a detailed questionnaire which employs a 1-week "reference period" (i.e., respondents are asked only about activities which were undertaken within the previous 7 days), records the type of activity undertaken using an open-ended question format, and obtains information about the frequency, duration, effort, and context associated with participation in each of up to three activities. The questionnaire thus aims to maximize the chances of accurate recall and to permit a strict definition of participation to be applied. The ISM report data were collected by way of telephone interviews, and the sample size for 2011 was 8,749 (in 2009 it was 9,767) individuals aged 16 years or over. Four ISM reports have been published to date (Irish Sports Council 2011; Lunn and Layte 2008, 2009; Lunn et al. 2007).

The ISM (2011) findings reveal that sports participation in Ireland has risen from 34 % (2009) to 46 % of the population. Participation in team sports (12 %) has remained steady compared with the 2009 (10 %) figure, but participation in individual sports (running, cycling, swimming, personal exercise) has risen considerably. Age and gender are two demographic factors most strongly correlated with sports participation – males are more likely to engage in sporting activity than females: 52 % compared with 40 %, and the nature of engagement differs with team sports being more common among males. The more popular sports among males and females (for 2011 and 2009) are as shown on Table 9.2.

Soccer continues to be the more popular sport among males (12 %), while exercise is the more popular among females (13 %). Female sport is dominated by two activities – exercise and swimming, whereas among males, the increased participation in individual sports means that the variations across four sports (exercise, running, swimming, golf) is narrower in 2011 than in 2009.

The highest level of sports participation in Ireland occurs among 16–19 year olds (77 %) with the lowest among the 65+ age group (29 %). Table 9.3 presents the

Table 9.3 Sport participation: age and gender (in percentage)

	16–19		20–24		25–34		35–44		45–54		55–64		65+	
Years	2011	2009	2011	2009	2011	2009	2011	2009	2011	2009	2011	2009	2011	2009
Total	77	64	69	47	56	45	42	33	35	27	34	22	29	14
Males	91	74	80	62	67	53	49	39	34	32	35	25	33	20
Females	63	53	60	33	44	37	36	27	36	22	33	20	26	10

Source: ISM (2011), Lunn and Layte(2009)

summary data for sports participation for 2011 and 2009, according to age and gender. It is interesting to note that the gender variation among the 16–19 year olds – 91 % of males compared with 63 % of females, participate in sport.

9.5.1 Sports Participation by Socioeconomic Status (SES)

To get a sense of the impact of socioeconomic status (SES) on sport participation, ISM study respondents were categorized into socioeconomic groupings using the standardized classification across the research industry – A, B, C1, C2, D, E, and F. For reporting and data analysis purposes, categories A and B and D and E were merged to provide a robust sample, given the general similarities across those groupings.

The ISM (2011) findings suggest a strong degree of correlation between socioeconomic status and participation in sport. Individuals in the AB (54 %) socioeconomic grouping (*professionals and management*) are significantly more likely to participate in sport than those in the C2 (47 %) group (*skilled manual workers*) and DE (38 %) groupings (*semiskilled or unskilled manual roles or on long-term benefits*). When the data is analyzed according to education, 50 % of individuals who have post-Leaving Certificate¹⁰ qualifications (*third-level education*) participate in sports, compared with 44 % of those who do not have third-level qualifications. Among individuals who had not completed second-level schooling, 46 % participated in sport and a small proportion (23 %) of individuals who left formal schooling earlier, engaged in sport.

Table 9.4 presents information based on SES with respect to individual and team sports played and for particular sports. A higher proportion of individuals in the AB (50 %) category engage in individual sports, compared with those in the F category (30 %). Team sports are more common among individuals classed as C1 and C2 SES compared with those in other categories.

Some individual sports are more commonly pursued by particular groups. Running is notable as there is a strong contrast between the higher AB category and the lower C2 and DE social groups in terms of their likelihood to participate.

¹⁰The Leaving Certificate is the terminal examination for second-level schooling in Ireland and would be considered equivalent to the UK A Levels.

Table 9.4 Types of sport played: socioeconomic groupings (%)

Grouping/sports	AB	C1	C2	DE	F					
Individual (I)	I	50	I	45	I	38	I	33	I	30
Team (T)	T	11	T	15	T	15	T	8	T	12
Exercise		14		13		11		9		7
Swimming		13		11		11		9		7
Running		13		10		5		4		5
Soccer		5		7		8		5		9
Cycling		6		7		6		4		4
Golf		7		5		5		4		1
Dancing		2		4		4		3		5
GAA football		3		4		4		2		3
Weights		2		2		2		1		1
Hurling		2		2		2		1		3

Source: ISM (2011)

9.6 Conclusion

The sporting landscape in Ireland has changed considerably during the last decade. The government is more involved in shaping sports policy and investment and through the Irish Sports Council providing governance support (financial and non-financial) for many national governing bodies (NGBs). In making grant awards, the ISC Council adopts a more strategic approach – identifying and targeting designated sports for international success. Figure 9.1 displays the plethora of interdependency ties which exist among sports stakeholders in Ireland. The contribution by the voluntary sector to sport in Ireland is immense, both in social and economic terms. This adds to NGB/organizational challenges, such as adhering to regulatory and legal requirements and combining the input of paid professionals with that by volunteers.

Christiansen et al. (2012) reviewed national sports policy documents for 25 European Region countries. Their findings reveal that all national strategy/policy documents have overall goals on participation in sport, physical activity, and/or goals on health. However, a number lacked measurable targets, specified budgets, and evaluation plans. These findings are reflected in the Irish case, as information pertaining to the Ireland's sports policy are widely documented and published, along with details of funding, participation, and volunteering. However, in some instances, there is evidence of duplicated efforts and a lack of specifics, particularly in relation to budgets and funding. Nevertheless, some progress has been made on policy evaluation, which to date has been completed on a rather fragmented basis – by organization, target group, or region.

There are two unique features of sport in Ireland. Firstly, the majority of sports are played on an amateur basis, and secondly, there is intense competition among the NGBs to recruit talented youngsters to their sport. There is a need to further enhance Ireland's sporting infrastructure, to ensure that talented (and not so talented) athletes are able to develop their sporting prowess. This review is limited in

that it focuses on the top layer of sport in Ireland. In this arena, attention is given to promoting sport among various target groups (women in sport, children, disabled people, multicultural groups, the disadvantaged, etc.). However, there is an absence of enablers to promote synergies across organizations and agencies, to ensure that sports policy and strategy efforts and initiatives are coherent and appropriately configured and coordinated at and across all levels.

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