

Strategy of Action or an Ambitious Platform for the Transformation of Sport in Canada (Part 2. “Engaged Governance”)

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Annotation. The article presents the results of a study of the strategic direction of “Engaged Governance” as a tool for improving the governance system of handball development in Canada. It was established that the current state of the national federation is characterized by contradictory tendencies: on the one hand, there is an increasing need to enhance athletic performance and international competitiveness; on the other hand, there is a deficit of transparent governance mechanisms, institutional sustainability, and effective interaction between national and regional levels. In the scientific and practical dimension, this necessitates the development of new models capable of integrating managerial, educational, and communication tools. The aim of the study was to substantiate and develop the Engaged Governance model, which ensures transparency, program quality, and trust in the handball system at all levels. The object of the study is the governance system for the development of handball in Canada, and the subject is the strategic direction of Engaged Governance as a means of ensuring institutional sustainability, ethics, and inclusivity. The methodology is based on systemic, structural-functional, and comparative analysis of international practices (LTAD, European Sports Charter), as well as elements of SWOT analysis. The results confirmed the feasibility of implementing four interconnected blocks: a national digital platform for document management, licensing, and process standardization; a system of educational modules for regional coordinators; quality assurance mechanisms through annual audits of PTSO programs; and modern communication tools based on a digital hub. The proposed model aligns with international standards of good governance in sport, shapes a new governance culture grounded in trust and accountability, and creates conditions for sustainable development of handball at both elite and grassroots levels. The practical significance lies in the potential to strengthen institutional capacity and increase the social attractiveness of sport.

Keywords: Engaged Governance; sports management; handball development; institutional sustainability; transparency; digital platforms; quality assurance; managerial competencies; internal communications; inclusion.

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Стратегія дій або амбітна платформа трансформації спорту в Канаді (частина 2. «Engaged Governance»)

Анотація. У статті представлено результати дослідження стратегічного напрямку «Engaged Governance» як інструменту вдосконалення системи управління розвитком гандболу в Канаді. Встановлено, що сучасний стан національної федерації характеризується суперечливими тенденціями: з одного боку, зростає потреба у підвищенні спортивних результатів і міжнародної конкурентоспроможності, з іншого – існує дефіцит прозорих управлінських механізмів, інституційної сталості та ефективної взаємодії між національним і регіональним рівнями. У науково-практичному вимірі це зумовлює необхідність розробки нових моделей, здатних інтегрувати управлінські, освітні та комунікаційні інструменти. Метою дослідження стало обґрунтування та розробка моделі «Engaged Governance», яка забезпечує прозорість, якість програм і довіру до системи гандболу на всіх рівнях. Об'єктом дослідження виступає система управління розвитком гандболу в Канаді, предметом – стратегічний напрям «Engaged Governance» як засіб забезпечення інституційної сталості, етичності та інклюзивності. Методологія ґрунтується на системному, структурно-функціональному й порівняльному аналізі міжнародних практик (LTAD, European Sports Charter), а також елементах SWOT-аналізу. Результати дослідження підтвердили доцільність впровадження чотирьох взаємопов'язаних блоків: національної цифрової платформи для документообігу, обліку ліцензій і стандартизації процесів; системи освітніх модулів для регіональних координаторів; механізмів quality assurance із щорічним аудитом програм PTSO; сучасних комунікаційних інструментів на основі цифрового хабу. Запропонована модель відповідає міжнародним стандартам good governance in sport, формує нову управлінську культуру, базовану на довірі й підзвітності, та створює умови для сталого розвитку гандболу як на елітному, так і на масовому рівнях. Практична значущість полягає у можливості використання моделі для зміцнення інституційної спроможності й підвищення соціальної привабливості спорту.

Ключові слова: стратегічний напрям, спортивний менеджмент; розвиток гандболу; інституційна сталість; прозорість; цифрові платформи; забезпечення якості; управлінські компетентності; внутрішні комунікації; інклюзія.

Introduction

Problem statement in general terms and its connection with important scientific or practical tasks. The current development of handball in Canada is characterized by contradictory tendencies. On the one hand, there is a need to improve athletic performance and international competitiveness; on the other, there is an evident deficit of transparent governance mechanisms, institutional sustainability, and effective interaction between national and regional levels of management. The absence of a holistic “Engaged Governance” system complicates the implementation of long-term athlete development programs and limits opportunities for the advancement of para-handball, inclusion, and mass participation in sport.

In the scientific and practical dimension, the problem is determined by the fact that international sports organizations and national federations demand the introduction of high standards of managerial transparency, program quality, and social responsibility. Addressing this challenge requires the integration of digital platforms for document management, educational modules for administrators, unified criteria for evaluating federations' activities, as well as the development of strategic tools capable of ensuring stability and trust in the handball system at all levels.

Thus, the study of the Engaged Governance problem in the context of handball development is directly connected with urgent scientific tasks in the field of sports management and with the practical needs of building a sustainable, ethical, and inclusive sports system.

Identification of previously unresolved parts of the general problem. Despite the existence of certain initiatives for the development of handball in Canada, key aspects of governance sustainability and transparency remain unresolved. In particular, there is no unified digital platform for document management and coach licensing; there are no systematic educational modules on managerial competencies for regional coordinators; there is no established mechanism for the annual independent audit of provincial-territorial sport organization programs. The system of internal communications between federations, clubs, the coaching community, and analytical structures is also insufficiently developed.

In the scientific context, there is a lack of comprehensive research integrating managerial, social, and sporting dimensions of handball development into a single concept of “Engaged Governance.” This gap necessitates new solutions and practical models capable of ensuring sustainability, trust, and the effective functioning of the national sports system.

Formulation of the article’s aim (problem statement). The aim of the study is to analyze the concept of “Engaged Governance” in the system of handball development in Canada, to identify its key structural components and practical implementation mechanisms, as well as to substantiate the necessity of introducing managerial, educational, and communication tools to ensure transparency, ethics, and institutional sustainability of the sports system.

To achieve this aim, the following *research objectives* were set:

1. To examine the current state of governance in handball and identify its problem areas.
2. To determine previously unresolved aspects of the general problem related to transparency, program quality, and communication mechanisms.
3. To substantiate the feasibility of creating a digital platform, educational modules, and program quality standards.
4. To propose a model for implementing “Engaged Governance” as a tool for strengthening the institutional and social foundations of handball development in Canada.

Object of the study – the governance system for the development of handball in Canada.

Subject of the study – the strategic direction of “Engaged Governance” as a tool for ensuring transparency, institutional sustainability, ethics, and inclusion in the national sports system.

Research methodology is based on the use of systemic and structural-functional approaches, methods of analysis and synthesis of scientific sources, comparative analysis of international sports development strategies, as well as elements of SWOT analysis to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the governance model in handball.

Results

The handball governance system in Canada today has a contradictory nature: there are ambitions to improve sporting results and reach the international level, yet there are also problems: a lack of transparent governance rules, inconsistent practices across regions, insufficient trust, limited education for administrators, and the absence of clear quality standards. As a result, everyone suffers: athletes do not receive equal opportunities; coaches are confused by regulations and paperwork; clubs operate under unequal conditions; and the federation loses trust and authority.

The concept of Engaged Governance is a modern management model that makes all processes transparent, introduces unified standards for federations and clubs, educates administrators, provides tools for fair program evaluation, and creates a high-quality communication system.

The strategic direction of Engaged Governance is focused on strengthening the institutional structure of handball in Canada through transparent management, harmonization of national and regional policies, improved communication, and the creation of a safe, ethical, and inclusive environment.

We support this approach and propose to expand it through the following elements: the launch of a national digital platform for document management, coach licensing, and compliance with transparency standards; the creation of educational modules on managerial

competencies for regional coordinators; the implementation of unified program quality standards (quality assurance) through annual audits of PTSO (Provincial-Territorial Sport Organizations) initiatives; and the strengthening of internal communication systems between federations, clubs, coaches, and analytical structures. In this way, Engaged Governance becomes not only an administrative tool but also a system of strategic thinking, where governance is service to community values rather than mere process mechanics.

This is important because athletes gain equal opportunities regardless of region; coaches have clear rules and simple tools for their work; federations earn trust and accountability; and society benefits from an ethical, safe, and inclusive sport.

We propose the introduction of electronic coaching licenses. Instead of paper documents, coaches would receive a digital license with a QR code. The federation would be able to see who is valid, when the license expires, and whether the coach has completed the required courses. This saves time and reduces the risk of “grey” coaching practices.

It is also recommended to implement online reporting for coaches and clubs. Each club could submit its annual report through an online account, including the number of athletes, results, and safety briefings. The federation would immediately receive standardized data from all regions, allowing for quick program comparison and identification of problem areas.

A unified database of decisions and policies should also be introduced. If the federation adopts a new standard (for example, heat control protocols or venue requirements), it would automatically appear in the system, ensuring that all regions operate under the same rules.

In addition, there is a need for educational modules for coordinators. For example, if two clubs in the same city are arguing over who has the right to conduct youth team selection, a coordinator who has completed a module on communication and mediation can apply conflict resolution techniques: organizing a joint meeting, presenting transparent selection criteria from the digital platform, and agreeing on a rotation system. The conflict is resolved without scandals or national federation intervention.

Another example relates to budget planning. After training in financial transparency, a coordinator can properly allocate grant funds: instead of chaotic equipment purchases, they prepare a transparent budget and report, accessible to all stakeholders in the digital system.

Thanks to strategic planning training, coordinators can also negotiate with local authorities and businesses, justifying the value of handball for the community (mass participation, inclusion, children’s health), opening the way to new partnerships and funding.

The implementation of a unified digital ecosystem is a key factor of institutional sustainability, as it: ensures consistent rules and criteria for all stakeholders, eliminating the possibility of double standards; increases transparency and accountability, fostering greater trust among athletes, coaches, managers, and the public; creates conditions for operational analysis of management decisions and strategic planning through real-time data collection and integration; enables information exchange between regional structures and the national federation without duplication of functions or excessive bureaucracy.

Thus, the digital platform serves not only as a technical tool for process optimization but also as the foundation for shaping a long-term governance culture aligned with international standards of sports management. It becomes a guarantee of stability, as it allows the integrity of the system to be maintained regardless of staff turnover or external challenges.

A system of educational modules for regional coordinators has been proposed, aimed at strengthening managerial knowledge, communication skills, and strategic planning abilities. This initiative is critically important, since regional leaders play the role of “mediators” between the national federation, clubs, and local communities. The quality of their training determines the effectiveness of implementing strategic decisions at the local level and the long-term sustainability of the entire system.

The module system includes: basic training in sports management, financial transparency, and ethical leadership; advanced training in the use of digital tools, data analytics,

and building KPIs for sports programs; communication courses that develop skills in interacting with different stakeholder groups – from coaches and athletes to local authorities and parent communities; strategic simulations and case studies, which enable coordinators to practice managerial decision-making in modeled crisis or conflict situations.

The introduction of such a training system contributes to the formation of a unified management standard across the country, reduces the risk of regional imbalances, and ensures staffing sustainability. In turn, this creates the preconditions for the effective implementation of the Engaged Governance policy and improves the quality of strategic sports management at the national level (Table 1).

Table 1

Transformation of Handball Governance in Canada

Area	Before (Current Situation)	After (With Engaged Governance)
Documents & Licenses	Paper-based document flow, different rules in regions, no unified registry of coaching licenses	Unified digital platform: online license registry, standardized documents, real-time access
Management Staff	Regional coordinators work without a unified training system; varying levels of knowledge and skills	Educational modules in management, finance, communication; simulations and trainings
Program Quality	Programs vary across provinces; lack of independent control; inconsistent training quality	Unified standards (Quality Assurance); annual audit; public reports; improvement recommendations
Communication	Fragmented system, duplication of functions, no unified information space	Online hub for federations and clubs; horizontal links between regions; regular online sessions; real-time analytics
Social Dimension	Unequal opportunities for different groups (youth, para-handball, newcomers)	Inclusiveness, transparency, mass participation: more participants, more trust

The quality assurance system provides for the development of clear criteria for evaluating training programs (training cycle structure, coach qualifications, compliance with LTAD principles, inclusiveness, and safety of the environment); an annual independent audit, the results of which serve as the basis for updating programs and improving methodological materials; feedback for PTSO, which not only identifies problems but also offers practical recommendations for their solution; and public reporting, which increases trust in the federation and encourages regional organizations to adopt a more responsible management approach.

Thus, quality assurance becomes not a formal inspection but a mechanism of continuous improvement and adaptation of the system to new challenges. It allows for the integration of best practices of international sports management into the national context and guarantees the stability and effectiveness of programs regardless of regional differences.

One of the key results of the study is the substantiation of the need to build an effective system of internal communications among all levels of sports governance—the national federation, provincial-territorial sport organizations (PTSO), clubs, the coaching community, and analytical structures. Currently, communication within the Canadian handball system is

fragmented, leading to duplication of functions, slowing down decision-making, and complicating strategic planning.

The proposed mechanisms include: the creation of a unified digital communication hub, which ensures regular information exchange and stores updated documents, methodological materials, and statistics; the establishment of horizontal connections between regional structures to share experiences and best practices without relying solely on the national federation; the implementation of transparent reporting standards and regular open online sessions for coaches and managers; and the integration of analytical tools that make it possible to track key performance indicators and adapt communication strategies in real time.

Thus, the communication system ceases to be merely a technical tool for information exchange and transforms into a strategic resource for development. It creates a shared information space where all stakeholders feel involved, and decisions are based on trust, transparency, and coordinated actions.

Comparison with international approaches shows that the proposed model is consistent with the key principles of LTAD (Long-Term Athlete Development), which emphasize the importance of integrity and systematization in sports governance. Similar strategies are applied in European countries, where the emphasis is placed on harmonizing intergovernmental and regional policies. This approach is reflected, for example, in the European Sports Charter, which highlights the need for coherence between national strategies and local implementation in order to ensure equal access, transparency, and sustainability of sport systems. By aligning governance structures across different levels, European practice demonstrates that long-term development and inclusivity in sport can only be achieved when institutional responsibilities are clearly defined and coordinated.

Similar strategies are applied in European countries, where the emphasis is placed on harmonizing intergovernmental and regional policies (Table 2). This approach is exemplified by the *European Sports Charter*, which stresses the need for consistency between national strategies and local implementation to ensure equal access, transparency, and sustainability in sport systems. The European experience demonstrates that only through clearly defined responsibilities and effective coordination across governance levels can long-term development and inclusivity be achieved.

Table 2

Comparative Analysis: European vs. Canadian Approaches to Sports Governance

Aspect	European Approach	Canadian Approach (Engaged Governance)
Core Principle	Harmonization of intergovernmental and regional policies	Institutional sustainability through digital integration
Framework	<i>European Sports Charter</i> sets standards for transparency, inclusivity, equal access	National strategy aligned with Provincial-Territorial Sport Organizations (PTSO)
Governance Focus	Policy coherence, alignment of responsibilities across levels of government	Centralized digital platform ensuring document management, licensing, transparency
Quality Assurance	Emphasis on compliance with EU and national regulations	Annual independent audits of PTSO programs, unified QA standards
Managerial Development	Professional education through EU-supported programs and Erasmus+ projects	Targeted educational modules for coordinators (management, communication, finance, strategy)

Aspect	European Approach	Canadian Approach (Engaged Governance)
Communication Mechanisms	Cross-border cooperation, networks for sharing best practices	National digital hub for horizontal communication and real-time analytics
Unique Feature	Strong intergovernmental coordination across EU member states	Integration of AI-driven tools, data dashboards, and adaptive decision-making processes

In the Canadian context, however, the uniqueness of the proposed *Engaged Governance* model lies in its focus on institutional sustainability through the creation of a centralized digital platform and the integration of quality assurance mechanisms at the level of Provincial-Territorial Sport Organizations (PTSO). While Europe prioritizes policy harmonization as the foundation of good governance, Canada’s challenge is not only to achieve alignment between national and regional levels but also to build a unified technological and managerial ecosystem that secures transparency, accountability, and adaptability across diverse regions. Thus, the Canadian model both reflects international best practices and introduces innovative elements tailored to its own structural and cultural realities (Table 2).

The comparison illustrates that both European and Canadian approaches share a commitment to transparency, inclusivity, and long-term sustainability. However, while the European model prioritizes policy harmonization and intergovernmental coordination as the foundation of good governance, the Canadian Engaged Governance model emphasizes technological integration and institutional sustainability at the provincial-territorial level. By combining international principles with innovative digital tools, Canada’s approach offers a context-specific pathway that not only addresses existing governance gaps but also sets a precedent for adaptive, data-driven management in sport. However, in the Canadian context, the unique feature is the emphasis on institutional sustainability through a centralized digital platform and the integration of quality assurance instruments at the level of provincial-territorial sport organizations.

At the same time, the study’s limitations should be noted. First, it remains conceptual and has not yet been tested in the format of pilot regional programs. Second, it requires further integration with economic and financial support mechanisms for sport, which are critical success factors. Third, there are risks of uneven implementation due to the varying levels of resource provision among PTSOs.

Thus, the proposed Engaged Governance model can be considered an effective tool not only for the development of handball but also for the broader Canadian sports system, as it combines managerial, educational, and social components.

Although Engaged Governance appears to be a strategic concept, its real value is manifested in the daily lives of athletes, coaches, coordinators, and clubs. It is through practical examples that one can see how digital tools, educational modules, and quality standards transform the system for the better.

Below are several typical stories that demonstrate the transformation of “before → after → result.” They show that behind management reforms stand not only documents and protocols, but also real people, their needs, and new opportunities.

The previous research results can be viewed as a systemic description of reform. However, the practical value of the model becomes clearer through concrete examples from everyday life. Below are the stories of coaches, coordinators, athletes, and entire teams that illustrate how the Engaged Governance model is transforming the sporting reality in Canada.

Story 1. The Coach and the Electronic License

Mari is a young coach in Toronto. Previously, she had to submit a pile of paper documents every year to renew her license. Documents were often lost or delayed. Now she has an electronic license with a QR code, which is easy to show at a tournament or training camp. All her course certificates are automatically uploaded to her profile. This saves time and gives her confidence: she knows her work is officially recognized and transparent.

Story 2. The Coordinator and the Club Conflict

Alex is a regional coordinator. In his city, two clubs argued over which one had the right to select players for the youth national team. In the past, such a conflict could drag on for a long time and even escalate into a media scandal. After completing a module on communication and mediation, he organized a meeting where he presented objective selection criteria from the digital platform. The clubs agreed to rotate and hold joint training camps. The conflict was resolved quickly and transparently – everyone was satisfied.

Story 3. Quality Program and the School

In a small school in Montreal, the handball program had long existed only “on paper”: a few training sessions a year and no official competitions. Thanks to the quality assurance system, the provincial federation received feedback that the program did not meet LTAD standards. The school was provided with methodological recommendations and a mini-grant for equipment. A year later, the team was already participating in a regional tournament, and the number of students attending the section had doubled.

Story 4. The Communication Hub and a Quick Decision

Previously, when a club in Winnipeg wanted to obtain permission to host a tournament, it had to wait weeks for a response from the federation. Now, through the online hub, the coordinator can see all the necessary information, instantly check compliance with the standards, and approve the request. The waiting time has been reduced from three weeks to two days.

Story 5. The Young Athlete and Transparent Selection

Anna, a 15-year-old student in Calgary, plays handball at her school. Previously, she never knew how players were selected for the youth national team: some said you “needed connections,” others said the process was “not transparent.” Now, thanks to the digital platform, selection criteria are open to everyone: test results, training attendance, and game statistics. Anna is confident that her chance depends only on her effort in training, not on “who she knows.”

Story 6. The Para-Handball

Player Denys has a disability and for a long time could not find a club that would accept him. Thanks to the inclusion program and quality assurance, a para-handball camp was opened in his region. He gained access to professional training, new friends, and the opportunity to participate in competitions. For him, this is not just sport, but also a sense of equality and support.

Story 7. The Youth Team from a Remote Region

A team from a small town in British Columbia had rarely participated in competitions before it was difficult to secure funding and support. Now, thanks to the online hub and micro-grant program, the team received equipment and coaching consultations. For the first time, they traveled to a regional tournament, and the players felt they were part of a larger sporting family.

Story 8. The Student and the University Program

Sarah is a student at a university in Ottawa. She wanted to play handball, but previously her university did not offer this sport. After the launch of partnership programs with universities, handball was included in recreational activities. Now Sarah trains weekly with her friends, participates in intramural tournaments, and feels part of the sporting community.

All these examples demonstrate that Engaged Governance is not just about management tools or administrative procedures. It is about changes directly experienced by athletes,

coaches, and communities: less bureaucracy, more trust, equal opportunities, and faster decisions. Through such stories, it becomes evident that the strategy will not remain on paper but can truly transform handball in Canada, making it transparent, inclusive, and internationally competitive.

As a result of the study, it was established that the strategic direction of “Engaged Governance” can significantly enhance the effectiveness of managing the development of handball in Canada. The study substantiated the feasibility of creating a national digital platform that would perform the functions of centralized document management, coach licensing, monitoring compliance with standards, and controlling the transparency of management processes. Such a tool allows for the unification of procedures across all levels of the sports hierarchy – from the national federation to provincial-territorial sport organizations.

The necessity of implementing unified quality assurance standards for all levels of handball development in Canada was confirmed, to be realized through an annual audit system of the activities of provincial-territorial sport organizations (PTSO). This approach makes it possible to assess the compliance of programs with modern requirements, increase the level of transparency, and eliminate regional disparities in development.

The results obtained confirm that the implementation of the Engaged Governance concept can substantially strengthen the governance capacity of handball in Canada. The proposed model combines digital tools, educational modules, quality assurance standards, and the development of communication systems. It not only optimizes administrative processes but also shapes a new governance culture based on trust, transparency, and accountability.

Conclusions

1. The study confirmed that the strategic direction of Engaged Governance is a key factor in ensuring the institutional sustainability of handball in Canada. Its implementation through digital platforms, educational modules, and quality standards guarantees transparency, accountability, and trust in the sports governance system.

2. The feasibility of creating a unified digital ecosystem for document management and coach licensing has been substantiated, contributing to the unification of procedures and the formation of a long-term governance culture independent of staff or political changes.

3. The proposed system of educational modules for regional coordinators establishes a unified standard of managerial competence, reduces the risks of regional imbalances, and promotes the effective implementation of strategic decisions at the local level.

4. The introduction of quality assurance mechanisms and the development of internal communication channels transform governance into an integrated system of strategic thinking that meets international standards of sports management and can be adapted to other sports.

Prospects for further research lie in testing the digital platform within selected provincial federations; evaluating the effectiveness of educational modules in developing managerial competencies; and conducting a comparative analysis of implementation results with similar initiatives in European countries.

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