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Perspectives on the role of football in youth development in Bahrain

A grounded exploration

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Disclaimer:

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List of Acronyms

S4D	Sport for Development
OFDPM	Office of the First Deputy Prime Minister
GOYS	General Organization for Youth and Sports
MYS	Ministry of Youth and Sports
SCYS	Supreme Council for Youth and Sports
BFA	Bahrain Football Association
BOC	Bahrain Olympic Committee
BOA	Bahrain Olympic Academy
FIFA	
AFC	Asian Football Confederation
GT	Grounded Theory
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
LTAD/LTD	Long-Term Athlete Development
u-18/16…	Under-18/16…
NBH	His Royal Highness Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa
CP	His Royal Highness Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa
EDB	Bahrain Economic Development Board
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
BQA	Education and Training Quality Authority
NERP	National Education Reform Project

Abstract

The football environment of Bahrain has been suffocating slowly Due to years of improper administration and planning, a lack of public and private investment, and decline of social engagement over time. As a result the sector is uninteresting and underdeveloped. In light of ongoing reforms to the sports sector overall, this study uses a grounded theory approach to explore peoples perspectives on football in Bahrain, and their views on the sector.

Things are not all roses, as Bahrain is infamous for having facelift policies only. So, I checked with people what they thought of this all, and they told me. As a result, I was able to bring forward some poignant moments shared with me by participants; some of the hopes and dreams of their youth, and moments of joy or sadness

I hoped to uncover what they had experienced and how the sector presents itself to the user, highlighting some issues that should be considered for future improvements. These improvements included the introduction of better procedures to ensure financial stability and transparency in the club sector, programmes to stem the waste of talent, a regulatory body for the private sector, and stopping the waste of talent by introducing well thought out and multi-impacted youth development policy.

Relevance to Development Studies

Bahrain's effort to transition out of a rentier economy towards more sustainable development requires significant economic, social, and institutional reform. Privatisation needs to be assessed in context instead of assuming it to always be negative, as does the case fo state provision of resources. It can be a very good development partner if harnessed and monitored properly. By capitalising on football's popularity and platforming it as a pioneering effort to use sports as a tool for overall sectoral development and institutional reform, this could possibly spell the beginning of the sustainable utilisation of human and economic investment practices and overall betterment to welfare.

Keywords

Bahrain, football, institutional reform, national policy, sports for youth development, private sector

Chapter 1
Arriving at the Pitch

Background to the research

When the Kingdom of Bahrain, won the 2019 Gulf Cup, the country exploded into happiness. The streets were full of processions and songs for at least a week, and everyone celebrated our win together. Prior to the win, the country was described as "parched for some joy" (MF; HS, 2020) Although I missed out on participating directly with my country people in their happiness and expressions of procession, it affected me just as deeply. Away from it all, here in The Hague, I wondered why this feeling was so alien. Bahrainis lacked the rallying power of our GCC neighbours because we have typically had few sporting achievements to boast, fewer reasons to celebrate.

The aftereffects of the win were positive overall, bringing my divided country together for a short while. It seemed that the end of problems and spending time divided by conflict was finally on the horizon (at least as far as football was concerned). The win was the highlight of the journey being underway, and the crowning glory of the new sports sector upgrading efforts in Bahrain as part of the national strategy, Vision 2030.

Inspired by football's immense potential, I decided to explore football in the lives of young people in Bahrain. The research journey has taken three main shifts in direction. First was setting out to employ a social capital framework to discover how football could be a ground for creation of such, then to discover if and how the same rules applied to young people. After two interviews, this proved not to be relevant. Allowing myself to be guided by the data, I gripped onto the oft-mentioned theme of youth development through sports (in general, but mainly related to football), and to discuss the possible outcomes of private provision of sports (framing it as a societal good). It was only when I began to properly look into official governmental sources relating to the development and provisioning mechanisms of the sports sector in Bahrain that the disparity between official statements and the perspectives of actors on the ground that the focus of this RP became clear to me. As such, the research objective is positioned thusly:

> *To apply a grounded theory approach to uncover the perspectives of football actors in Bahrain in light of Vision 2030 directed reforms, discussing the importance of appropriate policy design to ensure proper utilisation of youth development potential and upgrading of the sector.*

Through the research, some gaps were identified through this research, particularly regarding the mix of actors involved in providing access to the social good of football participation for young people and adults. Main takeaways included the massive waste of talent and potential in the football sector with multiple causes, private sector readiness and capacity, and a unanimous sense of optimism for a better future for football.

Using the momentum of the 2019 Gulf Cup win, it is important to use this momentum to drive development forward in a more thought out, coherent manner, and one that is more suited to the demographics, needs, and other particularities of Bahrain. It is imperative to create better feeder mechanisms between the institutions, to avoid wasting the talent

cultivated in private academies, reinvigorate the talent pool of league football clubs, and create institutional infrastructure to make way for professional transition.

Justification and relevance to literature

The first is the woeful neglect of scholarly research on perspectives of people on the ground in Bahrain in matters unrelated to politics. A dearth of knowledge exists about their lived experiences, and how they negotiate their circumstances and navigate through the quagmire of football (and sports) provisioning in Bahrain – or social provisioning of any kind. The second is that the government's undertaking to enact institutional and policy reforms is taking place now. Constantly unfolding developments to the sector make it difficult to pinpoint with any accuracy where the boundaries of these reforms will be. In addition, in the past, policy documents and strategic objectives in Bahrain were unclear and not usually made public, meaning there is little research done on them in English. Now since the launch of vision 2030 and subsequent government action plans, this study will add to the small body of literature engaging with their impacts as perceived by people on the ground.

This will also touch on discussions regarding the private provision of public services, and "soccer in its creative dimension as a sport taking part in the development of social and political sphere and in its role in the construction of personal and collective identities" (De Waele & Trif, 2020).

Problem statement of my research

Due to improper administration and planning, a lack of public and private investment, and decline of social engagement over time, the Bahraini football sector has been underdeveloped for decades, leading to wasted human and economic potential and a lack of professionalism.

A variety of issues combine to create this stagnant environment including the organisational culture of suffocating bureaucracy often seen in rentier economies, society's restrictions on giving feedback to (football) institutions, as well as institutional lack of transparency and accountability. Most pressingly, the cloudy economic situation in Bahrain has tightened sports' budget allocation and prompted the need for development in the sector.

The research problem I explored was people's perspectives on the current state of football in Bahrain and policy surrounding it, how they circumvented obstacles to participation, and their hopes for future development.

Therefore, I took a grounded, inductive approach, to maintain flexible during research, and to best reflect the personal narratives I encountered, and the type of thematic analysis performed. In order to achieve an in-depth understanding, I performed a series of qualitative semi-structured interviews, accompanied by an actor and provisioning mapping exercise to explore official standpoints that I used to juxtapose with the aforementioned perspectives.

Research question

how do improvements to Bahraini sports policy reflect the in-situ perspectives of people on football?

Sub-questions

a) what policies/aims have been introduced to upgrade the sports sector on a national level?

b) what are some perspectives held by people on the ground towards the current state of football in Bahrain?

c) how could sectoral restructuring meet the concerns raised?

Concepts list

I used a grounded theory inspired, intuitive exploratory approach for this study, therefore a brief set of informative concepts that underpin the research in lieu of a 'theoretical framework' is presented below. In chapter 5, I engage further with bodies of literature relating to Sports for Development (S4D) and the private provision of public goods.

Sports as a social good

The provision of football training programmes and facilities is regarded in this study as a social good. I base my reliance on well-documented numerous instances of the positive impact of sports in the lives of practitioners, but also its positive social externalities.

Regarding sports programmes for children, (sportanddev.org, 2020) indicates that by applying the Convention on the Rights of the Child to child development policies, this enables "sport, recreation and play to be considered not only as a necessary component of child and youth development (a 'needs' based perspective) but also one in which sport, recreation and play are considered as entitlements (a 'rights-based' perspective)". Although scholarly works explicitly making this connection are scarce, the interviews and analysis of this study have proven that this conceptualisation is not novel, at least in the minds' eyes of those involved in football in Bahrain.

Commodification and access to social provisioning

Regarding private sector provision, the study interacts with the concept of (de)commodification as proposed by Esping-Andersen (1990). He defines it as the availability if "alternative means of welfare to that of the market. De-commodification […] signifies the degree to which distribution [of welfare] is detached from the market mechanism" (Esping-Andersen, 1989, p. 21). This is related to shifting responsibilities of the public and private sector in Bahrain to provide access to social provisioning of public good of sports programmes and facilities. Bahrain's economic effort to transition out of a rentier economy towards more sustainable development will invariably impact people's ability to access these goods, something to keep in mind while reading.

Methodology

About Grounded Theory (GT)

Grounded theory aims to "generate a conceptual theory that accounts for a. pattern of behaviour that is relevant and problematic for those involved" (Tie, et al., 2019) and is inductive in nature, "attempt[ing] to bridge the gap between research and theory [and] emphasiz[ing] a simplified approach to methods that collect rich and unbiased data" (Sebastian, 2019, p. 1). Theories are built or "discover[ed] from data [that is] systematically obtained and analyzed in social research" (Glaser & Strauss in ibid). Tie et al (2019) describe it as a "structured yet flexible methodology […] appropriate when little is known about a phenomenon; the aim being to produce or construct an explanatory theory that uncovers a process inherent to the substantive area of inquiry". The analytic process itself prompts inductive theory discovery to produce new explanations of the phenomenon of study is common throughout the discipline (Gibbs & Huddersfield, 2010). It is clear therefore, that this method is dense, and requires much input and creativity in interpretation and interaction with the data by the researcher. Opinions differ amongst GT theorists as to what degree a researcher should engage with extant literature prior to fieldwork deployment, or if they should at all to limit the influence of pre-existing theories and/or preconceptions about the subject of study (Gibbs & Huddersfield, 2010). the processes of simultaneous data harvesting and analysis, and the attempt to generate or uncover of theory inductively or deductively from the data itself as well as constant comparison and the search for variation are common between all (Timonen, et al., 2018).

My approach

In this research project, I concerned myself with applying the core principles common amongst all schools of GT, rather than assigning myself to a particular school of thought none of these fit my needs exactly. (Timonen, et al., 2018)recommend instead *aiming* to build theory, even if the final product falls somewhat short of a full theory. The authors were careful not to give the illusion of 'watering-down' the credibility of the method by recognising challenges faced by researchers. To do this, they (very usefully) identified four core principles that an acceptable GT study must have. Styles of application may differ due to the particular circumstances of research, but the following pillars must be adhered to in order to be maintain methodological legitimacy. These are: grounding the study in the data at hand (not pre-existing theories), capturing and explaining context-related processes and phenomena (through the data collection process), pursuing theory through engagement with data, and pursuing theory through theoretical sampling. Classical GT recommends that researchers abstain from engaging with literature before conducting data collection, but I did not follow that method, due to academic requirements. Initial literature reviews were quite superficial, so as not to colour my views too strongly too soon.

Due to the time limitations of this RP, I was restricted in how many participants I could interview and analyze, making me unable to reach full saturation or properly conduct some of GT's requirement fully. Much nuance still exists in this topic that I did not touch upon in this research paper. At the end of this chapter, I have included recommendations on types of participants that may bring another researcher closer to saturation, were this study to be replicated.

Data collection methods

As mentioned, the study comprised of two main parts; the qualitative semi-structured interviews and the actors and provisioning mapping exercise.

Interviews

The participants were chosen based on their relevance to the subject matter and experience with footballing in Bahrain, and were chosen from a network of personal contacts. Snowballing (O'Leary, 2017, p. 211) was employed to a small number of them (only two participants were added at the behest of other participants). To choose my main sample, I relied on personal networks to allow my participants to feel some degree of comfort with me during the interview, having already been 'vouched for' by the person recommending me.

Participant	Description	Date of interview	Duration	Interview Medium
SS (my father)	to add historicity to the study (experience as a youth player and coach in the 1970s). also to contextualise my own personal involvement (he is my father)	10/09/2020	1 hour 12 minutes	Socially distanced face to face meeting
HS (my cousin)	sports journalist (formerly television coverage, has now shifted to Instagram), for understanding the wider aspects of football and sports in Bahrain institutionally, socially. Also discussed sports media (&its effect on society). Very informative.	09/09/2020	2 hours 1 minute	Zoom meeting
YA (referred by other participants)	CEO of Malaeb Application, a social community building app that allows the booking of private pitches and arranging games. Also long-time informal footballer.	10/09/2020	58 minutes	Zoom meeting
MF (referred by other participants)	head coach and founder of a football academy in Bahrain. Externally qualified with lots of insights and experience about the role of coaches for youth development and the road to professionalism through policy reconfiguration.	05/09/2020	1 hour 41 minutes	Whatsapp voice call
FK (my sister's friend)	currently a member of U-18 Women's national football team	17/08/2020	32 minutes	Facetime video call
MJ (my former boss)	female informal footballer	19/08/2020	25 minutes	Telephone call
AA (referred by other participants)	male footballer with a lot of experience playing formally and informally in and outside of Bahrain.	10/09/2020	40 minutes	Whatsapp voice call
WS (my brother's friend)	male informal footballer. Former member of Al-Ahli FC age divisions.	24/09/2020	1 hour 33 minutes	Facetime video call

I prepared a list of guiding questions for each interview, adding or removing topics from the previous list depending on two main factors. The first was the participant's subjective area of knowledge, a consideration I took to ensure the most relevant perspectives would be explored during our conversation. The second was adjusting based on what had occurred in previous interviews, and using constant comparison to follow their perspectives and common concerns. However, not all guiding questions were referred to during each interview, preferring instead to let the participant lead the discussion for a more authentic outcome, depending on their willingness to discuss. In keeping with the participant-led nature of the interviews, I ended by asking the participant whether they had anything else to add or that they wanted me to include in my study. By doing this, I ensured that my own criteria had been met, and that both parties were satisfied.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted over a variety of distance-based mediums, so as to avoid unnecessary risk to the participant or myself. I did not

specify a preferred language in which to proceed (Arabic, English, or a combination), preferring instead to allow participants to express themselves however best they could in their chosen language(s). With the participant's consent, audio recordings were taken of each interview for transcription and translation accuracy. Upon completion, the product was the recording for any errors in either aspect. I ran out of time to apply member checking to this study, a process described by O'Leary (2017, p. 144) as a verification process in which participants check that my interpretations from the interviews 'gel' with theirs.

Actors and Provisioning Mapping Exercise

This section of data collection was conducted after the interview stage. I intuitively chose to do this to further the participant-led direction of study, allowing them to inform me before I created my own opinions through my own research.

My first step was to lay out the actors and institutions drawn from the interviews and begin researching them. I conducted general keyword searches in English and in Arabic using a conventional search engine[1], using keywords gathered from the interviews. For this, I relied on grey literature sources like official government body websites, newspaper articles, Instagram, and Facebook. Once complete, I laid out the following information for each actor:

- The purpose and nature of this institution
- Officiated and run by whom?
- Who is catered to by this institution? Who is left out?
- What services does the institution provide?
- What other actors do they interact with?

In total, I identified three main types of actors involved in football provisioning; institutions (government bodies), the private sector, and the informal football networks that exist in Bahrain – each of which contained several actors.

Later, I was able to fill the outlines drawn for each institution with additional information gathered from my participants and grey literature. The mapping exercise was particularly useful in enriching my understanding of the context in which the participants exist, and the circumstances they must navigate in order to fulfil their desires to participate in and contribute to the football sphere in Bahrain. It was also useful in highlighting gaps in access to provisioning and exclusions to entitlement, which lead me to the discussions of commodification (Esping-Andersen, 1989) found in Chapter 5.

Data analysis

The data analysis process relied on a modified GT approach in which I attempted to address all of the stages of the data processing and analysis to some degree. All coding and data analysis were conducted manually. Firstly, I began by systematically applying a self-devised open coding system to each of the translated and transcribed interviews.

Then, I using labels distilled from the participant statements such as "club inefficiency", "football as a career/industry", and "societal/parental attitudes" to 'clumped' them into category families, otherwise known as axial coding (Böhm, 2004). Scott explains that "The problem is […] you are not going to know what you are studying until you have completed a

[1] It is common for Arabic and English versions of the same websites to contain very different information and functionality, or for one or the other not to be available at all, hence the precautions taken.

significant amount of analysis: the core category is the concept to which all other concepts relate" (2009). Urquhart (2017) provided some particularly useful directions on how to code and arrange each group of findings using a matrix, which helped further refine the categories.

At this point, I diverged away from the lengthy processes required by GT, opting instead to conduct a thematic analysis of the interviews to extract themes. The coding I applied was informed by Braun and Clarke (2006), constantly comparing the codes with each other at each stage to determine emergent groupings and linkages. Further processing was carried out leading to the eventual extraction of themes such as 'generational attitudes towards female football participation'. The checklist of criteria for conducting a thematic analysis provided helped me determine when enough analysis had been conducted on all data (ibid)

Evaluation and justification of methodological choices

Using a modified GT approach for my research allowed me to maintain reflexivity to my data. Personal approaches to football in Bahrain (rather than officially stated positions) are seldom addressed as 'legitimate', compounding upon the 'unserious' framing found within society as a whole. For this reason, I chose to let my participants guide the directions this would take. Doing this allowed for "*novel and valuable outputs, often based on a deep understanding of the experiences of a specific group of people, which other approaches have so far not facilitated*" (Dunne & Üstűndağ, 2020) to be expressed in my research. Other qualitative methodologies would not have been as useful in uncovering and extracting the type of nascent narratives I was hoping to find. A GT approach allowed the richness of the data and the stories and assertions of my participants to take the forefront, in line with the perspective exploring layout of the study. It also allowed for a more organic exploration of the many interrelated factors that surround the topic, and that may influence peoples perspectives based on the systems they have to engage with, holding that separate from the official policy position (which is as of yet, not fully fleshed out).

Limitations and recommendations for future research

Mentioned previously, GT only became known to me later on in the research process. Compounding the impact of the short fieldwork timeframe, I had to reassess my direction and then familiarise myself with the approach. Thus, some elements were not carried out to their fullest extent (of depth or quantity). Given the modifications to the study structure and in light of the timeframe, I do not feel that this is significant.

The timing of this research project also limited the amount of data I was able to gather from the field, as well as the analysis that could be carried out. This is in relation to the duration of the fieldwork, the global pandemic, and the actual point of time it was carried out was (mid-roll out of policy reforms). As policy is fleshed out and is given time to show impact, the situation on the ground may be very different. Timing also impacted the range of participants I was able to interview. Although planned, I did not interview anyone from with an official (administrative) position, other owners of private academies, or Non-Bahrainis.

I was also limited by the availability and diversity of data engaged with in this study. Many official documents were not publicly available, webpages were not functioning, or had missing information. Due to this, official policy implementation strategies were hard to come by, reducing the efficacy of my analysis.

Further research should factor in a longer fieldwork period with a more focused (and intentional) GT research design, rooted in an established school of the method. It should also include a wider range of participants and more thorough data collection and coding. Ideally future research should also be able to distil a theory out of the findings, as opposed to this research which suffices to generate the larger concepts and discuss their possible interactions with official policy (once fully rolled out and applied). Additionally, future work could focus on either aspect of the study (official policies or lived perspectives) to carry out a more thorough analysis of phenomena and/or policy.

Chapter 2
Context Before Kick Off

Part 1: Anecdotal History

Mapping the history of football in Bahrain The starting point of football is in the early 20th century, with Muharraq club opening its doors in 1928. Other clubs joined in the 1930s, but an official national team was not established until 1951. The Bahrain Football Association was established in 1957 to oversee clubs and the national team, with FIFA and AFC accreditations following in 1966 and 1969 respectively.

In the past, sports, cultural, and youth clubs acted as local community institutions that provided gathering space, held events, and also had sports teams. Some also held programmes for the young people of the area, usually sports or education related. They also were centres of local identity, something very important in Bahrain's social workings. Many people who left their areas due to urbanisation still identify by that label[2]. It is this micro-local identity that created discord and bureaucratic infighting in the amalgamation process, the effects of which are still seen today.

By the 1970s, there were over ninety clubs (Bashmi, 1972), many extremely geographically proximate to each other. As such, there were a series of amalgamations between smaller clubs to create "model clubs in the style of large clubs in Kuwait" (SS, 2020) with better facilities and catering to a wider range of sports. This was unpopular amongst many, while others welcomed the improvement. According to SS, another motive behind the first series of amalgamations between clubs was to stamp out possible sources of political discord popular during the 1970s. A seemingly unconsidered consequence of the amalgamations was the exclusion of many – showing that the footballing scene of Bahrain has not historically been good at capturing and developing talent, letting much of it go to waste.

Part 2: Actors Mapping Exercise

Administrative actors

Three administrative bodies relating to football in Bahrain (HS, 2020) – the Bahrain Football Association (BFA), the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports (SCYS). These institutions only cater to Bahraini citizens, mentioning little to no information regarding the provisions made for non-Bahraini residents of the country to access or otherwise be involved in the overarching network of sports policy and provisioning systems. These individuals' access will be discussed in the private sector (Al Shamlan, 2019).

[2] Belonging to a certain area can either open or close doors for a person. This is a non-negotiable identification, and is inherited even after generations of leaving.

Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS):

In 2015, the newly founded ministry took over the mandate of the General Organisation of Youth and Sports (GOYS), becoming the executive arm of SCYS. MYS's responsibilities broadly are "suggesting and executing plans, projects and programs related to serving the children, youth & sports in line with directives and recommendations of [SCYS] in collaboration with the relevant bodies and institutions in these sectors; […]delivering and equipping youth & sports facilities, providing the needed technical teams, preparing and training the young leaderships" (MYS, 2020). MYS also oversees "the Youth & Sports sector, youth centres, national clubs, and associated projects and facilities", a responsibility transferred to GOYS from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. MYS also contributes to the institutional landscape by way of providing day to day running and maintenance of non-club, state owned sport facilities. In effect, MYS serves to practically implement and manage the top-level directives of the SCYS. There is a programme development department, however these policy and programme documents are not available for the public.

Supreme Council for Youth and Sports (SCYS)

SCYS was established prior to GOYS, in 1975 (MYS, 2020), "for draw[ing overall policy for youth and sports programs aiming to achieve he total integration of all sectors of the youth & sports sectors with the aim to build [sic] good citizens: socially, physically, and intellectually" (ibid). Since restructuring in 2010 (SCYS, 2020), SCYC functions in practice as a forum for various ministers and other high level executives to ensure that at top level discussions of national objectives such as vision 2030, the interests of the youth remain a key consideration.

Aligning smoothly with the broader 2030 Vision, SCYS's mandate is to empower young Bahrainis through 11 broad policy areas, and to monitor the executive bodies responsible for enacting their recommendations and plans. All of the policy fields rely on the use of sports as a way to bring out the potential in children and young people, a way towards a healthier society (physically and in function), and as a means of economic diversification. Chapter 3 of this study discusses several of these policies in more detail.

HRH Nasser Bin Hamad was appointed Chairman of SCYS in 2010 His zeal in pursuing a more prominent sporting position is marked, and will be discussed in more depth in Chapters 3 and5. Currently, it is sufficient to note that the combination of drive and political will have enabled SCYS to engage in various profile-raising activities through various initiatives (Panja, 2020).

Bahrain Football Association (BFA)

BFA is directly responsible for the management and administration of official football clubs and national teams in Bahrain. Established in 1957 as the Bahrain Sports Association, it changed names sometime between establishment and 1966 when Bahrain joined FIFA. BFA is also responsible for coaches' cards, official identification that specifies the coach's capacity and Asian qualification level (BFA, 2020).

BFA is responsible for the training, management, and overall direction of the men's and women's National teams. These include the men's First national team, Olympic team, national team age divisions (u-20, u-18, u-15, u-13), Futsal national team and age divisions (u-20, u-16), and the beach football national team. Women's football covered by BFA includes the women's national team and age divisions (u-16, u-14) and the Futsal national team. While

the men's side have been representing Bahrain internationally for decades, women's appearance on the field was rather recent. The women's football team was first established in 2003 and did not play an international match until 2007 (BFA, 2020).

Football clubs

Presently, 19 registered football clubs have men's teams that compete in the first and second division leagues run by BFA. Most teams also have age divisions where young talent is sculpted and prepared to compete in the final men's team. As age progresses, stricter selection criteria are applied, leaving only the best young players to flesh out the teams. Some clubs like Al-Najma have youth training academies, which run alongside their age divisions, but crossover from academy to club (in any capacity) is minimal. Scouting from public arenas (schools, informal neighbourhood games etc) has stopped (HS, 2020). Unless a coach or other concerned person has a direct link with a football club, it is unlikely that scouts will be sent out to source new talent. Acquisition of new players is mainly voluntary, depending on a talented player to approach clubs themselves (HS, 2020). This stems the flow of new talent to clubs, causing stagnation and reduction of overall talent in clubs and leagues.

Geographic distribution of the football clubs corresponds to highly inhabited areas of the country, despite the reduction in number of clubs caused by historic amalgamation procedures. They cater to local Bahraini residents of their respective area, providing sports facilities and a (relatively) neutral community space for gathering and events. In many cases, the local club also functions as a tangible locus of area-specific identity.

Teams usually are comprised of Bahraini players, with some foreign professionals found in bigger clubs. Administration is also usually Bahraini, with influential members of local communities heading operations there. Support staff positions like physiotherapists are filled by all nationalities. Staff (administration and support) of clubs differ in their professional qualifications and experience in the sports sector. While some individuals are highly qualified, most of the administration of football clubs in Bahrain is run on an amateur basis. This shows through their performance over time, on and off the pitch, and through their ability to accumulate strength and clout, which varies tremendously. A few larger clubs like Muharraq FC, Riffa FC, and Al Ahli FC dominating the other smaller ones with titles and funding usually follow. Smaller clubs also often face fiscal difficulties, with salary arrears to players and staff, which can (and does) cause influxes to larger clubs that are able to avoid such problems and pay better salaries on time.

Non-club football (private sector)

The activities of the privately administered sector are split mainly on age basis. People under the age of 18 mostly access football through enrolment in private football academies. Alternatively (and usually once they have become teenagers), they may also fall into the network of informally organised friendly games held between friends and acquaintances. For younger children preference is given to private academies, based on their ability to train and develop skills and discipline in young players.

I was not able to find a definitive list of private football academies in Bahrain, but there does appear to be a thriving ecosystem with academies of different sizes. Currently, there is no monitoring or regulation body for the large number of academies, to certify them and their facilities, or ensure that their training programmes and staff are of adequate quality, despite calls being made for the same by owners of academies (AlBilad Newspaper, 2020).

For older people or those outside academies, self-organisation is necessary in every aspect. The informality of the games played means that on occasion (particularly with more porous groups) players will cancel last moment, or pitches are hard to find. Informal players are forced to use private pitches (prices vary across different locations and standards of quality), as public pitches are few and far between. Clubs and MYS run facilities are only available for organisations/official bodies use (MYS, 2020). Malaeb, a social community app to organise matches in Bahrain, fixes this problem and others. It is one of the most widely used solutions to casual and more consistent friendly arrangements, and is used by almost everyone, according to the founder (YA, 2020). Its features include pitch booking and payment, joining/advertising open slots in games, and a XP feature where users gain points for participation[3]

Girls and boys are catered to by the private sector, although it appears that not all academies offer training to girls. This is reflective of slowly shifting dominant conservative norms against girls playing football, also evident in the emergence of several informal women's teams (YA, 2020).

Pending BFA action, other leagues have been established for the private sector such as the Youth Development League (an inter academy football league), privately organised tournaments within the friendly game network, and the expat league. Here self-organised teams compete against one another, often including people from multiple social, national and ethnic backgrounds (AA, 2020)

[3] Further discussion of what value Malaeb provides to the informal landscape will be found in the analysis chapters of this RP

Chapter 3
Match Officials and Rules

This chapter will discuss official policies, new national directives in light of Vision 2030, and what the undergoing restructuring process involves and hopes to achieve. It will then progress to my analysis of the potential gaps in policies, referring to the concepts listed in Chapter 1.

Policy landscape of the past

In the past, sport was low on the list of national priorities, and had few recognisable goals or policies. Football was not spared, despite its popularity, and the overall health of the game suffered as a result of poor organisational management, lack of transparency and accountability, and a lack of clear strategies. Although infrastructure and organisations existed, their pull and impact decreased as time went on. As such, the entire sphere began to stagnate, suffering from the excessive bureaucracy that plagued many other institutions in Bahrain at the time (Al Shehabi, 2019). Club administration is widely lamented in Bahrain (SS, 2020), taking most of the blame for underdevelopment of the sector and poor quality of services. Infighting amongst administrators, over-bureaucracy, unqualified/unsuitable management, and corruption have been commonly listed problems for years.

On a country level, there has thus far been very little active and effective sports policy, with no clear strategy to expand audiences and recapture people's attention. It seems that tides are shifting now, and that the intention to clean up and develop is there. Measures are being taken to hold clubs and the officials that run them to higher levels of accountability and transparency. In May 2020, four clubs were referred to the Public Prosecution for accusations of corruption and embezzlement (AlBilad Newspaper, 2019).

Macro level policies: Vision 2030 and the National Development Strategy

Economic Vision 2030 national strategy, that reflected the SDGs was launched in 2008 by the Bahrain Economic Development Board (EDB), the national body responsible for the "ongoing programme of economic and institutional reform" headed by Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa (CP). The vision is clear and ambitious – to "shift from an economy built on oil wealth to a productive, globally competitive economy, shaped by the government and driven by a pioneering private sector. An economy that raises a broad middle class of Bahrainis who enjoy good living standards through increased productivity and high-wage jobs" (Bahrain Economic Development Board, 2008, p. 3). It lays out "aspirations for our economy, government and society in accordance with the guiding principles of sustainability, competitiveness and, fairness" (ibid, p2), aiming to foster cooperation between the government, civil society, the legislative body, and the private sector to "develop detailed strategic and operational plans […] translated into a tangible and coordinated National Strategy across government institutions"(ibid).

The Vision makes clear the intention to move away from the rentier state of the past, described by Beblawi (1987) as a state where the government is the primary recipient of the profits from the extraction of natural rents – in this case oil – and redistributing it to a population that is not involved in the production of those rents. Faced with already small and dwindling oil and gas revenue, "Bahrain's debt-to-GDP ratio stand[ing] at well over 100%" and ever increasing 'fiscal discipline' measures imposed by allies (Diwan, 2020), the goal of the government until 2022 is to lessen Bahrain's expenditure mainly through shifting reliance from publicly funded to private sector provision of goods and services (Government of Bahrain, 2019). the health and education sectors are already heavily commodified, with market-based access to provision becoming ever more common. Although the sports sector does appear to be able to follow the same logic, the government duty to provide a safety net of provision for basic needs like education and healthcare is much higher than in sports. As a non-essential entitlement, it is then understandable that spending on this public service is likely to be reconceptualised to "drain on the budget", and why it is now being encouraged to seek profitability (Al Mahmeed, 2018).

SCYS: policies and restructuring

Sports policy began to make regular appearances on national agendas since the launch of Vision 2030, albeit in almost an afterthought-like manner. Its' centre stage focus and importance to national policy came when NBH began participating in and became the patron of several sports including ironman and triathlon races, cycling, and equestrianism. In 2018, the SCYS underwent organisational reform, and relaunched with a new vigour and aim. The aim was to achieve the necessary institutional reform and create policies that "emphasize on the active role of the Supreme Council to ascend with both youth &Sports movements, through laying innovative ideas and development strategies to be implemented by [MYS] and [BOC], in order to continue the construction and development process in these pivotal sectors" (SCYS, 2020). The board now includes representatives from all ministries and planning-related entities to ensure adequate inclusion of youth and sports affairs in all aspects of national strategy and policy.

Royal attention was given to some of the longstanding problems facing the sector, and NBH announced a formal mechanism to remedy the disbursement of players and employees salary arrears (BahrainThisWeek, 2019). Other key initiatives to develop the youth and sports sector include "professionalism in sports and resolving the [matter of arrears], as well as the debts of national clubs, restructuring sports institutions, talents creating, establishing [corporations] that are affiliated with clubs and more" (ibid). SCYS is also conscious of sports' ability to foster social unity and cooperation, indicating that an increased role of sports will bring about betterment for people in their everyday lives, help foster emerging talent, and for better international performance by national teams (SCYS, 2020).

SCYS is ambitious in its endeavour to bring about "a paradigm shift in [policy] development" (SCYS, 2020) in line with Vision 2030 objectives to "deliver integrated youth and sports programs to create an active nation, innovative youth and sports achievements" (SCYS, 2020). Eleven areas are designated for focus and upgrading. These are:

1	Hosting youth and sports events	7	Increasing the awareness of sports culture among women
2	Leadership development	8	Ensuring the right of children to participate in physical activities
3	Planning the life cycle of an athlete	9	Empowering and involving the disabled in youth and sports activities
4	Administrative professionalism in sport institutions	10	Private sector is a strategic partner for youth and sports
5	Facilities for all	11	Create and develop legislations to support and improve youth and sports
6	Sports for a healthy lifestyle		

A wide range of objectives in many areas have been included in this relatively short list. Some draw on the portfolio of existing initiatives, such as the hosting of international sporting and leadership development events, whereas others address newly expanded concerns, such as the increased role of women and athlete life cycle planning. These new additions are mainly adopted as a result of compliance with international bodies like FIFA, or to make steps towards achieving the SDGs (AlBilad Newspaper, 2019).

Upon further inspection, I note that while general areas of focus have been laid out, there is no announced plan or mechanism for implementation or follow-through. Demarcation of responsibilities and jurisdiction have also been omitted, leaving no clear indication of how SCYS plans to achieve this through their own efforts or in coordination with other government entities. In phrasing the objectives, no specific and attainable targets, timeframes, or initiatives are mentioned.

Objective 3 (the life cycle of an athlete) details SCYS' intention to introduce the Canadian Long-Term Athlete Development model (LTAD) to refine talented young athletes into professionals. The sub-objectives are extremely broad, consisting of adopting the LTAD model, "creating an integrated system to nurture talented athletes, implementing a professional sporting system in compliance with international standards and criteria, creating a career path for athletes, and establishing a variety of coaching schools" (SCYS, 2020). It is unclear how these will be applied or developed, but this could indicate more care be put into the creation of programmes and retention of athletes in a more conducive and nurturing environment.

Objective 4 (administrative professionalism) directly addresses the need for "modern methods of administration in order to facilitate the process of achieving this vision and remain competitive in the international arena" (SCYS, 2020). Organisational and managerial competencies are to be introduced, aiming to create a better suited and more productive institutional environment.

Objective 10 (strategic partnership with private sector) is particularly important, following its increased role overall in Bahraini development plans. For this, SCYS envisions increased investment, the preparation and encouragement of specialised sports administrators and investors, budgetary contributions from the private sector, and the establishment of a unified youth and sports events calendar as their targets for meeting this objective (SCYS, 2020). By far the most established of the objectives, this aims to capture the momentum of the private sector to drive change within football.

Estijabah restructuring

In terms of enforcement mechanisms, the Coordination, Implementation, and Follow-up Committee, named Estijabah ('to answer' in Arabic), was majorly restructured in April 2020 (BNA, 2020), and has taken position as the primary taskforce for "enhancing cooperation […], work mechanisms, [and the implementation of] joint development projects that ensure the continuous development of the youth and sports movement in the kingdom" (ibid). Manned by a fairly young group of athletically inclined businesspeople (many also hold official positions within various sporting bodies in Bahrain), ready to "invest the state-owned sports facilities and create new fixed income sources for the benefit of the sports sector" (BNA, 2019) Estijabah is in effect, the powerhouse behind Bahrain's foray into international football.

Recently, Cordoba CF, a Spanish football team playing in the second division of the Spanish league, was purchased by Bahraini investment company Infinity Capital in a sale negotiated by the Estijabah team (NewsOfBahrain, 2019). As part of the deal, two members of the Estijabah committee were appointed as president and vice president of the club (Cordoba Deporte, 2019). This is one aspect of an ongoing plan to scale-up Bahrain's presence and strength within the international sporting scene, and accompanies various structural and investment strategy changes to the domestic landscape. Additionally, a 20% stake of Paris FC was also purchased a few months later (Panja, 2020), with the words 'Victorious Bahrain' emblazoned on the team's new jerseys (localbh, 2020). Advertising value aside, purchasing stakes in Cordoba CF and Paris FC football teams seem to be merely Estijabah's first steps in strengthening Bahrain's external network of football involvement thus far. Given the recent accreditation of Paris FC's youth academy, club president Pierre Ferracci stated that the "club will support its new shareholder in the development of training for coaches and young players in Bahrain" (Ramsay, 2020).

Not only are these deals good for the international reputation and profile, but they lay the foundations to recruit the necessary talent using the new foreign contacts to ensure Bahrain is well primed to produce local talent in the future, with the facilities to encourage their growth and development.

Estijabah's purpose is now to help introduce athletic professionalism into the sports sphere of Bahrain by way of amending the institutional environment (BNA, 2020). However, even though initiatives like Estijabah exist to level the playing field and bypass excessive bureaucracy (Al Mahmeed, 2018), it is likely that the implementation of such programmes will be no different to the methods and biases found within the existing government/official system. Inability to navigate the system means that it is likely for a person to be left out of the system, their talent wasted, with potentially disastrous long-term results.

Recent developments to football as a result of renewed drive

Although football is the most popular sport in Bahrain, SCYS has not laid out any policies specific to the sport. Football, however, remains a main concern for the Council and the country, and is where main development is underway. Cooperation between SCYS, BFA, BOC, MYS, and Estijabah has created a series of positive developments already.

Wider participation is encouraged across the board, through the setting up of a girls' league for the under-15 and under-18 age divisions amongst the registered clubs in Bahrain (AlBilad Newspaper, 2019), as well as a men's open league for non-club players. The latter was introduced in July 2020, although it is still in planning stages. It was proposed to increase accessibility to competition for those currently outside the club system, and is currently staged to include football clubs not registered with the BFA, private establishments, youth clubs, and individuals (Kooora.com, 2020). The former league for girls will follow BFA protocols, and the organisation will support all registered clubs to establish and run girls' age divisions (if not already present) in compliance with AFC and FIFA directives for the inclusion and development of female football talents. A landmark step, this serves the increasing number of girls who take football seriously and want to play competitively. Although there are only 19 teams registered, this opens the way for a much larger number of girls to participate when they previously could not do so. Currently, the league is open only to registered clubs, meaning non-club participants (non-BFA members, youth clubs, academies, groups of individuals) are not eligible yet.

Gaps in policies

Despite these efforts, not enough is being done in other aspects of the sports industry, particularly in terms of preparing things for professional transformation. On the ground, the situation remains similar, with most changes only affecting those within the formal club system. For those existing outside the officially sanctioned sphere, the effects of the new strategic directions are still mostly unfelt.

In such a behemoth restructuring project with so many interdependent variables, it would make sense for utmost clarity to be a guiding principle of the proprietor. However, messages are mixed regarding the facilitation of professional athleticism by SCYS or any other body involved. The strategy is indeed insinuated to by others outside the decision-making sphere of sports policy, but there is silence from the Council on this matter, apart from a brief mention in policy area 3 – planning the life cycle of an athlete. In their official statements, careers are mentioned as support, administrative, and technical staff but not for the athletes themselves.

As is typical in Bahraini government policy, meagre provisions are made for non-Bahraini residents of the country. (Al Shamlan, 2019) explains that there is a "practice of excluding non-nationals from the state funded provisions afforded to locals". Although there did not appear to be any rule prohibiting them from participation, in practice non-Bahrainis are not eligible for BFA club participation (unless they are a foreign player on contract), hiding them from the minds of policymakers. Passing references to wider accessibility like SCYS policy area 5 – facilities for all – refer to geographical distribution, not the pool of beneficiaries.

Chapter 4 'Talking With Your Feet'

This section presents the thematic analysis carried out on 8 exceedingly rich qualitative interviews. Without this important grounding of perspective in reality, one may be tempted to trust that the vigour of institutional reform will solve all sectoral issues relating to football in Bahrain. Notwithstanding current and future changes, much nuance, struggle, and success are hidden by impersonal policy statements. In presenting excerpts from the interviews, I discuss three perspectives – youth development, national teams and clubs, and the private sector. Finally, I present my personal interpretation of society's interaction with football as presented by the participants.

A Youth Development Story: The Suez Team

SS began coaching the neighbourhood boys at the age of 15 in the mid-1970s to fill his love of the game and engage with it, as he had no team to join at the time. Teaching himself techniques from Pele's book, he drilled alone with a borrowed ball in the evenings, and sat on the side-lines of the local men's team training sessions; a sympathetic coach recognising another lover of the game allowing him to fill in at times. "I just wasn't old enough to play with the proper team yet. They [younger kids] came to me and asked if I would coach them, I said yes I would but I have some rules, like the education one, which they accepted. Over time, the undisciplined ones dropped out and the good players started to improve, and more good boys started to join our team. Ones who already knew the rules and would fit in – no naughty behaviour, or smoking, or fighting, or causing problems in the neighbourhood. We even went and spoke to those type of boys who hadn't yet approached us. and that's how the team grew to the point where I had three teams, the 3 different age groups. They were the best guys in our town. Every one of these kids now have amazing careers, one of them is even an ambassador"

"being a coach or a headmaster of a group is about having leadership and setting a good example to follow. If I tell them to do something, I have to do it better than them or I'll get them to do it all the way to my skill/level – the better ones will exceed me. Success is to make them better than what they are, better than you, getting things structurally correct. Being good motivates them. Kids want to be the best and play for the best team and be the best team. No one likes to go to a football game and lose, it's how you deal with the loss and how does it feel. Do you want that nasty feeling to be repeated over and over again? No – which is why we must go and work on our weaknesses and improve ourselves, becoming better, faster, stronger so that we [kids] don't get pushed around or tired during the game. That's how I built them up slowly. We went from a team of kids running around in the neighbourhood to playing against the big organised club's teams and we actually beat them! And if they ever beat us, the score would be 1-0 or 2-1, so we were a very good team "

"I got them to buy into the team. Everybody has got to save and pay us a weekly contribution, and we got enough money to start buying a kit and all of a sudden we were the only team that had a full kit and when we would play, we would be seen as an actual team, not just a collection of kids kicking a ball about – we had that prestige, unity between our players. If you look good, you'll feel good, you'll play well. Then we decided we needed to upgrade our boots. Obviously, income differs between families, so contributed 50% towards the boots for him and we all started wearing proper football boots – all of us. So once we play with other teams, especially the big teams, you see those players looking neat with good shoes and proper uniform with numbers, and a coach at the side-lines wearing it too, watching them play; it was a very nice setup to have my players doing the same and having the same equipment as everyone else"

"The Suez team was a resounding success, so much so that all the neighbourhood boys wanted to join our team. We started selecting only the best. So much so that I made it a rule if a player wants to play on my team, they have to been good at school, this way their parents wouldn't blame me for their failure in studies. Any player who didn't succeed at school would not be allowed to participate, even if he was the best player. I would ensure from the teachers of the kids' grades myself, and it was like the whole society contributed to the betterment of the players. I don't want anyone to play for me who is neglecting their responsibilities. School comes first, then football".

"The team helped shelter them from bad habits like smoking and drinking and gangs, even at [10-12], there were people who got wrapped up in that. Our group were saved from that. The environment that we provided for them and facilitated for them has definitely helped shape them into the men they are today. They all became big personalities in Bahrain. It's essential to pay attention to school, and I used to ensure of that myself. Its easier to train people who are academically doing well, they're sharper. There were those who were talented and had a lot of skills, but I wouldn't let them into the team because of their academic performance. It means they only want to play, they don't care about anything else. I wanted a group I could nurture with similar interests. They weren't missing it from their home environments, but it was good for them to identify as a member of that team – it became an elite football team, but definitely NOT elitist. We had people from all walks of life, it didn't matter, but the most important thing is that he did well at school."

Youth Development

Each interview discussed the impact football participation has on children, drawing on their personal experiences. Irrespective of their age, each participant informed me that football was an integral influence throughout their lives, and that that impact is continued into their adulthood. Many still feel connected to it and participate in some form. The lifelong love of the game and the character basics emphasises in training often goes on to set them up well for their professional and personal lives.

The notion of sports benefitting the development of children in many ways was widespread throughout the interviews. SS points out that in Bahrain if a young person is not involved in sports, that is likely for there to be "*nowhere else for them to go and release their pent-up energy and normal aggression. If you can guide that and put a structure around it, it's the best thing for them*". In essence, each of the 5 C's of Positive Youth Development (Caring, Character, Competence, Confidence, Connection (Årdal & Larsen, 2017) (illustrated below) was addressed in some way by the participants, together forming an intricate experience.

Figure 1: The 5 C's of Positive Youth Development (I Can AZ, 2018)

Providers and coaches

Why coaches matter according to the participants

My participants illustrated the main roles of coaches as physical instruction duties, nurturing and teaching, and the provision of support to the players and their families. The role's importance cannot be understated, wielding an influence is often lifelong. MJ credits her career to her high school football coach stating that "*one of the most important relationships I got out of this was with the coach. He helped me and I wouldn't have been a lawyer if it wasn't for him*", with many others referring to their coaches as "fatherly figures" or friendly and invested in their wellbeing and overall development.

HS explains that coaches for younger children "*should have some knowledge of psychology, and know that you treat children differently to older people. The first thing the coach should do is teach the children how to play football (not so much 'coaching' as instruction and teaching skills), and show (particularly at a young age) how to have fun playing football, not how to win. Winning shouldn't be the ultimate goal, it should be to allow the kids to have a good time without any type of intense pressure. Competitiveness will come as they get older, and if they love the game and have fun doing it, it will come".* (HS). These requirements

resonate clearly with the physical literacy to excellence stages of the LTAD model (Athletics Canada, 2004).

Training at clubs (and coaches there)

YA relates this to the players' personal development, citing "*the very bad style of coaching in clubs and the old-fashioned coaches who are not able to nurture players. Grassroots is not only developing football skills, it's developing personal and education, using these skills to become role models in the future. [Club training] is very outdated in terms of both, sporting and education aspects*".

Listing his reasons for leaving national team and club coaching, MF recalls "*the training services, treatment, the bad behaviour [in clubs], unqualified coaches, and poor supervisors. Unqualified people work in clubs and have the ability to make decisions. For qualified people like me, who aren't working in sport. We distance ourselves from such organisations and stop working due to the low wage and very short contract periods*" (MF). Thus, qualified coaches are driven to the private sector, where salaries are more realistic, and their profession's importance is recognised and respected. This has left clubs with fewer qualified and invested coaches to sculpt upcoming athletes, although upgrading capacities and qualifications is amongst new policy objectives for the football sector.

Training at academies (and coaches there)

Discussing academies, HS claims that the spike in the amount of football academies and corresponding uptake in the number of parents wanting their children to join these academies is *"because these private academies are more interested in the output of good players and nourishing their skills and talents and building their characters."* The more promising environment offered also appealed to young people, such as AA and YA who said that if academies were available at his time, then he *"would have signed up for sure, the environment is better and people there are also concerned about their development. If [the academy] had then developed my football skills, I could have then continued and continued until a certain point*" (YA).

Academy coaches are seen to be more qualified than their club peers, and "*better at dealing with children. not only are they shining diamonds in the rough, they have fun with the child which also motivates the child to go to training or a match*" (HS, 2020). He explains *"the great focus on teaching the basics of football that might not be available within the club system […] there are a lot of players who are older and play in the wrong place because they don't have the basics like headers, receiving the ball, passing the ball, kicking the ball"*.

What my interviewees said about character development

Through basic skills training, socialization, and character development exercises, children learn "more than winning and losing". Traits like discipline, teamwork, and dedication to work towards achievement are developed through training, becoming in many cases core to adult development (SS, 2020). Due to out of touch coaching practices and a lack of proper player development strategy carried out largely by amateurs, a lot of youth talent is wasted in the current institutional environment in Bahrain. AA refers to how academy players worldwide are sculpted from a young age by qualified professional coaches, ingraining athleticism into their mindsets, leading to professional and dedicated players and professionals. Recognizing the futility of trying to reshape the current generation of players and

practitioners, HS emphasizes that "*mental development is key. For the whole new next generation, we have to include the drive that we are currently missing. I would implement in these younger players a love of football and the desire to surpass all boundaries and become the best players they can be*" (HS). The current generation of players furnishing men's teams, the lack of professionalism weakens players that base their drive on money instead of strong dedication and an athletic mindset. "*The [player]'s motivation is flawed; they will only perform and train seriously while the money is still there. Once that goes, they won't want to train*" (HS), commenting on its unsustainability. Establishing discipline and a love of the game in young players is a more guaranteed path to lifelong involvement in sports, can form the basis for a more sustainable intrinsic drive, setting beneficiaries up well for adult life, and more resilient and positive behaviour overall. On the matter of character building, "Duckworth posits three factors that build character: (1) Mindset – a belief that you can experience positive growth and change, (2) skill building, and (3) a supporting environment. Sports can contribute to all three of these factors" (Matthews, 2019)

Negative development

"the spirit of players is impacted, and they lose desire to play and participate. That's how you lose talent, by not giving it a fair chance to grow"(HS).

This statement rang true for one of my participants, who encountered many unpleasant experiences during his participation in football during his formative years. He was excluded from national team selections due to *Wasta*, was blocked from playing for a year due to negligent administrators and bureaucratic infighting between officials and clubs, and did not receive sufficient familial support. Consequences of these events included him walking away from competitive football and the acquisition of bad habits including smoking, problems with authority, and a general sense of cynicism towards the feasibility of salvaging the football sector. Yet, he shows resilience, sharing that his dream "*after university is to become a player agent for people who didn't have a voice, but I [can't] find a way yet. I have someone who I want to push towards that, but I don't have any contacts yet*". The participant shows courage and the ability to deal with shocks through his desire to assist others onto the path he was not able to access through no fault of his own.

Academia and football

To summarise the views of my participants regarding what they have learnt from football, I turn to FK, the youngest of the lot. On what football means to her, its importance goes far beyond a frequent obligation, instead "*it's a stress reliver. There's a quote that goes "you walk on the pitch and you leave all your worries behind" it's actually real. You get to the pitch and you want to focus on that. It can be a distraction, a stress reliver because you are shooting a ball as hard as you want and let out your anger. It's great for fitness. it gives you an insight into a different world, of other people's opinions. it makes you feel stronger mentally for me personally. Football and just sports in general are very big to me in my life. Without it I am not [me*]" (FK).

The participants also mentioned academic, 'street smarts', physical education and the understanding of tacit signals through body language – all important kinds of learning gained from interacting with so many different people.

Mirroring the Suez team's academic achievement requirements, achieving a balance between academic responsibilities and football practice was a key concern of my participants. Many S4D programmes across the world incorporate features to ensure a certain level of academic performance for attendees, and it is included as a key factor in Getting into the Game (Office of Research - Innocenti, 2019).

FK also expressed that achieving a balance between school and sports is difficult, "[during tournaments my schedule] is school, after school sports, football and then back home [around 9pm] eat then I have to cram all my schoolwork". Even at a high level of play, football still does not manage to break the hobby framing found in wider society, rendering the time spent in its pursuit as 'less valuably invested'. Concerned parents often attribute their children's withdrawal from football to such imbalances of time.

Positive behaviour training and Gender inequality in application

The self-organised Suez team lacking financial backing had the prestige of a uniform, the only non-club team to do so. unified team mindset and a sense of solidarity amongst the players who "looked good, felt good, and played well as a result". Examples like Suez emphasise the suitability of football as a vehicle for development (Office of Research - Innocenti, 2019). This not only helped establish the benefits of being in the team, thus increasing its popularity and pull within the community, but also proved that with a good, invested coach applying fundamental techniques, any challenge can be met. SS expanded on the psychological aspects of being in a group, and how this can be used to reinforce positive behaviour in the team and achieve results. According to him, "'"we went from a team of kids running around in the neighbourhood to playing against big clubs teams and we beat them". The rules and behavioural requirements are best enforced by example, and can uncover great determination in a child. However, FK spoke of the differences in behavioural discipline between boys and girls as part of athletic training. She alludes that boys are subject to stricter controls on rowdy or aggressive behaviour, whereas girls are more likely to say mean things (verbal bullying) or otherwise demoralise their teammates. Oftentimes the interactions go unnoticed by coaching staff, or are dismissed as insignificant, only intervening when absolutely necessary. Furthermore, harmful competitiveness presents differently in the training of girls, which may also go unnoticed. Combined with the other issues, these things can be detrimental to team spirit and unity in future expansions into women's football if left unaddressed.

Socialisation and relationships

Regardless of provider, football participation offers a space for socialisation with people outside of the household and intimate social circle of the child. Not only are they introduced to people from different ethnic, religious, and class backgrounds, but they interact and collaborate with them in a space where these labels are (or should be) rendered irrelevant. Bonds formed through football are also essential to the healthy development of children, according to the 5 Cs framework, a claim corroborated anecdotally by the participants of the interviews. Many social and professional bonds are made via football, whether it be through official institutions in the private or public sectors, or through informal footballing networks. The relationship between player, coach and family is no less important than with their teammates.

Participating in football offers the (theoretical) ability to bend the otherwise rigid social divide. MJ stated that "*some groups are really open about everybody that wants to participate, other groups are specific to certain types of people that they want to play. For example, the group that I was in was really open, we had foreigners we had Bahrainis, we had Sunni-Shia […] public schoolers and private schoolers, it really did not matter. The whole thing factor that they would take into account, when they are looking at somebody to add to the group is how they are as a person*". Moving beyond the beauty of that scene, I note that in Bahrain, participation habits falls along semi-segregated, albeit far more porous, social groupings/lines. Household finances are a far more deciding factor in determining the type of establishment frequented than any other socio-demographic factor. Al Shamlan (2019) establishes that type of school attended (public/private) are an axis of social stratification in Bahrain, forming the basis for semi rigid social groups to form, usually indicative of perceived economic class amongst Bahrainis.

Laying the groundwork for careers

For many, regular participation in football is reduced when education becomes more intense (secondary or tertiary levels). In the investment of time and focus, studying is a much more valuable endeavour, explains YA about his choice to prioritise higher education over the pursuit of professional football. "*It doesn't make sense because it's not sustainable, it's not proper, it's not well taken care of. If I get injured, what's going to happen? That's it my career is over, and I didn't get the best education I didn't focus on my career, so what am I going to do?"* (YA, 2020). Attributing an 'investment value' to football participation during youth, and weighing possible future returns against those offered a university degree or other 'respectable' career path is reflected across society – particularly in parents' plans for their children. It is a reasonable concern, given the lack of financial stability offered by the pursuit of football in Bahrain, and the semi-professional status that wards many young people (and their parents) off of considering it seriously at all. There are also few visible role models available to young Bahrainis, making it seem as if there is no reliable road to professional football at all. As of now, there is only one known Bahraini that has managed to achieve that goal – Abdulla Yousif Hilal, who plays for Slavia Prague FC, a regular champion's league contender.

Transferability to a career in the football sector is undeniably limited, given the domestic state of football, and access to global opportunities. Notwithstanding these macro-level interactions, the interviews corroborate the experiences of the Suez team case study in the benefit of the characteristics of youth development gained through football training in preparing children for careers later in life.

National Team and Clubs

Social perception

When addressing the state of the national team or football clubs in Bahrain most of my participants held a dim view of the institutions and everything to do with them. HS declared "*if I was to write down a list of the weakest things about Bahraini football clubs, I reckon the administration would be the weakest thing on that list*" (HS). Personal anecdotes of corruption and inefficiency are mentioned throughout the interviews. The echoes of the various rounds of club amalgamation still ring, contributing to much of the bureaucratic infighting amongst administrators – one of the sector's comorbidities. Lack of results is not surprising, claims HS, "when people are stuck on old petty issues, it's hard to get anything useful out of them". Thus, Bahraini society has grown accustomed to low results from the football sector, spurring many only half-joking memes about losing (again). Memes aside, the National team's performance was, for years, another source of disappointment inhabiting the hearts of its audience – our football devoted nation. Overall, although attitudes are slowly changing, local leagues remain unappealing to all but the most dedicated audiences.

Clubs also hold a reputation for bad behaviour and unprofessional mindsets amongst the players of their men's teams and youth divisions. YA echoed the opinions of AA and WS of their experiences in youth divisions in Bahraini football clubs, recalling that "Team members would go smoking after the games and I'd be interacting with people doing other stuff like that, so that discouraged me in that aspect". Some of the accusations made against the men's team players were being money driven, following financial incentives rather than intrinsic drive. This is a catch 22, related to the current semi-professional status of football and financial instability of sector participation for practitioners. Obviously, they will follow money, and want to be best compensated, but it's now the overriding drive, setting the tone for the sector. This can be attributed to malformations of the player's attitude, relating to the FUNdamentals and early stages of LTAD. S4D/PYD literature also addresses this point in younger children – ingraining the love of football in them, setting them up for a healthy, active life in the beginning.

Interestingly, despite this rather negative perception of the official football sector, it forms the upper limit of achievement in Bahrain is not questioned often. The semiprofessional status with poor performance is accepted, and audience attention shifts to foreign leagues, ignoring the local league's poor tactical skills and low entertainment value. Confusingly, despite the unquestioned dominance foreign leagues exert over Bahraini audiences, opportunities abroad are seldom considered. YA explains this as a fear-induced aversion to exploring outside Bahrain, noting it in private sector investment habits. Potential athletes (and their families) often fixate on several countries' top leagues as the only options for footballing careers abroad. "*they limit themselves to only playing here. If they don't reach the big European clubs that's it, they only think of England, Italy or Spain. If they don't get that they will stop playing football and forgo that dream, but they fail to see that football is played all over the world and not just in those countries but also Turkey, Czech Republic, USA and others. They play very high level of football and there's a lot of money to be made there too*" (MF, 2020).

Semi-professional status

"for most people sports is a hobby. Yes, there are professionals, but the overwhelming majority see it as a hobby, and you can see that in peoples mindsets and in remuneration people get from the clubs" (HS)

Structural factors and sectoral practices are at the heart of the semi-professional status of football in Bahrain that make staff (including players) unable to devote themselves entirely to their role in the football sector. Employment rights are seldom preserved, an example of which was the wage arrears settlement initiative (HS), and the few permanent employment contracts for staff. This destabilises the positions of the coaches and applies to coaches and to players as well, many of whom are not able to leave their day job and focus on football, as their daily means are not secure enough to Invest all their time in/on. Therefore, the result is inefficiency and sub-par administration, affecting the whole sector and reinforcing the limiting semi-professional status of football.

Furthermore, the organisational environment is not currently conducive to change and development. MF moved to private coaching when he was unable to function with club restrictions. Sectoral organisation has created an environment of "*low income, very short-term contracts up to 8 months, which is impossible. [As a coach] You will never be able to develop a person within 8 months only. I have so many things I want to achieve, but I found that I couldn't do anything in local clubs*" (MF).

How talent is wasted at clubs and why that matters for sectoral development

Poor talent recruitment and management was also designated by participants as a major reason behind the hemorrhaging of talent. Particularly concerning was the lack of a connection "between the clubs and the academies. There's no feeder system, especially now that scouting has stopped. In the 70's they used to scout talent from the streets and schools and bring them to the clubs. At academy level players will just go learn and train, and there is a league between different age divisions of private academies, but it stops there really. The scouting isn't done anymore, clubs don't build teams from external sources anymore" (HS). He continues, taking the example of "Ramadan tournaments or companies' tournaments, you'll see some fantastic players, but they have no way of getting into clubs. The disconnect is between clubs and these tournaments/academies where a lot of great talent is" (HS). AA discusses the surplus talent and notes the lack of clear separation between club players and friendly players, often overlapping in informal matches or tournaments. AA explained that "*Bahrain isn't like other countries in the sense that even professional players will play with people who aren't professionals. For example, Mahdi Humaidan (NT player) and I played in so many games together in teams in many friendly tournaments […] The level in Bahrain even in friendly games is very high. It's unfortunate that it isn't transformed into something more serious*".

Organizational factors were also attributed to talent waste. As far as the interviews showed and my other observations, Bahraini football clubs are not open to non-Bahrainis. Within the eligible group, *Wasta*[4] plays a role in determining selections and allocation of positions, "even down to club age divisions" (HS). Such biased and unqualified selection is detrimental for team spirit, unity, and overall fairness of the game; and common in football despite public awareness of *Wasta's* detriments.

[4] A cultural process of 'mediation or intercession' on another person's behalf (Cunningham & Sarayrah, 1994) similar to western concepts of patronage/clientelism.

Interviews also connected the common reluctance to consider pursuit of a career outside of Bahrain and administrative direction on player development, citing improper player mindset development as a reason for accepting the limitation.

Organisational reasons for poor club performance

Other than the factors already discussed like bureaucracy, *Wasta*, and mismanagement by unsuitable staff (in terms of qualification and qualities), the interviews produced two main organizational causes for poor club performance: a lack of transparency and accountability (generally and financial in particular), and a lack of clear organizational goals or targets. This study has already established that the former reason is a key objective of new government policy, with major reforms on the horizon. Of the latter, MF states "*If I need [the team] to reach the semifinal of the World Cup, I should know how to get there. what coaches, players, resources are necessary to enable the team to reach... The challenge is amongst us [within Bahrain] and not necessarily to compete with anyone outside."* (MF).

Private Sector

Activities

For clarity, when making references to the private sector of football, I refer to an umbrella term for many activities that require payment for participation. Weak policy implementation thus far has been felt most strongly by young people in Bahrain, who must navigate a complicated web of providers to play the beautiful game.

The private sector has been extremely active in expanding into football related activities over the past decade. According to the interviews, private pitches became popular around 2010, with private academies following soon after in 2012-2013. In addition to private pitch rentals and academies, private sector activities mentioned by my participants included Malaeb and the wide network of social and competitive self-organised friendly games that sustain a high level of informal play amongst many in Bahrain. This thriving environment is socially fluid, with no clear demarcation between amateur and semi-professional players, or on social boundaries based on sect, ethnicity, or class. He also touched on the mixing of social groups in friendly football noting "*I played against half of the teams that play in the ex-pat league friendly games",* reflecting on football's position as a socialisation space where the love of the game and chemistry overcome most rigid social boundaries. Additionally, organised competition does exist outside official leagues (excluding friendly networks), including inter-academy leagues, expat leagues, and self-organised leagues.

Whatever outlet it takes, the interviews were clear in that the private sector is stimulating the once swampy environment of football in Bahrain, creating spaces for competition and the development of talent. It actually creates a positive cycle of more active talent stimulating more facilities to house and develop that talent, stimulating more development and expansion, and so on.

Malaeb: a story of innovation

These spaces that facilitated community building was preceded by the physical infrastructure first established, which encouraged the development of secondary services to cater to the growing hunger in Bahrain for football and all that relates to it. Most notably is Malaeb, an application mentioned by all of my participants actively involved in football play as their main way to book private pitches to play on. YA, the CEO of the application, stated his inspiration as his personal frustration with the difficulty of booking a pitch and arranging a team to play on time. The resulting application has two main functions: booking private football pitches for a private game with friends, and/or joining public matches organised by others. Through Malaeb, many more young people are able to easily book and participate in matches on over 100 pitches fairly dispersed football grounds across Bahrain, easing the participation of large swathes of Bahrain's population.

Facilitating overall participation, making it "*much easier for people who don't play every day, who might play once a week or every 2 weeks or a month. They can much more easily find a location that suits them and play there*" (YA). Expats are also a main category of Malaeb user. They usually "*play at home with their friends. When they come to work here, they don't know anyone but don't want to stop playing, so they use Malaeb to join matches and play*" (YA).

Expanding their primary activities, Malaeb also provide consultancy services to prospective developers of land wishing to invest in a private football pitch. YA explains "*Now that there is an actual platform, people are making pitches with their extra land. It's very brave to make that jump and actually make their empty plots of land into a football pitch. After that half of their work is already done, they already have a marketing platform and they'll have a system and we'll provide them with a consultation. So [we get calls saying] hey we want to build a pitch. […] we prepare them with a whole study consisting of how much it's going to cost, How big is the land and how many pitches we can divide it into, how much can you rent it for after, and how much can you get in return. That usually incentivizes people who don't know how the football pitches work and how they make money to go for making a pitch instead of doing it traditionally and building a restaurant. And now they know that they can come to us and we'll give them a full study that they can utilize. To be honest some of them I tell them that it's a waste of time. Others [might invest] 100-200,000 BD into it and can still get a profitable return.*"

Malaeb's activities are a perfect start-up example of how the private sector can be an essential partner to Vision 2030 objectives. YA believes he is contributing to the overall health of the football sector "*in terms of encouraging others to come in and invest in it*". By offering a diversification of economic ventures, investment action is duly stimulated. Innovation is key as well, supplied by the public and supported by the government through various initiatives and bodies. Knowledge creation and development too – all falls into this objective and fulfils diversification. This creates the perfect environment to foster the emergence of the proposed specialised class of athletic administrators and professionals, developing Bahrain's human capital and creating an attractive investment environment, other objectives of Vision 2030.

Motivation

YA illustrates the vital profit incentive driving private sector development as a power levelling mechanism, empowering the consumer and forcing businesses to improve services, as "*Business owners know now that if their quality isn't good people have the options to take their business elsewhere instead*" (YA, 2020). However, profit is not the only source of motivation, with many new sports entrepreneurs being lovers of the game themselves. Having missed out on participation when younger, YA channelled that passion into a business venture. This drive is mirrored by many coaches and owners of academies or other ventures, and increasingly in administration. However due to the growing number of unscrupulous academy owners that

pay little mind to PYD, athlete creation, or proper facilities, some have voiced the need for a quality assurance body to be instituted (Al Alaiwi, 2017)

Opportunities and specific advantages

According to my participants, the private sector has several freedoms compared to clubs that enable it to do well in the football sector and make use of the high skill levels found in the country (AA, 2020). Firstly, it is relatively free from the many bureaucratic constraints of the public sector, and of the local identity-based politics that plague most of the clubs in Bahrain. Secondly is the type of administrators who are fuelled by a love for the sport and business sense, are streets ahead of their counterparts in the public sector. A better understanding of strategic planning, management, and the need to make a profit (thus warranting better and more constant capital investment) allow private practitioners to provide higher quality output of services. Highly qualified local and foreign professionals are employed in private ventures, and in some cases, links are made with international football bodies to arrange summer training camps, participation in international and regional tournaments, or even scouting (AA, 2020). Third is the responsiveness to changing demands and attitudes of Bahraini society. Services upgraded and diversified quickly since the initial success. Within less than a generation, there has been a huge uptake in football participation, spurred in part by the early academies, creating further demand and cementing their popularity.

How the private sector can contribute to sectoral improvements

Football is still an emerging industry, with low-level investment increasingly taking place. Unlike the saturated retail, food and beverage sectors, there is still a lot of demand for football related goods and services. The high consumer knowledge, existing popularity of the game, and a lack of alternatives all make for fertile ground for such business ventures. The fledgling industry must also take advantage of its ability to be responsive to demands of the Bahraini public and tap into other industries as well. Benefits would be seen in almost every industry as a result of increased activity within the football sector, ranging from journalism to administrative staff, legal representatives, manufacturing, lifestyle and nutrition, construction and maintenance, and so many more indirectly (MF,HS, 2020). MF puts it well, describing it as "*a job creating initiative, and its economically stimulating*".

Social impact of/on football

Examining the football sector without examining its users (society) is only half the picture. As dynamic as the game itself, society too changes with time and through its interactions with other institutions. Here, I discuss common societal attitudes towards the framing of football as a hobby, women's' participation in football, and audience attitudes.

Changing attitudes to girls and women

FK illustrate the stereotypes she faces from her otherwise supportive parents regarding her participation in football, calling it "*a guy's sport and it's too dangerous for a girl and things like that. Mom loves it when I play basketball, dad likes it when I do triathlons, swimming, running*". However, FK reminded us that "*it's not the same as 40 years ago – not the same generation. The community should be more accepting of what their kids want to do and support their girls to play*". Many of the younger participants were vocal about the need to include women in football, referring to the 'very good' women's national team, with the older generation coming around slowly too. MF used to be opposed to training girls on conservative cultural grounds but recanted this position once he "*became aware of the problems girls were facing in their mental and physical health*" without access to sports. Malaeb also takes the cultural norms surrounding women's behaviour in public into consideration, by creating a "*female friendly label [on the app], where [they] specified certain [secluded/very private] pitches where women who are not comfortable playing in front of men, or who want to play without a hijab can do so there*". He also touched upon male bias and "cultural restrictions [towards] participating" in the football sector, a reflection indicative of the new generation referred to by FK, with more liberal attitudes towards the cultural norms usually held about women in Bahraini society.

Audiences

Audience attitudes are fickle, both a product and a contributor to the dire state of football in Bahrain. At a club level, low pull factors to attract new players means the level of skill within organised league football is not reflective of the level of talent within the country as a whole. Lack of alternative leagues and smaller clubs exasperate this problem, as do the clubs' abilities to properly manage themselves as organisations and as employers (players, coaches, support staff). Holding a more special position, the NT overcomes local loyalties and sentiment (negative or positive), and is thus able to draw bigger audiences, brought out in a display of national pride. International games are more of a spectacle and provide interesting public events to attend, so while turnout is better than the leagues', overall attendance and support is still lacking. Many people relate this to low expectations and being used to disappointment from the national team (WS, MF, 2020). Still, the national team is the widely perceived pinnacle of football in Bahrain, with foreign pursuits left on the pillows of young men and women across the country.

Expression and discussion

SS referred to football as a societal release valve, and that if a proper and open football league was properly established, "you wouldn't see a single protest or talk of revolution in Bahrain, you know why? Because all the pent-up anger is gone, people are busy talking about something else." Communal emotional investment in a (relatively) apolitical environment (referring to the unity and politically harmless competition in the football leagues) can be seen in general interactions between people and is needed to maintain the morale of the population. HS says "it goes beyond football, there's an economic benefit, social benefits, long term and short term. It helps people forget the hardships they face in their daily lives" (HS) in the form Happier people are also more compliant, willing to work together, and HS

remarks "the more all these parts of society join together in unity, the more fruit it will bear and this can be seen on and off the pitch in all levels"

Insta-expression: HS's show's impact on society

Expression is key to the successful transformation of football into the societal release valve referred to earlier. State media censorship must be reduced to experience the benefits of expression, and properly express and to fulfil the undeclared objective of political distraction. HS used to work "*in television, I can tell you that the press censorship is very strict here, the number of rules we had to follow was so frustrating.*" Using the frustration constructively, since 2017, HS has been the host of a very successful audience interview-based show on Instagram. In it, he attends sports fixtures, but rather than providing coverage of the match, he interviews the audiences and other participants, providing them an accessible platform for expression.

"*I recorded a good, unfiltered interview. I will post anything as long as it is not abusive in any way; meaning no swearing, no racism, no sectarianism or hate speech […] I want to show the true state of sports in Bahrain. I think it was popular because I didn't censor myself, I was honest and direct, which is rare in Bahrain. People are scared to say what they think and publish it, but they appreciate it when others do it. At first people would run away from me at the stadiums, now they are more used to it and comfortable talking on camera. several people have come looking for me to give a statement because they had things to say that would be cut out on television*".

Social media has provided him and others the platform to express their more freely, with the additional benefit of being able to interact with content. Interaction online has been the driving success of the show, transpiring into real life changes in audience perception and interaction with Bahraini football. "*I was told by some of the fans that I was the reason they started going to matches and bringing their wives and children, because they didn't know there were family sections, that it was safe and suitable for families*" (HS, 2020). It is undoubtably an important outlet for social expression and commentary, and a more modern way to generate interaction with an uninteresting league. Social media on its own is not enough to reshape public interaction with football events and developments, nor is it enough to transform dominant narratives surrounding the sport. For this, the entire sports journalism sector must improve, and be more forthright in presentation and discussion of topics. HS hopes that in the future, "*transparent and strong journalism [will] occupy more of an influential position within sports in Bahrain, particularly the freedom to criticise constructively without worrying about ego flattery or hurt feelings. It should be an active participant in the industry and stir conversations, addressing important matters and causes*" (HS, 2020).

Chapter 5 – mind the gap: how and where clever policies can enable more than football participation

Objective 3: LTAD

What literature has to say about it

According to UNICEF, Sports for Development (S4D) "refers to the use of sport, or any form of physical activity, to provide both children and adults with the opportunity to achieve their full potential through programmes that promote personal and social development" (Office of Research - Innocenti, 2019). The report focuses on various S4D programmes that promote positive outcomes for children and youth in the areas of education, social inclusion, child protection, and empowerment. Other criteria to consider when designing child focused S4D policy could include education, behaviour, employment prospects, and health and wellbeing of the participants (The Centre for Social Justice, 2015).

Many (myself included) are inclined to understand sports as a magic salve for the problems of the youth. However, Coakley (2011) attributes the dubious equation between positive youth development outcomes in youth and sport participation to "the dual assumption that sport, unlike other activities, has a fundamentally positive and pure essence that transcends time and place so that positive changes befall individuals and groups that engage in or consume sport". Addressing concerns raised by (Coakley, 2011) (Black, 2010) and many other theorists within the sports and development field, Sportsanddev.org is clear in that sports participation itself "does not inherently provide positive educational outcomes", instead it is used as a hook or vehicle (as MF describes) for the delivery of positive messages. The success of the programmes relies heavily on the conduct and proficiency of instructors and management to deploy properly (sportanddev.org, 2020).

"Sport, therefore, is viewed as an effective activity for solving problems and improving quality of life for individuals and society alike" (Coakley, 2011) through the idealised testimonials of those with vested interest in the success of sports. Despite his criticism, and whilst it is true that idealization of values and character traits like honesty, teamwork, fair play, respect for themselves and others, adherence to rules (sportanddev.org, 2020) is almost inevitable when talking about sports participation for youth development – I assert that the proof is in the pudding. Sports for development programmes do help improve performance in education, behaviour, employment, and health and wellbeing for participants (The Centre for Social Justice, 2015) – something Bahrain quite sorely requires.

Long Term Athlete Development Framework

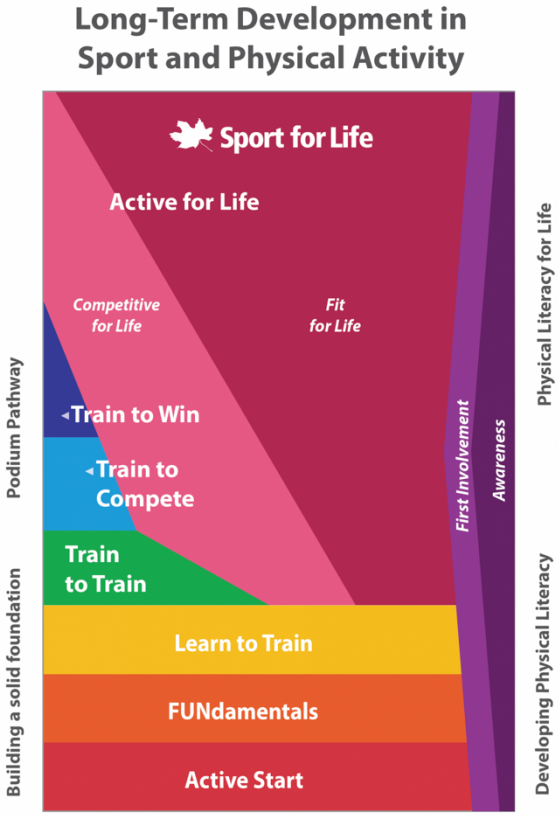

Figure 2 LTD Stages. Source (Sport for Life CA, 2019)

LTAD is a comprehensive framework that plots out several stages of athletic development over the course of a young person's life according to chronological age for sports practitioners to consider in their development of youth sports policy (Sport for Life CA, 2020). Outlined in the image above, the LTD framework, developed for Athletics Canada (2004) contains eight main stages, that can be arranged into the following groupings:

1- Awareness (of available activities) and (positive) First Involvement
2- Developing physical literacy (Active Start, FUNdamentals, Learn to Train). These stages "provide the foundation for those who choose to pursue elite training […] after age 12" (ibid).
3- Elite training (Train to Train, Train to Compete, Train to Win). These stages are for "those who want to specialise in one sport and compete at the highest level, maximizing the physical, mental, and emotional development of each athlete" (ibid).
4- Active for life (competitive or recreational)

Many examples have been given throughout this study on some of the ways my participants have experienced these stages through a hodgepodge of providers. This is by no means the optimal way, and a more unified, youth development friendly approach is needed to remedy the concerns they and others have.

LTAD in Bahrain: what is stated and what is experienced

As discussed, official policies enacted by various institutions and government bodies in Bahrain have emphatically increased their efforts to introduce LTAD methods into the

official sports sector. It is yet to be seen how these policies will be designed, or how implementation is planned to take place and by whom.

In the private sector, ventures have also started to adopt business strategies that are in line with these objectives too. Tekkers has become a global partner of Southampton FC youth training academy (AlBilad Newspaper, 2020), one of the most prominent of its kind in the UK. Other academies also run elite programmes according to accredited foreign training programmes. Juventus Academy is accredited by Juventus FC and use their training programme, and Ole is a branch of a Serbian youth training academy, with a German former professional footballer at the head of Bahraini operations. Such academies will often enrol in international tournaments and training camps, sometimes inviting foreign scouts to observe talent.

Balancing academic pursuits and a high level of training is often challenging for most serious young athletes (Sportanddev.org, 2020), a notion also referred to by the participants. However, due to the pervasive hobby framing, the pressures often referred to in literature for young athletes to side-line their academics to focus on sports are not present in Bahrain. Quite the inverse, where due to the imperceptible opportunity to pursue sports professionally, adults pressure younger people into pursuing studies more seriously, even when they may not be inclined to do so. YA mentions this, saying that "Because [academies] were not there at that point, I would not go to an official club, so I just decided to focus on my career and study as well" (YA). However, Winners Football Centre was selected to host the Edusports football scholarship programme, sponsored by Estijabah and Tamkeen[5] (Winners Football Center, 2020). Initiatives like Edusports combine both the opportunity for high level football training and the ability to pursue a valuable higher education, sacrificing neither. It is clear though, that the scholarship programme does NOT aim to guarantee a career as an athlete, making the differentiation between "professional athlete [that] make their living by competing in sporting competitions […]However, securing a sports scholarship does not include a salary to train. Even when a sports scholarship can pay for the cost of earning a university degree, you do not attend university solely to play your sport. Students with sports scholarships must be working towards a university degree in any field offered by the university" (Winners Football Center, 2020)

Objective 4: administrative professionalism

Integrating LTAD in Bahraini policies and goals

Through such developments, it is possible to see the importance of private expansion as well as governmental dedication to achieve the targets set, and the sheer potential of success in Bahrain. However, (Black, 2010) states that for successful S4D interventions, "there is a need to communicate and collaborate much more closely with development actors in other sectors and institutions. […] [S4D] interventions will not be successful or sustainable for most participants in the absence of a much wider range of interventions, changes and improvements". It is a vital need to create a proper institutional structure for football to flourish once again in Bahrain, creating ripples in the stagnant pond. Government is aware of the need for change, and has set institutional reform as a key objective in both Vision 2030 and the National Action Plan 2018-2022. Already,

[5] Government agency concerned with the support and training of private sector companies/staff.

overstaffing in the civil service has been addressed in an attempt to cut costs and streamline services and work (a highly criticised move, and not without its own negative ripples).

In drawing future youth and development policies, using a transdisciplinary approach with input from many stakeholders to attain national development objectives may prove the most fruitful for the country and its youth. GIZ lays out five principles for a successful S4D programme (GIZ, 2020) to incorporate into projects that "prioritize the personal and social development of youth participants", intended to "attain development objectives".

- Multidimensional development of participants
- Developing life skills
- Roles and responsibilities of a coach
- Appropriate educational goals
- Proper structure

To plan for the inclusion of GIZ informed S4D policies into the programmes and strategies of SCYS (or other implementation body) in a manner compatible with Vision 2030, coordination is required by various ministries and stakeholders, like Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, representatives from sporting institutions, universities and more. .

Some of these are currently applied in part, but overall efforts to utilise sports for youth development are ad hoc and standards vary widely between different enterprises in all sectors.

Additionally, following the policy recommendations of the Centre of Social Justice's Sport for Social Good report (2015) to the UK government, I identify possible areas of improvement that the Bahraini government can use to ensure proper sports policy development for the future.

- National strategy specific to sports as a social good
- Better accountability among sport's national governing bodies
- Political ownership of sport → cementing its importance in national policy by determining leadership in government. NBH's status as the face of youth and sports in Bahrain is well established and a common inclusion in local newspapers.
- Better access to sporting facilities to communities –, this recommendation can be expanded to all residents of Bahrain, placing them in urban and suburban areas. This would also provide beautification to urban planning, and reduce congestion caused by geographic oversaturation of retail planning.
- Using sports coaching to transform lives – many initiatives aimed at coach training and qualification have been implemented, most notably by BOA. I suggest coaching is underutilised in its ability to provide other forms of employment for Bahrainis.

Possible inspirations for future restructuring

No single governing entity has been created for the realisation of Vision 2030 goals, instead the document is used as an overarching inspiration/impetus for launching projects. Taking education as an example, the National Education Reform Project (an initiative of Vision 2030) established the BQA, an independent education quality monitoring entity for the increasingly privatised sector. The BQA is perhaps the best-established example, having successfully met and exceeded its original mandate. Now, it continues to take on more

responsibilities from the Ministry of Education – most recently overseeing middle and high school exams in all public schools (AlBilad Newspaper, 2020).

This additional jurisdiction comes after a stellar performance in reshaping and re-legitimising the educational sector of Bahrain, raising overall standards (Al Shamlan, 2019). The ability to do what so many had failed was due to clear organisational vision, new directives, and the ability to set standards and meet them. Such independent bodies were created as matters of priority, to strictly monitor and inspect the activities, ensure high quality service provision, and a quicker attainment of targets (policy implementation) – upgrading organisational capacities quickly and efficiently. These bodies have been incredibly successful in overhauling the performance and public perception of the government's management of the respective sectors.

Using individual political will to establish strong institutions

Strong political will and influence to make things happen is necessary to encourage any type of restructuring in Bahrain. It is stuck in its ways, and with the type of restrictive legislature system present, it is hard to enact any type of drastic policy change within ministries and official bodies. The current institutional state of affairs leaves little room for procedural transparency, no room for critique or input of opinion from members of the public, and little accountability on project success due to the lack of publicly available information. Oftentimes, these highly publicised initiatives and projects are left to die out after failing to launch and are never heard of again, wasting time and resources.

Reliance on one person's goodwill and drive of an individual instead of reliance on systems/institutions is undoubtedly precarious. Should that individual's attentions shift to a different matter, project progress is likely to stall. However, there is a positive Bahraini precedent in CP, using his individual ability to head NERP, establishing strong institutions along the way. Political will in the sports sector is encapsulated in one person (NBH). As discussed, he is active in developing Bahrain's sporting reputation inside and outside the country, and is enabling motivated, strategic, business-minded people to help achieve the goals.

I suggest the benefit of capitalising on his drive to "increase[e] the image and reputation of Bahrain" (Ramsay, 2020) internationally, and using it to develop better structures with which sport facilities can be provided to the public locally. In a statement regarding the Bahraini investment, Paris FC spoke of the development it will put into its own youth training academy (only the second in the Paris region of France), and of their future support for "the development of training for coaches and young players in Bahrain"(ibid), drawing on their experience with creating high-level youth training programmes in a more established atmosphere. This holds great promise of influential support being used to fast-track the development of well thought out sports investment strategies with internal and external arms. To ensure the sustainability of these ventures, it is vital to create strong institutions (as mentioned above) that can monitor the implementation of plans so carefully created.

Objective 10: private sector

Synthesising various sources in this manner allows us to see a strong message emerging of the increasingly large role of the private sector in every possible aspect of sports. Section 1.3 of Vision 2030 mentions the need to "*transform the economy in the long term by capturing emerging opportunities*" (Bahrain Economic Development Board, 2008, p. 16) – in which the sports and related industries hold much potential. Aligned with national objectives, the emergence of

football academies immediately becomes clear. Encouraged by the favourable institutional environment and taking advantage of the existing desire for good quality institutions to participate, the possibilities of the private sector seem endless. It also provides them escape from the swamp of bureaucracy, allowing them room to innovate. Their customer base was there and ready, unprovided for by the club system through lack of desire, access, or something else entirely.

There is a need for monitoring and regulation bodies for the private sector, made clearer after the discussions of this study regarding the gradually increasing shifting of government responsibilities to the private sector. Although it makes sense to some to distribute the economic load begin the shift away from the rentier welfare state of old, the process needs to be done carefully to ensure basic standards of quality. Never a smooth transition, there is added urgency to create such bodies given the sector's influence on the development of young people. Studies on the matter of private provision of public goods mainly relate to the provision of health and sanitary/waste management services by private companies, however some of their maxims can be applied here.

It is important to remain realistic about the de-commodification process of access to sports facilities. Given Vision 2030's commitment to include the private sector, it is unlikely to occur anytime soon, however, the involvement in football must be regulated properly for quality of programmes, staff, and facilities. It also needs to be done in a way that does not affect the ability of the private sector to innovate, expand, and fulfil its potential to be economically stimulating and create jobs.

Audience and social reintegration strategies

The lack of audience support is extremely detrimental to the overall health of football in Bahrain, and is vital for the success of any football related venture – regardless of sector. MF, SS, and HS all explained that audiences react to the environment, but are not the root of the success of football. MF explains that ultimately football "*is entertainment and people want to be entertained by good playing. I [the player] make them smile, I make them cry, I play with their emotions, but at the end of the day it's entertainment*". So far, the entertainment value provided by football in Bahrain has been minimal, losing audiences' interest. Accordingly, audience reintegration strategies should be a key course of action for any institutional redirection, and accompanied by an aggressive advertising campaign. Thus far, there has not been any clear movement towards this yet. Through interviews and other off-record conversations, I found that the measures and programmes ran by the government are not widely known to those outside the government sphere of influence (usually through in public schools). Unless otherwise planned, to inadvertently exclude on such large numbers of participants is indicative of organisational issues and inability to match capacity with the objective fulfilment needs.

Assuming institutional reform is to be carried out prior to launching advertising campaigns, the lack of attention paid by the public to football is a positive factor. It gives the much-needed time for a proper audience reintegration strategy to be created, and for the initial results of restructuring and new initiatives to be seen. In order to guarantee the success of these ventures, un-targeted and numerous awareness-creating publicity campaigns should be run to increase maximum exposure to and uptake of the programmes, incurring the most meaningful impact on the widest possible section of the population. Just as SS got the members of the Suez team to 'buy into the team', loyalty must be cultivated. Opening up

participation will also encourage audience participation (attending in support of their personal contacts), reintroducing matches as a place to socialise and be part of a larger experience.

If done correctly, it will assist in re-establishing society's trust in football's (and sports in general) legitimacy and its ability to gain influence, proven by the concrete and noticeable results of the new objectives.

Section conclusion

In this section, I have synthesised Bahrain's long-term national objectives, the perspectives of the participants engaging in the football sector, and indicated some extant sources of literature. Unified, multisectoral, and context-suitable strategy is as necessary for development as the establishment of strong, transparent, and accountable institutions and processes. Top-down pressure and macro-level direction will have to be applied, but despite the current challenges, the potential for establishing an economically stimulating sports sector is great. Let us live in hope that the ongoing restructuring retains its momentum and is able to better match organisational capacity to address concerns and policy gaps.

Chapter 6 The Referee's Whistle

Keeping in mind the need to not idealize the path that lies ahead and have realistic expectations, this research paper has critically engaged with the challenges perceived by participants interacting with the processes involved in the upgrading of the Bahraini football sector, and those facing the institutional environment. I have made suggestions for how S4D can be used to create more accurate policies, and how the establishment of regulatory bodies to monitor private sector activities is absolutely necessary to establish and maintain the quality of social good provided to children in a way that is potentially so influential to their whole lives.

Wishing to build off of current achievements, most interviews indicated the need to create more room for competition and increasing the role of women. The need to focus on young players was deemed essential by almost all that mentioned the subject, as was to upgrade the professional qualification and child-friendly manner of the coaches. The open, entrepreneurial mindset of the current generation continues to push boundaries. What sets them apart is their lack of willingness to wait for the government to make these changes, creating their own online and offline spaces that cater to their needs.

Embarking on the road to professionalism

Upon observing the national Olympics Instagram page, I came across a video of the week section where a new athlete is interviewed each week to discuss their rise to represent Bahrain on an Olympic level. In each athlete interview, the following features were present:

- Familial support
- School programmes that allowed them to be introduced to the game
- Coaches that were supportive
- Access to institutions (federations, associations etc) that allowed them to develop further

These are not abnormal requirements, rather a combination of support and proper structure to allow the athletes talent to flourish. We should enable such low-cost solutions to move confidently forward on the road to professionalism. I propose that mainstreaming programmes and means that aim to unlock the individual development potential of larger numbers of children and young people in Bahrain would hold many benefits for the country. I also propose that sports can become an example of institutional reform and proper policy creation and implementation, following in the footsteps of educational reform. I also propose that a national athlete development center be established within the Kingdom as a collaboration between the public and private sectors, akin to Aspire academy in Qatar.

My participants have discussed how football has the ability to become a full-blown economic sector, driven and employing individuals across many fields. Much is still left to do to realise that potential. In line with vision 2030, government plays a large role in making the road to sports sector professionalism for young people as a career option; diversifying from players and coaches to investors, entrepreneurs, administrators, physiotherapists, strategists, sports scientists, sports advertising, so much more. Allow the media to be capturing again, to stir conversation, to involve people. Allow the younger generation to have an idol, by doing this you also show parents and wider society that it's not all for waste. Remind them that football is *so* much more than just a game.

Chapter 7 Bibliography

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