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## **Sports clubs and organisations in changing times: The case of Singapore**

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# **Sports clubs and organisations in changing times: The case of Singapore**

Sports clubs are places where people commonly gather to engage in sports. In many countries it is a key component of the sport delivery system. This study examines the role and evolution of sports clubs in Singapore against a backdrop of the socio-political-economic development. In the process, three themes are identified, namely, (a) influence of state intervention, (b) nature and relevance of sports clubs through the years, and (c) market sector development and its influence on sports clubs. The functionalist view provides us with an understanding of the socio-political-economic conditions and why the government of Singapore employs sport as a vehicle for social development and nation-building. How the resultant sports policies, state-funded facilities, and sports participation conduits offered by the private sector shaped the evolution of the role of sports clubs is discussed. In Singapore, the role of the sports clubs is unique in that participating in sports is no longer confined to the traditional sports clubs, but is distributed across state-funded facilities and membership programmes as well as private sector offerings. Instead of sports being confined to the elite few as in the past, the notion of “Sport Without Boundaries” envisioned by Vision2030 is becoming a reality.

Keywords: sports club and organisation, Singaporean society, sport policy, national strategy

## **Introduction**

In the sector of the community sport development, voluntary sport clubs, both private and public, play a significant role in offering people an opportunity to participate in a range of sporting activities regularly. In the West, particularly in European nations, sport clubs operate as a key component within the sport development system of each state (Heinemann, 2005; Nichols, 2013). Given that the active participation in sport and physical activities can improve individuals’ health and the qualities of their life, it is not

uncommon to see that national and local sport governing bodies subsidize the operation of various sport clubs (Hallmann & Petry, 2013). At the same time, sport clubs also work as an important form of social capital which provides a mutually supportive network between club members, and subsequently offering them a sense of belongingness (Nicholson & Hoye, 2008; Putnam, 2000). This social connection and collective identity created through being a member of sport clubs (Eichberg, 2004, 2009) can also be utilised for achieving wider social goals by boosting club members to take part in a range of community development programmes (Jarvie, 2012). In effect, sport clubs as an active agent for promoting sport participation and as a social instrument to be harnessed to meet the communal needs, are an important component of society.

It appears that it is Scandinavian countries such as Denmark, Sweden, and Finland that most efficiently implement and practise sport policy that supports the voluntary sport club sector to increase sport participation rates and thereby fostering a sense of community between those who take part in sporting activities. For example, Koski (1999) who surveyed a sport participation rate in the late 1990s, found that about two-thirds of the total population in Finland were actively involved in sports programmes that local sports clubs provided. Additionally, approximately 25% of adults held a membership of various sports clubs in the country (Koski, 1999). It is understood that Finland had at least 6,000 sports clubs that organised a range of sport-for-all programmes and competitive sporting events with financial support from municipalities. Owing to this provision of sporting activities via clubs, it was found that almost 72% of the entire population of Finland regularly participated in sport, at least once a week in 1999 (Gratton, Rowe, & Veal, 2011). More recent figures also show that Finland is one of the physically active nations. In 2015, sports clubs still function as a

key feature in the Finnish sports scene. With the population size of 5.5 million (Statistics Finland, 2016), the number of sports clubs in Finland have increased to 7,800, and 75% of the 30,000 sports facilities are constructed and run by the municipalities (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016). 90% of the adult population participate in sports and physical activities at least twice a week (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2015).

However, in Singapore, the picture is quite different. In 2001, there were about 170 sports clubs. In a population of 4.1 million, only 9% were members of sports clubs<sup>1</sup> (Ministry of Community Development and Sports, 2001). Compared to Finland, there were far fewer sports clubs and a lower number of people held sports club memberships in Singapore. While there is danger of being seen as oversimplification, it seems apparent that there exist an association between a relatively fewer number of operating sport clubs and a lower sport participation rate in the country. The 2001 survey shows that only 38% of Singaporean people participate in sport at least once a week. In 2015, with a population size of 5.5 million which is similar to that of Finland, Singapore still has far less sports clubs than Finland (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2016). There were only 358 sports clubs registered with the Registry of Societies. One survey also reveals that 62% of the people in Singapore take part in sporting activities at least once a week which is still a lower number than physically active people in Finland (Sport Singapore, 2014).

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<sup>1</sup> More than two-thirds of the memberships are from SAFRA (Singapore Armed Forces Reservist Association), SPANS (Singapore Police Association of National Service), and CDANS (Civil Defence Association of National Service).

It seems that the Singaporean government and sport governing bodies are comparatively less supportive of fostering a voluntary sports club sector in their sport development system. Perhaps, the role that traditional sports clubs play changes through time in relation to the development of the overall sport system. While these traditional sports clubs which are typically formed by individuals with common interest in sports continue to cater to their members' needs, we are witnessing new forms of sports clubs in Singapore that seek to meet the needs of a wider segment of the population. These new types of sports clubs are not the same as the traditional sports clubs because they are funded by the government to achieve national objectives in the areas of social cohesion, nation-building, and public health. They are also operated by government-linked organisations. To reach out to as many people as possible, memberships to these new types of sports clubs are more inclusive. It also appears that this relative underdevelopment of the traditional sports clubs, and the emergence of the new types of sports clubs in this small country are closely related to rather volatile political and economic environments that have influenced the way in which sports clubs and sport (in general) develop in Singapore since the early nineteenth century. The sports clubs of the future as envisioned by the government in the Vision 2030 report (Singapore Sports Council, 2012) seem to extend beyond what the traditional sports clubs offer and have different functional values. Regarding this, this paper examines the role that sports clubs play in the sport development in the country. More specifically, by critically reviewing the modern history of Singapore and the nature of government initiatives for sport development in different historical and political-economic conditions, this paper discusses the socio-political values ascribed to sport and sports clubs (either the traditional ones or the new government-funded types) in each historical period. It also

investigates how the government intervention of sport development shapes the organization, characteristics, and role of sports clubs in Singapore.

## **Methods**

This study employed document analysis to investigate the nature and role of sports clubs amidst the different political-economic circumstances from the time when Singapore was under the British colonial rule to recent years where Singapore as an independent nation is governed by an elected government. “Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents – both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material” (Bowen, 2009, p 27). According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge. As a qualitative research method, document analysis is particularly applicable to qualitative case studies such as a single phenomenon, event, organisation, or programme (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994).

The researchers selected documents based on their relevance to the research problem and purpose, whether they provide information that fits the conceptual framework of the study, and also if they are credible, authentic, accurate, and representative (Bowen, 2009). In accordance with these criteria, the documents used in this study were government reports, speeches of Prime Ministers of Singapore, PhD dissertation, academic journals and books. Key speeches of Prime Ministers that pertain to significant political-economic changes and major sport policies were identified and retrieved from the National Archives of Singapore.

Using the timeline from 1819 (colonial Singapore when various sport clubs were first introduced by the British) to present day as the basic framework for investigation,

the researchers examined the documents through the iterative process of skimming, (superficial examination), reading (thorough examination) and interpretation (Bowen, 2009). Through this iterative process, the data were content analysed to identify the nature and role of sports clubs in relation to significant political-economic events and sport development policies. The information was organised into categories or themes related to the research problem and aims of the study.

## **Results**

Three themes were identified from the process, namely, (a) nature and relevance of sports clubs through the years, (b) influence of state intervention, and (c) market sector development and its influence on sports clubs. Guided by these themes, the information was further categorised into two overarching main themes, (a) ‘Sport and Singapore society’, and (b) ‘Sports clubs in changing times’ that provide us the framework for understanding of the instrumental value that the government of Singapore ascribes to sport, and how the nature and role of sports clubs evolve under different political-economic conditions. The former main theme briefly describes the political-economic conditions within the examined historical timeline and provides a background for understanding the function of sport in the Singapore society. In each of identified significant historical periods, the instrumental value of sport was found to be expressed by the political leaders in the form of speeches, sport policies or practices. The latter main theme describes how the nature and role of sports clubs evolved over time in relation to these significant historical periods and the sport policies that resulted in greater state involvement and private sector participation in providing sport facilities, programmes and services.



## **Sport and Singaporean society**

Sport development in Singapore largely reflects historical, political and economic development that the country experienced in the past (Horton, 2003). Some of the major incidents that significantly affect the characteristics of Singaporean society include British imperialism, anti-colonial struggle and the subsequent independence, the rapid economic growth, and its recent aspiration to become a major global city.

Singapore was founded in 1819 by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, a statesman of the then British Empire, and established a British Settlement in Singapore. During the first century as a colony of the empire, Singapore developed as a trading post under the British East India Company, and as part of the Straits Settlement under the jurisdiction of British India (Turnbull, 2009). The economic development of Singapore was interrupted briefly by the First World War, and thereafter the Second World War. During the inter-war period (1919 to 1941), Singapore continued to develop as a trading post (Turnbull, 2009). Upon the surrender of the Japanese at the end of the Second World War, Singapore again came under the British rule from 1945 to 1959. In May 1959, the People's Action Party won a landslide victory in the general election and Singapore became a self-governing state within the Commonwealth with Lee Kuan Yew as the first Prime Minister. On 31 August 1963, Singapore declared independence from Britain and joined Malaya, Sabah, and Sarawak to form the new Federation of Malaysia (Turnbull, 2009). After much strife and disagreement as part of the Federation, Singapore left the Federation of Malaysia and gained independence as the Republic of Singapore on 9 August 1965.

During the initial years (1965 to 1972) as an independent state that was not endowed with natural resources, striving to establish a viable economy was a key national priority. Amidst Singapore's rapid transformation as a trading centre and a

growing industrial and financial centre, the Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew urged the people of Singapore to remain alert, efficient, and to strive hard as no one owed them a living.

Through careful planning and hard work, from 1959 to 1972, we added to our internal and external assets by over \$10,000 million. We have always been a trading centre. Now, we are also an industrial, servicing, communications and transportation centre. We must remain alert and efficient if we are to become an ever more important link in the chain of sea and air transportation. We are growing as a centre for banking and finance . . . For Singapore only just getting industrialised, it will be disastrous if we think we can get more and more pay for less and less work. No one owes us a living (Ministry of Culture, 1972, pp. 2-3).

The leaders of Singapore envisioned Singapore as a developed country with an advanced economy by 1999. Vision 1999 was presented by the government in 1984 where Singapore aimed to be a developed country by 1999 (Ministry of Information and the Arts, 1992). The period from 1973 to 1992 marks the first phase of this economic growth towards being a developed nation. Singapore faced tough challenges as it neared the half-way mark of Vision 1999 (1992-1993). In the 1992 National Day Rally speech, Prime Minister Mr Goh Chok Tong highlighted the challenges faced by Singapore in achieving Vision 1999 (Ministry of Information and the Arts, 1992). The growth path was getting tougher as the world economy was in trouble. Singapore's double-digit growth trend was over. The people of Singapore were challenged to stay competitive. Again in 1993, with the economic gloom in the West, the Prime Minister warned that Singapore would face tougher challenges and emphasised the need to venture into the regional market because of the enormous vitality and growth in the Asia Pacific region (Ministry of Information and the Arts, 1993).

Singapore continued to face other challenges from 1997 to 2001. The slowdown of world economy coupled with the 1997 Asian financial crisis tested the fundamentals of the economy and the strength of the business organisations in Singapore. Various immediate measures and initiatives that work towards restructuring the economy were implemented. And the need to stay competitive continued as one of the top messages from the government.

With globalisation and the emergence of China as a large and powerful economy, Singapore was in need of a new vision and strategies to ensure that the small state can remain competitive. In 2001, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong painted a new vision for Singapore to be a global city.

My vision is to turn Singapore into a global city, a 'globapolis', with people from all over the world and well connected to all parts of the globe - by air, sea, telecommunications and the Internet, in market access and investments, and in areas such as education, sports and the arts. . . . New Singapore will be one of the world's finest, most liveable cities. Arts, theatres, museums, music and sports will flourish. (Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, 2001, p. 1).

By 2012, Singapore became a developed nation. Since its independence, Singapore has grown from a state with a third world nation status to a developed nation with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of more than S\$346 billion in 2012, and more than S\$402 billion in 2015 (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2016). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) classifies Singapore as one of the Advanced Economies in the world (International Monetary Fund, 2016). This economic development indicates that Singapore has emerged as one of the major global cities in the world finance.

It is this historical context and economic development through which the meaning of sport clubs and the nature of the Singaporean government's major sport

policies can be understood. The connection between the instrumental value of sport and key historical and economic developments in the state is summarised in the Table 1. In relation to this, our major foci are to provide a more comprehensive explanation of how these historical and economic circumstances shape the way in which sport, and sport clubs more specifically, develop in Singapore.

Table 1. Sport policies and functions of sport in relation to socio-political-economic climate

<b>Year</b>	<b>Significant historical periods of Singapore</b>	<b>Sport policy / function</b>
1819	Founding of Singapore	Sports as leisure pursuits
1819-1918	Singapore as a colony of the British Empire. Singapore as trading post of the East India Company, and part of the Straits Settlements.	- segregation between the ruling colonialists and the local ‘natives’ and
1919-1941	Growth as trading post resumed after the First World War	- Asian immigrants: segregation along
1942-1945	Japanese occupation of Singapore	racial lines among the
1945-1959	Continued British rule of Singapore	Asian immigrants
1959-1965	Struggle for self-governance and independence	Policy speech by PM Lee Kuan Yew in 1973: Sports
1965-1972	Initial rapid growth of Singapore as an independent state	for All
1973-1992	Strive for further growth as a nation towards becoming a developed country by	- Sport for nation-building

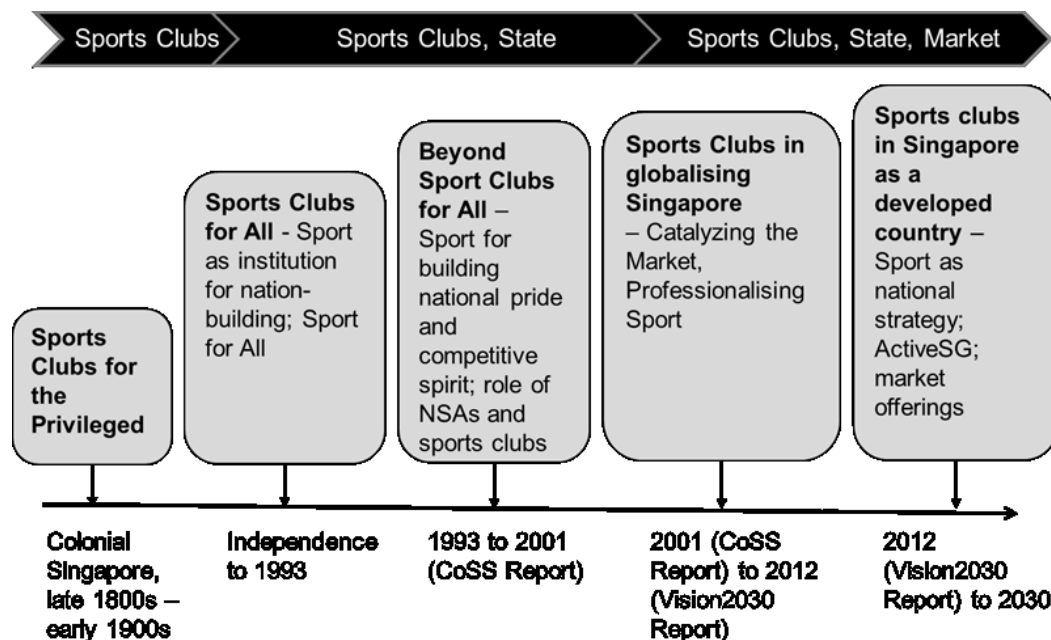
<b>Year</b>	<b>Significant historical periods of Singapore</b>	<b>Sport policy / function</b>
	1999 (Vision 1999)	
1992-1993	Midway towards Vision 1999 which was initiated in 1984. Singaporeans urged to stay competitive and prepare to face tougher challenges amidst early signs of economic trouble in the West while vitality in the Asia Pacific economies was observed.	Sports Excellence 2000 (1993) - Sport for building the competitive spirit
1997-2001	Singapore faced financial crisis and other challenges – slowdown of world economy, 1997 Asian financial crisis.	
2001-2010	New vision for Singapore as a global city	CoSS Report (2001): Three pillars - Sports for All, Sports Excellence, Sports Industry - Sport for building a global city
2012 - 2030	Singapore as a developed country with GDP of more than S\$346 billion in 2012	Vision 2030 (2012): - Sport as a national strategy for achieving national priorities

*Note:* Each sport policy is briefly discussed in the sections below.

## Sports Clubs in changing times

Within the context of the above-mentioned socio-political-economic climate and the sport policies, the development and the nature of sports clubs from the colonial days to the present time can be examined. In many ways, the sport policies and the involvement of the state such as the provision of sports facilities and the creation of state-related sports clubs shaped the overall growth and development of sports clubs in Singapore. This is represented diagrammatically in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Sports clubs in changing times



### *Sport clubs in colonial Singapore : For the privileged*

In colonial Singapore, sport was seen as one of the many colonial threads woven into the culture of Singapore (Oon, 1984). Sport functioned as a leisure pursuit. Accessibility to sporting facilities and participation in sports were divided along societal strata and racial lines. In the early 1830s, few sporting facilities existed and they were usually found within the club settings. These traditional sports clubs were established by the

colonialists and the local 'natives' were restricted access to them. Club sporting facilities and activities catered to the British and Europeans. Most sports were privately arranged and were reserved for the privileged and higher echelons of the society (Aplin & Quek, 2003). The memberships in the early sports clubs such as the Billiards Club (1829), Sporting Club (1843), Singapore Cricket Club (1852), and Tanglin Club (1865) were exclusively European and male. Asian, Eurasians and some women applicants were turned away (Pereira, 2003). The manner in which sport was formalised and segregated holds its utility value for the colonialists in two ways. First, the exclusivity of organised sport meant only for the elite few upheld the prestige of the ruling colonialists. Second, the availability of the sport clubs to the colonialists afford them reprieve from work and provide opportunities for leisure and enjoyment also further segregate the ruling elite from the rest of the society (Aplin & Quek, 2003). Sport as a form of leisure served to preserve the prestige and power of the ruling imperialists.

As Singapore prospered, more opportunities for, and actual, participation in sports also increased. However, it remained to be divided along racial lines (Makepeace, Brooke, & Braddell, 1921/1991; Pereira., 2003). Also, sport was the preserve of the colonialists and the affluent merchants. The Chinese immigrants, after having accumulated enough wealth, formed their own sports clubs such as the Straits Chinese Recreation Club (1885), and the Chinese Swimming Club (1909), and engaged in various sporting activities, often emulating their colonial rulers (Pereira., 2003). By 1914, other Asians reportedly were keen to participate in many of the sports (Pereira, 2003) and they formed their own sport leagues and clubs. That era saw the advent of sport clubs such as the Malay Football Club (1910), Singapore Indian Association (1923), Singapore Sikhs Cricket Club (1927) which was renamed as Singapore Khalsa Association in 1931, and the Lanka Union (1920) which was reconstituted as Ceylon

Sports Club in 1928. These local sports clubs grew organically out of the interest of the indigenous people and the Asian immigrants in participation in sports. The growth of these sports clubs for non-European ethnic group also reflected the desire of the locals and Asian immigrants to identify with one's own compatriots.

### ***Sports clubs in post-colonial Singapore: For all***

For Singapore, the role of sport in the society and also how the government employed sport in the service of national objectives (e.g., developing fit and healthy individuals, social cohesion, nation-building) vary in accordance to the growth and maturity of the nation. Upon gaining its independence and became a self-governing republic in 1965, sport was one area that the government focus on to eradicate communalism and racial divisions (Horton, 2003). Following the British rule and governance under Malaya, the Singapore society in many aspects was organized on a communal basis whereby loyalty to a socio-political grouping based on ethnic affiliation (e.g., Chinese, Malay, Indian, Eurasian). This was not in line with the aim of the government to forge a new nation with a common identity. Sports clubs that were communal in nature were banned. Clubs that were the preserve of British or European expatriates such as the Tanglin Club, Singapore Cricket Club were required to have specific percentage of local members. Inter-communal contest were also banned (Horton, 2003).

Sport has gone beyond being a form of leisure and recreation, and has assumed a functional role that is entwined with the political and economic aims of the nation. The "Sports for All" policy was emphasized by the Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, at the opening ceremony of the National Stadium in 1973.

Our best return is to generate healthy, vigorous exercise for the whole population, young and old, enhancing the valuable qualities we have – a keen, bright, educated people who



will lead better and more satisfying lives if they are fit and healthy (Ministry of Culture, 1973, p. 3).

This “Sports for All” policy was nationalistic as it served to facilitate the building a fit and healthy nation which was undergoing a critical period of nationhood (Horton, 2003). Sport was seen as a vehicle for building a cohesive society. Under the Singapore Sports Council (SSC), which was renamed Sport Singapore in 2013, Constituency Sports Clubs (CSCs) were established in 1976 to form one of the cornerstones of the “Sports for All” policy to provide opportunities for the masses to participate in sports and recreation activities. The CSCs, which are staffed by volunteers, have the following objectives (Ministry of Community Development and Sports, 2001):

- (1) promoting and organizing sports and recreational activities to the residents of the constituency,
- (2) selecting and training sportsmen and sportswomen from the constituency for participation in the Inter-Constituency Games,
- (3) providing feedback to the SSC on the sporting needs and aspirations of its constituents,
- (4) keeping the residents informed of Government action and policy on all matters pertaining to sports.

Club memberships were opened to all residents. The first inter-constituency sport competition (Football) was held in 1972. By 1983, inter-constituency competitions for football, badminton, hockey, volleyball, table-tennis, sepak takraw, basketball, and swimming were organised (Singapore Sports Council, 1983). The number of CSCs rose from at least 40 in 1976, 75 in 1983, to 84 in 2015. CSCs, now termed as Community Sports Clubs, reside under the People’s Association which is a grassroot organisation.

Through the resources of the state, Singaporeans were also provided with opportunities to be members of the Singapore Armed Forces Reservist Association (SAFRA) Clubs. These are mega-sized sports and recreation clubs with various facilities for social interactions. Formed in 1972, SAFRA's goal was to aid the Singapore Armed Forces enhance camaraderie and boost morale among National Servicemen. Females can also have access the facilities and programmes offered by SAFRA Clubs. Although females are not mandated by law to serve national service, they can still acquire membership to the SAFRA Clubs as family members of the National Servicemen. The network of clubs comprises Jurong, Mount Faber, Tampines, Toa Payoh, Yishun, and the upcoming Punggol clubhouses. With the establishment of the CSCs and SAFRA Clubs, the government extended access to sports amenities and services to all Singaporeans what the traditional sports clubs provide for their members. These "Sports Clubs for All" which differ characteristically from the traditional sports clubs can be seen as tangible manifestations the "Sport for All" policy held by the government.

Another significant government initiative—the setting up of the Advisory Council on Sport and Recreation—that culminated with the Report of the Advisory Council on Sport and Recreation in 1989 consolidated the role of the state as a major sports services provider. It established the vision and national priorities for sport development. Among these priorities, it set the direction for SSC to provide adequate and easily accessible sports facilities for the years to come under the Master Plan for Sports Facilities. "Every Singaporean will have access to a swimming pool, a stadium with track and field facilities, badminton, squash and tennis facilities within a radius of 3km from his home" (Singapore Sports Council, 1989, p. 5). No rationale was stated in the report for the choice of these sports facilities. However, one can surmise that the

SSC was catering to the people's choice of sports because swimming, jogging/walking, badminton, squash and tennis which were among the top ten sports with the highest participation rate. If the reason why people joined traditional sports clubs was to gain access to sports facilities, then this initiative would in effect further reduced the need for them to do so. Instead it enhanced the availability of another form of sports clubs—"Sports Clubs for All"—for the people of Singapore. It is also pertinent to note that while the report recommended that SSC was to work together with several agents of change namely, the CSCs, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Defence, national sports associations, media, commercial firms, no mention was made to the traditional sports clubs. It seemed that the traditional sports clubs did not feature as an important part of the sport delivery system in the subsequent years.

***Beyond "Sports Clubs for All": Additional focus on elite sports***

Indeed by 1993, with the implementation of the Master Plan for Sports Facilities, the main sports service providers playing important role in promoting sporting lifestyle were the SSC through the Regional Sports & Fitness Centres (SFRCs) and the CSCs, and the schools (Ministry of Community Development and Sports, 2001). Other sports service providers were traditional sports clubs, corporate sports clubs, community centres/clubs, and private/commercial firms. Beyond establishing "Sports Clubs for All", in 1993, against the backdrop of signs of economic trouble in the West and the need for businesses to venture into Asia Pacific, the government instituted the "Sports Excellence" policy to foster a competitive spirit and a sense of national pride. With the new policy thrust towards elite sports performance and international sporting success under the Sports Excellence (SPEX 2000) scheme in 1993, funding (S\$10 million a

year) to national sports associations (NSAs) which are the national controlling bodies of their respective sports meant that NSAs play a critical role in the sport delivery system. The traditional sports clubs were not the focus of the government action. However, sports clubs which are affiliates of NSAs were in the position to receive support if they align themselves with the funding objectives. What is important to note is that the state has begun to circumvent the traditional sports clubs in its push towards the twin national objectives of building national pride and fostering the competitive spirit of Singapore residents. Instead, it continues to rely more and more on its version of sports clubs (the CSCs, SAFRA Clubs, SFRCs), and particularly the NSAs to promote sport and achieve national priorities. The new focus on sports excellence with NSAs as the primary channel for sports development, and for delivering national outcomes such as winning medals at major international sporting arenas (e.g., Olympic Games, Asian Games, South East Asian Games), rendered the role played by the traditional sports clubs as fairly insignificant.

### ***Sports clubs in globalising Singapore: Their diminishing role***

With the government's new vision for Singapore as a global city, greater state involvement in sport was evident in 2001 with the release of the Report of Committee on Sporting Singapore (Ministry of Community Development and Sports, 2001). Recognising that sport connects people around the world, developing sport in support of Singapore's economic objectives became the government's priority. It also heralded government support for development of the capabilities of, and opportunities for, sports service providers in the private sector to serve the needs of the sports participants. To realise the vision of a "Sporting Singapore" which supports the new vision of

globalising Singapore, various recommendations for sport development were made, together with an initial funding of S\$500 million for the first five years and a subsequent investment of S\$350 million until fiscal year-end 2011. The Sporting Singapore vision is to realise a sporting nation where sports can:

- (1) develop resilient and healthy citizens
- (2) bring a multi-racial society together
- (3) enhance national pride
- (4) contribute to a vibrant society and economy
- (5) strengthen friendships with other nations

Sport industry development was added as the third pillar of sport development as part of the strategy to build a strong sport culture. Among a host of recommendations, it entailed the recommendations to catalyze the development of sport industry through funding sport events development and by co-investing in marquee sports events, and to build a multi-use sports hub. Today, the vibrant sports events calendar filled with events offered by various commercial operators, Sport Singapore, and other non-profit enterprises such as NSAs provide opportunities for sports participation more than what traditional sports clubs can offer, and contribute to the growth of the sport industry. The Singapore Sports Hub which was completed in 2014 is a place where people can play sports, participate in marquee sports and entertainment events, engage in sports programmes, and shop for sports apparel and equipment.

Another key recommendation that is relevant to this discussion on sports clubs was ‘nurturing sports bodies’. This involves, recognising CSCs for the work and important role that it plays in bringing sport to the masses, strengthening NSAs through funding and capabilities development, and strengthening the capabilities of sports service providers (including commercial firms) through funding “Sport for All”

projects/events, and capabilities development. In addition, the recommendation to maximise the use of facilities for sports called for the sharing of school facilities with the public (SSC dual-use scheme), and the use of vacant land, and available space in the parks and public buildings for sport. The overall implications of these recommendations meant that the role and functions of the traditional sports clubs may diminish further as (a) greater demand is placed on NSAs for effective sport delivery, (b) emergence of commercial firms in the private sector providing sports services and programming, (c) greater access to sport facilities from maximising the use of facilities for sports, and (d) people have more opportunities and access to sports programmes and events beyond those offered by the traditional sports clubs.

### ***Sports clubs in Singapore as a developed country: Sport as national strategy***

By 2012, with continual growth of the economy that rival those in other advanced economies, the government considered Singapore to be competing with major cities in other developed countries such as the United States and United Kingdom (Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, 2012). The multi-racial population of 3.29 million Singapore citizens, together with more than 533 thousands permanent residents and 1.49 million non-residents constituted a diverse and complex society. Under such a competitive economic climate and greater diversity in the society, Vision 2030 was launched in 2012 with the issuance of the “Live better through sports: Vision 2030 Steering Committee Report” (Singapore Sports Council, 2012). Sport is employed as a national strategy to achieve national priorities, and as a lifestyle choice.

With Vision 2030, Singapore recognises the value of sport in advancing the national priorities of developing our people and bonding our communities. Not only does sport help people lead healthier, happier lives, it can impart the skill sets necessary to achieve

success and upward mobility in life. Vision 2030 is about changing mental models to encourage people to live better lives through sports (Singapore Sports Council, 2012, p. 1).

One of the themes that emerged from the extensive conversations with people is “Sport Without Boundaries” (Singapore Sports Council, 2012, p. 2). It captures the notions of the need for inclusiveness in the sporting community, “providing everyone with the opportunity to access sports programming, physical space and people-support they need to live an active and healthy lifestyle through sports, anywhere, anytime, anyhow” (Singapore Sports Council, 2012, p. 16). This concept is interesting and broadening, and challenges the traditional view of sports clubs. Three key recommendations provide people avenues for participating in sports beyond that available in traditional sports clubs. They are aimed at giving participants a more enriching sporting experience and offer sport as a lifestyle choice. These recommendations are:

- (1) form regional Super Sports Clubs to extend the reach of sports programming to all Singaporeans
- (2) develop a new concept for the future planning and design of sports facilities under the Sports Facilities Master Plan; easy access
- (3) encourage new sports - SSC will partner with fellow agencies in the public-private-people sectors to assist in developing new sports

These three recommendations are implemented by the SSC respectively as ActiveSG, a new Sports Facilities Masterplan with various tiers of facilities used as Sports Centres, and assisting in developing new sport such as obtaining regulatory clearance, booking of space, and staging new sports events via ActiveSG. The focus is on ActiveSG (the state-driven Super Sports Clubs) instead of the traditional private sports clubs.

ActiveSG aims to create a sporting ecosystem that provides innovative and experiential

sport related programmes at sports centres island-wide. Membership is open to all Singaporeans and Singapore Permanent Residents. ActiveSG collaborates with the vendors from the private sector and offers holistic and affordable sporting opportunities to members at special rates. Non-members can still enjoy the facilities and programmes at standard rates. Anchoring on the key thrusts of membership experience (with a membership management system serving as a platform for social networking), programme design and facilities makeover of its sports centres, it further extended the concept of sports clubs from its traditional definition to one that embrace the new form of social interaction brought about by technological advances and affordable sports programmes held in a government subsidised state-of-the-art facilities.

The Sports Facilities Master Plan (SFMP) is a key recommendation under Vision 2030 to provide greater access to sports facilities and enable wider participation, whether as athletes, spectators or volunteers (Ministry of Culture Community and Youth, 2013). It provides the physical foundation for sports in Singapore and serves as a common space for people to interact, build community ties and rally around the athletes representing Singapore. The SFMP will transform Singapore's island-wide network of sports facilities into lifestyle destinations and innovative sports spaces. It is organised into four tiers of facilities, to cater to sporting needs at national, regional, town and neighbourhood levels (see Appendix). The implementation of the first phase of the SFMP will cost S\$1.5 billion.

With such attractive offering along with the various available public facilities for sport, it will not be a surprise if the percentage of people who choose public sport venues (around public housing estate, public park/beach, school/campus SSC dual-use scheme, SSC's sports facility, public space/road, community centre/club) over private sport venues (includes private gym/sports clubs, private housing/condo, home,



commercial sports centre, workplace sports facility, hotel gym/health club) to engage in sports increases above those reported in the National Sports Participation Survey 2011. In this survey, the proportion of public to private sport venues for “HDB dwellers”, “Condo/private apartments dwellers” and “Landed and ‘others’ property dwellers” were 83%:17%, 60%:40%, and 70%:30%, respectively (Singapore Sports Council, 2011).

## **Conclusion**

Through the years, the functional role of sport has evolved from sport as leisure pursuit to that of sport as a vehicle for social development and nation-building, and to sport as a national strategy to achieve national goals as well as a lifestyle choice. With the involvement of the state and the private sector, access and opportunity to participate in sport is no longer reserved for members of the traditional private sports club. Now, various organisations serve as sports service providers. The SSC through its channels such as the ActiveSG, sports centres, the Singapore National Games, sport events (e.g., Standard Chartered Marathon Singapore) offers residents ample variety and opportunities for sports participation. Other organisations such as SAFRA, SPANS (Singapore Police Association of National Service), and CDANS (Civil Defence Association of National Service) provides interesting sports programmes and events as well as access to quality sports facilities for their members. By default, all male Singaporeans who had serve their mandatory national service in the Army, Police or Civil Defence become members of these respective clubs. Females are eligible to join these clubs as family members of the National Servicemen. The NSAs are also one of the key sports service providers. Working closely with SSC, the NSAs and their collaborators such as their affiliate clubs and sports service providers in the private

sector offer various sports programmes and events to the public. Riding on the growth of the sport industry and rising sport culture, sports and events companies have created new sports programmes and sports events. Sports events with mass appeal such as the Sundown Marathon, the Great Eastern Women's Run, The Music Run, Singapore Duallython National Championships, Cold Storage Kids Run are well participated by residents. Examples of marque events that are well supported by commercial sponsor and partners are the Formula One Race, the HSBC LPGA Ladies Golf Championship, the BNP Paribas WTA Finals Singapore, and the Badminton World Federation OUE Singapore Open. It is suffice to say that participating in sports in Singapore is no longer confined to the traditional sports clubs, and that the notion of "Sport Without Boundaries" envision by Vision 2030 is becoming more real day by day. The social capital previously afforded by the traditional sports clubs now rest largely with the state-supported ActiveSG and the associated sports facilities, sports programmes and events. Sport as a national strategy for aligning "national priorities to develop resilient, tenacious people and strong, united communities" (Singapore Sports Council, 2012, p. 1) creates a broader and more inclusive form of social capital than that provided by the traditional sports clubs.

One limitation of this study is that the observations and conclusions were drawn from the selected relevant documents among those that we have found. It is possible that there may be other undiscovered documents that may provide similar or different perspectives on the topic. Another potential shortcoming is that the thinking of the government, when it was not clearly stated in any of the documents, was inferred from analysing the pertinent documents. In such instances, error in interpretation was mitigated by the insights gained on the policy intent behind various sport policies and initiatives by the first author's previous participation in the meetings and discussions on

sport related matters with high-level civil servants and politicians as a member of the management and senior leadership of the SSC from 1999 to 2008.

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## **Appendix**

### **Sports Facilities Master Plan (SFMP)**

#### Tier 1 – Singapore Sports Hub

Primarily consist of the facilities in the Singapore Sports Hub:

- A 55,000-seat National Stadium with a retractable roof and the world's largest dome;
- The existing 10,000-seat Singapore Indoor Stadium;
- A top-flight aquatics centre;
- An outdoor water sports centre;
- A multi-purpose sports arena;
- Numerous sports facilities such as rock climbing wall, basketball courts and jogging track.

#### Tier 2 – Regional Sports Centres (RSCs)

Regional Sports Centres (RSCs) will be progressively developed in each planning region by 2030. These RSCs will serve as a focal point for the development of sports programmes, activities and events in the region, with the following features:

- A comprehensive suite of sports facilities integrated with other recreational amenities. These could include indoor sports hall(s) for team sports, a multi-pool swimming complex, a football stadium, and popular sports facilities such as tennis courts and futsal courts.
- Added seating capacity, and enhanced events presentation capabilities such as giant LED screens, to host national and international competitions, and bring spectator experience to a new level.
- Conveniently connected to transport networks.



### Tier 3 – Town Sports and Recreational Centres (TSRCs)

Town Sports and Recreational Centres (TSRCs) are in HDB towns. These TSRCs will largely be redeveloped from existing Sports and Recreational Centres (SRCs), and are:

- Sized based on the size of the population of the HDB town where they are located.
- Typically have a swimming complex with two pools, an indoor sports hall, dance studios, gymnasium, and may also include tennis and futsal courts.
- In comparison with existing provisions, which tend to comprise individual, separately located facilities in HDB towns, a TSRC will have facilities that are clustered together, with more attractive features such as interactive water pools and more leisure options

### Tier 4 - Neighbourhood

New playing spaces will be developed in HDB neighbourhoods under the Sports-in-Precinct programme. In addition, more school facilities will be made available to the public.

- Under the new Sports-in-Precinct programme, new spaces and facilities in the neighbourhood for sports and recreation will be created, featuring sheltered playing areas and multi-use courts, to cater to all ages.