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# Breaking the Code (of Silence) in Lithuania: Understanding Safe Sport as an Ideoscape

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**Annotation.** Global attention on interpersonal violence in sport has raised calls for safe sport. In Lithuania, safe sport is not well-known. This study explores how individuals within Lithuania's sport system understand and conceptualise safe sport discourses. Data were generated via interviews with 18 Lithuanian student-athletes/coaches who revealed selective and hesitant approaches engaging to in safe sport ideas. Ultimately, we highlight how safe sport ideoscapes in Lithuania sit within sport governance modernisation agendas.

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**Keywords:** *safe sport, athlete welfare, Lithuania, sport education, sport governance, interpersonal violence in sport.*

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## Introduction

Increasing global media attention on interpersonal violence in sport has raised awareness of safe sport with organisations under pressure to develop and enforce safeguards (Nite & Nauright, 2020). Consequently, international and national sport organisations have created policies and initiatives, including education programmes, to advance safe sport. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the UK's Child Protection in Sport Unit are examples. In this paper, safe sport is understood as athletic

environments that are respectful, equitable, and free from non-accidental violence (Mountjoy et al., 2016). Here, forms of ‘non-accidental violence’ will be referred to as interpersonal violence, which the IOC defines as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation” (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024, p. 1326).

Scholarly activity on safe sport has largely focused on (predominantly Western) organisations’ actions to promote safe sporting spaces (e.g., MacPherson et al., 2022). This top-down approach to policy development and implementation has strongly encouraged National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) of their ‘duty to care’. This oversight and centralisation provide a means to enable the flow of information and safe sport ideas into national sport systems. However, robust evidence of policy in practice and its effectiveness, consistency, and implementation in national and local sports clubs appears to be absent. Furthermore, policies and programmes promoting safe sport are not yet fully embedded in the sport system in some countries. For example, in Lithuania, there are initiatives such as the National Sports Development Strategy (2022–2030) and the Lithuanian Health Program (2014–2025) aimed at promoting physical activity and healthy lifestyles, but safe sport, which relates to sport welfare, is not yet fully enshrined in national sport policy or the wider sport sector.

Notwithstanding the nation’s rich sporting background (and successes, particularly in basketball), Lithuania is of particular interest for study due to its historical and political positioning within the Baltic region on the perimeter of both Western and Eastern sport and governance frameworks (Blagojević-Hjuron, 2014). Having participated in the Soviet sports system and attaining major regional and global sporting achievements during the 20th century as an independent nation, the country’s modern sport profile, performance, and growth have continued. In more recent years, its sporting prowess has been positioned against and influenced by Lithuania’s entry into the European Union (2004) and Eurozone (2015). This regional integration and development have afforded the country’s sport organisations access to sector networks, funding, knowledge exchange, transnational discussions, competition and professional career mobility opportunities, and transnational safe sport collaborations.

Similar to sport development globally, issues related to safe sport have also featured in the Lithuanian sport landscape. In 2018, national courts saw their first case of athlete welfare with the prosecution of a cycling coach, Antanas Jakimavičius, who was distributing performance-enhancing drugs to athletes (BNS, 2018). In the same year, a documentary released about Lithuanian Olympic gold medallist swimmer Rūta Meilutytė revealed that, for her, persistent pressure she experienced during elite level training in the UK contributed to the onset of an eating disorder and deteriorating mental health (Buožis & Darulis, 2018). The exposing of such experiences, invariably,

may not have directly resulted in sector-wide changes or been reported in policies or practices within Lithuanian national sport federations. However, they have increased public awareness of safe sport, specifically athlete welfare (Purdy & Lang, 2023; 2024). In doing so, these stories offer an important counter-narrative to the dominant discourse frequently positioning sport as a universal positive.

Beyond Lithuania, a study conducted across six European countries (i.e., Spain, Germany, Belgium, the UK, Romania and Austria) reported that 75% of participants experienced at least one incident of physical, psychological, sexual violence or neglect in sports prior to the age of 18 (Hartill et al., 2021). While interpersonal violence in sport was reported in all six countries, there is no reason to believe that this is specific to these countries alone. Research focused on Lithuania, such as Vveinhardt and Fominienė's (2022) study on peer-to-peer bullying and harassment among athletes, found that about one-third of team sport athletes reported having been the victim of this type of violence. In addition, Purdy and Lang's (2023; 2024) research with young student-athletes/coaches in Lithuania revealed issues most relevant to their athletic careers were doping, overtraining, emotional/psychological abuse, and corruption. Notably, however, Purdy and Lang's (2023; 2024) project was undertaken following a flourish of global activity relating to awareness of (predominantly sexual) violence in sport (i.e., Netflix documentary *Athlete A*). Amongst the student-athlete/coaches interviewed, there existed a perception that aside from psychological abuse in some sports, other forms of violence were perceived to be absent. This is concerning as discussions within sport shape discourses that can reinforce areas of priority in sport and perpetuate a culture of silence around other issues that may be more prevalent.

Thus, this paper aims to articulate and explore how individuals within a particular national sport system understand, conceptualise, and see the relevance and challenges of wider safe sport. Accordingly, the paper evidences the existence of these discussions in providing an opportune moment for educational transformation. In this case, creating spaces for safe sport that recognise contextual experiences, interpretations, and socio-historical-cultural nuances. The paper's secondary aim is to draw attention to the development possibilities of a safe sport agenda in Lithuania, which involves embracing/challenging prevailing global discourse. Here, consideration of the *glocal* becomes important if we are to create meaningful safe sport education initiatives that challenge current cultures of interpersonal violence in sport. In what follows we consider how these prevailing ideas manifest and co-exist in Lithuania.

## Review of Literature

The 20<sup>th</sup> century has been characterised in part by increasing concerns about children's rights and child protection in sport in the West (Donnelly & Petherick, 2006). Since, literature and policy have continued highlighting a growing awareness of the need to protect athletes from various forms of maltreatment, including psychological, physical, sexual abuse and neglect, and be more respectful of their rights (Eliasson, 2024; Fasting et al., 2015; Lang, 2021; McPherson et al., 2017; Mohebbi et al., 2024; Muhonen et al., 2024; Nery et al., 2019; Ohlert et al., 2018; Willson & Kerr, 2022).

In Europe, the safety and well-being of athletes has been acknowledged through the development of comprehensive policies and initiatives (BESST, 2024; Council of Europe, 2021). The European Union (EU) occupies a crucial role in promoting these policies, with the Commission's 2007 White Paper on Sport, the EU's first comprehensive initiative on sport, that recognised the existence of issues such as commercial pressure, exploitation of young players, doping, racism, violence, corruption, and money laundering. However, it did not propose new legislation but opted for an advisory role, providing strategic orientations and recommendations. The intention or assumption was that recommendations are agreed and followed by national governments and their respective national sport federations, and from there, internal community sport entities.

The Council of Europe, specifically via the European Sports Charter (which underscores the necessity of protecting athletes from harm), has been afforded a strategic role in safe sport advocacy and reform (Council of Europe, 2021). In addition, at the institutional and infrastructural levels, the Council of Europe Convention on an Integrated Safety, Security and Service Approach at Football Matches and Other Sports Events aims to ensure that sports events are safe, secure, and welcoming for all participants (Council of Europe, 2016). Finally, the collaboration between European organisations and global bodies such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) have developed programmes and initiatives to 'strengthen safeguarding across the Olympic Movement' (IOC, 2025). Ultimately, this means that there are plenty of ways nations can access policy and 'best practice' with regard to safe sport, but some of this content may not directly fit their needs, understandings, or organisational priorities, resources, and political whims.

Within Europe, and more broadly, meaningful implementation of safe sport policy has been influenced by ways cultural assumptions and practices at national and local levels have shaped individuals' perceptions, learning, and engagement in their respective sports environments. Athletes who live in countries with fewer resources, Rutland et al. (2022) note, may have different priorities and experiences related to maltreatment than those in other nations. Such differences may, consequently, lead to different conceptual understandings, interpretation, and framings of 'safe' sport and its attendant boundaries. Addressing contextual nuances, Lee et al. (2022) furthers that

human rights violations against South Korean athletes manifest primarily as a product of power imbalances and compliance within the hierarchical structure of Korean sports that were shaped by Confucianism and hegemonic masculinity. Within the Global South, similarly, Solstad and Strandbu (2019) safe sports advocacy and mechanisms in Zambia were confronted by perceived necessities to balance athlete protection with a commitment to a culture of mental toughness and resilience.

Beyond these distinct socio-cultural conditions affecting the treatment of athletes, there are also diverse reactions to the global safe sport agenda. Writing about capoeira in Brazil et al. (2014) noted that the safeguarding plan was waiting to be implemented more than five years after its introduction. Towards this end, Solstad and Strandbu (2019) recognised that political mobilisation depends, in part, on how an issue is understood in the local context. Thus, Kisakye et al. (2023) argue that the degree to which international safeguarding policies can be adapted, tailored, refined, or reinvented to meet local needs is limited therefore, culturally relevant responses are needed. Yet, at present, the predominant strategy leveraged by the IOC and allies (e.g. Safe Sport International) is the privilege of a general 'universal' (Western) approach that assumes pan-national interpretations, understanding, and experiences of violence, maltreatment, abuse, and what constitutes 'safe' sport.

## Theoretical Framework

In Europe, policies and education initiatives, such as the aforementioned European Sports Charter and collaborations with the IOC, are promoting awareness about abuse in sport. These resources are underpinned by universal ethical principles which provide a foundation for global moral standards. The dissemination of existing material is based on particular ideals and in the pursuit of a shared understanding and vernacular there exist tensions in interpretations, meanings and how these are used to comprehend actions/interactions in sport related to a more holistic conceptualisation of 'safety'. In addition, the transformation and use of ideas (both nationally and globally) are influenced by temporal and spatial flows of information/ideals. In relation to safe sport discourse, this manifests in generational and sociocultural differences between coaches and athletes and experiences of different and evolving sport. Thus, there is value in utilising a theoretical framework that recognises the various transitions of cultural knowledge over time. Here, we are drawn specifically to Arjun Appadurai who introduced the concept of 'scapes' to explain the multifaceted and dynamic nature and movement of global culture, its forms, and meanings. He identified five distinct 'scapes' or flows, that shape such global cultural interactions: ethnoscapescapes, technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes. Each scape represents a different

dimension of global interactions which allows us to see how various elements influence each other across borders (Appadurai, 1996).

To briefly summarise, *Ethnoscap*es are the landscapes of persons who constitute the shifting world (Appadurai, 1996). These landscape dimensions comprise, for example, inter and intra movement of people within and across borders such as tourists, immigrants, and refugees. *Technoscap*es encapsulate global spreads of technologies and their impact upon societies and individuals (Appadurai, 1996). *Financescap*es refer to the disposition of capital and financial instruments across the world (Appadurai, 1996). Here, particularly emphasis is placed on the rapid and unpredictable nature of global financial markets and precarities (and continuities) that follow at the localised and/or individual level (Appadurai, 1996). *Mediascap*es are the distribution of information and images through media channels that shape how people perceive and understand the world, including the reception, adoption, negotiation and use of concepts, debates, values and discourse (e.g., in the case of this paper, notions of safe sport) (Appadurai, 1996). *Ideoscap*es are the flow of ideas, ideologies, and cultural symbols that travel across borders and influence global cultural landscapes (Appadurai, 1996).

As the focus of this paper, ideoscapes play a crucial role in shaping civil participation and values, and universal values by facilitating the global exchange of ideas and ideologies. Scholars have noted, for example, that within an ideoscape of shared humanitarian rights (e.g., social justice, equality, freedom) there exists a recognisable pursuit of universal ideas and a commonality of understanding that simultaneously unites individuals and communities, but also may exist harmoniously with localised ways of being and thinking (Horton, 1996; Erueti & Palmer, 2017; Mbewe, 2023). Altruistic and utopian in its aims, this pursuit of commonality has also illustrated tensions in the use, spread, and interpretation of ideas (e.g., notions of fairness, justice, identity, and rights related to colonial/post-colonial/anti-colonialism practices in education) (Fan & Popkewitz, 2020).

In this paper, the tensions in and across scapes serve to understand how discourses about the universality of safe sport ideas may yet be more nuanced and thus difficult to work towards without adequate considerations of disjunctures that occur at the individual levels of understanding and (national) organisation action. Mindful of the above theoretical framing, Appadurai's (1996) scapes are of value in exploring how globalisation is not a uniform process but a complex interplay of various dimensions that continuously shape and reshape cultural interactions worldwide. Our specific interest in this paper is in recognising the tensions between cultural homogenisation and cultural heterogenisation which shape attitudes, policies, and practices relating to safe sport.

When viewed through the lens of the Safe Sport agenda as an ideoscape, safeguarding encompasses the global flow of ideas and practices aimed at ensuring safety and well-being. That is, globally, UNICEF and the IOC's promotion of Safe Sport and

safeguarding in sport standards and policies are freely available and intended to be applied by all. We acknowledge many Lithuanian sport federations have signed up to and agreed to these universal safe sport discussions and structures. Notwithstanding this engagement, representation, and participation do not necessarily equate to systematic action or change. Whilst these initiatives are positive in that they build awareness of harmful practices in sport, various dimensions shape cultural interpretations of safe sport discourses and interactions about discourses.

## Methodology

Informed by the interpretivist paradigm, this project adopted a case study methodology (Merriam, 1998), to frame and understand the experiences of some student-athletes/coaches in the sport sector in Lithuania. Key to this methodology is the bounded nature of the case, whether this be limited by the number of interviewees, the timeframe for the data generation or the instance of an issue or concern (Merriam, 1998). Thus, this case was bound by its focus on the relevance of safe sport policy to a small number of practitioners (i.e., student-athletes/coaches) in Lithuanian sport. The focus on practitioners deliberately foregrounds the roles individuals concomitantly play in the generation and flow of particular ideoscapes and as change-makers/agents in challenging and changing the ideoscape contours.

Data were generated via focus group discussions with active Lithuanian coaches/athletes who had volunteered to participate in a week-long series of in-person workshops on safe sport offered at their university that was facilitated by the first author. 18 participants were involved in the interviews that were held in person and on Teams. The group was comprised of 11 women and seven men who had an average age of 22 years. Some were (age-grade) international, semi-professional, and national-level athletes or those who had recently retired and had taken up coaching roles. Participants were from a variety of specialisations (i.e., football, basketball, handball, rowing, canoeing, judo, and volleyball). The interviews were in the English language due to the first author's lack of proficiency in the Lithuanian language. However, approximately 30 percent of the Lithuanian population speaks English, including approximately 80 percent of individuals under the age of 30. In addition, English has become the second language taught in most schools (Statistics Lithuania, 2022) with the participants in this project required to study English as part of their degree programme. Consequently, the student-athletes were generally comfortable and proficient in English, although online translation tools were occasionally used to clarify technical terms.

The interviews were unstructured approximately 90 minutes in duration. A basic schedule of themed areas/topics for discussion was drawn upon as a guide. That is, the questions focused on the participant's observations of improvements since the initial



interview or developing and introducing safe sport related practice. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were cleaned (timestamps removed, anonymised) and subjected to thematic analysis based on Tesch (1990). As part of a wider study, they were read multiple times for immersion and familiarisation (Borkan, 2022). For this manuscript, transcripts were coded for meaningful words, phrases, and features related to safe sport in Lithuania (e.g., safe sport, performance enhancing drugs, Soviet system, coaches' power and authority, coach education). These meaning units were organised into categories such as 'forces that shape the sport sector', 'coach education', 'issues of safe sport', and 'athlete voice'. Finally, these categories were refined into four main themes that reflected the nuanced data: *Articulating Lithuanian ideals and experiences within sport*; *Relevance of safe sport*; *The role of the coach in safe sport*; and the less 'relevant' ideals.

## Results

### *Articulating Lithuanian Ideals and Experiences Within Sport*

In contrast to Western nations, Lithuania's sport sector contains shadows of the former Soviet sport system. Interviewees recognised their experiences of growing up in this system included encounters with coaches known for violence against athletes, but also that the actions, language, and assumptions about maltreatment were a seemingly ubiquitous aspect of sport. For example,

*Maybe, like, 2010–2012 maybe, coaches were with a Soviet mindset, and usually they start off by screaming what they're doing.... So emotional abuse, they just start hitting, maybe for example ... if it was girls, they just, the coaches pull their hair and just put them in a ...separate room, started shouting and hitting, maybe like slaps in the face. Male coach for males, I saw with my own eyes, a coach took him to the coach's room, they were alone as coach started [kicking] him.*

The Lithuanian experience illustrated here is reflective of a shared global sport discourse regarding the prioritisation of winning over welfare. These ideals have not only promoted win-at-all-costs but also toxic cultures that put athletes at risk of harm and conceal interpersonal violence (Purdy & Lang, 2023; 2024). For this participant there is a clear ideological recognition of what interpersonal violence in sport is, that it is unethical (e.g., 'emotional abuse'), but that constitutes normalised coaching practice. Conversely, the participants saw differences with the new generation of coaches who were in the system, stating "They don't have that Soviet mindset and they're more educated than the older coaches." Such observations by the participant here highlight both the temporal and dynamic nature of ideoscapes, and that this particular sports-



capex' contours are perceived to have been altered by changing coach education and geo-political shifts.

The focus on education was recognised as an important factor in sport sector change and moves towards greater standardisation, improved accreditation and quality assurance mechanisms, and alignment with national, transnational, and international standards. All coaches are now required to have a university degree in the area with participants commenting on the depth and breadth of knowledge covered in such programmes versus a coaching certificate that was the previous standard. As one participant stated,

*So maybe that some of the coaches in Lithuania, they only have certificates to work to train children, and we are now learning [at] the university for four years, and we're trying to better ... So, it is maybe a little bit unfair [to judge them] because they only have certificate and they were learning about, I think about a year only.*

While participants were able to contextualise their criticism, recognising the limitations of short-term coach education, the lived experience of this was notable:

*The older [sport] coaches I know... they are all old fashioned, so they raise their voice very often. I can even say that it is the way of teaching for them and then they don't know anything else that could work.*

This lack of knowledge of other coaching methods or approaches was also applied to training programmes with concerns that these might also be promoting out-of-date ideas or practices. As one participant identified,

*Because they are giving us the - we are working with the 20 or 30- or 50-years old programmes.... I don't know, maybe that's good, this is good, but I don't know.*

Conversely, the involvement of 'younger' coaches, or those with a different training background was praised for bringing fresh ideas and disrupting the traditional hierarchy. One participant commented,

*Maybe when we are working with the younger ... coaches... we have some kind of... we can talk with them....*

These participant explanations provide insight into how ideoscapes may exist and be known within a specific sport context, and participants perceive possibilities for ideals to be challenged and changed. The point here about the dynamism and 'flex' of the scape becomes important in the consideration of progressing safe sport work and agendas. In particular, developing congruence around what 'safe sport' is and can be, and what disjuncture and/or synergy in understanding there is between universal and local manifestations.

## *Relevance of Safe Sport*

In order to take action, participants recognised that there needs to be awareness of what constitutes unsafe practices. One participant noted,

*Basically, in our sport, we don't have so much abuse, or we just don't see it as an abuse, because we're like – we should think like we are a man, like we are adults, we must take this as a man, you know, be strong, don't think about it, do everything we can. Actually, we get screamed [at], like our coaches scream [at] us, "Do that, do that!" but we just – like it's a normal thing, just so we don't take this so serious[ly].*

As one participant stated, this lack of awareness is fundamental to implementing safe sport, "Because in Lithuania, [abuse] was not like a problem. No one thought this was a problem, but I think it's a big, big problem that needs to be solved." Another participant echoed, "we can't change something like abuse because we don't see it as an abuse." Thus, for some sports, the starting point is to understand what constitutes safe sport.

In addition to awareness-raising as to what safe sport looks like, participants identified that a 'one size fits all' model of safe sport will not work. Herein underscoring the nuances of ideoscapes in which the understanding of ideals matters as much as the subsequent interpretations and deployment within day-to-day *in-situ* practice. Moreover, that the use of specific language (e.g., 'safe sport') among a particular community (e.g., sport workers), even over time, does not necessarily denote universal or shared understanding. Such a critique has also been noted by scholars in relation to the general conception of 'sport' and its paradoxically globally accepted usage, hegemonic discourse, and semantic contestations (McDowell, 2022). As one participant identified, individual sports and team sports had different risks. That is:

*I also find some more things: that more abuses, sexual abuses, psychological abuses, and [...] eating disorders are more in the individual sports, and in team sports, they're match fixing, also some abuses, but maybe not that much because in team sports you can have a friend that is close, and you go through the same things together. So yeah, so different topics for team sports and individual sports.*

Participants also picked out key problems that featured in their sport, for example, the use of performance-enhancing drugs, over-training injuries, poor mental health, a lack of agency or voice in matters that affect them, and no mechanism to report concerns. Again, their focus may be unsurprising given that these concepts, ideas, and issues are well known within contemporary global sporting practices. Yet, of interest is that these are what they deem to be (or at least) articulate as the more prominent features of the landscapes within their local spaces. For example, one participant commented, "I think that the most important fact in Lithuania is use of performance enhancing substances because we have lots of athletes that use them in sports." Indeed, concerns

about doping are reflective of activity in the media, which covered the prosecution of a Lithuanian cycling coach for distributing performance-enhancing drugs to athletes (BNS, 2018). While not a focus of this paper, the presence of these stories in the media contributes to the development of a particular mediascape (framing) that promote dominant ideas and prevailing ideoscapes about sport (e.g., drug misuse) and obscures wider issues and links with regard to safe sport.

### *The Role of the Coach in Safe Sport*

The student athletes/coaches noted the significance of coaches' roles in facilitating and/or challenging safe sport environments. For example, one participant drew attention to athlete's struggles with coaching behaviour "A lot of players that I know have a lot of problems because of the coach, because of the things they said." Beyond the emotional, participants also raised concerns about the training methods used.

*We know that there [are] injuries... like injuries constantly because here's the thing pain, is a symptom if you listen to symptom then you are going to injure, but if you play and do nothing about them, then it comes to injury. Coaches see how the players and their teammates are in pain, and they do not think about that, because coaches endure pain.... They don't care about our health.*

The hierarchical nature of the coach-athlete relationship has been identified as one reason for problematic practice in sport, athlete compliance, and silence. Participants in this project perceived there to be a culture of fear with athletes and other members of the sport community afraid to speak out or express any opinion on practices in the sport out of concern of retaliation from the coach or sports federation. As one participant stated:

*I think that we discussed this, that the most important thing would be to create this space, a community, where somebody could have their voice, with not their name on it, and could probably raise more awareness. Because right now, we work with children, or even adults are just scared to give their voice. And we thought earlier, what we were saying about how it's not a problem in Lithuania, the people like the coaches, touching the athlete, and whatnot, you actually don't know if that's a problem. That's the scary part, because they just might not have the ability to say it. They might be afraid.*

One way to counter this issue that was recognised by participants is by increasing athlete agency. In one participant's words, "I think it's really important that athletes do understand they have a voice." Allowing athletes' voices to be heard and their experiences and insights used for the improvement of sport, has been established as essential in transforming education on safe sport spaces, and the roles of safe sport within good governance. Within this redevelopment, Purdy and Lang (2024) advocate for the necessary involvement of and leadership of (young) athletes within sport

governance and education strategy and implementation. Athletes and their experiences, thus, are pivotal in bringing meaning to the ideoscape and how ethics manifests in action. While this is happening in other nations and slowly occurring in Lithuania, issues remain within the country's sport.

### *The Less 'Relevant' Ideals*

The data also indicate there are predominant ideas that are prioritised within the context of a Lithuanian ideoscape of safe sport and, moreover, that these acknowledgments are bound within individuals' understanding and experiences within the national context. The explanations are telling in what they do not reveal or emphasise in relation to safe sport. For example, although participants identified key issues relating to safe sport that resonated in their sporting lives, global activity relating to racism (i.e., Kick it Out campaign) in sport did not resonate. We bring to light here the notion of ideoscape voids or dark spots. These are, to rehearse, landscape areas where certain global ideals fail to permeate individual and/or collective conscience or are actively resisted. Acknowledging ideoscape voids, we contend, is of value in offering a powerful analytic for understanding the limits of top-down educational interventions in regard to safe sport. As suggested by others (Powell et al., 2011; Rai, 2018), ideoscapes are not merely about the presence of ideas but also about the absence of certain narratives and the silencing of others. For example, as scholars elsewhere have explored, and we have witnessed in our ongoing engagement in the field, these gaps may stem from generational memory, linguistic translation gaps, or socio-political taboos.

What becomes apparent is a particular reading among participants of issues within Lithuania, Lithuanian sport, and the impacts of wider forces on the concept of safety within sport. For example, given the geopolitical position of Lithuania within Europe, the Baltics, its proximity to Russia, migration trends West-ward into the country (IOM, 2024), and the resultant general right-wing political and social movements within the region exacerbating xenophobia, racism, and nationalistic fervour (Doidge, 2016; Nissen et al., 2021), individuals did not connect this wider context to sport perceptions and experiences. As one participant stated, "A very, very small amount of people [are affected] by racism." Thus, there were degrees of detachment (in this case with regards to racism) and the presence as a significant issue within sport. Paradoxically, there were degrees of detachment (in this case with regards to racism) and the presence as a significant issue within sport. There was recognition by some individuals that other elements of safe sport were more important (e.g., doping, injury, psychological abuse) (Purdy & Lang, 2023; 2024). In essence, we might configure these theoretically as ideoscape 'voids' or 'dark spots' where information and flows of ideals are absent or avoided for one reason or another. Although we acknowledge that this interpretation may be a by-product of individuals' generational, translational or subjective recall, there is an indication there may be a distinct way of ideologically framing safe sport

within Lithuania that has contours and interpretations that differ from elsewhere. Such variations may, thus, present a sticking point for any subsequent adoption and implementation of a universal set of safe sport priorities (which may then also get bureaucratised into national sport policy priorities).

## Discussion

While there are some defining features of the ideoscape of safe sport (in this case, ideas about abuse or neglect, interpersonal violence, maltreatment, and what actions are needed), the scape is vast, and organisations' positions upon it differ. As evidenced in this research, ideoscapes have a conceptual value in encompassing the shifting discourses around athlete welfare, abuse prevention, and ethical governance, which are shaped by both global norms and local interpretations. Critically, Appadurai's emphasis on disjuncture (Rai, 2018) is of use in understanding the tensions between universal safe sport standards and their local enactments. As the Lithuanian case presented in this paper reveals, such disconnect emerges where local priorities (e.g., infrastructure and physical safety) diverge from the broader ideoscape promoted by transnational bodies like the IOC. Such divergence underscores the need for what Appadurai later termed grassroots globalization – a bottom-up approach that privileges local agency and culturally resonant practices (Appadurai, 2006).

Accordingly, the efforts to unify discussion are helpful in presenting a collective force for action and movement towards a greater good. Moreover, there is evident effort that these discussions have and are making sport safer (e.g., Cycling New Zealand, 2024; UK Sport, 2025). Certainly, among international and national governing bodies there exist implicit assumptions that safe sport is a universal standard, and all are working from the same historical/contemporary understanding of what this means (Rutland et al., 2022). Also, where safe sport sits within the sport model (e.g., as a 'priority' to be addressed). While few would disagree with the binary that safe sport is 'good' and abuse is 'bad', the promotion of safe sport appears to get muddled at the organisational and policy level where other priorities, assumptions, interpretations, and, fundamentally, politics, creep in and determine how these things should be addressed and what (successfully) addressing this looks like in reality (e.g., Fonseca & Vieira, 2014; Rutland et al., 2022). Nonetheless, the pursuit of universality need not come at the expense of understanding, utilising, and respecting localised meaning making and experiences in which safe sport may be conceptualised with different reference points and priorities.

Thus, there is merit in continuing to foster inter-ideological dialogue that creates meaningful conversations in safe spaces across borders and using the notion of a varied ideoscape to catalyse further safe sport education transformation. In terms of a Lithuanian-generated safe sport programme this education may involve wider

discussions of how safe sport issues, concepts, and ideas might be prioritised and played out as meaningful and understandable actions at the local level. Education transformation has, ultimately, to draw people into discussions that move safe sport forward and encourage sport communities to be open and reflective. In contrast to drawing upon the IOC's resources, the data in this paper suggests there are benefits in providing culturally relevant ideology, management and pedagogy reflective, and respectful of the nuances of where each national and community sport is on its safe sport journey. Anecdotal conversations with individuals within the sport sector in Lithuania, for example, in one sport context have pointed to improving infrastructure and the creation of safe physical spaces first and foremost as a national priority before other areas of safe sport are viewed to be relevant.

In this manuscript, we have illustrated how ideoscapes provide the foundation for organisational and education development in safe sport. However, they exist in tandem with the need for tangible structures and processes. In this case, the necessity of developing practical frameworks and processes to disseminate safe sport policy and spread the educational message across the national sport system. For a sports organisation to begin to adopt a safe sport agenda, there is the task of creating (or adopting an existing policy) and guidelines for best practice, reporting processes, and the dissemination of these to clubs. International organisations such as the IOC and allies offer resources that may guide principles, practices and accountabilities. However, similar to Fonseca and Vieira's (2014) analysis of safeguarding in Brazilian capoeira, the process of adapting these to national contexts may be lost in what we conceptualise, tentatively, as a *bureaucroscapes*. That is, an ethically and politically contested terrain of policy and strategic discourse *about* safe sport and limited meaningful *action* and *accountabilities* toward actual improvement of the space that has advantageous effects on the everyday experiences of coaches and athletes. Introduction and consideration of a safe sport *bureaucroscapes* aligns with attendant sport governance critiques of policy inertia and performative metrics (see Donnelly et al., 2016). Specifically, the notion of a *bureaucroscapes* can be seen clearly where a proliferation of safeguarding protocols (either at the international, national, and local levels) has frequently obscured substantive cultural change. Consequently, the concept offers a new practical and conceptual means of understanding and interpreting the safe sport ideal nuances and how related ideals may manifest within local contexts through policy, education, and practice.

## Conclusion

International organisations' approach to safe sport has provided a strong foundation for safe sport policy, including education. However, as this paper demonstrates, scope remains for this content to better acknowledge and reflect national and cultural nuances.

Here, common national approaches have tended towards targeting and 'resolving' individual cases in which specific perpetrators are positioned as a 'bad apple' within the system and are removed or punished. Subsequently, this may lead to some 'easy win' organisational changes. Yet, in the case of Lithuania (and other nations), the more difficult aspect is for the organisation to acknowledge that it may have systemic and institutional flaws in its systems and underlying ethical values and practices that are entrenched and have become normalised. Organisation changes may be fundamentally harder and require concerted reflection, accountability, and efforts to redress structural shortcomings and appreciate wider safe sport ideals. Therefore, consideration of the conceptual underpinnings of safe sport (e.g., the ideoscape) is a potentially useful starting point for policy and education projects. We contend that in the context of Lithuania, ideoscape change requires negotiating prevailing and entrenched cultural ideas of what safe sport issues matter most, how international/global safe sport concerns manifest in the landscape, and what strategies might be needed to entwine cultural logics on the ground with progressive actions.

In this pursuit, Appadurai's (1996) work is helpful, as it lets us look at how ideoscapes flow and interact with local-level issues. Scapes are not, however, apolitical, but rather, shaped by political forces (in this case, the geopolitics and westernised contours of the IOC and its universalising of ethics and, ultimately, the contours of safe sport). Wherein such politics can help advance the flow of ideas (e.g., through leadership, resource support, and advocacy), there is a dynamism to the scape and inevitable tensions as ideas and meanings are shared and areas of commonality established. At present, the ideoscape of global safe sport in many countries is still burgeoning, and governance and education remain driven by top-down approaches.

Examination of examples within Lithuania's sport sector affords opportunities to comprehend the limitations and consequences of the IOC's reductionist universality with regard to safe sport. This is not to suggest the IOC's efforts should stop. Rather the issue is that interpretations of the IOC/UN/World organisations need to be balanced against national/NGB/ground-up cultural logics and contexts. NGBs in Lithuania may be well positioned to collectively work on a nationally-grounded safe sport agenda and subsequent educational strategy that starts from the point of learning from localised histories and socio-cultural forces that shape (safe) sport and how this translates to individuals' current experiences of wider ethical issues across sport.

Ultimately, building on these insights, future educational approaches in safe sport may be advantageously reimagined as *culturally-situated empathetic engagements* that work in complement and synergy with top-down transmissions of universal norms. By anchoring educational development in these lived ideoscapes, we can foster pedagogies that are dialogic, reflexive, and responsive to the ethical tensions that shape sport in diverse contexts. Within this, Appadurai's ideoscape framework compels us to treat athlete and coach perspectives not as peripheral anecdotes but as central



epistemologies that reveal how global ideals (in this case regarding concepts of safety, risk, abuse, etc.) are refracted through local histories, politics, and identities. In employing Appadurai's framing in understanding safe sport, we encourage stakeholders to envision alternative futures for sport that transcend bureaucratic compliance and instead foster ethical reflexivity and community-driven transformation. In doing so, what becomes valuable is building educational resources and subsequent learnings from athletes, coaches, and others that illuminate complexities of key safe sport issues and how these connect to global solutions or actions.

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## (Tylos) kodo laužymas Lietuvoje: saugus sportas kaip idėjų peizažas

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### Santrauka

Pasaulinės žiniasklaidos dėmesys tarpasmeniniam smurtui sporte padidino saugaus sporto informuotumą, todėl daugelis sporto organizacijų patiria spaudimą kurti ir įgyvendinti įvairias saugos priemones. Vis dėlto taip yra ne visose šalyse. Pavyzdžiui, Lietuvoje, mažoje šalyje, turinčioje ilgą ir reikšmingą sporto istoriją, saugus sportas nėra gerai žinomas. Šio

straipsnio tikslas – ištirti, kaip asmenys konkrečioje nacionalinėje sporto sistemoje supranta, konceptualizuoja ir mato platesnių saugaus sporto klausimų ir diskursų aktualumą. Kitas tikslas – atkreipti dėmesį į saugaus sporto Lietuvoje darbotvarkės plėtros, apimančios vyraujančio pasaulinio diskurso priėmimą kaip iššūkį, galimybes. Šio tyrimo duomenys, gauti diskusijų su 18 trenerių ir sportininkų metu, atskleidė selektyvų ir neryžtingą požiūrį į saugaus sporto supratimą jų šalyje. Šis tyrimas, remiantis Appadurai pavyzdžiais, atskleidžia, kaip saugaus sporto ideologijos Lietuvoje dera su sporto valdymo modernizavimo darbotvarkėmis. Be to, kuriant naują darbotvarkę, saugaus sporto konceptualių pagrindų (pvz., ideologijos) svarstymas yra potencialiai naudingas atspirties taškas tiek politikos, tiek švietimo srityse. Todėl nacionalinė, vietinė ir į sporto darbuotojus orientuota kultūra, niuansai ir patirtis turėtų būti organizacijos politikos, pedagoginės transformacijos ir pažangių veiksmų pagrindas.

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**Esminiai žodžiai:** *saugus sportas, sportininkų gerovė, Lietuva, sporto švietimas, sporto valdymas, tarpasmeninis smurtas sporte.*

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