



The Governance Challenges and Strategic Pathways for Sustainable Development of County-Level Football Associations in China

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Abstract

The sustainable development of county-level football associations is a requirement set forth by various policy documents from the Party and the State, reflecting the essential principles of Chinese civil sports organizations. Unlike the Chinese Football Association (CFA) and provincial football associations, county-level football associations are characterized by their non-governmental, civic, and amateur nature. This study examines the development of these associations and identifies several significant issues impeding their progress: outdated development concepts, unclear division of power and responsibilities, unequal resource distribution, ineffective roles of leadership bodies, and a lack of clear definitions for the roles of governing bodies. Currently, these associations face the challenge of lagging behind in development due to these unresolved issues. To address these challenges, it is essential for county-level football associations to revamp their development concepts to align with contemporary needs and expectations. Strengthening the leadership roles within these associations is crucial, as it will provide clear guidance and direction for their activities. Additionally, there is a need to improve the system design to make the management of these associations more efficient and effective. Encouraging the participation of all relevant stakeholders is also vital to form a cohesive and synergistic approach to development. By fostering collaboration among various parties, county-level football associations can leverage diverse resources and expertise, leading to more robust and sustainable growth. The ultimate goal of these recommendations is to promote the endogenous development of county-level football associations. By doing so, these associations can play a pivotal role in enhancing grassroots participation in football, thereby contributing to the broader objective of nurturing a strong mass base for football in China. Through improved governance, resource allocation, and stakeholder engagement, county-level football associations can achieve sustainable development and ensure widespread participation in the sport across the nation.

Keywords: *County-Level Football Association, Dilemma, Path*

A. Introduction

The rule of counties is the peace of the world, and the prosperity of counties is the strength of the country. County governance is an indispensable part of achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation; similarly, the construction of a modern sports powerhouse leaves the high-quality development of sports organisations at the non-county level. China's football development is at a key crossroads of reform, at present, China's school football, clubs, youth training and other aspects of more investment, ignoring the development of county football, county football associations as the capillary of China's football development, has a broad mass base, but its development of the survival of the environment is unsatisfactory. 2015 enacted the "overall programme for the reform and development of football in China" (hereinafter referred to as the "Football Reform Programme") mentioned that it is necessary to improve the management system of local and industrial football associations, and gradually form a

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management system of football associations with nationwide coverage and complete organisation; in 2016, the National Development and Reform Commission promulgated the "Medium and Long-Term Development Plan for Chinese Football (2016-2050)" (hereinafter referred to as the "Development Plan") requires the people's demand for football to be basically satisfied and supports local football tournament activities. Encouragement is given for County-level football associations have been formed in various forms according to local conditions; in addition, the "Several Measures of the Chinese Football Association on Further Promoting the Reform and Development of Football" (hereinafter referred to as the "Measures") also points out that it is necessary to actively encourage and guide the establishment of local football associations and the organisation of local leagues. A series of measures taken by the Party and the state have provided a living ground for the development of county-level football associations, but the development of county-level football associations also needs the help of various governance bodies, how to deal with the synergistic relationship of various governance bodies is the "talisman" for the development of county-level football associations, and the SFIC model is able to reflect the synergistic relationship of various parties to provide a basis for the synergistic governance of county-level football associations. The SFIC model can reflect the synergistic relationship of all parties and provide a basis for the synergistic governance of county-level football association. Therefore, this paper will explore the collaborative governance of county-level football association based on SFIC model.

The development of football at the county level in China presents significant challenges in governance and sustainable growth. Despite increasing attention and investment in the sport, county-level football associations frequently encounter issues related to ineffective governance structures, resource shortages, and difficulties in policy formulation and implementation. These challenges hinder the progress of the sport and limit the potential for talent development at the local level (Zhang et al., 2021). The primary issues faced by county-level football associations include the inability to implement effective governance structures, lack of resources, and challenges in strategic planning. Inadequate governance structures often lead to unclear responsibilities, lack of transparency, and low accountability (Liu & Wang, 2022). Furthermore, a shortage of financial and human resources impedes the associations' ability to run programs that can enhance game quality and develop local talent. Difficulties in designing and executing effective policies exacerbate these issues, causing associations to fall short of their potential in advancing football within their communities (Yang & Li, 2023).

Existing literature on sports governance in China reveals that effective governance structures and practices are crucial for achieving sustainable sports development. Zhang et al. (2021) highlight the importance of governance reforms within sports associations in China, noting that a lack of transparency and accountability often hampers sports progress. Their research indicates that many sports associations, particularly at the county level, lack adequate systems for monitoring and evaluating performance and ensuring efficient resource utilization. Liu and Wang (2022) add another dimension to this discussion by emphasizing that many county-level football associations lack clear strategic guidance and sufficient financial support. They note that these associations are often dependent on external aid and lack the capacity to design effective long-term strategies. In this context, development programs designed without considering adequate governance aspects tend to fail in implementation, ultimately affecting the quality and sustainability of these initiatives. Additional research by Yang and Li (2023) extends the understanding of how infrastructure deficits and training shortages at the county level also play a significant role in football development. They demonstrate that while there have been efforts to improve sports facilities, many associations still struggle with a lack of trained coaches and comprehensive development programs. This contributes to a gap between national policies and their local implementation, creating a disconnect between expectations and reality.

This study aims to explore the primary challenges in governance faced by county-level football associations in China and identify strategic pathways for sustainable development. The primary objectives of this research are to identify and analyze various aspects of governance affecting the effectiveness of county-level football associations. By conducting an in-depth examination of organizational structure, policies, and resource management, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors impeding football development at the local level.

In the context of sports development, particularly at the local level, strong governance and well-planned strategies are essential for achieving long-term success. The central argument of this study is that without identifying and addressing existing governance challenges, county-level football associations will continue to face difficulties in reaching their full potential. Effective governance structures and well-designed strategies can enhance operational efficiency, improve resource utilization, and ensure that development programs run smoothly and sustainably (Zhang et al., 2021; Liu & Wang, 2022). By identifying the key governance challenges and developing strategic pathways to address them, this study aims to make a significant contribution to improving the structure and practices within county-level football associations. Through data-driven insights and in-depth analysis, this research seeks to provide valuable recommendations for local stakeholders, policymakers, and association managers to design and implement more effective policies. The ultimate goal is to promote more inclusive and sustainable football development, allowing the sport to thrive at the county level and deliver greater benefits to local communities (Yang & Li, 2023).

With a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities in governance for county-level football associations, and with recommendations based on best practices and empirical data, this study hopes to be a crucial step towards enhancing the quality and sustainability of football development in China. This research will not only provide useful insights for local sports managers but also contribute to broader efforts to strengthen the overall sports system in the country.

B. Methods

This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to examine the governance challenges and strategic pathways for the sustainable development of county-level football associations in China (Yin, 2018). The research procedure begins with the selection of several representative county-level football associations from various regions in China. Initial data is collected through policy documents, annual reports, and relevant literature (Creswell, 2014). In-depth interviews are conducted with association managers, members, and stakeholders to gain insights into governance challenges and development efforts (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Field observations are also carried out to understand the internal and external dynamics of the associations (Flick, 2018).

Data validation is achieved through triangulation to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings (Denzin, 2017). Data collection techniques include documentation, semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and questionnaires (Patton, 2015). The collected data is analyzed using thematic analysis to identify and report the main emerging themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data triangulation is used to verify findings from various sources (Jick, 1979). A SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) is also performed to understand the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the governance of county-level football associations (Humphrey, 2005). Validity testing is conducted by comparing the findings with previous literature and studies (Maxwell, 2012). Through this methodology, the research aims

to provide a comprehensive overview of the governance challenges and strategic pathways for the sustainable development of county-level football associations in China.

C. Findings and Discussion

1. Concept and Characteristics of County Football Associations

The Implementation Plan of the Chinese Football Association on Accelerating the Growth of Local Member Associations to Carry Out the "Breakthrough Plan" issued in 2018 provides the following explanation for member association organisations: member association organisations are non-profit social sports organisations that carry out football activities, promote football values, activate the football market, and cultivate the football culture. Therefore, this paper defines the county football association as an organisation that organises and operates football within a county administrative unit, and its main tasks include organising and managing football activities in the area. County FAs play an important role at the local level in promoting the prosperity of football at the grassroots level through cooperation with local governments, schools, clubs, etc. Their organisational structure and responsibilities vary in different regions and countries, but the overall objective is to facilitate the development and promotion of football within a specific local context.

County football associations have the following characteristics: 1. non-government, that is, the county football association independent self-government, neither belongs to the government agencies, nor using the government system for management, most local football associations in the form of "football enthusiasts associations" and other forms of existence; 2. Folk, county football associations of the participants from all aspects of the community, teachers, students, Self-sufficiency, the county football association as an autonomous unit, the source of funds for activities mainly rely on membership fees and commercial sponsorship of the two blocks; 4. Amateurism, most of the association's work for part-time staff, football enthusiasts to use their spare time to carry out, reflecting the heavy amateur colours, and therefore the work of the degree of dedication, the degree of completion of the work of the lack of dependence: the county football association's survival and development depends on government support, the activities of its Dependence: the survival and development of county-level football associations depend on government support, and their activities are subject to the selective control of the government, which makes county-level football associations in the state of "positive obedience and negative compliance" to the government for a long time (Liu & Xu, 2019).

2. Dilemmas

Lagging Development Concepts

China's county-level areas are lagging behind in their ability to accept new ideas and things, and there is a certain gap between their economic level and living conditions and those of developed cities. County football is influenced by the prestige of elders in traditional Chinese social ethics, and the decision-making of the association has the tendency of "one-word"; the managers of the association are limited by their own business ability, unable to recognise the importance of the county football association as a service role, and on the contrary, the county football association is regarded as a subordinate governing body of the administrative unit, which can't adequately safeguard the sports needs of the people (Zhu, Ding, & Hong, 2022). Moreover, most of the leaders of county-level football associations are school teachers or part-time personnel of institutions, and they are not sufficiently committed to the work of county-level

football associations, lack a sense of responsibility and commitment to public sports affairs, and do not fully combine local humanities, geographic resources and so on, to find a road suitable for the development of local football (Chongqing Sports Bureau, 2023). At present, the county-level football association also exists "xenophobic" sentiment, its internal composition is mostly composed of local football enthusiasts, migrant workers, some ethnic minority area enthusiasts to join the association will have a lot of "threshold" and high membership fees (Bai & Wang, 2020). This leads to the formation of "regional protection" of county-level football associations in the long term, which is not conducive to the diversified development of football associations.

Unequal Distribution of Resources

County-level football associations lack resources. The CFA has professional tournaments such as the Chinese Super League, the Chinese First Division and the Chinese Second Division, and the Municipal Football Association of Chongqing, for example, has the Chongqing Municipal Amateur Football Super League (hereinafter referred to as the "Super League") and the Chongqing Municipal Amateur Football First Division (hereinafter referred to as the First Division), which have pre-season and promotion/lowering systems; while county-level football associations lack high-quality tournaments (Liu, 2022). The pre-season and promotion/lowering system is implemented in the two leagues, and the matches are highly ornamental; while the county-level football associations lack high-quality matches; the county-level football associations are unable to meet the needs of the public in terms of venues, equipment and facilities, etc. Take T County in Sichuan Province as an example, with a population of 130,000 people in the county, it only owns a seven-a-side pitch, and the turf, nets, and goals are damaged for a long period of time, which is a big safety hazard, and the pitches of primary and middle schools are not open to the public due to safety considerations (Zhao, 2021); while provincial and municipal football associations have sufficient venue resources. The provincial and municipal football associations have sufficient venue resources, according to the Chongqing Municipal Sports Bureau 2022 Sports Venue Statistics Survey Data Bulletin, Chongqing has 2,937 football venues, with a venue area of 6,721,700 square metres. Among them, there are 502 eleven-a-side football venues; 665 seven-a-side football venues; 1,764 five-a-side football venues; and five beach football fields (Chongqing Sports Bureau, 2023). In addition, county-level football associations are mostly composed of college students and amateurs, and the referees are randomly appointed by college students; while in provincial and municipal football associations, the participating players have strong professional colours, and in the Heavy Super League, for example, the matches have retired professional players or players with professional ladder experience, and the referees are highly competent in their business, and they have the experience of studying in colleges and universities or of enforcing professional matches (Liu, 2022). To sum up, county-level football associations are in a long-term disadvantageous position in the allocation of main resources, which is not conducive to the long-term development of county-level football associations.

Vague Division of Authority and Responsibility

Although policy documents such as the "Football Reform Programme", "Development Plan" and "Measures" promulgated by the State all mention that "grassroots football should be developed and local football associations should be encouraged to organise leagues", local football associations are required to take responsibility for building membership organisations, competitions, training, various types of football activities and publicity in their own regions and

sectors. Local football leagues are encouraged, and local football associations are required to take responsibility for member organisation building, competitions, training, all kinds of football activities and publicity in their own regions and sectors. Policy documents are the "baton" for reform and development, but the policy documents that have been issued do not form a clear system for the division of powers and responsibilities, resulting in county-level football associations being unable to form an effective synergy with higher-level departments. In 2016, the "Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Adjustment and Reform of Local Football Associations" pointed out the need to gradually realise the de-administratisation of local football associations, but up to now, the delinking of local football associations has stayed in the form, failing to carry out the process fundamentally (Bai & Wang, 2020). To realise the delinking of local football associations from local administrative departments, the original "two brands, one set of teams" model should be broken to ensure the separation of government and society, and the separation of powers and responsibilities. In addition, the implementation of the delinking is a mandatory measure of the government departments, but there is no guidance on the specific operation of the local football association after the delinking (Zhao, 2021). The delinking of county-level football associations deprives them of government support, while at the same time the social recognition and support they receive is insufficient, putting them in a dilemma.

The Leadership Role of the Higher Football Associations is Not Evident

The CFA is supposed to take on the important task of leading the reform and development of local football associations, and it has the best resources, but from a practical point of view, the CFA has invested a great deal of resources in the national team and professional leagues, but has invested very little in local football associations, especially at the county level (Zhu, Ding, & Hong, 2022). Although it is also mentioned in the "football reform programme" that "the development of grassroots football should focus on supporting the development of social football in terms of funding, venues, time, competitions, coaching, etc., and that people's organisations such as trade unions, the Communist Youth League and the Women's Federation should give full play to their respective strengths and promote the development of grassroots football" (Liu, 2022), the development of county-level football associations has never been given due attention. Higher-level football associations by the "national system", "winning" and other deep-rooted influence of the idea of the results of the game-oriented, contrary to the objective laws of football development, ignoring the grass-roots people on the needs of China's football development for a long time stagnation or even retrogression. Although the county-level football associations represent the needs of the general public in football, there are shortcomings in the implementation of specific policies; the CFA communicates with the county-level football associations through the two departments of education and sports, but the departments of education and sports have failed to play the role of "starting from the top and starting from the bottom", which has led to the function of the county-level football associations being "stranded" (Bai & Wang, 2020).

Gaps in Government Sectoral Synergy Mechanisms

At present, in promoting the development of county football associations, the main formation of the county sports department, the education sector as a complementary pattern, there are imperfect supervision between the two departments, the lack of communication and collaboration and other issues, and the Education Bureau, the Sports Bureau is busy with their respective institutions, limited understanding of each other, the two departments did not achieve

a real organic link, and sometimes even the formation of the "separate positions" situation, making the synergistic governance process difficult (Zhao, 2021). "The Education Bureau has long been busy with school work and unit construction, while the Sports Bureau pours power into the organisation of institutional sports events and campus sports leagues, and does not invest enough in grassroots football leagues with the county football associations as the main body, which puts the county football associations in a dilemma; the physical reform of the county football associations will touch or even break the existing interests of the county football associations. The reform will touch or even break the existing interests, and there will be a redistribution of interests. In order to maintain the existing interests, some local governments will adopt the speculative strategy of "the upper level has a policy, and the lower level has a plan". The lack of transparency and accountability mechanisms leads to the abuse of power and makes the autonomy of county-level football associations open to question (Chongqing Sports Bureau, 2023). County-level football associations are mainly responsible for amateur leagues, community activities or school competitions in the county, and their access to resources is relatively small, and their influence is mainly limited to the county-level area, which is relatively lacking in all aspects compared to provincial-level football associations and the CFA (Liu, 2022). The differences between county-level FAs and provincial-level FAs and CFA make county-level FAs struggle in the process of collaborative governance (Zhu, Ding, & Hong, 2022).

Tabel 1 Comparison between County FAs and CFA/Provincial FAs

specificities	County Football Associations	China, provincial football associations
Institutional structure	Bottom-up, institutional independence	Top-down, institutional dependency
composition of the staff	civil society	official (relating a government office)
Nature of work	Amateur, part-time	Professional, full-time
Sources of funding	Association crowdfunding	state funding
Commercial sponsorships	Local private enterprises	Large state-owned enterprises, national brands
Characteristics of the nature	non-profit	profit-oriented
business planning	autonomy	directive
Mobility of personnel	free movement	Limitations of the rules

3. Crack path

Updating the development concept, clarifying the goal orientation, and rationally dividing powers and responsibilities

The overall development of the county football association should ensure "gradual", not "overnight", that is, in the macro-issues to take conservative measures, while in the micro-issues can use relatively open measures, only so that the combination of gradual change and radical change, in order to minimise the risk of reform. Only by combining gradual and radical changes can the risk of reform be minimised. First of all, the county-level football association should get rid of the confinement of the political centralisation mode, break the "one-word hall" mode, implement the flat development mode of "vertical contraction and horizontal expansion", weaken the power of the internal leaders, and delegate the power to the members, and learn from the development mode of the European and American membership football clubs. The

development model of membership football clubs in Europe and America is to be learnt. Take Spain as an example, each professional club has a large number of member organisations, fans only need to pay 200 euros in membership fees to become a club member, members have the right to vote and the right to stand for election, in the appointment and dismissal of the club's chairman to cast their own valuable vote, membership clubs do not have a real club owner, the club belongs to all the members, the club's profits are not shared with the members for dividends, but rather used for team The profits of the club are not shared with the members, but are used for the construction of the team and the continued development of the club. Membership clubs are mainly funded by membership fees, and in times of crisis, members will also help the team to tide over the difficulties. County football associations can adopt this membership model to achieve their own sustainable development.

The design of the rules and regulations should fully reflect the civil colour, and a model of checks and balances based on the separation of legislative, operational and supervisory powers can be adopted to prevent leaders within the association from monopolising power. A single association that is delinked from the association should have full power to act. In terms of supervisory power, it can draw on advanced foreign experience to improve its corporate governance structure, requiring that county-level associations should unconditionally accept the review of the civil affairs department and formulate legal penalties in the review process and in the event of a violation. In terms of personnel composition, the scale of membership should be enlarged, membership access standards should be liberalised, and access conditions without threshold, high or low, or class should be adhered to, so as to attract enthusiasts of different identities and nationalities to join, give full play to the function of service, incorporate the sense of national community into the development of the county football associations, and establish a fair, just, and open competition mechanism.

Finally, the person in charge of the county-level football association should improve their own business ability and leadership ability, grasp the latest concept of football development in real time, build partnerships with local colleges and universities and clubs, form the pattern of "substitute for training with matches, and bring training with matches", and sign contracts with club managers, coaching staffs of colleges and universities, and persons in charge of sports companies, etc., so as to The county-level football associations can obtain advanced football resources and provide a platform for market development. For example, the Chiba Prefectural Football Association in Japan has long been recruiting within the prefecture on the basis of merit, recruiting university students with professional subject backgrounds to enter the association, establishing an internal talent management system in line with the development of the local football association, and fully ensuring the development of the prefecture's football reserve talents. For example, in November 2019, the Japan Football Association (JFA) signed a consulting partnership agreement with Deloitte on strengthening the organisational foundation and governance of the association, where Deloitte is actively involved in strengthening the governance of nine regional, 47 prefectural football associations in Japan (Japan Football Association, 2022.)

Strengthen the main role of leadership and give full play to the advantages of leadership.

Building a strong sports nation requires optimising China's sports development model and constructing a path of "strong government, strong society", which can not only get rid of the dependence of the county-level football associations and prevent the government from eroding their internal affairs, but also solve the problem of the county-level football associations' own

insufficient governance capacity. Firstly, the government should increase the devolution of power, which should focus on the lack of decision-making power of the county-level football associations, so that the associations can become local football agents rather than representatives of government interests (Guo, 2021). Government departments should reasonably merge the Education Bureau and the Sports Bureau according to the local actual situation, to ensure the full cooperation of the two institutions, to optimise the management path and to establish a cooperation platform.

Secondly, establish a high-quality service system, make emergency plans for security, medical care and logistics, set up special funds to give county-level football associations financial subsidies and incentives; introduce third-party organisations to assess and supervise the performance of county-level football associations and the operation of their internal powers, and rectify and abolish and reorganise those associations that do not meet the requirements. Playing the economic function of the association, it actively undertakes government functions in campus tournaments, county-level tournaments as well as trainings for coaches and referees, so as to improve the association's "blood-forming" ability. County football associations make full use of their economic functions not only to objectively promote the government's investment in the football industry, but also to enhance their own viability (Huang, 2021). Finally, government departments should organise multi-level and diversified tournaments, such as horizontal county tournaments, neighbouring county tournaments, and vertical formation of U-series tournaments, which will in turn lead to tournament-orientation as a goal and give full play to the role of leadership.

Refinement of policies and regulations and sound legal protection.

The supply of local policies and regulations should be consistent with the concept of party discipline and state law. At present, the institutional norms of county-level football associations are characterised by "ad hoc" and "directionality", lack of visionary thinking, and zero-time decision-making to solve a problem that has already arisen. Therefore, the government, official football associations and other governance bodies should take a long-term perspective in rule-making, avoiding policies that generate non-stable development expectations, so as to provide pointers for the actions of county-level football associations; policies and regulations ensure that county-level football associations have specific assessment standards in the registration of associations, registration of players and teams, donations for the public welfare, tax exemptions and qualifications, and combine with the feedback from members and customers to continuously improve and enhance the quality of services and further improve the behavioural norms; and service quality and further improve the code of conduct; for example, in the UK, there are nearly 100,000 teams, with over 30 million spectators and 11 million participants across the country. After a long period of research and listening to public opinion, the FA will issue a Code of Governance for County Football Associations in 2020, which will establish 50 County Football Associations across the country. The Code sets out strict rules in the areas of structure, staffing, communication, standards and behaviours as well as policies and processes, with a total of 63 key requirements, all of which have been subject to rigorous scrutiny and assessment before they can be used (English Football Association, 2020).

Secondly, in strict accordance with the Accounting System for Private Non-profit Organisations, the association should improve its financial accounting and fund flow system, adopt the equity method of accounting, and disclose information such as net investment gains and losses, and the association's financial status and operating results in the notes to the

accounting statements (Ministry of Finance, 2020); and use the governance rules to deal with illegal and disorderly behaviour of athletes and referees, and put an end to fake games and black whistles. For the participating teams to collect a certain deposit, after the game by acting will be based on the team present there is no violation of the spirit of sports to decide whether to return, and will be the field of illegal and disorderly behaviour and the next year's eligibility to participate in the link. In addition, bans, cancellation of team results, rankings and other means can be taken to ensure the smooth running of the game; open information disclosure platforms, the establishment of information databases, to ensure that the public has the basic information of the members of the review to ensure that the public's right to know; in order to ensure that the operation of the county football association, the internal election system should be improved, meritocracy, and attract young people to join the association; at the same time, to enhance the association's transparency of information At the same time, it should improve the transparency of information of the association and provide a window for enterprises, media and the public to report and complain, so as to promote the smooth flow of information inside and outside the association.

Encourage the participation of many parties to promote governance

County football associations should return to being associations and change their service function from serving the government to serving their members and other stakeholders; they are the most capable county associations to serve their localities and provide safe, fun and genuinely suitable football for all, and they should collaborate with a wide range of participants so as to build a linkage mechanism that engages the government, the community and the schools. In complying with the guidelines, governments should ensure that their associations operate to the highest standards of governance. These standards help to ensure that their internal leadership and other decision-making bodies are optimally equipped to maintain and develop the game.

County associations should have a highly qualified executive or management team responsible for the day-to-day running of the association and for co-ordinating the relationship between the government, the county football association and the community; the councils are part of what makes up a county football association, and for this reason the government should put in place a regular evaluation mechanism as a means of assessing how well the councils are doing and whether they are fairly representing the participants and stakeholders in the sport. Evaluation can help associations decide whether their councils are truly serving the association and its members. The results of the evaluation process, plans or next steps to be taken should be posted on the website.

The society should respond positively to the government's call for the development of county-level football associations relying on member support. Taking Nan'an FA as an example, Nan'an FA is a county-level FA located in Quanzhou, Fujian Province, which relies on the support of local private enterprises, coupled with donations from local entrepreneurs, has developed into a county-level FA with a good internal operation system and thousands of members, and has received special support from the provincial FA as well as the municipal finance. Therefore, the use of public charity is also an effective measure to ensure the normal operation of county-level football associations (Liang, 2023); the public should establish a sense of "ownership", as part of the association, and contribute to the development of county-level football associations.

Schools should learn to provide students with a wealth of competition opportunities, and strongly encourage physical education teachers as the coaching team of the county football

association, one can improve their own business level, and the other can provide professional guidance for the county football association team. To sum up, the sustainable development of county-level football associations can not be separated from the government, the public and the school's extensive participation and joint discussions, the need for the concerted participation of multiple subjects, the formation of the Education Bureau, the Sports Bureau, the school and the social governance of the situation, so as to crack the reality of the county-level football associations in the predicament of the development of grass-roots football to provide a good soil (Bai & Wang, 2020; Zhu, Zhao, & Li, 2023).

D. Conclusion

County Football Association (CFA) is a grassroots non-profit social sports organisation in China, and as a service role to co-ordinate the development of county football tournaments, the county CFA should cross the river by touching the stones, and constantly seek the road of county football development in line with the actual situation of China. Based on the theory of synergistic governance and using the SFIC model, this paper explores the whole process of the development of county-level football associations starting from the four major variables of county-level football associations in terms of unequal subject status and resources, lack of leadership, backwardness of institutional design and lack of synergy, aiming to seek feasible paths for the reform and development of China's football career. Influenced by the actual situation and humanistic customs of each place, the reform and development of county-level football associations is much more difficult than that of CFA and provincial-level football associations, but therefore it also has a more far-reaching research value.

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