

10.2478/nispa-2024-0001



Public Policy Failure: The Case of Arts and Sports Policy in Kazakhstan

Maxat Argynbekov¹, Elmira Joldybayeva²

Abstract:

In his address to the nation on September 1, 2020, Kazakhstani President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev pledged to promote mass sports and arts among youth. To achieve this, the Kazakhstani government launched ArtSport, a nationwide initiative to create new programs from swimming and dancing to sculpture. Nevertheless, the multi-million-dollar initiative was suspended in 2022 due to various problems and scandals. This article aims to understand and explain why ArtSport failed to achieve its policy goals despite the central government's commitment and enormous investment. This article examines the nationwide initiative from the theoretical lens of the policy cycle to achieve the research aim. Adopting a qualitative approach to a case study, it combines the analysis of official and non-official documentary sources with anonymous elite interviews of senior government officials at the regional Culture and Sports Committees. Tracing the policymaking process from agenda setting to implementation, we argue that although the Government's intentions were good, the policy design behind ArtSport had critical weaknesses that led to failure in policy implementation. These weaknesses include the initiative's overly ambitious scope, the technical shortcomings of the ArtSport online platform, and lack of funds. As a result, ArtSport failed to achieve its expected outcomes, and the initiative was also marked by embezzlement and corruption scandals. Given the Government's decision to continue

1 The Institute of Management, Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Astana).

2 The Institute of Diplomacy, Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Astana).

with ArtSport through policy changes and additional funding, this article develops practical recommendations to improve the program design and implementation process.

Keywords:

ArtSport, Kazakhstan, policy cycle theory, policy failure, sports policy

1. Introduction

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, in his address to the people of Kazakhstan on September 1, 2020, placed great emphasis on the issue of developing the athletic and creative potential of the younger generation. Tokayev said,

“In times when there is a shortage of funds, it makes no sense to support professional sports clubs entirely at the state’s expense. Billions of tenge from the state budget and quasi-state companies are being spent inefficiently. Priority should be given to mass sports, physical education and, of course, to children. In each region, sports facilities should be opened in large district centres. We also need to resume the activity of ‘children’s clubs’, where representatives of the young generation can learn the basics of creativity and handicraft. Modern realities can be so dangerous for children: their energy and curiosity need, therefore, to be guided in the right direction. After all, children are the future of our country. This will be a criterion by which we will evaluate the work of governors” (President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2020).

Shortly after the address, Tokayev signed the law ‘On Approval of the Rules for Per Capita Normative Financing of Creative Circles for Children and Youth’, which entered into force on May 1, 2021 (Kasymzhanova, 2022). It entitled children and youth to attend sports and arts sessions free of charge, with financial support from the state budget.

Later in the same month, the Ministry of Culture and Sports launched the ArtSport national program. The idea behind the program was to use the ‘lion’s share’ of the sports budget to provide funding for children aged 4 to 17 to attend sports and arts activities. As an innovative approach, ArtSport developed a new electronic platform called “Artsports.kz”, enabling service providers and youth participants to complete their online registration and enrollment. In 2022, more than 458,000 children and adolescents attended 14,652 sports and arts sessions for free (Nurbai, 2022). During its first two years, the program covered 4.6 million children, or 9.7 percent of the population aged 4 to 17 in Kazakhstan in 2021 (Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of Kazakhstan, n.d., a.). Nevertheless, as the study results demonstrate, the ArtSport program failed to reach its

policy aims because of its all-inclusive scope of target users, the lack of funds, technical defects of the ArtSport platform and corruption scandals. Not only did they sabotage the entire policy implementation process, but they also allowed people to educate children who had no education and had been convicted of prostitution.

This article is a study of the ArtSport national program. The aim is to understand why, despite the central government's commitment and enormous investment, the nationwide initiative failed to achieve its policy goals. To answer this question, we draw upon Paul Cairney's policy cycle theory to analyze the multi-stage process through which ArtSport was designed, formulated and implemented. Given the complex, multifaceted nature of policymaking and implementation, we conduct a qualitative, empirical study of ArtSport by examining government documents, statistics, laws, newspaper articles and interview texts. The findings show that although the intentions behind ArtSport were good, the policy design suffered from critical weaknesses that led to failure in policy implementation. In particular, this study identifies four problems: the all-inclusive scope of target users, the technical shortcomings of the ArtSport platform, the lack of funds for the policy implementation, and embezzlement and corruption scandals. As a result, ArtSport did not achieve its expected results and emphasized the importance of effective public administration to the country's success in sports and economic development.

This article is divided into three sections. The first section lays out the theoretical framework for this study. This framework dissects public policymaking into a chain of interrelated stages from agenda-setting and policy implementation to policy maintenance, succession or termination by drawing on the literature on policy cycle theory. By identifying where mistakes occurred in the policymaking process, this study provides an explanation of why ArtSport has failed. The second section delves into the empirical case study of ArtSport. To trace the process through which the nationwide initiative was designed, implemented and eventually suspended, this study adopts a qualitative approach by combining the analysis of official and non-official sources with anonymous, semi-structured elite interviews. The theoretical framework helps to collate the collected material in a structured manner, highlighting the significant elements of policy study such as a problem definition, policy objectives, instruments and evaluation. It discusses ArtSport by analyzing how the national program was launched and implemented to promote the participation of more children and youth in mass sports and arts activities. The final section of this study discusses the flaws in the formulation and implementation of ArtSport that led to its downfall. Based on the study results, the conclusion offers constructive recommendations for improving and making ArtSport work in the future.

2. Theoretical framework of public policymaking

Scholars have long developed and applied different concepts, models and theories to

understand and explain public policy, which involves a government's direct or indirect activities to maintain order and address public issues and citizens' needs (Cairney, 2020). They allow scholars to define the scope and dissect the complex process of public administration. As Viotti and Kauppi put it, *"a theory is an intellectual construct composed of a set of interrelated propositions that help one to identify or select facts and interpret them, thus facilitating explanation and prediction concerning the regularities and recurrences or repetitions of observed phenomena"* (Viotti & Kauppi, 2013: 6-7).

The discipline of public administration possesses an extensive body of theories and concepts rooted in European and American public administration systems and traditions. These traditions provided the foundation of modern principles of public administration, such as hierarchical control, extensive networking, effective delivery of public goods and services, professionalism, decentralization, rationality, transparency and public accountability (Lampropoulou & Oikonomou, 2018). Among the concepts and theories of public administration, the more influential ones include New Public Governance (Osborne, 2006; Robinson, 2015), New Public Service, New Weberian State, Good Governance (Weiss, 2000; Lampropoulou & Oikonomou, 2018), Digital-era Governance (Dunleavy et al., 2006), Network governance (Klijn, 2008) and Interactive Governance (Torfing et al., 2012). Since our concern here is how ArtSport is formulated, launched and implemented, the theoretical framework draws upon the works of policy cycle theory (from now on, the policy cycle).

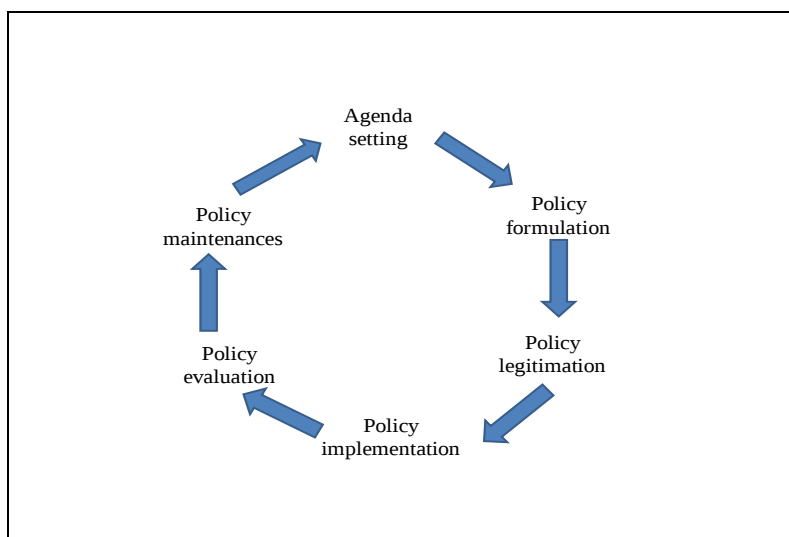
As a theoretical framework, the policy cycle will help explain the legal monopoly of the Kazakhstani Government in drafting and implementing policies by dividing the process into clear stages (Kingdon, 1984). Lasswell was the pioneer who proposed modelling the policy process as a sequence of steps to make sense of the intricate world of public policymaking in 1956. He divided the policymaking process into seven distinct phases, each with a specific function: intelligence, promotion, prescription, invocation, application, termination, and appraisal (Lasswell, 1956; Jann & Wegrich, 2007). The policy cycle theory gained prominence in academia during the 1960s and 1970s as a framework for studying public policy and administration (Jann & Wegrich, 2007). However, Lasswell's model is prescriptive rather than analytical. Moreover, it is too simple to provide an accurate description and helpful explanation of the complex nature of public policymaking that involves many actors (Jann & Wegrich, 2007).

Notwithstanding the criticisms, Lasswell's model has become the basis of subsequent research on the decision-making process. His typology has been further developed by Brewer and DeLeon (1983), May and Wildavsky (1978), Anderson (1975), Jenkins (1978), Burstein (1991), Howlett and Ramesh (2003), Cairney (2019), Lindquist and Wellstead (2021) and Howlett (2023). Despite their differences, these models all include four main functional stages: agenda setting, policy formulation, implementation and evaluation (Jones, 1970; Howlett, 2018). On the other hand, they emphasize the importance of other factors, including state and non-state actors, policy tools or public issues in policy analysis. Burstein (1991), for instance, underlines how important it is to include the policy domain in the research. Howlett, meanwhile,

draws attention to policy instruments such as public hearings or commissions of inquiry as methods to achieve the Government's goals throughout the policymaking process (Howlett, 2023, p.3, p.36).

Today, policy cycle theory remains a widely used framework for public policy research (Fischer & Miller, 2007, p.45). Some scholars remain concerned with the entire policy process (Everett, 2003; Howard, 2005; Colebatch, 2020), while others focus their attention on individual stages such as policy implementation and agenda setting (Smith, 1973; DeGroff & Cargo, 2009; Mubarok et al., 2020). Since this article aims to dissect the policymaking process surrounding ArtSport and explain where mistakes occurred, it adopts Paul Cairney's policy cycle theory (Figure 1), which is inherently considered more appropriate (Cairney, 2019).

Figure 1:
The Policy Cycle



Source: (Cairney, 2019)

The model divides the policy process into a chain of interrelated stages, from the beginning, from when a social problem is identified to when a solution is proposed, implemented, and evaluated. In total, Cairney identifies the following six stages:

- *Agenda Setting*: Public policy actors set the agenda when they identify and define the problems that need to be addressed by the Government and put them in order of importance.
- *Policy Formulation*: Policymakers draw up the solution(s) by defining their objectives, selecting the instruments to implement them, and estimating their

costs and effects to address the target problem(s).

- *Policy Legitimation*: Policymakers build political and public support for the policy through executive approval, legislative approval, consultation with interest groups, referenda, and the like.
- *Policy Implementation*: The Government delivers the policy by establishing, appointing or employing an organization with the mandate and resources to execute the decisions and ensuring that all solutions are carried out accordingly.
- *Policy Evaluation*: Public policy actors assess how the policy is implemented ‘correctly’ and produces the planned outcomes.
- *Policy Maintenance, Succession, or Termination*: The Government determines if the policy should be ‘continued, modified, or discontinued’. (Cairney, 2019, p.33)

As the following discussion will show, Cairney’s theory provides a suitable framework for dissecting the otherwise intricate and complex life cycle of public policymaking, from the beginning when sports became a public policy issue in Kazakhstan, to the end when ArtSport had to be suspended due to various problems and scandals (Alkhabayev, 2023). This study also draws upon the works of Lasswell, Brewer and DeLeon, May and Wildavsky, and others.

3. Empirical study: the case of Artsport

As the US football player and Olympic gold medalist Julie Foudy said, “Sports build not only better athletes but also better people”. Arts and sports activities enable children to develop intellect, emotional intelligence and social skills (Coghlan, 2021). They foster a sense of competence and pride by increasing children’s self-esteem and confidence. As a nationwide initiative to promote the physical and intellectual development of the youth in Kazakhstan, ArtSport was launched by the Government in May 2021. Nevertheless, the ambitious program was suspended after one year due to a range of issues. Based on Paul Cairney’s theory of policy cycle, this section traces and analyzes the interrelated stages through which ArtSport was designed, implemented and eventually suspended.

3.1. Research methods and materials

This qualitative empirical study traces the policymaking process by combining document analysis with anonymous, semi-structured elite interviews to examine why ArtSport was unsuccessful despite sizeable public demand and strong support from the highest level of government. To begin with, we examine a wide range of official

and unofficial primary sources, including news reports from the mass media, government documents, statistics, and articles written by scholars and experts. In our research, for instance, we draw upon official documents such as the President's annual addresses, orders from central and local governments, statements of members of the Mazhilis, and relevant laws in the Adilet and Zan databases. At the same time, we analyzed sources from more than fifteen media outlets and newspapers over the past two years, including The Astana Times, Forbes.kz, Kazakhstan Today, KazInform, Khabar 24, Liter and TengriNews. Anonymous, semi-structured interviews with Heads of the Department of Culture and members of Sports Committees in different regions of Kazakhstan complement document analysis. These interviews helped us better understand the subject matter from the perspectives of public administrators and, most importantly, gain insights into the complex policymaking process in Kazakhstan. Moreover, communicating with them helped us access other valuable materials, such as government statistics and reports.

3.2 Agenda-Setting

The agenda-setting scholarship demonstrates that major national events can create the conditions needed to push a government to address public problems (Hays & Glick, 1997). For example, Downs argues that the "issue attention cycle" occurs when the media focuses public attention on a particular problem (Downs, 1972). The Government is then forced to respond to such nationwide, recurring issues by applying new political solutions. Kingdon (1984), on the other hand, claims that critical public issues and the public interest in them provide opportunities for politicians to garner more support from the elites and public, especially for potentially controversial policies.

The idea of promoting the participation of children and youth in sports and arts activities did not come up in the President's message by chance. This issue of lack of investment in mass sports has been brewing in Kazakhstani society for a long time. The main reason is the Government's bias in favor of professional and elite sports, which have received the most funding from state and non-state sponsors. Indeed, supporting professional sports associations such as the Kazakhstan Boxing Federation, Kazakhstan Football Federation, the Astana Barys Hockey Club, and the Kazakhstan Cycling Federation requires significant financial investment (Sponsors, 2023).

According to the Ministry of Culture and Sports, out of the 160 billion tenges allocated for sports in 2020, 55.5 billion went to professional sports clubs (Medeubayeva, 2020). If we compare the sports budget of 2020 with those of the following years, the Government's support for sports has diminished. In 2021, 47.1 billion tenges were allocated for sports, 82.7 billion tenges in 2022 and 105.7 billion tenges in 2023 (About the republican budget for 2021-2023 Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2020). The above was primarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent national lockdown, significantly undermining Kazakhstan's sports and arts industry (Kazinform, 2022).

Despite abundant governmental funding, professional sports teams did not achieve good international records. For example, the Kazakhstani national football team finished last in the qualifying round for the 2022 World Cup. The team had three draws and five defeats in eight matches; they only scored only five goals while conceding twenty; this was the worst record among all Group D teams (France, Ukraine, Finland, and Bosnia and Herzegovina) (Kazistaev, 2021). Therefore, it is not surprising that Kazakhstani society started to demand an end to funding for professional sports and reallocate the budget to the development of youth sports.

The issue of financing mass sports and arts activities was actively debated in the local press and the highest political circles. Public pressure led members of Parliament to hold discussions and urge the Government to reallocate the funding for professional sports to mass sports (Rezvantsev, 2020). A window of opportunity appeared when the new Ombudsman for Children's Rights, Aruzhan Sain, took office on October 4, 2019 (Commissioner for Children's Rights, 2022a). Ms. Sain sent official letters to municipal governments of all cities and towns (akimats), urging them to stop excessive spending on professional sports, wasteful events and concerts. Instead, public funding should be redirected to mass sports and arts activities for youth (Commissioner for Children's Rights, 2022a).

Unfortunately, not a single region responded to Ms. Sain's call. The issue was finally put on the central government's agenda when the Ombudsman voiced her views to President Tokayev at the first meeting with him on November 5, 2019 (President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev received the Commissioner for Children's Rights Aruzhan Sain, 2019). The President expressed his support for her proposal. In his message to the people of Kazakhstan on September 1, 2020, the President announced the plan to finance sports and arts activities for children and youth (President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2020), which, in turn, put the issue of the funding mass sports on the bureaucracy's agenda.

3.3 Policy Formulation

The second stage of the policy cycle involves formulating a new policy (Howlett, 2019). The key tasks at this stage include the definition of the policy's aims, identifying target user groups, and develop in rules and policy instruments to achieve policy aims (Schneider & Ingram, 1997). The political leaders' positive decision marked the beginning of the ArtSport program. On May 1, 2021, the Ministry of Culture and Sports formally launched "ArtSport". The arts and sports program was unprecedented in that it covers the entire country, including cities and the country's most remote areas. Indeed, while the population in large cities such as Astana and Almaty have access to various sports and arts activities, the number of class places is so meager that even children living in the urban or suburban areas cannot get enrolled quickly. The situation in small towns and villages was much worse than expected (Nurbai, 2020).

As outlined by the President in his address to the nation, the goal of ArtSport is to provide opportunities for all children in Kazakhstan to participate in arts and sports (President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2020). To achieve this goal, the Government would use the “lion’s share” of the sports budget to fund arts and sports activities through a voucher system. The initiative was ambitious in its geographical and demographic scope, as it was designed to include all children aged 4 to 17 (Akimat of the Abay region, 2023). Except for the age limit, there were no further restrictions on eligibility.

To achieve the ambitious goal of providing free access to arts and sports activities for all children and youth across Kazakhstan, ArtSport adopted a public-private partnership model whereby the Government would outsource services to organizations or private instructors. As an innovative approach, a new electronic platform called “Artsports.kz” was developed to process all administrative procedures required by service providers and class attendees. The 2022 program budget amounted to 54.4 billion tenge (Per capita regulatory financing of state sports and creative orders, n. d.) program. The Government applied a new financial instrument - the state creative order- to implement the ArtSport program (Law ‘On Culture’ of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2006). In other words, Kazakhstan introduced a system of vouchers to distribute public support. Local governments were primarily responsible for handling financial issues, such as issuing vouchers to families and making payments to service providers (Rules for placing state creative orders in creative circles for children and youth and their functioning approved by Order of the Minister of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2021). The Artsports.kz platform allowed city and local governments to quickly sign online contracts with sports and arts service providers. The process of registering, signing a contract with service providers and receiving electronic vouchers was simple and fast. All official and financial matters were dealt with directly through this platform (Instrukciâ dlâ postavšikov artsport.edu.kz, 2021).

3.4 Policy Legitimation

This stage of the policy cycle discusses the legal acts adopted by Kazakhstan to establish the legitimacy of the ArtSport program. Six months after the President issued his instruction on September 1, 2020, the Government passed eight (new) laws. It introduced changes to the ‘Law on Culture’ regarding the introduction of a new system of vouchers (Commissioner for Children’s Rights, 2022a). According to the “Law on Culture”, the state creative order or method of vouchers refers to “a state-funded volume of services in the field of culture for children and youth, determined according to the methodology of per capita regulatory financing of the state creative order and placed with suppliers, regardless of their form of ownership, departmental subordination, types and kinds” (Law ‘On Culture’ of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2006). Table 1 gives a brief overview of the purposes and functions of these enacted laws, which are divided into four categories: methodology, selection, financing and ranking.

Table 1:
Regulatory laws on ArtSport

No.	Name	Description
Methodology		
1	"The methodology of per capita financing for the state arts order" was approved by the Order of the Minister of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated April 27, 2021, No. 113 (Adilet,2021b). "The methodology of per capita financing for the state sports order" was approved by the Order of the Minister of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated April 27, 2021, No. 119 (Adilet,2021c).	The methodology for per capita financing of the state creative order was developed per the "Law on Culture" and "Law on Physical Culture and Sports", which outline a unified approach to calculating the per capita standard for financing the state arts and sports orders. These legal documents cover the list of 50 arts (painting, dancing, singing, ballet, and the like) and 64 sports sessions (judo, karate, boxing, tennis, and the like). This methodology specifies three main criteria for selecting service providers: quality standards, infrastructure requirements and training requirements.
Selection		
2	"The rules for placing a state order on arts sessions for children, youth and their functioning" were approved by the Minister's Order for Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated April 28, 2021, No. 122 (Adilet,2021a). "The rules for placing a state order on sports sessions for children, youth and their functioning" were approved by the Minister's Order for Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated April 27, 2021, No. 120 (Adilet,2021d).	Placing an order for arts or sports classes for children and youth includes the following steps: 1) registration on the ArtSport platform; 2) selection of service suppliers; 3) booking a place in arts and sports classes. The online operator processes all bookings and registrations subject to approval and confirmation.
Financing		
3	"The rules of per capita financing for art sessions for children and youth" were approved by the Order of the Minister of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated April 28, 2021, No. 123 (Adilet,2021e). "The rules of per capita financing for sports sessions for children and youth" were approved by the Order of the Minister of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated April 27, 2021, No. 121 (Adilet,2021f).	According to these rules, service providers should send the ArtSport operator an electronic report about the implementation of state orders. The report should include an attendance sheet of all participating children and scanned copies of their documents. Every child's attendance sheet should be signed by their legal representative (parent or guardian) using an electronic digital signature, or it should be confirmed through their account, or using a short text message to a subscribed number. Upon receipt of the report, the operator will make payment within seven working days.
Ranking		
	"The rules for determining the ranking of art clubs for children and youth" were approved by the Order of the Minister of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated April 27, 2021, No. 111 (Rules for determining the rating of art sections for children and youth approved by Order of the Minister of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2021). "The rules for determining the ranking of sports clubs for children and youth" were approved by the Order of the Minister of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated April 27, 2021, No. 112 (Rules for determining the rating of sports sections for children and youth approved by Order of the Minister of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2021).	The Government introduced new rules outlining the overall ranking process for arts clubs to increase competition among service suppliers. The same ranking rules are applied to sports clubs as well in order to determine the quality and popularity of service providers.

Source: Authors' own, 2024.

3.5 Policy Implementation

The responsibilities for implementing the above-mentioned regulatory laws were assigned to the ministries and local governments, with the Ministry of Culture and Sports as the primary executor to oversee the implementation. To implement ArtSport, the Committee for Culture and Committee for Sports created a new working group with the participation of local municipal governments and non-governmental organisations from 17 regions (Commissioner for Children's Rights, 2022a). The budget of the ArtSport program for 2021 amounted to 14.7 billion tenge (Official website of the ArtSport program, n.d.) program. The program sought to promote public-private partnerships in developing the country's sports and digital infrastructures to create opportunities for all children in Kazakhstan to participate in sports and arts activities. To develop ArtsSport.kz, the working group cooperated with the private software company LLP "SoftDeCo", which designed the electronic platform (Bekbergenov & Yensebaeva, 2022).

This platform allowed the central and local municipal governments to oversee the whole management process, including selecting the suppliers of sports and arts services, signing a contract with them, paying for their service, processing the registration of users for sports and arts classes, and the like (Rules for placing state creative orders in creative circles for children and youth and their functioning approved by Order of the Minister of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2021). For instance, to bid for government contracts, suppliers are required to submit an online application to the local authority with a list of documents that includes the following:

- Curriculum approved by the supplier indicating the type of sports and arts classes they can offer;
- Information about necessary materials and technical equipment for running classes;
- Timetable of classes;
- Rules for visiting arts and sports sessions;
- A list of employees hired to teach classes, their employment documents, such as a resume, passport, workbook and a certificate confirming the existence or absence of criminal records.

An online application is usually processed within ten working days from receipt of the application. Given the broad scale of the project, the turnaround time is relatively short, casting doubt on the quality of document processing and its ability to ensure the legal validity of all presented documents.

Similar to the approval process for service suppliers, voucher issuance and class enrollment are processed via the online platform. The online platform stores a list of children registered for the voucher, indicating the name, number, address and date of application. A child's legal representative must submit an electronic application to

receive a voucher for enrollment in art classes. The voucher is a unique document containing information about the registered child, the name of the service provider, and the amount of funding allocated to that child. The application should be submitted personally by the child's legal representative. If a violation of this rule is detected, the online system will cancel the registration and the voucher as well. Information about the issued voucher is sent to the child's legal representative by e-mail.

An online queue is formed separately for each supplier's class and consists of applications submitted by the children's legal representatives. Enrollment applications are processed by the date and time of submission. The exchange of places in the queue is not allowed. The voucher is valid for ten business days, during which the child's legal representative collects the documents necessary for enrollment and signs an agreement with the service provider.

Between the provider specified in the voucher and the child's legal representative, an agreement is concluded for taking classes during the voucher's validity period. The service provider offers two free trial sessions for children and their parents to attend. These sessions will help collect additional information and decide on the conclusion of a contract with the supplier. Despite the existing official rules and procedures, the Government has lost sight of the entire policy implementation process, resulting in a domestic policy that has failed halfway through. As will be discussed in the next part, the population's indignation was caused by the inefficient use of the budget for mass sports activities.

3.6 Policy Evaluation

Since ArtSport began operation on May 1, 2021, it has been mired by controversies and corruption scandals. The study results identified several problems that led to the policy failure (Table 2). They are: the all-inclusive scope of target users, the technical shortcomings of the ArtSport platform, lack of funds, and embezzlement and corruption scandals (Table 2).

Table 2:
Mapping the policy failure problems

№	The existing issue	Measure taken by the Government to rectify the situation	Responsible organization public
1	Technical shortcomings of "Artsport.kz" platform	Allowed regions to choose their own information platform	Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan
2	Embezzlement and corruption scandals	The leadership and officials of the responsible public organization are under the lawsuit	Anti-corruption Agency, General Prosecutor's Office of Kazakhstan
3	Lack of funds for the implementation of ArtSport	The number of vouchers and types of sports and arts activities were reduced.	Local municipal governments
4	All-inclusive scope of target users	No measure is taken	The Government, Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Source: Authors' own, 2024.

Technical shortcomings of the "Artsport.kz" platform. ArtSport has been subject to considerable public scrutiny. Kazakhstan's experience providing public services through an electronic platform has revealed some disadvantages of using digital technologies in public administration, such as data security, lack of centralized control and data falsification. As the results of the study show, the technical shortcomings of the online platform turned out to be fatal for the implementation of ArtSport. The identified errors include the following:

- While each child or youth would receive two vouchers every year, the ArtSport online platform allows citizens to register in the system repeatedly under the same name and receive free vouchers countless times. Some accounts are registered under the names of non-existent or deceased individuals (Akimat of Almaty, 2022).
- Since the platform is not a full-fledged information system, it is not synchronized with government databases. For example, one can complete registration with a false individual identification number by entering any set of numbers. They can also enter any username instead of their full name without verifying their identity. The lack of an identity verification function resulted in massive overpayments, to the extent that the Government considered stopping the funding for ArtSport (Akimat of Almaty, 2022).
- The Government failed to form a waiting list to enroll students from the queue in vacated places. For example, if a student drops out of class, the

current system does not automatically enroll students from the waiting list into the available place (Akimat of Almaty, 2022).

- There was also no proper procedure for verifying the attendance sheet. Anyone who knows an account's login name and password can independently confirm their attendance. The online platform does not require an electronic signature or facial recognition (Akimat of Almaty, 2022).
- The review process for service provider applications is not transparent. There were cases where applications were rejected without explanation. According to a letter from the Commissioner for Children's Rights, Aruzhan Sain, to the Office of the Prosecutor General, the Ministry of Culture and Sports and the Presidential Administration, many complaints were received from the public. (Commissioner for Children's Rights, 2022b).

According to Ms. Sain's letter, other ongoing issues have been unresolved. For example, failure to comply with deadlines for processing registration applications and the lack of control and accountability on the part of local municipal authorities. Instead of solving these technical problems of the ArtSport platform, the Government decided to transfer this responsibility to local municipal authorities by amending existing regulatory laws. According to the new law, starting January 1, 2023, local governments can choose an independent online platform for managing ArtSport. The risks of repeating the same mistakes are now much higher since there are 17 regions in Kazakhstan (Zhana Kazakhstan: renewed country - new regions, 2022).

The proposed decentralization of the ArtSport online platform threatened to reduce public transparency and give rise to corruption. It may also undermine the vertical reporting structure between central and local governments, as it would be difficult for the Ministry of Culture and Sports to monitor the program's implementation across different regions. To avoid technical problems in the future, the Government should continue to improve the ArtSport platform. Creating a separate online platform for each region will not solve the existing problems but rather exacerbate them. Maintaining the current platform will also save taxpayers money since there is no need for additional funding to develop new online platforms.

Embezzlement and corruption scandals. The vulnerability of the ArtSport online platform allowed unscrupulous suppliers to launder public money (see Table 3). As a result, the Government has been dealing with different criminal cases that have sprung up in several regions. For example, in 2022, a financial audit of ArtSport by the General Prosecutor's Office found that 1.1 billion tenges were stolen through fictitious enrollment of about six thousand non-existent children in various sports and arts activities (InformBuro, 2022a).

Table 3:
ArtSport Corruption Map

Nº	Corruption type	Causes	Mitigation measures
1	Forgery of documents	Technical shortcomings of "Artsport.kz" online platform	It is necessary to improve the technical characteristics of the online platform and introduce an electronic digital signature.
2	Accreditation, licensing and registering service suppliers at the national level	The local accreditation system is not transparent and is often subject to rampant corruption. To encourage bribery, local accreditation authorities create intentional delays or reject local suppliers' applications without providing reasoned explanations.	The national accreditation system should be digitized to improve transparency.
3	Corruption and embezzlement	By the Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, from January 1, 2020, to January 1, 2024, executive authorities at the central and local levels are prohibited from conducting inspections and preventive control with visits to small businesses, including micro-businesses.	The prohibition of preventive control in the future should not apply to the types of organizations related to children's health.
4	Decentralization of the ArtSport platform	Due to the technical problems with the ArtSport platform, the Government decided each region would operate its own online platform.	It is necessary to work on one platform to reduce corruption risks.

Source: Authors' own, 2024.

Fraudsters registered fake service providers in the online system, and, in connivance with government officials, they received money for non-existent services. However, as noted, the Government was responsible for creating the loopholes for fraud and embezzlement. As a result of the decree exempting small and medium businesses from inspection or injunctions by the authorities from January 1, 2020, to January 1, 2024, the Government was unable to inspect the facilities of service providers under the ArtSport program (On introducing an amendment to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022).

The moratorium on inspections thus put the health and safety of children at risk since many of the facilities allocated for sports and creative activities did not meet health and safety standards. In East Kazakhstan, for instance, 71 out of 136 premises did not meet the standard requirements. Classes were held in ill-equipped halls, apartments, basements, and even in stores, significantly increasing the risk of accidents. Moreover, in some regions, including East and West Kazakhstan,

schoolchildren were taught by individuals who either did not have recognised qualifications or, worse still, had been previously convicted of prostitution or other sex crimes (Alkhabayev, 2023).

To address these regulatory loopholes, the Government tightened the rules governing the activities of sports and arts associations. However, all these measures could have been taken earlier to avoid public outcry. In the future, the Government must first test new programs in one region. Launching pilot projects can help identify gaps, improve them, and implement them throughout the country.

Lack of funds for the implementation of ArtSport. Given Kazakhstan's strong hierarchical administrative culture, local executive bodies must follow public directives from the Central Government. Despite the shortage of workforce and funding, all local executive bodies were required to continue implementing the ArtSport program. Some public administrators did voice the issues. According to the Vice Minister of Sports and Culture, local governments could not handle the large number of applications they received from both suppliers and users.

Moreover, the budget allocated for local governments to run ArtSport was insufficient, and the public debt to private suppliers amounted to 6.6 billion tenge (Bekbolaeva, 2022). Lack of funding led to the suspension of classes by arts and sports clubs, which, in turn, triggered mass protests from the public. To rectify the situation, the Government optimised the ArtSport funds and reduced the number of sports activities from 71 to 64 and arts activities from 59 to 50 (Central Communications Service under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022).

All-inclusive scope of target users. While it is the first time a voucher system has been introduced in Kazakhstan, the use of vouchers as a public policy instrument is not new. Indeed, various developed countries have used voucher programs to improve arts and sports activities for children and youth. The study examined the Czech Republic and Australia's sports policies to provide a comparative perspective. A comparative analysis helped to identify some shortcomings in the sports policy of Kazakhstan, especially within ArtSport, which led to its failure. Here, we are referring to the participants of ArtSport.

As discussed in sub-section 3.2, Kazakhstan has set no restrictions on those who can receive free access to sports and arts classes. Any child from a wealthy or low-income family, disabled or healthy, living in a city or village, can participate in ArtSport. The study shows that an all-inclusive approach to identifying the target groups puts intense pressure on Kazakhstan's bureaucracy, which could not process a large number of applications, and also on the public budget. Such a significant policy failure would not have occurred if financial support had been offered only to those who needed it, as in the Czech Republic and Australia. ArtSport shows that Kazakhstan embarked on a journey that it was not prepared for.

According to Pavlik and Vries (2013), the Czech Republic has used a voucher system to support children's sports since 2008. The city of Hodonin, with a population

of 25,000, has the most extended history of using a voucher system for sports programs. The same policy has been carried out in the cities of Opava and Podebrady, with a population of 58,000 and 14,000, respectively. Although each city has an independent implementation policy, there are certain similarities.

The voucher distribution policy has some general principles. A person eligible to receive a voucher must first visit the municipal office to receive it. The voucher is then transferred to the sports club the user has chosen. The sports club then submits the vouchers collected to the municipal office to receive funding. The cost of the voucher is set before it is distributed (€ 40 per voucher in Prostějov in 2012) (Pavlik & Vries, 2013), or it is calculated based on the total amount of subsidies and the number of vouchers presented by sports clubs (Hodonin - € 85 per voucher in 2012). These cities have used vouchers as an additional method of distributing financial support to specific beneficiary organizations. Age and physical fitness are some requirements for eligibility to receive a voucher (Pavlik & Vries, 2013).

In Australia, the state of Queensland launched a similar sports program for children called FairPlay in 2019. The aim is to encourage and support children aged 5 to 17 who may experience financial, geographic or other hindrances that prevent them from participating in physical activities Queensland Government (FairPlay voucher activity providers, n. d.). There are also some general terms and conditions for using vouchers, such as one child is entitled to receive only one voucher during one calendar year; a voucher can only be used to pay the membership, registration or entrance fee of a sports program not exceeding USD 150. Recent surveys by the Queensland Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sports have proven the effectiveness of the government's FairPlay voucher program (Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport, 2023). For example, 12,800 people participated in the 2022 public survey, and 97% were satisfied with FairPlay vouchers (Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport, 2023).

Pavlik and Vries's (2013) study shows both advantages and disadvantages of using the voucher system. On the one hand, using the voucher system has bureaucratic implications for sports organisations and municipalities. As we can see, sports organizations do not receive direct funding; instead, they have to collect vouchers and return them to the municipal office to receive financing, resulting in excessive bureaucratic and administrative procedures. On the other hand, the voucher distribution system is seen as helping and motivating parents to control and force their children to attend sports events (Pavlik & Vries, 2013).

As for the financial resources, Kazakhstan did not limit the voucher cost like Australia (USD150 - 2023) and the Czech Republic (€ 40-85 - 2012). Instead, they used a complex methodology, which subsequently had a negative impact on the distribution of the budget (see Table 4). The cost of vouchers depended on the type of service, region and infrastructure facilities (Methodology for per capita regulatory financing of state creative orders approved by the Order of the Minister of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2021).

Table 4:

Sports policy comparison - Kazakhstan, Australia and the Czech Republic

	Kazakhstan	Australia	The Czech Republic
Program's aim	Reach all children in the country without restriction	Reaching out to children who may experience financial, geographic or other difficulties.	Reaching out to children who may experience financial, geographic or other difficulties.
Voucher cost	There is no fixed cost	USD150. If the service cost exceeds then the difference is paid by the parents or guardians	€ 40-85
Allowed number of vouchers	Two vouchers per child	One voucher per child	One voucher per child
How to enroll in classes	Registration to classes is online, through the ArtSport platform	The voucher must be physically delivered to the sports facility.	You need to physically receive the voucher from your local municipality and give it to your service provider.

Source: Authors' own, 2024.

3.7 Policy maintenances

This stage centres on the Government's decision regarding the initiated policy: to terminate or maintain. According to Hogwood and Peters, 1983, policymakers decide to keep the existing policies in most cases because they know that the groundwork has already been completed and the problems have been identified. Financial and administrative factors can also influence policymakers' decisions to maintain policies. The negative publicity accompanying policy failure will not satisfy the country's top executives. All that remains is the faith that the Government will rectify the situation (Hogwood & Peters, 1983). Indeed, the Kazakhstani government was faced with this challenge in the case of ArtSport. At an expanded meeting of the government, the President stated the following:

“This [ArtSport] is an initiative to develop the physical abilities of the younger generation. Funds were allocated for additional sports and arts activities under the state order. I think it was a strategically correct decision. However, several shortcomings were made in the year the project was launched. There were errors related to the financial management and the operation of the online platform. Cost overruns, fraud, outright theft began. Parents sent their children to several sessions at once. Unfortunately, such pressure prevented access for other children. It is necessary to correct all shortcomings and continue this good undertaking” (InformBuro, 2022a).

Several changes were introduced to the ArtSport program to rectify the situation. For instance:

- The Government has strengthened the requirements for service providers. The premises where sports and arts activities are held must now meet all the requirements, such as sanitary and hygienic standards and fire and technical safety. It also must have video surveillance and proper sports equipment (How the Artsport program will work, 2022).
- One child is now entitled only to one voucher. This amendment was made to attract more children (One child - one voucher: changes have been made to the Artsport program, 2022).
- The list of sports clubs has been reduced from 71 to 64 and arts from 59 to 50 (Central Communications Service under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022).
- Local governments are now granted the freedom to develop their own online platforms. However, their platform must be integrated with government databases. This ordinance came into force on January 1, 2023.

4. Conclusion

This article has explored and examined the implementation of the ArtSport program in Kazakhstan, which employed a voucher system as a financing tool for promoting the participation of children and youth in arts and sports. The policy cycle theory as an overarching framework helped analyze different stages of ArtSport, from agenda-setting and policy implementation to policy maintenance. To generate a more nuanced understanding about the success and failure of ArtSport, the policy examination process incorporated a comparative analysis of Australia and the Czech Republic.

The study shows that the President's initiative to improve the quality of life of children by involving them in sports and arts activities was received very positively by the general public. It is believed that such an approach helps nurture talented athletes and a healthy nation. The findings of this study show that despite the social benefits to the general public, the whole process of designing and implementing the ArtSport initiative was marked by drawbacks. Four main reasons led to the failure of its implementation: an all-inclusive scope of target users, the technical shortcomings of the ArtSport online platform, lack of funds for the implementation of ArtSport, and embezzlement and corruption scandals. All these gaps in policy implementation have drawn public criticism, and the Government has been quick to respond in an attempt to correct the mistakes.

The study argues that ArtSport failed from the beginning at the stage of policy formulation - the ArtSport program aimed to engage all children in Kazakhstan in sports and arts activities. If we compare ArtSport with the sports programs in Australia and the Czech Republic, the former had very ambitious goals. On the other hand, Australia and the Czech Republic set modest goals for their programs. They adopted a selective approach to the target youth population, making the programs more achievable and focused. They aimed to help financially and socially disadvantaged children, as well as those who lived in remote areas. Given the underdevelopment of sports and arts infrastructure outside the urban areas, the shortage of manpower in public administration and the financial limitations of Kazakhstan, this nationwide initiative faced formidable challenges in implementation. The problems of the policy were further exacerbated by the technical flaws of the ArtSport website, which prepared the ground for corrupt activities. This study shows that Kazakhstan embarked on a journey that it was not prepared for.

Despite the low level of policy formulation and implementation capacities of the Central Government, the social demand for ArtSport remains very high, which has kept it alive so far. To expand the ArtSport program's scope and reach out to children left behind, the Kazakhstani Government introduced a number of new measures. To begin with, the number of sports and arts activities was reduced from 71 to 64 and 59 to 50, respectively. Meanwhile, the decision to grant more freedom and flexibility to local municipal governments in developing their own electronic platform will increase local budget expenditure. There is also a risk of repeating the same mistakes if the selected electronic platform malfunctions. Despite the policy failure, Kazakhstan decided to continue funding ArtSport due to the positive social effect, which indicates a high share of state support for children's mass sports and hobbies.

As a result of this study, the article makes the following recommendations:

1. The study shows the importance of setting technically, financially and politically feasible goals at the policy formulation stage. The policy goals of the program should be narrowed down to remove vagueness, generalization, and abstraction to ease the pressure on ArtSport. Like the Bolashak Presidential Scholarship in Kazakhstan, ArtSport can become a nationwide initiative to select the most talented children in sports and train professional athletes who will improve the country's performance in the Olympics.
2. The age limit should be further strengthened depending on the types of arts and sports activities to build on the abovementioned idea. ArtSport should target those who are talented, interested and committed to sports.
3. To optimize the budget and reduce corruption risks, it would be more effective for the Government to keep the ArtSport platform as a single unified public service delivery system. The idea of creating new online

platforms for each region and city should be abandoned.

4. The Government should remove the national moratorium on inspecting participant companies or organizations in the ArtSport program.

As shown in this study, the lack of public control undermined sports and arts services' quality and safety standards, consequently putting children's health at risk.

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