

# (SP) RELATION BETWEEN GOVERNANCE AND ORGANISATIONAL CONFIGURATION IN BELGIAN SPORTS FEDERATIONS

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## **Introduction**

The organization of the Belgian sports system is widely dependent on the political system. Since 1978, sport competencies were transferred from the federal state to the Communities. Communities recognize sports federations and subsidize them according to their activities.

Public authorities became the main shareholder in the governance of sports federations. They are influenced by other contingent factors such as political institutions (federal state, Europe), the demand from their clients (sportsmen, supporters), the intervention of new actors (media, commercial partners ...) or some divergences in sports (Moingeon – Ramanantsoa, 1993) (Amis – Slack – Berret, 1995). All these factors are to be taken into account by the public authorities.

Nevertheless, many Belgian sports leagues <sup>10</sup> and federations take those contingency factors only partly into consideration within their organization. This results in some lacuna's in terms of governance <sup>11</sup>. These voids mainly appear in their reduced capacity to interact with the factors that should introduce changes in their organization.

## **Method**

During a period of several years, eight community sport federations (4 issued from the Flemish Community – 4 issued from the French speaking Community) were subjected to a configurational analysis (Mintzberg, 1999) (Nizet – Pichault, 2000) (Zintz – Camy, 2005). Our hypothesis was that their organizational configuration should reveal the characteristics of their governance and, as a consequence, that an evolution of the governance of the organization could play a role in the evolution of its configuration.

This article presents four aspects of our research: the configurational approach of the organization of Belgian sports federations (1), the relations between organizational configurations and governance (2) and the coherency between changing governance and changing configuration (3). In our conclusion, we present some change proposals related to the governance of sports federations (4).

## **Results**

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<sup>10</sup> Belgian Sports federations that have split, according to the transfer of sports competencies from the federal state to the Communities since 1978, have two leagues – a Flemish one and a French one - . Many of them are still called “federation”.

<sup>11</sup> In this paper, we refer to a sociological definition of governance as given by Chevallier : « (la gouvernance) ... pose la question essentielle du pilotage de l'action collective dans un environnement incertain associant de multiples acteurs dont les intérêts et les logiques divergent (...) dans le but d'optimiser la performance des organisations pour qu'elles produisent une plus grande valeur ajoutée sociétale (...). Placée au cœur du processus de décision stratégique, l'information devient le facteur clé du succès, et le système d'information l'axe central autour duquel s'articule en temps réel « la gouverne » du lien stratégie – structure, au cœur des organisations » (Chevallier, 1999)

Three configurational groups were identified: the professional bureaucracy, the missionary configuration and the sports federal bureaucracy. This typology should be considered as a dynamic system, of which every single federation is in a specific state of evolution along its organizational lifecycle.

The sports federal bureaucracy is a kind of “ideal type”, encompassing a charismatic leader, one dominant shareholder (public authorities), a strong vertical hierarchy, a great continuity of actors, a tension between the organization’s goals and those of its members and a confusing system of statutes, functions, power and decision.

These characteristics interfere with the two forms of governance that we present in the following discussion.

### **Discussion**

The first form is the so called «undifferentiated power distribution». The functions of the elected actors interfere with managerial and operational tasks. Hence, the paid staff is pushed into pure subaltern operational tasks. This is due to their lack of domination on the organisation’s environment and its characteristics, to their unreasoned submission to the public authorities (Communities, federal state, Europe), to the sport authorities (international bodies), to the economy and more specifically to a polymorphic president acting at strategic, management and operations levels. This kind of governance constitutes a major danger of collapse of the federations in case of retirement of the president.

The second form of governance is the so called «differentiated power distribution». Some paid staff members will be in charge of the management, as an interface between the strategic functions of the elected actors and the operational functions of other paid staff members. This governance form will give rise to a global coherence between the four main components (structure, contingency factors, goals and systems of power distribution between actors) of the configurational approach. This is due to the clear view that results from the distinction between strategies, management and operations.

As a conclusion, we would like to insist on the evolutionary character of configurations. The aim of this research is to show how the pertinent environment (sport, socio-politic, socio-cultural, socio-economic) induces or even imposes changes in the governance, resulting in major impacts on the configuration of sports federations. This is also the rationale behind the fact that no typology should have the capacity to produce a static classification of all sport federations within a sports system.

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