

SPORTS FEDERATIONS: “ENTERPRISES” WITH A SOCIAL GOAL? SOME ISSUES OF INNOVATIVE MANAGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Whether it is a matter of defining the strategy that allows to reach the defined goals or a matter of managing all the needed resources while taking the almost ever-changing environment into account, managing an organisation requires frequent adaptations and everlasting transformation. For many authors, “managing” means putting the process of change into practice . « Giving structure to the organisation so as to reduce the uncertainty, while using this uncertainty to innovate: this is the dilemma a company faces today” points Alter (1999). Sports federations and their directors have to face this dilemma with two contradictory principles, namely stability and innovation. In this context, they should be considered as particular enterprises : to face the needed changes, entrepreneurship is requested. The aim of this article, while sports federations loose their monopolistic situation and become “ a part of the greater society in wich they exist, they must anticipate chages in both their external and their internal environment” (Hums & MacLean, 2004), is to contribute to the definition of fundamentals of an innovative and strong – partly professional - management. This contribution takes into account their social goal when considering the impact of volunteering in their organization (Miège, 2000).

This study combines the approaches of the sociology of organisations and of the management theories. She is based on the observation of configurations and their change and shows the evolution of the governance of the studied federations as a result of the process of change. The joint study of federations of two close countries that are actually quite different is deliberate. It puts into perspective the national differences and it is used to strengthen the validity of the analysis.

METHODS

In Belgium, five federations divided in regional leagues and one undivided federation form a representative but limited sample of the possible situations to establish a general typology of the federations’ configurations. The French case of the Fédération Française d’Athlétisme complete this sample and allow us to compare transnational data as well as managerial similarities and differences.

The study was conducted with the use of qualitative and quantitative methods. Semi-conducted interviews with the president and secretary general and questionnaires to the main actors were used. An analysis of relevant documents (reports of board meetings and general assemblies) over a period of 6 years was also conducted. Financial figures were studied over the same period.

RESULTS

The most important asset of this research is the demonstration of the current evolution of some federations with characteristics from more than one configuration (the so called hybridisation of configurations (Mintzberg, 1989) (Nizet & Pichault, 2000)). As a consequence, one can say that these federations have adapted themselves to their environment. It looks like a change process has gotten under way. However, the sense of this adaptation remains unanswered. A second asset is the appearance of new entrepreneurial and professional configurations among the studied federations of which the primitive configurations (still present) were rather “missionary”. This coexistence is advantageous regarding the adaptation process, but also generates problems within the governance process.

DISCUSSION

These mentioned assets underline the fact that it is important to control the change processes. This control calls for a good understanding of the mechanisms to which the “voluntary board” of the federations should have access. These often complex mechanisms are therefore understood by using analytic grids applied to the federations goals, to their stake- and shareholders, to the identification of decision makers (...) such as those proposed by H. Mintzberg (1989), J. Nizet and F. Pichault (2000) in their theorisation of the process of change. They are also supported by researches lead by Bayle (1999), Chantelat (2001), Chelladurai (1987), Kikulis., Slack and Hinings (1992) and others. This understanding leads to action. Following this idea, our study reveals five main issues in order to conduct the process of change in federations. The first one affects the federations’ missions (i) and is the inevitable precondition of the other issues. It is the centre of the governance mode. The second one affects the organisation of the federations (ii). The third one is related to the human resources management (iii). A fourth issue concerns the support to be given to federations (iiii) in order to sustain their engagement within a necessary configurational change. The final one is related to the management of the relation of federations towards their relevant environment (iiiii).

By the end, the analyzed federations show major similarities with enterprises. Professionalisation and new governance modes turn these sports organisations into real enterprises. They are well under way to be integrated in the economical environment their directors ignored for a long time. As a conclusion, one can say that the sports federations will likely become “enterprises” with a “social goal”.

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