The organisation of football in Europe

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Aim of paper and research questions
Despite its booming popularity across Europe and further, today questions can be asked about the sustainability of professional football. From the end of the 19th century football spread as pastime and basically a non-profit and amateur sport (Eisenberg, 2003), but ironically perhaps, through its gradual conversion towards professionalism and, in the last three decades, commercial business, football in Europe has moved from being non-profit to being not-profit (Lago et al., 2006).

Although football is a sport of which much is being reported and written, we can still claim that it is an area of life of which we have not much knowledge, at least from a scientific point of view. In particular, we think, this is true for the way it is organised and managed, at the national level as much as the international and transnational.

The aim of this paper is therefore, as a first step, to present an extensive literature review and discussion on organisational theoretical perspectives that can be used to understand changes in the organisation of football across Europe. Central in this respect will be perspectives on transnational regulation (cf. Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson, 2006) and the development of organisational fields (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991), but also perspectives that highlight the local responses to global trends. Hence this paper will suggest theories and concepts by which we can understand the evolution of the organisation of football across Europe over the last decades.

Literature review
The recent developments of European football can be studied against the idea of the constitution of an expanding transnational organisational field (Djelic & Sahlin-Anderson, 2006; Djelic & Quack, 2008) in which there are a growing number of actors interacting to transform or defend logics and institutions within the game. Whilst the constitution of organisational fields has been ascribed the propensity for homogenisation processes in organisational structure and management (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), others highlight the robustness of national institutions (e.g. Whitley & Kristensen, 1996), the coexistence of multiple institutional logics (Kratz & Block, 2008), the scope for translating and editing transnational rules, ideas or innovations in the process of dissemination (e.g. Czarniawska & Sevon, 1996), or for strategic manoeuvring when the institutional contexts appear multiple or incoherent (e.g. Oliver, 1991). Moreover, studies of Europeanisation indicate that there is considerable margin for domestic diversities in national policy-making (e.g. Héritier et al., 2001), and reviews about the patterns of the diffusion of sport has revealed a dynamic interchange between the local, national and global – hence creating “diminishing contrasts and increased varieties”(Maguire, 2002: 363).

This literature review, and the identification of relevant organisational studies perspectives, will be structured around the existing literature describing the recent evolution of the organisation of football across Europe. This shows that top football historically has been organised very differently across Southern, Central and Northern Europe as well as across the West and the East of the region. At the same time the collapse of the iron curtain dividing the East and the West in Europe; the formation and gradual extension of the European Union and the European
market; the Bosman ruling in 1995 that forced UEFA to abide with EU law on the issue of worker mobility; and the transformation of the broadcasting media in European countries are path-breaking processes that have vastly changed European football, perhaps in the direction of convergence in its organisation and management (e.g. Amara et al., 2005; Ascari & Gagnepain, 2006; Brand & Niemann, 2007; Gammelsæter & Jakobsen, 2008; Gammelsæter, 2009; García & Rodrígues, 2003; Hare, 2003; Hoehn & Szymanski, 1999; Holt, 2007; Lago, Simmons & Szymanski, 2006; Levermore & Budd, 2004; Morrow, 2003; Senaux, 2008; Wilkesmann & Blutner, 2002).

Research design and proposed data analysis

N/A (review paper)

Discussion of progress

The theoretical perspectives developed in this paper should help future research to identify patterns in the organisational development of European football over the last decades and to analyse these changes, but this would obviously need more empirical / descriptive work.

Still, we think the theoretical perspectives developed in this paper will be useful to translate and discuss empirical findings from future studies on the recent evolutions of football, and to provide explanations for the development that we can see in European football.

Finally, we discuss the contribution of organisation theory in understanding the development of football in Europe and the future of European football.

References


