

A contribution to good enough governance of European sports federations: from conceptualisation to deconstruction

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“Good Governance” is widely promoted by European public authorities as a means for structural, processual and ethical transformation of international non-profit sports organisations (ISO) facing corruption or mis-management. The European Council and the European Olympic Committees (EOC) with the Fédération Internationale de l’Automobile (FIA) have provided a first set of principles, such as transparency, accountability or democracy, in 2000 and 2001 respectively. However, more than ten years later, European public authorities still ask ISOs to comply with such principles, when in parallel these are either creating special governance committees or their own principles.

This sporting and political activism shows that there is not yet a consensus on the consolidation of such principles and even less on their application. To date, once ISOs and European public authorities have identified a problem in a given circumstance and a need to re-act, many uncertainties remain about the effective means for its resolution. It seems like the process starting with the definition towards the implementation of good governance has frozen at the first stage, and that a reflection on the implementation phase is still lacking. Three potential reasons may be addressed here. First, the complexity of the European sports system and its multiple chains of accountability between various stakeholders do not allow the implementation of universal principles. Second, many of the principles or lists of principles that are proposed are too ambitious. Third, there remains an inconsistency on the legal status of the principles. Accordingly, the author argues that ISOs need “good enough governance” (Grindle, 2004), a stance that can be seen as more realistic. On this basis, the question is by which means a European level sports organisation can achieve good enough governance? The author assumes that in order to provide a heuristic answer, it is necessary to adopt a methodological framework on the basis of four dimensions:

1. A consistent knowledge of the European sports system and the relations among its stakeholders

2. A solid theoretic basis for good enough governance
3. A reflexive deconstruction of the concept into attributes and measurable indicators
4. Defining a systematic process of monitoring

The aim of this contribution is to load good enough governance with conceptual substance as well as deconstructed attributes and indicators. Fortunately good governance has been extensively conceptualized in non-profit, corporate, and development studies. Different non-European countries such as Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand have extracted the theoretical groundings of the first two to be applied to sports organisations. However, in both situations, scholars have identified several shortcomings, notably on the empirical value of the Carver policy governance model for non-profit organisations (Hoye & Cuskelly, 2003; Mowbray, 2012) and the potential inconsistencies between corporate and non-profit values, missions and strategies (Alexander & Weiner, 1998). The underlying premise is that democratic governance is a potential fertile soil for the deconstruction of concepts as well as identifying salient indicators of measurement, notwithstanding the recognition that international sports organisations have both, a public and a private dimension. They are for the vast majority of them non-profit associations under Swiss Law and some have features typically found in corporate boards and governments (Forster & Pope, 2004).

This contribution is part of a wider project on good governance of ISOs. It will provide a theoretical grounding to be empirically tested on seven European sports federations that have their legal seat in Switzerland and five in Luxembourg.

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