

The effectiveness of the Polish Sport Federations in the athletes' opinion

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Aim of abstract

Due to numerous scandals in international and local sport associations (e.g. corruption, lack of transparency, sustainability problems etc.), there is a rise of public attention towards those entities. A strong position of traditional sport organizations is now being questioned and it is justified to investigate who those organizations serve to. Therefore, the main purpose of the study is to evaluate how effective Polish Sport Federations are in the opinion of sports athletes. The key issues considered in the study are: functioning of those organizations from the athletes' perspective, identifying their main concerns and describing the relation between them and their Federations.

Theoretical background

In order to make sure that Sport Federations fulfil their obligations in a way that they ought to, their actions and interests need to be recalibrated with the normative expectations of their social constituency of legitimation (Geeraert, 2015). Referring to organizational effectiveness, several different approaches have been analyzed e.g. goal-oriented approach, process approach, system resources oriented approach or competing values model. In our opinion the most relevant theory for this study is the strategic stakeholder approach (Cameron, 1984). It highlights that organizations operate in a complex environment and its stakeholders (employees, managers, shareholders or partners) may have different goals. Therefore, the effective organization is the one that meets possibly the broadest expectations of its main stakeholders.

While analyzing the Sports Federations it seems natural that the needs of athletes should be seriously taken into consideration. However different studies show (e.g. Papadimitriou, Taylor, 2000) that athletes are one of the least satisfied groups. The Principal-Agent theory could be useful to explain this phenomenon (Geeraert, 2015). Although athletes are not direct principals of National Federations, they are the main reason for those organizations to exist. Serving athletes is the basic argument for social legitimization of those entities. Athletes are linked to National Federations through a long chain of delegation, which increases an agency slack (Nielson and Tierney, 2003). That puts them in a situation where there is no control mechanisms and as the Principal-Agent model predicts – this causes the effect that agent minimizes his efforts on behalf of the principal and even pursue its own interests at the expense of the principal (Pollack, 2003). Mere consultation offers no assurance that athletes' concerns and ideas will actually be taken into consideration; this requires access to decision-making and decision-making power (Young, 2000).

Methodology

The research consists of two parts – qualitative study based on ethnographic interviews and quantitative study where electronic

survey is used. Both methods are dedicated to sport athletes representing Olympic disciplines in most of the Polish Sport Federations. For the purpose of this abstract, 10 interviews and 50 surveys were conducted, whereas another 5-8 interviews and 100 surveys are planned to be carried out in coming 2 months. Data collection for the survey was a random sampling and snowball sampling. The data from the qualitative studies give insight into the relations between athletes and federations and provide information about the direction and dynamics of changes. It also help to precise the expectations of the athletes towards their federations. The survey analysis allow to draw more general conclusions and formulate stronger recommendations.

Preliminary results and conclusions

The top athletes claimed that they have poor influence on their Sport Federations. However due to their successes, it is still stronger than other athletes have. Athletes agree that Federations meet their needs in terms of training, medical support and sport equipment. Nevertheless when they raise problems or questions, the discussions with federations are hardly ever possible. One of the problems emphasized by respondents was that they have no representation in the Federations or it is not sufficient. The Polish athletes were criticizing very little participation in a decision-making processes and authority organs of SFs. All the same they admitted to stay rather passive on changing that. Most athletes claimed that they are not interested in the way federations operate, as long as their needs are met and they feel fairly treated. Although when they need a voice or problems appear, they are hardly listened to. The lack of transparency is also seemed as an issue. Due to the fact that the study is ongoing, complete findings will be described in detail during the presentation on EASM 2016.

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