

The logics of sport and sport management as meta-logic

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Aim

The aim of this paper is contribute to a new conceptualization of sport management as a research field.

For those of us that teach and write in sport management a question constantly looms in the back of our head. Or it should. What is really sport management? What is its scope? In terms of discipline, are there clear demarcations towards sport sociology, sport economy, sport history, sport psychology, etc? In terms of domain, is development and execution of sport politics, sport development programs, sport participation initiatives, and sport events etc. within the scope of sport management?

The European Sport Management Journal defines its scope as “committed to publishing research that advances theory and its application to all aspects of sport management, including the management and governance of sport bodies in the public, voluntary and commercial sectors”. Whereas this definition does not answer our question about disciplines, it provides an important pointer to an immanent character of contemporary sport; that sport is organized through diverse sport bodies in and across at least three diverse sectors in the society.

This specific inter-sectoral character makes sport complex and makes its management and governance difficult to grasp and execute in ways that are fully appreciated. This means that sport, despite all its ideals, also have to live with tensions, and that leaders and managers in the sport field have to endure and, to the extent possible, deal with tensions.

Theoretical approach

In this conceptual paper we address this issue from the perspective of institutional orders and logics (Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury, 2013), a perspective that explains individual and organizational behavior as located in social and institutional contexts, which both regularizes behavior and provides opportunity for changing it. Thornton and Ocasio (1999: 804) defined institutional logics as “the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality’, and connected these to diverse institutional orders in society, such as family, religion, market etc.

In building on this framework we are interested in analyzing the logic of sport as seen from diverse sectors, or rather institutional orders in society and to understand the conflicts and dependencies across these orders and how these are played out in the ways sport are organized.

Implications

If sectors of society are conceptualized as diverse institutions suffused with diverse institutional logics, this means that the ideas about sport and how sport should be organized are different across institutional orders such as the state, the market and voluntary sport. Furthermore, it means that there

are contested ideas about what sport is and how it should be organized, and that the field of sport management and sport managers have to address these controversies. In essence, while it is conceptually impossible for an individual to be a-contextual and unaffected by logics (and culture), the field of sport management would profit from developing a meta-logic of sport, which incorporates sport as multi-institutional. The paper will explore what this means for students and teachers of sport management.

References

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