

Configurations and organisational change of Belgian sports leagues and federations. Typology and possible evolution

Thierry Zintz

Université Catholique de Louvain,
Institute for physical education and rehabilitation..

Introduction

Sports organizations, such as leagues and federations, have to face the variety of senses of the word « sport » as well as a changing environment. They may be described as *concrete systems of action elaborated by men in order to structure their action in a particular domain – sport – that is part of a larger system, the society* (Crozier – Friedberg, 1980). Due to a phenomenon of latency, those systems are no more adapted to the changes of their environment.

The main topic of this paper is to understand whether they have the capacity, as organizations, to give an adapted answer to this evolution, or even if they are able to anticipate the changes requested by this evolution. One can suggest that the men who should be able to manage the new contexts should also be able to conduct the transformation necessary for sports organizations by solving the new questions that arise. They should be able to *deal with the change*.

Social sciences as well as management sciences suggest that several methods can be used to answer the main question of this paper. Some of them were based on a structuralistic approach, followed by approaches based on the theory of contingency (Lawrence - Lorsch, 1973). More recent approaches have been centred on the actors within the organization (Crozier - Friedberg, 1980). Approaches based on the study of organizational configuration were exploited in the analysis of private companies (Mintzberg, 1999), or public administrations and non-profit organizations (Nizet- Pichault, 2000) in the past ten years.

Method

In this research, we have adapted, the model of the configurational approach of organizations (Nizet – Pichault, 2000) to sports leagues and federations. For each of them, we have taken into account, the structures (Slack - Hinings, 1987), the relations between the actors of the organization (Slack, 1997), the pertinent environment, the missions, the values and the strategies (Thibault – Slack - Hinings, 1993). With the help of this model, every organization can be situated in an organizational life cycle. The model also reveals the factors – external and internal – that should stimulate the organizational changes.

We took a sample of Belgian sports leagues and federations from the Flemish speaking Community and from the French speaking Community. Three goals were set up: identifying a configurational typology (1), enlightening the change process (2) and presenting different proposals in order to deal with the organizational changes required by the evolution of the environment (3).

Results and discussion

This research offers us a framework through which we give answers to the two first goals. However we can not say we are able to classify all Belgian sports leagues and federations. Despite this, we provide a common framework of analysis to those who are in charge of the leagues and federations. In that way, this research allows them to make their analysis match together..

We discerned three dominant configurational groups, namely *the professional bureaucracy, the configuration centred on the missions and the federal sports bureaucracy*. Such typology should be considered in a dynamic approach according to the level of evolution of each league or federation related to its organisational life cycle.

The federal sports bureaucracy is a kind of « ideal type » specifically related to those sports leagues and federations that were part of the study. This bureaucracy has adapted itself to the interaction of structural,

political and contextual variables that are specific to sports leagues and federations in Belgium. This configuration can be described as a combination of entrepreneurial and mission oriented characteristics at both strategic and managerial levels, with bureaucratic characteristics at managerial and operational levels. Due to this combination, the federative sports bureaucracy increases to a high level its capacity to exploit signs of the pertinent environment, especially those from the major owner that are the Communities. This exploitation supports mission oriented goals, that are clearly defined and converted in operational goals.

The proposals we make in order to conduct the change process are elaborated according to five topics (the missions, the organization, the relations between volunteers and wage-earners, the offer of support and the management of the relation of the organization to its environment). They are oriented to give support to the actors within the pertinent environment, to the ministers in charge of sports and to their administrations, and finally to those actors who are part of the structure of the league or federation.

This research has been conducted in the context of fragmentation of sports between very little leagues and federations in Belgium. The aim was to give support to those who are in charge of sports, at a strategic, managerial and operational level in order make them able to manage the change process in their structure. Therefore, we tried to give a framework of comprehension and tools that should help the decision makers.

References

- CROZIER Michel - FRIEDBERG Erhard, 1980, « *L'Acteur et le Système : les contraintes de l'action collective* », Le Seuil, Collection Points Essais, Paris.
- LAWRENCE P., LORSCH J., 1973(réédition 1989), « *Adapter les structures de l'entreprise ; intégration ou différenciation* », Paris, Editions de l'Organisation.
- MINTZBERG Henry, 1999, « *Le Management - Voyage au centre des organisations* », Editions de l'Organisation, Paris.
- NIZET Jean, PICHAULT François 2000, « *Comprendre les organisations - Mintzberg à l'épreuve des faits* », Gaëtan Morin Editeur, Levallois-Perret (France).
- SLACK Trevor & HININGS Bob, 1987, « Planning and Organizational Change : a Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of Amateur Sport Organizations », *Canadian Journal of Sport Sciences*, Canada, Vol 12, n° 4, pp. 185-193.
- SLACK Trevor, 1997, « *Understanding Sport Organizations* », Human Kinetics-Champaign -II – USA.
- THIBAUT Lucie, SLACK Trevor & HININGS Bob, 1993, « A Framework for the Analyzis of Strategy in Non profit Sport Organizations », *Journal of Sport Management*, n° 7, pp. 25-43.

Contact co-ordinates author

Thierry ZINTZ,
IEPR
Université Catholique de Louvain
Place Pierre de Coubertin 1
1348 Louvain-la-Neuve
Belgium
e-mail: Thierry.Zintz@iepr.ucl.ac.be