# (SP) CULTURAL SELF PERCEPTIONS OF SPORT ORGANIZATIONS IN AN INTERSECTORAL COMPARISON

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## Introduction

The concept of organizational culture became popular in the early 1980s when it was considered an important factor for explaining success or failure in organizations. An analysis of culture in sport organizations seems to be promising as sport organizations are traditionally rife with such characteristics as stories, myths, symbols and rituals, some of the principal manifestations of an organization's culture (Slack 1997, 271). Anyhow research on the topic is still rather fragmented and often restricted to illustrating general concepts of organizational culture with examples from the sports area. There are, however, interesting approaches to the topic (e.g. Macintosh & Doherty 2005, Colyer 2000 or Hoye et al. 2006). In an interdisciplinary research project promoted by the German Sport University Cologne the concept of organizational culture in sports is analysed. The main objective of the project is to understand the cognitive, perceptional and interpretative patterns constructing culture in sport organizations. Three methodological approaches are used: (1) Following Schütz (1971), Rosen (1988) and van Maanen (1988) qualitative interviews are used in order to understand organizational culture as an implicit phenomenon. (2) Following Hofstede (1980) and Cochran (1990) organizational culture is analysed through quantitative research. (3) Structure-Dimensional Analysis (Schack 2002) is used in order to understand the representation of knowledge referring to organizational culture. In this paper the quantitative approach will be presented. In order to find out whether there are culture-related patterns of self perception and interpretation in sport organizations, a sport specific questionnaire was developed. In theoretical approaches to organizations the differences between the economic sectors (Public, NPO, FPO) are stressed time and again (Wex 2004). It can be assumed that sport organizations have sector-related organizational cultures (Hoye et al. 2006, 149). According to Hansen (1995) commercial organizations would have to be characterized by a "mentality of purchase", statal organizations by the "Iron case of bureaucracy" (Weber 1921) and the primary concern of NPOs would be the interests of the members (Horch 1983). In the research, it was investigated if organizational cultures reflect the sectoral paradigms, if the theoretical classification can be empirically reproduced and if there are indicators of intersectoral identities. Furthermore, the study was looking for internal differences between federations and clubs in the Non-Profit-Sector and sport agencies and fitness centres in the For-Profit-Sector.

## Methods

In order to compare different cultures quantitative approaches are considered to be an important tool. It has to be taken into account though that the selection of the right group of people for the survey is of high importance as the perception of a culture is subject to an individual point of view. In the project, as a first step, the focus was put on the view of sport managers. The perspective of sport managers provides an interesting view on an organization's culture. As sport managers are in a responsible position, they can be expected to have a good overview of the organization and to be able to acknowledge the particularities of the sector they are working in. Therefore, managers of sport clubs (N=145), sport federations (N=146), commercial fitness

centres (N=598), sport agencies (N=61) and municipal sport administrations (N=112) have been interviewed. The questionnaire contained different kinds of variables, referring to different areas such as specific goals (e.g. active shaping of the culture, feeling responsible for society), type of leadership (e.g. teamwork, sanctioning of failures) and general cultural characteristics (e.g. profit orientation, adaption to new sport vogues, expansion of the organization). The variables were presented as a five point likert scale.

**Results**

      The results show significant differences in the cultural self perception which supports the theory of a sectoral differentiation. For example, NPOs are feeling much more responsible for the society (Mean 4,2) than the FPOs (fitness centers and agencies, Mean 3,9 and 3,6). Additionally, significant differences between the subtypes of the sectors were found: Fitness centre and agency managers answered differently in many cases: while fitness centres value rules very high (Mean 4,0 on the five point likert scale: 1 lowest to 5 highest), agencies value them less (Mean 3,2). These differences could be explained by environmental characteristics as well as the different functions of the respective organisations. Our main hypothesis was that there are special cultures in different sectors. A cluster analysis of the different cultural variables was expected to result in an empirical typology, which was supposed to be similar to the sector typology. Even though several sector defining items were included in the study, there was surprisingly weak evidence of empirical types around the sectors.

**Discussion**

      The main result of this study is that the sector factor does not explain the cultures of sport organizations as their managers perceived them. Of course the sectors are in some aspects a strong factor, but not in general. Having a closer look at the organizations, many managers in municipal sport administration, sport clubs and federations were found that try to run their organization like a for profit organisation (mimetic isomorphism, DiMaggio & Powell 1983). On the other hand, there are for profit organizations such as small businesses, which are far from any bureaucratic structure. Their managers have strong bonds to sport values and do not pay much attention to the stakeholder value and making big profits. This is in line with the effect of normative isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). Cultures of sport organizations in the different sectors are not only very close to each other, but also they are overlapping. An understanding of the culture of sport organizations is not only theoretically enlightening, it also provides interesting starting-points for practical actions of managers as the actions of the members of an organization can only be understood against the background of cultural typical value and interpretation patterns.

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