

Session: **Research for management and marketing V.**
Abstract nr: **EASM-0119**

Organizational change of sports clubs initiated by a centrally implemented quality management system: The case of Belgian gymnastics clubs

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In recent years various actions are taken by many sports federations and leagues to improve the quality of the Belgian (youth) sports clubs (Van Hoecke, et al., 2009). A specific certification scheme that is able to approach sports clubs as relatively autonomous organizations is used in order to measure the degree of professionalization of the clubs. In this paper the impact of the top-down implementation of a quality management system is examined, initiated and coordinated by a leading sport federation. The purpose is to show if and if so, to what extent the system affects the structural organizational characteristics of the clubs. Furthermore there is assessed how traditional organized sports clubs adapt themselves to the recommendations of the quality system and what impact it has on the changes towards a more professional gym club.

The sample used for the study is a set of Belgian gymnastics clubs undergoing institutional change as a function of professionalization. The data has been collected by experienced auditors, coordinated by the university. Because of the focus on gym clubs, IKGym is used as the most appropriate tool for this application. IKGym is a functional, valid and reliable quality (management) system, especially designed for the evaluation and management of gymnastics clubs (Van Hoecke & De Knop, 2006: 374). This paper integrates the structural dimensions of specialization, standardization and centralization, combined with the structural characteristics of a sports organization. Following Kikulis, et al. (1995), a taxonomy is constructed and a design archetypes is used as a model for change. This, in combination with collected secondary data about the structural characteristics of gym clubs, enables us to make comparisons across dimensions and across time. So the changed approach of the different clubs is evaluated.

We expect the results will indicate that the clubs certainly develop in the direction of better quality and more professional sports organizations. There are several reasons why we consider these changes due to the implementation of IKGym. First of all we think of the prestige of the certification document and what benefits it can bring for the amateur clubs. There is also the aspect of a changing policy environment in Belgium with emphasis on improving youth work. In line with this, the contribution of this paper is important for the policy. A first evaluation of the centrally implemented quality system makes clear if and where the changes in the structure of the various clubs are, so there can be a respond to this. This analysis of the structural organizational characteristics and the is a function of a higher degree of professionalism and finds its international character in the fact that also other foreign federations and leagues (wanted to) use the services of this audit tool.

Kikulis, L., Slack, T. & Hinings, C. (1995). Sector-specific patterns of organizational design change. *Journal of Management Studies*, 32, 1, 67-100.

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Van Hoecke, J., De Knop, P. & Schoukens, H. (2009). A decade of quality and performance management in Flemish organized sport. *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*, 6, 3, 308-329.