

HOW TO MANAGE ETHICS IN THE SPORTS SECTOR: A FLEMISH STUDY ON ETHICAL SPORT POLICY

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Abstract

The sports sector becomes more and more commercialized. We study whether this evolution represents a threat or rather a protection for the singularity of the sports sector and its specific values.

Empirical literature on how to protect ethical values in a professionalized and commercialized sports sector is very limited but the recent introduction of the concept of CSR in sports management allows to address this question (Babiak&Wolfe, 2009). Our research will focus on this concept with as main research question: can CSR protect the ethical values in a professionalized sports world? A second important research question on which this study is focused, is whether ethical policy represents a good alternative to additionally promote ethics in sports where needed? We thus want to find out whether the professionalization of the sports sector with its ethical principles incorporated in management models (CSR) provides enough protection on its own to protect the singularity of sports or whether governance policy and measures are needed to 'ethically correct' the commercialized sports sector.

The empirical study that would be used for the EASM paper is the first part of the above research and approaches the concept of CSR in the sports sector from policy perspective as sport is a highly institutionalised sector, with organizations embedded in regulating and (semi-public) bodies, such as the sport federations. We shed light on the effectiveness of such ethics policy by analyzing the Flemish decree of Ethical Responsible Sporting (Vlaamse_Overheid, 2010) which 'forces' subsidized sports federations and their sports clubs to autonomously develop activities around ethics in sport (a CSR program), bringing them into practice from the beginning of the year 2011. Following the new principles of public governance, this is implemented as a co-governance process (Groeneveld, 2009). The question is now to what extent this co-governance is an effective way

to achieve more ethics in sport? Can the attention for values in governance be externally enforced and is this aligned with the other values of the sports organizations?

In a longitudinal research design, this study analyzes the specific co-governance process the Flemish government uses to implement ethics policy and its effectiveness, measured on the sports club level. Data are collected by means of a survey mapping the CSR activities of the clubs (corresponding the CSR activities and criteria included in the decree). Next to measuring the decree specific effect, the research questionnaire is extended with a scientific measure to gain insight in the ethical climate of the sports clubs (the Ethical Climate Index (ECI) (Arnaud, 2010)).

A random sample (300) will be taken from the sample frame consisting of all clubs connected to the authorized and subsidized federations. This sample will be questioned at two periods in time, once in April/May 2011 and once in 2013 to map the results of the ethics policy. Although no longitudinal results will be available yet for EASM 2011, we will already have an idea of the existing ethical activities and be able to shed light on the extent in which ethics is important for sports clubs in Flanders. We will also be able to contribute to the academic discussion regarding the existing instruments to measure the concept of ethical work climate (EWC). For years the ECQ (Martin & Cullen, 2006) has been the dominant foundation for ethical climate research, providing the basis for nearly 75% of all studies of ethical climate. However, this framework has also been the target of a number of serious critiques and a call arose for a new theory and measurement of the construct. Arnaud (2010) addressed this call and developed the ECI based on the Psychological Process Model (PPM). The first findings are promising but more research is needed to validate and refine the ECI. We want to contribute to this by expanding the ECI research geographically (America to Europe) and between sectors (specific application on the sports sector).

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