

EUROPEAN OR NORTH AMERICAN WAY? THE GOVERNANCE OF ICE HOCKEY IN FRANCE AND UK

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which characterise all sport organisations. Finally, we gathered quantitative information in terms of both sporting and financial performance to assess the respective qualities of each system and whether a specific model of governance has any particular impact, but also to understand potential factors which may explain the evolution towards or resilience of a given model.

Indeed, the financial and sporting difficulties of ice-hockey in the UK, might explain the constitution of the EIHL in 2003, initially as breakaway league, but a major reorganisation of British ice-hockey had already taken place in 1996. More importantly, the instable history of ice-hockey in the UK over the last decades and the natural influence from North America for British hockey might be explained by the over dominance of football and to a lesser extent rugby and cricket which does not let much space for other sports. In France, ice hockey is also a relatively minor sport, but the organisation of sport in that country, with strong involvement from local authorities through the provision of facilities and financial subsidies, may explain the maintenance of a traditional European model of sport organisation. Still, such explanations are not enough and looking at both the normative, regulative and cultural-cognitive dimensions of the institutional context in which actors are embedded is necessary.

Abstract

The European model of team sport organisation is typically characterised by a pyramidal system, open leagues with promotion and relegation, and autonomous clubs. On the other side, the North American model relies very much on closed leagues with teams being franchises, and strong economic regulation (revenue sharing, draft system and salary cap etc.). This paper explores the governance of ice hockey in two medium ranked hockey countries: France and the UK. Ice-hockey is the main professional team sport in Canada and the NHL is one of the 4 major league in North America. Ice-hockey is also the most popular and leading team sport in a handful European countries (Finland, Russia and to a lesser extent Sweden and the Czech Republic). Very few sports, if any, can claim such a status: basketball is played competitively on both sides of the Atlantic, but is not the main sport in any European country though some leagues are very developed. For this reason, it is interesting to see how ice-hockey is organised and governed at the periphery.

While the traditional European model is found in France, ice-hockey at the highest level in the UK is currently organised very much with a North American model: the Elite Ice Hockey League (the top division in the UK) is effectively a closed league, with clubs acting as franchises. Drawing on institutional theory in organisation studies, this paper aims at critically analysing the governance of ice-hockey in France and the UK, and at understanding how and why it has evolved likewise.

The data used in this paper come from a variety of sources. We collected secondary data from newspaper articles and archival documentation to reconstitute the background and recent evolution of the organisation and governance of ice-hockey in these two countries. This is supplemented by semi-directed interviews with clubs' managers to better apprehend their logics, the motives behind the adoption of each system and the complex power games, coalition building and network of relations

