

# ANALYSING THE PATTERN OF ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE IN LOCAL SPORT CLUBS

Jochen Perck, Jo Van Hoecke, Hans Westerbeek, Diane Breesch  
Department of Sport Policy and Management, Vrije Universiteit Brussel  
Department of Sport Policy and Management, Vrije Universiteit Brussel  
Institute of Sport, Exercise and Active Living, Victoria University  
Department of accountancy, Auditing and Corporate Finance, Vrije Universiteit Brussel

## Aim of abstract/paper - research question

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 & De Knop, 2006). A specific certification scheme that is able to approach sports clubs as relatively autonomous organisations is used in order to measure the degree of professionalisation of the clubs. Using the theoretical framework of Kikulis et al. (1989) this paper uses the development of a *structural taxonomy* to understand the professionalisation of local gymnastics clubs in Flanders (Belgium). The purpose is to show if and if so to what extent the system affects the structural designs of the clubs. Furthermore there is assessed how traditional organised sports clubs adapt themselves to the recommendations of the quality system and what impact it has on the changes towards a more bureaucratic and professional gym club. In this paper the impact of the top-down implementation of a quality assurance system is examined, initiated and coordinated by a leading sport federation.

## Theoretical background or literature review

According to DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) institutional theory governments and federations put institutional pressure on clubs to change towards more professional organisations. This paper deals with the concept of isomorphism whereby a sport federation tries to control its network of local sport clubs by the implementation of a system of performance measurement and quality assurance. Furthermore, the population ecology is used to focus on organisational diversity and adaptation within a population of organisations (Druckman, Singer, & Van Cott, 1997). This paper integrates the structural characteristics of specialisation, standardisation and centralisation, combined with the descriptive profiles of sport organisations. Following Kikulis, Slack, and Hinings (1995) a taxonomy is constructed and structural design types are used as a model for change.

## Methodology, research design and data analysis

The sample used for the study is a set of Belgian gymnastics clubs undergoing institutional change as a function of professionalisation. Data was drawn from a sample of 120 Flemish non-profit gymnastics clubs, evaluated by the quality assurance system IKGym minimum twice from 2004 till 2010 (Van Hoecke & De Knop, 2006). 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 assurance system, especially designed for the evaluation and management of gymnastics clubs (Van Hoecke & De Knop, 2006, p. 374). The Sequential, Agglomerative, Hierarchical, Non-overlapping clustering method (SAHN-method) was used to divide the sample into seven clusters according to Ward's method. The resulting structural design types are a representation of different clubs during their latest evaluation by IKGym. These organisational designs are used to evaluate the process of organisational change influenced by the institutional pressure of the federation and (local) authorities. This enables us to make comparisons across dimensions and across time. So the changed approach of the different clubs is evaluated.

## Results, discussion and implications/conclusions

The results indicate that the clubs develop in the direction of more professional and more bureaucratic organisations. 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 where the changes in the structure of the various clubs are, so there can be a respond to this. This analysis of the structural characteristics finds its international character in the fact that also other foreign federations and leagues (wanted to) use the services of this audit tool.

## References

- DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48(2), 147-160.
- Druckman, D., Singer, J. E., & Van Cott, H. (1997). *Enhancing Organizational Performance*. Washington, D. C. : National Academy Press.
- Kikulis, L. M., Slack, T., Hinings, B., & Zimmermann, A. (1989). A Structural Taxonomy of Amateur Sport Organizations. *Journal of Sport Management*, 3(2), 129-150.
- Kikulis, L. M., Slack, T., & Hinings, C. R. (1995). Sector-specific patterns of organizational design change. *Journal of Management Studies*, 32(1), 67-100.

- Van Hoecke, J., & De Knop, P. (2006). Development of a relevant quality system for gymnastics clubs: an application of the principles of total quality management in traditionally organised sport. *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*, 1(4), 359-377.