

HYBRID PROFESSIONS IN THE SPORT SECTOR

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Background and research question

Historically many sport organisations are voluntary associations that can be positioned within the third sector or civil society and sport can be characterised as an autotelic activity. In the last decades however hybridity is a feature becoming more common in (sport) organisations on a national and local level. Sport and its organisations seem to become a contested field of social and cultural capital. We will describe the hybridisation of sport organizations as a repositioning between civil society, market and state, and how this affects the work of these organisations and of professionals and volunteers involved (Evers & Hämel, 2007; Houlihan & Green, 2009). E.g. sport clubs are urged to take up societal duties and fitness centres are becoming involved in preventive health care (Lucassen & Van der Roest, 2011b). National and local authorities expect a lot of benefits of this kind of widening of the ‘traditional’ aims of sport organisations. But do these benefits appear in reality?

The new expectations toward sport organizations also have consequences for their workers, whether voluntary or professional. New competences have to be added to the traditional qualities of coaches and managers and there’s a growing need for life long learning (Lucassen, 2012). For the changing demands from the sport organisations new training programs for professionals are developed and new functions have been constructed. In the Netherlands, the emergence of hybrid professions can be witnessed through the engagement of entrepreneurial sport coaches in for example tennis schools and soccer schools; when sport marketeers are introduced in non-profit organizations, or when sport community-workers or ‘dual sport coaches’ (working for example part time in sport clubs and at primary or secondary schools) are being introduced. The execution of these new functions is by no way without problems and tensions. There can be debate on the formal position of the workers (two employers, unclear duties) and the professionals and their management have to deal with different work contexts, with specific cultures, production logics or ‘mixed rationales’. These developments have lead to our main question: Why are hybrid professions being introduced in the sport sector and which challenges and outcomes have been experienced for the involved (sport) organisations?

Methodology, research design and data analysis

Results of several research projects will be combined. Starting in 2008 over 1200 professionals have been appointed on a local level as dual sport coach. A monitoring framework for the evaluation of the outcome of these new hybrid professions has been developed. From national paneldata the development of organisations employing dual sport coaches (sport clubs, schools) has been compared with traditional organisations working without them, specifically with respect to their involvement in societal activities.

A second research project consisted of the evaluation of the appointment of dual sport coaches within local communities (n=12) (Heijden & Leijhorst, 2011). The process of appointment of these professionals has been evaluated through interviews with different stakeholders (n=57) and the introduction of the workers and results of their work have been evaluated through surveys for their employing organisations (n=510).

Results, discussion and implications

Our research indicates that overall outcomes are in line with the policy targets on national and local level: In the target group more primary schools offer frequent sport activities apart from obligatory physical education lessons. Over half of them offer these activities on a weekly or more frequent basis. Sport clubs involved report to be more actively involved in community programs. They cooperate a lot with schools and the number of youth members of the clubs has grown. The dual sport coaches play a clear connecting role between local organizations and their activities improve the quality of service for youth members. People involved indicate that sound communication is the key factor for success.

The workers also experience some difficulties. They often mention ‘aligning the expectations of parties involved’ as a main challenge. Lack of clarity with respect to tasks is also a problem often experienced by organizations involved. Other experienced barriers for effective operating are lack of time and the work of the coaches being not enough publicly visible. Overall the local context and the competences of the coaches appear to be important factors for the realization of expected outcomes. Although the introduction of dual sport coaches is a challenging process of hybridization we can conclude that sport organizations can cope with this and in general has positive outcomes.

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