
CAUSES, FORMS AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF INTERNATIONAL SPORT FEDERATIONS IN SWITZERLAND: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND FIRST RESULTS

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Synopsis:

Sport organisations are facing multiple challenges originating from an increasingly complex and dynamic environment in general, and from internal changes in particular. Our study seeks to reveal and analyse the causes for professionalization processes in international sport federations, the forms resulting from it, as well as related consequences.

Abstract:

AIM OF ABSTRACT/PAPER - RESEARCH QUESTION

Sport organisations are facing multiple challenges originating from an increasingly complex and dynamic environment in general, and from internal changes in particular. In this context, professionalization seems to have been adopted by sport organisations as an appropriate strategy to respond to pressures such as becoming more “business-like”. The ongoing study seeks to reveal and analyse the internal and external causes for professionalization processes in international sport federations, the forms resulting from it (e.g. organisational, managerial, economic) as well as related consequences on objectives, values, governance methods, performance management or again rationalisation.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND/LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on sport as specific non-profit sector mainly focus on the prospect of the “professionalization of individuals” (Thibault, Slack & Hinings, 1991), often within sport clubs (Thiel, Meier & Cachay, 2006) and national sport federations (Seippel, 2002) or on organisational change (Griginov & Sandanski, 2008; Slack & Hinings, 1987, 1992; Slack, 1985, 2001), thus leaving broader analysis on governance, management and professionalization in sport organisations an

unaccomplished task.

In order to further current research on above-mentioned topics, our intention is to analyse causes, forms and consequences of professionalisation processes in international sport federations. The social theory of action (Coleman, 1986; Esser, 1993) has been defined as appropriate theoretical framework, deriving in the following a multi-level framework for the analysis of sport organisations (Nagel, 2007). In light of the multi-level framework, sport federations are conceptualised as corporative actors whose objectives are defined and implemented with regard to the interests of member organisations (Heinemann, 2004) and/or other pressure groups. In order to understand social acting and social structures (Giddens 1984) of sport federations, two levels are in the focus of our analysis: the macro level examining the environment at large (political, social, economic systems etc.) and the meso level (Esser, 1999) examining organisational structures, actions and decisions of the federation's headquarter as well as member organisations.

METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

The multi-level framework mentioned seeks to gather and analyse information on causes, forms and consequences of professionalization processes in sport federations. It is applied in a twofold approach: first an exploratory study based on nine semi-structured interviews with experts from umbrella sport organisations (IOC, WADA, ASOIF, AIOWF, etc.) as well as the analysis of related documents, relevant reports (IOC report 2000 on governance reform, Agenda 2020, etc.) and important moments of change in the Olympic Movement (Olympic revenue share, IOC evaluation criteria, etc.); and secondly several case studies.

Whereas the exploratory study seeks more the causes for professionalization on an external, internal and headquarter level as depicted in the literature, the case studies rather focus on forms and consequences. Applying our conceptual framework, the analysis of forms is built around three dimensions:

- 1) Individuals (persons and positions),
- 2) Processes, structures (formalisation, specialisation),
- 3) Activities (strategic planning).

With regard to consequences, we centre our attention on expectations of and relationships with stakeholders (e.g. cooperation with business partners), structure, culture and processes (e.g. governance models, performance), and expectations of and relationships with member organisations (e.g. centralisation vs. regionalisation).

For the case studies, a mixed-method approach is applied to collect relevant data: questionnaires for rather quantitative data, interviews for rather qualitative data, as well as document and observatory analysis.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS/CONCLUSIONS

With regard to causes of professionalization processes, we analyse the content of three different levels:

1. the external level, where the main pressure derives from financial resources (stakeholders, benefactors) and important turning points (scandals, media pressure, IOC requirements for Olympic sports);
2. the internal level, where pressure from member organisations turned out to be less decisive than assumed (little involvement of member organisations in

decision-making);

3. the headquarter level, where specific economic models (World Cups, other international circuits, World Championships), and organisational structures (decision-making procedures, values, leadership) trigger or hinder a federation's professionalization process.

Based on our first analysis, an outline for an economic model is suggested, distinguishing four categories of IFs: "money-generating IFs" being rather based on commercialisation and strategic alliances; "classical Olympic IFs" being rather reactive and dependent on Olympic revenue; "classical non-Olympic IFs" being rather independent of the Olympic Movement; and "money-receiving IFs" being dependent on benefactors and having strong traditions and values.

The results regarding forms and consequences will be outlined in the presentation.

The first results from the two pilot studies will allow us to refine our conceptual framework for subsequent case studies, thus extending our data collection and developing fundamental conclusions.

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