

Title:

What does Professionalization mean? Perceptions of Professionalization in Sport Federations

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Abstract:

Introduction:

Organisational changes in sports federations are often associated with a drift from a volunteer driven to an increasingly business-like phenomenon (Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011). This process of transformation is called as “professionalization”. Accordingly, professionalization seems to be an appropriate strategy for sport organisations in order to meet organizational pressure due to challenges of a more complex and dynamic changing environment adequately. Despite the increasing research interest and the attempts for systematization on the phenomenon of professionalization it still remains unclear what does the term professionalization exactly mean (Dowling et al., 2014). Thus, there is a lack of a consistent concept of professionalization that is needed in order to explore different facets and perspectives of this phenomenon more validly. Against this background following question emerged: What is the suitable concept of professionalization for analyzing the actual ongoing processes of change, adaption or transformation in sport federations?

Methods:

Dealing with this question, following two-step approach was chosen: (1) In a first step a scholar’s perspective at professionalisation of sport organisations will be displayed in order to explore both the common ground as well as divergences and inconsistencies in previous approaches. Therefore, a literature review is indicated. (2) In a second step, and in contrast to previous studies we will consider a practical point of view by a so called second-order observation of experts to gain valuable insights into current thinking and acting towards professionalization in sport federations. In doing so, a hermeneutical approach is used, which is about understanding the meaning of contexts by grasping the everyday world, and draw insight and meaning from it (Shilbury et al., 2013). Accordance with hermeneutics, the explorative interpretive knowledge of expert interviews was used. The interviews were conducted with a sample of six selected experts, who have both dedicated insider knowledge and the overall view of all Swiss sport federations.

Results and discussion:

The summaries of literature review could be categorized into two research currents. The one defines professionalization as a structural process towards professional status of occupations. The other defines it in a broader sense as an organisational change towards a business-like approach. Whereas the first perspective there is a broad scientific consensus that second isn’t that clear, however. Explorative analysis of interview data reveals different themes in relation to professionalization of sports federation. First theme deals with a changed philosophy as more strategic alignment towards for-profit, efficiency and quality orientation. Second theme refers to paid work associated with more competence orientation and balanced governance between paid and voluntary work. Third theme deals with acting shift towards more rationalization and efficiency by implementation of innovative management and communication tools. Based on findings of both our review of scholar’s perspective as well insights from experts we will provide – in the sense of synthesis – a more clear understanding of what does professionalization mean that can be useful in terms of further studies.

References:

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