

International sport federations: Drivers for and barriers to professionalization

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Introduction:

In their quest to explain professionalization in sport federations, researchers have extended the scope in recent years by adding the question of rationalization and efficiency (Chantelat, 2001) to the formerly predominant focus on occupational and organisational professionalization. International sport federations have to face new and multiple challenges in an increasingly complex environment: regulatory requirements, interdependences and stakeholder involvement, etc. These challenges result from internal as well as external factors. Nagel et al. (Nagel, Schlesinger, Bayle, & Giauque, 2015) address this question in their work on causes, forms and consequences of professionalization in sport federations. Based on their conceptual framework, three levels of analysis that shall be applied: 1) the headquarters, 2) the federation's internal level (members), 3) the external level (stakeholders from sport and society). This analysis should enable us to highlight sector-general and sport-specific moments of rupture, factors for incremental changes and significant elements of continuity. It should also enable us to assign the origin and the impact of these factors to the different levels described above. Literature on international sport federations in terms of professionalization is still rare. While some research exists on governance and organisational change at national level, no studies exist that analyse drivers for and barriers to professionalization at international or national level. Indeed, Dowling's (Mathew Dowling, Jonathon Edwards, & Marvin Washington, 2014) findings reveal that a systemic approach to the questions of governance and management in sport federations is still lacking.

Methods:

In order to locate and extract supporting evidence, an exploratory study has been carried out among representatives of umbrella organisations in sport (i.e. IOC, ASOIF) in a first phase, seeking to understand the perception of professionalization in sport federations. In a second phase, 6 international sport federations (FIH, UCI, FIVB, FISA, FISU, UWW) were selected for case studies. In total, 29 semi-structured interviews, a questionnaire, and secondary literature comprising internal documents and relevant literature supplied us with considerable data. All the data collected has been triangulated and analysed according to the conceptual framework developed by Nagel et al.

Results and Discussion:

The classification of internal and external factors shall allow us to distinguish different types of behaviour in international sport federations. A typology leaning on findings of Miles and Snow (Miles, Snow, Meyer, & Coleman, 1978) is suggested, assigning the federations' most important characteristics to four types: prospectors, defenders, reactors, and analysers. Following this typology, the relevant discussion question for future research is: Do the federations' adaptation patterns and behaviour lead to different forms?

References:

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