

PROFESSIONALIZATION OF THE VOLUNTARY SPORT SECTOR

Case Helsingin Palloseura – from Finnish champions to local youth development

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ABSTRACT

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Professionalization in sport is an increasingly studied topic in the field of sport sciences. The focus of the scholars has been especially on the voluntary sport sector of which several case studies of sport federations have been published. However, there is a need for more case studies, also of the voluntary sport clubs, to better validate the theoretical frameworks in the field.

The recent developments in the voluntary sector make it an interesting area for research. The changing role of the voluntary sport clubs only adds to the interest. By better understanding the operational environment of the voluntary sport clubs, it could be possible to make them more efficient and successful in their operations, thus benefitting the vast amounts of members of the clubs, and the society in general.

The aim of this study was to add to our understanding of the operational environment of a voluntary sport club in the process of professionalization. The objectives to achieve this aim were to study professionalization in the voluntary sport sector, and specifically to analyse the recent professionalization process of the football club Helsingin Palloseura. The organizational culture and the operations of HPS as well as the changes and challenges regarding them were under the spotlight.

The data for this case study was collected in two focus group interviews, one with four current and former chairmen and members of the board of the club and the other with three longest-serving staff members of the club. The interviews were analysed by using qualitative content analysis, and the findings were combined with the theoretical models and frameworks reviewed. Based on the analysis, a model of professionalization for voluntary sport clubs was proposed.

The main finding of the study was the importance of the commitment of the chairman and the board members in the professionalization process of a voluntary sport club, especially in the initiation of the process. Likewise, it became evident that shared leadership becomes increasingly important as the voluntary sport club begins to hire paid employees. The importance of quality orientation cannot be overstated, either. In an operational environment where resources are scarce, efficient cooperation and quality operations are all important.

Key words: Professionalization, voluntary sport sector, football club, HPS

Table of contents

ABSTRACT	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Outline of the thesis.....	2
1.2 Personal interest.....	3
2 SPORT IN FINLAND – FROM CIVIC ACTIVITIES TOWARDS PROFESSIONALISM	5
2.1 Sport sectors in Finland	5
2.1.1 The voluntary sport sector in Finland – historical background	7
2.1.2 Football in Finland – historical background	9
2.1.3 Towards professionalization and hybrid organizations	11
2.2 Professionalization in sport	12
2.2.1 Sport management and the unique features of sport.....	13
2.2.2 Value creation in sport.....	15
2.2.3 Professionalization in the voluntary sport sector.....	18
2.2.4 Hybrid organizations.....	22
2.2.5 A framework to analyze professionalization	23
3 HELSINGIN PALLOSEURA – FROM FINNISH CHAMPIONS TO LOCAL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT	27
3.1 Historical background of the club	27
3.2 The professionalization process of Helsingin Palloseura.....	28
3.3 Helsingin Palloseura today	30
3.3.1 Organizational structure.....	30
3.3.2 Club management	31
3.3.3 People and their positions	32
3.3.4 Important stakeholders.....	33
3.3.5 Operational environment	34
3.3.6 Strategies and activities	35
4 RESEARCH TASK AND METHODOLOGY.....	36
4.1 Aim and objectives of the study	36
4.2 Research methods of the study	37
4.2.1 Data collection and analysis	38
4.2.2 Reliability and validity of the study.....	40
5 FINDINGS	42

5.1 Professionalism in the club.....	42
5.2 Main findings of the study.....	45
5.2.1 Attitude and commitment	46
5.2.2 Shared leadership	48
5.2.3 Quality orientation	49
5.3 Challenges during the professionalization process.....	51
5.4 The future of Helsingin Palloseura.....	52
6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS.....	53
6.1 Analysis of the professionalization process of Helsingin Palloseura.....	53
6.2 A model of professionalization for voluntary sport clubs	55
6.3 Conclusions	57
6.3.1 Limitations of the study	58
6.3.2 Suggestions for future research.....	59

REFERENCES

APPENDICES

1 INTRODUCTION

Currently, there is a trend of professionalization in sport organizations.

Professionalization in general has received plenty of attention in the academic world with several studies on the professionalization of voluntary and non-profit organizations being published lately (e.g. Dowling, Edwards & Washington 2014; Nagel, Schlesinger, Bayle & Giaouque 2015; Ruoranen et al. 2016). Indeed, the recent developments in the voluntary sector, such as hybridization and increasing demands towards voluntary organizations, make professionalization an interesting area for research.

Recent studies in the field of sport and organizational sciences have focused on the forms and causes of professionalization as well as on the consequences of the professionalization process (Nagel et al. 2015). Subsequently, several frameworks to analyse professionalization have been presented (e.g. Nagel et al. 2015; Ruoranen et al. 2016). Ruoranen and others (2016) suggest that further qualitative case studies would be a good method to validate their framework for analysing professionalization.

Furthermore, the perceptions of practitioners in the field offer necessary support for the theoretical concepts of professionalization (Slack 2014; Van der Roest, Spaaij & van Bottenburg 2015). Ruoranen and others (2016) continue by arguing that by integrating the perspectives of the practitioners into a framework, it would also be possible to increase the reliability and applicability in the analysis of a sport federation, or a sport association.

The voluntary, or third, sector has undergone major changes in recent decades. The boundaries of the public, private and voluntary sectors have started to fade, and their roles and responsibilities to merge and mingle. The concept of hybridization describes this phenomenon. (Billis 2010) As a result, there is talk of the “new third sector”. Examples of this shift are, among others, the idea of a customer instead of a member and the organizational practices adopted from the private sector, or the business world. (Saukkonen 2013)

In the voluntary sport sector, the increasing importance of voluntary sport clubs as the health promoters of people leading ever more sedentary lifestyles (Koski, Itkonen, Lehtonen & Vehmas 2015; Koski & Mäenpää 2018) makes the research topic even

more interesting. The role of voluntary sport clubs has also become that of a service provider, to ever more demanding customers (Koski 2012a; 2012b). It is therefore crucial to understand the functions of voluntary sport clubs in order to make them more efficient and successful. Besides, finding out and identifying best practices in the field could lead to repeatability in other clubs. By better understanding the operational environment of the voluntary sport clubs it could be possible to make them more efficient and successful in their operations, thus benefitting the vast amounts of members of the clubs, and the society in general.

Football as the most popular sport in Finland with almost 140 000 registered players (Palloliitto 2019) offers a fine context for this study. Moreover, the century-long history of Helsingin Palloseura (HPS) allows us to inspect the historical development of a voluntary sport club through the different phases of the voluntary sport sector in Finland. There have been ups and downs in the history of the club, but the upward trend of the last couple of decades, including for example the vastly increased number of members (Lindbohm 2017), presents an interesting and successful example of how a voluntary sport club can become more professional, and more significant for its stakeholders.

Despite the ever-increasing academic interest in football and professionalization, there is a distinct lack of empirical research on the topics in Finland (Szerovay 2015; Szerovay, Itkonen & Vehmas 2017). Therefore, this study seeks to add to the literature the case of HPS, one of the most historically prestigious and successful football clubs in Finland, as an example of the professionalization process in a voluntary sport club.

1.1 Outline of the thesis

In this master's thesis, the recent developments in HPS, a football club from Helsinki, are inspected. In the literature review, a closer look is taken at the history of the voluntary sport sector in Finland, the focus being on the current trend of professionalization. Furthermore, the history of football in Finland is discussed, followed by that of HPS.

After presenting the methodology of the study, the findings section focuses on especially the last two decades of operations in HPS. The change in the focus and emphasis of the club are analysed, along with the professionalization process that has taken place in the club. To understand this process better, key persons, namely staff and members of the board, were interviewed.

Based on the literature review and the findings of the interviews, a model of professionalization for voluntary sport clubs is introduced. Finally, the limitations of the study as well as suggestions for future research are presented.

1.2 Personal interest

Personally, the interest in this topic arises from my enthusiasm for football and football club management and operations. In addition, I have played for the club in question, HPS, for almost 15 years, and I am currently still playing for the club.

My personal attachment to the club makes the topic and HPS as a case study subject interesting and meaningful to me. The extensive first-hand knowledge of the club that I have acquired during my time as a player can help me to understand the operational aspects of the club better and to form conclusions from the findings of the study.

Further reasons to choose Helsingin Palloseura as the case study are firstly the fact that football is the most popular sport in Finland. Secondly, there is a current boom going on with the recent success of the men's national team. Therefore, HPS as a football club with a large member base is an interesting study subject. Additionally, the century-long history of HPS makes it possible to examine the historical development of a voluntary sport club by applying the different phases of the voluntary sport sector in Finland (see Itkonen 1996).

Lastly, the important role voluntary sport clubs can play in the battle against sedentary lifestyles adds to the interest and importance of the study. By understanding the functions of HPS and the recipe for its recent success, it could be possible to repeat them in other clubs, thus promoting football as a form of exercise.

My close connections to the club present an issue for the objectivity of the study, which may have affected the research process and my interpretations of the data. Hence, during the research process, I have had to constantly keep in mind my role as a researcher, and not allow the membership of the club or personal relationships to actors in the club distract me from critical thinking and examination. Nonetheless, my assumptions and relationship to the study subject have undoubtedly influenced the quality of the research (Sparkes & Smith 2014, 19).

2 SPORT IN FINLAND – FROM CIVIC ACTIVITIES TOWARDS PROFESSIONALISM

In this literature review, the three sectors of sport in Finland are introduced. The existing literature in the field of voluntary sport sector, the most important sector for the purposes of this thesis, is reviewed. The history of the voluntary sport sector in Finland is examined, and the different phases of it are presented. Likewise, the historical background of football in Finland is covered as an introduction to the specific context of this study.

Then, the recent trend of professionalization in the voluntary sport sector is analysed. Additionally, a short introduction to sport management as well as to the value creation processes within sport are included due to their possible, and even probable, importance in the professionalization of voluntary sport clubs and associations. A framework to analyse professionalization is presented to conclude the theoretical section of this literature review.

2.1 Sport sectors in Finland

The sport field in Finland has been traditionally divided into three sectors: public, private and voluntary sector. Each of these sectors has its specific characteristics (e.g. Itkonen 2002; Smith 2008). Nowadays, more and more organizations especially in the voluntary sport sector are hybrids with features adopted from all three sectors (Saukkonen 2013). These hybrid organizations mix elements, values and principles from the three sectors (Billis 2010). Thus, knowing and understanding their basic elements is vital.

The public sport sector includes governmental institutions and organizations from the national all the way to the local level. The main function of these actors is to develop and maintain sport policies as well as the sport and physical activity culture itself (Smith 2008). Smith (2008) highlights that the interest and engagement in sport from the governmental side is a result of the potential of sport to create positive economic,

social and political benefits. These benefits can be, for example, success in international competitions or promotion of recreational mass sport (Laine & Vehmas 2017).

Furthermore, sport can positively affect infrastructural and environmental elements (Masterman 2004; Preuss 2007). For instance, sporting success can tempt public authorities to build sport facilities. Partly for this reason sport clubs in Finland are closely linked with the public sector; when in need of a new football field, it pays dividends for a football club to have a good relationship with the local authorities.

The division of labour between the public sector and the voluntary sector in Finland is based on the Sport Act, which defines the role of the public sector as building and maintaining the infrastructure for sport as well as financially supporting the organizations in the voluntary sector. The voluntary sector for its part is responsible for organizing and executing sport and exercise activities both nationally and locally. Although its name might so imply, the law itself does not include detailed rulings or any demands for actions in practice; it is more of a general code of conduct. (Ilmanen 2015; Kokkonen 2013)

The private sector differs significantly from the public sector, as in the private sector, the private companies and other actors primarily focus on making a profit (Laine & Vehmas 2017). Thus, the private sector is business- and market-oriented as well as commercialized. There are diverse operators in the private sport sector, for example professional sport clubs and leagues, sport retail companies and fitness centres.

In recent years, the private sport sector has been growing in Finland (Laine 2017). This can be seen in the steep increase in the number of corporations in the sport industry (Gholamzadeh Fasandoz 2016) as well as in the corporations' increasing investments in sport sponsorship (Sponsor Insight 2018). Besides sponsorship, voluntary sport clubs are more and more connected to the private sector. For example, sport clubs often form a private company to manage their facilities, such as sport halls and fields. This is also the case for Helsingin Palloseura: the club has founded and is the sole owner of a limited liability company, which manages and operates the football fields of the club.

The voluntary sport sector, also referred to as the civic or non-profit sector, comprises the sport clubs, associations and federations and other governing organizations. The voluntary sport sector has had an important role in the development of the Finnish sport and physical activity culture (Itkonen 2002). Some defining characteristics of this sector

are the focus on public good while basing activities and operations on voluntary actions and goodwill. As such, the voluntary sport sector takes care of offering sport products, which are not within the realm of interest or capabilities of the public or private sector. (Smith 2008)

The current state of the voluntary sport sector in Finland is the result of over a century-long history. Itkonen (2000) has divided this in four clearly defined stages. To properly understand the current situation in the field, it is necessary to familiarize oneself with these phases in the development of the voluntary sport sector. Prior to delving into the phases of the voluntary sport sector, the history of the civil movement in Finland is shortly covered.

2.1.1 The voluntary sport sector in Finland – historical background

In the civil movement lie the foundations of the voluntary sector in Finland: civic physical activities have been linked to other organizational operations in Finland more than possibly anywhere else in the world (Hentilä 1993 as cited in Itkonen 2000, 12). Already in the late 19th century, different associations and clubs had an important role in shaping the Finnish society as well as educating and enlightening people of all social classes (Itkonen 2000). Even today sport clubs and associations are mostly based on the same ideals and values of voluntary work.

The first Finnish sport clubs date back to the time of the rise of the civil movement in the mid- and late 19th century. However, only in the turn of the century did sports and sport clubs begin to organize themselves in associations. This marked the beginning of the development of the voluntary sport sector in Finland as we know it. Itkonen (1991; 2002) has named this first era the age of organizational culture, going from the beginning of the new century to 1930. It is followed by the age of hobby-competition (1930-1960), the age of intense competition (1960-1980), and the age of divergent activity beginning from 1980, and continuing still.

Most of the first sport clubs and associations, including HPS, had multiple different sports under their guard. In the 1930s, the organizational culture of sport and physical activity reached its tipping point (Hentilä 1993 as cited in Itkonen 2000) as individual

sports and sport clubs began to demand more in order to be more competitive. By the end of the decade, the age of hobby-competition had begun.

As the Finnish voluntary sport sector developed after the associational organization, the meaning of individual sports grew larger. There was a need for reorganization to be able to take the needs of different sports better into consideration, especially since sport clubs had more and more competitive goals in their activities. Along with the number of different sports and sport associations, also the number of sport facilities increased. The improved training conditions allowed for more competition to take place in more and more different sports, which led to increased competition between sports in the fight for scarce resources of the municipalities. To be successful, the competition systems within a sport had to be developed. This evolution marked the beginning of the age of intense competition. (Itkonen 2000)

At the end of the 1960s the time of planning optimism began in Finland. The ideas of planning were embraced also in the field of sport and physical activity. Political parties were compiling sport-political programs and the municipal sports administration gained more resources. The national and municipal emphasis was on the health of the citizens and their ability to function, whereas in sport clubs the level of competitiveness kept on rising. (Itkonen 2000)

In sport clubs, the planning and the increased amount of information led to the sectorization of coaching knowledge and to professionalization (Itkonen 1996). Consequently, the sport federations developed their coach education systems. Itkonen (2000) has looked at some of the reasons for this difference in emphasis between sport clubs and the national and municipal administrations. Firstly, and most importantly, the stagnant change of civic actions is pointed out. As most of the actors in a club, or any civic association, are voluntary, the operative side of the work is learned by doing and the prevailing practices and modes of operation are not questioned. Consequently, one does what has always been done. Additionally, organizations have been noted to resist change, preferring the previous state of inertia (Skinner, Stewart & Edwards 1999).

Secondly, the sport-specificity of competitive sports led to the safeguarding of one's own sport's resources. This can still be seen today in sport facilities where practitioners of different sports meet; opposition, or even animosity towards one another, can be observed. Thirdly, the significance of children and youth in sport club operations was

showcased in the child attaching himself to a club via a sport hobby. This is a rather important notion for sport clubs to make.

Finally, the need for sport and physical activity for health reasons arose only later once the sedentary lifestyle became more common due to urbanization and the rise of the service society. Most of these factors can still be seen today. Hence, the latest stage pointed out by Itkonen (2000), the age of divergent activity, is even currently prevalent.

The 1980s saw a vast expansion of the field of sport and physical activity in Finland, both organizationally and content-wise (Itkonen 2000). Scholars (Koski 2012a; Itkonen & Salmikangas 2015) emphasize the notions of individualism, differentiation and specialization in their description of this era. Furthermore, the age of divergent activity is that of fragmentation; the trend of specialization is still ongoing in the Finnish sport culture (Itkonen 2002). As resources are scarce and one single club or association cannot do everything successfully and competitively, this trend can only be expected to continue.

2.1.2 Football in Finland – historical background

Much like the phases of the voluntary sport sector in Finland, the history of football in Finland can be divided in four periods, starting from the turn of the 19th and 20th century. Through the inspection of these periods one can see the key points in the history of and the changes occurred in Finnish football as well as some typical traits of Finnish football. These periods are landfall, the age of organizing, the formation of a national competition system, and the early internationalization and globalization. (Itkonen & Nevala 2006)

Modern football has its roots in 19th century Great Britain, and indeed it was the British sailors who first brought the game to Finland at the end of the 19th century.

Consequently, the rise of football in Finland started in coastal cities with major harbours, such as Helsinki, Turku and Vaasa. Schools and teacher seminars were the first places to offer practice and instructions in the sport, but in the first years of the 20th century, during the age of organizational culture, football, too, started to organize itself.

As a result, the Finnish Football Association was founded in 1907. (Itkonen & Nevala 2006)

As football became more organized, and more popular, an increasing number of sport clubs included football in their activities. New football clubs were founded, and many of them were separate from other voluntary sector organizations. This phenomenon might have influenced the Finnish sport culture in terms of sport-specificity (Itkonen & Nevala 2006). The developing society along with the trends of industrialization and urbanization led to more people living in cities, and to more people having free time. This in turn enabled also the working class to practice sports such as football. (Kanerva, Arponen, Heinonen, Tamminen & Tikander 2003, 254)

Football developed slowly but steadily in Finland until the 1930s, much like elsewhere in Europe. However, it was the backwash of the Civil War that had a major detrimental impact on the development of football in Finland. After the Civil War, the civil guards were strongly introducing a new sport, Finnish baseball, to people especially in the countryside, where most of the population still lived (Kortelainen 2007). Hence, football had limited opportunities to spread outside of coastal cities and major industrial cities inland. Due to the status of baseball in the countryside, football did not take its place as the leading sport in Finland, like it did in most of the other European nations (Itkonen & Nevala 2007, 14). Moreover, the tradition of volunteerism in sport in Finland and the subsequent lack of professionalism has negatively affected the international success of Finland in football, leaving Finland in a peripheral position in the global football figuration (Szerovay et al. 2017).

The third phase of Finnish football, the formation of a national competition system, began already during the war years in the 1930s and 40s. The modes of operation became established and the organizational division of labour clarified. An important step in developing a national football system was the common competition system between the Finnish Football Association and the Workers' Sports Federation. (Itkonen & Nevala 2006) This enabled the existence of one football movement, bourgeoisie and the working class together, unlike in many other sports in Finland (Mäkinen, Aarresola, Lämsä, Lehtonen & Nieminen 2016).

The national championship in the form of a league had started in the 1930s, but it was in the 1960s when the overall national football system with established competitions,

coaching and education was built. This phase coincides with the third phase of the voluntary sport sector in general, the age of hobby-competition. The decision of the Finnish Football Association to continue with the ideas and values of amateurism certainly confirmed this. (Itkonen & Nevala 2006)

The 1970s saw Finnish football take its first steps towards internationalization. The number of players and their mobility increased along with the number of national team matches, and the possibility to watch international football matches in television brought the beautiful game to every living room in the country. As the influx of players to and from Finland increased, the age of intense competition began also in football; coach and player education saw major developments take place and the competition system was renewed. (Itkonen & Nevala 2006)

By the 1990s globalization had reached Finnish football. Today, Finnish football is part of the international football landscape with player transfers and diverse fan culture, among other phenomena. (Itkonen & Nevala 2006) Football has grown internationally and is today a media product and a major industry, and although Finland is lagging in this development, football is the most popular participation sport in Finland and is expected to only grow further in popularity in the future.

2.1.3 Towards professionalization and hybrid organizations

The three sport sectors are increasingly inter-related, as their activities intersect in multiple different ways (Smith 2008). The concept of hybridization is used to describe this trend (Billis 2010). Especially clubs and associations in the voluntary sport sector are nowadays operating in an environment where the ability to adapt to the demands and characteristics of both the public and the private sector is vital (Heikkala & Koski 2000; Harris 2010). Indeed, market-oriented elements have gained importance in the operation of Finnish voluntary sport organizations (Szerovay, Perényi & Itkonen 2016).

Slack and Parent (2006, 154) proposed that “in the most effective sport organizations there is a fit between the demands of the environment and the type of structure and managerial practice followed”. Achieving this in the voluntary sector can be difficult, as voluntary clubs and associations act and operate based on the ambitions, values and

goals of their members; mutual understanding is hard to come by. Consequently, the direction of a club or an association can vary to a large extent depending on the persons in charge. (Heikkala & Koski 2000)

Today, there is more specialization and differentiation in voluntary sport clubs than before (Koski 2012a; Nagel et al. 2015; Itkonen & Salmikangas 2015). The traditional aspects of the voluntary sector are also increasingly combined with methods usually related to the private sector (Saukkonen 2013). Thus, it is hardly a surprise that tensions and conflicts have arisen in voluntary sport clubs, which are still mainly based on the ideas of voluntarism and the resources provided by the members and the parents of the youth athletes (Szerovay et al. 2016). To tackle this issue and to come up to increasing expectations towards them, voluntary sport clubs, and organizations in the voluntary sector in general, have become more hybrid and professionalized.

2.2 Professionalization in sport

Historically, the concept of professionalism has been the opposite of amateurism, referring to athletes practicing professionally and having an occupation in sport. Today, professionalization is widely used to illustrate the trend of increasingly professional operations both in top-level sport and in the voluntary sport sector, and the subsequent employment opportunities for athletes, coaches and administrators. Professionalization also includes specialized sport organizations with competitive goals as well as rationality, efficiency and predictability of actions both in the organization and competition level. (Peterson 2008)

The concept of professionalization first emerged within the fields of sociology and management in the early 20th century. However, it was only in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the concept became more prevalent within the field of sport management. (Dowling et al. 2014) The rise of television as a medium and the commercialism that followed in the 1960s and 1970s spurred the study of sport professionalization (Slack 2003). Robinson (2008, 313) summarises the thoughts of fellow scholars in recognising that “one of the main consequences of the commercialism that has occurred in sport

over the past few decades has been the increasing professionalisation of those... involved in managing sports organisations”.

The same applies to the voluntary sport sector as well; the number of paid employees in the voluntary sector is growing (Ruuskanen, Selander & Anttila 2013; Szerovay 2015) and so are the levels of planning and organization. Companies have also noticed the potential voluntary sports clubs have in terms of value creation (Sponsor Insight 2018). To meet the increasing expectations of stakeholders and to survive in a dynamic organizational environment of today, using larger management structures and formalization, i.e. to professionalize, has become essential for organizations (Ruoranen et al. 2016).

Before going further into the topic of professionalization in sport, it is essential to review the basic aspects of sport management and the unique features of sport to fully understand the environment in which sport organizations and managers operate. The value creation processes within sport are also presented as they can have a major impact in the professionalization of voluntary sport clubs and associations. Following these topics as the background for professionalization in sport, the literature on professionalization in the voluntary sport sector is reviewed. Finally, a framework to analyse professionalization is presented.

2.2.1 Sport management and the unique features of sport

Although sport management practices have largely been based on common management practices and managers of sport clubs often have a business or management background, it is vital to note that sport has multiple unique features (Smith & Stewart 2010). Hence, to be successful, it is essential that people in management positions in sport organizations have at least some knowledge of sport management. In voluntary sport clubs, this applies especially to the paid staff in the management side of the club but also to some extent to the chairman and the members of the board of the club.

The most characteristic feature of sport is the phenomenon of people developing irrational passions for sport teams, competitions or athletes. There is a symbolic significance in relation to sporting success and celebrating achievements in sport that

cannot be found in any other economic or social activities. (Hoye, Smith, Westerbeek, Stewart & Nicholson 2015) This phenomenon is perhaps not as prominent in amateur sport as it is in professional sport, but it should be recognized in voluntary sport clubs and associations, nonetheless. Successfully harnessing people's passions can be highly beneficial for a voluntary sport club in terms of volunteer recruitment and fund raising, for example.

There are also significant differences in the ways sport organizations are evaluated in comparison to other businesses. While private or publicly listed companies exist to make profits, sport organizations often have other priorities, such as winning championships or delivering services for different stakeholders. This is certainly the case for voluntary sport clubs and associations in Finland, as they are non-profit organizations with substantial tax exemptions. The main function of a voluntary sport club, such as HPS, is to offer its members opportunities to practice sport, and on this basis the success of its operations is assessed. Financial outcomes should never be totally overlooked, though, as the organization must be on a sustainable base in order to function. (Smith & Stewart 2010)

Because of this emphasis on utility maximization rather than profit maximization (Sloane 1971; 2015), the managers and other leading figures of sport clubs, and sport organizations in general, might have less of an external pressure to deliver. Consequently, one can witness rather long periods of employment in sport organizations compared to more traditional businesses. Similarly, it is quite common for the voluntary members and the chairmen of the boards of sport clubs and associations to hold their positions of trust for long periods of time. This is not necessarily a negative phenomenon. The chairman of the board and the head of youth development of HPS, for instance, have served in their respective positions for over ten years, which has brought stability to the club and enabled long-term growth and development.

In addition to the above-mentioned ones, other unique features of sport include competitive balance, limited availability and the variable quality of sport as a product. Moreover, sport can cause unique behaviour in people, such as a high degree of brand or product loyalty or a high level of optimism in relation to their team's performances. Lastly, it is quite common for people to appreciate the nostalgic aspects of sport consumption and engagement and to be reluctant to adopt new technologies in sport.

(Smith & Stewart 2010) Together, these unique features create a challenging environment for the managers of sport organizations, also in the voluntary sport sector, to operate in.

2.2.2 Value creation in sport

The unique features of sport represent unique potential to create value for different stakeholders. Usually, value creation in sport has been linked with the private sport sector and profit-making. As the three sport sectors are increasingly intertwined and voluntary organizations have become hybrids, it is vital for club managers and other such actors also in the voluntary sport sector to understand at least the basics of value creation. A voluntary sport club can utilize the unique features of sport to create value for corporate partners, for example. However, value creation through sport is a complex process (Jalonen et al. 2018), partly due to these unique aspects of sport, and partly due to the multifaceted concept of value.

In the relevant literature, multiple suggestions have been presented in describing the concept of value (e.g. Sheth, Newman & Gross 1991; Rintamäki, Kuusela & Mitronen 2007). In the contexts of sport and business, Jalonen et al. (2018) identify economic, functional, symbolic, emotional and social values as the manifestations of value.

Traditionally, the school of thought in sport management, and management in general, has circled around the notion that firms create value by combining resources, and customers then buy products and consume value (Woratschek, Horbel & Popp 2014). This perspective is called the goods-dominant logic. It refers to goods, be it products or services, being the main reason for economic exchange to take place (Vargo & Lusch 2004).

However, recent studies in the field of sport management have labelled this approach as being inappropriate for describing the complex process of value creation within sport (Jalonen et al. 2018). The service-dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch 2004) has subsequently taken the place of the goods-dominant logic as the foundation of economic exchange in management studies. The main difference between these two perspectives is the notion of service being the basis of economic exchange in the service-dominant

logic; economic exchange meaning basically an exchange of service for service, goods with skills and knowledge embedded in them delivering the services (Woratschek et al. 2014).

More importantly, in the service-dominant logic value creation is no longer solely in the hands of the producer so much as in the collaboration between firms, customers and other stakeholders. According to this perspective, service providers can only offer value propositions; for the value to realise, the customer needs to join in with his or her skills and public, market-facing and other resources. For example, the value of a sport event, such as a football match, cannot be defined by the service provider, the football club, alone but also by the spectators attending the match. Thus, value is co-created. (Woratschek et al. 2014; Jalonen et al. 2018)

Based on the ideas of the service-dominant logic, Woratschek et al. (2014) developed a sport value framework, to express the nature of economic exchange and to describe the nature of value co-creation in sport industries. Building on their work, Jalonen et al. (2018) concur that sport is a platform connecting different actors and different perspectives.

Moreover, on the grounds of an extensive literature review conducted (Jalonen et al. 2018), two uses of sport in value creation were found, namely instrumental and metaphorical. In terms of instrumental use of sport in value creation, brand promotion and corporate social responsibility are typical examples; brand promotion being more prominent in professional sports and communication of a company's social responsibilities in amateur sports.

For the metaphorical use of sport in value creation, sport can be used to highlight enthusiasm, respect, commitment to colleagues, community spirit and other positive attributes of sport. Additionally, sport can offer ideas and good practices for leadership and strategic management. (Jalonen et al. 2018) Companies can therefore learn from sport in terms of leadership and organisational development. Haltia and Jalonen (2015) have presented the different actors in the value co-creation process in sport as well as their objectives in it. The multiple manifestations of value and the unique features of sport are also involved in their model (Figure 1).

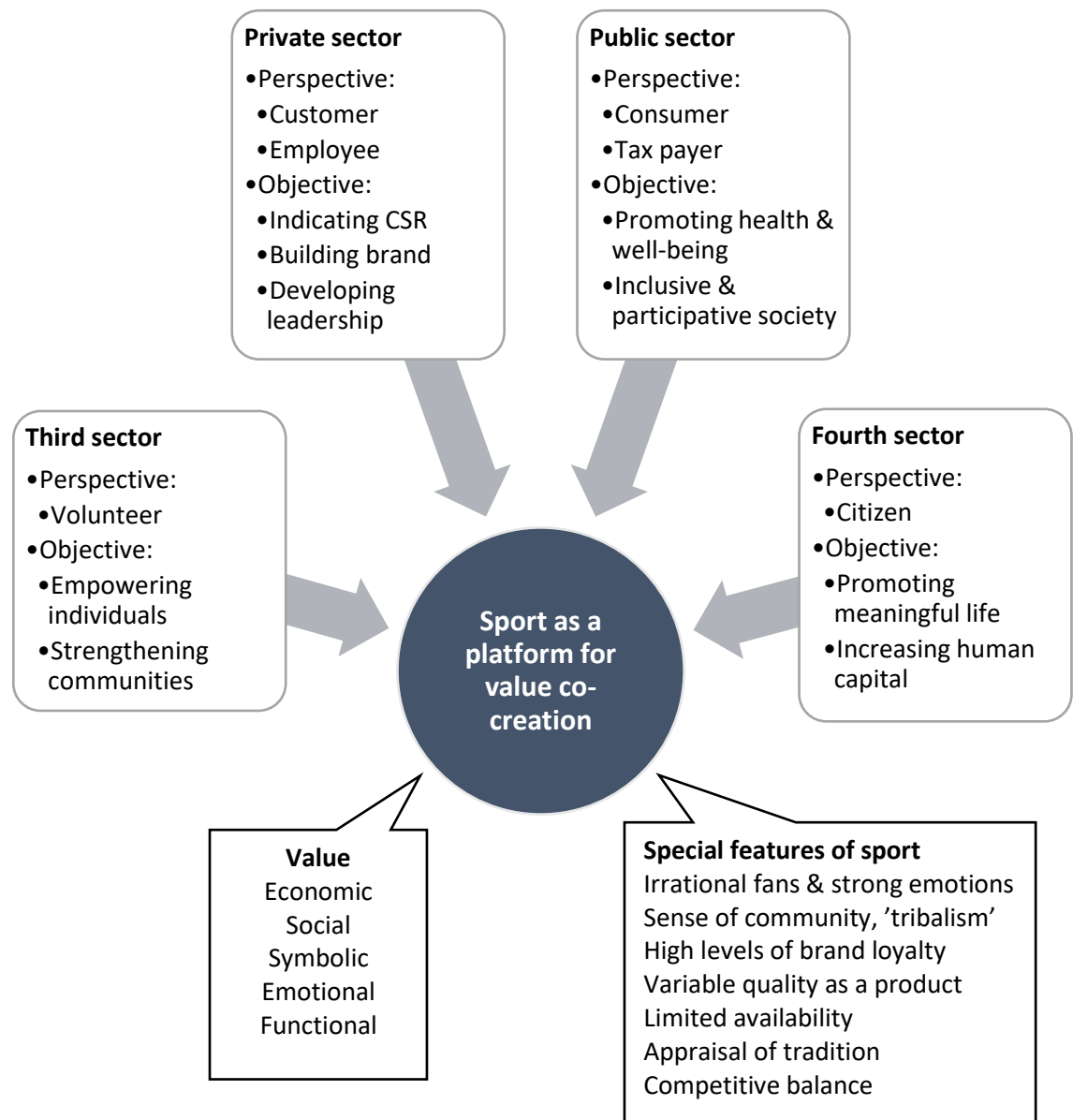


FIGURE 1. Sport as a platform for value co-creation (modified from Haltia & Jalonen 2015).

Voluntary sport clubs can be found in the third sector in this model. The fourth sector, meaning the individual, is a key component of voluntary sport clubs as individuals form the base of volunteers within sport clubs. However, as value is co-created and the different sectors in sport intertwine and co-operate, the managers and other leading figures in the voluntary sport clubs must have at least a basic understanding of the value (co-)creation processes in sport.

Additionally, when considering the potential of voluntary sport clubs for corporations to communicate social responsibility (Jalonen et al. 2018), sport club managers, much like their corporate counterparts, can work for the benefit of their organizations in terms of the economic prospects while maximising the social benefits delivered to the society (Smith & Westerbeek 2007). For example, a sport club can set up a children's sport camp with financial support from a corporate partner, thus benefitting both counterparts.

Auvinen and Kuuluvainen (2017) agree by stating that due to their high potential of local identity and engagement, sport clubs can establish positive effects in their operations, especially on the local level. The complex nature of both sport management and value creation in sport implicate that this can hardly be achieved by volunteers alone. Therefore, voluntary sport clubs, and the voluntary sport sector in general, have recently undergone a process of professionalization.

2.2.3 Professionalization in the voluntary sport sector

Although professionalization as a concept emerged in the fields of sociology and management already in the early 20th century, and in the field of sport management in the 1980s and 1990s, scholars are yet to clearly define the term (Ruoranen et al. 2016). Consequently, the concept of professionalization is often used ambiguously, unclearly and implicitly. Furthermore, there is an existing discrepancy of the conceptualisation of professionalization between sport management, sociological and managerial literatures. (Dowling et al. 2014)

In addition to the historical use of the concept of professionalism as the opposite of amateurism (Peterson 2008), professionalization has been described as a process by which individuals and organizations receive accreditation or become a professional association (Dowling et al. 2014). Dowling et al. (2014) summarize some of the previous definitions in their extensive review of the topic in stating that professionalization is understood to be the process through which occupations change to obtain a professional status.

In addition to these efforts of defining the term, another school of thought sees professionalization as the organizational changes occurring within an organization

towards a more business-like approach to its operations (Dowling et al. 2014), or as Shilbury and Ferkins (2011, 108) put it: “the transition from an amateur, volunteer-driven pastime to a more business-like sector”. As these two definitions differ quite substantially, it is evident that there is indeed a lack of consensus amongst the scholars on the definition of professionalization. As a result, professionalization has been studied from multiple perspectives.

In the relevant literature, three broad classifications of professionalization have been specified: organizational, systemic and occupational professionalization. Out of these, organizational is the narrowest and occupational the broadest conceptualization of professionalization. (Dowling et al. 2014) As organizational professionalization has been intensely studied within the field of sport management, and it is closely related to the topic of this thesis, the focus in this section will be on that specific classification of professionalization. The other two classifications are shortly presented as follows.

Systemic professionalization describes professionalization as a by-product of environmental shifts in organizational field or system development, an external influence causing the change. Change of this nature is a long process and requires consensus through rational discussion among all participants (Skinner et al. 1999). The emphasis on external, rather than internal influence is the major difference of systemic professionalization in comparison with organizational and occupational professionalization. (Dowling et al. 2014)

The concept of occupational professionalization stands for the transformation of occupations into professions. Its common characteristics include exclusivity, specialized training and skills, complexity, gaining specific credentials and establishing professional client-relationships. Vollmer and Mills (1966 as cited in Dowling et al. 2014) presented certain traits characterising occupational professionalization, including a basis of systematic theory and a professional culture. (Dowling et al. 2014)

Organizational professionalization refers to the processes of change as a result of the influx of full-time managerial business-like professionals into traditionally volunteer-run organizations. Following these changes, new managerial practices, decision-making processes, programs and policies are often put in place. Within organizational professionalization literature, there are three distinct areas of investigation: sport governance, organizational structure and policy-making, of which policy-making has

received little scholarly attention within the field of sport management. (Dowling et al. 2014)

Sport governance has been defined as “the structure and process used by an organization to develop its strategic goals and direction, monitor its performance against these goals and ensure that its board acts in the best interest of the members” (Hoye & Cuskelly 2007, 9). In short, governance is about ownership, steering, regulation and control (Dowling et al. 2014).

Shilbury and Ferkins (2011, 122) assume that the “adoption of established governance functions, including performance, conformance, policy and operations, indicates the degree to which sport is professionalizing”. The societal expectations, and research focus, on how sport organizations should be governed have indeed significantly grown. Research on sport governance includes topics of shared leadership, board capability and the regional-national governing relationship, board motivation, and board structure and performance.

One specific area thoroughly discussed within sport governance literature have been the tensions existing between volunteers and paid professionals (Dowling et al. 2014). Shilbury and Ferkins (2011) indicate that these tensions can significantly affect the relationships between volunteer based boards and professional staff in the governance of sport organizations in the voluntary sector; an interesting notion considering the topic of this thesis.

As the number of professional paid staff has increased in voluntary sport organizations following professionalization, the attitude towards volunteers has changed. Volunteers are nowadays often recruited in similar fashion to paid employees, their tasks are explicitly described, and they have support and reward mechanisms in place. All in all, a more professional output is expected of volunteers. (Robinson et al. 2011)

The third area of investigation within organizational professionalization is organizational structure. Studies in this area have examined how professionals entering organizations affect the structure of sport organizations. Kikulis et al. (1992) identified seven dimensions in this regard (Table 1). Using these dimensions, they introduced three organizational archetypes specific to national sport organizations. These archetypes consist of kitchen table, characterized by the lack of professionalization and bureaucratization; boardroom, with bureaucratic processes and formal structure; and

executive office with a bureaucratic structure supported by the professionalization of roles. These archetypes have since become common terminology within the field of sport management (Dowling et al. 2014). In Table 1, the archetypes are compared in terms of their organizational values and structure.

TABLE 1. Institutionally specific design archetypes for national sport organizations (Kikulis et al. 1992).

	Kitchen table	Boardroom	Executive office
Organizational values			
Orientation	Private, volunteer non-profit (membership & fund raising)	Private, volunteer non-profit (public & private funds)	Private volunteer non-profit (government & corporate funds)
Domain	Broad: mass-high performance sport	Competitive sport opportunities	Narrow: high performance sport
Principles of Organizing	Minimal coordination; decision making by volunteer executives	Volunteer hierarchy; professionally assisted	Formal planning; professionally led and volunteer assisted
Criteria of Effectiveness	Membership preferences; quality service	Administrative efficiency & effectiveness	International success
Organizational structure			
Specialization	Roles based on interest & loyalty	Specialized roles & committees	Professional technical & administrative expertise
Standardization	Few rules; little planning	Formal roles, rules & programs	Formal roles, rules & programs
Centralization	Decisions made by a few volunteers	Decisions made by the volunteer board	Decisions decentralized to the professional staff

The archetypes can be used to classify and compare sport clubs, and to analyse the extent of professionalism in them. Hence, these archetypes will be used later in this thesis as one of the ways of analysing the professionalization process of HPS.

2.2.4 Hybrid organizations

Nowadays, there is more specialization in the roles and tasks of the voluntary sport clubs. The internal and external relationships and the forms of communication are also unlike before. (Nagel et al. 2015) The traditional features of the voluntary sector have been combined with objectives and practices that are typical to the private sector (Saukkonen 2013). The different sectors of the society have converged, leading to changes in the ways of operation within the sectors and in the relationships between them. This, along with the increased demands and expectations towards voluntary sport clubs and the subsequent professionalization, has led to the formation of hybrid organizations that mix elements, values and principles traditionally linked to different sectors, thus generating new action models (Billis 2010).

Hybridity can be classified as shallow or entrenched. In shallow hybridity, a voluntary organization typically has professionals from other areas, such as the business world, in its board, who seek to bring more commercial functions to the operations of the organization. One or few staff members might also be hired, but the organization is still firmly based on voluntary work. Organizations with entrenched hybridity, on the other hand, have multiple paid staff members who have the primary responsibility in the operational level of the organization. Moreover, an extensive management structure is usually established, and the organization receives regular resources from the public or private sector. (Billis 2010, 58-62)

With voluntary sport clubs having more and more paid employees in Finland (Szerovay 2015) and sport sponsorship being on the rise (Sponsor Insight 2018), it can be argued that there has been an increase in entrenched hybridity in Finnish voluntary sport clubs over the last few years. This is also the case in Helsingin Palloseura, as will be covered later in this thesis.

2.2.5 A framework to analyse professionalization

Because of the lack of a clear definition of professionalization, the approaches taken by scholars have been diverse and plentiful. It is no surprise then that they have resulted in multiple different frameworks and other such presentations of the phenomenon that is professionalization. For example, Nagel et al. (2015) presented a multi-level framework based on the social theory of action for analysing professionalization in sport federations. In their framework, the authors display the causes, forms and consequences of professionalization within sport federations. Moreover, their model shows how expectations of member organizations and other stakeholders affect the structure and culture of the federation, and how the structure, culture and processes of the professionalized federation, in turn, affect the member organizations' and other stakeholders' expectations towards the federation.

Koski and Heikkala (1998) listed nine characteristics of professionalization: time, place, resources, criteria of recruitment, attitude and commitment, knowledge, efficiency and quality, responsibility, and power. These characteristics are defined in Table 2 and will be used later in this study to analyse the level of professionalism in HPS.

TABLE 2. Characteristics of professionalization (Koski & Heikkala 1998, 36-38).

Characteristics of professionalization	Definition
Time	Formally regulated working hours; full-time and permanent staff
Place	Official place/location (i.e. office)
Resources	Accessibility to mental, physical and financial resources
Criteria of recruitment	Staff with proper education and competence
Attitude and commitment	Professional attitude and motivation – high level of engagement
Knowledge	Competence and specific knowledge
Efficiency and quality	Efficiency and quality of products and operations
Responsibility	Especially financial responsibilities
Power	Regulation and distribution of power

Building on these characteristics based on their work on Swiss national sport federations, Ruoranen et al. (2016) presented three main characteristics of professionalization: changed management philosophy, functional differentiation and specialization, and application of management tools.

By changed management philosophy, the authors refer to for-profit orientation, service and customer orientation, quality improvement, rationality and efficiency orientation (performance optimizing), and strategic planning. Functional differentiation and specialization include aspects of balanced governance, differentiation of positions, competence orientation and paid staff. Finally, application of management tools encompasses tools for control, administration and communication. (Ruoranen et al. 2016) These characteristics are in line with other studies in the field and are commonly agreed upon by scholars.

Ruoranen et al. (2016) created an analytical framework to analyse professionalization in sport federations (Figure 2). In their framework, the authors use three dimensions of professionalization: activities, individuals, and processes and structures. These dimensions have been used in earlier analysis of voluntary associations (Legay 2001; Bayle & Robinson 2007, as cited in Ruoranen et al. 2016). They rename the three dimensions as strategies and activities, people and positions, and structures and processes. Furthermore, the authors develop the model by incorporating federation culture in it, as it was a recurring subject in the interviews during their research.

The dimension of strategies and activities includes features typical to the corporate world and is strongly related to the changed management philosophy. All in all, the features under the dimension of strategies and activities illustrate the business-like operations taking place following the professionalization process in a voluntary sector organization. (Ruoranen et al. 2016)

People and positions refer to the characteristics of individuals, allocation of competences and the relationship between individuals and between positions. Ruoranen et al. (2016) note that one common issue in voluntary sport organizations is the clear definition of responsibilities and competences, and their effect on staff recruitment and voluntary board selection processes. For further research, the authors propose the analysis of possible shifts in decision-making competences and responsibilities between

paid and voluntary positions in voluntary sport organizations following professionalization.

Structures and processes contain items such as structural differentiation, governance structure and routines in decision-making. As an organization becomes more professional, the internal structures and processes tend to become more formal and organized. It can be pondered how these types of organizing and controlling mechanisms resulting from professionalization are suited to the voluntary culture of a national sport federation. Linking to the dimension of people and positions, the authors suggest the investigation of human resource management in such organizations for future research. (Ruoranen et al. 2016)

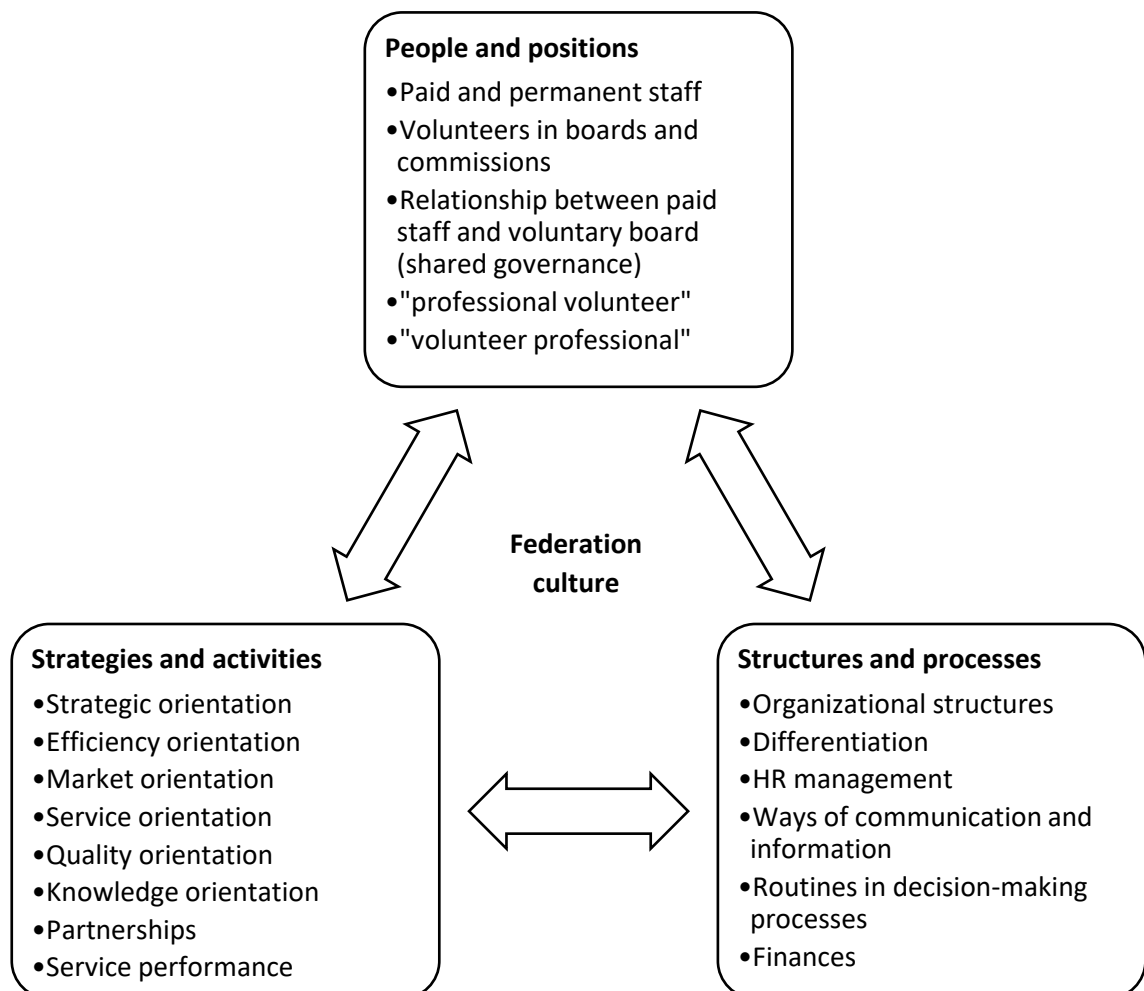


FIGURE 2. A framework to analyse professionalization in sport federations (Ruoranen et al. 2016, 67).

An attitude of individuals to do a good job, or a professional job, emerged as a new perspective of professionalization (Ruoranen et al. 2016). Organizational culture, therefore, is also an aspect of professionalization. As voluntarism is the basis of any organization in the voluntary sector, it is quite evident that indeed the organizational culture and the attitudes and motivations of the volunteers are of paramount importance in the process of professionalization.

For the purposes of this master's thesis, the above framework is used to analyse the professionalization of Helsingin Palloseura. The framework together with the characteristics of professionalization (Koski & Heikkala 1998; Ruoranen et al. 2016) offer a good base to examine the professionalization process HPS has undergone in recent years. The characteristics of professionalization will also be used to determine the level of professionalism and the extent of professionalization in the club today.

3 HELSINGIN PALLOSEURA – FROM FINNISH CHAMPIONS TO LOCAL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

In this sector, the subject of this case study, Helsingin Palloseura, is introduced by going through the history of the club and describing the current situation of the club in detail. As with any organization in the voluntary sector, the operations of HPS have been strongly dependent on the activity and commitment of the volunteers involved in the club, both the members doing voluntary work as well as the chairman and the members of the board managing the club. During the last decade or so, paid staff has joined the chairman and the board in developing the club and taking it forward.

3.1 Historical background of the club

Helsingin Palloseura was founded in November 1917, during a turbulent time both in Finland and in Europe (Lindbohm 2017). In terms of the phases of the voluntary sector in Finland, the founding of HPS took place in the age of organizational culture, when new clubs were founded in great numbers. Football had also begun to gain foothold in Finland as the Finnish Football Association had been founded 10 years prior to the founding of HPS. (Itkonen 2002)

HPS was first established as a bandy club, but football quickly came along and the first football match of HPS was played in September 1918. Success soon followed: HPS won its first national championship in 1921, and successfully retained it the following year. From there on, HPS managed to win the championship further seven times in the following decades, the last one coming in 1957. (Lindbohm 2017)

Following the title in 1957, HPS was entitled to participate in the European Cup the following season, the first Finnish club to do so. Although HPS still won the Finnish Cup in 1962, and consequently participated in the Cup Winners' Cup in 1963, the golden era of the club at the top of Finnish football had come to its end. HPS was relegated from the Finnish Football League in 1964, and for good. The financial situation of the club had already started to worsen after the title of 1957, and by the end of the 1960s the club was balancing on a tightrope. (Lindbohm 2017)

During the age of intense competition, as its name suggests, HPS had to compete with a host of new applicants for corporate and municipal funding. Ice hockey was also emerging to contest football as the nation's number one sport. Moreover, the urbanization of the society meant people moved from the Helsinki city centre to the outskirts of the city, in the new suburbs. HPS followed the trend in the early 1980s by moving from Vallila, a traditional location of the club in the vicinity of downtown Helsinki, to the region of Pakila-Paloheinä in the Northern parts of Helsinki. On the football field, the club's men's first team moved between the first and third divisions. (Lindbohm 2017)

During its long history, HPS has had teams playing, among others, bandy, ice hockey, basketball and handball. By the end of the 1980s, however, football remained the only sport practiced in the green colours of HPS. Big changes took place in the club in general in the 1990s as the focus of the club shifted from the men's first team to local youth development. The last straw was the ending of the first team activities for the 1999 season, because of the partnership with FinnPa, which ended miserably after FinnPa got relegated from the Finnish Football League, Veikkausliiga. Thus, the new millennium saw the HPS men's first team starting its way back from the bottom, the seventh division, and the club being ever so strongly led by active parents of the youth players of the club. (Lindbohm 2017)

The development within HPS in terms of the structure and focus of the club go hand in hand with the overall development of the voluntary sport sector in Finland. During the age of divergent activity HPS has become a football club instead of a multi-sport club, differentiated itself as a parent club, and specialized in local youth development. Furthermore, following the trend of professionalization, HPS has hired professional full-time staff. Currently, HPS has eight staff members in its ranks, six of whom are full-time. (Lindbohm 2017; HPS 2019)

3.2 The professionalization process of Helsingin Palloseura

The roots of the professionalization process of HPS lie in the late 1990s. The running down of the men's first team in 1999 meant that a fresh start was needed; reorganizing

the club was necessary. A group of active parents of youth players took a hold of this job and began to develop the club and its conditions, their goal being to offer opportunities for as many children as possible in the area to have football as a hobby, and to have a men's first team again.

The then restated mission and purpose of the club has guided the actions and operations of the club ever since a new action plan was presented in 2002. Although HPS had gone through some tough times and was run by a few active volunteers, creating and presenting a concrete action plan showed clear signs of professionalism in terms of planning and organization. Already back then, quality, one of the key characteristics of professionalization (Koski & Heikkala 1998; Ruoranen et al. 2016), was inserted as a central feature in the club operations, as a part-time head of youth development started in his position and the venture for building the club's own football dome kicked off. The clarity of the organization helped everyone at the club in their daily and weekly functions and enabled the club to grow. (Lindbohm 2017)

The operations under the new club strategy were at first small-scale; the ideas of professionalization and having full-time staff members were miles away. Steadily things improved, though, and as the number of club members increased, so did the amount of money that came in. Further investments, such as the club's own football dome, enabled more and more growth. As a result, the first staff member was hired in 2008, when the permanent position of head of youth development was established. The main objective of this decision was to clarify the coordination of the coaching within the club, which had previously been done by third-party actors. HPS wanted to develop the quality of its operations on its own terms. (Lindbohm 2017)

To sum up the professionalization process of HPS in line with the institutionally specific design archetypes of Kikulis et al. (1992), HPS has transformed from a kitchen table organization to a boardroom one in less than twenty years, and mostly thanks to a group of active volunteer chairmen and members of the board.

3.3 Helsingin Palloseura today

At present, Helsingin Palloseura is a club of over a thousand members (HPS 2018). The growth of the club in this sense has been quite astonishing in the 21st century, for in 2002 there were some 400 members (Lindbohm 2017, 314); in less than two decades, HPS has almost tripled its member base. After the ‘reboot’ of the club in the 1990s, parents of youth players and other enthusiastic volunteers were in major roles in governing the club and organizing its operations. A testament to their work was the football dome built in Pakila in 2003, which was, and still is, a major boost for the training conditions for HPS, especially in the wintertime. (Lindbohm 2017)

Although the club has grown in such numbers that paid staff has been hired to manage its operations, HPS could not survive without the countless volunteers coaching and leading teams, taking care of the fields, running the club café, and putting the dome up every fall and getting it down every spring. The members and volunteers of the club are also the bond that ties HPS to its local environment in the suburbs of Pakila and Paloheinä. Thus, the importance of the members and the volunteers of the club cannot be overstated.

3.3.1 Organizational structure

Organizationally, HPS is operating like any other voluntary association in Finland. In the annual meetings the members of the club relieve the chairman and the members of the board of their responsibilities for the previous year and elect them for the new year or tenure. The turnover rate has not been very high in recent years; usually one or two new members join the board in the annual meeting.

The chairman and the members of the board then act based on this trust from the members of the club and run the club to their best capabilities, making the major decisions concerning the club operations and setting guidelines for the staff to operate within.

Moreover, all the teams within the club run based on the annual parents' meetings in which the parents of the youth players decide on the financial aspects of their team for the upcoming year. The football-related aspects are led and organized by the club staff. The heads of coaching are responsible for the playing style and training methods within all the teams of HPS.

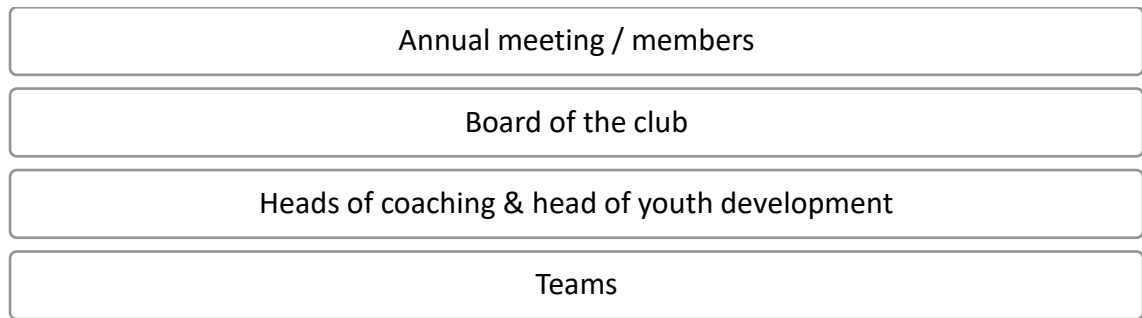


FIGURE 3. The organization chart of Helsingin Palloseura (HPS 2019).

3.3.2 Club management

The club management in HPS is very much in the hands of the chairman and the vice-chairman as well as the head of youth development. The chairmen manage all issues related to the employer side and the board of the club, making sure everything is in order in the big picture and the club is running smoothly. The head of youth development, on the other hand, is responsible for running the everyday operational actions of the club, especially on the football side of matters. He is, for example, in charge of coach recruitment.

The club management has seen major changes during the last decade or so, as before full-time staff was hired, it was the board of the club who oversaw the operational side of the club. With the arrival of more and more staff members, the role of the chairmen of the board has shifted towards being more of a superior to the employees of the club. The board of the club have a supportive role, taking care of back-office duties such as event organization, public relations and field maintenance, thus enabling the staff to fully focus on coaching and player development.

Having several paid staff members responsible for the operational side of the club and a clear and extensive management structure in place, it can be claimed that HPS is a hybrid organization, the hybridity being quite entrenched within the club (Billis 2010, 58-62).

3.3.3 People and their positions

In 2019, the board of HPS consists of the chairman, the vice chairman, ten members of the board and two associate members. For the year 2020, two new members were elected but the overall number of members in the board remained the same. The club also has a treasurer. From late 2019 onwards, the new club secretary will take care of the role of the treasurer. The roles and the areas of responsibility of the members of the board are clearly defined, with one member in charge of the sponsorship and corporate co-operations, and another for development of the training conditions, for example. (HPS 2019) Additionally, smaller commissions are formed within the board to prepare initiatives for the board meetings. (Lindbohm 2017) In short, the role of the chairman and the board of the club is to govern the club and to create the conditions for the paid staff and coaches to focus on the football side of matters.

The current chairman has served in his position for over 10 years already, and in the board of the club he has been since 2000. Similarly, the current vice-chairman (until 2019) has also acted in different roles in the board of the club since 2000. Both have been active members of the club even before their positions of trust, as they have several years of experience of coaching and administrating teams of their own children in HPS. (Lindbohm 2017) It is therefore safe to say that HPS is in the hands of people who know the club through and through. Continuity and consistency are of paramount importance in a club such as HPS where resources are scarce, and the commitment of the members and the volunteers are the cornerstone of the operations.

Since the appointment of the first full-time employee in 2008, the number of staff members at the office of HPS has steadily grown. Today, the club has eight staff members with the following roles: head of youth development, head of coaching for girls, head of coaching for boys, club secretary, youth coordinator and three coaches, of

whom one is also responsible for goalkeeper coaching. Additionally, there are approximately 20 coaches working for the club on fixed-term contracts. (HPS 2019)

3.3.4 Important stakeholders

As a voluntary sport club, the most important stakeholders of HPS are its members. For the board of the club, the most important stakeholders are the parents of the youth players, as they are the “customers” of the club, the ones paying the membership fees. The staff members, on the other hand, raise the youth players as the most important stakeholders, for if they are happy, so are their parents.

In recent years, sponsors and partners have taken their place as major stakeholders of HPS. Previously the club had hardly any sponsors or corporate partners, but today it has a membership card with benefits in a plethora of local companies, several advertisement boards around its fields, and naming rights for the club’s home field. Thanks to the numerous sponsorship deals, the men’s and women’s first teams of HPS are operating mainly on the sponsor revenues.

Both the board of the club and the paid staff agree that the corporate partnerships are the single most valuable aspect in taking the club further forward. This idea is well in line with recent publications in the field. Auvinen and Kuuluvainen (2017), among others, state that as a result of their high potential of local identity and engagement, sport clubs can establish positive effects in their operations, especially on the local level.

The staff members also emphasize the importance of partnerships and co-operation with other football clubs. In women and girls, HPS is working together with HJK, the leading football club in Finland, to offer development opportunities for the most motivated and talented female players. In older youth age groups, both boys and girls, co-operation with neighbour clubs in the form of joint teams is necessary as otherwise there would not be a team at all for the youth players of certain age groups.

According to the current and former chairmen of the board, the city of Helsinki and its sport department or the Football Association of Finland and its Helsinki district organization have not been very active in the rebuilding process of HPS. The chairmen and the board members of the club highlight that they have had to do practically

everything by themselves to get HPS to where it is today. The city of Helsinki, for example, only guaranteed the substantial loan HPS had to take to build its own field. On top of that, the city asks for a steep rent for the land use, even though the club has built the artificial grass pitch, which serves hundreds of Helsinki citizens on a weekly basis. Considering the role of the public sector according to the Sport Act, i.e. building and maintaining infrastructure for sport and supporting voluntary sector organizations, it seems that the city of Helsinki could do better in this sense.

3.3.5 Operational environment

Ever since the 1980s, HPS has been based in the suburbs of Pakila and Paloheinä in Northern Helsinki (Lindbohm 2017). The socio-economic background of the residents in this area has strongly shaped the club during the years as the area is one of the most expensive ones in Helsinki and the residents in the area consist of people of high education and families with children. Thus, a need for a hobby such as football has always been there as well as parents willing and able to pay for their children's hobby.

On the downside, the relatively high socio-economic status of the club members has meant that for most youth players football is not the number one thing in their lives. Weekends and vacations are spent on summer cottages and abroad; the commitment towards the team and the club is often not on an adequate level for high performance or even competitive sport success.

The high educational background of the members and the parents of the youth players has brought some positives, too. When planning the new strategy of the club in the early 2010s, a parent of a youth player, who is a professional in strategic planning, volunteered to assist in the forming of the new club strategy. The members of the board of HPS are also professionals in several different fields and can therefore add value and expertise to the club operations. The phenomenon of volunteer professionals is highly important in the professionalization of volunteer associations, as Ruoranen et al. (2016) note.

3.3.6 Strategies and activities

As a club, HPS has a clear mission of providing football for everyone on their own level, with four core values, trustworthiness, community, happiness and success, guiding their operations towards this mission (HPS 2019). To put these ideas and the club mission into practice, the club has worked on its strategy, with a discrete strategy commission put up to do this work.

Naturally, the main activities of HPS as a football club revolve around playing and practicing football. Organizing and carrying out training sessions for its multiple teams is the bread and butter of HPS. In addition to regular team training sessions, HPS offers its players for example goalkeeper coaching, skill training, and competitive training for more advanced players. In order to get more members in its ranks, HPS organizes kindergarten football, parent-child football, and football schools and camps for young children.

In recent years, the club has also started teams for parents of the youth players as well as senior teams. This trend is well in line with the club motto “Football for everyone – on their own level”, as well as with the community aspect of the club operations.

Furthermore, these sorts of activities tend to get the parents and senior players become more committed to the club, and thus more likely to volunteer for tasks at the club or participate in club events, for example. According to the club staff members, having the whole family as members or even players at the club is also the best way to promote the club.

4 RESEARCH TASK AND METHODOLOGY

In this section, the research task is described; the aim and the objectives of the study are described, and the research questions proposed. Following this, the methodology used in the study is presented and justified. Finally, the reliability and the validity of the study are examined.

4.1 Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of this thesis is to add to our understanding of the operational environment of a voluntary sport club in the process of professionalization. The objectives to achieve this aim were to study professionalization in the voluntary sport sector, and specifically to analyse the recent professionalization process of the football club Helsingin Palloseura.

Hence, a literature review on professionalization in the voluntary sport sector was conducted, and a close inspection of HPS as a club performed in the forms of a review of its history and interviews of the main actors in the club during the last two decades. The findings regarding HPS were then integrated into the theoretical framework that came up in the literature review.

To gain knowledge and understanding of the environment in which HPS is operating and to analyse the recent professionalization process in the club, four research questions, stemming from the discoveries in the literature review, were proposed:

What kind of an organizational culture is there in HPS?

How has the organizational culture changed during the last 20 years?

What kind of operations has the club management implemented during the professionalization process to facilitate the change in the organizational culture?

What kind of challenges has the club faced during this process?

In terms of the definition of organizational culture, there does not seem to be consensus about it among researchers. In one of the most commonly cited definition of the concept, organizational culture is defined as “the accumulated shared learning of the group... which has worked well enough... to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, feel and behave...” (Schein & Schein 2017, 6). Culture, then, is something that is common or shared between members of an organization. (Maitland, Hills & Rhind 2015) For the purposes of this study, this rather simplified definition of organizational culture is applied.

4.2 Research method of the study

A qualitative research method was chosen as the aim of the study is to analyse and understand the phenomenon of professionalization. More specifically, the thesis is a case study, which has become an increasingly important approach in terms of organizational and sport management research (Nagel et al. 2015; Slack & Parent 2006).

Some reasons for this development can be found in the very nature of case studies: the aim to improve understanding of a case or a phenomenon by thoroughly examining it and exploring for potential explanations (Farquhar 2012). Furthermore, the strength of the case study approach in sport management research derives from its ability to describe and explain phenomena of reality and society. Common features and benefits of a case study are its suitability for developing a holistic understanding of a phenomenon and the possibility of expressing relatively general statements about similar cases, based on relatively few observations. (Skille 2013)

Considering the aims of a case study and its increasing importance in organizational and sport management research, it can be argued that the method chosen for this study is appropriate. The suggestions of scholars for further qualitative case studies (e.g. Slack 2014; Van der Roest et al. 2015; Ruoranen et al. 2016) serve to support this argument.

4.2.1 Data collection and analysis

The primary data for this research was collected in two focus group interviews. As the research is a case study on the recent development of a specific club, the sample size was small and rather self-evident; there are only so many persons with a major role in the club during the time period. On my part, the sample was also convenient as I am well acquainted with all the interviewees. Thus, all the practicalities of the interviews were easily dealt with.

Focus group interview was selected as the preferred mode of data collection method for two reasons. Firstly, as the sample size was small and the extensive knowledge of the recent history is only in the hands of a few, it was logical to focus on these few individuals. Secondly, having group interviews can help the interviewees remember better jointly experienced events (Tracy 2012) and generate deeper and richer data than in individual interviews (Rabiee 2004).

The two focus groups consisted of people behind the recent professionalization process of HPS. In one group, there were the current chairman and the vice-chairman of the club as well as the former chairman of the club and the author of the club history. The other group was made up of the three longest-serving staff members of the club. The interviewees are introduced below (Tables 3 & 4), with a list of their major roles in HPS.

It was crucial to have both the volunteer chairmen and board members and the paid staff members interviewed, as the interaction between the two is one of the key elements of professionalization (Ruoranen et al. 2016). Additionally, the two sets of people look at the club from different perspectives, thus offering valuable and differing insights considering this research.

The interview questions were divided in several themes, based on the theoretical frameworks presented in the literature: people and positions, structures and processes, strategies and activities, and operational environment and conditions. In one question, for example, the interviewees were asked to describe the organizational structure of HPS. In addition to the topical questions, the interviewees were first asked to tell about their background and lastly to tell how they see the club developing in the future. The

interview frameworks can be found in the appendices of this work (Appendix 2 in Finnish; Appendix 3 in English).

TABLE 3. Interviewees of the first focus group and their major roles in HPS.

<i>Group 1 – Chairmen & board members</i>	
<i>Interviewee 1</i>	Chairman 2008–; vice-chairman 2000–08; youth team coach c. 1988–99
<i>Interviewee 2</i>	Associate member of the board 2020; vice-chairman 2008–2019; member of the board 2000–08; youth team coach/administrator c. 1992–2009
<i>Interviewee 3</i>	Chairman 2000-08; youth team coach c. 1992–2007
<i>Interviewee 4</i>	Author of the club history 2017; member of the board 1996–97, 2001–11; associate member of the board 2000–01; vice-chairman 1998–99; club development venture 2000; youth team coach c. 1994-2011

TABLE 4. Interviewees of the second focus group and their major roles in HPS.

<i>Group 2 – Paid staff</i>	
<i>Interviewee 5</i>	Head of youth development 2008–
<i>Interviewee 6</i>	Head of coaching for girls 2014–; head of coaching 2009–14; head coach of the men’s first team 2010–12; coach of the men’s first team 2013-16, 1996–97
<i>Interviewee 7</i>	Head of coaching for boys 2016–; coach of the men’s first team 2019–; head of youth coaching 2011-15

The two focus group interviews were conducted in early April 2019 in the offices of HPS, the first in the office next to the club’s home field and the second in the staff office next to the football dome of HPS. The first interview with the chairmen and the board members lasted for 135 minutes, and the other with the club staff for 90 minutes. The interviews were recorded with a recorder, having a mobile phone as a back-up. During the interviews, there was a calm and relaxed atmosphere. The interviewees were

happy to share their opinions and past experiences in the club. At times, the interviews were more like discussions, which certainly aided in acquiring deeper information regarding the club operations, past and present.

Afterwards, the interviews were transcribed. The transcriptions were made using the “clean read” style (Mayring 2014, 45); utterances and decorating words were left out. The transcriptions summed up for a total of 21 A4 pages of text. Qualitative content analysis was chosen as the analysis method. More precisely, a summarizing content analysis was conducted, as the goal was to reduce the material to core contents (Mayring 2014).

Regarding all the themes and topics covered in the interviews, the main points were extracted from the transcribed interviews to form the main findings of this study. This was achieved by reading through the interview transcriptions several times. While reading through the transcriptions, I made notes and highlighted the most relevant comments related to the topic and its theoretical background. The importance of the roles of the chairman and the board members of the early 2000s was highlighted in both interviews, for example. Considering my first and second research questions, it also became clear that there have been major changes and developments in the organizational culture of HPS during the last 20 years.

The main findings of the study were identified based on their prevalence in the interview data. To conceptualize them, features that came up in the theoretical frameworks were used: attitude and commitment, shared leadership, and quality orientation.

4.2.2 Reliability and validity of the study

Reliability and validity are not entirely appropriate concepts when examining the scientific consistency of this study as it is a qualitative one. Instead, we can explore the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the research. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018) Because the study at hand is a case study and I, as a researcher, have close connections to the club studied and to the interviewees, it can be argued that there

are issues with all four constructs when considering them strictly from a scientific point of view.

Credibility suffers as I am so familiar with the case study subject and the interviewees; objectivity is hard to come by. My close familiarity of the club studied may have affected the research process and my interpretations of the data (Sparkes & Smith 2014). Transferability can also be difficult to achieve in a case study, especially considering my extensive prior knowledge of the subject. However, it can be claimed that a qualitative case study of a voluntary sport club could be repeated with a similar research design and with similar focus groups.

Regarding the dependability and the confirmability of the study, I have maintained as objective as possible during the research process, despite my close connections and personal interests concerning the case study subject. Despite my efforts, my assumptions and relationship to the study subject have undeniably influenced the quality of the research (Sparkes & Smith 2014, 19).

Good scientific practices were followed in the interview process, as a consent form and the interview topics were sent to the interviewees beforehand and they were free to leave from the interview situation at any point. The interview transcriptions were handled with confidentiality. Finally, as the study is a master's thesis, the confirmability of the study is taken care of the thesis supervisor checking the study.

5 FINDINGS

After reviewing the relevant literature and introducing the context as well as the methodology of this study, the findings of the study can now be presented. The findings are based on the data acquired from the two focus group interviews with key persons of Helsingin Palloseura, as well as on the history of the club.

As an introduction to the findings section, the current level of professionalism in the club is analysed using methods and indicators covered in the literature review. Then, the main findings of the study are presented. Challenges during the professionalization process of HPS that came up in the interviews are stated. Finally, a look at the future of HPS is taken.

5.1 Professionalism in the club

Based on all the information available on HPS and the interviews with the board and staff members, professionalism in HPS is on a good level for a voluntary sport club. At the end of the 1990s the club had less than 200 members and everything was done by a few active board members. Since today HPS is a club of more than 1000 members and eight employees, one can easily see that the club has progressed and professionalized.

To present the level of professionalism of HPS more accurately, a look at the characteristics of professionalization of Koski and Heikkala (1998) can be taken (Table 2): time, place, resources, criteria of recruitment, attitude and commitment, knowledge, efficiency and quality, responsibility, and power.

The time aspect of professionalization is in order in HPS as there are full-time staff members with formally regulated and monitored working hours. It should be noted, though, that as can be quite common in the voluntary sector, staff members work more than is expected of them, either voluntarily or due to time pressure (Ruuskanen et al. 2013).

The place aspect can also be found, since HPS has its office next to its football dome and another one next to its home field. Currently, the premises are of temporary nature.

The club is planning to build a clubhouse with a proper office next to its home field in the coming years.

Resources are always scarce in a voluntary sport club, but the situation in HPS is satisfactory in this regard. The club has worthy assets and physical infrastructure in the form of its football fields and dome, and the sponsorship deals continue to grow in number and in magnitude. The club also has a foundation to support underprivileged children in their football hobby. Furthermore, HPS has put in place a club strategy to help the board and the staff in their work. The head of coaching has also created an HPS way of playing to help the coaches in their respective work.

To implement the club strategy and the way of playing in practice, HPS has a recruitment process in place. New coaches coming in must fit the club culture and be committed to the HPS way of playing football. The coaches and the heads of coaching currently on the club's payroll are all educated professionals with high level coaching licences. Moreover, the club supports its staff to further educate themselves. For example, the head of youth development took part in UEFA's club management program recently.

As HPS is a voluntary sport club, attitude and commitment are everything. The club would not be where it is today were it not for the commitment of the chairmen and the board members of the 1990s and 2000s. The same attitude has still resisted in the 2010s as staff members have come in the picture. There is undoubtedly a high level of engagement from the side of the chairman and the board of the club to staff members, all the way down to individual members of the club volunteering for all sorts of tasks.

With more and more professionals joining the club, both in the board of the club and in the office, the amount of knowledge has risen significantly. The staff are competent and use up-to-date information from scientific research in their decisions, regarding the HPS way of playing, for example. The board of the club and the volunteers in the club consist of professionals in several fields, such as marketing and communications; thanks to this, the club has, among others, a YouTube channel named HPS TV and a club membership card.

It can be said, then, that HPS has become a tempting option for corporations to communicate social responsibility (Jalonen et al. 2018), and consequently, the economic prospects of the club have improved (Smith & Vesterbeek 2007). When the internal

resources are not adequate, the club buys the services outside. For example, an engineering agency was used in the building of the club's home field.

Efficiency and quality of products and operations can be hard to achieve, and measure, in voluntary sport clubs. The voluntary nature of the chairman's and the board members' work means that the club work is at times overtaken by their actual work. Furthermore, efficient co-operation between paid staff and volunteers is easier said than done. However, based on the group interviews and my own experiences as a player of the club for more than a decade, it can be argued that HPS runs quite efficiently and the most important stakeholders, the players, have it all good in the club.

The members seem to be overall satisfied with the club operations, as surveys conducted by the club have showed good results in the satisfaction of the members and the parents of the youth players. The parents have also been giving positive feedback to the staff members for the organization of club camps and other events, which is quite a clear sign of quality operations.

The responsibility of the club is applauded by the staff; the club is steadily run and is a good place for its employees. In terms of finances, the club has for many years had its own qualified accountant as treasurer, taking care of the club's accounts and financial statements together with an accounting company. On the social side, with more than 900 youth players (Lindbohm 2017, 347), the club is responsible for offering them a safe and supportive environment, which it seems to be succeeding in according to the feedback and the survey results.

As a voluntary sport club, HPS is 'owned' by its members: in the annual meetings the members have the power to vote for the next chairman of the board and for the members of the board of the club. The members also have the power to decide which direction the club should be heading. In terms of operational power, the chairman and the board of the club lead the club based on the mandate given to them by the members in the annual meeting. The staff members do not hold any power, per se; they simply execute orders and guidelines presented by the chairman and the board of the club.

To further analyse the level of professionalism in HPS, the operations of the club can be portrayed through the three main characteristics of professionalization presented by Ruoranen et al. (2016, 64): changed management philosophy, functional differentiation and specialization, and application of management tools. The management philosophy

of Helsingin Palloseura has certainly changed since the late 1990s and early 2000s; the club has a clear strategy according to which its operations are planned and executed. A key part of the club strategy has been, and still is, quality. The club aims to achieve this by basing its decisions on rationality and efficiency, by using scientific research in the development of the playing style and training methods within the club, for example.

It is evident that there is functional differentiation and specialization in HPS. There are paid staff members as well as clearly defined and differentiated positions both within the staff and in the board of the club. Furthermore, the governance of the club is balanced between volunteer chairmen and board members and paid staff members. The club is also orientated towards competence, which can be seen in the recruitment process of the club.

Finally, several management tools are applied in HPS. Financial reporting can be mentioned, although HPS as a registered association is legally obligated to present a financial statement annually. The Finnish tax authorities have become stricter towards voluntary organizations in recent years; thus, all capital flows must be properly documented.

In its administration, HPS uses a cloud service whereby all its documents are digitally stored. Communication-wise, the club has several social media accounts and its own YouTube channel HPS TV for external communication. For internal communication, HPS is using a service for sport clubs via which club information can be sent to all members. It also acts as a member database and a tool for member fee invoices. Moreover, the service enables the upkeep of a club-wide calendar in which club events and matches of the men's and women's first teams are marked; an important function in the fostering of the club community spirit and togetherness.

5.2 Main findings of the study

Based on the data collected, the main findings of the study relate to the beginning of the professionalization process of Helsingin Palloseura in the turn of the century, and especially to the importance of the attitude and commitment of the chairmen and the

board members. More recently, the shared leadership in the club has had a major role in the continued development of HPS.

During the interviews, it became clear that the volunteer chairmen and members of the board of the club have been key figures in the development of the club, starting from the historical low of HPS at the end of the 1990s. Then, the small group of active parents of youth players decided to make the club a good place for local children to play football as a hobby. Quality of operations was installed as a key figure in the club strategy from day one, and that orientation towards quality set up the club for future success.

The more recent history of the club is that of volunteer chairmen and members of the board acting together with paid staff members. HPS has managed to avoid the typical pitfalls of this co-operation. All the current key persons in the club have been in their positions for a decade or so, thus making long-term growth and development of the club possible.

5.2.1 Attitude and commitment

The attitude and commitment of the chairmen and the members of the board of the club have been key in the development of HPS in the 21st century. Prior to hiring full-time staff members, it was the chairman and the board members who did also the operative work in the club. All of them first got involved in the club operations due to family connections as they all had their children playing in HPS. One can better understand the level of their attitude and commitment from their comments on the additional reasons that made them join the board of the club.

“The atmosphere that everyone can play and kids come here to have a hobby, that it is our job to offer them that opportunity.” (I3.)

Already then, the board members had a clear idea what needed to be done to facilitate growth once more.

“Back in 1999 when we started to build the new HPS with the new board, some tough strategic decisions were made that if we want the club back on track and growing again, we need facilities and to improve coaching. So we started to work on that almost immediately.” (I2.)

It is evident that the role of the chairman and the board members was crucial in the early phases of “the new HPS”. Their attitude and commitment have not been left noticed on the staff side, either.

“It makes you wonder in awe when you think that they are volunteers managing the club, and still they can do all this. Hats off.” (I5.)

The volunteers in the club seem to be rather committed as well. All the teams of the club have volunteers as team administrators and treasurers. Their vital work makes it possible for the professional coaches to focus solely on the coaching matters, which is not always the case in sport clubs.

“They invest a lot of their time here, valuable work so that the coaches can focus only on coaching.” (I5.)

Based on these findings, the first and second research questions regarding the organizational culture of HPS and its recent changes can be answered. It seems that the volunteers in the club are very committed to do their job as well as possible. The chairman and the board of the club lead the way in this regard, as they have done for the past 20 years.

There have been major organizational changes in HPS during this time. More people have joined the board of the club and new staff members have been hired on a relatively regular basis since the first one in 2008. The nature of the volunteer work has also changed. Earlier, teams were quite individually managed and active parents of youth

players organized tournaments to fund the operations of the teams. At present, the club organizes several tournaments annually and the role of the volunteers is more of a supportive one.

Times have changed, but the attitude and commitment of the volunteers in the club remain on a similarly high level. The changes in the organizational culture can best be described using the archetypes of Kikulis et al. (1992). Organizationally, HPS has evolved from a kitchen table organization to a boardroom organization. In practice, this has meant that instead of a few active volunteers doing busy work, HPS is led and managed by experienced volunteer board members and professional staff members. Moreover, the club operations are based on an explicit and well-planned strategy.

5.2.2 Shared leadership

The roles of the chairman and the board of the club have changed with staff members being hired. Nowadays, one of the main responsibilities of the chairmen is the role of superior. The chairman and the vice-chairman have adapted to this role rather well. They have also been committed to improving their performance in this new role. The staff members highlight the importance of trust.

“A lot is depending on that the board trusts us. The trust must be there. That’s why we have been here for so long. That’s the role of the board.” (I6.)

The quite recently adopted role of superior has brought more responsibility to the chairman of the club. In the operational side of matters, conversely, more is asked of the staff members. For the club to be successful, it is vital that the cooperation between the two parties works well. The third research question regarding operations to facilitate changes in the organizational culture is hereby answered as well.

“The role of the chairmen as superiors has become more intense. We have monthly meetings, development discussions, the communication has improved. That’s good.”

(I7.)

As the staff members do not have any decision making power or responsibility over other than their own work, all the responsibility lies within the chairman and the board of the club. Despite this great power and responsibility, it is necessary that the chairman and the board members allow the staff members, especially the professional coaches, to take charge of the football-related matters in the club.

“The board sets up the framework of what can and what cannot be done, but we are very much responsible for what happens out there on the field every day.” (I7.)

It is this combination of volunteer chairmen and board members and professional staff that has helped HPS to grow and develop as a club in recent years. The division of work has been successfully implemented in that the chairmen and the board of the club are responsible for the overall operations of the club and its strategy, with the day-to-day work left to the hands of the staff members.

5.2.3 Quality orientation

Ever since a new action plan was presented in 2002, quality has been one of the key features in the operations of HPS (Lindbohm 2017). Quality can be defined in many ways, but in this context, it relates to the business-like operations, such as creating and implementing a well-planned strategy. In addition, the attitude of individuals to do a good job is strongly related to quality orientation. (Ruoranen et al. 2016)

“It’s important that we want to progress, to do things better... A developing club, there is a will to develop...” (I7.)

The aspirations and orientation towards quality have led to e.g. HPS having multiple artificial grass fields of its own. HPS has also successfully launched its own way of playing and practising football. The systematic organization of coaching is indeed where the orientation towards quality manifests itself; offering football activities is, after all, the main function of HPS. The clear organization of coaching and the HPS way of playing have helped the work of volunteer coaches in all the teams in the club and increased the quality in the football operations of the club. Likewise, the earlier mentioned supportive role of the volunteers makes it possible to increase quality in the daily operations.

“The key to quality is that the coaches can focus only on coaching.” (I7.)

In terms of marketing and communications, HPS has for a few years now had its own YouTube channel HPS TV and a membership card. Both two functions have been mainly implemented by volunteers of the club. For example, the club membership card, the HPS card, was launched, and the subsequent sponsorship network was set up by one long-term volunteer and board member of the club. Now HPS has a wide array of corporate partners, which helps to fund the operations of the men’s and women’s first teams.

“We have a sponsor for our home field... which gives the name to the field. All those ads we have there, the HPS card... and what it creates through the partners and their interest towards HPS. How we market them, that’s how the advertisement side has started. And they have noticed that they get more customers, their sales increase, they are willing to invest in this. That’s how it started and it’s growing all the time.” (I2.)

All in all, quality is instilled in the operations of HPS. The club strategy sets up the framework on which all the decisions are based. Having same persons in key roles for a long time has enabled the club to set a high standard in terms of quality in its operations. The systematic implementation of long-term plans has greatly developed the club during the first two decades of the 21st century.

“Being systematic and consistent year after year, that’s where it’s emphasized.” (I5.)

5.3 Challenges during the professionalization process

Regarding the fourth and final research question about challenges faced during the professionalization process, one issue clearly arises. Since the appointment of the first full-time staff member and the subsequent change in the role of the volunteers, more work has accumulated for fewer people, especially for the head of youth development. The presence of a paid employee lowered the threshold for the volunteers to seek assistance and delegate their work to the paid employee. The same phenomenon has occurred with the professional coaches in some of the teams of the club.

“At first in a new role, the tasks just kept on accumulating, and a few years ago we had to start to consider his well-being. Now we have properly gone through his tasks and specified what in fact are his tasks.” (I1.)

“Coaches come to work here. A negative consequence is the ... accumulation of work for these paid coaches.” (I1.)

HPS recently hired a club secretary to assist the head of youth development and share his workload. Likewise, a new full-time coach started in his position. These are important steps in tackling the challenges that HPS has faced during the professionalization process. Finding a balance between the voluntary chairman and the board of the club, the volunteers in the club, and the staff members of the club is not simple. But it certainly helps to have more people sharing the workload.

5.4 The future of Helsingin Palloseura

When looking at the current state of the club, the future of HPS looks bright. The chairmen and the staff members concur by stating that the club has potential to further add to its number of members and to develop the club. Organizationally, the club has a solid structure in place to facilitate future growth and development. Moreover, further marketing efforts can take the corporate relations and sponsorship revenues of the club to another level, thus enabling future investments, first and foremost the clubhouse.

However, certain challenges also arise. The long-serving chairman of the board of HPS is due to leave his position in 2020, which means that changes will happen. It is highly important that the handover of power is implemented smoothly so as not to cause any harm or inconveniences to the club operations.

The staff members of the club take forth the issues of club profiling and professionalization of coaching as possible challenges in the future. Profiling the club has been constantly discussed. By defining itself as a parent club even more clearly than it currently does, HPS could operate more efficiently and with more clarity. Combined with partnerships with other clubs with differing profiles, such as HJK as is currently done in girls and women, HPS could offer even for the most motivated and skilful youth players the path to the top where they can reach their full potential as football players.

The challenges posed by the professionalization of coaching relate to the least motivated youth players who might drop off if their team is too competitive to their liking. A voluntary sport club such as HPS cannot afford to lose too many of its members mainly for financial, but also for community reasons; a person who has played for the club as a youth player is likely to bring his/her future children to join the club. As the scale of player talent and motivation is wide, it is challenging for HPS to live by its motto of offering football for everyone on their own level. How the club manages to tackle this challenge in the coming years will be a key factor in determining whether HPS can further grow and develop from its current state.

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this final section of the study, the professionalization process HPS has undergone recently is analysed based on the reviewed literature on the topic. Following the analysis, the professionalization process of the club is presented in a framework. Based on the professionalization process of HPS and the theoretical frameworks covered in the literature review, a model of professionalization for voluntary sport clubs is proposed.

Then, some conclusive remarks are made. The limitations regarding the study are stated and explained. Finally, topics and study subjects are suggested for future research.

6.1 Analysis of the professionalization process of Helsingin Palloseura

Following the characteristics of professionalization of Koski and Heikkala (1998), the professionalization process of HPS has been built on a foundation of attitude and commitment, place and resources, and efficiency and quality. Additionally, by using the three main characteristics of professionalization (Ruoranen et al. 2016), it can be argued that the professionalization process of HPS started with the changed management philosophy at the turn of the millennia. Especially strategic planning was key in the rebuilding of the club; the decision to focus on youth development by offering football as a hobby for local children was the turning point in the recent history of HPS.

Furthermore, the importance of the attitude and the commitment of the chairman and the members of the board of the time cannot be overstated. As presented by Ruoranen et al. (2016), an attitude of individuals to do a good job, or a professional job, and the resultant organizational culture are essential aspects of professionalization. Especially in a sport club such as HPS, which is based on voluntarism, the organizational culture and the attitudes and motivations of the volunteers are vital in the process of professionalization.

As the number of members started to grow following the restructuring of the club, the need for club facilities grew as well. Subsequent investments in the operational environment of HPS enabled the club to facilitate and foster this growth. Having fields

owned and operated by the club itself radically improved the training conditions of its teams. Moreover, rental fees from the fields proved a stable revenue stream for the club.

It was then possible to hire full-time staff, which led to more efficiency and quality in the club operations and activities. Previously, all the teams of HPS operated rather individually and were mainly coached by volunteers. Following the appointments of full-time staff members, the teams have been coached by professional coaches based on the HPS way of playing, created and implemented by the head of coaching. The professionalization process of HPS is presented in Figure 4.



FIGURE 4. The professionalization process of Helsingin Palloseura.

Following the changed management philosophy, functional differentiation and specialization (Ruoranen et al. 2016) soon followed with differentiation of positions first in the board of the club and later among the paid staff. Furthermore, competence orientation was adopted in the club as more and more professionals were hired and elected to the board of the club. With an increasing number of staff members, balanced governance was introduced as the club operations were shared between volunteers and paid staff.

Regarding balanced governance, it must be noted that most of the volunteers in the board of HPS, especially the chairman and the vice-chairman, have been at the club for a long period of time. The same applies to the paid professionals in the club staff. Consequently, the relationship between them is good, which is not always the case between volunteers and paid professionals (Shilbury & Ferkins 2011; Dowling et al. 2014). Moreover, the longevity and long-term planning in HPS was mentioned as a key aspect of the club operations in the interviews. Changes in personnel have been minimal

if non-existent and thus, the long-term growth and development of the club has been possible.

The third characteristic, application of management tools (Ruoranen et al. 2016), has become increasingly important as the number of members of the club as well as the number of staff members have starkly increased in the last decade or so. As the scope of operations grows, having good controlling and administrative processes is adamant. The importance of communication cannot be forgotten, either. Communicating with over 1000 members and several stakeholder groups must be done properly and professionally in order to succeed.

6.2 A model of professionalization for voluntary sport clubs

Based on the literature reviewed and the analysis of the recent professionalization process of HPS, a model of professionalization for voluntary sport clubs can be proposed. First and foremost, come the notion and the will to professionalize; the changed management philosophy (Ruoranen et al. 2016) and the attitude and commitment (Koski & Heikkala 1998). As the organization is voluntary by its nature, the idea of and the motivation for significant changes such as professionalization must come from within. Additionally, strategic planning, or strategic orientation (Ruoranen et al. 2016), is key in setting the club up for professionalization. To professionalize can hardly occur by accident; planning and organization according to a well-implemented strategy is necessary.

Operational environment is another crucial element of professionalization. Resources are extremely scarce for voluntary sport clubs and most sports require having proper facilities. Thus, how the club can tackle the challenges in its operational environment can go a long way in deciding whether it can successfully professionalize or not. In many recent cases, also for HPS, the issue has been solved by the club building its own facilities. This way, the club does not need to pay high rental fees for third parties. Instead, it can rent its facilities for other clubs and entities for profit.

In terms of operational environment, voluntary sport clubs should also understand their potential role as value creators and communicators of social responsibility (Jalonen et

al. 2018). As Smith and Westerbeek (2007) state, sport clubs can act for the benefit of their organization in terms of economic prospects and maximize the social benefits at the same time. Because of their high potential of local identity and engagement, sport clubs can establish positive effects in their operations, especially on the local level (Auvinen & Kuuluvainen 2017). This applies to voluntary sport clubs as well, meaning that in order to professionalize and to acquire more resources, voluntary sport clubs should not neglect their potential in value creation.

Voluntary sport clubs would not exist without the members and the volunteers of the club. However, a sport club can only go so far with volunteers. In order to professionalize, additional input is needed in terms of human resources (Nagel et al. 2015). Therefore, the third major part of the suggested model of professionalization (Figure 5) is people and positions, adapted from the model of Ruoranen et al. (2016).

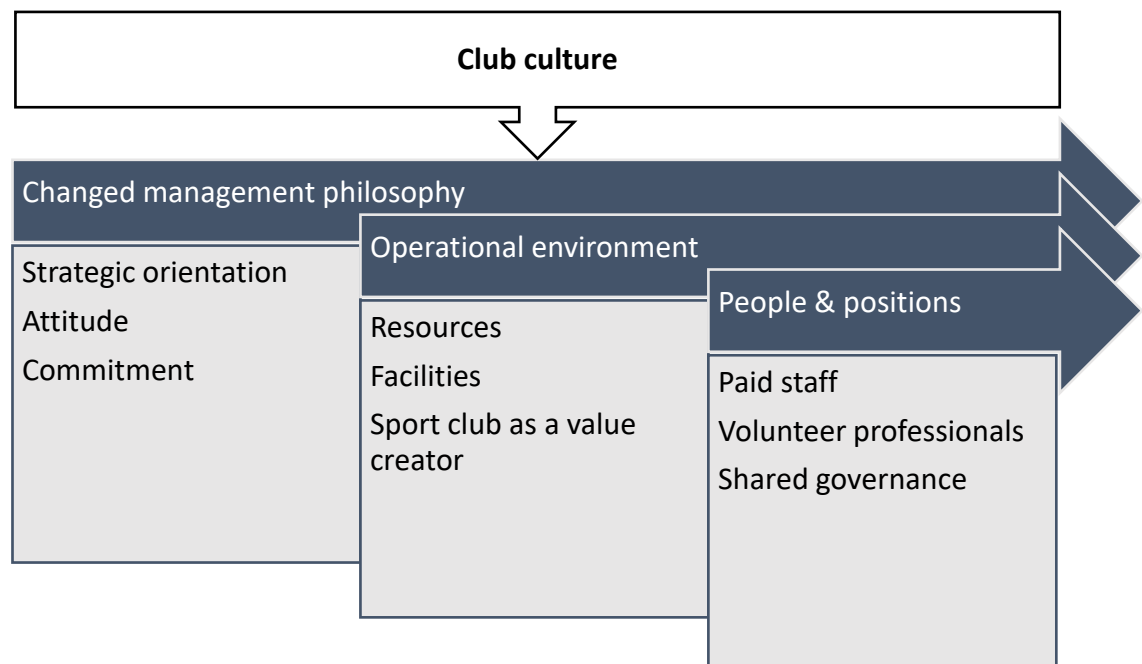


FIGURE 5. A model of professionalization for voluntary sport clubs, based on the work of Ruoranen et al. (2016), Koski & Heikkala (1998) and Haltia & Jalonen (2015).

For as long as the operations of the club remain small-scale and the number of members is relatively low, having only volunteers is adequate. As the club grows, though, the

amount of work required to run the club properly grows as well. Consequently, paid staff is usually hired to share the workload, and to develop the club. While having paid staff is often necessary at some point for voluntary sport clubs, it can also create problems at the club: the co-operation between volunteers and paid staff can have its issues (Shilbury & Ferkins 2011; Dowling et al. 2014). Nevertheless, having capable people at the club, be it volunteers in the board or paid professionals in the office, is crucial in the professionalization of a voluntary sport club.

Intertwining these features of professionalization together is the organization culture, featured in the work of Ruoranen et al. (2016). As voluntarism is the basis of a voluntary sport club, the organizational culture in the club and the attitudes and motivations of the volunteers, and paid staff as well, are of paramount importance in the process of professionalization. As resources are limited, an attitude of individuals to do a good job, or a professional job (Ruoranen et al. 2016), is needed in the voluntary sport club willing to professionalize.

To bring all the major aspects of professionalization together, a model of professionalization for voluntary sport clubs is proposed (Figure 5). There is quite a lot of variation in voluntary sport clubs and thus, the model cannot suit every one of them. Nevertheless, it can be used as a guideline for a voluntary sport club willing to grow and develop, and to professionalize.

6.3 Conclusions

In this study, the prevailing trend of professionalization in the voluntary sport sector was examined by looking at the case of Helsingin Palloseura and its recent professionalization process. The study covered the historical background of sport and football in Finland and presented some of the academic findings on the topic of professionalization.

The main finding of the study was the importance of the commitment of the chairman and the board members in the professionalization process of a voluntary sport club, especially in the initiation of the process. Likewise, it was highlighted that shared leadership becomes increasingly important as the voluntary sport club begins to hire

paid employees. In an operational environment where resources are scarce, efficient cooperation is all important.

6.3.1 Limitations of the study

This study is not without its limitations. Firstly, it is a case study on one single voluntary sport club. Thus, the findings have very limited transferability and generalizability. Secondly, the primary data for the research was collected in two focus group interviews. Therefore, interviewing more current and former members of the board, perhaps in individual interviews as well, could have enhanced the credibility of the results, and of the study in general.

Moreover, the objectivity of myself as the researcher can be questioned. Although well prepared and considerate on this issue, my long-withstanding connection to the club and personal relationship with the interviewees has undoubtedly affected my stance on some of the topics and events in the club history during the research process.

In hindsight, one can easily point out several aspects of the study that could have been implemented in a different way. Instead of listing them all out, I opt to state that overall I am satisfied with this study and the research process. The aim of this thesis was achieved as the operational environment of a voluntary sport club in the process of professionalization was analysed. Key findings were presented and discussed, and the case of Helsingin Palloseura was successfully added to the professionalization literature.

Furthermore, my motivation and interest towards the study and its subject remained high throughout the process. However, I would rather have completed the study in one go; due to other responsibilities, there was a break of several months in the research process.

6.3.2 Suggestions for future research

As far as future research is concerned, more case studies on voluntary sport clubs are suggested. Researchers agree that further case studies and the perceptions of practitioners offer highly needed support for theoretical concepts of professionalization (Slack 2014; Van der Roest et al. 2015; Ruoranen et al. 2016). International focus in the field has been on sport federations. The scale and the mode of operations of sport federations and umbrella organizations are often very much different to those of sport clubs. Therefore, there is high demand for studies on the professionalization of sport clubs. The sport clubs are also the organizations and the environment where most people practice sport.

Sport clubs are all different in terms of size and operational environment. Consequently, conducting several case studies on sport clubs would result in several different results and findings. However, by reviewing several case studies on sport clubs, for example within one country such as Finland, it could be possible to find out generalizable results and best practices in the field. This way, more specific and comprehensive models and frameworks for sport club professionalization could be proposed.

Finally, the recent developments in the voluntary sport sector, and the voluntary sector in general, such as hybridization and increasing demands towards voluntary organizations, make professionalization an interesting area for research. The changing role of the voluntary sport clubs, e.g. that of a service provider, also highlight the need for further research. Only by understanding the operational environment of the voluntary sport clubs better can we make them more efficient and successful.

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Appendix 1. Information letter and consent from for interviewees.

Tiedotuskirje ja suostumuslomake fokusryhmähaastatteluun osallistuvalla

Jyväskylän yliopisto
Liikuntatieteellinen tiedekunta
Pro Gradu -tutkielma
Ohjaaja: Hanna Vehmas
Tutkija: Olli Annala

Suomalaisen urheilun vapaaehtoissektorin ammattimaistuminen – Tapaustutkimus: Helsingin Palloseura

Tutkimuksessa käsitellään suomalaisen urheilun vapaaehtoissektorin muutosta ja ammattimaistumista. Tutkimuksessa keskitytään Helsingin Palloseuran toiminnan muutokseen ja ammattimaistumiseen 2000-luvun aikana.

Osallistujan suostumus

Osallistuminen tutkimukseen on täysin vapaaehtoista. Osallistujalla on fokusryhmähaastattelun aikana täysi oikeus poistua haastattelusta ilman, että siitä aiheutuu minkäänlaisia seuraamuksia. Osallistuja saa itse päättää käytetäänkö tutkielmassa hänen nimeään tai muita tunnistettavia tietoja.

Haastattelu nauhoitetaan aineiston litterointia varten. Haastatteluaineistoa käsitellään luottamuksellisesti ja se tulee olemaan ainoastaan tutkijan käytössä. Aineisto tuhoetaan käsittelyn jälkeen asianmukaisesti. Haastateltavalla on oikeus saada lisätietoa tutkimuksesta tutkijalta missä vaiheessa tahansa.

Suostun osallistumaan tutkimukseen:

Päiväys

Osallistujan allekirjoitus ja nimenselvennys

Nimeäni saa käyttää tutkimuksessa

Suostumuksen vastaanottaja:

Päiväys

Tutkijan allekirjoitus ja nimenselvennys

Appendix 2. Interview framework in Finnish.

Tausta

1. Nimi
2. Asema(t)/rooli(t) ja vuodet organisaatiossa
3. Koulutus
4. Mikä sai lähtemään mukaan seuratoimintaan?

Ihmiset ja asemat

Johtokunta

1. Millainen on seuran johtokunnan rooli?
2. Mitkä ovat johtokunnan tärkeimmät työtehtävät?
3. Miten johtokunnan työskentely on muuttunut vuosien varrella?

Vapaaehtoiset

4. Millainen rooli vapaaehtoisilla on seurassa? (toimenkuvat, aktiivisuus)
5. Onko vapaaehtoistyöskentely muuttunut vuosien varrella?

Palkattu henkilöstö

6. Millainen rooli palkatulla henkilöstöllä on seurassa?
 - a. Mitkä ovat palkatun henkilöstön työtehtävät seurassa?
7. Miten palkatun henkilöstön toimenkuvat ovat muuttuneet vuosien varrella?

Jäsenet

8. Millainen on jäsenten rooli seurassa?
9. Onko jäsenten rooli muuttunut vuosien varrella? (esim. innokas talkoilija vs. maksava asiakas)

Sidosryhmät

10. Mitkä sidosryhmät ovat tärkeimmät HPS:n toiminnan kannalta?
11. Onko tilanne sidosryhmien osalta muuttunut vuosien varrella?

Rakenteet ja järjestelmät

Hallintorakenne

1. Millainen on HPS:n organisaatorakenne?
 - a. Onko seurassa toimikuntia? Jos, minkälaisia?
 - b. Millainen on päätöksentekoprosessi?
2. Miten hallintorakenne on muuttunut vuosien varrella? Miten sitä voisi kehittää?

Seurajohtaminen

3. Mitkä ovat seuraajohtajan tärkeimmät tehtävät?
 - a. Kuinka merkittäviä osa-alueita ovat:
 - i. toimenkuvat ja vastuualueet
 - ii. seuran talous
 - iii. seuran strategia
 - iv. ulkoinen ja sisäinen viestintä
 - v. yhteistyökumppanuudet?
4. Mitä ominaisuuksia seuraajohtajalta vaaditaan?
5. Mitkä ovat suurimmat haasteet seuraajohtamisessa?
6. Onko seuraajohtaminen muuttunut vuosien varrella?
7. Millainen olisi ideaaliorganisaatorakenne seuraajohtajan näkökulmasta?

Ammattimaistuminen

8. Miten kuvailisit termin ”ammattimainen urheiluseura”?
9. Millä tasolla on HPS:n hallinnon ammattimaisuus? (johtaminen, suunnitelmallisuus, toimintatavat, seuranta yms.)
10. Miten HPS on ammattimaistunut vuosien varrella? Onko kehityskulku ollut tavoitteellista alusta alkaen? (Ts. tehtiinkö joskus päätös, että nyt palkataan ammattilaisia ja jaetaan johtoryhmän tehtävät tehokkaammin? Vai onko prosessi ollut vähittäinen?)
11. Millaisia haasteita ammattimaistuminen on tuottanut seurajohtajalle?

Strategiat ja aktiviteetit

Seuratoiminta

1. Mitä toimintoja HPS on järjestänyt vuosien varrella? (1990-luvulta alkaen)
 - a. Kuvailkaa lyhyesti. (Esim. talenttivalmennus, kesäleirit, futiskoulut)
2. Mikä on HPS:n missio? (Tärkein tehtävä ja olemassaolon syy)
 - a. Onko tässä tapahtunut muutoksia vuosien varrella?
3. Mikä on seuran visio?
 - a. Onko tässä tapahtunut muutoksia vuosien varrella?
4. Onko HPS:lla seuran kehittämiseen liittyviä asiakirjoja?
 - a. Toimintasuunnitelma
 - b. Talousarvio
 - c. Toimintakäsikirja tms.
 - d. Viestintä- tai markkinointisuunnitelma
 - e. Muita dokumentteja
5. Miten seuran strategia laaditaan?
 - a. Millä tavoin tavoitteiden toteutumista seurataan?

Valmennus

6. Miten valmennustoiminta on organisoitu?
 - a. Miten toiminta on muuttunut palkatun henkilöstön myötä?
7. Miten HPS:n valmennuslinja/pelitapa on otettu vastaan seuran sisällä eri joukkueissa?

- a. Miten pelitavan jalkauttaminen on onnistunut?
8. Mitkä ovat valmennustoiminnan keskeisimmät haasteet?

Yhteistyökumppanuudet

9. Mikä on yhteistyökumppanuuksien rooli ja merkittävyys HPS:n toiminnassa?
 - a. Miten tämä on muuttunut vuosien varrella?

Toimintaympäristö ja olosuhteet

1. Millaisessa toimintaympäristössä HPS toimii? (tilat & olosuhteet, yhteiskunta, poliittinen ilmapiiri)
2. Mitkä tekijät vaikuttavat toimintaympäristöönne?
3. Minkälainen toimintaympäristö on hyväksi seuratoiminnalle?
4. Onko toimintaympäristössä tapahtunut muutoksia vuosien varrella?

Yhteenveto

1. Mihin suuntaan uskotte HPS:n kehittyvän?
2. Muuta lisättävää?

Appendix 3. Interview framework in English.

Background

1. Name
2. Position(s)/role(s) and years in HPS
3. Education
4. What made you join HPS as a volunteer/employee?

People and positions

The board of the club

1. How would you describe the role of the board of the club?
2. What are the most important tasks of the members of the board of the club?
3. How has the work of the board of the club changed along the years?

Volunteers

4. How would you describe the role of the volunteers in HPS?
(tasks/responsibilities, activity)
5. Has the work of the volunteers changed along the years?

Paid staff

6. How would you describe the role of the paid staff in HPS?
 - a. What are the tasks of the paid staff in the club?
7. How have the roles and responsibilities of the paid staff changed in the club along the years?

Members

8. How would you describe the role of the members in the club?
9. Has the role of the members changed along the years? (volunteer activity, adoption of the role of a customer etc.)

Stakeholders

10. Which stakeholders are the most important ones for the club?
11. Has the situation regarding stakeholders changed along the years?

Structures and processes

Organizational structure

1. How would you describe the organizational structure of HPS?
 - a. Are there commissions in the club? If yes, what kind of commissions?
 - b. How would you describe the decision making process in the club?

2. How has the organizational structure of the club changed along the years? How could it be developed?

Club management

3. What are the most important tasks of a club director?
 - a. What is the importance of
 - i. roles and responsibilities
 - ii. club finances
 - iii. strategy of the club
 - iv. external and internal communication
 - v. partnerships?
4. What kind of attributes are required from a club director?
5. What are the greatest challenges in club management?
6. Has club management changed along the years?
7. What kind of an organizational structure would be ideal from a club director's point of view?

Professionalization

8. How would you describe the term 'professional sport club'?
9. On what level is the professionalism of the governance of HPS? (leadership, planning, policies, control etc.)
10. How has HPS professionalized as a club throughout the years? Has the development been goal-directed from the beginning? (I.e. was a decision made to hire professionals and divide the roles and responsibilities of the board members more efficiently? Or has the process been gradual?
11. What kind of challenges has the club management faced due to professionalization?

Strategies and activities

Club operation

1. What kind of activities has HPS organized along the years? (since the 1990s)
 - a. Describe them shortly. (E.g. talent coaching, summer camps, football schools etc.)
2. What is the mission of HPS? (The most important function and the reason for existence)
 - a. Have there been changes in this regard along the years?
3. What is the vision of the club?
 - a. Have there been changes in this regard along the years?
4. Does HPS have documents concerning the development of the club?
 - a. Annual report
 - b. Budget
 - c. Action plan
 - d. Communication and/or marketing plan
 - e. Other documents

5. How is the strategy of the club devised?
 - a. In what way(s) is progress monitored?

Coaching

6. How is the coaching of the club organized?
 - a. How has the operation changed with paid staff in the picture?
7. What kind of reception has the 'HPS way of playing' received in all the teams within the club?
 - a. How has the implementation of the club playing style worked out?
8. Which are the key challenges in the coaching of the club?

Partnerships

9. How would you describe the role and significance of partnerships in the operation of HPS?
 - a. How has the situation changed along the years?

Operational environment and conditions

1. How would you describe the environment in which HPS is operating? (facilities and conditions, society, political atmosphere)
2. Which factors affect your operational environment?
3. What kind of an operational environment is good for sport club operations?
4. Have there been changes in the operational environment of HPS along the years?

Conclusion

1. How do you see HPS developing in the future?
2. Do you have anything to add?