

# EASM 2022

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## 30<sup>th</sup> European Sport Management Conference

Bridging Sport, Tourism & Leisure Management

## BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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## **TOWARDS PROFESSIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY**

### **ORGANISATIONS: TRANSFORMATION OF GRASSROOTS SPORTS CLUBS IN FINNISH TEAM SPORTS**

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#### Aim and research questions

The aim of this study is to produce deeper understanding on the professionalisation of Finnish grassroots sports clubs since the 2000s. Research questions are, (1) how the research-defined forms of professionalisation have emerged in grassroots sports clubs and (2) how the actors of the clubs have perceived professionalisation in their daily work and development of club activities. While answering to these questions the study will also describe the ongoing transformation of Finnish sport clubs from mutual benefit, volunteer organisations towards professionally managed, service delivery organisations.

#### Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Professionalisation of sport organisations has been an interest area of sport management research for the last three decades. Previous research has identified different dimensions of the phenomenon, such as changes in organisation structures and governance, specialisation, formalisation, and transition from volunteer work to work conducted by paid employees (Dowling et. al. 2014). In addition, the causes, forms, and consequences of professionalisation have been defined (Nagel et al. 2015). In this study, we concentrate on examining the forms and consequences of professionalisation in grassroots sport clubs but are also interested on the club actors' own interpretations of the phenomenon.

From organisational transformation point of view professionalisation can be interpreted as a manifestation of hybridization, mixing of practices and operational principles of different societal sectors (Billis 2010). In this study professionalised sport clubs are interpreted as hybrid organisations, which have roots in the third sector, but have also adopted to their activities characteristics from other societal sectors. Such characteristics include, for example, taking on paid staff and businessification of club activities. In Finland the amount of full-time paid staff in sports clubs has doubled in ten years, from 2006 to 2016. Additionally, market logic has become more dominant in the organisation of club activities (Koski & Mäenpää 2018.)

#### Research Design, Methodology and Data Analysis

This sub-study is a part of larger research project on professionalisation of five Finnish team sports: ice hockey, floorball, Finnish baseball, basketball and football. In Finland, professionalisation has been recognized as one of the key trends in the field of sport club activities in the last decades (Koski & Mäenpää 2018). However, there is scantily research, how the professionalisation has progressed in different sports and how the club actors themselves perceive the phenomenon.

This study utilises multiple case study, which has not been the mainstream method in analysing professionalism. With this method the study can observe themes and developments shared in various sports contexts, not only in one specific sport. Five professionalized grassroots sport clubs from the different team sports are examined. Purposeful sampling was applied in the selection of clubs. Firstly, researcher selected potential clubs from the largest clubs in each five sports. Secondly, the potential clubs were discussed with the expert of NGB, to get more information on the clubs' situation. Final selection was made by the researcher.

The main research data consists of club documentation and 22 thematic interviews of the club actors. Theory driven content analysis is used, utilizing the theoretical frameworks created in previous research on professionalisation of sport organisations (Dowling et al. 2014, Nagel et al. 2015) and in David Billis's research on hybrid organizations (2010).

Basis for the case study approach is provided by a survey data (n=91) collected from the first league clubs and largest clubs in the examined sports in 2020–2021. This data on clubs' professionalisation supported the selection of case study clubs and planning of thematic interviews. The data has been analysed by descriptive statistical methods and will be published on separate sub-study.

### Results and Discussion

This study will produce deeper understanding on, how the professionalisation has progressed and factored in Finnish grassroots sports clubs of different team sports during the last two decades. The transformation from voluntary-driven organisations towards professionally managed, service delivery organisations will be described more elaborately.

The study will also provide insights, how the theoretical conceptualization of professionalisation corresponds to the club actors' perceptions on the phenomenon. Actors from different levels of the club organisation are represented among the 22 interviewees. The analysis of the research data is still ongoing but early results will be presentable in the conference. Early analysis suggests that while the professionalisation is perceived important for the club development, the interpretations of the concept vary between actors of different club levels.

### Conclusion, Contribution and Implication

This study will contribute to the previous research on Finnish sport clubs and professionalisation of sport organisations by turning the focus on the grassroots level and diversifying the analysis with qualitative research methods. Finnish sports clubs and NGBs are looking for better understanding on their continuing professionalisation process and its consequences. Furthermore, the study will open new opportunities for comparative research as professionalisation and hybridisation are not processes identified only in sport organisations but also in other third sector organisations.

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