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PROFESSIONALISING CLUBS: INCREASING PAID WORK IN FINNISH TEAM SPORTS CLUBS

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Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this study is to analyse professionalisation of Finnish teams sports clubs. Study focuses in most professionalised clubs, in order to enhance understanding of the dimensions in ongoing professionalisation process. Research questions are, 1) what is the number of paid employees in clubs in various fields of operation, 2) what kind of external support clubs have for financing paid work and 3) how the clubs perceive the current situation and importance of paid work in clubs. Study focused in organizational work, and players as employed professionals were left out from the study scope.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Professionalisation of sports organizations has been of interest in sport management studies since the early 1990s. Many scholars have identified various dimensions related to professionalisation processes, such as changes in structures and governance, specialisation, and shifting from volunteer-driven organisation to utilizing paid work (Dowling et al. 2014). Similarly, Nagel et al. (2015) have defined the forms of professionalisation of sport organisations emerging in structures and processes, strategies and activities and individuals. In this study, we focus in individuals, although we see the relation to other dimensions as well.

Research Design, Methodology and Data Analysis

This substudy was part of a larger research project on professionalisation of five Finnish team sports. In Finland, employing professionals in sports clubs have increased heavily in the last decades. It is estimated that there are thousands of full-time employees in approximately 10 000 sports clubs (Koski & Mäenpää 2018, Turunen 2020).

Data was collected by survey sent for first league clubs and the biggest clubs according to player licenses, altogether 170 clubs. 91 clubs responded to the survey. Data was analysed by descriptive statistical methods.

Results and Discussion

The mean number of full-time employees in clubs was 7,2, of which 2,3 in administration, 4,1 in sports activities and 0,8 in other activities. The number of full-time employees varied between clubs, 70 per cent of clubs had seven employees or less, and nine clubs had 20 or more. The median for full-time employees was four. The number of full-time employees was highest in league clubs. 80 percent of clubs reported that they have part-time employees, and the mean number was 17,3 employees per club, range of variation being from 1 to 200. Most of the clubs (56 %) had had external resources to employ people. The most common (33 % of respondents) channel for financing employment was employment subsidy (employing unemployed person) and apprenticeship training. Secondly, 28 percent of clubs had had

support from sports federation, and 17 percent from states sports club support system. These direct support channels were most common among junior clubs, whereas league clubs presumably finance their activities more via business partnerships.

The clubs were also asked to assess issues related to paid staff in clubs. Half (53 %) of the clubs reported that the current situation in number of employees was good or fairly good. 92 percent of clubs considered significance of this issue in relation to clubs objectives as high or extremely high. Similarly, “recruiting competent people”, was considered being at good or fairly good situation in 45 percents of clubs, and 90 percent considered this being high or extremely high in significance.

Conclusion, Contribution and Implication

This study introduced new insights to professionalisation of sports clubs. Firstly, the shifting from volunteer work to paid work seems to be spreading from some central positions to other operational roles as well, like coaching junior teams. In our data, number of full-time employees is rather high in most professionalised clubs and already four fifths have part-time workers. Secondly, competencies for using these financing channels are crucial when taking steps in professionalisation. In our data, already over half of the clubs use multiple external channels for financing paid work. This is also an interesting research direction in the future, since the possibilities for financing sports clubs professionalisation vary between sports as well as between countries. Thirdly, it is evident that the professionals are seen as a mean to reach clubs’ goals in the future as well, and professionalisation process continues to evolve further. Almost all clubs in our data considered issues related to this significant, but half of the clubs considered the current situation not corresponding to desired situation.

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