

The “dark side” of professionalisation in national sport federations: A case study of the Swiss Floorball Federation

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Abstract

National sport federations (NSF) are undertaking organisational adaptations towards professionalisation. To what extent they benefit from these adaptations is a matter of controversy. Furthermore, the negative effects of an NSF’s proactive professionalisation strategies have gained little attention. This paper explores the dark side of professionalisation in a Swiss NSF. The process and negative effects were investigated using a qualitative analysis of interviews, documents, and secondary studies. We found the dark side of professionalisation to be mainly present in the deteriorating inter-organisational relationships. The NSF was distracted from the needs of the sport community; the objectives of the professionalisation strategy did not reflect the member organisations’ values and visions. Furthermore, the NSF’s offensive marketing activities exceeded clubs’ capabilities. The evidence suggests that active involvement of clubs into strategy development and the professionalisation process could help it to avoid the negative effects and instead support an efficient use of resources.

Keywords: professionalisation; professionalisation strategy; sport federations; national sport federations; sport clubs; sport management; sport marketing; floorball; sport Switzerland; case study; negative consequences.

1 Introduction

When national sport federations (NSFs) undertake organisational adaptations in order to meet the challenges of changing environments, they are likely to be perceived as legitimate attempts when they correspond to an approach that is commonly deemed “professional” (Dowling et al., 2014; Hwang and Powell, 2009). Thereby, structures, processes, strategies and individuals undergo change; daily processes are formalised, new management practices introduced (e.g. performance measurement and strategy papers) and professional staff are hired (Nagel et al., 2015; Ruoranen et al., 2016). However, to what extent NSFs benefit from professionalisation is a matter of controversy (e.g. Parent and Hoye, 2018).

Professionalisation practices have structural, cultural and social consequences, which can be perceived as either positive or negative. On the one hand, professionalisation appears to be a promising approach to improving NSFs’ performances and governances. On the other hand, professionalisation can have consequences that are not aligned with the interests of the NSF’s actors and stakeholders. For example, processes that an NSF implemented to meet its goals efficiently may affect their valued routines and traditions. Alternatively, new activities the NSF offered may exceed the resources of yet other stakeholders. These ambivalent perspectives call for empirical studies to understand the consequences of the professionalisation process in NSFs. It is worth investigating the “dark side” of professionalisation in order to enhance awareness that adapting one feature of an NSF can be detrimental to another of its features.

This paper considers the dark side of professionalisation in NSFs, where it is understood to be an organisational adaptation from amateur structures towards a business-like organisation. We explored the professionalisation strategy and the negative effects of the professionalisation processes in a case study with the Swiss Floorball Federation (SFF). Empirical insight into the adverse consequences of professionalisation in NSFs can help sport

managers, officials and stakeholders, such as policymakers, who require these changes, avoid inconvenience and wasting resources.

2 Literature review and theoretical framework

To gain insight into the dark side of professionalisation, we consider NSFs conceptually as social systems (Luhmann, 2006). The systemic perspective considers the momentum that characterises organisations as autopoietic social systems that emerge from and reproduce themselves through decisions. Accordingly, the observable features of an organisation, such as the aims, management and services, are the results of preceding organisational decisions (Luhmann, 2006; Thiel and Mayer, 2009). Each organisation develops its own built-in dynamics, whereby the change always remains uncertain with regards to the purpose.

Professionalisation in NSFs is a matter of making decisions about adapting (or maintaining) organisational structures and practices to meet internal and external expectations. National sport federations tend to make decisions based on rational logic used to satisfy diverse stakeholders, improve organisational performance and legitimise public subsidies (Hwang and Powell, 2009; O'Brien and Slack, 2004). However, if, for example, new management practices are implemented without considering the NSF's unique characteristics (e.g. structure, decision-making convention and common values), the probability of negative consequences increases. Together with other elements of the organisation, adaptations can result in organisational features, e.g. new power relationships, which in turn conflict with existing internal conventions. Thus, organisational structures and processes are not only a result of strategies and active management, but also emerge from these processes (Luhmann, 2006; MacLean and MacIntosh, 2012; Ortmann, 2010). Furthermore, they always depend on the organisation's "path", i.e. previous decisions reduce the scope of current possibilities (Scott, 1995). Within these possibilities, an NSF will

prioritise among the expectations of its diverse stakeholders in order to reach its goals. Therefore, some decisions become more likely than others and perfectly rational decisions are bounded (March and Simon, 1958). Attempts to mitigate new issues may conflict with the current features of the NSF, undermining its effectiveness and efficiency (Ortmann, 2010; Parent and Hoye, 2018; Sam, 2012; Sharpe et al., 2018). Supposed causalities and adaptations that are deemed successful lead to these being prioritised in allocation of resources. This is likely to be at the expense of other interest groups' priorities, whose potential relevance to the perceived improvement is overlooked (Fahlén and Stenling, 2018; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). Decision-makers may underestimate the mechanisms behind the NSF's performance and the risks of making adaptations that are inconsistent with current organisational characteristics.

Against this background, professionalisation in NSFs should not be taken as a self-evident improvement of the performance and relationships of these organisations. Instead, the impact that incompatible organisational adaptations may have on NSF's existing structures and culture should be considered. We have arranged the negative effects of professionalisation in sport organisations in previous literature into four themes.

Conflicting values: Abundant research on NSFs has linked professionalisation with a transformation of organisational values and objectives (e.g. Amis et al., 2002; Nagel et al., 2015; Shilbury et al., 2013; Shilbury and Ferkins, 2015) and discussed power conflicts between the two competing values of managerialism and volunteerism (Dowling et al., 2014). Nowadays, NSFs cooperate closely with organisations that conform to a business-logic. Due to increasing dependence on business-logic organisations, NSFs feel under pressure to adapt to such models, even though their aims conflict with these organisations (Babiak, 2007; Stenling and Fahlén, 2009; Van der Roest et al., 2015). The NSFs and sports clubs are

characterised by organisational structures that do not fit such a template: they have a federal governance, decisions are made through delegates, their purpose is to satisfy the members' interests instead of focusing on economic revenue and they operate on a voluntary basis (e.g. Thiel and Mayer, 2009). However, to secure funding, NSFs appeal to commercial stakeholders, commercialising their activities but compromising their traditional representative functions and social cohesion (Åberg, 2013; Dowling et al., 2014; Sam, 2009).

Tensions between volunteer committees and paid administrators: The shift from amateur to more professional management is a challenge for the leadership of NSFs, as the NSFs want to optimise the efficiency of the organisational processes as well as that of the volunteer boards (Dowling et al., 2014; Parent and Hoye, 2018, for an overview). According to Thiel et al. (2006), voluntary organisations can benefit from employing paid staff if these individuals serve the organisation's aims and culture. It is often assumed that paid managers ensure efficiency and maximise commercial opportunities, while the board looks after the members' interests and focuses on strategy (e.g. Shilbury and Ferkins, 2011). However, several studies report that employing paid staff causes tensions among volunteers in regards to dividing the roles and competences, disparities in time and commitment and in resources, motivation and values (Dimitropoulos, 2014; Fahlén, 2017; Ferkins et al., 2009; Lusted and O'Gorman, 2010; Shilbury and Ferkins, 2011; Vos et al., 2012).

When NSFs are expected to implement new management practices and, for example, run standardised programmes, this easily exceeds the temporal and monetary resources of volunteer officials (Harris et al., 2009; May et al., 2013; Walters and Tacon, 2018). Volunteer boards, which traditionally have had control over NSF strategy, can lose competences and influence, while professional managers gain power (Ferkins et al., 2009; Houlihan and Green, 2009; Lusted and O'Gorman, 2010).

Overwhelmed lower-tier organisations: The professionalisation of governing bodies can strain the lower-tier organisations' resources, and the pursued improvements of the two can be entirely different. The professionalisation strategies of the former may not be compatible with the available time and financial resources required, or with the commitment, expertise, perceived responsibilities and the disinterest in new management tools in the member organisations (Edwards and Leadbetter, 2016; Fahlén, 2017; Nichols and James, 2008). Furthermore, since member organisations mostly continue to rely on volunteers, paid management in the umbrella organisation poses a risk of additional tension if the member organisations experience little support (Shilbury and Ferkins, 2011).

Weakened legitimacy of NSFs: It is generally assumed that professionalised management contributes to better organisational performance and efficient use of resources (e.g. Bayle and Robinson, 2007; Madella et al., 2005; Nichols and James, 2008; O'Boyle and Hassan, 2014). To be evaluated, performance needs to be measured. In fact, excessive regulation and formal rules that impede action or decision-making may only lead to more "red tape" that limits the organisation's flexibility (e.g. Kaufmann et al., 2018) but claims a significant share of resources without making real improvements (Fahlén, 2017; Gilmour, 2007; Houlihan and Green, 2009; Lusted and O'Gorman, 2010; Macris and Sam, 2014; Nichols et al., 2016; Nichols and James, 2008).

Another concern is that proof is needed to measure performance. This has been found to undermine trust, which has conventionally been the basis for work and relationships in organisations in the third-sector context (Fahlén, 2017; Macris and Sam, 2014; Nichols et al., 2016). Given that the interests of the organisations that now monitor organisational performance (e.g. governments, NSFs) are supposed to be the same as the interests of the

organisations being monitored (e.g. NSFs, clubs), such practices weaken the relationship's legitimacy. Furthermore, the homogenising effects of (national) policy implementation and uniform strategies restrict NSFs' and sport clubs' autonomy and reflect a profound mistrust even between public authorities and volunteer sport providers, i.e. civil society (Adams, 2011; Fahlén, 2017).

Previous research has approached organisational change towards rationalisation and new management practices mainly as a process that is triggered by the implementation of specific, uniform government (policy) programmes. However, the process of professionalisation in NSFs is affected by diverse factors, both internal and external. The negative effects of an NSF's proactive, self-driven professionalisation strategies, decision-making and action (Ruoranen et al., 2018) have gained less attention so far. Furthermore, the consequences of professionalisation in NSFs that operate between upper-tier organisations (government, umbrella organisations), upon which they obviously depend, and lower-tier organisations, which consider NSFs legitimate only when these represent their interests, have been less extensively studied (Fahlén, 2017; Parent and Hoye, 2018).

Since policymaking in Switzerland is based on the principles of autonomy and subsidiarity (municipalities, cantons, confederation), and there is no nationwide sport policy, the sport system is open to proactive professionalisation strategies (Chappelet, 2010; Kempf and Lichtsteiner, 2015). This makes Switzerland an interesting case for studying the dark side of professionalisation: the NSFs can develop strategies tailored to their individual conditions, which enables them to minimise negative consequences of their actions even when they are reliant on government funding and the Swiss Olympic Association (SOA), the umbrella organisation of Swiss NSFs.

Drawing on previous research and theoretical considerations, we explore SFF's goals, professionalisation strategy and processes, and aim to identify the negative effects, the "dark side" of the professionalisation process in SFF in terms of its organisational performance, governance and internal relationships.

3 Case setting: The Swiss sport system and the Swiss Floorball Federation

In Switzerland, the Federal Office of Sport (FOSPO) develops sport policy together with the SOA. The SOA and the NSFs are responsible for the implementation of these policies. In 2010, SOA revised its strategy for promoting NSFs. As a reaction to international competition, the main aim has been to improve training conditions and talent promotion. The NSFs receive grants from SOA for agreed upon 4-year goals that are related to sport performance, management structure and financial and human resources spent for talent promotion (Swiss Olympic, 2010, 2013). The SOA offers tools and consultancy, but for the most part, the NSFs are autonomous in implementing the strategy. Nevertheless, SOA and FOSPO have incorporated a culture of professionalisation in promoting NSFs. This is evident from the extensive use of the term "professional" and also from the new public management instruments that the SOA has introduced, the formalisation of the relationship between the SOA and the NSFs, as well as from the state's increased tendency towards service agreements with non-profit organisations, in general (e.g. Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport, 2015; Helmig, et al., 2011; Swiss Olympic, 2010, 2013).

3.1 Description of SFF

This study contributes to a larger project that examines professionalisation in international and national sport federations. The SFF is one of the NSFs included in the project and was chosen to explore the dark side of professionalisation for the following reasons: 1) even

though floorball is the second most popular team sport in Switzerland according to its number of licensed members, it is deemed a marginalised sport by the public and media; 2) it is a relatively new sport (i.e. the reference to tradition [Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005] is very different to most studies of traditional sports) and has experienced rapid growth; 3) SFF has followed a proactive professionalisation strategy, which 4) has been perceived as successful over recent years (SOA Vice-Director, personal communication, 10 September 2014).

Floorball is considered a young, fair sport, and SFF enjoys a positive reputation. The SFF was established in 1985. The number of licensed members has increased from 1,100 to around 32,000 in 30 years, with exponential growth from 1990-2000. In terms of high-performance sport, Switzerland is one of the top nations.

Before the performance agreement with SOA, the main drivers for the professionalisation of SFF were volunteer officials' dissatisfaction with decision-making, lack of transparency and member organisations, who felt disregarded. The SOA mostly influences the 4-year strategy, particularly the promotion of high-performance sport, solid governance and a Charter of Ethics. In 2015, the COO of SFF explained the initiatives for professionalisation by describing SFF as “too big to not work professionally” and “not interesting enough for the media”. Consequently, over the last decade, SFF has invested significantly in marketing and gaining publicity.

Figures 1 and 2 present the structure of SFF in 2018. It appears evident that the divisions of the volunteer board (finance, marketing and sport) are aligned with the divisions of the paid General Secretariat. The highest body is the Assembly of Delegates, whereas the highest representative executive entity is the elected board (six members, including the president) (Swiss Unihockey, 2016, C. Art.43, §1). The COO reports directly to the president. The full-time equivalent at SFF General Secretariat has increased from 11.3 in 2012, when SOA adapted its NSF promotion strategy, to 18.4 in 2018 (Swiss Unihockey, n.d.c; Swiss

Unihockey, n.d.d). The SFF has two divisions: National League (NL-A and NL-B) and Regional League (seven regions). The latter represents grassroots teams.

Figure 1 Structure of SFF, 2018 (January)

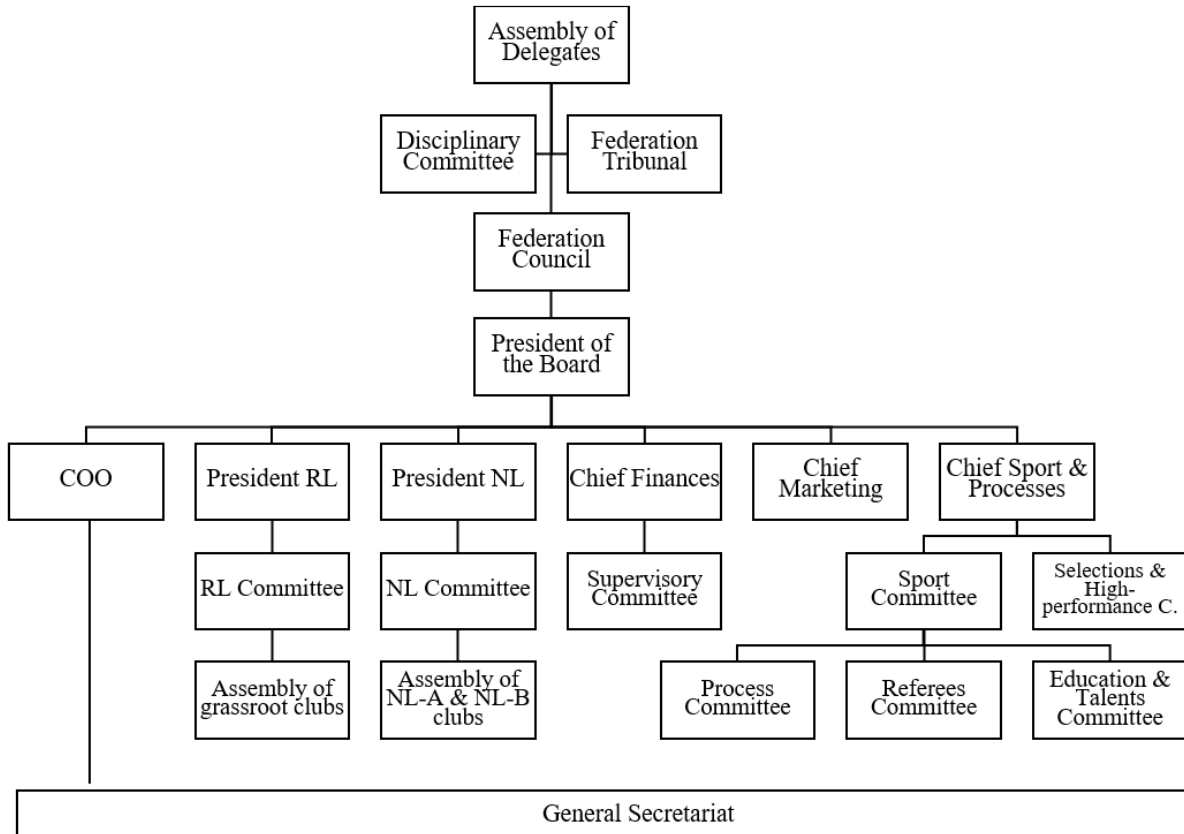
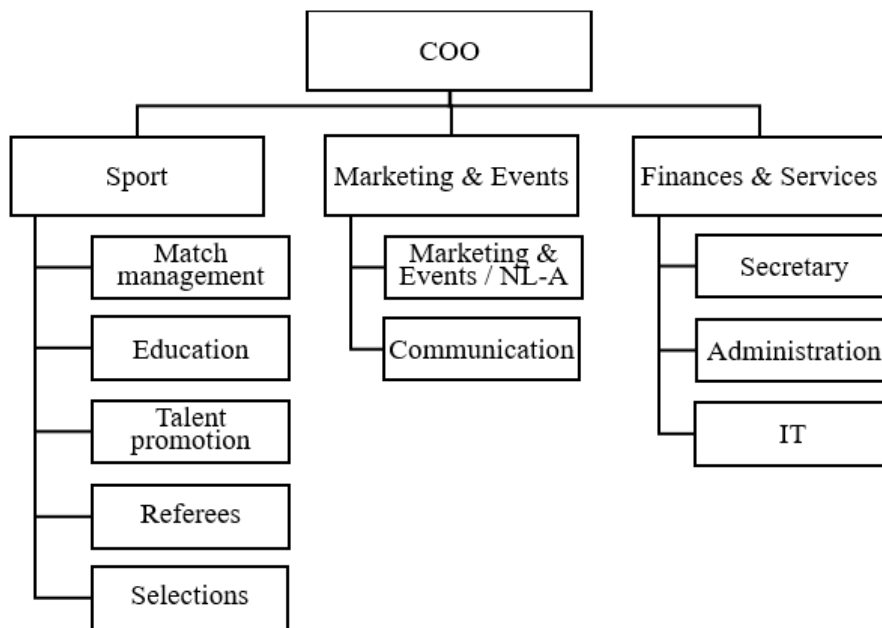


Figure 2 Structure of the General Secretariat, 2018 (January)



4 Method

We chose an iterative, process-oriented, single-case study design based on documents, semi-structured interviews and secondary data (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2017). This allowed us to comprehensively analyse the dark side of professionalisation, to identify relationships and consider relevant factors and processes in a dynamic setting. Crossing data from different data sources increases the reliability of the results. Due to their close relation to contextual factors, results from case studies can be generalised to similar contexts (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2017; Skille, 2013; Yin, 2014). We examined professionalisation in SFF retrospectively back to 2008. Interviews and documents indicated that this year could reasonably be considered the beginning of the strategic shift towards professionalisation.

4.1 Data collection

Data was collected from March 2015 to January 2018. The interview data became the main reference for reconstructing professionalisation and its consequences for SFF as 1) data generated so far was considered when conducting the interviews and 2) further data revealed a more comprehensive context, particularly with regards to SFF's goals.

Desktop research: Prior to the interviews, various documents were analysed to obtain a picture of the present SFF, provide context, become familiar with the organisation's history and trace the SFF's development and aims. The data was collected in a wide-ranging data matrix designed for analysing different dimensions of professionalisation. The homepage was screened continuously during the analysis.

The documents originated mainly from SFF's website and included:

- Annual reports, available from 2010 onwards. In 2016, SFF began reporting every two years (personal communication with General Secretariat, 14 November 2017). Thus, the 2015-16 Annual Report was the most recent report we could obtain;
- Strategy papers, statutes, Organisation Handbook;
- Feedback from club presidents (collected by SFF) and presentations;
- Competence matrix (sport), regulatory papers (e.g. sponsorship, communication, cockpit drafts);
- Publications such as member magazines (these provided information dating back to 2002) and media reports; and
- Documents related to SOA's promotion of NSF (e.g. agreement papers).

Interviews: For this case study, interviews were conducted with three key people from SFF (Table 1). To consider diverse views, we interviewed a person with a long history within SFF, as well as one who had been committed to the organisation for just a few years (Chief Operating Officer, COO). Also, perspectives from both strategic and operational entities (the board and General Secretariat, respectively) were important. Considering the further study objectives of the research project, the interview guide did not focus solely on the negative consequences of professionalisation. The framework for the interview was the professionalisation of SFF to date as well as its causes and consequences. The interview guide was adapted for each interviewee in consideration of their position. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Table 1 Interview partners

<i>Interviewees</i>	<i>Date, interviewers</i>
COO (2010-2015) - background in the private sector - no previous relation to SFF - left SFF 2015	April 2015 (1:00h) 1 st , 4 th , and last authors
President (since 2012) - board member 2011-2012 - club official until 2012 - entrepreneur	May 2015 (1:20h) 1 st and last authors
Interviewee 3 - board member 2009-2014 - diverse paid and volunteer positions at SFF and FOSPO - former national player	July 2015 (1:50h) 1 st author

Secondary data: We also considered earlier studies on SFF. These dealt with the governance structure (documents and interviews), regionalisation (interviews with representatives from national, regional and club levels), volunteering, the situation of coaches, and the situation in women's floorball in Switzerland (questionnaires).

4.2 *Data analysis*

After the main data collection, information on goals, strategies and negative consequences of professionalisation was extracted by applying inductive open coding using Atlas.ti software (Gläser and Laudel, 2010, 2013). Open coding allows the adaptation of the dimensions of categories and the addition of new ones if the material does not suit any existing categories (Gläser and Laudel, 2010, 2013). Codes and codings were continuously compared and, where feasible, merged or removed. Since the aim was not to summarise the case but to maintain the context and influences (Flyvbjerg, 2006), the codes were not strongly abstracted but kept close to the data, particularly to capture interactions, interrelationships and the timeframe (i.e. strategy/decision-making and the negative effects identified from this). The iterative process of analysis allowed us to, ultimately, group the negative effects of professionalisation close to the topics extracted from the previous literature.

For trustworthiness, the interviewees were invited to review the translation and context of the quotations presented here. Additionally, the identified effects were compared with the perceptions of an individual who was involved in several positions in different clubs and sat on strategic SFF committees for decades. This individual was asked to independently summarise his opinion (2018, Jan 30th, here: Person 4).

5 Results

5.1 Moves towards professionalisation

Table 2 presents the changes in organisational structures, processes and strategies in the SFF that we identified as its early moves towards professionalisation. Two main pillars of the strategy became apparent: the professionalisation of processes directly related to sport and the professionalisation of marketing.

Table 2 Moves toward professionalisation

<i>Origin</i>	<i>Major influence and changes</i>
<p>The board consisted of 14 members. Decision-making responsibilities lay with just a few individuals.</p> <p>The division of both power and decision-making competences, as well as the lack of transparency, caused discontent within the federation.</p> <p>“We felt we were not innovative enough...our product could reach many more people...[but] only a few considered that we could develop our sport better.” (president)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure and composition of the strategic (volunteer) board <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “There were six or seven exponents from different positions” with a clear vision in mind and the willingness to risk negative consequences; “They came up with a real strategy to replace some board members.... This paved the way [for professionalisation]” (president). - A board of six members, including the president. - To improve the “quality of the work, reaction time and efficiency” (president) of the volunteer board members. - Emphasis was placed on board candidates’ experiences in leading positions, economic and political networks, and the compatibility of expertise within the board. “In [preparing] each issue, a lot of competence has already been applied and people involved have had the opportunity to make their case [before presentation to the board]. Ultimately, it’s only about weighing up the arguments.” (president) • COO from outside the floorball community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To ensure ‘neutrality’ of the COO, “[the board] wanted someone with private sector and management experience and an explicitly unbiased external view.” (COO) • More responsibility for the General Secretariat, which is the SFF’s operational centre with paid administrative staff; it serves the voluntary board and committees.
<p>No clear federation strategy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new board “developed a modern, updated Mission Statement and precisely defined the SFF’s strategic orientation.” (Former president, cited in Federation Documentation 2010-11 [Swiss Unihockey, n.d.a, p.16]) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “We have an incredibly cool product...with lot of potential regarding marketing... We need to utilise this potential and to push on” (president). • Professionalisation of processes directly related to sport and professionalisation of marketing • Establishment of a standing committee for both sport and marketing

We categorised the dark side of the professionalisation of SFF into the following themes, comparable with the literature review: 1) tensions between volunteer committees and paid

administrators, 2) overwhelmed member organisations, 3) drifting visions and 4) weakened legitimacy.

5.2 Tensions between volunteer committees and paid administrators

One of the main pillars of the SFF's professionalisation strategy was the sporting aspect: "The declared aim of SFF leaders [was] to pay more attention to sport issues in the next decade" (Swiss Unihockey, n.d.c, p.11). However, the new COO had no connection to floorball. "They wanted someone with private sector and management experience and an explicitly unbiased external view," said the COO. Interviewee 3 explains:

He wasn't blinkered in SFF's practice.... I think that was a huge gain for [SFF's] professionalism, because there were no personal preferences, no 'that's how it has been done in the past' and such like.

By the time the "external" COO was employed, the board had decided to assign more responsibility to the General Secretariat. The General Secretariat is the SFF's operational centre with paid administrative staff and serves the voluntary board and committees. The General Secretariat evaluates options and risks to assist the responsible board member in decision-making. However, the change to a "neutral" COO was more problematic than expected, because "he was 100% dependent" on the board and on employees who had worked at SFF for several years. This was because "there were no records, everything was just in people's heads" (president). Additionally, the expectations that SFF had regarding the objectivity of an "external" COO were unrealistic, because "half the board has been committed to the sport for 30 years, there's astonishing passion...but sometimes it's difficult when they want to control every detail" (COO). Additionally, the paid staff's expectations of volunteer officials with extensive expertise were a source of conflict: "How much can you

expect of the volunteers and how fast can you expect them to work, knowing that you're dependent on them," said the COO. Interviewee 3 thought, "Are you grateful that they just do the work, or do you have the right to demand more and say, 'You have to do it my way'?" Similarly, the president—a volunteer for SFF and an entrepreneur in his professional life— noted that the entrepreneurship within the board "bears potential for conflict. You can meddle too much, because you feel an NSF should be run like a company...well, in my company, we don't have any volunteers."

The distinction between the strategic and operational bodies has seemingly not been as clear as intended. The president found that the board can "not focus solely on strategy, because, based on our experience and given our ambitions, we can see that the General Secretariat and committees still need some support." The COO found that "the expectations were different regarding decision-making competences." He perceived the dependency as a sign of mistrust. Of the further challenges that emerged from the extensive professionalisation of governance and management, the president said, "Maybe we wanted to change too much at once...now we just need a little reorientation." These experiences may have influenced the decision to later hire a COO who had both a background in floorball and qualifications in economics.

To support the structural adaptations and benefit from the well-considered profiles of the strategic and administrative bodies, SFF drafted an internal Organisation Handbook in 2014. This determined the rights and duties of volunteer officials (e.g. quick responses). "Now we have the chance to clarify the situation in detail so that it is transparent to all parties; what the board expects...from the General Secretariat" (COO).

5.3 *Overwhelmed member organisations*

A common concern related to the professionalisation of NSFs is sponsor requirements (Nagel et al., 2015). As it regards the SFF, “We have the usual sponsorship contracts; they give us money for certain services, we guarantee them publicity on and off the court, and hospitality” (COO). The SFF’s main sponsor has generated substantial resources for the promotion and has contributed considerably to the recognition and popularity of floorball in Switzerland (e.g. regular media coverage). One of this sponsor’s approaches has been to turn matches into entertainment events (Kirchhofer, n.d.; Salzmann and Thalmann, n.d.; Swiss Unihockey, n.d.a, pp.10, 15; Thalmann, 2008).

They’ve supported us and brought us publicity, made us presentable, with good innovations and a whole entertainment programme...We have achieved an incredible impact, it has only been possible thanks to them. (Interviewee 3)

With this approach, the growth rates in licensees and in live and TV audiences reached double digits. The 2015-16 Annual Report cites the SFF president as saying, “Our roadmap works. More licence holders, bigger audiences, more impact. Our sport is on the right track to get rid of its ‘marginal sport’ status” (Swiss Unihockey, n.d.b, p.11).

However, the extensive implementation of SFF’s strategy and successful marketing at the SFF internal level, which led to rapid growth, clearly had consequences at the inter-organisational level: the structures and processes of the umbrella and its member organisations were not equal. The rapid development exceeded the clubs’ capabilities: “We saw that some clubs needed support...with VAT, migration issues, integration, contracts” (president). Besides issues within the administration, the clubs struggled with infrastructure: there was a lack of courts, which was exacerbated by the same sponsor equally promoting other three indoor sports and thereby creating a competition (e.g. Caluori, 2015; Thalmann, 2008). The “event professionalism” (president) has increased the expectations of match

organisation: requirements, such as fully equipped media zones for NL-A clubs (Strategy 2014-2018), exceed the clubs' capabilities. Furthermore, the clubs lacked the personnel to manage their events; even NL-A clubs needed support in hosting matches that met the expectation of entertainment events (e.g. Caluori, 2015; unpublished survey "Development of women's floorball in Switzerland", 2013). Another consequence of SFF's close partnerships with sponsors and the three other indoor sports was the exclusive rights that limited the SFF's own sponsorship potential as well as that of the clubs.

5.4 Drifting visions of SFF and member organisations

Whereas organisation at the SFF internal level could be adapted to the expectations of the external stakeholders, this not only exceeded the clubs' resources but also widened the gap between the umbrella and member organisations' goals and motivations. Our data indicates that the vision upon which SFF's professionalisation strategy was based did not necessarily correspond to the floorball community's vision. Evidently, SFF's decision-makers developed a professionalisation strategy and began to implement it without involving the member organisations. For example, the visions of the regional league clubs are basically disregarded in the SFF strategy. The SFF management team was concerned that clubs did not "think outside the box and do something for those who aren't familiar with floorball yet" (president), and stated that it was "crucial to anticipate and follow opportunities" (COO). The broader floorball community, in turn, missed sport formats for other target groups; for example, elderly and hobby players (Strategy 2014-2018), who identified less with the entertainment culture. Interviewee 3 said:

How can [gaining more individual members] be the strategic goal of a federation? ...
I always reminded the others: our members are the clubs...we can only support them to want more members. But maybe that's not the goal of a club. Maybe it doesn't

want more members, because it lacks trainers or sport facilities. How can we [SFF] define any goals without knowing whether they correspond to the vision of those who'll have to implement them?

The question arose of how the vision of an NSF should be defined: should it be determined by governance or evolve “from the middle?” In SFF:

We [the board] invested extensively in strategy, vision, organised workshops, external supporters, everything.... But I'm not sure whether we as a board [were] the right ones to do all that.... We had long discussions about sustainability projects, invested money and achieved nothing. (Interviewee 3)

Where the adaptations of processes did not progress as intended, SFF saw the member organisations as responsible even though they had minimal involvement in strategy development. Despite the unequal opportunities, management was disappointed with the clubs' efforts, for example, regarding infrastructure: “If we failed, it was in that we didn't manage to get the clubs to put more effort into getting courts” (president). The Annual Report 2011-12 cites the NL-CEO: “A well-organised federation and new events are not enough for further development. Active, hard-working clubs with sustainable strategies are equally important” (Swiss Unihockey, n.d.c, p.14).

The fact that some regional federations organised regional tournaments independently of SFF made it clear to the organisation that its objectives did not match those of the lower-tier groups. Obviously, the member organisations were motivated to develop their activities, with the means that were reasonable for them. Annoyed by its members autonomous activities, SFF included the diversity of interests in its Strategy 2014-2018 to “create

pragmatic, logical and individual sport formats, especially at grassroots level” (Strategy 2014-2018).

5.5 *Weakened legitimacy*

The SFF recognised, that for successful professionalisation, “it was important to see that we needed to have better connections with the clubs” (president). In order to involve member organisations more in decision-making, SFF established an annual “Presidents’ Day” and set up a sports committee in which representatives from all organisational levels and bodies decided on matters concerning the sport. The closer relationship also enabled SFF to monitor and prevent the clubs from independent operation that had occurred in the past (Swiss Unihockey, 2014).

The SFF has introduced several reporting instruments in recent years, at both the internal and inter-organisational levels (the former being required by SOA). It is believed that these instruments have improved transparency between SOA, NSFs and the member organisations: “Everybody has an insight into what the money was spent on” (president). However, instruments that were meant to increase quality and efficiency, for example in talent promotion, “mainly increased administrative work” (Interviewee 3). Again, there was a notable discrepancy between the insights of the NSF’s strategy-makers and the clubs who were supposed to implement these strategies. The umbrella federation could have handled some tasks more efficiently (Person 4), as the “quality criteria” were deemed realistic only for NL clubs (unpublished document). For most clubs “the goals weren’t realistic. A federation has employees, can make a certain effort, line up new things, but the clubs cannot implement them” (Interviewee 3). Consequently, “the clubs start to calculate whether the benefit is worth the effort.” This is contrary to SFF’s intention to improve quality and efficiency through standardised processes. “Now we have a communication concept and this

and that...elaborated very professionally, the ideas are great, but all that energy could be spent elsewhere” (Interviewee 3). The more specific and measurable the targets are, the more closely they can be monitored. As interviewee 3 discovered, too much control chokes energy: “Often I think the strategy has replaced the vision, vision as dreams and goals. And that’s not a positive thing.” Instead of supporting the clubs’ innovative initiatives—a goal of the decision-makers—“the federation tends to steer the clubs too much.” The SFF reined the clubs in, as if it was afraid that some clubs would become too powerful (Interviewee 3; Person 4). The reduced autonomy and increased control of the member organisations cast a shadow over the professionalisation of SFF which goes beyond the everyday issues of the NSFs, in general. For example, the sport activities that SFF offered, for example, became homogenous for all of the member organisations. This contradicts the aim and policy of the Swiss Federal Government to democratise sport and provide “sport for all” (Adams, 2011; Fahlén, 2017; Macris and Sam, 2014; Nichols et al., 2016).

6 Discussion

The instant study’s objective was addressing the dark side of professionalisation in the case of the SFF. While many of the SFF’s organisational adaptations towards a more business-like approach have achieved an impact, SFF’s proactive, offensive professionalisation also has its dark side. Previous literature has mostly dealt with supra-organisational requirements and the impacts of policy implementation in lower-tier organisations. Although the Swiss sport system complies with the Swiss policy principle of autonomy, the negative effects of professionalisation in SFF appear similar to previous studies. In particular, the offensive marketing strategy—commercialisation—to enhance the status of floorball with the public has had negative impacts from the member organisations’ perspectives. There were conflicts between the much-discussed volunteerism and managerialism (Dowling et al., 2014),

whereby the divide was particularly located at the inter-organisational level (Nagel et al., 2015). The values and goals reflected in SFF's professionalisation strategy were very different to the member organisations' values and visions (cf. Edwards and Leadbetter, 2016; Fahlén, 2017; Lusted and Gorman, 2010; Nichols and James, 2008; Shilbury and Ferkins, 2011). The SFF's member organisations appeared motivated to promote the sport in accordance with their vision, 'Floorball for all', and with means that were reasonable for them. Therefore, it is not necessarily an incorporated traditional culture that may hinder professionalisation promoted by an NSF (e.g. Thiel et al., 2006), but rather, in NSFs and sports without a long history, divergent views on innovation and on common identity can cause the problem.

We observed the opposite in previous studies on shared governance, which report on conflicts between paid management and volunteer-based boards in many regards, e.g. availability, commitment, expertise (Dimitropoulos, 2014; Fahlén, 2017; Lusted and O'Gorman, 2010; Shilbury and Ferkins, 2011; Vos et al., 2012). The SFF has implemented business logics at the NSF internal level (Nagel et al., 2015) by enlisting professional employees not only in management, but also in the strategic board. The professionalisation of decision-making in terms of expertise, management skills and an entrepreneurial culture resulted in profiles being close to that of the paid management. If the management does not have the specific sport background, the closeness of such "professional volunteers" (Ruoranen et al., 2016) to the sport can become a 'trump card' when it comes to decision-making and power. Thus, the approximation of qualifications in NSF governance with those in the General Secretariat does not necessarily facilitate the separation of a strategic board and operational management.

As in previous studies, we found that the quality of work and the tools to manage and measure organisational performance required by (sport) governing bodies have exceeded the

capabilities and knowledge of volunteer-based, lower-tier organisations and volunteer officials (Harris et al., 2009; May et al., 2013; Walters and Tacon, 2018), leading to an unbalanced development (Edwards and Leadbetter, 2016; Fahlén, 2017; Lusted and O’Gorman, 2010). Demands from external stakeholders that are “delegated” to clubs exceed even high-performance clubs’ resources. The clubs also lack experience in negotiating with political organisations; for example, with municipalities about infrastructure. Therefore, what is perceived as success by the umbrella organisation—growth in this case—can quickly become a burden for the member organisations. Such an imbalance is likely to constrain the further progress of an NSF (Ferkins and Shilbury, 2010; Shilbury and Ferkins, 2015), and may explain why professionalisation in NSFs has negative effects, especially for lower-tier organisations whose resources are scarce. When NSFs respond to adversities with more red tape (Kaufmann et al., 2018), they restrict rather than support their member organisations, and the gap between the potentials of the upper- and lower-tier organisations becomes even wider (e.g. Harris et al., 2009; May et al., 2013; Walters and Tacon, 2018).

Similar to Nichols and James’s (2008) finding in England, our study indicated that it is not obvious that member organisations will follow the NSF’s strategy and programme, but that they will weigh the terms of the support offered. For example, given that the NSF’s financial resources are largely covered by the fees that individuals and member clubs pay, it is odd when the NSF’s restrictive sponsorship contracts exclude individual sponsors that the clubs could attract through social cohesion and shared local interests alone. The NSF’s legitimacy is questioned when member organisations opt out of, or do not opt into, the professionalisation strategy for promoting the sport. Indeed, sport clubs acting independently are at odds with NSFs’ purpose of representing their members’ interests. This development homogenises sport instead of providing “sport for all” (Adams, 2011; Fahlén, 2017; Macris

and Sam, 2014; Nichols et al., 2016), and is contradictory to the principals of subsidiarity and autonomy of the federal Swiss (sport) policy system.

In this study, the dark side of professionalisation became visible via the erosion of the values of the floorball community as a result of marketing activities and the NSF's orientation toward external relationships. The negative effects did not so much emerge from the NSF's professionalisation process and specific organisational adaptations. Rather, the organisational adaptations toward a more business-like approach exposed drifting visions and revealed the discrepancy between the NSF internal strategy and goals and the floorball community's visions and values. Consequently, even though an NSF's proactive professionalisation is perceived as successful and the pace of its achievements is impressive, the clubs consider the fact that the NSF's performance is inadequate in terms of representing their interests. In line with our theory, it is challenging to serve all interests and adapt the organisation accordingly without creating undesirable effects elsewhere.

6.1 Limitations and future research

A strength of the instant study is the range of data sources. Interviews provided us with three different views on SFF's professionalisation and its dark side, but also included valuable information on where to investigate further in other data sources. Caution is needed because professionalisation is commonly understood to be a progressive process and the persons involved may avoid criticising their organisation for political reasons and in order to defend their personal actions. However, our interviewees appeared critical and open, with complementary views. This study did not research the perceptions in the member organisations, which became prominent in the perspectives of the representatives of the umbrella organisation. However, member organisations' perceptions of SFF's professionalisation were addressed in our data sources, and they were also consistent with our

interviews. Based on this study, future research could explore supportive professionalisation from the perspective of member organisations. This study was retrospective, and decision-making was dealt with as organisational decision-making, namely goals and strategies. A longitudinal study could reveal clearer correlations between decisions, actions and consequences. As basketball, handball and volleyball are promoted in a similar manner by the same sponsor as SFF, it would be interesting to investigate whether these NSFs have managed to implement similar requirements without the negative effects.

6.2 *Conclusion*

The purpose of professionalisation in NSFs is to improve the quality of work and ensure efficient processes to enhance performance and ultimately achieve the goals effectively. This study has shown that professionalisation also has a serious dark side, even when an NSF has the opportunity, and is encouraged, to develop its individual strategy. The negative effects are comprehensive because they concern the relationships between the upper- and lower-tier organisations and include the risk of the latter opting out. The terms of that scenario deserve more investigation as opting out contradicts the purpose of NSFs within the sport system and questions their legitimacy. Research on the fact that sport clubs are willing and able to organise activities and develop their sport independently of the NSF would indicate how inter-organisational resources could be used efficiently. If member organisations were involved early in the strategy development and could actively contribute to the professionalisation of NSF's structures, processes and activities, substantial challenges to the clubs' work—the dark side of professionalisation of NSFs—could be avoided.

Acknowledgment

The study was supported by Swiss National Science Foundation [100017_129563/1].

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