

THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF FINNISH VOLUNTARY SPORT CLUBS

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RESEARCH PROJECT OF FINNISH SPORT CLUBS

Preliminary article topics

1. The professionalization of Finnish voluntary sport clubs in the 2010's
2. The shifting profiles of Finnish voluntary sport clubs: Creating their own space?
3. Seasonality of sport in Finland: Towards sport clubs' all year round activities?



AIM OF THE STUDY

- To gain more understanding about the changes and current situation of voluntary sport clubs in Finland in the 2010's
- Research question:

In what way has the operation of Finnish voluntary sport clubs become more professional in the 2010's?

- Sport **professionalization**: the process by which sport organisations, systems, and the occupation of sport, transforms from a volunteer driven to an increasingly business-like phenomenon (Dowling, Edwards & Washington 2014, 527)

FINNISH VOLUNTARY SPORT CLUBS

In a need for in-depth qualitative studies

- Four out of five Finnish young people participate in sports club's activities before their 19th birthday (Koski & Tähtinen 2005)
- The **focus of operation has shifted** from competitive sport to a wider perspective (Koski 2012)
- The number of **full-time professionals** has grown 5-10 % annually (Mäenpää & Korkatti 2012)
- Growing **cost of participation** in physical activities (Puronaho 2014)
- A shift towards '**consumer logic**' has taken place (Szerovay, Perényi & Itkonen 2016)

METHODS & RESEARCH DATA

65 semi-structured expert interviews
With Finnish voluntary sport clubs (2014-2017)

The chairman, a board member, the general manager, or
another official interviewed

Carried out by Finnish 2nd and 3rd year *Social sciences of sport*
students in the Research Methods unit at the University of Jyväskylä

24 different sports + 5 multi-sport clubs
Both from urban and rural areas

Thematic analysis

27 out of 65 interviews transcribed and analyzed

METHODS & RESEARCH DATA

Informants

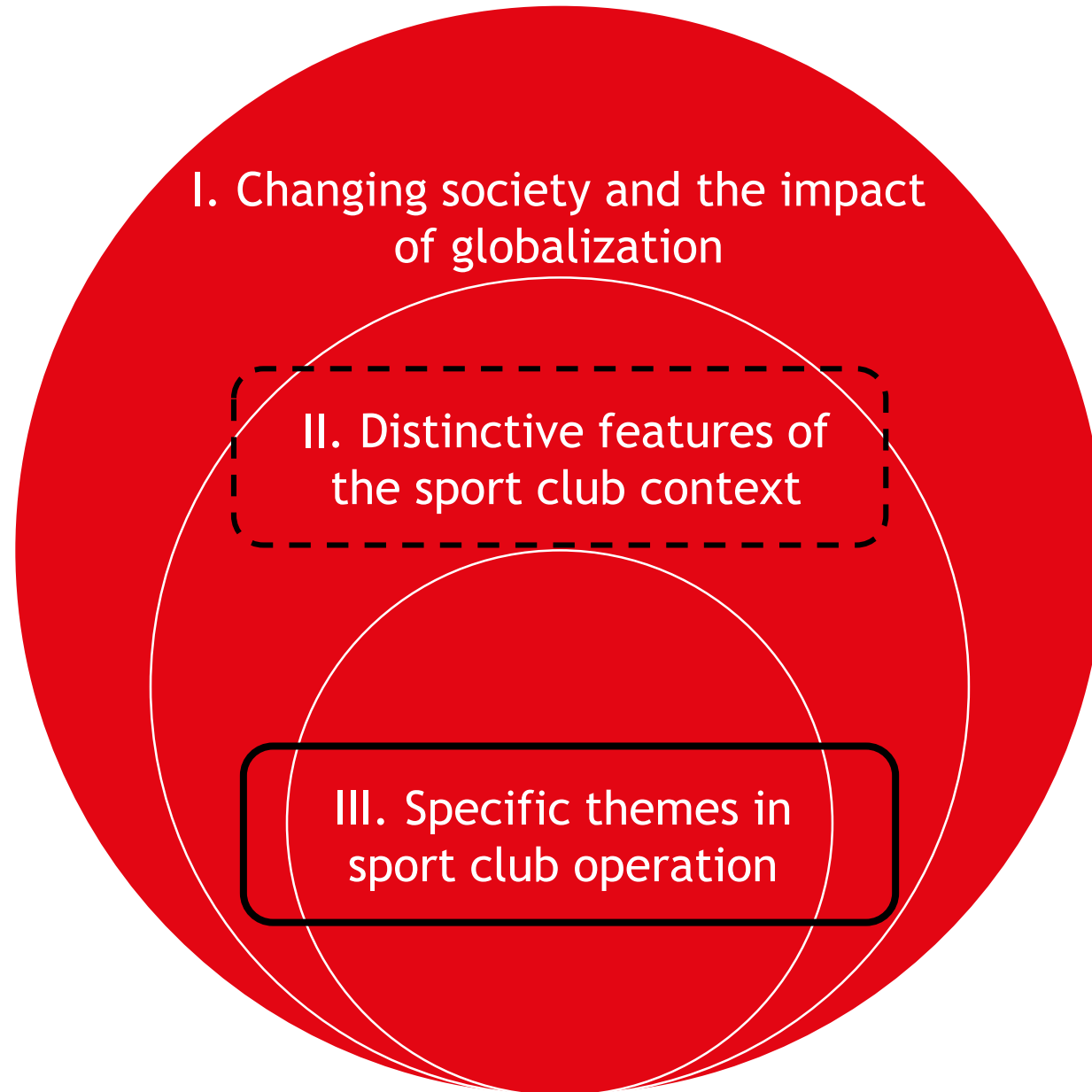
Sport discipline(s)	No. of CLUBS
Multi-sport club	5
Football + futsal	5
Gymnastics	4
Floorball	4
Finnish baseball	1
Skiing	1
American football + handball	1
Swimming + diving	1
Figure skating	1
Ice hockey	1
Basketball	1
Tennis	1
Triathlon	1
Total	27

Position in the club	No. of INTERVIEWEES
Chairman	11
General manager	6
Head of youth	3
Board member	2
Club manager	1
Secretary	1
Head of coaching and finances	1
Head of coaching	1
Treasurer	1
Head coach of the first team	1
Club coordinator	1
Total	29

Note: Two interviews had two interviewees

PROFESSIONALIZATION OF SPORT CLUBS

Three levels of analysis





PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Emergent themes from the data





II THE SPORT CLUB CONTEXT

1. Growing number and variety of stakeholders
2. Increasing circulation of money
3. Complying with external policies
4. Shift in the field's logic and language

III SPECIFIC THEMES IN OPERATING SPORT CLUBS

1. Widening range of roles and forms of compensation
2. A shift from individual teams to centralized administration
3. Diversification of participant pathways
4. Increasingly (sport) specific requirements for facilities



III SPECIFIC THEMES IN OPERATING SPORT CLUBS

Theme 1

Widening range of **roles** and **forms of compensation**

- Working with **specialists** of different fields (coaching, administration, marketing...)
- Using the logic and **language** of professionals

“None of our coaches are full-time, but we pay something to everyone. Coaches can decide whether they take it as a salary or as expenses.” *(basketball)*

“Physical conditioning of our skaters is taken care of by an athletics club.” *(figure skating)*

III SPECIFIC THEMES IN OPERATING SPORT CLUBS

Theme 2

A shift from **individual teams** to **centralized administration**

- Guidelines, strategies and documentations **provided by the club**
- Defining **areas of responsibility** within the board
- Changing dynamics of power and communication -> board - *employee(s)* - volunteers

“The development process that started with launching a strategy nine years ago clarified the profile of our club, and during this period a shift has taken place from individual teams to a unified sport club” (*football*)



III SPECIFIC THEMES IN OPERATING SPORT CLUBS

Theme 3

Diversification of participant pathways

- Sharpening the profile of clubs *and* Providing broader range of activities
- Participant pathways stretch across clubs
- Diffusion of **technical language**

“In the competitive section of our club, we created a pathway for coaches in which we defined what level of license they need for coaching specific teams.”

(gymnastics)



III SPECIFIC THEMES IN OPERATING SPORT CLUBS

Theme 4

Increasingly (sport) specific requirements for facilities

- Using **private facilities** has become more common
- **Club-owned facilities** appear
- Requiring facilities for **complementary training**

“The football pitch project in cooperation with the municipality was successful...we have now our own ground on the land owned by the municipality.” *(football)*

“We use the facilities of our partners [sponsors] for strength and conditioning training.” *(women’s Finnish baseball)*

CONCLUSIONS

- A shift in the logic of the sport club field has pushed the clubs towards **more professionalized operation**
- Simultaneously, increasing number of **sport clubs have become employers** which has had significant impact on the various aspects of the organizations
- However, clubs with different profile and in different geographical location have changed in diverse ways
- The most relevant aspects of changes include the **various roles** in sport clubs, the composition of resources, the **increasing demand for sport specific facilities** and the **diversification of activities provided** by the clubs

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

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