

# **Causes, forms and consequences of professionalization in Swiss national sport federations**

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## Preface

This doctoral thesis is part of a research project entitled 'Professionalization in sport federations in Switzerland: causes, forms and consequences' (Aug 2014 - Feb 2018) that is being conducted at the Universities of Bern and Lausanne (Switzerland) and is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation [100017\_129563/1]. The project explores causes, forms, and intended and unintended consequences of professionalization in Swiss national as well as international sport federations (IFs) based in Switzerland. Apart from two of the studies conducted at the University of Lausanne, that are presented briefly further below, this thesis focuses on Swiss national sport federations (NSFs).

The research project is led by Prof. Dr. Emmanuel Bayle (Lausanne) and Prof. Dr. Siegfried Nagel (Bern), and the project group consists of Grazia Lang (PhD candidate, Bern), Dr. Christoffer Klenk (Post-Doc, Bern), Prof. Dr. Torsten Schlesinger (Bern and Bochum), Josephine Clausen (PhD candidate, Lausanne), and Prof. Dr. David Giauque (Lausanne). All research group members have authorship rights over publications generated within the research project.

Herewith, I state and confirm my contribution to the papers enclosed in the present doctoral thesis. Since I was involved in the project from the very beginning, I have contributed to the conceptualization of the overall project, and, to major extent, to the execution of the part on national federations. The first article involved the active participation of several researchers with regard to its conceptualization, the development of research instruments, data collection, analysis, and writing up. The work for the second and the third studies, including data collection and analysis, interpretation of the data and writing up, was carried out, for the most part, by me. I was also responsible for making the corrections required by the reviewers. This applies also for the first article. I received valuable support from the supervisor of this thesis (Prof. Dr. Siegfried Nagel) with regard to the conceptualization and design of the research and the development of the publications. The other co-authors contributed mostly by providing critical feedback to improve the manuscripts.

In addition to the study objectives and articles presented here, the doctoral thesis comprises additional contributions on the professionalization of IFs, which were led by my project colleagues at the University of Lausanne. These are briefly presented here. I contributed actively to the conceptualization and design of the article on drivers of, and barriers to, professionalization in IFs and to reviewing the manuscript. To the publication on commercialization in IFs, I contributed mostly by reviewing the manuscript.

While there is abundant research on professionalization in national sport governing bodies and clubs, studies on IFs are rare. The first study on IFs, first authored by Josephine Clausen (Clausen et al., 2017), explores the *drivers of, and barriers to, professionalization in IFs*. It considers the concepts and dynamics of organizational change and professionalization

in IFs (based in Switzerland), the influence of isomorphic pressures, and the operationalization of a multi-level framework. The study provides a definition of professionalization in sport organizations, which is considered an important element of the changes that have occurred within these organizations in recent years. Data from six IFs were analyzed, employing qualitative content analysis. The data were collected through interviews with a total of 20 staff members of the IFs of cycling, football, hockey, rowing, volleyball and wrestling. This material was complemented with document data. The findings reveal that professionalization in IFs is non-linear, due to the unpredictable nature of changes in the politico-economic and institutional environment and their influence on federations. In conclusion, three main assertions could be made from observing the dynamic phases in six IFs: 1) dynamic phases of professionalization vary according to the size of IFs; 2) professionalization influenced by external pressures is likely to be followed by a slower phase of internally driven professionalization; and 3) IFs become increasingly business-oriented and commercialized (Clausen et al., 2017). Regarding the operationalization of the multi-level framework of Nagel et al. (2015), we suggest a more differentiated approach for analyzing IFs.

The second publication, also first authored by Josephine Clausen (Clausen et al., 2018), addresses the rapid and profound *commercialization of activities observed in IFs* over the last two decades. Applying Crisp-set qualitative comparative analysis to 22 Olympic federations, the study examines the conditions and configurations that particularly influence the commercialization of IFs. Sixteen interviews were conducted in six Olympic IFs and one international sport umbrella organization. The findings reveal a variety of commercialization configurations, such as specialization and social media engagement associated with high levels of commercialization, and strategic planning and low accountability aligned with less commercialized outcomes. The analysis demonstrates that IFs are becoming increasingly businesslike. The importance of specialization and social media engagement for commercialization is highlighted. However, with regard to monetization, IFs should be cautious of the associated risks such as stakeholder legitimacy, mission drift, goal vagueness and straying from good governance principles (Clausen et al., 2018).

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## 1. Introduction

The modernization and rationalization of society have seen national sport federations (NSFs) undergo considerable organizational changes. Environmental pressures, such as the impact of international success and increased expectations from various interest groups, over the last one or two decades have forced NSFs to adapt their structures and practices to new standards and norms, notably to demonstrate efficiency, rationality and accountability (Chantelat, 2001; Child & Rodrigues, 2011; Kikulis, 2000; Slack & Hinings, 1992). Growing competition for financial resources has put them under pressure to monitor performance and to legitimate their activities in accordance with current (normative) expectations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Hwang & Powell, 2009). NSFs in particular need to adapt to the culture of accountability in order to garner financial resources, notably in countries where government funding is critical to their viability – as it is in Switzerland. Common responses to the new challenges include the establishment of new management structures, governance and capacity building, formalization of daily processes and employment of people with specific qualifications (for an overview see Dowling, Edwards, & Washington, 2014). Yet, NSFs and their member organizations are characterized by organizational structures that do not fit these developments: they are federally governed; decisions are made on a delegate basis; their purpose is not to accrue economic revenue but to satisfy their members; and they operate on a voluntary basis (Thiel & Mayer, 2009). However, NSFs today are not only answerable to their member organizations, but also to public and private institutions and a range of stakeholders, such as state, sponsors, member clubs, media, etc. (Bayle & Madella, 2002; Evetts, 2011; Kikulis, 2000; Maier et al., 2016; Slack & Hinings, 1992). In short, the community expects more from sport federations than their former organizational structures can facilitate. The organizational adaptations have led to a transformation of NSFs “from an amateur and volunteer-driven pastime toward increasingly business-like organizational entities” (Dowling et al., 2014, p. 523; Chantelat, 2001). Scholars and practitioners of sport organizations often refer to such organizational changes as ‘professionalization’.

Even though commercialization and professionalization in sport organizations have been prevalent topics in sport management and sport sociology research over the last number of decades, the underlying mechanisms remain unclear as attempts at conceptualization and operationalization of the related concepts have been disregarded (Dowling et al., 2014). Furthermore, it is unclear whether the concepts used by scholars correspond to understandings of professionalization in practice. In order to address this multi-faceted phenomenon, knowledge of the causes of professionalization and of how contemporary practices and structures in NSFs have evolved would be beneficial for researchers and decision-makers alike. These factors are worthy of investigation, as are the consequences of

decision-makers' responses to the new challenges in sport, especially since there is evidence that professionalization can have the opposite of the intended impact on NSF's performance if contemporary governance practices are implemented without properly considering the existing structures and culture.

Systematic and differentiated knowledge of how changes evolve and the mechanisms behind professionalization processes can help NSFs avoid conflict and can support more efficient strategy development. Greater knowledge of the process of professionalization could mitigate against unintended consequences of the actions of NSFs, and lead to greater efficiency in the organization of sport in line with community demands.

### **1.1 Research questions and objectives**

This doctoral thesis consists of three studies. With reference to the aforementioned gaps in knowledge, it was designed to answer following research questions:

1. Do the concepts applied by scholars mirror the perception of practitioners in sport federations, and how can the phenomenon of 'professionalization in sport federations' be conceptualized?
2. What roles do the government, member organizations and other stakeholders play in the professionalization of NSFs in Switzerland, and are there other, more instrumental influences or interests dominating the professionalization of Swiss NSFs?
3. What consequences, intended and unintended, has the change from existing as a traditional amateur body to a more formalized businesslike organizations had in a Swiss NSF?

Encompassing the three research questions, the general objective of the doctoral thesis is to gain an in-depth understanding about the process of professionalization among NSFs in Switzerland. This entails focusing on the concept as such, and on the causes for, and consequences of, professionalization in Swiss NSFs, differentiating between NSF's endogenous attributes and its internal environment and external environment (Nagel et al., 2015).

The objectives of the three specific studies and articles are:

1. To investigate understandings of professionalization in NSFs among scholars and Swiss practitioners, and, based on that, to develop a conceptual framework for analyzing professionalization in NSFs. For this purpose, a literature review and expert interviews were conducted.

2. To explore NSF's endogenous causes, expectations from their external environment and those from their internal environment that have resulted in professionalization in seven Swiss NSF's. For this purpose, a multiple-case study was conducted by means of interviews and documents and using a hermeneutic multi-level framework.
3. To identify the extent to which a Swiss NSF has been able to achieve the desired results of professionalization and whether its professionalization strategy has had unintended consequences for the NSF's governance and its relationships with external stakeholders and member organizations. For this purpose, a single-case study was conducted using interviews, documents and secondary data to explore the NSF's goals, motivations and strategy with regard to professionalization, its current status and the challenges it has confronted to date.

With these objectives, the intention is, on the one hand, to examine forms of professionalization in NSF's and, on the other hand, to address professionalization as a (continuous) process. The study design also aims to consider the interrelationships between different actors in the sport system.

The thesis is subdivided into the following parts. First, the environmental setting of Swiss NSF's – the sport system in Switzerland – is presented. This is followed by a review of previous research relevant to the research questions. The next two chapters present the analytical framework and the methodological design of the project, respectively. The sections that follow present the three studies, each relating to one of the research questions stated above. The studies are integrated here in the form they were published (the third study as the manuscript version that has been submitted), including references. However, pages, tables and figures are numbered in the thesis consecutively. Finally, the results of the three studies are summarized and discussed from a broader, more general perspective.

## **2. The Swiss sport system**

Switzerland has a strong tradition of voluntary sport organizations. There are 88 national sports federations catering for nearly all sports and 19,500 sports clubs (Swiss Olympic, 2017). Since NSFs are affected by their political, economic and social environment, it is important for the purposes of this thesis to introduce the Swiss sport system. In Switzerland, sport policy is based on principles of subsidiarity and on the autonomy of NSFs (funding from the Swiss government is small compared to other European countries). The responsibility for policy development lies with the Federal Office of Sport (FOSPO), together with the NSFs. Implementation is the responsibility of Swiss Olympic Association (hereafter referred to as Swiss Olympic), which is currently the umbrella organization for 76 Swiss NSFs and 12 partner organizations, and policy implementation follows the federal policy system constituted on federal, cantonal and municipal levels (Bayle, 2017; Chappelet, 2010; Kriesi & Trechsel, 2008). With more than 19,000 clubs, NSFs autonomously organize both grassroots and top-level sports, which opens the system for individual and collective initiatives. While both Swiss Olympic and its member NSFs are independent from the Swiss Confederation, the only supervisor who directly influence the NSFs is Swiss Olympic (Bayle, 2017). In 2010, Swiss Olympic revised the federation's promotion strategy, whose pivotal component is a performance agreement about the NSFs' 4-year goals. In order to decide about grant allocations, Swiss Olympic uses several criteria relating to both top-level sport (international success and future potential, as well as strategy implementation) and recognition of the sport (international and national acknowledgment and economic relevance) (Swiss Olympic, 2013a). Nevertheless, for the most part, the NSFs act autonomously in implementing the development strategy set out by Swiss Olympic

### 3. Previous research

Studying professionalization in sport organizations is not new. The organizational changes that have seen sport organizations turn into businesslike entities have been studied from diverse perspectives. First, attempts were made to identify different design models of sport organizations with regard to their structural and value characteristics (e.g., Kikulis, Slack, & Hinings, 1992, 1995; Slack & Hinings, 1994). These follow the concept of structural archetypes in general theories of organization (e.g., Miller & Friesen, 1984; Mintzberg, 1979), which identify and describe very different forms of Weberian ideal type bureaucracy (e.g., specialization, clear hierarchy, standardized rules) (Weber, 1947). Kikulis et al.'s (1992) institutionally specific archetypes classified according to organizational values and structure have become one of the most influential theories in organizational professionalization. They refer to professionals entering (volunteer-based) organizations. The three organizational archetypes, which Kikulis et al. devised (with regard to Canadian national sport organizations), are common terminology in the field today: Kitchen Table, Boardroom and Executive Office. These "rooms" refer to different levels of organizational change and professionalization in sport organizations from "a lack of professionalization and bureaucratization", to "bureaucratic procedures and formal structure", to "a bureaucratic structure supported by professionalization of roles", respectively (Kikulis et al., 1992, p. 354).

Design archetypes describe the state of a phenomenon rather than its processes. In the last decade, scholars have begun to pay more attention to dynamic processes of organizational *changing*, transition and transformation (e.g., Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011; Skinner, Steward, & Edwards, 1999). Factors that cause, and have an impact on, the move toward professionalization in sport organizations have received more attention, as have the consequences of professionalization (for an overview see Nagel et al., 2015). Recent research is interested in the what occurs between the "rooms" – what happens when a sport organization which had performed as if at a Kitchen Table now operates as in a Boardroom, and what are the consequences?

Much is known about how the structures of sport organizations change as they become professionalized, in the sense of having paid, professional management (e.g., Kikulis et al., 1992, 1995; Slack & Hinings, 1992, 1994; Thibault, Slack, & Hinings, 1991). Studies of professionalization in sport organizations, understood as a transformation toward organizational rationalization, efficiency and businesslike management, have focused on different aspects, including board roles and board performance (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010; Ferkins, Shilbury, & McDonald, 2005; Hoye & Doherty, 2011; Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011), performance management and measurement (Bayle & Robinson, 2007; Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010; Madella, Bayle & Tome, 2005), and conflicts that ensue when paid professionals enter

### 3. Previous research

sport organizations that have traditionally been managed by volunteers (Seippel, 2002; Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011; Thibault, 1991; Amis, Slack, & Berrett, 1995).

The existing research on the transformations in sport organizations toward more rationalized structures and processes is presented in brief. Corresponding to the three objectives of the thesis, this chapter is subdivided into three parts. The first part presents the literature on concepts of professionalization in sport organizations, the second part examines research on causes of professionalization and the final part addresses the literature on consequences of professionalization in sport organizations.

#### 3.1 Concepts of professionalization

Even though studying professionalization in sport organizations is not new, few scholars have attempted to clearly conceptualize the phenomenon. Dowling et al. (2014) reviewed the sociological, managerial and sport management literature on professionalization in (amateur) sport organizations. To identify research gaps, Dowling et al. categorize the literature on professionalization into three broad areas of investigation:

1. *Organizational professionalization*, which is explained as “a transition [...] from an amateur and volunteer-driven pastime towards increasingly business-like organizational entities” (p. 523). Studies in this category have examined aspects of professionalization such as governance (e.g., Bayle & Robinson, 2007; Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010), organizational structure and policy-making processes (e.g., Dowling, Denison, & Washington, 2015).
2. *Systemic professionalization*, which generally refers to professionalization as “a by-product of environmental shifts resulting in organizational field or system development” (p. 524).
3. *Occupational professionalization*, which Dowling et al. (2014) identify as “the transformation of occupations into professions” as a means of legitimating them (p. 524; see also Evetts, 2011; Abbott, 1988). Occupational professionalization is the broadest (and oldest) understanding of professionalization. It commonly relates to analyses of characteristics of the management.

This thesis incorporates the first two perspectives, which relate to organizational changes in sport federations. Systemic professionalization directly corresponds with institutional theories that are prominently used to understand how fields of sport organizations are constituted and how sport organizations are affected by environmental factors. Scholars who use institutional theories examine the external drivers of professionalization, such as field-level pressure and isomorphic pressures, particularly stakeholder expectations and attempts



to assure legitimacy (e.g., O'Brien & Slack, 2003, 2004; Washington & Patterson, 2011; in general, DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Organizational professionalization, understood as the process of moving away from "amateurism" (e.g., Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011; Skinner et al., 1999) and introducing professionals into traditionally volunteer-based sport organizations, comprises features such as new managerial practices, specialization and standardization (for an overview see Dowling et al., 2014).

Despite increased interest in the phenomenon of professionalization and attempts to systemise it, a comprehensive concept has yet to be developed. As Dowling et al. (2014) conclude, "the exact manner by which the concept [professionalization] is operationalized is often ambiguous, unclear, implicit or omitted entirely" (p. 2). Furthermore, it is unclear whether the concepts used in the literature correspond to understandings of professionalization in practice. Therefore, it is worth investigating whether the concepts applied by scholars mirror the perceptions of practitioners in the federations. It is important that practitioners and researchers have a common understanding of the term 'professionalization' (Slack, 2014; Van der Roest, Vermeulen, & Van Bottenburg, 2015). A clearer concept of professionalization that is common to scholarship and practice would facilitate a holistic analysis of professionalization in sport federations and enable comparisons of different forms of organizational transformation.

#### **3.2 Causes of professionalization**

As a review of the literature by Nagel et al. (2015) shows, pressures from organizations and institutions, such as the government, umbrella organizations and NSFs' member organizations, have been examined in order to understand professionalization in sport organizations. Endogenous factors of NSFs, such as powerful key individuals and financial resources, are also important for professionalization.

The first section focuses on works that build on neo-institutionalism and institutional mechanisms (e.g., Edwards, Mason, & Washington, 2009; O'Brien & Slack, 2003, 2004; Washington & Patterson, 2011). Three types of external pressure that cause organizational adaptations are identified: coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Whereas coercive isomorphism, which includes factors such as legal requirements, is persuasive, mimetic and normative isomorphism describe ways of gaining legitimacy by "being as the others" in the organization's field. Organizations – more or less unconsciously – imitate other organizations that they deem successful, or they attempt to conform to the current norms of a rationalized, legitimate organization. One common way of doing this is to hire professional managers with specific skills and recognized credentials, or to draw expertise from similar sources, such as same consultants (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). O'Brien and Slack (2003,

### 3. Previous research

2004), for example, found that professionalization varied among amateur rugby clubs, depending on the professionally oriented institutional logics that new actors brought with them. Slack and Hinings (1994) examined 36 national sport organizations in Canada, which had adopted bureaucratic structures and were controlled by professionals supported by volunteers. More bureaucratic structures were adopted when pressure was exerted by an umbrella organization. However, the extent of the changes varied. The researchers traced these differences back to the transfer of professionals and consultants from one organization to another. These individuals were found to have affected the organizations by exerting normative pressure toward bureaucratic structures. As Amis, Slack and Hinings (2004a) conclude from their 12-year longitudinal study, the pace, sequence and linearity of change vary across sport organizations due to the different pressures they experience. International competition is also a driver of professionalization in NSFs (Nagel et al., 2015). Similar external pressures driving professionalization have been found in IFs. General cuts in funding to nonprofit organizations (NPOs) (Alexander, 2000; Levine & Zahradnik, 2012), together with an increasing perception of sport as entertainment and as a common good (Borland & Macdonald, 2003), has significantly increased competition between sport organizations for financial resources.

The second section of the previous literature reveals internal conditions that drive professionalization. These include the values and interests of (individual) actors and their ideas of what a modern, efficient sport federation should look like (e.g., Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2002; O'Brien & Slack, 2003). Other internal conditions that have led to professionalization are the need for financial resources, the increased size of NSFs and changes in organization culture and leadership relations (Horch & Schütte, 2009). Media coverage of sport also promotes professionalization of NSFs (Nagel et al., 2015).

A multiple-case study of IFs found the following internal aspects to either trigger or hinder professionalization: management practices that paid experts from within and outside sport introduced into the federation, commercialization of federation activities, board efficiency (orientation), leadership and organizational culture (Clausen et al., 2018). Like NSFs, IFs increasingly adopt for-profit business methods and structures in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness (Dowling et al., 2014; Ferkins & Shilbury, 2015; Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011).

Certain internal condition that drive NSFs to professionalization may also hinder the process of professionalization. For example, the attitudes of volunteers, traditional culture and scarce financial resources have been recognized as factors that hinder professionalization (Slack & Hinings, 1992; Welty Peachey, Zhou, Damon, & Burton, 2015). In their literature review on institutional theory and sport management research, Washington and Patterson (2011) call for a determination of the factors required to bring about the institutionalization of

a new practice. Investigation of the necessary behaviors, actions, supporting agencies, etc. required to bring about professionalization would benefit researchers and practitioners alike.

Studies on the causes of professionalization only consider a small number of factors that promote or hinder professionalization, and usually in an Anglo-Saxon context. Since sport policy and the proportion of subsidies that make up the total income of sport organizations differs between countries, the impact of the external environment on professionalization of NSFs largely depends on the specific national sport system and on the varying coercive pressures of governments. Several studies (e.g., Amis et al., 2002; Edwards et al., 2009; Slack & Hinings, 1994) have found clear coercive pressure by the government in Canada, whereas in Norway and Belgium the pressure exerted by the state has been rather low (Seippel, 2002; Vos et al., 2011). Therefore, it is useful to investigate causes of professionalization in a specific state from a multi-level perspective. We believe that it is important to consider institutional influences, individual key actors, as well as unforeseen internal factors equally. Furthermore, previous research has rarely differentiated between initial internal and external triggers for professionalization and additional more instrumental factors that contribute to establishing professionalization practices. Greater understanding of how changes evolve and of the mechanisms behind the processes of professionalization in different NSFs from the same field can help NSFs to avoid conflicts and discrepancies and support more efficient service and strategy development.

### **3.3 Consequences of professionalization**

A prominent topic in the research on the consequences of professionalization is the employment of paid staff. The focus is generally on the negative consequences for volunteers and for the organization, since the relationship between paid staff and volunteers is often characterized by tensions and conflicts (e.g., Amis et al., 1995; Seippel, 2002). Specific challenges may arise with respect to board structure and performance and a balance between paid managers and volunteers leaders (e.g., Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011). Adaptation of governance and decision-making structures often result in changes in the role of the elected board, transferring its focus from daily affairs onto strategy issues (for an overview see Ferkins et al., 2005). At the same time, specific competences of board members have gained more weight and many NSFs have embraced a “businesslike philosophy”. Through networks in economic and political fields, board members and the board as such can gain considerable power over the NSF (Maier et al., 2016). Board performance has also received attention with regard to the consequences of professionalization (e.g., Hoye & Doherty, 2011). Nagel et al. (2015) even claim that “board performance has proved to be an interesting dependent variable

### 3. Previous research

of professionalization” (p. 421), as sport organizations aim to optimize efficiency and effectiveness with managerial skills.

Besides consequences relating to people's roles, abundant research on NSF's has linked professionalization with a transformation in organizational values and objectives (e.g., Amis et al., 2002; Maier et al., 2016; Shilbury, Ferkins, & Smythe, 2013). Changes in objectives and the existence of diverse values may result in contradictory goals within an NSF as well as between the NSF and its member organizations. These contradictions, in turn, affect the legitimacy of the organization (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Maier et al., 2016). Ferkins and Shilbury's research (2010) on consequences of professionalization suggests that the adaptation of an umbrella organization's strategies can improve its collaboration with its member organizations.

Considering the nature of NPOs in general, professionalization in NSF's may result in conflicts between nonprofit values and economic logic, putting NSF's under pressure to invest more in commercial partnerships and to “sell their product”. Drifting between diverse values can distract NSF's from advocating for the interests of their member organizations (Koski & Heikkala, 1998). Such legitimacy paradoxes may lead NPOs to decouple implementation of formal policies from their actual organizational practice in order to still appear legitimate (Åberg, 2013; Amis et al., 2002). An NSF may adapt its strategy papers and appear to introduce management practices and differentiated structures to demonstrate professionalization in accordance with (internal and external) expectations, when, in fact, the federation continues operating according to traditional values and institutionalized practices. Bayle and Robinson (2007) observed another form of drifting apart in national sport governing bodies following professionalization. They found the gap widening not only between formal and informal practices but also between actual and potential performance (Bayle & Robinson, 2007).

Existing research on the consequences of professionalization has focused on NSF's' specific attributes, structures and capabilities, that has mostly been triggered by specific policy programs imposed by sport governing bodies (e.g., Dowling, et al., 2015; Nichols, Grix, Ferguson, & Griffiths, 2016; Sam, 2009). Over the course of professionalization, NSF's are subject to diverse internal and external drivers and barriers that affect their decision-making. At the same time, daily decisions are made according to strategies with targets of up to four years in the future. To understand professionalization as a process with the potential to impact upon the whole organization, it is worth broadening the focus from specific aspects of professionalization to understanding interaction of the changes concerning different parts of the organization. NSF's need to address such relationships to achieve their goals and prevent wasted resources. It would also be interesting to enquire into improvements in the consequences of professionalization, which have received little attention so far.

#### 4. Analytical background

A multi-level framework to examine professionalization in sport federations, based on a literature review by Nagel et al. (2015), provides the heuristic frame for this thesis. The researchers reviewed the sport management and sociological literature on professionalization in sport federations and developed a framework that brings together causes and consequences of professionalization on three organizational levels (Figure 1): the endogenous level (relating to the specific structures and processes of NSFs), the internal environment (relating to the member organizations of the NSFs) and the external environment (concerning stakeholders in sport and society).

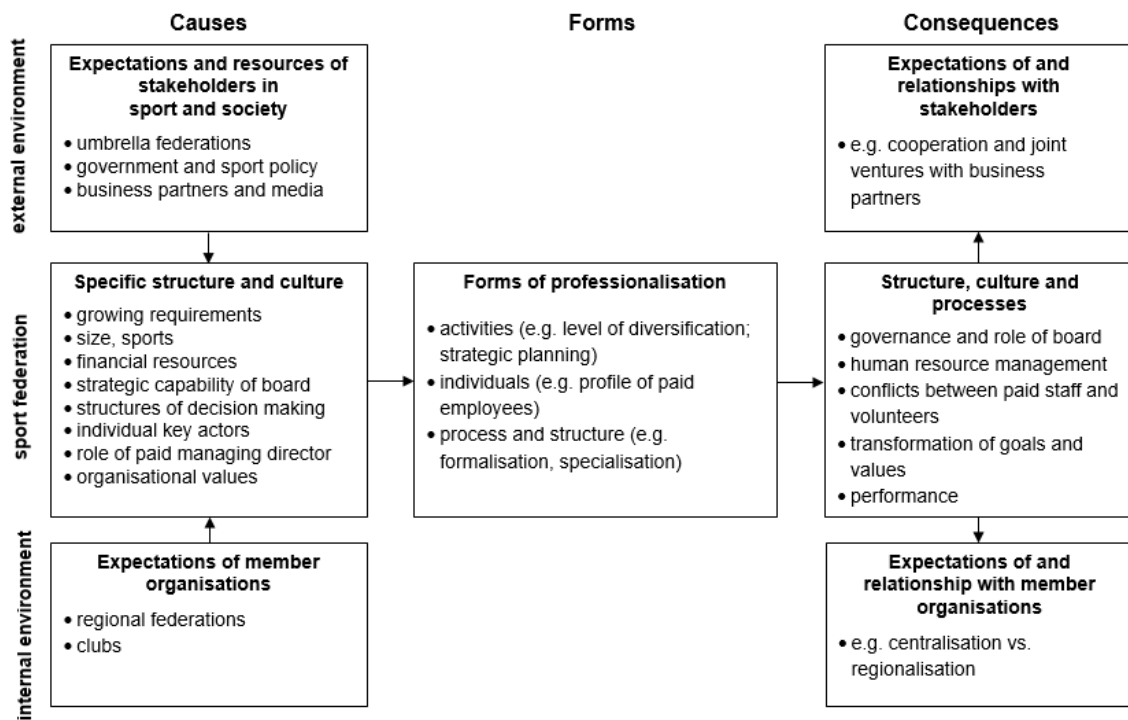


Figure 1. Multi-level framework for analyzing professionalization in sport federations (Nagel et al., 2015).

Underlying the three-level framework is an understanding of NSFs as corporate actors that evolve through reciprocal relations between social action and structure (Giddens, 1984). Endogenous structures, which include factors such as norms and informal rules, affect the decision-making of the organization, and vice versa. The purpose of NSFs is to act in the interests of their member organizations, and while NSFs are embedded in a macrosystem, they are also influenced by that system and the actors within (Nagel et al., 2015). The

framework illustrates, first, how different factors on these three levels influence professionalization. It also shows the consequences that professionalization can have for an NSF and for its internal and external relationships. Drawing on research by Legay (2001) and Bayle and Robinson (2007), Nagel et al. assess forms of professionalization with: professionalization of 1) activities (e.g., quality management), 2) individuals (e.g., credentials), and 3) structure and processes (e.g., formalization).

This thesis seeks empirical evidence of various sections of the analytical framework. The first objective relates to forms of professionalization. We did not aim to examine whether different forms of professionalization can be identified among Swiss NSFs with regard to the dimensions demonstrated in the framework of Nagel et al. (activities, individuals, and processes and structures). Instead, the purpose was to contribute to analyses of such forms by providing a comprehensive framework. The second study of this thesis uses the three levels, which Nagel et al. drew from their literature review, as an analytical tool. The aim was to gain empirical in-depth knowledge of the causes of professionalization in Swiss NSFs. The procedure was open to enable possible development of the framework. The third paper applied a similar approach in order to investigate intended and unintended consequences of professionalization using a case study, also from Switzerland.

## 5. General methodological design

Predictive theories and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs. Concrete, context-dependent knowledge is therefore more valuable than the vain search for predictive theories and universals. (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 224)

This thesis uses a case study design. A case study is well-suited for gaining in-depth knowledge of a real-life phenomenon. It offers empirical insight into the (causal) mechanisms and interactions of a social phenomenon, as well as intentions, reasoning, capabilities, and (power) relationships of the actors involved in a given setting (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017; Gerring, 2007; Yin, 2014). Referring to Karl Popper's black swans, which he used to falsify the claim that all swans were white, Flyvbjerg (2006) claims that case study research is good for identifying 'black swans'. Using case studies, researchers may acquire knowledge that subverts their (theoretical) proposals – even if the knowledge is only of a single case. A case study also allows researchers to study the object of their research in its setting, which is a relational and spatial context constituted by social activities and interactions, and to make “purposeful efforts to respond to uncertainty” (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, p. 12).

The multi-level framework developed by Nagel et al. (2015) and introduced above serves as a heuristic frame for this doctoral work. It guided the development of the research instruments and the analyses of the second and third studies. We approached twelve Swiss NSFs as case studies for analyzing causes, forms and consequences of professionalization (Table 1). The NSFs were selected using purposive sampling, considering the number of members, the sport (individual/team, winter/summer, Olympic/non-Olympic), as well as the NSF's scope (single/multiple sports). In order to also consider NSFs whose scope differs from that of common NSFs, the umbrella federation for sports for people with disabilities was included. Since interviews were one of the main means of data collection, accessibility to the NSF and their willingness to participate in the study was important for selection of cases.

## 5. General methodological design

Table 1

*Swiss NSFs included in the project*

Federation	N member clubs*	N active members/licenses*	Interview partners	Article	Master thesis at Institute of Sport Science, University of Bern <sup>1</sup>
PluSport (umbrella federation for people with disabilities, multi-discipline) <sup>2</sup>	79	9'100	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General Director</li> <li>• Chief Marketing &amp; Communication and Chief Grassroots Sports (together)</li> <li>• President</li> </ul>	Paper 2	Sport federation development: Professionalization in PluSport (Oct 2017)
Swiss Fencing <sup>2</sup>	52	2'700	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Former Coach National Team &amp; Elite for 16 years</li> <li>• President</li> <li>• Sport Manager</li> </ul>	Paper 2	Professionalization in Swiss Fencing (May 2016)
Swiss Gymnastics <sup>2</sup>	2'957	247'700	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chief Marketing &amp; Communication and Chief Media (together)</li> <li>• General Director</li> <li>• President</li> </ul>	Paper 2	Professionalization in Swiss Gymnastics (Nov 2014)
Swiss Handball <sup>2</sup>	247	19'000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• President</li> <li>• Chief Handball Promotion / Director of a regional federation</li> <li>• General Director</li> </ul>	Paper 2	Professionalization in Swiss Handball Federation: an analysis of the strategy "SHF Structure 2020" (June 2016)
Swiss Judo & Ju-jitsu Federation	274	14'200	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A person with experience from different positions at Swiss Judo &amp; Ju-jitsu for many years</li> <li>• General Director</li> <li>• President</li> </ul>	-	Causes, forms and consequences of professionalization in Swiss Judo & Ju-jitsu Federation (Aug 2017)
Swiss Orienteering <sup>2</sup>	96	8'400	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chief General Secretary and President (together)</li> <li>• Ex-CEO of a former main sponsor</li> </ul>	"To be professional!" Analysis of professionalization process in Swiss Orienteering Federation (first authored by C. Klenk, in process)	-
Swiss Rowing	76	11'600	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General Director</li> <li>• Board member (high-performance sport)</li> <li>• n.d.</li> </ul>	-	Professionalization in Swiss Rowing Federation (in process, deadline June 2018)
Swiss Ski <sup>2</sup>	756	67'600	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chief Directory / Sport Director</li> <li>• Acting Chief Directory / Marketing Director</li> <li>• Member of Presidium / President of a regional federation</li> </ul>	Paper 2	The meaning of sponsor partnerships for professionalization of sport federations: the case Swiss Ski (Oct 2016)
Swiss Triathlon <sup>2</sup>	75	4'900	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General Director</li> <li>• External Consultant for Strategy 2017-2020</li> </ul>	Examining the impact of leadership style on board-initiated strategy development in a federated sport network (first authored by C. Klenk, in process)	Organization development of Swiss Triathlon: An analysis of the strategic development based on the strategy periods 2013-2016 and 2017-2020 (Nov 2016)
Swiss Unihockey (floorball) <sup>2</sup>	416	32'400	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COO</li> <li>• President</li> <li>• A person with experience from different paid and volunteer positions at Swiss Unihockey and FOSPO for many years</li> </ul>	Papers 2 & 3	-
Swiss Volley <sup>2</sup>	503	29'400	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General Director</li> <li>• President</li> </ul>	Paper 2	-
Eidgenössischer Schwingerverband (Lutte Suisse)	168	6'000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chief General Secretary</li> <li>• Chairman of the Board</li> <li>• Board member (finances) / President of a regional federation</li> </ul>	-	<i>Bachelor thesis:</i> Professionalization and volunteering in Association Fédérale de Lutte Suisse

\* State 2016 (Swiss Olympic, n.d.)

<sup>1</sup> The thesis on Swiss Gymnastics was supervised by Torsten Schlesinger, Swiss Ski by Grazia Lang, and Swiss Triathlon by Christoffer Klenk. The other Master theses and the Bachelor thesis were supervised by Kaisa Ruoranen.

<sup>2</sup> The federation was included in a Master thesis "Governance in 9 Swiss National Sport Federations" at the Institute of Sport Science, University of Bern, supervised by Kaisa Ruoranen.



### 5.1 Development of the study instruments

The first step was the development of an interview guide for the expert interviews together with other members of the project group (Appendix 1). Due to the other objectives of the research project, the guide was based on the literature review and multi-level framework developed by Nagel et al. (2015) for analyzing forms, causes and consequences of professionalization. For the expert interviews, it included questions on the interviewee's understanding of professionalization and its characteristics.

The next step was to develop an interview guide for the case studies (Appendix 2). This was based on the findings from the first study, which synthesized practitioners and scholars' perceptions of professionalization (Ruoranen et al., 2016). Accordingly, the interview guide follows the three topics used to investigate professionalization: persons and positions, structures and processes, and strategies and activities. Particular features of NSFs relevant to professionalization are called elements of professionalization. The interview guide for the case studies also follows the three levels of the analytical framework of Nagel et al. (2015). Consequently, questions on causes and consequences of professionalization were structured according to the external and internal environment of the NSFs and their endogenous features.

Besides semi-structured interviews with key persons from the NSFs, data was collected by screening a large number of documents. Therefore, similar to the basic interview guide, which was adapted to each interview partner taking his or her position into consideration, a multi-faceted matrix of aspects of professionalization was developed (Appendix 3). The data matrix facilitated wide-ranging data collection and was filled in for each NSF included in the project. The data was mainly sourced from documents presenting the state-of-the-art and the forms of professionalization in the NSFs. The matrix also served as a means of managing the data relating to each NSF.

Apart from their use for the analysis, the documents were also an information source that reduced the asymmetry of the relationship between the researcher and key informants from the organizations. Being informed also demonstrated researcher's interest in the interviewee's organization and helped to build trust, which was of the utmost importance for conducting this research.

## 5. General methodological design

### 5.2 Analysis of the case studies

A qualitative approach to content analysis was applied in all studies. A qualitative design is fruitful for interpreting social circumstances, particularly those that result in verbal description. Differing from quantitative methods, which explain causalities between two or more social phenomena by defining statistically significant, i.e., not incidental, relationships, qualitative methods examine the mechanisms behind the causalities. In short, a qualitative approach enables researchers to *describe* real social phenomena – in this case, professionalization in Swiss NSFs – without the aim of standardizing the information, which characterizes quantitative methods (Gläser & Laudel, 2010, 2013; Mayring, 2000). The methods of each individual study are described in more detail in the articles.

Some of the cases addressed here were also explored in Master's theses (Institute of Sport Science at the University of Bern). In addition, a small number of case studies were conducted as Master's theses on NSFs, which were not considered in the analyses of this doctoral thesis. The same applies for a Bachelor's thesis on professionalization in Association Fédérale de Lutte Suisse. All these works were based on qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews and documents and were supervised by members of the project group at the University of Bern, most of them by Kaisa Ruoranen (see Table 1). Furthermore, additional students' theses that were completed for two Masters' courses running during the project at the University of Bern ("Management in sport federations", Spring 2015 and 2016) were used as secondary data in the analyses of the present doctoral work.

## 6. Developing a conceptual framework to analyze professionalization in sport federations

Ruoranen, K., Klenk, C., Schlesinger, T., Bayle, E., Clausen, J., Giauque, D., & Nagel, S. (2016). Developing a conceptual framework to analyse professionalization in sport federations. *European Journal for Sport and Society*, 13, 55-74. doi:10.1080/16138171.2016.1153881

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### 6.1 Introduction

In the course of societal development towards modernization and rationalization, environmental pressures have pushed organizations to adapt their structures and practices to new standards, notably to demonstrate modernity, rationality and accountability (e.g. Child & Rodrigues, 2011; for sport organizations: Kikulis, 2000). Meeting expectations of stakeholders using larger management structures and formalization has become essential to the survival of organizations in a dynamic organizational environment. This pressure is observed in public and corporate sectors as well as in non-profit organizations (NPO), and particularly in the sport sector where a response to liability issues is needed to legitimize (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) their activities (Evetts, 2011; Kikulis, 2000; Hoye, 2003; Maier et al., 2014; Maier et al., 2016; Slack & Hinings, 1992). As key actors within a (global) sport system (Stichweh, 2013), international and national sport federations (NSF) are required to justify their social and commercial activities to their stakeholders – state, sponsors, member clubs, media, etc. This pressure has caused profound organizational changes, such as institutionalized management, implementation of standardized instruments in daily practice, and employment of people with specific qualifications. Yet, sport federations as well as sport clubs are characterized by organizational structures that do not fit these developments: they have a federal governance, decisions are made on a delegate basis, their purpose is not economic revenue but satisfying their members, and they operate on a voluntary basis (e.g. Thiel & Mayer, 2009). The organizational adaptation has led to a transformation of sport federations, ‘from a volunteer driven to an increasingly business-like phenomenon’ (Chantelat, 2001; Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011). This development has often been referred to as ‘professionalization’, even though there is no clear definition of the term.

### 6.2 Definitions and dimensions of professionalization

There are few scholars who have defined or attempted to conceptualize ‘professionalization’. Dowling and colleagues (2014) analyse sociological, managerial and sport management literature on professionalization in sport organizations. Based on their review, they propose a classification into three categories:

## 6. Developing a conceptual framework

1. *Organizational professionalization* means 'a transition [. . .] from an amateur and volunteer driven pastime towards increasingly business-like organizational entities' (523), and has been researched in terms of governance, structure and policymaking;
2. *Systemic professionalization* is 'an attempt to account for an external factor that is influencing [. . .] sport organizations within a particular system or organizational field' (524).
3. *Occupational professionalization* is defined as 'the transformation of occupations into professions' and 'a means to explain the legitimization' (524; see also Abbott, 1988; Evetts, 2011).

In this paper, we incorporate the first two perspectives, which are directly relevant to organizational development in sport federations. Systemic professionalization directly corresponds with the institutional approach discussed. This theoretical concept focuses on the external factors of occupational professionalization, such as field-level pressure, expectations of stakeholders, and legitimization (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Descriptions of organizational professionalization as a process away from 'amateurism' (Bailly & Chapelle, 2013; Chantelat, 2001; O'Brien & Slack, 2003, 2004; Salamon, 1987; Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011; Skinner et al., 1999) has these main features: employment of professionals with expert knowledge in the federations, a process towards rationalization, efficiency, project management, and commercialization to ultimately legitimize their activities (Dowling et al., 2014; Hoye, 2003; O'Brien & Slack, 2003, 2004; Seippel, 2011). These features have also been attributed to 'being business-like' (Maier et al., 2014). In the main, most authors reflect on organizational professionalization from a functional perspective, and issues of organizational culture are rarely discussed.

Legay (2001) and Bayle and Robinson (2007) distinguish three dimensions of organizational professionalization in sport federations:

1. *Professionalization of activities*: A professionalized organization defines goals and develops measures to work towards these goals. These measures are regularly evaluated in terms of efficiency and effectiveness, to ensure constant self-monitoring, and to finally enable potential improvement.
2. *Professionalization of individuals*: This means an increased number of paid employees and higher expectations of the competence of volunteers. The activities of the individuals can be in the field of management of the organization or in sport (e.g. athletes, coaches). The priority between professionalizing the sports department by engaging paid trainers, and increasing administrative staff is often discussed.
3. *Professionalization of processes and structures*: This applies to both centralization and more hierarchical decision-making processes, as well as to specialization and

differentiation of roles, the functions and tasks in the organization, such as dealing with external players, ensuring organizational learning and knowledge management, and implementing modern technologies.

### **6.3 Causes and consequences of professionalization**

Aside from the conceptualization of professionalization, the researchers have also attempted to grasp the characteristics of stages and sequences, the causes and drivers, in terms of environmental influence as well as internal factors that may trigger or hinder processes of professionalization, and to finally assess the consequences of the organizational changes (e.g. Bayle & Camy, 2004; Dowling et al., 2014; Ferkins, Shilbury, & McDonald, 2005; Kikulis et al., 1992; Shilbury, 2001; Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011). Nagel and colleagues (2015) have summarized the current sport management and sport sociological literature and positioned all relevant perspectives into a multi-level framework of forms, causes and consequences of professionalization. There are several internal and external drivers for federations to professionalize: e.g. pressure from the government, expectations of sponsors, media, and umbrella organizations, increased workload, strategic capability of the board and key individuals. Traditional culture (Welty Peachey et al., 2015; Slack & Hinings, 1992) and scarce financial resources can hinder professionalization, whereas international competition and media coverage in certain sports promote professionalization (for more details see Nagel et al., 2015).

The influence of the environment, and adaption to common expectations of other institutions (e.g. umbrella organizations, member organizations, and policy makers), is often explained using institutional theory (Horch & Schütte, 2009; Kikulis, 2000; O'Brien & Slack, 2004; Slack & Hinings, 1992; Washington & Patterson, 2011). Our study approaches professionalization with a 'theoretically open mind'; professionalization is multifaceted and by maintaining an openness in theory and by accessing multiple approaches we may better understand different aspects of the phenomenon (Abbott, 1988; Horch & Schütte, 2009; Welty Peachey et al., 2015; Slack, 2014; Slack & Hinings, 1992).

## 6. Developing a conceptual framework

### 6.4 Outline of the present study

Despite increasing research interest and many attempts to systemize the phenomenon of professionalization, there is still no comprehensively applicable concept. According to Dowling and colleagues (2014), 'the exact manner by which the concept is operationalized is often ambiguous, unclear, implicit or omitted entirely.' (2). A more profound concept that provides a common understanding of the phenomenon would assist the analysis of professionalization in sport federations as a holistic phenomenon and enable comparison of different forms of organizational transformation.

As well as maintaining conceptual ambivalence, it is particularly unclear if the concepts used in the literature correspond to the understanding of professionalization in practice. To date, we do not know whether the concepts applied by scholars mirror the perception of practitioners in the federations. However, valid research necessitates practitioners to have a common understanding when using the term professionalization, e.g. when they write documents or take part in academic research. The perceptions of practitioners in the field are essential to validate the theoretical concepts of professionalization (Slack, 2014; Van der Roest, Vermeulen, & Van Bottenburg, 2015). The integration of practitioners' perspectives into a framework would also increase the reliability and applicability in the analysis of a particular sport federation.

The main focus of this paper is to better understand professionalization in sport federations. For this purpose, this study explores professionalization in the context of Swiss NSF. Specifically, we (1) ask how experts from the field of Swiss NSF perceive professionalization, (2) compare their perceptions with concepts of professionalization that have been used in the literature and (3) propose a conceptual framework for professionalization.

Considering both the perspectives of researchers and practitioners, we can establish the basis of a comprehensive conceptual framework that could be used to analyse forms of professionalization in sport federations. Such a framework would also help sport federations to develop adequate management and governance concepts and ultimately result in an increased strategic capability (Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011).

## 6.5 Method

### *Hermeneutical approach*

A hermeneutic approach has been selected. To date hermeneutic phenomenology has not had much attention in sport management research (Edwards & Skinner, 2009; Shilbury et al., 2014; Skille, 2013). However, when attempting ‘to grasp the everyday world, and draw insight and meaning from it’ (Shilbury et al., 2014, 350), hermeneutics is a fruitful method, as its strength lies in the understanding of the meaning of context. To this end the researcher observes an observer (second order observation) and reconstructs the subjective view and interpretation that the first order observer has of a phenomenon.

### *Expert interviews*

Qualitative expert interviews are an eligible instrument for a hermeneutic analysis of perceptions of real-life phenomena.

Table 2  
*The experts*

<b>Experts</b>	
Vice Executive Director of SO (for 2 years) - responsible for federation development - several years at SO in various leading positions	Head of Ethic & Education Department of SO (for 8 years) - responsible for club and federation development - several years in sport management at SO
Counsellor for NSFs/NPOs (for nearly 20 years) Lecturer in Education (offered by national umbrella federations) - involved in promotion of leisure, tourism & sport, together with public sector	Chief of the Resort Sport & Society at the Federal University of Sports (for 9 years) Leading position in a large NSF - several years in a large NSF in various leading positions
President of one of the largest NSFs (for 8 years) A board member of foundations and associations for sport and health system promotion	Executive Director of the Cantonal Federation of Sport Zurich (for 3 years) (umbrella organisation of the sport federations of Canton Zurich)

Such experts can be seen as specialists in specific constellations (Mayring, 2000), because they possess not only technical information (data and facts) and process information (e.g. about interactions), but also information about contexts and meanings. Through the first set of information they are able to refer to fields where they are not actors themselves, whereas the latter set refers to the views, interpretations and perceptions, the experts have been able to create about the phenomenon (Gibbs, 2007; Lindseth & Norberg, 2004; Petty et al., 2012). Therefore, in this study the experts are expected to have knowledge beyond any single sport federation, and to be familiar with the environment of the federations, such as political institutions. Being able then to understand the context in which professionalization is taking

## 6. Developing a conceptual framework

place, the experts are expected to be able to relate information and thus be able to interpret and build a view of their observation.

### ***Data collection***

Interviews were conducted with six people with diverse backgrounds in the field of Swiss sport (Table 2). After five interviews, the material appeared saturated, this was confirmed by a sixth interview. The interviews were conducted face-to-face by a minimum of two of the authors and guided by these main research questions: What does the interviewee understand by 'professionalization in sport federations'? What characterizes professionalization? How does a professionalized sport federation differ from a less professionalized one? Following additional objectives of the study, the interview guide also included questions about causes, influencing factors, and the consequences of professionalization. The topics of the interviews were set by the literature review, which is the basis of Nagel and colleagues' (2015) multi-level framework for analyzing forms, causes and consequences of professionalization. In this paper, we focus only on the responses related to forms of professionalization. The interviews took place between October 2014 and January 2015, were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. The average duration was about one hour.

### ***Swiss sport system***

In Switzerland, sport politics work on three levels (e.g. Kempf & Lichtsteiner, 2015): federal, cantonal and municipal, and sport is organized by public and private corporations. Public bodies are responsible for sports-for-all and college sport, whereas the umbrella federation Swiss Olympic Association (SO), its 86 NSF that represent 20,000 clubs, organise grassroots and top-level sport. Compared to other European countries, the Swiss sport system is funded to a small extent by the Federal Office of Sport (BASPO) that mainly supports the action of the cantons, municipalities and private organizations (Chappelet, 2010; Kempf & Lichtsteiner, 2015). The sport federations and their clubs hold a central position in the Swiss sport system and play an important role in sport activities, e.g. 25% of the population is member of a sport club and its sport federation (Stamm & Lamprecht, 2011; Stamm et al., 2015). Currently, the federations in particular are in a process of professionalization leading to an obvious increase in paid staff. One reason for this is the requirements of SO for funding, such as strategic concepts and management structures.

### ***Experts***

In their previous and current functions, the selected experts have been associated with the process and development of several Swiss NSF (Table 2). The sample contains representatives of different parts of Swiss sport system: public sector (BASPO and a cantonal



umbrella federation), private sector (SO and NSF), and persons in (formerly) voluntary as well as in paid positions. Some of the experts hold or have held positions “between” SO and the NSF. The organizations where our experts work and have worked are all involved in the process of professionalization, and the experts operate as actors in the development of Swiss sport system. In their various positions they deal with the challenges the federations face today, address these with the federations, and represent the interests of sport in politics. As they work with several NSF, they are able to compare their development and thus to better reflect on different procedures. In the results section, we refer to the interviewees using letters (Interviewee (I) A-F), which do not correspond to the order of the persons in Table 2.

### ***Data analysis***

The interviews were screened line by line for characteristics and units of meaning of professionalization by two researchers independently. Researchers' notes and the units were then compared, discussed and divergences synchronized, after which each interview was coded electronically. In this phase, the codes were kept close to the material to avoid losing any information. In the next step, the coded segments of all interviews were checked for their commonalities and discrepancies, grouped accordingly, and named inductively by consensus. For data management, we used the software Atlas.ti. Finally, the codes were printed out, spread on a table and grouped by four researchers. In the following, we refer to these groups as characteristics of professionalization.

## 6. Developing a conceptual framework

### 6.6 Results

The characteristics of professionalization that we identified in the expert interviews could be inductively assigned into three groups: (1) changed management philosophy, i.e. for-profit orientation, service and customer orientation, quality improvement, rationality and efficiency orientation, and strategic planning; (2) functional differentiation and specialization, i.e. differentiation of positions, balanced governance, competence orientation and paid staff; and (3) application of management tools, i.e. controlling, administration and communication tools. The results are elaborated in the following sections.

#### 6.6.1 Changed management philosophy

A prominent issue in the experts' views of professionalization was a shift in the federations' philosophy towards 'business-like', service-orientated organization, due to the focus on economic performance, investment and capital reserves. Where a sport federation traditionally and legally operates on a non-profit basis, today, they seem to adopt practices from FPO. Interviewee D described professionalization as "economization", and even found: "The for-profit orientated part [of a federation] becomes bigger and bigger, investment is an issue, and federations expect revenue, not non-profit" (I-D). Nevertheless, as the other interviewees, also interviewee D emphasized that the increasing orientation at practices and activities that are common in FPO does not result in a shift towards FPO, as the fundamental non-profit logic, that is, voluntarism and representation of members' interests, remains central.

In accordance with FPO orientation, most experts observed that Swiss sport federations see themselves more and more as *service providers*. Using attractive events and well-known athletes, federations can "create a selling product that the sponsors will market in return" (I-D). This implies that, in contrast to representing members' interests, the market analysis of supply and demand gains importance, and promoting their own "product" for multiple stakeholders becomes one of the core tasks of the federations. A negative consequence of a customer-service provider relationship can be that:

The demands increase, because consumer-service provider relationship automatically means higher expectations, people don't accept any failures. [...] That means that the remaining voluntary work becomes more and more challenging. (I-F)

Some interviewees related professionalization to the intention to *improve the quality* of the federation's performance, for example by developing their 'product' and their services. As interviewee E stated:

Professionalization always comes into play when things go wrong. [...] It's basically all about getting better. The athletes, the coaches, the federation itself. We want to be better, meaning qualitative development. (I-E)

Later in the interview, interviewee E pointed out that professionalization does not guarantee the improvement in the federation's performance.

For the experts, optimizing organizational performance means more *rationality and efficiency* of the processes. All of them have observed that Swiss sport federations are struggling with limited resources and capacities (personnel and financial), but also with ineffective allocation of scarce resources. This prompts the NSF to optimize the day-to-day processes in order to operate efficiently. For interviewee A, this means "not to turn everything upside down all at once", professionalization needs to aspire to "a certain modesty" – not to conflict with the interests and benefits of member clubs. In the end, it is the members that evaluate the quality of the performance and services of a federation.

To characterize professionalization, the experts consistently contrasted unplanned muddling-through (Schimank, 2005) with *long-term strategy*: "Strategic way of thinking and concepts behind, analysis and systematic actions, that's professionalization" (I–E).

The professionalized federations put effort into self-reflection, analysis of their environment, and documentation of policy and knowledge, where they can configure long-term concepts – "not that you start all over again with every change in staff" (I–A). Interviewee F emphasized the importance of a vision: a federation should first pursue a vision "to give the strategy a direction" (I–F).

The interviews indicate that the shift in management philosophy towards 'business-like' organizations is challenging the NSF. Because of the relationships with different stakeholders, whose expectations may differ from each other, the federations have to follow diverse goals, or their ultimate goal may even not be clear. Without clearly defined goals then, it is difficult to determine measurements for quality, efficiency, and long-term strategy, or to define achievement and success. Interviewee E raised a related and conflicting issue: because "a lot is done in an informal manner [which] is more difficult to measure", "looking at formalities, whether the federation has this and that, how the financial control works" does not reflect the real performance and how the federation "works in reality" (I–E). Interviewees questioned the application of financial control tools commonly used in public offices and the associated economic reckoning.

Finally, the majority of the interviewees pointed out that the shift in management philosophy, as it is described above, does not solely concern sport federations, but is the spirit of time, "the trend" (I–F):

It has to do with current phenomena of the society, it's in the culture. We used to clean our homes by ourselves, voluntarily, and today we employ a cleaner. (I–E)

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### 6.6.2 Functional differentiation and specialization

The interviewees further characterized professionalization through changes in organizational structures and adaptations in personal policy, particularly in terms of differentiation and specialization of functions and roles. Sport federations differentiate and establish (new) positions and further specify tasks. According to the experts, without specialization of the staff, the NSF would be overwhelmed by the increasing complexity of their activities. Interviewee C clearly stated: “you can already grasp the level of professionalization of a federation through certain forms: when you see three people taking up 20 functions, the federation is about to collapse”. All interviewees pointed out that paid staff needs a differentiation of functions and specialization of roles, and their employment is reliant on financial resources. According to interviewee B, this is not the only solution, particularly for small federations: “It also depends on the person – some people are happy when they have different kinds of tasks to do” (I–B).

All but one interviewee explicitly stated professionalization in NSF is characterized by a clear differentiation between the Executive Board and the Executive Office, meaning that the decision-making competences – who is responsible for strategic issues, who has the competence for daily affairs – are clearly defined, so that “everyone, whether a volunteer or a paid employee, has his/her position and task in the system as a whole” (I–B). In accordance with interviewee B, for several experts it seems that at the moment that the Board still “has to *learn* to differentiate between Executive and Operative” (I–B) (emphasized by the interviewee). But then again, “the paid operative body should also have the non-profit way of thinking, and appreciate collaboration with volunteers” (I–A). As *balanced governance* (cf. Auld & Godbey, 1998), the interviewees observed various solutions and constellations in the Swiss NSF. They did not suggest any specific constellation as the professionalized governance, but emphasized the meaning of a balance between the mutual complement of a strategic Board and an operative Executive Office, that often corresponds to voluntary (the Board) and paid (the Executive Office) work. Characteristic for professionalization would be to entrust strategic development to the volunteers, which would then be put in action by the paid staff to finally follow the vision of the federation.

A further characteristic of professionalization that was identified in the interviews was *competence orientation*. Related to the idea of differentiation of structures and positions, federations today prefer a work force with specific qualifications and knowledge – instead of choosing just anybody, positions are increasingly occupied by specialized experts. From the perspective of the interviewees, such competence orientation does not only apply to paid staff, the federations may also consider occupying voluntary positions, for example in the Executive Board, with “professional volunteers” (I–B):

Someone who is an accountant or a banker could quite easily take up a voluntary job as chief of finances. So, the volunteer would work in his

profession and bring in his knowhow in addition to his heart for the sport. (I–B)

Hence, professionalization means profit of the respective *know-how, expertise and experience* where it is needed. Correspondingly, the federation benefits not (only) from the conventional long-term commitment of the volunteers but also from the knowledge and experience that the people in the federation bring with them.

Considering these tendencies to expertise, the Swiss experts perceived professionalization as “a transformation from volunteering to professional paid work” (I–D) – a prominent aspect that is known from several previous studies and concepts. Professionalization of NSF, however, does not mean an enterprise-to-be that operates exclusively with paid employees: five interviewees explicitly stated that “volunteers remain the basis” (I–C). The role of the *paid staff* should rather be considered as a support to “relieve the volunteers from certain [daily] tasks, to allow the volunteers to do what they can and want” (I–C). Nevertheless, the activities and events of sport federations often take place in the evening and at weekends, favoring voluntary engagement and not corresponding with common working hours. Thus, professionalizing federations need to be capable of considering the paid staff as “remunerated employees, who may be committed voluntarily somewhere else” (I–B). In contrast to voluntary commitment, contract-based commitment “allows [the federations] more control” (I–E) over the work.

The experts distinguish between on and off the field professionalization. The objective of the first includes aspects of sport ‘on the field’, such as athletes and coaches, whereas ‘off the field’ refers to structural and managerial changes. The central interview issue was the choice between trainers or administration as the first concern in professionalization. Five interviewees considered the issue more deeply. They all agreed that for high-level sport, investment in paid trainers is a prerequisite, and that the job of these trainers is only to train athletes. Some interviewees observed that as soon as a trainer is paid, “he’s burdened with all administrative work” (I–C), although “protocols can be shared, there’s always someone who will write them” (I–E).

In line with the differentiation of functions, competence orientation and an increase in paid staff, the Swiss experts saw professionalization characterized by a shift in the relations between the people working in a federation. Interviewee F put it the following way:

The human, private sense may suffer a little. [...] Among volunteers the relationship is more like a friendship, you are companions. Professionalization is somehow a move from a chummy to a formal relationship. (I–F)

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### 6.6.3 Application of management tools

The interviewees further referred to professionalization in NSF as the increased application of different tools, whether in the federation's controlling system (e.g., "particularly financial reporting, Swiss SportGAAP is the classic example" [I–F]), in administration (e.g., digitalized documentation), or in communication, for example, "the whole social media has become a component for success" (I–F). It should be noted that many of the instruments that sport federations apply in the course of professionalization have their origins in FPO.

The establishment of different tools for monitoring federation's performance goes hand-in-hand with the effort to achieve rationality and efficiency. In the eyes of the experts, using such control, management and analysis tools, NSF orientate at practices in FPO, and aim to standardize activities and processes, and to demonstrate rationality and transparency to their members and stakeholders. From the implementation of such classic economic instruments they hope to better fulfil their adapted role as efficient, long-term planning, customer-oriented service providers. However, as illustrated above, despite the increased application of tools and controlling instruments, what should be measured in terms of goal achievement is not as clear in sport federations as it is in FPO.

To summarize the results of the interviews, Table 3 provides an overview of the detected characteristics of professionalization from the practitioners' perspective.

Table 3  
*Expert interviews: Characteristics of professionalization*

Changed management philosophy	Functional differentiation and specialization	Application of management tools
For-profit orientation	Balanced governance	Control tools
Service and customer orientation	Differentiation of positions	Administration tools
Quality improvement	Competence orientation	Communication tools
Rationality and efficiency orientation (performance optimizing)	Paid staff	
Strategic planning		

### 6.6.4 Professionalization as part of organizational culture

It is worth emphasizing that five experts thought that despite the alteration and processes towards 'business-like' and for-profit-organizations, *voluntary work remains the basis* for sport federations (Seippel, 2002). Almost all also stated that *professionalization is a matter of professional attitude* and not only of paid employment. To exemplify this, they contrasted NSF

that are not professionalized, despite a paid, qualified management, with federations that operate exclusively with volunteers and can nevertheless be seen as highly professionalized.

When considering these characteristics, it becomes apparent that from the perspective of the Swiss experts the course of professionalization in NSF does not aim to replace, but to work with and build on the existing systems, thus progressively optimizing them. This is reflected in the ideal complementary relationship between 'professional volunteers' and 'volunteer professionals'. 'Professional volunteers' make effort and are willing to work 'professionally', for example, by being open to new ideas and tools, to question efficiency of daily processes, and, in case of boards, to commit their strategic decisions to the Executive Office that puts the decisions into practice. In addition, similar to paid staff, 'professional volunteers' take over functions that correspond to their individual competences and expertise, and the qualities of their remunerated work. Similarly, to work 'professionally', paid staff are not only supposed to bring specific credentials, but also have a heart for working for the sport, as well as an understanding for voluntarism and volunteers. To adequately support the volunteers and to facilitate cooperation, commitment beyond common office hours is expected. However, paid staff – and volunteers – needs to ensure that paid staff do not 'volunteer' in their paid occupation.

### **6.6.5 Critical aspects of professionalization in NSF**

Almost all interviewees also remarked that professionalization does not automatically mean positive development "[or] does it equal quality" (I-E), and sometimes may be questioned. The main concern are priorities in the allocation of scarce resources of a federation: Does the best costs-benefit result come from paying trainers, investing in young talent, or increasing paid administrative staff? Should that be a highly qualified manager, extensive marketing, or something else? "One of my main concerns is the extent the sport and all of the rest benefit from professionalization" (I-D).

Despite limited financial resources, increasing means from sponsorship was not only positively assessed: it was also suggested that professionalization in NSF results in a zero-sum situation, as sponsors' expectations increase they determine exactly what the money is for: "They dictate, we deliver. We are not allowed to spend the money elsewhere. We can then decorate the stadium, but won't have more success in sport" (I-E). Sponsorship may backfire for the federation when it has to spend scarce resources on tasks that are demanded by stakeholders – and not spend where the money is most needed.

Other professionalization concerns lie in the relationship between volunteers and paid employees, and that when "the acknowledgment of voluntary work gets lost, the fire [for the work] may really get lost" (I-B), for "an employee doesn't have a relationship to the work" (I-

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E), “he just does his job” (I–F). Some experts directly questioned, and others inferred, how much and how long NSF can sustain professionalization:

In the long-run, the management of [a NSF] can't orientate towards FPO, but need to make concessions and gifts. You can never rearrange [NSF] according to economic logic, because in the end [in a NSF] you always hold political responsibility. (I–D)

### 6.7 Discussion

This study aims to conceptualize professionalization by synthesizing the perceptions of six practitioners from the field of Swiss NSF with concepts from existing literature. The characteristics of professionalization found in expert interviews were grouped into three topics: 1) changed management philosophy, 2) functional differentiation and specialization, and 3) application of management tools. These aspects largely correspond with previous research on sport federations (for an overview, Dowling et al., 2014). However, the interviews with practitioner's uncovered characteristics that supplement the current understanding of professionalization, and these will need to be more carefully considered in future research.

Our expert interviews confirm the development from mainly voluntary federations to more business-like organizations, and the tendency towards more paid staff (Bailly & Chapelle, 2013; Dowling et al., 2014; Emrich et al., 2001; Hwang & Powell, 2009; O'Brien & Slack, 2003, 2004). The idea of professionalization as the establishment of tasks and positions, and the specialization of the work force, was also in line with other studies (Dowling et al., 2014; Emrich et al., 2001; Legay, 2001; Winand, Zintz, Bayle, & Robinson, 2010). Business-like behaviour, orientation towards FPO, rationalization and accountability, market orientation, and orientation towards ‘commercial forces’ (Shilbury et al., 2014), all explored in several previous studies – and sometimes vaguely referred to – were also identified by our experts. However, ‘professionalism’, which has been applied to similar transitions (e.g. Hwang & Powell, 2009; O'Brien & Slack, 2003, 2004; Skinner et al., 1999), was found by the experts to be a matter of attitude and not necessarily linked to remunerated positions nor to the occupation (similar to Chantelat's [2001] findings in NPOs in general). In this way, features that commonly are related to FPO, such as openness to innovative management tools, efficiency orientation, identification as a service provider, a sense of long-term strategy, and the separation between strategic and operative instances, etc., are characteristics that in the course of professionalization can apply also to volunteers and voluntary sport federations. Clear concepts and long-term strategy, which the practitioners saw as central elements of professionalization, have not received much attention in previous research (Ferkins et al., 2005; cf. Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011).



The practitioners did not view professionalization in NSF only positively and questioned the extent to which this occurs. Some authors have discussed negative consequences of professionalization (for an overview, Nagel et al., 2015). These concerns have mostly focussed on conflict between volunteers and paid staff, the transition of values (e.g. Auld et al., 1997; Cuskelly et al., 1999; Seippel, 2002), debt, and volunteer roles as an oxymoron, as their responsibilities assume genuine director characteristics (Shilbury, 2001).

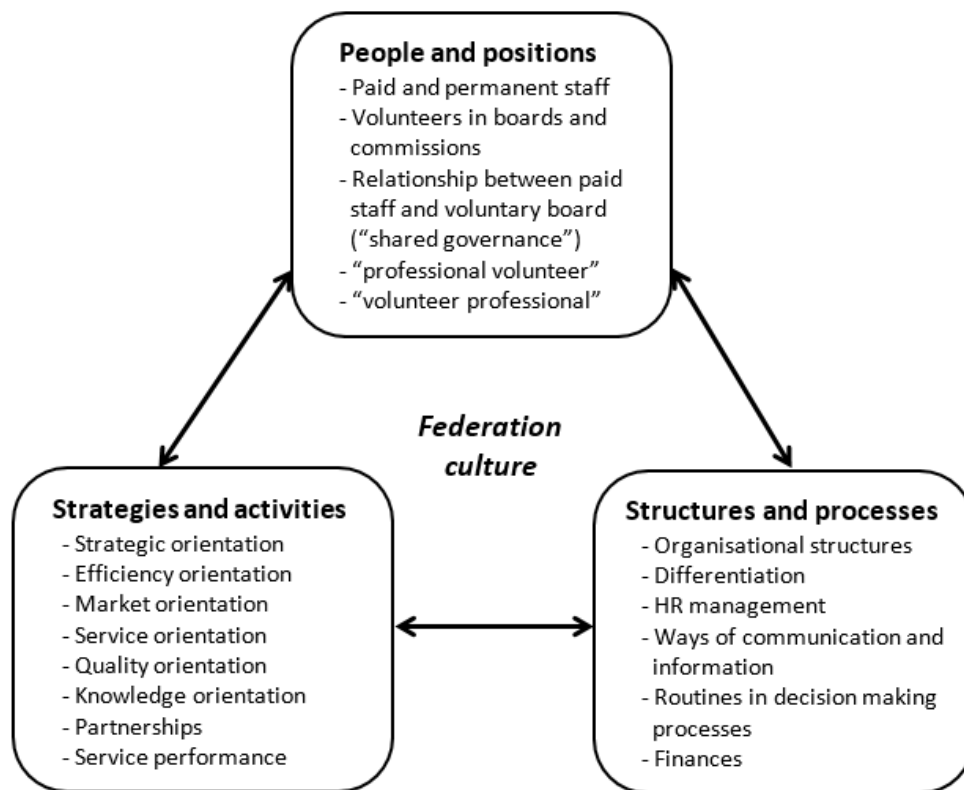


Figure 2. A framework to analyse professionalization in sport federations.

### 6.7.1 Synthesis of scientific concepts and the practitioners' views of professionalization

To assist with the conceptualization of professionalization in NSF we have synthesized previous concepts and the perception of practitioners into an analytical framework (Figure 2). In doing so, we build on Legay's (2001), and Bayle and Robinson's (2007) dimensions of professionalization, i.e. the professionalization of activities, individuals, and processes and structures.

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### ***Strategies and activities***

Many of the characteristics allocated to strategies and activities have been used by scholars to describe 'business-like' or 'for-profit-like' organizations and correspond to the 'changed management philosophy' found in our expert interviews. To date, researchers have placed little focus on the strategic orientation and goals of the federations (Ferkins et al., 2005). In the expert interviewees, long-term strategy was a frequent issue. The (diverse) goals and the strategies for achieving the goals are worth addressing, and whether or not there is a strategic plan in the first place. We could consider the main goal of a NSF, and whether the organization needs to develop diverse, perhaps contradictory strategies to meet different goals, for example, service agreements, or the needs of member clubs. Professionalization can be studied, for example, in terms of federations' management philosophy towards FPO, and how this is reflected in their strategies and activities. We may look at how federations' endeavor to ensure efficiency, such as financial control instruments and service agreements (efficiency orientation), or whether it applies external knowledge and counselling, and to what extent it educates the management of the member clubs (knowledge orientation). It would also be interesting to study the criteria applied to developing cooperative partners, and whether the partnerships of a federation are aligned with its targets and goals (partnerships). Further indicators that could be applied when examining strategic orientation and activities of NSF might be the share of spending on marketing (market orientation) and the support it offers to its members to optimize their performance (service orientation).

### ***People and positions***

Here, we address professionalization in terms of the characteristics of individuals, allocation of competences, as well as the relationship between individuals and between positions. Firstly, we could investigate to what extent a NSF employs paid staff, and secondly, to what extent employees are attached to particular tasks. From the experts' point of view, the relationship between Executive Board and Executive Office is relevant to shared decision-making competences ('balanced governance', Auld & Godbey, 1998), but also with regard to the positions taken by paid and volunteer employees. Here an important question regarding professionalization is whether responsibilities and competences are clearly defined and if they are the main criteria for the selection of people for positions.

It would be reasonable to look at responsibilities, competences and qualifications of the voluntary board and commission members compared to the permanent staff. (Possibly required) formal and informal qualifications of volunteers would indicate the level of functional differentiation and specialization independent of the paid staff. In addition, the extent professionalism in management practices is related to paid positions, and the allocation of decision-making competences between these two bodies should be considered. It would be

interesting to analyse shifts in decision-making competences and responsibilities between paid and voluntary positions. As personal and informal relationships are also important to the functioning of NSF, formal and informal decision-making routines, and communication and information practices could be analysed. This would give an insight into the reciprocal understanding, as well as the means and practices for managing divergent interests and conflicts between the federation's staff in general.

### ***Structures and processes***

Structural differentiation (e.g. into departments, functions, outsourcing) has been related to professionalization in NSF. It is, however, not the only aspect of structures and processes that should be addressed when analysing professionalization. Beside the governance structure, routines in decision-making, e.g. frequency of meetings of the relevant actors, or the existing regulations for decision-making processes, could shed light on professionalization efforts of NSF. Finances, for example, are widely considered in the literature, as well as by the practitioners in this study. Financial resources have been observed as a factor that influences professionalization processes. An indicator of the shift in management philosophy of a NSF could be, for example, the proportion of member fees compared to sponsorship income in the federation's annual budget. Communication and information could be analysed through noting if there is a formal concept for communication, how the internal and external communication works in reality, and where and what information becomes available.

When considering the apparent central role of qualifications, competences, roles and relationships of people and their positions, it would be worth investigating how NSF manage their human resources (HR), and whether they have a HR concept. Professionalization embraces various mechanisms for organizing and controlling work. The issue is how well these are suited to the voluntary culture of NSF.

### ***Federation culture***

A new perspective on professionalization was the idea that 'professionalism' is an attitude of individuals to do a good ('professional') job. As a consequence, professionalization becomes a matter of organizational culture. The practitioners in our study also think that despite professionalization, voluntarism – a central feature of NSF – remains the basis of its operation. Consequently, when studying professionalization we should focus more on volunteers, i.e. their positions, differentiation of functions, qualifications, internal relationships (with other volunteers and with permanent staff), external relationships (networking), balance of governance. Observing the organizational structure of a NSF may not say a lot about the federation's professionalization, if the position, for example, of the voluntary board and its

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relation to the structure is overlooked. When studying professionalization in a NSF it is valuable to consider the opinion of the volunteers.

If the people working for a NSF do not have the appropriate attitude and the willingness to do a good job, the adaptations that the federations undertake, may harm the federation, particularly its image and performance as an agent of its members.

### **6.7.2 Critical discourse on professionalization in NSF**

Several characteristics of professionalization in sport federations appear to be in contradiction. On the one hand, it was described as a tendency towards 'business-like' culture, on the other hand, volunteer culture was emphasized as a fundamental element, for the paid staff as well. Occupation as a 'professional' paid employee is also conventionally characterized by autonomy, as the person is employed on the basis of his/her credentials and expertise. However, professionalization embraces various mechanisms for controlling work. With increasing organization of working processes, for example through bureaucratization and standardization, the specific qualifications that initially provide trustworthiness and autonomy for the professionals lose their meaning and lead to a movement towards de-professionalization (Evetts, 2009; 2011). Furthermore, in the course of professionalization, federations implement management tools and adapt their structures and processes to those of FPO, which do not appear applicable to NSF that follow goals other than making profit (cf. Thiel & Mayer, 2009; Van der Roest et al., 2015): they tend to have multiple objectives and their ultimate goal may not be clear. Therefore, it is not obvious how performance and efficiency should be measured.

Interestingly, the practitioners working with Swiss sport organizations and involved in the development of the Swiss sport policy pointed out that professionalization does not necessarily mean positive organizational development. They were also concerned about the extent NSF can be professionalized given the direction development is now taking. As these experts are involved in the core of the federations' development, one could expect them to find solutions to reduce the negative consequences. It appears that for the practitioners, the aim in the course of professionalization should not be to replace but rather to complement existing practices of the federations. Strong self-reflection and long-term strategies were emphasized in the interviews and could be a way to determine beneficial changes for each federation, to prepare them with means to meet secondary effects.

### 6.8 Limitations and future research

All our experts were from Switzerland, which may limit the general application of the views. We should also bear in mind that the common standards, practices and tools Swiss NSF are exposed to may be grounded on some theoretical frameworks. It is also worth mentioning that the experts only deal with national sport federations. Thus, experts who work with international federations could reveal additional knowledge for such a framework, as they may face additional challenges and show specific characteristics when dealing with professionalization issues. In an ongoing project, a preliminary analysis of expert interviews from international federations has revealed many congruent perceptions of professionalization with this study. However, these experts have also referred to professionalization with legal affairs, which we did not detect in this analysis. Studies on NSF in other countries may also contribute to the concept, as the perception of professionalization may vary due to different institutional systems, different roles of NSF, and meeting other requirements. However, we did not observe characteristics of professionalization directly related to the specific features of the Swiss political system. Furthermore, the findings are largely in line with existing literature that involves studies of professionalization in different countries. Our understanding of professionalization is enhanced through the notion of professionalization as an attitude of people and as a federation culture. Future research should consider these aspects for a comprehensive picture of forms of professionalization in NSF.

Further qualitative case studies would be an excellent method to validate the framework for analysing professionalization. Its applicability should be tested by selecting NSF that differ in size, staff, sports, governance etc., but also more broadly selecting international sport federations and sport federations in other countries. The framework could then be used to study forms, causes and consequences of professionalization in NSF (Nagel et al., 2015).

Some aspects of the framework may be quantifiable. We may think of, for example, shares of competences of the Executive Board and Executive Office in decision-making, or specified tasks per position as indicators for professionalization. Considering the comprehensiveness of the phenomenon and the concerns raised by the interviewed practitioners about the process, rating some indicators of the framework higher than others should be questioned. We would not claim that, for example, available HR concepts indicate more or better professionalization than a widespread differentiation of the General Secretary. In terms of 'more', we have to keep the limits of professionalization in mind before the development converts into disadvantage for NSF. Common turning points, where professionalization shifts to organizational de-professionalization (cf. Evetts, 2009; 2011) could be discovered through future research.

The purpose of our concept is to encourage comprehensive research and analysis of causes, forms and consequences of professionalization in sport federations using case

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studies or quantitative research strategies. Furthermore, NSF could use the framework as a tool to analyse and reflect the progress of professionalization. It could also be used by practitioners and researchers for developing questionnaires to survey people's attitudes towards the current form and progress of a federation, and also their commitment to the organization. It would assist in comparability of NSF, as well as for compatibility of analyses and action plans, if NSF and researchers use a similar framework for analysing forms, causes and consequences of professionalization. The knowledge gained can then be applied for further development of the federations' practices.

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## 7. Causes for professionalization in national sport federations in Switzerland

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### 7.1 Introduction

To align with current societal norms, such as modernity, rationality and accountability, national sport federations (NSF) need to reflect on their structures and processes and make appropriate adjustments. Doing so is vital for gaining legitimation in the organizational environment and society and garnering the financial resources essential for them to be able to meet their goals (e.g., Child & Rodrigues, 2011; Doherty, Misener, & Cuskelly, 2014). Seemingly, common responses to the new challenges have been, for example, establishment of new management structures, governance, formalization of daily practice, and employment of people with specific qualifications (Dowling, Edwards, & Washington, 2014). Furthermore, strengthening their position against public and private institutions, and a range of stakeholders (state, sponsors, member clubs, media, etc.), sport federations need to respond to multiple liability issues (Bayle & Madella, 2002; Evetts, 2011; Kikulis, 2000; Slack & Hinings, 1992). Organizational adaptation in sport federations has been described as a transformation 'from a volunteer driven to an increasingly business-like phenomenon' (Chantelat, 2001; Dowling et al., 2014). The development can be summarized as a form of professionalization that is undertaken to manage present challenges (e.g., Dowling et al., 2014; Skinner, Steward, & Edwards, 1999). The objective of this study is to explore causes for professionalization in Swiss NSFs. We aim to uncover NSFs endogenous causes, and expectations from their external and internal environment that cause professionalization.

To consider a comprehensive transformation, we refer to professionalization in a broad sense addressing structures and processes, strategies and activities, as well as persons and positions of the NSF (Ruoranen et al., 2016).

Studying professionalization in sport organizations is not new (Dowling et al., 2014; Nagel, Schlesinger, Bayle, & Giauque, 2015). However, studies on causes of professionalization in sport organizations tend to consider only a few organizational factors that can promote or hinder the process of professionalization (e.g., growing tasks, financial resources, organizational values). Current research also lacks differentiation between internal and external causes that may, however, have relevance for detecting interrelationships between NSF internal pressures and expectations from their environment for professionalization. We endeavor to fill these gaps through a multiple-case study in the Swiss context. The cases, which include not only popular but also less popular sports that have been

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ignored so far in previous, prominently Anglo-Saxon studies (Dart, 2014), will be investigated by applying a multi-level framework for analyzing causes for professionalization (Nagel et al., 2015). In doing so, we contribute to the knowledge of relations of professionalization in the headquarters to their member organizations that – aside from Ferkins and Shilbury's study (2010) on national-regional governing relationship – has received little attention (Dowling et al., 2014). In addition to knowledge on development of NSFs, we aim to contribute to analytical and theoretical concepts of professionalization. Understanding how change evolves and knowing more about mechanisms behind professionalization processes in different NSFs from the same field can aid them in avoiding ineffective service and strategy development. This is particularly important, because NSFs are largely financed by membership fees and public grants.

In the next section, we present the conceptual background of the paper and related previous research. Thereafter, the Swiss sport system – the environment of the analyzed NSF – is introduced, followed by our method. The results are divided into three subsections along the analytical framework, and, finally, discussed.

### 7.2 Conceptual background and previous research

Nagel et al. (2015) have summarized the current sport management and sport sociological literature and positioned forms, causes and consequences of professionalization in sport federations into a multi-level framework. The review is based on three dimensions of professionalization according to Bayle and Robinson (2007) and Legay (2001): professionalization of 1) activities (e.g., quality management), 2) individuals (e.g., qualification, paid employment), and 3) structure and processes (e.g., board structure, formalization). The review embraces various theoretical backgrounds (e.g., contingency, agency and institutional theory) and presents causes for professionalization on three levels: endogenous causes (e.g., increased workload and key persons), and causes in federations' external and internal environment (e.g., pressure from sponsors and requirements of umbrella organizations, or expectations from member organizations).

The review uncovers a mainly constructionist perspective on professionalization. On the one hand, professionalization in sport federations has been caused by pressure from their external environment. On the other hand, NSFs respond to the pressure differently. In particular, the interests of NSFs and stakeholders may differ, because NSFs are committed to their members' interests. Therefore, we should also consider NSFs endogenous conditions as affecting changes in sport organizations (e.g., Horch & Schütte, 2009). Kikulis and colleagues (Kikulis, Slack, & Hinings, 1995) explained variation in organizations' responses to institutional pressures with the active role of key actors in the design of organizations. Interests of

organizational members and their decisions characterized the stepwise changes, for example towards (de-)centralization.

Amis and colleagues (2002) found that Canadian national sport organizations, whose members held values congruent with the prescribed changes, were able to make large-scale organizational change successfully. Conversely, organizations whose members opposed the changes entered a period of largely superficial conformity. Also, O'Brien and Slack (2003) explain differences in the transition from amateur to professional status in UK rugby clubs by values and beliefs of powerful new actors who brought professionally orientated institutional logic with them. They pointed out that, while elite support is necessary for radical change, it is not sufficient.

While these approaches build on interests and decisions of key actors, other scholars apply the contingency theory and assess other (internal) situational characteristics as effecting changes in (sport) organizations. These can be, for example, financial resources, size, culture, and leadership relations (Horch & Schütte, 2009). Slack and Hinings (1992), for example, found a considerable hindering influence of organizational culture (e.g., shared operating norms, ideology, myths) that was challenged by professionalization. Resistance of volunteers, for example, often stems from fear that changes erode the traditional values of the organization (Horch & Schütte, 2009; Slack & Hinings, 1992; Welty Peachey, Zhou, Damon, & Burton, 2015). Scarce financial resources are another situational characteristic hindering professionalization, whereas international competition and media coverage may promote it (Nagel et al., 2015).

Expectations from stakeholders, such as the state or umbrella organizations, (e.g., National Olympic Associations), have often been considered important for understanding professionalization from neo-institutionalist perspectives (Washington & Patterson, 2011). Funders or collective actors such as political institutions, but also evolutions in civic and economic conditions can cause changes in processes and structures and affect a transition of nonprofit organizations (NPOs) in general towards business-like organizations (Maier, Meyer, & Steinbereithner, 2016; Seippel, 2002; Vos et al., 2011). Pressure from the external environment can be coercive, normative or mimetic, with the tendency to result in isomorphic organizations within their field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Slack & Hinings, 1994).

Since sport policy, the logic and proportion of subsidies of the total income of sport organizations differ between countries, the impact of the external environment on professionalization of NSFs probably depends on the specific national sport system, and varying coercive pressures of governments. Several studies (e.g., Amis et al., 2002; Edwards, Mason, & Washington, 2009; Slack & Hinings, 1994) have found clear coercive pressure by the government in Canada, whereas in Norway and Belgium the pressure through state funding has been rather low (Seippel, 2002; Vos et al., 2011). The influence of the state and

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other stakeholders on NSFs through conditioned subsidies reveals that NSFs depend on external resources to be able to perform their activities (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). Through resource dependence, the state can control sport organizations' actions and have the potential to instrumentalize them (as intentionally operating agents) for sport policy (Vos et al., 2011).

Against this background, it may be interesting to investigate circumstances causing professionalization from a multi-level perspective in a specific state context. We believe that it is important to consider institutional influences, individual key actors, as well as internal unintended stimuli equally. For that purpose, the multi-level framework of Nagel et al. (2015) appears an eligible entry. For a better understanding of the mechanisms behind professionalization, we intend to contribute to refining that framework by means of inductively collected empirical data from NSFs. Hence, we explore what role the state, member organizations and other stakeholders play in the professionalization of NSFs in Switzerland, whose sport system is relatively open and where NSFs are permitted autonomy. Also, we examine whether there are other, more instrumental influences or interests dominating professionalization of Swiss NSFs. Consequently, this study explores 1) NSFs endogenous causes, 2) expectations from their external environment, and 3) expectations from their internal environment that cause professionalization in Swiss NSFs.

### 7.2.1 Swiss sport system

In Switzerland, sport policy is based on principles of subsidiarity and autonomy. The implementation follows the Swiss federal policy system (Bayle, 2017; Chappelet, 2010; Kriesi & Trechsel, 2008), constituted on a federal, cantonal and municipal level. The Federal Office of Sport (FOSPO), together with the NSFs, are responsible for policy development. However, the 86 NSFs and their umbrella organization, Swiss Olympic (SO), are responsible for implementation of the policy. They organize both grassroots and top-level sports autonomously, which opens the system for individual and collective initiatives. While both are widely independent from the Confederation, the only supervisor who can have direct impact on the NSFs is SO (Bayle, 2017). To support and strengthen its member NSFs, SO has established a federation promotion concept whose central element is an agreement about the NSF's goals. The financial support to reach the agreed performance is bound to five "promotion categories," to which each NSF is assigned. For the categorization into 1-5 (1 qualifying for the highest grant), SO uses several criteria regarding both characteristics of the sport (e.g., individual/team) and organization of the NSF (e.g., manager). Nevertheless, for the most part, the NSFs are autonomous in implementing the organization development strategy of SO.

### **7.3 Method**

To analyze factors contributing to professionalization in Swiss NSFs, a multiple-case study was conducted, applying a qualitative content analysis according to Gläser and Laudel (2010, 2013). Semi-structured interviews and public documents of seven Swiss NSFs were analyzed inductively. The study contributes to a bigger study project on professionalization of national and international sport federations.

#### ***Selection of cases***

A purposive sample of NSF was achieved by considering number of members, sport (individual/team, winter/summer, Olympic/non-Olympic), as well as the NSF's scope (single/multiple disciplines) (Table 4). To consider also NSFs whose scope differ from common NSFs, the umbrella federation of sports for people with disabilities PluSport was included. Data were collected by means of interviews with key persons and analysis of available, mainly public documents. The availability and points of reference in the documents were crucial for the approximate period of analysis, mainly addressed also in the interviews. Overall, roughly the last ten years were covered.

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Table 4  
Selection of cases

Federation	N clubs <sup>3</sup>	N regional/ cantonal federations	N active members/ licenses <sup>3</sup>	N paid employees <sup>4</sup>	Interviewees
PluSport (PS; multi-discipline)	79	8	9'134	32 <sup>5</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General director (GD) (interview conducted Nov 2015)</li> <li>• Chief Grassroots sport and Chief Marketing &amp; Communication (together, Jan 2016)</li> <li>• President (Jan 2016)</li> </ul>
Swiss Fencing (SF)	52	0	2'736	4 <sup>6</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• President (Oct 2015)</li> <li>• Sport Manager (Dec 2015)</li> <li>• Past national trainer (Nov 2015)</li> </ul>
Swiss Gymnastics (SG; multi-discipline)	2'957	28	247'662	43 <sup>7</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chief Media and Chief Marketing &amp; Communication (together, Jun 2014)</li> <li>• General Director (Sep 2014)</li> <li>• President (Jul 2015)</li> </ul>
Swiss Handball (SH)	247	7	18'958	9.7 <sup>8</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chief Handball promotion/Director of a regional federation (Mar 2016)</li> <li>• President (Mar 2016)</li> <li>• General Director (Apr 2016)</li> </ul>
Swiss Ski (SS; multi-discipline)	756	12	67'560	41.1 <sup>9</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chief Directory/Sport Director (Aug 2015)</li> <li>• Acting Chief Directory/Marketing Director (Oct 2015)</li> <li>• Member of presidium/President of a regional federation (Dec 2015)</li> </ul>
Swiss Unihockey (floorball, SU)	416	7	32'356	15.5 <sup>10</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General Director (Apr 2015)</li> <li>• President (May 2015)</li> <li>• Chief Trainer education at FOSPO / different past functions in SU (Jul 2015)</li> </ul>
Swiss Volley (SV)	503	15	29'396	13.5 <sup>11</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General Director (Mar 2016)</li> <li>• President (Jun 2016)</li> </ul>

### Data collection

**Documents.** Documents were analyzed ahead of interviews to collect information and get familiar with crucial reference points in the NSF's development as well as its previous plans. Some documents, especially annual reports and protocols, look back and can thus be used to create a chronology due to their regularity. Causes for professionalization were assigned to three levels in a data matrix: NSFs endogenous, NSFs' external environment and their internal

<sup>3</sup> Swiss Olympic (n.d.).

<sup>4</sup> For PluSport, Swiss Fencing, and Swiss Gymnastics the number refers to persons. For Swiss Handball, Swiss Ski, Swiss Unihockey, and Swiss Volley the number refers to full-time equivalent.

<sup>5</sup> PluSport (n.d.e, p. 4)

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication with President of Swiss Fencing, October 24, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> State July, 2017 (Swiss Gymnastics Federation, n.d.c., Table: Der STV in Zahlen. [Swiss Gymnastics Federation in numbers])

<sup>8</sup> State June 20, 2015 (Swiss Handball Association, 2015, p. 42).

<sup>9</sup> Swiss-Ski (n.d.a, p. 60).

<sup>10</sup> State May 1, 2015 (Swiss Unihockey, n.d.d, p. 7).

<sup>11</sup> Swiss Volley (n.d.e, p. 29).



environment. NSF internal factors that were seen to have facilitated or hindered the process were noted openly. Additional information about the NSF's professionalization was registered as well. The documents were mainly gained from the NSF's homepages and included:

- Strategy papers and conceptions (e.g., projects, communication, also of SO)
- Annual/financial reports and protocols
- Publications (e.g., member magazines, leaflets) and media reports

The documents can be found in the references for each NSF separately. Additional documents were studied to gain an overall picture of each NSF.

*Interviews.* 2-4 persons from each NSF were interviewed (Table 4), face-to-face and by a minimum of two of the authors. The main criteria were the interviewee's overview of the NSF's professionalization. Thus, also persons with past positions were included. Because of further study objectives, the interview guide did not focus only on causes but also included other questions on professionalization (e.g., consequences). The frame of the interview was professionalization of the NSF to date, related strategy and challenges. Thereby, the topics were persons and positions (e.g., positions of paid staff v. volunteers), structures and processes (e.g., communication and decision-making), and strategies and activities (e.g., strategy development and evaluation). To enquire about causes for professionalization, the guide followed the three levels of the framework of Nagel et al. (2015). If not explained automatically, causes for adaptations and barriers to their implementation were asked about constantly. For example:

"What were the causes for [e.g.] hiring someone for marketing?"

"Whose initiative was [the mentioned adaptation]?"

Finally, the interviewees were asked about causes for professionalization at large, clearly referring to the three levels of the analytical framework, as well as about factors that have facilitated or hindered the NSF's professionalization. The interview guide was adapted for each NSF according to knowledge from the documents, as well as for each interviewee in consideration of the position of the interviewee (e.g., elected member/paid employee) and his/her relationship to the NSF (e.g., long-/short-term). The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The average duration was 1.5 hours.

### **Data analysis**

The data were analyzed inductively applying open coding and supported by Atlas.ti software. Open coding allows adapting dimensions of a category during the analysis and complementing the category system by knowledge derived from the material that does not suit any existing category (Gläser & Laudel, 2010, 2013). The code-tree followed the levels of the multi-level framework of Nagel et al. (2015). Subcodes were assigned to an appropriate head code but

## 7. Causes for professionalization

kept close to the material. Interviews were constantly compared with previous ones and codes renamed to be more open. To reduce the code-tree, codes and codings were compared in-between and, where feasible, merged or removed. Thereby, codes for causes for professionalization were assembled adhering to the multi-level framework. In addition, NSF-specific internal factors that were deemed facilitating or hindering professionalization were gathered for each NSF separately (Appendix [in this publication]) and then generalized. For trustworthiness (Guba, 1981, cited in Shenton, 2004), data interpretations were reviewed by the research team, which determined reasonable final terms/characterization and presentation of the results. The interviewees had the opportunity to check the translation of their quotations. The detected causes for professionalization were roughly related to forms of professionalization that had commonly been affected by these as indicated in the empirical material (i.e., professionalization considering persons and positions, structures and processes, and strategies and activities).

## 7.4 Results

The results are presented for each NSF separately in three sections: NSFs endogenous causes (Table 5), and expectations from their external (Table 6) and internal environment (Table 7) that have caused professionalization in these NSF. In addition, the tables link these to particular forms of professionalization that commonly have been affected, and present additional NSF-internal factors that were found to have been facilitating for or hinder NSFs in meeting expectations from their environment for professionalization.

### 7.4.1 NSFs endogenous causes

There seem to be certain NSF-specific endogenous circumstances that cause professionalization (Table 5). From this perspective, causes for professionalization were very similar across the seven NSF and could be resumed into four groups.

*Deficits in decision-making.* Deficits in decision-making in the NSFs' governance and management have been a central cause for professionalization in the seven analyzed NSFs, with the goal to determine a strategic role of the board. In some NSFs, there was also mismanagement, that is, financial crisis and leaders who dominated the elected board. Consequently, for example in PS, statutes were revised, the leadership became shared between a strategic board and operative general secretary, and the organizational structure was adapted (already at the beginning of the 1990s). The General Director (GD), who had several years of experience also in the board, formalized the processes further following his "Professionalization initiative 2009". That was enabled by a progressive attitude of the board members and their trust in the GD, and relatively healthy finances. In SU, in turn, *"about 4 years ago we had a board whose members actually have done a lot for the development of floorball, but who also claimed a great deal of decision-making competences"* (SU president). However, in several cases, competences still cause conflicts within the boards as well as between them and current paid GDs, impeding organizational changes. In case of SG, after first initiatives more than 20 years ago, the delegates accepted a statute revision not earlier than 2006. However, taken out from the strategy 2014-2019 – and claimed by the interviewees, too – responsibilities and competences are not entirely clear.

*Organization structure.* In SH, professionalization was put in process because of inadequate federation structure that hindered cooperation and efficient operation: *"There was neither a General Director nor was the federation otherwise lead, the president took over intermittently, the departments worked in their own silos... often, the staff couldn't be found in the offices and there were no regular meetings"* (SH GD).

Activities of regions and clubs were not nationally coordinated. Consequently, the NSF established a more harmonized general secretary and centralized the NSF structure – at the

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end top down – to standardize processes to be more efficient. In SV, in turn, efforts to reduce regional federations, were not approved by the member organizations.

*Increased expectations and requirements.* Overall, through professionalization, the analyzed NSFs strive for professional structures and conditions for athletes and clubs to be internationally successful: *“In top-level sport, you have to be a professional player, and professional management is required not only for the athletic part, but the same is true for the marketing part, for handball development etc.”* (SH president). In some NSFs, failures of national teams had been the key moment for starting professionalization, whereby the new benchmarks make the work more challenging. Increased expectations for quality of work (e.g., people’s qualifications) within the NSF but also relationships with different stakeholders have forced the NSF to build departments, staff, strategies, etc., to better merchandise their sport and thus generate financial resources. At the same time, restricted financial resources have slowed down or hindered professionalization in various areas (e.g., employment of paid staff).

Also, growth of NSFs, including events and services for member organizations, has increased work and complexity of tasks, which NSFs intend to manage by professionalization: *“We offer much more services...so, we said, we would professionalize the federation regarding marketing and communication, and then we established this paid position”* (PS M&C).

In SF, national trainers had driven professionalization in the federation for years. Under a constantly changing board until 2005 without any common vision, resources were put into sport and indispensable administration, disregarding organizational structures. This was possible because of the confidence from SO in the federation’s international success. However, because of increasing success, managing the federation became increasingly time-consuming and complex. Thus, it became impossible for the trainers to further manage *“federation’s issues that were no concern of mine”* (SF past-trainer). Ultimately, organizational structures, responsibilities and administration were insufficient to manage the sport. The same applies to SS.

*Key persons and management philosophy.* The data showed a high relevance of key persons’ management philosophy. In several cases, it was dissatisfaction of board members that caused the first moves toward professionalization: *“one-man-show”* (SH Regional Director), *“double-head leadership”* (PS GD) caused uproar, leading to deselections and reduced boards. To form a strategically capable board, the NSFs pay attention to the volunteers’ expertise in the private sector (leading positions), as well as networks: *“It doesn’t make sense to have five persons from the basis [in the board] and none of them understands anything about finance”* (PS Chief Grassroots). NSF boards seem to ensure a “professional” attitude at work by recruiting board members through personal networks. As an exception, SF highly values a fencing background.

At the headquarters, in turn, differentiation and specialization have commonly been driven by management philosophy of GDs that they bring in from the private economy: *“What I changed was the organizational structure with clear responsibilities for everyone, especially for the management team...The management team has to be empowered to have a clear and strong position vis-a-vis the board”* (SV GD). Also, specific and more recent changes concerning daily processes to support strategy development are introduced by paid staff, particularly the GD. The implementation, however, mostly requires the acknowledgment of the board. The NSFs have implemented little process coordination so far, which can be hindering for further federation development, because many tasks are done “ad hoc.” However, management and monitoring tools are under development in the NSFs. In contrast to the other NSFs, in SF it was a national team trainer and sports director, who initiated and drove professionalization until 2008, when they were released by the new president from administrative tasks.

## 7. Causes for professionalization

Table 5

*Causes for professionalization: NSFs endogenous causes*

	NSFs endogenous causes						Forms of professionalization
	PluSport (PS)	Swiss Fencing (SF)	Swiss Gymnastics (SG)	Swiss Handball (SH)	Swiss Ski (SS)	Swiss Unihockey (SU)	
<b>Deficits in decision-making</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• unclear responsibilities and competences (also between general secretary and board)</li> <li>• discrepancies, little cooperation between departments</li> <li>• unequal decision-making</li> </ul>	–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• unclear responsibilities and competences (also between general secretary and board)</li> <li>• lengthy processes, conflicts between volunteers and paid staff</li> <li>• internal conflicts of interests («long-term members»)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• regional federations too powerful</li> <li>• board members had also operational responsibility/competences</li> <li>• board members required (more) power</li> <li>• discrepancies, little cooperation between departments</li> <li>• discrepancies between paid-volunteer engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• conflicts in decision-making between presidium and directory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• unclear responsibilities and decision-making competences (also between general secretary and board)</li> <li>• unequal decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• differentiation of strategic board and executive general secretary</li> <li>• definition and allocation of competences</li> </ul>
<b>Organization structure</b>	–	–	–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• little national coordination (decentralized structure; member organizations, leagues)</li> </ul>	–	–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• centralization</li> </ul>

Table 5 continued

	NSFs endogenous causes						Forms of professionalization
	PluSport (PS)	Swiss Fencing (SF)	Swiss Gymnastics (SG)	Swiss Handball (SH)	Swiss Ski (SS)	Swiss Unihockey (SU)	
<b>Increase d expectations and requirements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increased workload</li> <li>- growth (members, services etc.)</li> <li>- to further secure decentralized federation structure</li> <li>- to strengthen political position</li> <li>• increased (internal) expectations on work</li> <li>• need to generate financial resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increased workload</li> <li>- success</li> <li>- increased requirements for top level sport</li> <li>• weak administration and structures compared to sport technical sector</li> <li>• need to generate financial resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increased workload</li> <li>- size (esp. events to gain visibility and improve image)</li> <li>- overloaded volunteers (regional federations)</li> <li>- difficult to find volunteers</li> <li>• «key-moment»: international goals missed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increased workload</li> <li>- comprehensive development (top-level sport and match organization is not enough)</li> <li>- overloaded volunteers</li> <li>• no process coordination (esp. between regions, and regions and NSF)</li> <li>• «key-moment»: international goals missed</li> <li>• need to generate financial resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increased workload</li> <li>- size and success</li> <li>- increased requirements for top level sport</li> <li>• weak administration and structures compared to sport technical sector</li> <li>• increased (internal) expectations on work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increased workload</li> <li>- growth (members, services, events to gain visibility)</li> <li>- increased requirements for top level sport</li> <li>- overloaded volunteers</li> <li>- difficult to find volunteers</li> <li>• increased (internal) expectations on work</li> <li>• need to generate financial resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• paid employees (administration)</li> <li>• differentiation and specialization</li> <li>• development of marketing and modern means of communication</li> <li>• marketing and sponsoring</li> </ul>
<b>Management philosophy and initiatives of key persons</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• management philosophy and initiatives of (new) GD, president and board members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• requirements of national trainer for best promotion/support of athletes</li> <li>• management philosophy and initiatives of Sport Director and president</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• initiatives and management philosophy of president</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• management philosophy and initiatives of president («one-man-show») and (new) GD</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• management philosophy and initiatives of (new) GD and staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• management philosophy and initiatives of president(s), board members and (new) GD</li> <li>• president's commitment</li> <li>• management philosophy and initiatives of GD («Mr. Volley»)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reduced intern selected board</li> <li>• strategic constellation of board (networks, expertise)</li> <li>• professional attitude of president and board members</li> <li>• paid GD, differentiated general secretary with clear competences</li> </ul>

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### 7.4.2 Expectations of stakeholders in sport and society (external environment)

Professionalization has been triggered also by NSF's relationships with actors from their external environment (Table 6). Mostly, NSF's receive financial support only, when they fulfill the requirements placed by the state and other stakeholders. As explained above, Swiss NSF's operate widely autonomously. However, there are some concepts stipulated by the Confederation that apply to all. FOSPO conducts most of them in cooperation with SO. Business partners and media have also caused particular forms of professionalization, whereby NSF's positions in these relationships differ.

*State and policymaker.* The societal meaning and democratic organization of sport obliges Swiss NSF to establish further services for kids and grassroots sport. In addition, because of the meaning of sport in the international context, FOSPO has established a program for sustainable top-level athlete promotion. That, in turn, enables NSF's to create professional training conditions for athletes, which the NSF's otherwise could not offer (e.g., additional paid positions).

Although a SO member, PS, whose main aim is integration of people with disabilities, is not supervised by SO but the Federal Office for Social Insurance (FOIS) and Swiss Charity Monitoring (ZEWO). The requirements of FOIS seem very similar, including performance agreements and a specific auditing system. However, the subsidies are prescribed for services and distributed to the clubs, whereas top-level sport is funded by SO. Recently, FOIS has begun requiring accounting for each club and service separately. That prompted PS to create a position responsible for the clubs' accounting, because they cannot handle it by themselves. So far, PS has no output measurement instruments – “*we did not have to have that*” (PS GD) – but has to invest in such tools now, because FOIS plans to switch from performance agreements to an efficacy orientation.

*Umbrella organization Swiss Olympic.* In the preamble of the federation promotion concept SO writes: “In the strategy of SO of 2012, the support and strengthening of the member federations as a service provider...[is] the highest legitimization of SO.” Performance agreements are a central element of federation promotion. Therewith, SO has considerable impact on NSF's professionalization. For SO, the agreements are “a long-term strategy...securing the planning for SO, as well as for the NSF” (Swiss Olympic, 2013, p. 4). “Eligibility for promoting” of the NSF's depends on the respective grading, and their financial resources determine their “capability for promoting” (ibid). Because of these obligations, NSF's have to present 4-years-strategies, which had been – if existing at all – vague in some, even bigger NSF so far.

The federation promotion concept “should not consider only high-level sports, but has to include also leadership and ethics in an adequate manner” (“completeness”), and “the self-



responsibility and scope of design of the member federations are to be acknowledged and reinforced" ("autonomy ") (Swiss Olympic, 2013, Preamble). Despite *"some additional laps"*, the NSFs understand the requirements of SO and welcome the transparency between all actors, for, *"if you want grants, you have to do some adaptations and you just do it"* (SV GD). As explained before, in SF, there was clearly a need for new structures and adaptation of processes to ensure appropriate management of the sport. However, it was only after pressure by SO that necessary actions were taken:

[SO] animated us to improve the headquarter structures and administration...First I was against this system, because they forced us into additional expenditures.... At the end, they were right; after optimizing the administration, we could generate resources to gain funds better, use the systems, we rationalized and made them more efficient. At the end, it costs, but we still benefit. (SF president)

Autonomy of NSFs in strategy implementation may to some extent explain why, despite the contracts and similar concepts that all NSFs need to fulfill, professionalization and current designs differ between NSFs. The implementation then depends on, for example, financial and human resources, or the role of member organizations, which tend to be more critical of the need of such concepts.

*Business partners and media.* Sponsors and media partners undeniably impact professionalization of all analyzed NSFs. The president of SH wrote in the Annual Report of 2012/13: "I've previously pointed to the international professionalization and related commercialization, new approaches of national sponsors in grassroots sport,...and the fully altered communication environment" (Swiss Handball Association, 2013, p. 29). The main aim of business partnerships is to generate financial resources for building the best possible training conditions to promote international success and guarantee NSFs' function as umbrella organizations. SH, SU and SV seek visibility via platforms, such as well-showcased events, to attract people and ensure sustainability: *"Best sustainability is when we get young players to a big event saying 'Wow, that's what I want'. Now I'll go and train more"* (past-SU/FOSPO).

In business partnerships, NSFs are bound to diverse organizational adaptations (apart from SF, which perceives no pressure from sponsors, because these support athletes), such as hiring qualified people for marketing and public affairs. *"A great amount of the money [from the sponsor] goes into communication [to present the sponsor]"* (SH president). However, GD of SH says, *"respective structures, such as centralized marketing systems, are necessary"* to manage the requirements of sponsors efficiently. As a reaction to the exponential event expansion of the NSFs, PS, for example, extended event development and hired an additional person "to serve the media more specifically and to build a network" (PluSport, n.d.d, p. 10). Somewhat ambivalently, business partners may require a contact person, or someone for marketing.

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The positions of the analyzed NSFs on the market differ, because sports that are little noticed in society are less attractive for media and sponsors. The NSFs seem willing to follow the requirements of business partners – or they may have no choice. Since media and sponsors are needed for securing all kinds of resources, for NSFs that are hardly visible, to adapt to present needs appears difficult and can be done only in small steps. The mutual sponsor of the team sports SU, SH and SV (Mobiliar; an insurance provider) has not only required professionalization, but even supported the NSFs in the process. The relationship has brought them far more than financial resources. It has helped the NSFs to improve their performance (e.g., event organization) and thus significantly contributed to their popularity and visibility.

We've been lucky with Mobiliar, we basically got it without any investment. They basically found us, which is rare in sport. It was a milestone [in professionalization of SU]; how they've supported us and brought us popularity, made us presentable, with innovative good ideas, the whole entertainment framework. I think, we got a lot...and made an incredible impact, what was possible only thanks to them. (past-SU/FOSPO)

SU, SH, SV and the Swiss basketball federation established a stock corporation on the initiative of Mobiliar – *“a really professional partner”* – to *“act as counterbalance to ice hockey, soccer, skiing”* (SV president). For bigger platforms for all actors, the four NSFs guarantee Mobiliar professional communication and more consumer services, such as player statistics, in return.

SS and PS have attracted business partners for many years. Thus, compared to the five other NSFs, they are more empowered in those relationships. Especially alpine skiing is very popular in Switzerland, whereas PS, although until recently unknown even in politics, has always profited from a *“disability bonus”*; *“disability sport is attractive, young, dynamic, it appeals to people to donate”* (PS Chief M&C). Solid finances have enabled PS to enhance professionalized services to their member organizations and respond better to environmental changes. SS, in turn, has concentrated its resources into professionalization of marketing and event organization, including paid staff.

Table 6

*Causes for professionalization: NSFs' external environment*

	Expectations of stakeholders in sport and society			Forms of professionalization	NSF-internal facilitating and hindering factors
	PluSport (PS)	Swiss Fencing (SF)	SG, SH, SS, SU, SV		
<b>Government and policy maker (FOSPO)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>requirements for efficient sport promotion and spending of funds (FOIS, ZEWO)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>expectations on young athletes' promotion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>expectations on young athletes' promotion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>concepts for sports promotion</li> <li>expanded general secretary (paid staff, differentiation, specialization)</li> <li>output measurement, auditing</li> </ul>	<b>facilitating factors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>solid finances</li> <li>success</li> <li>sponsor relationships</li> </ul>
<b>Swiss Olympic</b>	–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>performance agreement</li> <li>auditing system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>performance agreement</li> <li>auditing system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>documentation of strategy, implementation and governance structure</li> <li>output measurement, auditing</li> </ul>	<b>hindering factors</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>scarce financial resources</li> <li>invisibility in the media</li> <li>overloaded staff and volunteers</li> <li>lack of transparency / resistance of member organizations</li> </ul>
<b>Business partners and media</b>	do not claim any requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>expectations of media for highest actuality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increased expectations on work/return, e.g., professional marketing, communication and sponsor support in the NSF</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>establishment of (specialized) marketing/event organization</li> <li>media and market analysis</li> </ul>	

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### 7.4.3 Relationship with and expectations of member organizations (internal environment)

Little professionalization in NSFs has been caused directly by member organizations. Some NSFs, especially PS, SG and SU, have been forced to professionalize the relationship with their dissatisfied member organizations. The visions drifted apart, and member organizations felt overrun in the strategy and federation development. This is manifest in the following example:

They were dissatisfied with the voluntary disciplinary committee, the decision-making takes too long...dissatisfied with the new homepage....And then, the clubs complain "when we once deliver delayed match reports, we get fined. My dear federation, the homepage still isn't updated. Do you get a fine, too?" (SU president)

Interviewees from other NSFs also stated that the member organizations have been neglected in federation development. Their dissatisfaction and mistrust became evident as NSFs have made the tasks more demanding for their member organizations (through new process management, larger headquarters, steering instruments, etc.) to finally address these as "their needs." Hence, in the course of NSFs' professionalization, member organizations feel that they too have the right to express higher expectations. However, the common drivers for the professionalization of service delivery for clubs and regions are employees at the headquarters. Being aware of the volunteer basis and scarce resources of the member organizations, the NSFs *"have to find a balance between the needs of the volunteers, who do their work with enthusiasm as a hobby, and a professional appearance"* (SG GD). Once NSFs realized that the clubs lacked the time and expertise to address the growing demands, they hired employees to support the clubs: *"It's clear that twice the number of camps [for club members] means more work. We realized that we've missed out on the club support so far and hired now two persons who literally go to the clubs"* (PS Chief Grassroots sport). Other expectations of the clubs concern mostly services to their members and expectations from media and the public (e.g., social media, good event organization). Our analysis did not show intentions of NSFs regarding headquarters, decision-making, or evaluation/steering tools that were not fulfilled because of resistance of member organizations. Transparent communication is the key to avoiding resistance against further professionalization.

Table 7

*Causes for professionalization: NSF's internal environment*

	Relationship with and expectations of member organizations						Forms of professionalization	NSF-internal facilitating and hindering factors	
	PluSport (PS)	Swiss Fencing (SF)	Swiss Gymnastics (SG)	Swiss Handball (SH)	Swiss Ski (SS)	Swiss Unihockey (SU)			Swiss Volley (SV)
Relationship with and expectations of member organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• mistrust and dissatisfaction</li><li>• needs disregarded<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- deficient communication between NSF and clubs/regions</li></ul></li><li>- gen.secretary not well organized; responsibilities not clear (for clubs)</li><li>- little awareness of the work of the gen.secret</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• increased expectations</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• high workload for volunteers</li><li>• expectations on support (e.g., event organization)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• NSF's perception of processes of member organizations, i.e., presumed deficits<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- disorganized club/match arrangement (diversity, little nationwide coordination)</li></ul></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>do not claim any requirements</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• dissatisfaction, asymmetric power relation<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- deficient communication between NSF and clubs/regions</li></ul></li><li>• increased expectations on services</li><li>• pressure through members' expectations</li><li>• NSF's perception of processes of member organizations (i.e., presumed deficits)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>do not claim any requirements</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• support in administration, consulting (club advisors)</li><li>• communication platforms</li><li>• transparency</li></ul>	<p><b>facilitating factors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• solid finances</li><li>• clubs' involvement in planning and decision-making</li></ul> <p><b>hindering factors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• scarce financial and human resources</li><li>• lack of time or capacity of volunteers to master new tasks</li></ul>

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### 7.5 Discussion

This study explored causes for professionalization in seven Swiss NSFs, based on a three-level framework for analyzing causes for professionalization (Nagel et al., 2015). Although the NSFs differ, for example, in size, organizational structures, and international resonance, causes for their professionalization have been widely similar. Thereby, causes at external and endogenous level seem to influence each other reciprocally and are hard to distinguish. NSF-specific conditions, particularly financial and human resources, popularity of the sport and (striving) attitude of individuals towards professionalization seem to have an additional impact on NSFs' capability to respond to external expectations.

#### 7.5.1 Theoretical reflection of the findings

Referring to the similarity of causes for professionalization – besides external pressure – competing for resources and uncertainty may have led some NSFs to mimic and model themselves on those NSFs that they deem successful, leading to similar conditions (e.g., with respect to workload and internal expectations) that call for professionalization (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). It is also conceivable that shifts in societal norms have influenced the thinking of board members, leading them to transfer their management perspective from the private sector into the NSF (O'Brien & Slack, 2003), reflected, for example, in domains ascribed to each board member. However, the conceptions that strategy makers have of an appropriate umbrella organization seem to be “initial bursts of change” and deficits in decision-making “high-impact-elements” that, due to their symbolic role in effective functioning of an organization, are preferably adapted early for further professionalization process (Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2004a). Such conditions are independent of the NSF's size, as is increase in workload, which emerges as a side-effect of international success and maintenance of it (O'Brien & Slack, 2004), on the one hand, and from internal and external requirements for the quality of work, on the other hand.

Our study contributes to knowledge of causes for often taken-for-granted institutional arrangements and practices that legitimize the “new” organization, and thus to perspectives of institutional theories of how fields of sport organizations are constituted and how their environment affects their characteristics (Washington & Patterson, 2011). The expectations on professionalization from NSFs' external environment reflect general trends in society, such as the meaning of entertainment, the weight of performance measurements (Bayle & Robinson, 2007; Macris & Sam, 2014) and rationalization, and seem to be aimed at demonstrating professional NSFs (Hwang & Powell, 2009). The state has also become more efficiency-orientated and expects evidence for the use of funds, the result of which is that personal relationships and trust no longer suffice. This is particularly implicated in the

requirements for PS that are in line with those of the other NSFs, although PS is answerable to other funders (social insurance) and its scope of service (social integration) differs from the other NSFs.

Resource dependence theory recognizes organizations as intentionally operating actors that are not able to perform their activities without resources from their environment (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). That implies social mechanisms and makes the theory a helpful supplement to institutional mechanisms. As we saw, the institutions that exert coercive pressure on the NSF tend to be the ones on which NSFs commonly depend (Edwards et al., 2009; Vos et al., 2011). We may ask whether causes for professionalization can be discovered – retrospectively, *per se* – or whether we should focus on the reasoning, rationale and aims of (organizational) actors behind professionalization of NSF and support institutionalist approaches with, for example, resource dependence theory. Such a perspective is missing in the present analytical framework. It could, however, support analysis of both intended and unintended consequences of professionalization, such as the risk that, when budget allocation is strictly dependent on performance, NSFs concentrate as much on the relationship with the contributor as on real improvement of their performance (Gilmour, 2007, as cited in Macris & Sam, 2014). Continuous adaptations as such may also run into legitimacy problems, contrary to the goal of professionalization (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Macris & Sam, 2014).

Expectations from NSFs' member organizations evolved from umbrella federations' professionalization, rather than triggering it as suggested by Nagel et al. (2015). Furthermore, the NSFs postulated clubs necessities that the clubs themselves did not perceive. For efficient use of resources, stakeholders should keep an eye on necessities and assumptions in the NSF. The discrepancies could result from a certain collision of "sports-for-all" logic promoted by the sport movement itself with commercialization and performance measurement of competitive sports (Stenling & Fahlén, 2009). A specialized club advisor, now established in some NSFs, may elude demands that clubs raise following the requirements of the NSF. However, conversion to a service provider bears the risk that NSFs to some extent neglect their duty to advocate the clubs' interests. Our analysis confirms that transparent communication to reduce information asymmetries between umbrella and member organizations are of utmost importance (Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2004b; Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010). Club supporters as "buffers" could help sport clubs to continue with a community-oriented sport and professionalize only to a certain degree compared to the competitive sport part of the NSF (Ferkins, Shilbury, & McDonald, 2005; Skille, 2009), also in terms of warranting clubs' autonomy. Principal-agent theory could be a useful approach to address the meaning of professionalization for member organizations together with the role of the NSFs as agents driving their interests, to contribute to more symmetry in the relationship. It could address, for example, factors that promote mechanisms to ensure symmetry (e.g., securing

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shared values, defining short-term goals) or issues that both parties deem appropriate to be required from paid staff/umbrella organizations and vice versa.

### **7.5.2 Reflection on the multi-level framework for analyzing professionalization in NSFs**

The framework of Nagel et al. (2015) appears too simplified for an analytical framework, and it does not capture factors that influence professionalization once it first has been initiated nor interrelationships between the levels. The analysis of seven Swiss NSFs revealed though that professionalization is continuously influenced by factors that apply to the NSF unequally but are essential to meet expectations from the external and internal environment. Considering plainly which actors or circumstances bring about professionalization disregards a dynamic process of varying pace, directions and possibly throwbacks. Definition of competences between a strategic board and operative general secretary, for example, has been an initial goal of professionalization. However, in several cases these still cause conflicts. Referring to our findings, several circumstances that the multi-level framework deems as causing professionalization seem rather factors that would have an influence on the nature and pace of an ongoing process (e.g., financial resources), or factors that have a considerable influence on first gaining these resources (e.g., size, media). These factors seem to be in line with internal situational characteristics that research applying contingency approach has considered as barriers or facilitators for professionalization (Horch & Schütte, 2009). Scarce financial resources may trigger professionalization when the NSF begins to restructure the organization to optimize efficiency. However, financial resources play an essential role in allowing professionalization to be brought about, as has been discovered also in previous studies (e.g., Welty Peachey et al., 2015). SS, SF and PS (“disability bonus”) appreciate the profit they have from solid finances for professionalization. SS and SF are not the only NSFs with disciplines in the highest category of SO (i.e., internationally successful); however, additional revenue from sponsoring (SS) and “advantageous stance” towards SO (SF) may have strengthened their favorable financial situation. NSFs of less popular sports invest in marketing and communication, because they struggle with the interdependence of success in sport and attractive preconditions, that is, presence, interest of media and sponsors and financial resources, whereby the last two affect the conditions for the first two – and the chain closes. Since similar conditions, plus structures and strategic concepts determine subsidies from SO, NSFs’ internal efforts may not be sufficient for professionalization. Or, the NSFs may not be strong enough to argue against it.



### 7.5.3 Limitations and future studies

This study has some limitations. Our subjective perception of Swiss NSFs may have influenced the selection of the cases, excluding less professionalized federations. Although our analysis reached back to a time when the NSFs operated in a straightforward manner and mostly voluntarily, our data may still miss information about all barriers to eventual professionalization initiatives faced by the NSFs. To better understand barriers – or reasoning for not approaching professionalization – future studies could focus only on less professionalized NSFs. The selection of the interview partners could have biased the (prominent) role of individuals in professionalization. Being familiar with the NSF's professionalization could mean that they also perceive an essential role of themselves in the NSF's development, especially in seemingly successful cases (Freitas, Girginov, & Teoldo, 2017). Nevertheless, the interviewees traced professionalization back to diverse persons, not necessarily themselves, confirming a central role of persons in different positions initiating and driving professionalization. The same was evident for the restricting role of key persons. These results remind us that we should also consider theories other than organizational ones in NSF studies; for example, social identity theories (e.g., what role do the differences between the identities of a board member, who is passionate about sport, and an employee, whose identity reflects a manager's role, have for strategy development?), or the leader-member-exchange theory (e.g., what would be the best indicators of a relationship with the most productive potential between club presidents and employees at the headquarter?) (cf. Todd, Andrew, & Sowieta, 2009). Since professionalization is mostly deemed a desirable process of modern organizations, social desirability of informants must be considered: besides personal impact, interviewees may be interested in the good reputation of their NSF. This issue we addressed by including persons of different, also past, positions, with shorter and longer history in the NSF, persons who also have criticized the development, as well as documents. Also, it is possible that interviewees are open about past deficits to emphasize positive development. Nevertheless, a retrospective view can distort one's perception of causes for professionalization. Thus, our interviewees may have rationalized it retrospectively with endogenous causes, although external pressure would have been crucial, such as the requirements of SO regarding the level of grants (e.g., Chief Sports, talent development concepts). Longitudinal observations would be useful to eliminate false rationalization of change by the interviewees, as well as to better consider "emergent changes" in organizations that may have no causal explanation (Smith, 2004). Furthermore, we acknowledge the issue of generalizability of the results from the Swiss context. However, they present a good starting point for analyzing causes for professionalization and factors that have a further impact on the process in other countries.

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Further research is needed to investigate forms of professionalization in more detail and to discover causes – and barriers – for more or less successful professionalization. Research should not disregard unintended consequences of professionalization. The question of whether professionalization leads to more effective outcomes, or whether it is a rationalized “institutional myth” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) should be addressed. Single-case studies could be useful to understand more clearly the mechanisms, potential phases, to avoid unintended consequences. This may be of interest for SO and the Swiss NSF, too, to optimize the development of clubs and support for athletes.

### 7.5.4 Conclusion

The endogenous and external causes for professionalization in Swiss NSFs seem to be interdependent resulting in a reciprocity of the same. Although Swiss NSFs are widely autonomous, they can be steered by the state and SO. Since professionalization is costly, and in order to improve their activities, NSFs remain dependent on their external environment, which is increasingly demanding. However, there are NSF-specific factors that allow (or hinder) professionalization to be advanced as expected from NSFs’ external and internal environment. These may be added by SO to considerations for allocating subsidies. Networks between stakeholders and key actors in the NSF could be an appropriate strategy for avoiding barriers and completing a deliberate professionalization of intended outcomes. Our analysis is a first step towards understanding professionalization processes in Swiss NSFs. Knowing the factors that have triggered NSFs to change their structures and processes can help advisors accompanying Swiss NSFs, as well as NSF managers, to scrutinize the necessity of changes and avoid unintended consequences, and thus support NSFs’ development in an efficient manner.

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## 7. Causes for professionalization

Appendix. NSF-internal factors that facilitate or hinder NSFs in meeting expectations from their environment for professionalization.

	PluSport (PS)	Swiss Fencing (SF)	Swiss Gymnastics (SG)	Swiss Handball (SH)	Swiss Ski (SS)	Swiss Unihockey (SU)	Swiss Volley (SV)
<b>Facilitating factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• solid financial situation (societal resonance, good sponsor relationships)</li> <li>• commitment of people and striving individuals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• «a privileged NSF» for SO (international success)</li> <li>• trust between president and sport manager</li> </ul>	For generating financial resources: impact of successful single athletes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sponsor (Mobiliar)</li> <li>• clubs' initiatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• solid financial situation (good sponsor relationships, international success)</li> <li>• popularity, media presence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• solid financial situation</li> <li>• sponsor (Mobiliar)</li> <li>• clubs' initiatives</li> <li>• striving individuals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sponsor (Mobiliar)</li> <li>• trust between president(s) and GD</li> <li>• active committees</li> <li>• (clubs generally willing for development)</li> <li>• GD</li> </ul>
<b>Hindering factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• invisibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• scarce financial resources (sponsors prioritize athletes)</li> <li>• knowhow (even structure) is person-dependent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• scarce financial resources (unattractive image in society)</li> <li>• deficient planning/strategy</li> <li>• conflicts of interests</li> <li>• resistance of member organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• volunteers not capable to master new tasks</li> <li>• scarce financial and human resources</li> <li>• conflicts of interests, quarrel and little process coordination</li> <li>• resistance of member organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• discrepancy between organization of sport and administration</li> <li>• structure</li> <li>• conflicts of interests</li> <li>• lacking knowhow (staff and discontinuity)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• little (media) presence</li> <li>• scarce financial and human resources</li> <li>• vision incoherence and communication NSF-clubs</li> <li>• conflicts of interests</li> <li>• inadequate infrastructure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• little (media) presence and acknowledgment in society</li> <li>• scarce financial and human resources</li> <li>• resistance of member organizations</li> <li>• inadequate infrastructure</li> </ul>

## **8. Intended und unintended consequences of professionalization in national sport federations: A case study of Swiss Floorball Federation**

Ruoranen, K., Nagel, S., Lang, G., Klenk, C., Clausen, J., Bayle, E., Giauque, D., & Schlesinger, T. (2018). *Intended and unintended consequences of professionalization in national sport federations: A case study of Swiss Floorball Federation*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

### **8.1 Introduction**

Within sport organizations today, the term “professional” is ubiquitous. The term encompasses a normative understanding of performance. Organizational adaptations, which national sport federations (NSFs) are undertaking to meet challenges from changing environments, are likely to be perceived legitimate when they correspond to what is commonly deemed “professional.” Professionalization in NSFs can be understood as organizational change from amateur pastime structures toward more rationalization, formalization, specialization and professional management, that is toward businesslike organizations (Dowling, Edwards, & Washington, 2014; Kikulis, 2000). Thereby, various aspects of the organization undergo changes: structures, processes, strategies and persons (Nagel, Schlesinger, Bayle, & Giauque, 2015; Ruoranen et al., 2016). However, whether NSFs benefit from professionalization is debated. Some studies show that the implementation of new management practices associated with professionalization increase the efficiency and strategic capability of sport organizations (e.g., Papadimitriou, 2002; Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011; Shilbury & Moore, 2006). Other empirical evidence indicates that professionalization improves the performance only under certain circumstances. In some cases, it may even have the opposite effect and hamper efficiency (e.g., Papadimitriou & Taylor, 2000; Sam, 2012).

NSFs should not be understood simply as formal organizational “containers” but as “living social entities.” Each change has the potential to affect the individual actors in the organization, as well as its culture, objectives and resources. We propose that if new management practices are implemented imprudently, the probability of unintended consequences for the NSF increases. In particular, the implementation of contemporary management practices without considering the NSF’s existing structures and culture may undermine the efficacy and efficiency of the organization. Making organizational adaptations to meet the expectations of external stakeholders may create other problems for an NSF that could impede its operations and the provision of sport. Undeniably, NSFs can profit from implementing policies and strategies to become more “professional,” but it may be costly or have unintended consequences that conflict with (other) stakeholders’ interests. The consequences of professionalization may be structural, cultural or social and may be positive or negative. The integration of new market-related activities, for example, may require cuts to

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other – well-recognized – services; additional paid positions may exceed resources. Formalized, differentiated management structures have benefits, but proven routines and traditions may become disregarded.

Little research has been conducted on consequences, both intended and unintended, that organizational change for the purpose of professionalization has on the structural, social, and cultural conditions of NSFs. This research was designed to examine these consequences. Its purpose is to demonstrate intended and unintended consequences of professionalization by means of a retrospective case study of the Swiss Floorball Federation (SFF). By “unintended” we refer to unexpected detriments that result from professionalization, which do not comply with the goals and culture of the NSF and cause organizational problems, possibly exacerbating existing challenges. Understanding the impact of professionalization in NSFs in more detail can help practitioners to prevent the occurrence of unintended consequences and wasted resources. They can also benefit from the identification of good practice in professionalization.

In this paper, we first outline the theoretical context of organizational decision-making and introduce the Swiss sport system. Thereafter, we review the existing research and describe the methodological approach. We then depict professionalization in SFF with the focus on the intended and unintended consequences before discussing the findings.

### 8.2 Theoretical framework

According to Luhmann (2006), organizations can be viewed as autopoietic social systems emerging from, and reproduced themselves through, decision-making. Thus, all observable organizational features such as aims, hierarchy, management programs and services result from organizational decisions (Luhmann 2006, for sport organizations, see Thiel & Mayer, 2009). Following Luhmann, it can be said that professionalization, seen as adaptations toward more businesslike organizations, is a process whereby NSFs are constantly addressing internal and external expectations that require decision-making. Research on organization explains that decisions can have unintended effects, and that attempts to mitigate the consequence can have other, both intended and unintended effects. This process describes the autopoietic nature of organizations and the phenomenon of emergence that characterizes organizations as living social entities (Luhmann, 2006; Ortmann, 2010). This means that organizational structures and processes not only comprise strategies and active management, but also result from these processes and the systemic order of the organization itself (MacLean & MacIntosh, 2012; Ortmann, 2010). Thus, despite the formal rules and regulations of NSFs and their consideration of as many factors as possible when making decisions, not all processes can be anticipated but emerge from structuring and social interaction itself.

Precipitated by internal and external actors, NSFs employ professionalization based on economics logic as a strategy to serve diverse stakeholders, seek international success and secure financial resources. In case of success after organizational and strategic adaptations in an NSF, it will likely keep focusing on those adaptations. Those aspects will be given priority with respect to decision-making power and the allocation of resources, presumably at the cost of other valuable routines and aspects of the NSF that are not directly associated with the success.

An NSF can become unstable when single parameters such as certain values and performance measurements are continuously adapted and other aspects disregarded. Such instability may considerably affect the quality of the NSF's performance, even leading to a loss of its newly attained success. Further efforts to achieve success and efficiency through professionalization bear risks, caused by factors such as inconsistent goals and conflicts of interest between diverse groups in the NSFs (e.g., volunteers and paid staff). Decision-makers may underestimate the risks entailed in decisions that focus only on particular aspects of the organization. Therefore, it is worth investigating the intended and unintended consequences of professionalization in order to enhance awareness that adapting one aspect of an NSF can be detrimental to another aspect and, ultimately, to support an efficient use of resources.

### **8.3 Case setting: the Swiss sport system**

In Switzerland, responsibility for the implementation of sport policy lies with Swiss Olympic Association (SO), which is the umbrella organization of currently 88 NSFs, and with the NSFs themselves. Policy-making is based on principles of subsidiarity and autonomy. With more than 20,000 clubs, the NSFs organize both grassroots and top-level sports autonomously, which opens the system for individual and collective initiatives (Chappelet, 2010; Kempf & Lichtsteiner, 2015). While both are independent from the Swiss government, the only supervisor who can have a direct impact on the NSFs is SO (Bayle, 2017).

The study question arose from a general observation of organizational change in Swiss NSFs from amateur tradition to more formalized businesslike organizations (O'Brien & Slack, 2003). SO has also incorporated a culture of professionalization in its promotion of NSFs. This is evident not only from the use of the term "professional" but also from SO's introduction of new public management instruments and in the formalization of the relationship between SO and the NSFs.

In 2010, SO revised its strategy for promoting NSFs. NSFs are divided into five "promotion categories," according to criteria relating to the concept of high-performance (its implementation, international success and potential) and resonance of the sport (international acknowledgment, national and economic relevance). SFF is considered in the second

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promotion category. Compared to other Swiss NSFs, SFF is financially healthy. The NSFs receive grants from SO, with whom they agree 4-year targets. Evaluating whether the targets are fulfilled is based on sport performance, management structure, and financial and human resources with regard to talent and top-level sport promotion (Swiss Olympic, 2010, 2013). Although SO offers tools and consultancy services for implementing strategy, for the most part, the NSFs have autonomy in this regard. Some NSFs more than others need to adapt their structures and processes, which is another reason for investigating consequences of professionalization. With respect to professionalization, NSFs need to find a balance between representing the interests of their member organizations (MOs), and the performance required by other stakeholders. SO does not supervise how NSFs manage their MOs.

### 8.4 Previous research

Professionalization and the impact of strategic change has been investigated in sport organization from various perspectives. We divide the existing literature into the following five topics.

#### ***Change in governance structure***

The shift in NSFs from volunteers to more professional management creates challenges for the governance of sport. In the last decade, board performance has been extensively researched, as sport organizations aim to optimize the efficiency of their boards (Dowling et al., 2014, for an overview). Nagel et al. (2015) cite board performance as “an interesting dependent variable of professionalization” (p. 421) and call for research into how an effective board might facilitate professionalization. In general, research indicates that professionalization affects board structures, which influences board performance, which, in turn affects the performance of the organization (Hoye & Doherty, 2011; Kikulis, 2000; Shilbury, 2001).

Key research interests in sport governance are the impact of professionalization with respect to shared leadership between paid and volunteer executives, board structure and strategic capability (Ferkins, Shilbury & McDonald, 2005; Hoye & Doherty, 2011). Adaptations to board structure, for example, can both constrain and enable a board’s strategic capability (Ferkins et al., 2005). Kikulis (2000) described volunteer boards as deeply institutionalized, taken-for-granted structures, because they adhere to the tradition of NSFs. Employment of paid managers may impede leadership, because of power struggles and a shift of control from volunteers to paid staff. Shared leadership can enable paid managers to ensure efficiency and maximize commercial opportunities, while the volunteer board looks after members’ interests and concentrates on strategy. Research on professionalization emphasizes the importance of



satisfying board members, encouraging volunteer boards, and not diverging from expected roles (Shilbury, 2001; Amis & Slack, 1996).

### ***Efficiency of function fulfillment***

A common assumption is that “professional” management contributes to efficient use of resources (e.g., O’Boyle & Hassan, 2014; Madella, Bayle, & Tome, 2005; Nichols & James, 2008). Accordingly, several studies have examined the impact of organizational change on efficiency. In a study on French NSFs, Bayle and Robinson (2007) found that professionalization (restructuring, functional specialization, and co-ordinator networks) facilitated the actual organizational performance of NSFs. Various forms of performance measurement are common objectives in NSFs, both for assessing performance on and off the field and for satisfying various stakeholders (e.g., Carlsson-Wall, Kraus, & Messner, 2016; Plumley, Wilson, & Ramchandani, 2014). In order to evaluate their investments, stakeholders bind financial allocations to measurable targets. Whereas accountability serves for transparency, evidence-bound resource allocation can change the behavior of recipients in both intended and unintended ways (Sam, 2009; Van Dooren, Bouckaert, & Halligan, 2010). Strict monitoring of performance bears the risk of spending abundant resources on achieving targets, administration and on building the stakeholder relationship instead of making real improvements and effectively meeting goals (Gilmour, 2007; Houlihan & Green, 2009; Macris & Sam, 2014; Nichols, Grix, Ferguson, & Griffiths, 2016). In Nichols et al.’s (2016) study on consequences of a government-monitored volunteer policy program, for example, significant time was spent on running the programme because of pressure to meet the performance indicators. Resources were wasted on “chasing meaningless targets [...] with results that could be inaccurate, or at worst, fabricated,” instead of “establishing solid, long-term links between volunteers and sport clubs” (ibid, p. 69). As Papadimitriou (1998), the managements of NSFs are expected to “engage in activities that ensure access to resources rather than facilitating performance or efficient operation in their sport” (p. 177).

A number of studies have investigated the consequences of formalization as a management practice. Formality in sport club management and club organization promoted by an umbrella organization, has been associated with efficiency, effectivity and sustainability (Egli, Schlesinger, Splinter, & Nagel, 2016; Nichols & James, 2008). However, by pushing clubs to more professional management, the umbrella organization may claim clubs’ resources on concerns that are different from their real, pragmatic aspirations, such as access to facilities (Nichols & James, 2008).

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### ***Consequences for volunteer work***

Shifts in governance and leadership also affect relationships between volunteers and paid staff. The MO representatives tend to lose power and influence, whereas professional managers gain decision-making powers (Houlihan & Green, 2009; Shilbury, 2001; Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011). It is not only the power relationship between MO representatives and leaders that is affected by professionalization but also between volunteers and paid staff. According to Thiel, Meier and Cachay (2006), voluntary organization can benefit from the employment of paid staff if they serve the goals and culture of the organization. However, several other studies report that while the control over NSFs have largely remained at volunteers, the employment of paid staff causes tensions among volunteers, with respect to issues such as organizational commitment and satisfaction (Amis, Slack, & Berrett, 1995; Auld, 1997; Cuskelly, Boag, & McIntyre, 1999; Hoye & Cuskelly, 2003). Generally, professionalization can make voluntary engagement difficult because of the temporal and monetary costs (Harris, Mori, & Collins, 2009; May, Harris, & Collins, 2013). Regarding the implementation of management practices, governing bodies should avoid introducing complex standardized systems and programs (e.g., education programs, monitoring systems) as the financial and human resources and the expertise of volunteer-based entities are easily exceeded.

### ***Relationships within the sport system***

The existence of multiple stakeholders (public and private, national and local, NPOs and FPOs) in sport governance has led to more collaboration within the sport system. To achieve their common goals, partners need to agree on “working rules” and be willing to monitor those to enable joint decision-making (Thomson & Perry, 2006). Some research has been conducted on the impact of professionalization on the relationship between local and national sport governance. Regional entities can benefit from collaborative partnerships in relation to involvement in decision-making, less partisan leadership, improved communication and trust. In general, working together can heal adversarial relationships between an umbrella organization and its MOs. On an individual level, participation in decision-making reduces uncertainty and increases one’s feeling of control (Bordia, Hobman, Jones, Gallois, & Callan, 2004). Enhancing the governance capability of directors and boards in MOs through dialogue can prevent widening gaps between the paces of professionalization of the MOs and the umbrella organization (Edwards & Leadbetter, 2016; Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010; Sam, 2009; Shilbury & Ferkins, 2015). Nevertheless, if the strategies, processes and services of the umbrella federation are not applicable to the MOs, they fail to meet the needs of their members and can result in the side-effects described above (Blackshaw & Long, 2005, as cited in Nichols & James, 2008; Edwards & Leadbetter, 2016).

***Mission drift and legitimacy***

Abundant research on NSFs has linked professionalization with a transformation of organizational values and objectives (e.g., Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2002; Kikulis, Slack, & Hinings, 1992; Shilbury, Ferkins, & Smythe, 2013). NSFs follow nonprofits based on volunteers, membership and sport delivery. Today, however, NSFs work closely with organizations that conform to business logic (i.e., government, national sport governing bodies, public and commercial sport providers), which appear to have overtaken amateur traditions of sport sector (e.g., Amis et al., 2002; Babiak, 2007; Stenling & Fahlén, 2009; Van der Roest, Vermeulen, & Van Bottenburg, 2015). When the aims of these organizations are not aligned with those of the NSFs, NSFs feel under pressure to conform to business models. Sam (2009) demonstrated how governments' efforts for professionalization and modernization of NSFs resulted in trade-offs and consequences that cannot easily be reconciled. Formalization, the introduction of established management practices and monitoring, resulted in a shift away from traditional representative functions toward commercialization. This had consequences, such as a disregard for diversity and an increasing emphasis on elite sport. Sam concludes by questioning the compatibility of commercialized practices and the capacities of NPOs to deliver community sport. NSFs experience mission drift (DiMaggio, 1986), whereby their initial missions of representing the interests of MOs and building social cohesion is compromised by focusing on service provision and appealing to commercial stakeholders to secure funding from external sources (Dowling et al., 2014). One way for NSFs to prevent legitimacy paradoxes is decoupling formal policies from the actual organizational practice (Åberg, 2013). Amis et al. (2002) observed Canadian sport organizations "introduc[ing] measures to give the appearance of conformity while operating in a way that retained many of their traditional operating principles, building gaps between the formal and the technical parts of the organization" (p. 460). Balancing between the tradition of volunteer organizations and the demands of professionalization, NSFs would do well to anticipate the consequences of their strategies.

In sum, existing research shows that while professionalization can improve the relationship between umbrella organization and MOs, it can also exceed resources. Paid staff should support volunteers, but working together can be tense, and appealing to new financial sources often conflicts with the traditional mission of NSFs. Consequences of professionalization have been investigated with respect to specific aspects, and mostly as a process triggered by governing bodies. However, the process of professionalization, decision-making in NSFs is affected by diverse drivers and barriers, both internal and external. Furthermore, NSFs' daily decisions follow long-term, often 4-year (Olympic cycle), strategies. We postulate broadening the enquiry from specific aspects of professionalization onto both

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intended and unintended consequences of organizational change. To achieve their goals, NSFs need to address the organizational complexity of these relationships, which has been overlooked in research so far. To examine intended and unintended consequences of professionalization in NSFs we conducted a case study with SFF. Drawing on previous research and our theory, we aim to identify 1) the extent to which SFF has been able to follow its strategy and achieved its goals through professionalization, and 2) whether SFF's professionalization strategy has had unintended consequences for its performance and governance, and for its relationships with different stakeholders. To this end, we compare SFF's goals and strategy regarding professionalization over approximately the last 10 years and the challenges it faces today.

We chose SFF as a case study for the following reasons: 1) even though SFF ranks third most popular team sport NSFs in Switzerland by number of members, floorball is deemed marginalized sport; 2) it experienced rapid growth; 3) its professionalization strategy has been successful over the last number of years (SO Vice-Director, personal communication [PC], 10.9.2014), and 4) SFF has followed an offensive professionalization strategy.

### **8.5 Method**

This study contributes to a larger project that examines professionalization in national and international sport federations. We chose an iterative, process-orientated single-case study design based on documents, semi-structured interviews and secondary data (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). This allowed us to analyze consequences of professionalization comprehensively, to identify causalities and to consider relevant factors, processes and relations in a dynamic setting (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017; Skille, 2013; Yin, 2014). We examine professionalization in SFF retrospectively, beginning around 2008, which the interviews and documents indicated to be a feasible point to begin when examining strategic shifts in SFF.

#### ***Data collection***

Data was collected over an extended period (desktop research from March 2015). The interview data became the main reference for reconstructing the process of professionalization and its consequences in SFF as 1) data generated so far was considered in the interviews, and 2) further data, particularly regarding SFF's goals, could be set into a more "qualitative" context.

#### ***Desktop research***

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

- Annual reports (ARs), strategy papers, statutes, and Organization Handbook (OHB)
- Feedback from club presidents (collected by SFF), presentations
- Competence matrix (sport), rule papers (e.g., sponsoring, communication, cock-pit-drafts)
- Publications such as member magazines and media reports
- Documents relating to SO's promotion of NSFs (e.g., promotion schemes, agreement papers)

Diverse documents were analyzed ahead of interviews to collect information on the current status to SFF and to become familiar with its development and its aims. ARs were particularly useful for chronology due to their regularity. The data was collected in a wide-ranging data matrix designed for analyzing different dimensions of professionalization. The website was screened continuously during the analysis. The available ARs dated back to 2010. Since 2016, SFF reports every two years. Thus, AR 2015-16 is the latest AR (PC with Directory, 14.11.2017). Member magazines provided information dating back to 2002.

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### ***Interviews***

Interviews were conducted with three key persons from SFF (Table 8). An interviewee with a long history within SFF was essential, but we also valued the “free-from-SFF-history” perspective of the Chief Operating Officer (COO). Perspectives from strategic (the board) as well as operative organs (general secretary) were important. Because of further study objectives, the interview guide did not focus solely on consequences. The frame of the interview was professionalization of SFF to date, and the causes and consequences of its professionalization. The topics were persons and positions (e.g., positions of paid staff versus volunteers), structures and processes (e.g., communication and decision-making), and strategies and activities (e.g., strategy development and evaluation). 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 8  
*Interview partners from the SFF*

Interviewees	Date, interviewers
Interviewee 1 (I1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- COO (2010-2015)</li><li>- Background in the private sector</li><li>- No previous relation to SFF</li><li>- Left SFF 2015</li></ul>	April 2015 (1:00h) 1 <sup>st</sup> , 4 <sup>th</sup> & last author
Interviewee 2 (I2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- President (since 2012)</li><li>- Board member (Sport) 2011-2012</li><li>- Club official until 2012</li><li>- Entrepreneur</li></ul>	May 2015 (1:20h) 1 <sup>st</sup> & last author
Interviewee 3 (I3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Board member 2009-2014</li><li>- Diverse paid and volunteer positions at SFF and FOSPO</li><li>- Former national player</li></ul>	July 2015 (1:50h) 1 <sup>st</sup> Author

### ***Secondary data***

Earlier studies on specific topics in SFF provided additional information. These included a study on regionalization (interviews with representatives from national, regional and club level), on volunteer work, the views of coaches, and the development of women's floorball (each examined with questionnaires), and a study exploring aspects of governance (documents and interviews). The studies were conducted 2012 – 2017.

### ***Data analysis***

After the main data collection, information on goals, strategies and consequences of professionalization was extracted and structured with respect to the research questions (Gläser & Laudel, 2010, 2013). Extraction of consequences of professionalization followed the levels of a multi-level framework developed by Nagel et al. (2015): relationships with clubs, relationships with external actors, and SFF's endogenous attributes. The goals of SFF were categorized as "before 2014," "2014-2018," and unspecified. Additional head categories (e.g., "structure and competences") structured and reduced the data. We applied inductive open coding using Atlas.ti software. Open coding allows to adapt dimensions of a category during the analysis and to add categories if material does not suit any existing category (Gläser & Laudel, 2010, 2013). However, since the aim was not to summarize the case but to maintain the context and influences (Flyvbjerg, 2006), the codes remained close to the material, particularly to capture interactions and interrelationships. Memos provided more detailed information and helped to link data sources, actors and timeframes. Codes and codings were continuously compared and, where feasible, merged or removed. Finally, the intended and unintended consequences of professionalization were identified as presented below.

For trustworthiness, the interviewees were invited to review the translation and the context of any citations used. Additionally, the consequences identified were compared with the perceptions of an individual who had been involved in different clubs and positions for decades and had sat on strategic committees of SFF, and who was asked to summarize his opinion independently (hereon: PC, 30.1.2018).

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### 8.6 Results: Consequences of professionalization in Swiss Floorball Federation

#### 8.6.1 Description of SFF

SFF is a young federation. It was established in 1985. Within 30 years, the number of licensed members has increased from 1,100 to around 32,000, with the most exponential growth occurring 1990-2000 (about 17,000 new members). In 2017, floorball is the second most popular team sport in Switzerland. However, it is still considered a marginalized sport. Although it is popular elsewhere, significant potential exists in the French- and Italian-speaking areas of Switzerland. Floorball is regarded as a young, dynamic and respectable sport. Accordingly, SFF has a positive reputation. Regarding high-performance sport, Switzerland belongs to the top nations, another main goal of SFF.

The diagrams below present the structure of SFF and its headquarters in 2011/2012 and 2018. Obviously, the division of the board and management are aligned (finances, marketing and sport). The highest organ is the Assembly of Delegates. The highest representative and executive organ is the Elected Board (six members including the president), (SFF, 2016a, C. Art.43, §1). The COO reports directly to the president. The fulltime equivalent (FTE) of SFF headquarter has increased from 11.3 in 2012 (when SO's adapted its federation promotion strategy) (SFF, n.d.e, p.8) to 18.4 FTE in 2018 (SFF, n.d.f). SFF has two divisions: the National League (NL) and the Regional League (RL; 7 regions), which represent high-level and grassroots teams, respectively.



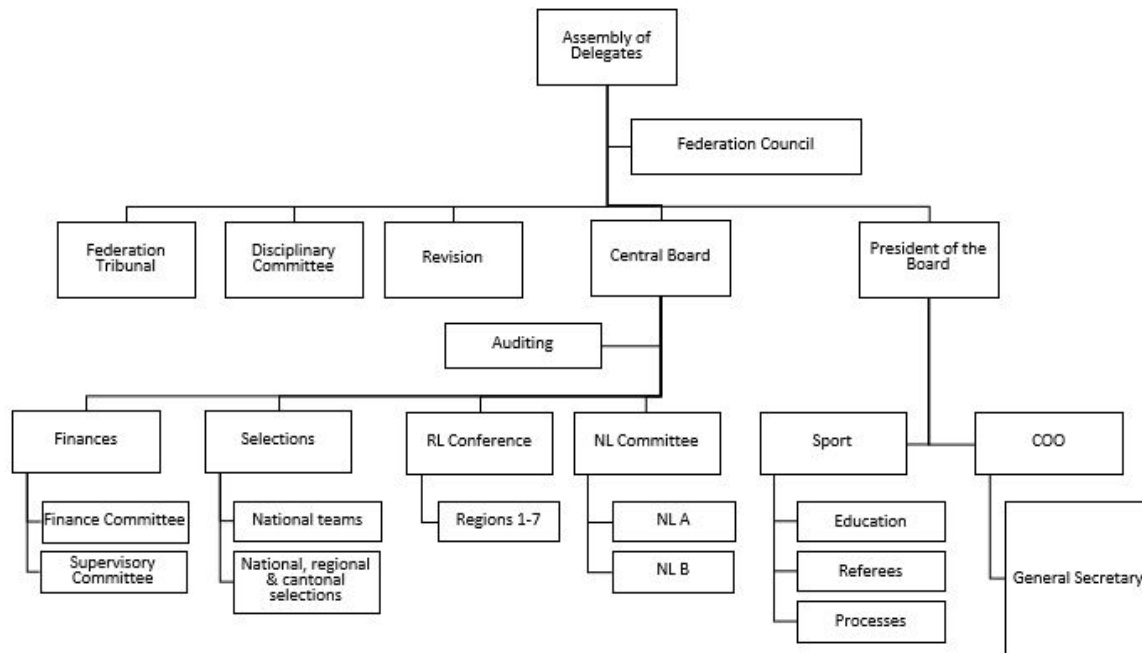


Figure 3. Structure of SFF 2011.

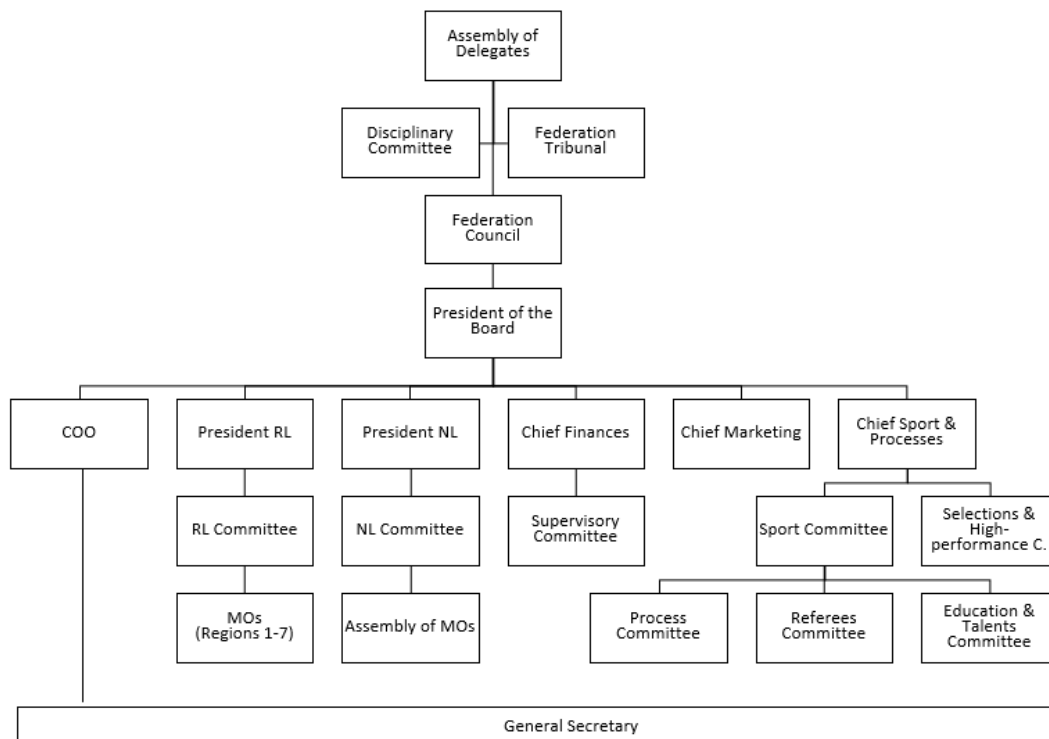


Figure 4. Structure of SFF January 2018.

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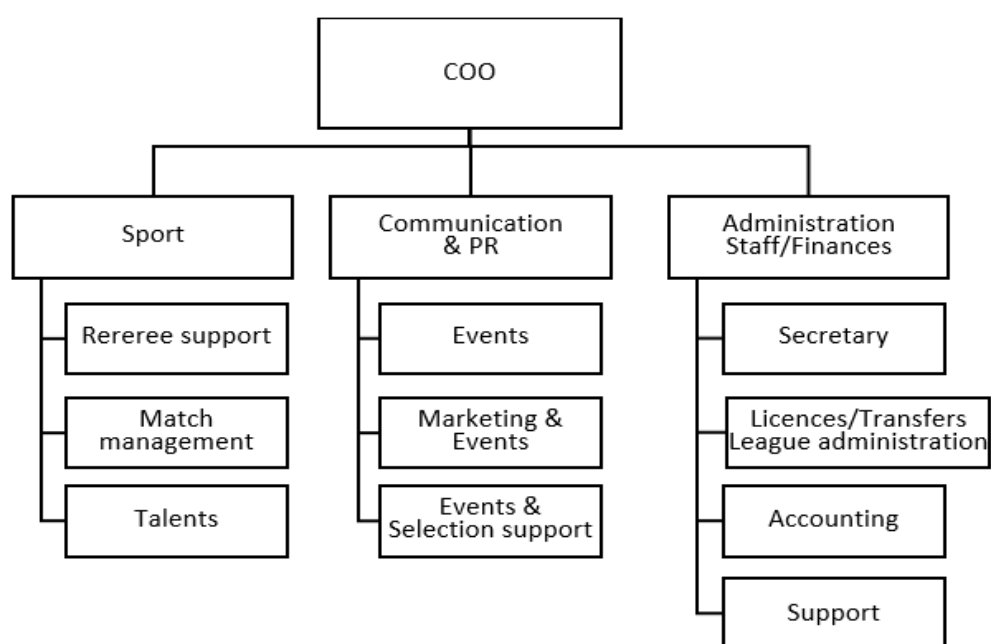


Figure 5. Structure of general secretary 2012.<sup>12</sup>

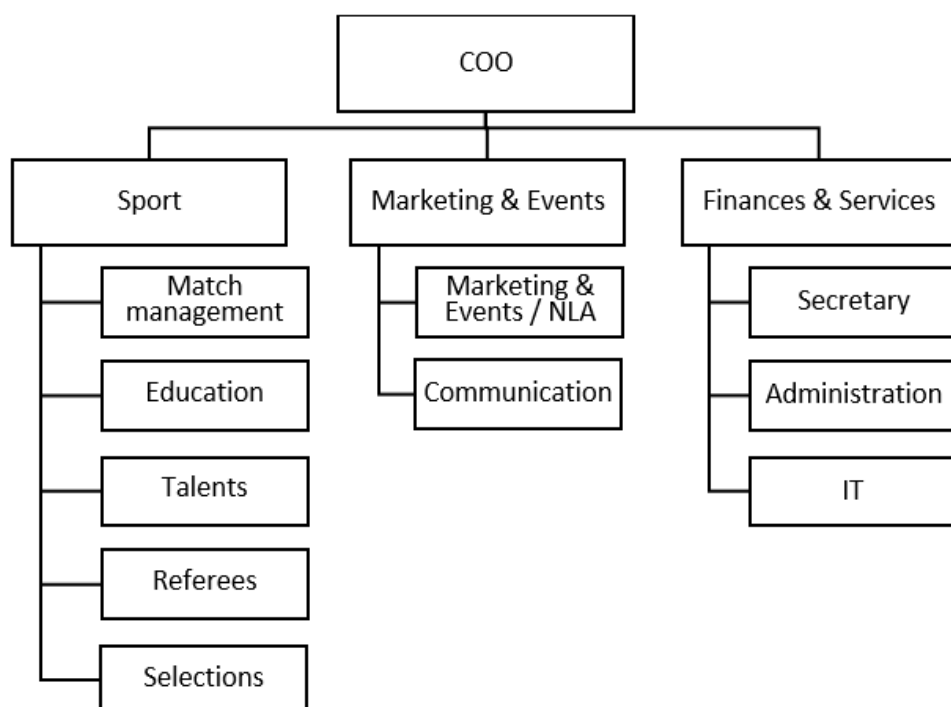


Figure 6. Structure of general secretary January 2018.

<sup>12</sup> Before 2012 there is no headquarter chart available.

### 8.6.2. Measures and moves toward professionalization

Significant drivers for professionalization of SFF included dissatisfaction among volunteer officials regarding decision-making, lack of transparency, discontent among MOs who felt disregarded and the performance agreement with SO. SFF is positively viewed by SO and FOSPO, not least because of its international success and its promise to fulfill requirements. In the performance agreement, the critical point is international “Top 3” ranking (I1-215; I3-16). The president does not envisage major changes through the agreement: “We have the benefit of reaching the second [highest] category” (I2-93). The COO goes further: “It’s not only about finances, which for sure are an important positive side-effect. It’s more qualitative issues that we need to address” (I1-211). The influence of SO is mostly on SFF’s 4-year strategy, particularly concerning the promotion of top-level sport and solid governance. Ethics is another central criterion for SO. SFF declared Ethic Charta in the Strategy 2014-2018 to be implemented by 2016, which SFF managed, while also developing a new strategy (SFF, n.d.d, p.20). In 2015, the COO explained the initiatives to professionalization with: “too big for not working professionally”, but “not interesting enough for media” (I1-115). Consequently, over the last decade SFF has invested significantly in marketing and gaining publicity.

### 8.6.3 Confusion in decision-making and clearer definition of competences

Looking back to 2008, which we consider the starting point for (strategic) professionalization, SFF’s board consisted of 14 members. Decision-making responsibilities lay with few individuals, namely the president, vice-president and the COO, and committees were not involved in central decisions. By that time, the COO had led the headquarter for 16 years, 8 of them as COO. The vice-president was a board member for 14 years. The power constellation and lack of transparency caused uproar within the federation. Also, as the president explains: “We felt we were not innovative enough...our product could reach many more...and we knew we’re a healthy federation” (I2-25), going on to say that “few would have questioned whether the development of our sport couldn’t be better” (I2-43).

A group of “six or seven exponents from different positions...thought through a real strategy to have some board members replaced...that paved the way” (I2-33). This is how the board was strategically built and reduced to six members including the president. It also “developed a modern, up-dated Mission Statement and defined precisely the strategic orientation of SFF” (Former president, cited in Federation Documentation 2010-11 [SFF, n.d.b, p.16]).

From those days on, two main pillars of SFF’s strategy can be identified: the professionalization of processes directly related to sport, and professionalization of marketing; “We have an incredibly cool product...with lot of potential regarding marketing.... We need to use the potential and bring it further” (I2-63). These pillars soon became visible in the board

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structure. The proactive group convinced the board of the benefits of a steady committee for sport, established 2012 (I2-33; President's Day, 2013). In the AR 2011-12, the former president described that year as "a year full of challenges," with "reorientation in the board," and "a virtually new leadership crew", including a new COO 2010 (SFF, n.d.e, p.11). SFF's strategy was reflected in the board through the establishment of a marketing committee.

The intention of building a new board was to improve the "quality of the work, reaction time, and efficiency" (I2-25). Importance was granted to board candidates' experience in leading positions, economic and political networks, and the compatibility of expertise within the board. Today, the board and the committees are perceived as competent and harmonic. The president deems the decision-making efficient because of the specific expertise and entrepreneurship of each board member: "In each issue, a lot of competence has already contributed to the preparation and people involved have had the opportunity to make their arguments...Finally, it's only about weighing arguments" (I2-123).

The strategic constitution of the board has contributed to the network of economic and political influence that SFF has today: "There's a huge difference between our relationships with politicians 4 years ago and today...also through the board members. Like now, we try to systematically benefit from the network of [a person with CEO background]" (I2-95, 113; SFF, 2014, p.14). This is important for obtaining sponsors.

Whereas "the declared aim of SFF leaders in the next decade [was] to pay more attention to sport issues" (SFF, n.d.e, p.11), the new COO had no relationship to floorball. "They wanted someone with experience in the private sector and management, and an unbiased external view" (I1-111). The interviewee, who has experienced the organizational changes from different positions, found:

He [the external COO] wasn't blinkered in company practice...I think, that was a huge gain for [SFF's] professionalism, because there were no personal preferences like 'that's how it has evolved in the past' and so on. (I3-83-87)

By the time the "external" COO was employed, the board decided to assign more responsibility to the directory, which is the operative centre of SFF, and which was to act as a service provider to the voluntary board and committees. The directory members consult the relevant board member in decision-making by preparing data and considering all necessary aspects, and by identifying risks and possible hazards.

However, the change to a "neutral" COO was trickier than expected, because "he was 100% dependent" on the board and on employees who had worked there for several years, because "there were no records, everything was only in people's memories" (I2). Additionally, the expectations that SFF had regarding the neutrality of an "external" COO, proved

controversial, because “half a board has been committed to the sport for 30 years, there’s astonishing passion...which enables us to progress at good pace...but sometimes it’s difficult when they want to control every detail” (I1-35), so that the line between strategic and operative businesses blurs. Potential for conflict also existed in expectations of paid staff from volunteer positions:

How much and how fast can you expect from the volunteers to work, knowing that you’re dependent on them, but also that they work 100-120% in another job? It’s a balancing act that needs caution and sensibility. (I1-17)

As well as:

Are you grateful that they [the volunteer officials] just do the work, or do you have the right to demand more and say: ‘you have to do it well’, or ‘you should do it according to my ideas’? (I3-255)

The president – voluntary himself – noted that the appraised entrepreneurship in the board “also bears potential for conflict. If you meddle too much [in other organs], because you feel, an NSF should be lead like a company...well, in my company, we don’t have any volunteers” (I2-25).

Seemingly, the distinction between strategic and operative organs has not been as clear as intended in the last number of years: “we [the board] are not that far that we could focus only on strategy, because, based on our experience and goals, we see that the directory and the committees still need some support” (I2-43). The directory experienced the dependence as mistrust. The COO found “the ideas of decision-making competences were partly divergent” (I1-35). These experiences may have influenced the decision in 2015 to hire a COO with both background in floorball and an education in economics and marketing. The implementation of the new structure may have been too fast and thus brought new challenges: “maybe we wanted to change too much at once.... Now we just need little reorientation” (I2-43). A more deliberate, early definition of the roles of the volunteer officials and paid staff might have helped to avoid conflicts.

The confusion about decision-making competences led to recording them in an OHB in 2015: “Now we have the chance to clarify them in detail so that they are transparent to all parties; what the board expects from working together, and from us [the directory]” (I1-15). The OHB details the competences of volunteer officials and paid employees. It sets out volunteers’ rights as well as duties (e.g., quick reaction time) (I2-51). The OHB was designed to increase the involvement of the committees, which are the basis of the NSF. However, for it to work, it needs to be accepted and followed by all actors.

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### **8.6.4 Visibility and increased expectations of clubs through professionalized marketing**

As mentioned above, the other pillar of the board's strategy besides sport is offensive marketing. After restructuring and the challenges it experienced with external agencies, SFF returned to self-managed marketing (SFF, n.d.e, p.8; Delegates' Assembly 2011 [Keller, 2011]). Today, some board members have extensive experience in marketing. Through its offensive media strategy, SFF has gained presence and popularity (cf., goals in Strategy 2014-2018 [SFF, 2014]). Sponsors, especially the leading sponsor (a big insurance company), have considerably promoted and supported the federation's progress, particularly with respect to professionalization of its marketing activities and event management. Its sponsors have enabled SFF to arrange activities that otherwise would not have been possible (e.g., SFF, n.d.b, p. 15).

How they've supported us and brought us publicity, made us presentable, with innovative good ideas, the whole entertainment program... we achieved an incredible impact, it was possible only thanks to them. (I3-207)

SFF's main sponsor has contributed considerably to the perception and popularity of floorball in Switzerland, and has led SFF to follow the strategy of framing the games as events with innovative approaches to enhancing the entertainment factor. Of sponsorship requirements, which is commonly discussed in context of professionalization of NSFs, the COO says: "It's usual sponsorship contracts; they give us money for specific services, we guarantee them publicity on and off the court, hospitality and advertising in our magazines" (I1-249). The sponsor generates resources for promotion of sport, and it has enabled SFF to employ a communication manager and promoted floorball to be shown regularly in TV and online broadcasts by the Swiss national broadcaster (SFF, n.d.b, p. 10, 15; Thalmann, 2008, p. 8).

In 2015 – after the introduction of the Strategy 2014-2018 – the leading sponsor established an autonomously organized cooperative (Indoor Sports) between the Swiss NSFs of floorball, volleyball, basketball, and handball, as well as some commercial partners. The intention was to enhance the attractiveness and the number of members in those federations through events and activities (Indoor Sports, n.d.). The growth rate in live and TV audiences, and in licenses, runs to double figures (SFF, n.d.d). The AR 2015-16 cites the SFF President: "Our roadmap works. More licenses, bigger audience, improved impact. Our sport is on the right track to ridding itself of the status of 'marginal sport'" (SFF, n.d.d, p.11). However, since media presence, sponsor attractiveness, and financial resources are clearly interrelated, marketing issues and competing with the bigger federations and the more recognized sports for publicity remain challenging.

Its current growth following successful marketing has had troublesome consequences concerning infrastructure (e.g., Caluori, 2015; Thalmann, 2008, p. 10-13). Also, “event professionalism” (I2-117) has increased the expectations placed on organizers of the games. Requirements, such as modern, well-equipped working places for the media from the NL-A clubs (Strategy 2014-2018 [SFF, 2014]), exceed the capabilities of the clubs. Beside infrastructure, clubs lack people to manage the events. Even NL-A clubs need support with marketing in order to frame their matches as “events” (Caluori, 2015; feedback at President’s Day 2013 [SFF, n.d.a]; survey “Development of women’s floorball in Switzerland”, 2013). Umpire recruitment is also challenging (I1-263). Another consequence of the close partnerships of SFF with sponsors and the Indoor Sports is the exclusive rights of the commercial partners. These limit SFF’s own partnerships and exclude clubs’ own sponsors. Thus, some of the MOs would prefer independent marketing. Despite its good relationships with its partners, there is a need for SFF to regulate sponsors to approach individual members (I2; I3-67-75; PC, 30.1.2018). While SFF generally benefits from its cooperation with similar NSFs (e.g., with regard to saving resources), the four NSFs compete for infrastructure and members.

### **8.6.5 Overwhelmed clubs and drifting visions**

SFF has addressed its goal of attracting more members by promoting floorball as entertainment scenery and using professional media services. With regard to SFF’s goal of achieving larger live and TV audiences and higher revenues, the new cup events are achieving great success. However, the extensive implementation of SFF’s strategy has exceeded the capability of the clubs: “We saw that some clubs needed support... with VAT, with immigrants, integration, contracts” (I2-87). Today, SFF provides numerous guidelines and templates for its clubs. Nevertheless, the data indicated that the vision upon which SFF’s professionalization strategy is based did not necessarily correspond to the vision of the floorball community. For example, “the visions of the small-court clubs [principally RL] are basically disregarded in the SFF strategy” (feedback at President’s Day 2013 [SFF, n.d.a]). One interviewee said:

How can [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 access to sport facilities. How can we [SFF] define any goals without knowing if they correspond to the vision of those who’ll have to implement them? (I3-175)

Apparently, SFF’s decision-makers developed a professionalization strategy and began to implement it without involving the MOs, and so its vision drifted. The umbrella

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federation seemed to appeal other groups and did not represent how the floorball community sees itself. The broader floorball community identifies less with entertainment culture, but expects sport formats for other, existing, target groups (e.g., seniors and hobby players [cf. strategy, SFF, 2014, p.8]). Furthermore, smaller clubs were overwhelmed by various issues. The SFF management proposes here a pitfall “that you don’t think outside the box and do something for those who aren’t familiar with floorball yet” (I2-63), “whereas it’s crucial to anticipate and follow opportunities” (I1-111). The question of how the vision(s) of an NSF should be defined arises; should it be determined by the leaders or evolve “from the middle?” In SFF:

We [the board] invested extensively in strategy, vision, organized workshops, external supporters, everything... But I’m not sure, whether we as a board are the right ones to do all that... We had long discussions about sustainability projects, invested money, and achieved nothing. (I3-63)

The differences between the goals of MOs’ and those of the federation’s leaders could explain why management was disappointed with the clubs’ efforts: “If we failed, it was in that we didn’t manage to get the clubs to put more effort into getting courts” (I2-75), and the Chief of the NL stated:

A well-organized federation and new events are not sufficient for further development. Active and hard-working clubs with sustainable strategies are as important. (SFF, n.d.e, p.14)

SFF-independent regional tournaments posed serious concerns for SFF. That led to SFF addressing a diversity of interests in its strategy 2014-2018, aiming to “create pragmatic, logical and individual sport formats, especially at grassroots level” (SFF, 2014, p. 8).

### **8.6.6 Transparency and more active relationship with MOs**

Before the recent changes to the structure and processes, SFF had disregarded the committees that represented the MOs’ interests [SFF, n.d.c]. The MOs were unsatisfied with communication and smaller clubs were overwhelmed by various issues. Therefore, for professionalization to be successful, “it was important to see that we needed to have better connections with the clubs” (I2-79). In 2012, a sport committee was established by the board. This committee brings together the representatives of both leagues, other committees, as well as the Chief Sport & Processes both from the board and the directory to decide on all issues concerning sport. The aim was to incorporate their perspectives to avoid adverse consequences for one part of the organization when changing another part. The president describes it as “consolidated power of competence”, as all parties bring in their competence



and experience, including the MOs; “people talk to each other...also about consequences” (I2-18; 51-55). Involvement of the basis in strategy development was formalized in 2013, with the establishment of an annual “President’s Day” to enable exchange between club presidents and the SFF [SFF, n.d.c]. Such working groups and platforms have improved the transparency and reciprocal understanding of decision-makers. Overall, SFF appears to have become a more multifaceted NSF, which better considers the diversity of its MOs.

With closer relationships to the regions, SFF also intends to bring them closer to the umbrella federation and prevent independent operation, which occurred in the past (SFF, 2014, p. 5). This may bring benefits of a centralized, unified organization. There is also vast consensus that a comprehensive strategy is important for successful professionalization. However, the more itemized and formalized the strategy, the more detailed and measurable the targets and the stricter the supervision. This diminishes clubs’ autonomy (e.g. in marketing) and is problematic as MOs are mainly responsible for implementing the strategy. Furthermore, 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” (I3-59). Instead of letting leading clubs proceed with innovative ideas, “the federation tends to steer the clubs too much,” and reins them in as if it is afraid of some clubs becoming too powerful (I3-67-75; PC, 30.1.2018).

To qualify for the highest possible subsidies, Swiss NSFs are expected to develop specific strategies and to acquire labels. These requirements have consequences for the MOs as well. The introduction of reporting instruments by SFF is believed to have improved accountability and transparency between SO, NSFs and the MOs:

Through the professional headquarter, the quality of the back-office work is much higher. I think that people at the front see the transparency of the accounting.... Everybody sees what the money was spent on. (I2-117)

However, instruments that were meant to increase process quality and efficiency, in talent promotion for example, “mainly increased administrative work” (I3-223). For efficiency, some tasks could better be handled by the umbrella federation (PC, 30.1.2018). Furthermore, the “quality criteria” were deemed realistic only for NL clubs (President’s Day 2013 [SFF, n.d.a]), whereas for most clubs “the goals weren’t realistic. A federation has employees, can make certain effort, line up new things, but the clubs cannot implement them”. Consequently, “the clubs start to calculate whether the benefit is worth the effort” (I3-223). This is contrary to SFF’s intention to improve quality and efficiency through standardization and supervision of 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” (I3-56).

Social media and other new channels, that were demanded also by the floorball community, not least to promote the entertainment effect, are expected to attract wider

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publicity. Spending resources on secondary activities, however, seems contradictory to the development of the sport. One interviewee said: “That’s what I criticize about our process”, because “with all those concepts...and using [e.g.] social media no one will play better floorball” (I3-63). As a whole, digitalization has put pressure on the back-office, especially in relation to IT and supporting clubs. Since it was mainly wanted by the clubs, SFF is under pressure while struggling with sound running of the services (SFF, 2018; PC, 30.1.2018).

### 8.7 Discussion

This study approached intended and unintended consequences of professionalization processes in NSFs using a case study. We first introduced NSFs as autopoietic social systems constituted by decision-making, and then reconstructed an account of the professionalization process and its impacts in SFF. Our theoretical framework was organizational decision-making to explore professionalization as a social mechanism, and to leave scope for interpretations and for diverse conclusions from the case (Flyvbjerg, 2006). In what follows, the central points of the case are identified and related to previous research.

The consequences of professionalization in SFF relate to external actors (e.g., SO) and the MOs that influence the internal decision-making. SFF is accountable to both “levels”, but for different motivations: it is dependent on financial resources from external actors, whereas its legitimacy relies on looking after the interests of the MOs. While the professionalization of SFF has generally had the intended impact, it also has had unintended consequences, mainly for its relationships with its MOs. While its goals and their intended impact relate to the external environment, the unintended consequences concern the internal environment. Since the adaptation of one part of an NSF has consequences for other parts, which, in turn, require further adaptations, professionalization requires a dynamic approach. Frameworks, such as the one developed by Nagel et al. (2015), present professionalization as something formal caused by different factors, which can be completed, and which has diverse consequences. It does not account for the fact that the consequences of professionalization, whether intended or unintended, in turn, call for new forms of professionalization.

We can say that the professionalization of SFF follows two main strategic goals: the development of floorball and marketing. The data showed that the first relates to pressure from the external environment to implement contemporary management practices. Similar to the findings of studies in other countries, it was found that SFF deals with tasks (e.g., monitoring) because of its dependency on SO and FOSPO for resources. Apart from improved accountability, the real impact of formalization and performance measurement systems imposed by (national) governing bodies on success can be evaluated only in a countable way

and not qualitatively (e.g., medals at high-performance and increases in members at grassroots level) (e.g., Nichols et al., 2016; Papadimitriou, 1998; Van Dooren et al., 2010).

The offensive marketing strategy of SFF appears to be two-directional. Investment in relationships with sponsors and the media relationships (external environment) has had consequences for the MOs (internal environment). This manifests in strategies that exceed resources and divergent goals, which is also found in previous studies of NSFs (e.g., Edwards & Leadbetter, 2016; Houlihan & Green, 2009; Nichols & James, 2008). We observed a mission drift and an imbalance in the organization in SFF: its concern with market values and its belief in the potential of floorball distracted from the needs of the floorball community, for example, for play-for-fun formats, which SFF wanted to avoid. Building commercial relationships costs SFF resources instead of effectively meeting the NSFs' goals from the MOs' perspective (Sam, 2009).

Considering volunteer positions in SFF, the cohesiveness of SFF's board has improved and the relationship between the board and the directory been formalized since SFF's offensive professionalization strategy. In contrast to previous research, the professionalization of SFF has not necessarily led to more decision-making power among paid managers. Rather the board retains its power (cf., Houlihan & Green, 2009; Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011; Shilbury, 2001). SFF's board is constituted by members with both floorball background to clearly recognize the interests of the sport and a flair for management and policy-making. In fact, as asserted by Taylor and O'Sullivan (2009), it has an ideal composition for governing NSFs: besides being widely representative, the members have business expertise and experience in nonexecutive monitoring. However, the combination of such a "capable" board and a COO without a floorball background blurs the line between roles of the board and those of paid executives. There is a potential for conflict between paid and voluntary staff concerning availability, commitment and 'professionalism' (e.g., Hoye & Cuskelly, 2003). Professionalization and commercialization of "club goods" do not necessarily replace volunteer work as the fundament of NSFs (Enjolras, 2002), which was a central concern of previous research. Volunteer's working processes and communication practices, for example, can be standardized like those of paid staff, and volunteer officials can follow the same culture of "professionalism" as employees of the directory. Because fast-moving sport requires timely decisions, it is important to clarify responsibilities clearly. SFF addressed this potential for conflict potential with a simple solution – an Organization Handbook.

Only by having an idea of the impact that decisions and changes in environment will have, will NSFs be able to adapt appropriately (Luhmann, 1984). Promotion through sponsorship and the board's clear goal of professionalizing SFF have had the intended impact and have improved the presence of floorball. SFF has also established what could be called "culture of talking" by involving concerned parties including MOs in decision-making, which

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has healed adversarial relationships with MOs (Shibury & Ferkins, 2015). However, the clubs have experienced the negative consequences of the increased popularity of floorball, which they may have anticipated better than the federation, namely, an incompatibility with infrastructure and volunteer officials (e.g., referees), because many of SFF's activities are the clubs' responsibility. We question how many consequences are unintended but not unknown, and how do NSFs justify risking adverse consequences? In the case of SFF, an example can be found in the Indoor Sports cooperative: it ensures the four NSFs trustworthy partners and saves resources. At the same time, the NSFs compete with each other. Since they face similar challenges, it is hard to imagine that the consequences were unexpected. Thus, it is possible that NSFs risk certain adverse consequences of professionalization process, for the sake of finding new solutions. Such decisions become problematic when there are multiple interrelated consequences that were not anticipated. Then, finding solutions to one aspect without incurring unintended consequences for other aspects is challenging.

The question arises of and how should the visions and goals of an NSF be defined, that is, whether they should be determined by the leaders or if they need to evolve "from the middle." This is not only an ideological question between decision-makers and members but relates to incurring risks, especially when visions and goals differ, and especially when MOs will implement the strategy. Equal to comparisons between coaches and managers, people involved in one area have different views of possibilities and risks than those of people in other areas.

Risk relates to pressure, and while NSFs do not generally experience direct coercive pressure, increasingly businesslike logics and decision-makers with management backgrounds increase normative and mimetic pressure, whereby the consequences for NPOs are underestimated (O'Brien & Slack, 2004). SFF's main commercial partners, for example, can obviously support the federation with respect to marketing issues, and the goals of the sponsors do not seem contradictory to those of SFF. However, the sponsors will hardly be responsible for any unintended consequences of these common strategies. Even when the consequences would not be irreversible, they may be complex and widespread and reparation may require valuable resources. Furthermore, frequent adaptations can give an impression of insecurity and create mistrust. The fact that volunteer leaders are not perceived as "professional managers" may enhance doubts about their capability to lead an NSF (DiMaggio, 1983).

### 8.7.1 Limitations and future research

The purpose of this case study was to reconstruct the professionalization process and its consequences for SFF. A strength of the study is that it was drawn from a variety of data sources. The interviews gave us valuable references regarding where to dig deeper. However, since professionalization is commonly perceived as a positive process, it is questionable whether interviewees from the NSF in question would honestly criticize their organization – for political reasons and as unwillingness to criticize their personal actions. However, the interviewees were critical and open and held differing views. We acknowledge that the view of the MOs on the consequences of SFF's specific decisions were not directly examined. However, secondary data from surveys on aspects of professionalization correspond with interpretations from other sources. A clear limitation of the study is that we did not confront interviewees with specified strategies. This may be handled differently in future research. It would be interesting, for example, to draw comparisons with the other Indoor Sports NSFs. This study was retrospective and decision-making was taken to be organizational decision-making, as in goals and strategies. This meant that gathering empirical information on the consequences of particular decisions was challenging. A longitudinal study would provide better insight into the relationships between decisions and consequences.

The diversity of the needs and demands within the SFF and the floorball community is expanding. SFF is a complex system with a differentiated structure, including two national leagues, a regional league, and semi-professional, as well as smaller provincial, clubs. In addition, SFF is dependent on municipalities for infrastructure. In accordance with our theory, it is challenging to serve all interests equally and to make adaptations to parts of the organization without creating undesirable outcomes elsewhere. For SO grants, it is of the utmost importance for SFF to remain among the international top-level, and clubs are expected to take responsibility for achieving SFF's targets while the federation guides and supports them. Therefore, it is worth asking whether the emerging form of NSF – a traditional NSF adhering to economic logic – is the most appropriate organization to serve floorball and sport in general.

Against this case study, we – cautiously – advise NSFs to involve the MOs more in decision-making to better anticipate impacts of adaptations. SFF has now recognized this and has begun to implement appropriate practices. It would be worth developing a greater variety of strategies to meet diverse goals and to allow the MOs more autonomy, participation and responsibility for their “own” goals. This could minimize the unintended consequences for other parts of the NSF.

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## 9. Paper summaries

### 9.1 Developing a conceptual framework to analyse professionalization in sport federations

Ruoranen, K., Klenk, C., Schlesinger, T., Bayle, E., Clausen, J., Giauque, D., & Nagel, S. (2016). Developing a conceptual framework to analyse professionalization in sport federations. *European Journal for Sport and Society*, 13, 55-74.  
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The initial motivation for this study was the observation that the concept of 'professionalization' is imprecisely defined in the existing research on sport organizations. Furthermore, the question of whether analytical concepts of professionalization correspond with understandings of the phenomenon in practice had not been previously addressed. Therefore, this study explored the perceptions of practitioners and proposed a framework for analyzing professionalization in NSFs. Expert interviews were conducted with six key people from Swiss NSFs and analyzed to identify characteristics of professionalization using a hermeneutic approach. The characteristics that the experts attributed to professionalization were divided into three topics: (1) change of management philosophy, (2) functional differentiation and specialization, and (3) application of management tools. Despite the fact that these attributes describe businesslike organizations, professionalization was primarily perceived to be a matter of "professional" attitude that transforms into federation culture. The practitioners held ambivalent views of professionalization, for example, businesslike culture versus voluntarism, for-profit versus nonprofit orientation, autonomy versus control. The analytical concepts and practitioners' perceptions were synthesized into a conceptual framework, which could be used for researching causes, forms and consequences of professionalization in NSFs.

## 9.2 Causes for professionalization in national sport federations in Switzerland

Ruoranen, K., Clausen, J., Nagel, S., Lang, G., Klenk, C., Giauque, D., Bayle, E., & Schlesinger, T. (2018). Causes for professionalization in national sport federations in Switzerland: a multiple-case study. *Current Issues in Sport Science*, 3:003.  
doi:10.15203/CISS\_2018.003

This study explored causes for professionalization in Swiss NSFs. We conducted a multiple-case study, employing a qualitative approach using interviews and documents from seven NSFs. The multi-level framework developed by Nagel et al. (2015) guided the analysis, which distinguished endogenous causes for professionalization in NSFs from causes related to their external environment (e.g., umbrella organizations, sponsors) and their internal environment (i.e., member organizations). We found that the causes of professionalization were similar across the seven NSFs. Prominent triggers for professionalization were conflicts in the board, ambiguous decision-making competences and initiatives taken by key persons. The particular forms of professionalization resulting from those triggers included establishment of strategic boards and executive headquarters, specialization and employment of paid staff. The Swiss government, Swiss Olympic Association and sponsors (external environment) have been responsible for considerable adaptations to NSFs' strategies with regard to accountability issues and commercialization, whereas the expectations of NSFs' member organizations (internal environment) have generally had little impact on the professionalization of their umbrella federations. Rather, the NSFs believe that their member organizations need support that the member organizations themselves do not perceive necessary. Our analysis revealed additional NSF-specific factors (e.g., popularity, financial resources, attitude of individuals toward professionalization) that have an impact on the pace and continuity of the professionalization process once it has been initiated.

This study can be seen a first step toward a comprehensive understanding of the professionalization processes in Swiss NSFs. Regarding the similarity in the causes for professionalization, we propose that uncertainty and competing for resources may have led some NSFs to mimic NSFs, which they deem successful. Similarities in features such as organizational structures and management practices are likely to lead to similar conditions that call for professionalization. These might include increasing workloads or higher internal expectations. We suggested that networks between stakeholders and people in the NSFs, who are motivated to forward professionalization, could support deliberate professionalization that does not overwhelm at once the involved actors. With regard to future studies, we recommend further consideration of the relationship between the endogenous and the external causes for professionalization of NSFs, as our findings suggest that they are reciprocal. Single-case studies would be useful for a greater understanding of the mechanisms

and phases of professionalization, and to identify barriers to professionalization and avoid any unintended consequences of professionalization.

### **9.3 Intended und unintended consequences of professionalization in national sport federations: A case study of Swiss Floorball Federation**

Ruoranen, K., Nagel, S., Lang, G., Klenk, C., Clausen, J., Bayle, E., Giauque, D., & Schlesinger, T. (2018). *Intended and unintended consequences of professionalization in national sport federations: A case study of Swiss Floorball Federation*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

This study aimed to identify and analyze intended and unintended consequences of professionalization in NSFs, understanding NSFs as autopoietic social systems emerging from decision-making. In our case study of the Swiss Floorball Federation (SFF), we compared SFF's goals and strategy regarding professionalization over approximately the last 10 years and the challenges it faces today. To this end, we collected on data from interviews, documents and secondary studies. SFF's offensive professionalization strategy, using marketing and holding events to gain publicity and new memberships has been successful. Professionalization of the board has also enhanced its strategic capability. However, focusing on marketing and other professionalization strategies has meant that the needs of the clubs have been disregarded. The emphasis on the entertainment impact and attempts at standardization have exceeded clubs' capacities. To avoid these unintended consequences of professionalization and to prevent wasting resources, we encourage NSFs to involve clubs early in strategy development and allow them the autonomy to pursue more diverse goals and strategies.

In addition to the case study of SFF, we explored consequences of professionalization in a multiple-case study consisting of seven Swiss NSFs. This was in relation to the study of the causes for professionalization in the same seven Swiss NSFs (Ruoranen et al., 2018a). The findings were presented at the 25th conference of the European Association for Sport Management 2017 in Bern, Switzerland (Ruoranen et al., 2017), and in a meeting with practitioners from Swiss NSFs (December 6, 2017).

The intended and unintended consequences of professionalization were analyzed using the multi-level framework developed by Nagel et al. (2015), which is based on a review of sport management and sport sociology literature and addresses consequences of professionalization on three levels: the endogenous consequences and those relating to the internal and external environment of NSFs. Each case was investigated using documents and semi-structured interviews, which were analyzed qualitatively. In terms of intended consequences, it was found that the transparency of NSFs' operations was improved by

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professionalization. Paid staff and professionalized structures were found to reduce the workloads of volunteer officials, and differentiation of volunteer board and the appointment of general secretaries contributed to defining strategic and executive competences. New marketing activities enhanced the social presence of NSFs. However, the findings showed that professionalization of NSFs tended to put too much pressure, with respect to time and capabilities, on their member organizations. Consequently, the NSFs have recognized the importance of supporting clubs and involving them better in decision-making. The unintended consequences that NSFs have faced include leadership conflicts, higher costs, increased workloads, and widening gaps between different parts of the organizations. Furthermore, some stakeholders were found to dictate the expenditure of resources. Concluding from this analysis, besides its intended impact, professionalization is found to have unintended consequences that result in new challenges for NSFs. Deliberate, unhurried professionalization provides NSFs with opportunities to develop their sport and member services.



## 10. General discussion

### 10.1 Reflection on the three studies

The main objective of this thesis was to investigate causes, forms and consequences of professionalization in NSFs. The aims were to develop a conceptual framework for analyzing professionalization, to examine causes for professionalization, and in a single-case study to identify consequences of professionalization. The research questions arose out of an observation of a profound move among NSFs in Switzerland toward businesslike logics, a transformation that seems contradictory to the volunteer tradition of NSFs. Underlying this doctoral thesis was the analytical premises that forms of professionalization manifest in various organizational aspects and that the causes and consequences of professionalization can be assessed on multiple levels (the endogenous level and the levels of the internal and external environment of the NSF). The thesis aims to offer empirical insight into the multi-level framework developed by Nagel et al. (2015), which represents the literature in sport management and sport sociology on professionalization in sport organizations.

The thesis contains three studies. The objective of the first study was to develop a conceptual framework for analyzing forms and characteristics of professionalization in NSFs by synthesizing perceptions of scholars and practitioners. The second study assessed causes and other promoting factors of, as well as barriers to, professionalization in Swiss NSFs. For that purpose, we conducted a multiple-case study of seven Swiss NSFs. The objective of the third study was to identify and analyze intended and unintended consequences of professionalization of NSFs in Switzerland by studying a single case (Swiss Unihockey). In what follows, the thesis will be discussed more broadly, reflecting in particular on the analytical framework and its limitations. It concludes with recommendations for future research on professionalization in sport federations.

The first step to contribute to sport management and sport sociology literature so far with specific, though wide-ranging, empirical knowledge was to simply ask selected experts: "What do you understand by 'professionalization in NSFs?'" The brief was to contribute with their perspectives to missing aspects or ambiguous outlining of the concept in the literature. This was to achieve a better foundation for operationalizing forms of professionalization (study 1). The perception of the selected practitioners from the field of Swiss NSFs corresponded to a large extent with the attributes of professionalization found in the literature (Dowling et al., 2014). One important aspect that enhances our understanding of professionalization in sport federations deserves particular attention. Research has linked professionalization to a transformation of organizational values and objectives from a traditional volunteer- and member-based pastime toward more sophisticated business values (e.g., Amis et al., 2002;

Maier et al., 2016; Shilbury et al., 2013). Our experts added another perspective in saying that professionalization does not necessarily mean paid staff, specific organizational adaptations or similar. They perceived professionalization, in the first place, as an attitude, a management philosophy that is necessary to compete for financial resources and to ensure the survival of an NSF today, but which can be incorporated by NSFs as federation culture. In that sense, professionalization and commercialization of sport activities do not necessarily interfere with NSFs' traditional nonprofit values and their role as advocates for the interests of the member organizations (Enjolras, 2002; cf. Koski & Heikkala, 1998).

The three studies conducted for this thesis contribute to calls for research in the last decade. By considering the endogenous level and the levels of the internal and external environment of NSFs, we can shed light on systemic professionalization (Dowling et al., 2014; Washington & Patterson, 2011). We saw that NSFs experience similar changes elicited by shifts in their environment (Ruoranen et al., 2018a). For example, Swiss Olympic and sponsors of sport are no longer only interested in supporting sport. They also value international success, reputation and visibility. Accordingly, what is expected of NSFs has changed. We also saw how professionalization can influence power structures, an example being the increased power of sponsors (Ruoranen et al., 2018b). Examining factors related to NSFs' member organizations, as well as the external environment and the NSF's own targets and pressures is useful for understanding links within various institutional levels and between these levels (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). However, it is to concede that the aim of this thesis was not to identify a common orbit of Swiss NSFs.

A good deal of attention has been directed at professionalization in relation to institutional isomorphism (e.g., O'Brien & Slack, 2003, 2004; Slack & Hinings, 1994; Washington & Patterson, 2011). However, less attention has been paid to the establishment of institutional arrangements (Taylor & McGraw, 2006; Washington & Patterson, 2011). By examining the causes of professionalization, we gained an insight into the various effects of professionalization on NSFs and the factors that affect institutional arrangements and practices in NSFs (study 2). NSFs have to adapt their structures and practices because of their dependence on externally secured resources. However, the decision to pursue such a strategy requires decision-makers who are convinced of the importance of those external resources and who manage to steer the NSF accordingly. This research examined this issue using a case study to analyze the strategies and the motivations with regard to professionalization of an NSF (study 3). Observing, how an NSF reacts to changes yielded interesting insights, especially in relation to unintended consequences professionalization. It provided an insight into the NSF's attempts to sustain their legitimacy in the face of adversity (Macris & Sam, 2014). Legitimacy issues are discussed more profoundly below.

Even when the conditions in NSF's external environments are similar, the pressure to respond them is not necessarily the same (Slack & Hinings, 1994). The multiple-case study conducted for this thesis provided insight into varying degrees of isomorphic work and how they reinforce each other across NSF's. NSF-specific conditions, such as financial and human resources, can determine whether new management practices and structures become institutionalized in an NSF or not (Ruoranen et al., 2018a). NSF's are not mere passive receptors of institutional pressures but can actively resist such forces (for an overview see Welty Peachey et al., 2015). Swiss Fencing, for example, resisted for making structural as well as human resource adaptations for a long time, since its international success afford it that freedom. Changes to some organizational characteristics are easily achieved. Common sense tells us, for example, that for good performance contemporary NSF's need to pay 'professional' managers.

Also, coercive, normative and mimetic isomorphisms affect organizational attributes in different ways (O'Brien & Slack, 2004; Slack & Hinings, 1994). We observed, for example, that those on the boards of NSF's generally thought that a board should be composed of members with entrepreneurial experience and good networks in the for-profit sector and in politics. This form of professionalization would be less subject to coercion from external actors, such as the Swiss government or Swiss Olympic. Furthermore, decision-makers in the NSF's think that a clear differentiation of the strategic decision-making from operations is a prerequisite for a well-recognized NSF. Thereby, the strategic board remains composed of volunteers (O'Brien & Slack, 2004; Ruoranen et al., 2018a). We found that also softer indicators of professionalization, such as adequate, transparent communication and proper involvement of member organizations, were affected by normative rather than coercive pressure, or they were subject to mimicking other NSF's. That is to say, those attributes would not be so much required by Olympic committees but rather by member organizations. These attributes are central in traditional NSF's and are, therefore, essential for NSF's legitimation (Amis et al., 2004a; Slack & Hinings, 1994).

With regard to the cases examined in this thesis, coercive pressure on NSF's comes from Swiss Olympic and FOSPO. Dependence on funds and other forms of support from Swiss Olympic compels NSF's to implement various management strategies tailored to ensure efficient organizational performance and instruments that account for proper investment of subsidies. Hence, we can say that the art of professionalization is largely determined by Swiss Olympic and FOSPO. However, the introduction of management instruments and standardized processes is also driven by CEOs and directors (Ruoranen et al., 2018a). National laws and government policy have little impact on NSF's in Switzerland. In fact, it is open to question why the actors in Swiss sport pursue the professionalization of traditional

sport federations instead of seeking new, possibly more suitable ways of organizing sport communities and high-performance sport?

### **10.2 Causes and consequences of professionalization in a multi-level framework**

This thesis pursued the findings of the multi-level framework developed by Nagel et al. (2015) that, first, professionalization occurs in the structures and processes of sport federations and the individuals within these federations, and, second, that the causes and consequences of professionalization can be observed on three levels. The validity of the framework for analyzing professionalization in Swiss NSF was assessed. However, since the multi-level framework is fundamentally a broad literature review and is rather vague about its content, we did not apply it strictly but chose open approaches for the analysis. Generally, open, inductive procedures are valuable to specify frameworks for analyzing professionalization in sport federations using empirical evidence. The multi-level framework used in this study represents a process advancing from the causes to the forms and on to the consequences of professionalization. However, when we reflected it against empirical knowledge, it appears static. The framework does not account for the factors that support and hinder the institutionalization of professionalization once it has been initiated (Ruoranen et al., 2018a; Slack & Hinings, 1994). Barriers to professionalization are particularly important for such a framework since they play a considerable role in the development of sport federations, especially with regard to the levels of importance that different actors in the sport system put on the professionalization of NSFs today. Integrating these dynamics that apply to NSFs to greater or lesser extents would be valuable for developing analytical frameworks. Furthermore, the framework developed by Nagel et al. (2015) could be further developed by considering the interdependence of the levels. The three levels (NSF-specific structures and processes, NSFs' external and internal environments) can be easily observed when exploring professionalization in sport federations. However, when it comes to the mechanisms behind the professionalization of structures, processes and individuals, differentiating the levels becomes challenging. The interdependence of discipline, media attractiveness, sponsors' interest, and financial resources is an example (Ruoranen et al., 2018a). Finally, and possibly most importantly, a linear cause-form-consequence relationship implies a process that is completed either intentionally or unintentionally, whereas the professionalization of NSFs is a dynamic ongoing process, as organizations continue adapting to changes in, and pressures from, their internal and external environment and build new organizational features that may cause further professionalization (Anheier, 2000; Luhmann, 1984, 2000).

### 10.3 Challenges for understanding professionalization and performance in NSFs

Returning to the question of why actors in Swiss sport federations continue in their efforts to professionalize traditional sport federations instead of seeking other ways to organize sport at community and high-performance level, the following explanation is proposed. NSFs provide and organize sport, which is considered as a public good, which contributes to a “healthy society” and should be available to everybody (e.g., Borland & Macdonald, 2003). Furthermore, professionalization is a positively connoted social norm. The state, for example, has become more efficiency-oriented and expects NPOs to provide evidence of their use of funds. In general, the pressure on NSFs to pursue professionalization from the external environment reflect general trends in society, such as placing greater importance on performance measurements and accountability. Professionalization has become a *dispositif* (Foucault, 1978), a concept whose meaning is determined by the term itself, an assemble of elements that are deemed proper when it comes to professionalization. In that sense, professionalization equates to quality. Apart from the pressures and requirements that are clearly expressed, professional performance as a norm restricts organizational behavior and exerts pressure on organizations to adapt in order to be perceived professional.

The overall aim of professionalization of NSFs is better performance (Bayle & Madella, 2002; Winand et al., 2010; Winand, Rihoux, Qualizza, & Zintz, 2011). For NSFs, better performance refers to international success in sport (i.e. medals) and services provided to member organizations. As discussed, a common strategy to improve performance is to pay staff to support voluntary work. Paid managers and specialized staff are expected to introduce standardized processes and specialization (Dowling et al., 2014), which are associated with expertise, efficiency and transparency of actions. These professional norms have become important in sport (e.g., Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010), since the various stakeholders who finance sport organization determine with the recipient the outcomes. According to economics logic, recipients of grants are accountable to their funders and are expected to report on the use of funding. Due to dependence on their funders, NSFs seem to be obliged to fulfill one requirement after another to remain eligible for grants. These requirements have typically been developed in the belief that they will improve the quality of work and thus the performance of NSFs (e.g., that standardization improves efficiency).

To evaluate the extent to which goals are achieved, performance needs to be assessed in measurable units. For financial supporters, it is easier in terms of transparency to rely on “hard facts”, such as number of medals, and disregard more qualitative evaluation, such as illness of athletes or extreme weather conditions on a certain day resulting in an athlete coming fourth rather than winning a medal at the Olympic Games. However, number

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of medals is a weak indicator of the NSF's overall (organizational) performance. Therefore, stakeholders have begun to rely on more differentiated evaluation of NSFs' (and member organizations') performances by breaking down goals into more detailed targets. As the studies for this thesis show, these include instruments for achieving goals (e.g., quality labels for training conditions). In fact, steering and control mechanisms have become important for managing NSFs at an organizational as well as an individual level, whereas autonomy and individuality have been restricted. In terms of accountability, clearly determined targets are justified to more qualitative but less definable goals. Sanction mechanisms are also easier to apply to measurable targets. However, having to constantly justify, display and report decisions and activities negatively affects one's competences. This is contradictory to the concept of professionalization and to the idea of professionals, whose qualifications are commonly approved through credentials, and resembles rather a shift to de-professionalization (Evetts, 2011, 2009). Furthermore, the various mechanisms for organizing and controlling work are often unsuitable to the voluntary culture of NSFs; how much steering and regulation are reasonable to people working without remuneration? In fact, our data indicated that officials in Swiss sport clubs are beginning to discredit the umbrella federations' idea of professionalization and are wondering if the benefits of quality measurement are worth the effort.

The research for this thesis shows that professionalization is more than tangible adaptations of organizational structures, processes, activities, and individuals (cf., Chappelet, 2001; Bayle & Robinson, 2007; Nagel et al., 2015), and that "professional" performance entails more than quantifiable indicators and written concepts (Ruoranen et al., 2016; Ruoranen et al., 2018b). Professionalization can also be understood as a philosophy or an attitude to work, to conduct a task professionally (Ferkins et al., 2005). One can also have expertise in specific areas without any credentials. This study shows that continuous and sincere self-reflection characterizes professionalization in NSFs, as well as a culture of participation and communication. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of transparent communication to reduce information asymmetries between umbrella and member organizations, as well as involvement of the member organizations in decision-making (Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2004b; Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010). Whereas aspects of professionalization such as strategy and communication are checkable, qualitative improvement of performance is difficult to measure. "Soft factors", such as communication culture and knowledge transfer, are also more challenging to assess. Observing the organizational structure of an NSF may not say a lot about the federation's professionalization, if, for example, the position of the voluntary board and its relation to the overall structure is overlooked.

The legitimacy of NSFs lies in their representation and organization of their member organizations. Accordingly, their visions and goals should reflect the interests of the member

organizations. Some of the contradictions within the practice and culture of professionalization of NSF may be linked to conflicts between the needs of member organizations and the values and norms that NSF follow to demonstrate professionalism within the organizational field and to gain legitimacy. For example, even though professionalization leads to businesslike NSF with paid managers, volunteers and a willingness to volunteer are expected to remain fundamental to NSF (Enjolras, 2002; Ruoranen et al., 2016). Consequently, it appeared to be of the utmost importance for all research participants to emphasize that volunteers can work as “professionally” as paid staff. However, many practices entailed in professionalization are difficult to reconcile with volunteer work, for example, time-keeping.

To be recognized as a professionally operating NSF without eroding its volunteer and membership culture, an NSF may decouple formal policies from its actual organizational practice (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). It may, for instance, introduce evaluation processes without applying them in practice (e.g., Åberg, 2013; Slack and Hinings, 1994). Therefore, symbols and rhetoric are important for legitimacy, while it can be possible to continue operating under conditions that work in practice. This thesis shows that, on the one hand, voluntary boards and institutionalized opportunities having one’s voice heard have the symbolic character necessary for NSF to be perceived as legitimate. Exploring the causes of professionalization, we found, on the other hand, that due to the symbolic role of the volunteer boards, deficits in decision-making, that is in boards and general secretaries, were “high-impact elements” that were preferably adapted early to ease further professionalization (Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2004b; Ruoranen et al., 2018a). The implementation of new management practices while retaining former practices can have unintended consequences, such as wasting financial and human resources.

#### **10.4 Limitations and future research**

The studies conducted for this thesis have some limitations that, in addition to their consideration in the articles, are discussed here more generally. With regard to methodology, interviews with members of the federations have certain shortcomings with respect to a normative perception of professionalization in NSF. Apart from social desirability, the research participants may be delicate in their criticism in order not to discredit themselves. They may be interested in their personal reputation, especially if they have been involved in the process of professionalization so far. As (political) representatives of the NSF, they will also be concerned about both the reputation of their organization, and their relationships to the organization’s stakeholders. We addressed this issue by combining a diverse range of data sources. Furthermore, case studies are a valuable method in this regard, since discrepancies, such as those between interviewees, can easily be identified and do not discredit the data. However, we were impressed by the (apparent) openness and critical

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reflection of the informants, even though we could not secure their anonymity as most of them held central positions in the NSFs. However, in future studies views from different levels of the NSFs could be considered. That could be done, for example, with purposeful, perhaps even tightly focused, surveys of member organizations. Surveys at that level would afford a more detailed view. When the size or league of the clubs were taken into consideration, as these can have a considerable influence on a club's relationship with its umbrella federation and on the consequences of professionalization. Focus group interviews would also be a useful way of analyzing professionalization in NSFs. Diverse points of views could be brought together in a group consisting of current representatives of the NSF and its member organizations or people who have been involved in the NSF at different times, especially to explore decision-making and the consequences of professionalization. Such a method would mean that researchers would not have to determine when a decision or a move into professionalization is "completed" in order to investigate its consequences.

Related to the question of political correctness among research participants, it is possible that critical cases would not have been willing to participate in the investigation and allow us access to their organizations. A more systematic selection of NSFs could have extended our knowledge of professionalization in Swiss NSFs, particularly regarding the barriers to it. Exploring all Swiss NSFs would offer the possibility to compare professionalization between NSFs according to different attributes and characteristics, which would contribute to our knowledge of types of professionalization. A full or large sample could also shed light on common turning points.

This thesis investigated professionalization in Swiss NSFs retrospectively. A retrospective view of (ongoing) processes can be biased as it can distort one's perception of the past. We tried to tackle this concern by using multiple data sources from several years. However, for future research, longitudinal studies would be valuable for investigating the causes, forms, and consequences of, and the barriers to, professionalization in NSFs. Thereby, the cases could enclose NSFs that are to various extent professionalized.

Regarding the first study, Swiss Olympic's recommendations for experts with wide and diverse views across Swiss NSFs and the sport system was beneficial. For further development of the concept of professionalization in NSFs, it would be useful to explore the ideas and expectations that member organizations have of professionalization of NSFs.

Finally, we acknowledge that the Swiss context limits the generalizability of the results presented in this thesis. However, we believe that these contributions can form a basis for similar studies in other countries. Research within other sport policies could shed light on, what in effect is the meaning of the political autonomy that is ascribed to Swiss NSFs.

Choosing appropriate terms was a challenge when writing this thesis. In works on occupationalization and in studies investigating professionalization in sport organizations on



organizational and systemic levels, the term “professional” is commonly used for paid staff (independent of their performance) and does not include volunteer officials, whose work may be very “professional”. A common perception among research participants, scholars and broader audiences was that a “professional” is not only a person with specific credentials nor an attribute of paid staff, but people who work on an honorary basis can perform as “professionally” as the aforementioned. The term appears to have a clear normative meaning. Hence, the culture or attitude of professionalization, not only its visible forms but how it is practiced in NSFs, would be an interesting topic for future research.

### **10.5 Implications and conclusion**

Apart from its analytical approach, this thesis contributes to the empirical and practical knowledge of professionalization in Swiss NSFs, enabling them to recognize and improve their wide-ranging relevance in society. The studies show that professionalization is not always a positive development, especially to the extent it is taking place currently. It also shows that individuals in Swiss NSFs recognize that. The challenges that professionalization brings and the balancing act between its benefits and its disadvantages for NSFs are increasingly acknowledged in research as well as in the field of sport.

The idea of professionalization and the procedures that currently dominate in Swiss NSFs seem to make the rich richer and the poor poorer, as the allocation of financial subsidies and sponsorship is based mainly on international success and number of members. This makes it difficult for smaller NSFs (i.e., representing less popular sports or with little international high-performance activity) to professionalize. Furthermore, focusing on a single target, basically the financial backing of Swiss Olympic, threatens the motivation for creativeness and innovation in NSFs. It is recommended that NSFs remain open to a diversity of goals and visions and explore new formats that will allow clubs more autonomy without withholding subsidies or withdrawing support for clubs’ activities. Sport benefits from development, the introduction of ski cross and beach volleyball being recent examples. Therefore, the institutions that finance and support the NSFs and the NSFs themselves should pay more attention to grassroots and the broader club basement (something that Swiss Olympic has begun to think about). They should also consider making the allocation criteria and performance indicators more qualitative in nature. The satisfaction of the clubs and the personal efforts of individual members should be considered, particularly with respect to NSFs with little resources. This would mean a shift from *malus* to *bonus*. Finally, it is recommended that moves toward professionalization of NSFs be moderate and gradual and that the interests of member organizations be considered. Ultimately, it is the members who evaluate the quality of the NSF’s work.



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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Interview guide for expert interviews.

#### Interview guide – Expert interviews

- Introduction of the project
  - Explain the role of the interviewee
- 
- 1) From your point of view, what is meant with professionalization in national sport federations?
    - a) What are the characteristics of professionalization?
    - b) How would you describe being “not professional” for a sport federation?
    - c) Among the Swiss national sport federations, do you observe different types of professionalization
      - Examples?
  
  - 2) How is the current situation in Swiss national sport federations in terms of professionalization?
    - a) How does a “professional” federation differ from a “not professional” one? (regarding sport, administration and development)
    - b) Which characteristics/conditions make the difference?
      - Examples to trigger information
  
  - 3) Which factors influence professionalization process?
    - a) Why, under which conditions, should a sport federation consider development towards professionalization? Why not?
    - b) Which factors trigger professionalization process?
    - c) Which factors hinder or slow down professionalization process?
    - d) What kind of a role do member organizations play?
    - e) Does Swiss Olympic coerce some processes in the member organizations?
    - f) Does the International Olympic Committee put pressure on the development of the Swiss Olympic?
  
  - 4) What kind of consequences have professionalization processes (had)?
    - a) Which changes and processes do you value positive and beneficial for the federations (and Swiss Olympic)?
    - b) What kind of development do you perceive as negative and restrictive?

- 5) Taking professionalization in sport federations as a process, are there some stages, steps or sequences that you find to be essential? (first elite sport, then administrative, development etc...)
- a) Are there some relevant points of time that should be considered?
  - b) Are there steps that are necessary for the follow-up progress?

## **Appendix 2. Basic interview guide for case studies.**

### **(1) OPENERS**

- What challenges is the federation currently facing?
- How relevant is professionalization currently for your federation?
- Is there a high need for action to professionalize?
- Which areas have experienced professionalization so far?
- Which areas are subjects to professionalization in the future?
- What is the superordinate purpose of the federation?
- Which goals and targets does the federation pursue?

### **(2) FORMS OF PROFESSIONALIZATION**

Take up topics from above and continue with following areas. Consider changes and shifts in the last ten years.

#### **People, roles and functions**

##### *Specialization*

- Which positions and functions are filled by volunteers and paid employees, respectively?
- Which positions are to be filled by volunteers, which by paid staff and why?
  - How are employees recruited?
  - Who is responsible for the employment? Any difficulties?
  - What qualifications are expected from volunteers and paid employees? Are there job descriptions?
- Which compensation regulations apply to volunteers and paid employees?

##### *Working together and relationship between volunteers and paid employees*

- Which roles and tasks do volunteers and paid employees have in the federation?
- How is the concrete allocation of tasks between volunteers and paid employees organized? Who coordinates and supports the work of volunteers and paid employees, and how?
- Has volunteer work become different by entering of paid staff into the federation?
- How does the federation bind volunteers and paid employees?

#### **Structures and processes**

##### *Federation Culture*

- What is the self-image of the federation? (e.g., service orientation)
- What characterizes the culture of the federation? (e.g., volunteer basis)
- How relevant is voluntary work? What is the meaning of tradition for the federation?
- Do decision makers and committees follow same values? How is the feeling of belonging / corporate identity?

- What kind of reputation has the federation in Switzerland?

#### *Leadership and decision-making processes (knowledge management and communication)*

- How are the decision-making powers allocated? What are the tasks and roles of different decision-making bodies?
  - Which committees have decision-making power?
  - Does decision-making follow a hierarchy?
- How is decision-making processed in the federation (what are the established routines)?
- Where does the federation get relevant knowledge for decisions (e.g., for strategy)? Who is responsible for that and how is this implemented? Do all actors have the same information or how is information asymmetries handled?
  - How are decisions communicated?
- To what extent are resolutions binding?

#### *Strategic management and business model*

- How central is strategy for the federation? How is it worked out and implements it?
- How is achievement of goals supervised and evaluated? Which management and controlling tools are used? (e.g., BSC Cockpit)
- What role do external partners play for the strategy?

#### *Work processes (standardization, formalization, efficiency, quality orientation)*

- What are the organizational workflows? What is important here?
- How is the procedure in short- and long-term planning (e.g., for strategy, staff, offers)?
- How relevant are effectiveness and efficiency in your federation? How are they ensured?
- By which means is success of the federation measured?
- How do you ensure quality (of products, processes, task completion, decisions)?
- How important is transparency? (e.g., decisions, outcomes) To whom, to which organizations, is the federation accountable?

### **(3) PROCESS LEVEL OF PROFESSIONALIZATION (DYNAMICS)**

- Which factors have had an impact on the professionalization efforts in the discussed areas? Which factors are central? (e.g., key actors, resource, shared values, support of the clubs)
- Which factors have so far accelerated the process, which slowed down?

#### **(4) CAUSES OF PROFESSIONALIZATION**

What were the causes for professionalization (in different areas)?

Which goals are related to particular adaptations?

- What are the internal causes?  
Ensuring resources (e.g., funding acquisition), challenges in daily processes (e.g., efficiency), staff related causes (e.g., lack of volunteers), role of individual actors, reorientation...
- What are external causes? (external environment)  
What requirements and expectations does the federation experience from the external environment?  
What impact do sports policy, umbrella organizations, public and private partners, media, other institutions have?
- What are the expectations and requirements of the member organizations with regard to professionalization of the federation? (internal environment)

#### **(5) CONSEQUENCES OF PROFESSIONALIZATION**

What consequences can be observed from the professionalization efforts? What are the resulted advantages and disadvantages?

#### **Structures and processes**

##### *Leadership*

- Management: leadership and governance of the federation
- Decision-making processes
- Competences and responsibilities

##### *Performance*

- To what extent has professionalization influenced the organizational performance (effectiveness, efficiency, success, quality)?
- Competences and responsibilities of volunteers and paid employees
- Work performance, motivation, corporate identity
- Relationships between volunteers and paid employees

##### *Federation Culture*

- Shifts in the basic values / self-image of the federation

#### **Federation's internal environment**

- Expectations and demands with member organizations
- Relationships with member organizations
- Professionalization in member organizations

#### **Federation's external environment**

- Requirements and expectations from the external environment, such as Federal Offices, Swiss Olympic, sponsors
- Relationship with external partners

### Appendix 3. Elements of professionalization – a grid for data collection.

Elements of professionalization: Persons and positions.

Persons and positions		
Element	Aspects	
<i>Paid and permanent staff</i>	<p>quantity</p> <p>recruiting</p> <p>incentives</p> <p>quality: expertise, split resorts (sport, administration, executive, operative), competences, qualification profiles</p> <p>motivation</p>	<p>To what extend does the NSF employ paid staff? Share to volunteers?</p> <p>Degree of specialization of the employees (and the NSF): What qualifications are paid attention to? How (via which channels) is paid staff recruited?</p> <p>How does the NSF attract and bind paid staff? (e.g., education) In comparison to volunteers?</p> <p>The degree of specialization and functional differentiation (in the General Secretary): Which positions are occupied by paid employees? What kinds of credentials are required? To what extend are the employees attached to particular tasks? Which different functions/positions are distinguished? What kind of background/career do paid staff have?</p> <p>What motivates the paid staff to work for the NSF?</p>
<i>Volunteers in boards and committees</i>	<p>quantity</p> <p>recruiting</p>	<p>To what extend does the NSF operate with volunteers? Share to paid staff? To what extend is the NSF lead by volunteers? Which positions are occupied by volunteers?</p> <p>The relationship between the NSF and the volunteers in the board and committees: How are the board members recruited and elected? How often is the board renewed? What characteristics/attributes are paid attention to?</p>

Elements of professionalization: Persons and positions – continuing.

	<p>incentives</p> <p>quality: expertise, split resorts, competences</p> <p>political responsibilities</p> <p>satisfaction</p> <p>motivation, commitment</p>	<p>How does the NSF attract and bind <u>volunteers</u>?</p> <p>How are the board members honored?</p> <p>What are the incentives/compensation they receive?</p> <p>The degree of specialization and functional differentiation in the board/committees:</p> <p>Which different functions/positions are distinguished?</p> <p>To what extent are board members attached to <u>particular functions/tasks</u>?</p> <p>What experience and which expertise do the board members offer?</p> <p>Which qualifications are required?</p> <p>In which positions specific credentials are (not) required?</p> <p>What are the responsibilities of the board and committees (members)?</p> <p>How satisfied are the board and committee members?</p> <p>To what extent are the board and committee members committed to the NSF?</p> <p>What is their motivation?</p> <p>How do they respond to the expectations of and challenges in the NSF?</p> <p>How is their relationship to the NSF?</p>
<i>Relationship between paid staff - volunteer board</i>	<p>conflicts</p> <p>divergent interests</p> <p>shift in responsibilities</p> <p>decision-making competencies</p> <p>shift in influence</p> <p>roles and tasks/functions</p> <p>identification</p>	<p>Are there conflicts between the paid staff and the volunteer officials?</p> <p>How do the NSF deal with conflicts?</p> <p>How do interests of the paid staff and volunteer officials differ?</p> <p>Do their motivation differ?</p> <p>Have the responsibilities of the paid and volunteer officials shifted?</p> <p>Who has the decision-making competence in which occasions?</p> <p>Have the decision-making competences shifted?</p> <p>How are the roles and tasks differentiated and shared between paid staff and volunteer officials?</p> <p>Does the identification with the NSF differ between paid staff and volunteer officials?</p>

Elements of professionalization: Strategies and activities.

Strategies and activities		
Element	Aspects	
<i>Scope and concept of the NSF</i>	determination of aims/goal setting  differentiation of goals  strategic orientation	Aim of the NSF: What does the NSF aim at? (aims of societal, financial, political importance) Does the NSF have a Code of Conduct/ethics chart?  Do the NSF follow diverse goals? Does the NSF have specific development projects/programs?  Does the NSF have a long-term strategy? Does the NSF have divergent strategies?
<i>Efficiency / efficacy orientation</i>	controlling instruments (BSC, SportGAAP)	How central are efficiency and efficacy issues in the NSF? How are efficiency and efficacy determined and measured? Which management instruments does the NSF apply? Does the NSF conduct performance agreements with other organizations?
<i>Market orientation</i>	analysis of demand product/sport development, innovations communication tools  marketing  development of rules/regulations	Does the NSF analyze supply-demand relationship? How does the NSF respond to demands on the market? Which tools are used for (external) communication? How central are marketing <u>issues</u> ? Marketing in the organization structure? Share of spending for marketing? Marketing tools? How does the NSF respond to demands on the market (and of sponsor)?
<i>Service orientation</i>	consulting and support services (member organizations, athletes)	Which services does the NSF offer to its members regarding development aspects? (e.g., courses) Which services does the NSF offer to its members regarding administrative aspects? (e.g., documents)



Elements of professionalization: Strategies and activities – continuing.

<i>Quality orientation</i>	controlling instruments  process managing certification	Quality assurance/performance evaluation: Which management instruments does the NSF apply? Are the instruments required by other organizations? (e.g., Swiss Olympic) Does the NSF analyze supply-demand relationship? Does the NSF orientate at and approach certificates?
<i>Knowledge orientation</i>	learning organization research development education availability/distribution of knowledge	Does the NSF analyze and reflect its performance? Does the NSF participate in research? (e.g., with universities) How is knowledge (consulting, analyses, research) applied? Does the NSF offer education or participate in education programs? To whom is knowledge distributed? Who is responsible for that?
<i>Cooperation, partnerships</i>	interrelationship, networks, dependency, involvement	With which organizations/other NSFs does the NSF cooperate? Are there dependences in these partnerships? Dependency from economic partners? Memberships of the NSF? (e.g., IFs, continental) In which projects/programs is the NSF involved? (e.g., societal, development)
<i>Services / performance</i>	service provision (services, events, success in sport) consulting	In general, what does the NSF offer (for the public)? (e.g., events, infrastructure) Does the NSF offer external or internal consulting services?
<i>Finances</i>	amount, sources, gains	Annual revenues, financial development in the last 5-10 years: Share of member fees, sponsoring, etc. of the annual budget? Share of spending? Who are the sponsors? Dependences? Which other financial sources does the NSF have? By which means does the NSF raise further capital (i.e., new sponsors/partnerships, joint ventures, events, etc.)? How are resources allocated into different activities? (i.e., high level sporting events, sport for all, social events, market targets, etc.)

Elements of professionalization: Structures and processes.

Structures and processes		
Element	Aspects	
<i>Federation culture</i>	<p>norms, values, tradition, self-image</p> <p> routines, practice, cooperation, conflicts</p> <p>orientation of organizational action / behaviour</p> <p>atmosphere</p> <p>image</p> <p>financial inflow</p>	<p>How does the NSF see itself? How do they characterize themselves?</p> <p>Is the NSF's culture influenced by tradition?</p> <p>Are there traditions/rituals that are important to and upheld by the NSF?</p> <p>With which (what kind of) organizations does the NSF cooperate?</p> <p>Are there internal or external conflicts because of divergent values/norms?</p> <p>What goals does the NSF approach?</p> <p>Which players in the field influence the NSF's practice/orientation?</p> <p>What kind of atmosphere dominates in the NSF? (e.g., satisfaction, cohesiveness, willingness to changes)</p> <p>Communicated values (i.e., of the sport, social projects, slogans, etc.)?</p> <p>How is the NSF financially supported? Which values play a role?</p>
<i>Organizational structures</i>	<p>model of managing/governance</p> <p>separation of power</p> <p>hierarchy structure</p> <p>organizational structure</p>	<p>The structure of the governance:</p> <p>Is there a clear differentiation between strategic and operational organs?</p> <p>Are there clearly separated general secretary and a board of elected?</p> <p>How are responsibilities and decision-making competences shared?</p> <p>Level of hierarchy</p> <p>How is the organization chart? Existing? (differentiation, weight of departments, etc.)</p>
<i>Differentiation</i>	<p>positions/resorts</p> <p>process organization</p>	<p>Of which departments does the NSF consist of?</p> <p>Level of centralization and autonomy of processes and instances</p>

Elements of professionalization: Structures and processes – continuing.

	committees, boards (status) outsourcing	Differentiation and specialization of committees? Are some activities outsourced?
<i>Human resources management</i>	human resources concept  education  incentive/reward scheme	How are the human resources managed/ <u>organized</u> ? Does the NSF have a HR concept? Who is responsible for HR? Does the NSF offer/support further education? What incentives does the NSF offer? How are people acknowledged for their work?
<i>Ways of communication and information</i>	communication/information flow (formal/informal)	Communication strategy of the NSF (who, when, what, how): Does the NSF have a formalized concept? How does the NSF communicate with the clubs? Which channels are used for internal/external communication?
<i>Rules / regulation scheme</i>	process organization, planning, coordination (form of cooperation)	The official procedure for establishing, changing, developing the NSF's rules: By whom are changes initiated? To what extend other organizations take influence? Who revises and updates the NSF's sporting rules?
<i>Rules / routines for decision-making processes</i>	who, where, when, which occasions	How are decision prepared and made: How often do different actors meet? How is the knowledge flow? Is the decision-making procedure formalized? (in line with the informal procedure?) Who has decision-making competences in which occasions?