Global, National, and Local Factors in the Management of University Sport: The Hungarian Case

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ABSTRACT

Because of the international nature of university sport, the appearance of transnational areas, events, results, and actors occurred very early. Therefore, the harmonization of the national and international factors influencing the functioning and development of student sport has been necessary since its rise. The objective of the article is to reveal the interaction between global, national and local factors influencing university sport, through the example of the Hungarian case. The paper is based on the results of extensive empirical research carried out by the author with the help of several methods: survey, in-depth interview, document analysis, and participant observation. Sport-globalization is regarded as the theoretical framework for the analysis. The results are discussed according to the following dimensions: strategic management of university sport; event and project management; cooperation between the two “owners”, the sports sphere and the academic education; migrant student-athletes; volunteering in university sports; and the external and internal environment of Hungarian university sport. In the conclusion, it is emphasized that the management of university sport in Hungary has been influenced both by the globalisation of sports and the transformation of the Hungarian sport structure following the 1989-1990 political regime change (Földesi 2000). The combined effect of global and domestic factors meant a permanent challenge for the management of university sport. The Hungarian University Sports Federation succeeded in providing adequate answers to the new challenges, as Federation strategic planning was always based on knowledge-based strategies.

KEYWORDS

sport-globalization, academic education, political regime change, migrant student-athletes

Introduction

The roots of sport management at modern universities date back to the period of institutionalizing of university student sport. In early times, students organized their sport life on their own in an informal way. University-based sports clubs were established relatively soon, later on national university sport federations, like the first university sport associations (USA 1905) were formed (Szikora 1997, 2007). The world's second University Sport Federation was founded in Hungary in 1907. Since the spread of university sport clubs, professional sports events have no longer been organized individually, but instead on a corporative basis, a tendency even further affirmed by the foundation of national sport federations (Campana 1999, 2004).

International dimensions would soon figure in certain countries' university sport lives (Renson 1999). Like in the field of sport as a whole, university sport was also an area where European-rooted international rules were voluntarily undertaken in several places of the world in the twentieth century. Although other continents and cultures initially had tried to preserve their traditional sports, they did not consider the expansion of Western sports as a unifying intention.

The international dimensions of national sport were multiplied in the 1990s. When the global nature of sport was affirmed to be contrary to its national nature, university sport was not stretched beyond its national and local confines. The expansion of transnational fields, events, and actors in the global society could not be ignored during national and international decisions, but the area remained relatively independent, not annexed by the sport industry. The effects of globalization of sports changed the preferences of sports, but most university students could occasionally do grassroots sports in volunteer-based civil sport organizations, and the fitness industry remained outside universities and colleges.

The autonomous nature of university sport was manifested even more in the university students' professional sport. *In performance sports*, also including Olympic sports, a profit-oriented mood became more dominant and the classic amateur status was recreated to a new one. The common name used for professional and Olympic type of sports (prolympic sports") shows how little the difference is between the traditional professional and the modern Olympic professional sport. The amateur sport idea has not been eroded in the university professional sport area; classical sport values have not disappeared here. Henceforward, championships are not held on local, regional, national and international level mainly for gaining profit, but also for enjoying fair play events and the spirit of sport-friendship (Gallien 2004).

However, globalization did not leave university sport completely untouched. For example, students were also assuming the possibility of free movement of labour in many countries. Although in the field of university sports the migration of competitors and coaches did not grow to considerable size, and was run under different conditions like in other spheres of high-level professional sport. Consequently, migrant university student athletes basically retained their amateur status.

The impact of sport globalization is connected to the effects originating from national sports and higher education systems all over the world; thus, many variations can be seen if it. In eastern Europe the situation is very peculiar, since both economic and social changes together with the globalization of sport could be experienced nearly at the same time during the changes in the political system occurring in 1989 and the 1990's (Földesi 2001, 2006). This era did induce structural and functional changes both in sport and higher education. One of the most acute issues in recent years is how global, national and local factors interact with each other, and how exploring this process could increase the efficiency of university sport management. This problem area is demonstrated by a Hungarian example below.

Objectives

This article intends to discover the interaction between the global, national and local factors influencing Hungarian universities. It is formulated on the basis of the results of extensive empirical research carried out by the author. In the paper the following major issues are discussed:

- some characteristics of strategic management in contemporary Hungarian university sport, the interweaving of the global, national and local elements of sport management,
- some examples of event and project management in student sports,
- advantages and disadvantages of the phenomenon called dual owner" (belonging to sport sphere and higher education),
- volunteering, one of the manifestations of civil society,
- the external and internal environment of university sports.

Theoretical framework: sport and globalization

Globalization is quite an ambiguous concept – the exact meaning of it is highly controversial even among theoretical professionals. They figure the start of the globalization process with different historical periods and interpret its features in different ways. However, the accentuation of globalization's multi-dimensional nature is common in various theories, as well as the identification and recognition of increasing economic globalization and, accordingly, the role of transnational economic institutions in the recent decades of post-industrialism (Lay 2001).

The cross-border economic, political and cultural ties loosened the framework of world order at that time; the world had become a global village, in which the transnational inequalities became intensified and partly re-arranged. World society can be characterized by mutual dependency, but it has distinct consequences in central, semi-peripheral, and peripherally ranked states. Since transnational fields, events, and actors have special importance in modern sport, in this article the definitions of globalization are used which point to the change of the previous order in time and space. The first one belongs to Giddens (2000), according to whom globalization is the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa", thereby changing all aspects of our everyday life.

Besides Giddens, Beck's approach (2006) is taken into account, which focuses on the supranational aspects of globalization and draws attention to the fact that transnational processes can be experienced all over the world, but with different consequences in the countries of the global village.

In essence, the researchers examined the relationship between sport and globalization from two basic positions. First, the global development of sport, that is, sport-globalization on the one hand, and the function of sport in globalization and national identity on the other hand. They analyzed sport-globalization along the following pairs of opposite dimensions:

- universalisation versus particularism,
- homogenization versus differentiation,
- integration versus fragmentation,
- centralization versus decentralization,
- side by side" versus synchronization.

Exploring the impact of sport on globalization processes, the researchers also focused on the contradictions and the decreasing contrasts, together with the growth in the number of variations. The role of sports in globalization could have been subject to research because almost all forms of the phenomenon (political globalization, economic globalization, and cultural globalization), and several elements of its expression (global migration, global tourism), can be found in the world of sport. Essentially, all of them need a multi-disciplinary approach.

Sport management has been devoting special attention to the issue of sport and globalization in the recent past (Nyerges and Petróczi 2007, Mintzberg 2010). Considering the topic of this article, the most instructive words are Thibault's (2009), who talks about four important questions following the concept of Zeigler:

- international division of labour, in which manpower is brought in for manufacturing sport equipments and clothing from developing countries by transnational companies,
- increasing migration of athletes, resulting in the removal of birth and social origin as obstacles to sport talent development,
- increasing involvement of global media in sport,
- impact of sport on the environment.

Methods

Information given in this article is based on empirical research conducted by the author using the following methods: survey, in-depth interview, document analysis, and participant observation.

The survey method was used to measure the actual situation of university sport in 2005-2006. Colleges and university faculties who had membership in the Hungarian University Sports Federation (HUSF) were considered to be the basic unit of the research. The study was carried out with the full population (N = 41). Data collection was managed by structured questionnaires. The questionnaires were sent the first time by e-mail, then by mail, to the sport/physical education department of the schools. Directors, or his/her deputies, gave the answers on behalf of the unit. The response rate was 68%. The data were processed by means of the Microsoft Access program. *The Commission for Theory and Research of HUSF* contributed to the work with the survey.

In addition to the survey method, research was supplemented by document analysis (annual programs, reports, sport concepts) and in-depth- interviews (N = 28) with sport officials (*Elnökségi beszámoló, 2000-2010*). In-depth interviews were also a basic method during the international research, called *Think globally, act locally*", that was done in 2007-2008. At that time, the interviewees were selected from among the upper management of international sports organizations and some foreign universities (N1 = 12, N2 = 14). The guidelines of the interviews consisted of questions about the harmonization of internationally and nationally originated factors, which have an effect on the internationalization and globalization of university sport.

The internationally well-known method of SWOT analysis was used in 2009-2010 in order to assist HUSF management in making strategy and coming to some important decisions. The name of the method is shown in the first letter of each of the four English words:

- strengths,
- weaknesses,
- opportunities,
- threats.

The analysis is used to identify the tested entity's (in our case, the HUSF) internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats. The analysis was carried out along two dimensions (internal and external factors). The results were summarized in 2 x 2 tables and an interaction matrix.

The possibility of continuous adaptation of participant observation as a research method was created by an exceptional situation. The development of both university education and sports, and subsequently, the structure and operation of university sport, were significantly affected by macro-structural changes that took place in Hungary in the second decade following the political and economic system changes subsequent to 1989. The article's author was a close witness of the situation, since he was one of the leaders of the National University Sports Federation that time, thus he had the chance to follow up on the effects of changes to structure and function. He was also involved in the international university sport life working as a commission member for the International University Sports Federation (FISU).

Results

Strategic management of university sport

The stability of Hungarian sport's external environment disappeared after the political and economic change of 1989-1990 (Földesi 2006). The economic and social environment of university sport has also been changing dynamically and became unpredictable in the past few decades. External factors have been forcing the association to make a conscious strategic management program. Strategic management binds Hungarian university sport to HUSF at a national level. Strategic thinking is constantly present in the Hungarian university sport management, which is manifested in its daily functioning.

Strategy making at the HUSF was supported by background knowledge during the past two decades. During the rebuilding of the organization in the 1990s, university sport leaders approved knowledge as a strategic resource and created a special committee for this purpose in the organizational structure. A number of surveys were made by the management of this committee (Hédi 1994, 2004), which mapped the initial conditions for the theoretical foundation of the federation's strategy. During these times, knowledge management was based on HUSF board members' initiatives, but the broader context of the internal response was contradictory: a significant part of sport experts cast doubts on the efficiency of efforts to use organizational knowledge.

Event and project management

The findings of the document analysis show that the most successful activity of the HUSF is related to event management. The federation managed the university championship system in a wide variety of sports and tried to offer every student the opportunity to participate in elite sports.

Based on the analysis of in-depth interviews made by Hungarian sport officials it is clear that HUSF management considered promoting students' participation in international competitions as an important task since its foundation. Furthermore, in-depth interviews with international officials confirmed the presumption, according to which the international position of Hungarian university sport has further strengthened over the past twenty years. The HUSF undertook the organization of ten university world championships. Frequently topping their tasks, implemented with international contentment, Hungarian university sport recognition and prestige in the international arena are higher than at home.

It seems that on the national level, the gains from the organization of the university world championships are not in proportion with the actual expenses. The trustees and true winners of the successes achieved on this part are the universities, counties, city councils, and the volunteers involved.

The best example of effective project management is diplomatic sports activity within university sports. Sports diplomats represent Hungarian university sports in the International University Sports Federation for long periods. In the period of state socialism, power holders on the one hand tried to show their will of cooperation in the way that they made Hungarian experts as candidates, and on the other hand with this move they tried to hide the fact that university sports was not a civil organization, but a centralized, semi-governmental institution. The continuity was not terminated after the 1989-1990 political and economical regime changes. On the contrary: due to consciously organized, goal-oriented project management, the expansion of Hungarian sports diplomacy and the increase of the number of Hungarian officials in the International and the European University Sports Organization occurred. Looking back at the sports diplomatic successes of the past twenty years it can be said that Hungary is overrepresented in the FISU. Of course, in this internationally recognized position, the reliability, excellent work, and performance of the officials over decades also played an important role and also contributed to the growth of the international recognition of Hungarian university sports.

On the other hand, the participation of Hungarian university students in the international sports programs and their accomplishments contributed to the development of Hungarian elite sports.

Two owners": the sports sphere and academic education

The relative independence of university sports from some tendencies of globalization is due to the fact that it doesn't only belong to the sports sector, but also to another important social subsystem: education. This makes its position – in a positive way – exceptional and unique of its kind. The fact that university sports operate in academic institutions, but at the same time having to follow

international regulations and trends, calls for special management techniques. The cooperation of the two social subsystems is not usually smooth, and not without conflicts, either.

The results of the survey show that there are huge differences between students' sport activities at different universities. One of the main reasons is the dual background of university sports, as it is related to two different social subsystems: sports and education. Both fields treat university sports adversely, sometimes from economics, sometimes from morality, and sometimes from both aspects (Földesi 2001). The basis of HUSF's strategic thinking relies on the axiom that the position of university sports can only be improved if a closer and more synchronised cooperation is fulfilled between these fields. This is necessary because university autonomy often prevents non-governmental organization (NGO) sports organisations from fulfilling their plans and programmes. There is often an overlap between activities of university NGO sports organisations, sports clubs, and governmental university sports institute; their infrastructural background is usually the same. In order to significantly increase the number of students involved in sport activities at less active universities, it should be desirable to make students interested in sports (such as ensuring the possibility of earning additional credits), and to also make universities interested in boosting local sport life, by means of granting allowances, which can be spent only for sports, according to the number of students regularly involved in sports.

Migrant student athletes

Dual social background, occasionally, results in a loss of taking responsibility, and none of the sectors faces and tries to address new challenges. This statement can be illustrated by the current situation of migrant student athletes.

Migration, an outgrowth of globalisation, can be observed in the field of university sports as well. The migration of university student athletes has been amplified recently. Present research findings suggest that there is not an institutional way of applying for and winning sport scholarships abroad, primarily in the U.S., either in the field of sports or in the field of higher education. While preparing for international and world sporting events and choosing the right candidates, it is difficult and complicated to communicate with migrant athletes because most of them are more interested in meeting the expectations of their own universities than representing Hungary at university student world events.

Volunteering in university sports

One of the main characteristics of civil society is that members of different social organisations and associations, who can identify themselves with the ideas of the organisations, do volunteer work on principle. This phenomenon can be experienced in every democratic society. It is ensured by law and related legislation. In Hungary, due to well-known political and social reasons, the establishment of civil society took longer time than other countries. The field of sports had been in a more favourable situation because, in clubs and federations, it had always been people obsessed with social work". However, the number of sport volunteers has not increased in the last two decades following the political system change in Eastern Europe. Further research is needed to reveal why the influence of NGO sports organisations has not been strengthened and why volunteer activity has not gained more prestige in that period. The findings of present research show a slight decrease in the number of volunteers in university sport. According to interviews with several sport leaders, the principal reasons for this situation are rooted in the continuous changes both in sport and higher education, a lack of motivation, and multiple reorganisations of the governmental infrastructure of sport.

HUSF made efforts to support volunteer work of teachers and students over the last decades. In the 1990s, training was organised for student volunteers, but had to be suspended due to insufficient funds. However, the HUSF's competition systems are still supported by a large number of teachers,

many of whom do volunteer work, and they are hardly motivated by material interests. It has to be emphasised that volunteer students take also part in HUSF leisure and international programs. They contributed to the success of international sporting events organized in Hungary, and they spread Hungarian hospitality, and culture.

2011 is the year of volunteering in the European Union. HUSF plays a huge role in – and supports financially – the training of potential volunteers, and tries to involve more teachers and students to successfully fulfil its programs.

External and internal environment of Hungarian university sports

Since 2005, both the restructuring of Hungarian sports and, partly related to this, the amendment of the Sports Act of 2004 in force, have been on the agenda of Hungarian sport policy. Recently, this old topic has emerged again. In this situation the HUSF has made efforts to ensure the appropriate representation of university sports in the reorganised structure of national sport. Among other actions the federation started to frame a new strategy that is designed to adapt university sports to the changing environment of sports and higher education. The first stage of strategic planning was an investigation among the HUSF membership organisations in 2009-2010, which included a SWOT analysis. The latter shows the following results about the position of the federation:

Internal environment

Strengths

- sustainable stability, reliability, and the organisational structure of HUSF; its capability to reach every institution; its satisfactory relationships related to physical training and sport sciences,
- organizing, coordinating, and financing the national university competitions; establishing and developing the so-called Universitas competition system,
- domestic and international sports diplomacy activities, organizing international events; participating in summer and winter Universiades and university world championships.

Weaknesses

- lack of the student motivation for doing sports, few opportunities for non-athletic student competition;
- 'self-management', popularisation of HUSF activities for non-members,
- lack of initiatives coming from the universities, heterogeneous local activities (huge differences between universities),
- insufficient management of the relationship between representatives of education, public health, sport associations, local governments, and the media.

External environment

Opportunities

- increasing the number of students doing sports and participating in sport-related social work; cooperation with the student self-government, youth organisations, and young teachers,
- undertaking responsibilities for government's tasks; influencing decision-makers of sports policy; enforcing the interests of Hungarian university sport in different ministries; and leading circles of higher education (Rector's Conference, Hungarian Accreditation Committee, Educational Office),
- claiming European Union funds in the next 7-year period; finding out how to win these tenders.

Threats

- as a result of the newer and newer changes in higher education, youth politics and sport policy, sports might be forced back to the background, the position of HUSF might weaken and will not be able to chose its place in the repeatedly changing structure of Hungarian sport; its NGO character will not strengthened,
- universities have not been prepared for the increased number of students in the field of sports, either. The operation of the whole national university sport competitions system is threatened, in part, by the increasing power of non-sporting student associations to spend money for other purposes (not for sport) and, in part, by the passivity of students in sport,
- funds used for physical educations might be reduced; radical cuts of public funds are possible. Because of the reduction of government funding, sport infrastructure remains insufficient in institutions of higher education; development and renovation of university sport facilities might be delayed again. The dilemma of financing elite sports or sport for all students continues to exist.

The results of SWOT analysis suggest that the attitudes of university PE teachers, coaches, and sports leaders towards knowledge strategy are strongly divided. A minor group considers knowledge an important factor during the strategic planning process, but a major group is sceptical, undervalues the role of knowledge in domestic sports culture, and its importance as a strategic resource. The members of this group do not undervalue the knowledge itself, but they think that the political decision makers do not take into account the accumulated knowledge within the university sport organisations. According to their experience, the role of cultural capital seems to be insignificant compared to social capital and by the lobbying activity of other sport associations.

Conclusions

In modern sports, including university sports, because of their international nature, transnational areas, events, results, and actors appeared very early. Therefore, since their rise it has been necessary to harmonize the national and the international factors influencing their functioning and developing. Assessing present Hungarian university sport from the aspect of management, as well as the global and local driving factors having an impact on it, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- in the last two decades, the management of university sport has been influenced by the globalisation of sports and the transformation of the Hungarian sport structure following the change of political regime during 1989-1990. It has been a permanent challenge for HUSF management to address the combined effect of both the global and domestic factors;
- university sports practiced in university clubs and associations generally play a key role in elite sport in economically and culturally developed countries. University sports are considered to be the cheapest sports in the world. In spite of this fact, in Hungary management has not been able to upgrade the status of university sports and to improve the position of the once famous university clubs in the last 20 years. The HUSF has attempted to promote true alteration in these areas, but without any significant results so far;
- the structure of Hungarian sport and its continuous changes caused a difficult situation for the management of university sport. The real values and the wide range of HUSF programmes have not been sufficiently appreciated yet;
- the highest sports authorities have not appreciated, and as a consequence the media has not paid yet enough attention to, the international achievements of HUSF. In Hungary, the value of university sport, are still waiting to be exploited. The status and the role of university sports in the sports culture are still controversial, although its development would fill in a huge gap in the Hungarian sport system and would contribute to the improvement of the international results of Hungarian athletes.

Both in Hungarian sport and university education radical changes are expected in the near future. The Sports Act of 2004 will be amended in a few months, and a new law on higher education will be issued this year. These changes mean new challenges for the management of university sport. To give adequate answers to the new challenges the federation's strategic planning has to be based on knowledge, as before. By means of knowledge as strategic resource, the effects of global, national, and local factors can be better harmonized. This might be lead to the desirable way, as Anthony Giddiness said, *acting and living (together) over distances, across the apparently separate worlds of nation states, religions, regions and continents*” in the field of university sports.

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