

## ATHLETES' POSITION WITHIN MONTENEGRIN OLYMPIC MOVEMENT

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### **Abstract**

This paper will analyze the institutional position of athletes within the Montenegrin Olympic Movement in order to design better policy mechanisms that will amplify the strengths and dampen the weaknesses. With penetrating to the essence of the formal (informal) organizational structure is intention to improve institutional position of athletes that is likely to lead to better development of sports, to a more fulfilling career for athletes and their integration as functioning members of the society after the end of their careers.

**Keywords:** athletes, the Olympic movement, sports career, Montenegro

### **Introduction**

For adjustment of the Olympic Movement in Montenegro it is necessary to welcome de Coubertin idea of an athlete as a center and an athlete as a vehicle for sharing/promoting Olympic principles:

“In order for 100 people to develop their bodies it is necessary for 50 to practice a sport, and in order for 50 to practice a sport it is necessary for 20 to specialize; but in order for 20 to specialize it is necessary for 5 to be capable of outstanding achievement.”<sup>1</sup>

Going from the statistical position that Montenegro is country under million people population, sport activities should be control by state authorities but with decentralizing principles within National Sport Federations (constituents of Montenegrin NOC).<sup>2</sup> Under State control, Italian Olympic Committee (CONI) is in charge of sport activities.<sup>3</sup> Decentralizing principles means that it should be involved all who actively participate in specific sport (from athletes to the sponsors). United States Tennis Association (USTA) is an example where athletes, coaches, referees, sponsors actively participate within USTA various Committees, provided by USTA Constitution, Bylaws, and diversity and inclusion statement.<sup>4</sup>

Sport plays a very important role of Montenegrin overall identity, especially in times where economic crises tremendously increased gap between classes with negative effects on socialization of the vulnerable population. With these negative outcomes, sports organiza-

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<sup>1</sup> In MÜLLER, N. (1986) /IOC (Eds.) Olympic Education : Pierre de Coubertin. Textes choisis. Vol.I « Révélation». Zurich, Hildesheim, New York, p. 436.

<sup>2</sup> <http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=Montenegro>

<sup>3</sup> Legge N. 91/81 sul Professionismo Sportivo, Art. 14.

<sup>4</sup> [http://assets.usta.com/assets/1/15/2012\\_Constitution\\_Bylaws3\\_022212.pdf](http://assets.usta.com/assets/1/15/2012_Constitution_Bylaws3_022212.pdf)

tions tended to follow organizational structure of other governmental organization. In his work, Chifflet defines three different types of organizational cultures of the sport governing bodies: the association culture of the elected volunteer executives, which is based on the federal values of amateurism and volunteering; the public service culture of public servants, who are placed at different levels within the federation formally, Montenegrin sport organizations tends to follow this organizational group); and the managerial culture of managers and experts, which is based on meritocracy, performance and profitability.<sup>5</sup>

On another hand, not many studies have addressed issues related to sport organizations from a relational perspective.<sup>6</sup>

### MOC-NSF Relational Structure

The legal position of Montenegrin Olympic Committee is federation of all sports federations (non Olympic sports as well). Strategy and action plans depend on NOC of Montenegro General Assembly comprised by various representatives of Sports Movement (national sports federation representatives).<sup>7</sup> Crozier and Friedberg, having in mind organizational system that is increasingly bureaucratic, suggested that stakeholders operate with significant level of autonomy.<sup>8</sup> Although they are obliged to adhere to the statutory obligations, representatives are still inclined to make decisions based on their informal alliances in order to meet their private interests. Despite obstacles within society, Coakley concluded that sport is consisted of rules created by interpersonal cooperation.<sup>9</sup> Contextual cultural elements (taken for granted) are widely spread within Montenegrin Olympic Movement decision-making process.<sup>10</sup> National Sports Federations are governmental organizations consist of or union of sports clubs as their members. Majority of clubs are either in private ownership or public with fully control by private individuals (usually connected with political stakeholders).

The review of Statutes<sup>11</sup> (umbrella legal tool of every NSF) leads to conclusion that priority or central point of NFS in Montenegro is athletes' development. By athlete development it implies enabling best possible conditions to participate in order to develop them and achieve best possible sporting results. Basically rest of the Statute is not providing any legal or any additional bylaw which could provide practical application of the above mentioned. Clearly, informal alliances are building by needs from stakeholder common share goals in order to remain on position and to maximize their interest. For example, situation in Czech governing bodies is analyzed by Numerato:

'From the perspective of social capital, a sport governing body represents an institution as a set of network ties which have a certain configuration and which are organized in a certain way. The members of a federation share cognitive images about themselves and the relationships are maintained through a certain level of trust. Behavior of the association

<sup>5</sup> Chifflet, P. (1993). Associations de sportifs ou entreprises du sport. In A. Loret (Ed.), *Sport and Management*. Paris: Dunod.

<sup>6</sup> Harvery, J., Lévesque, M., & Donnelly, P. (2007). Sport Volunteerism and Social Capital. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 24(2), 206-223.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.cokcg.org/onama/statut/>

<sup>8</sup> Crozier, M and Friedberg, E (1977) *L'Acteur et le Système*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

<sup>9</sup> Coakley, J (2007) *Sport in Society – Issues and Controversies*. Boston: McGraw Hill.

<sup>10</sup> About cultural elements of the context in: DiMaggio, P.J., & Powell, W. W. (1991). The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality. . In P. W.W & P.J. DiMaggio (Eds), *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analasys*. Chicago, IL. University of Chicago Press. 26-27.

<sup>11</sup> Most of NSFs has similar Statute (only Montenegrin version): <http://www.mta.co.me/userfiles/file/Statut.pdf>

members, who are more or less identified with a sport movement, is regulated by norms and obligations.<sup>12</sup>

### **Position of Athletes**

Current constitution of NSF affected by global economic crises on one hand and accepting market oriented philosophy without necessary legal instruments (Statutes and Bylaws for improvement of athletes' position) on another hand creates overall neglect of athletes with only aim for stakeholders to receive state funds and to expand sphere of their influence. Most NSFs via Statutes didn't predict institutional position of athletes. Positive example is Football Association of Montenegro, where clubs, athletes, coaches, referees, medical stuff and grassroots representatives have their own unions within umbrella federation.<sup>13</sup> The central issue of the Olympic movement in Montenegro is vulnerable position of athletes (legally and practically). In his speech, Frank Frederiks noted following:

"There is no doubt that without athletes, there will be no Olympic Games, there will be no sport."

Without institutional support during sporting career, career after sport is uncertain and blurry and there had been a many evidence about athletes using alcohol to deal with end of their sporting career.<sup>14</sup> Let's pay attention on IOC Congress recommendations from October 2009:

"All athletes are at the heart of the Olympic Movement. They are supported by extensive structures which include, in particular, local clubs, National and International Federations and National Olympic Committees... Athletes should be encouraged to play an integral part in the organization and development throughout the twenty first century."<sup>15</sup>

On another side, regarding uncertain path of athletes, Fuchs Ebaugh (1988) noted:

"The process of disengagement from a role that is central to one's self-identity and the reestablishment of an identity in a new role that takes into account one's ex-role constitutes the process I call role exit."<sup>16</sup>

Olympic Movement in Montenegro doesn't recognize either formal or informal structured institutions to protect athletes in order to remain productive after sporting career. This is very important because they could serve as role models on one side and more important it could significantly reduce possibility for ex-athlete to become a social problem. As continuation regarding developments of athletes:

"Athletes from across the globe and from all sports should have access to an appropriate level of basic legal advice and guidance throughout their sporting careers. Stakeholders of the Olympic Movement should, at their cost, identify policies and procedures to achieve this objective."<sup>17</sup>

Olympic Movement in Montenegro is a state oriented system with private or politically eligible individual in charge and with constellation at the NOC of Montenegro makes them very influential. The Statute of Montenegrin NOC enables NFS representatives to take positions in various commissions regardless whether they possess necessary prerequisite for it.

<sup>12</sup> Numerato, D. (2008). Czech Sport Governing Bodies and Social Capital. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 43(1), 21-34.

<sup>13</sup> [http://fscg.co.me/images/stories/pravilnici/2012/Statut\\_FSCG-02.pdf](http://fscg.co.me/images/stories/pravilnici/2012/Statut_FSCG-02.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Mihailovic, M. (1968). The status of former sportsmen. *International Review of Sport Sociology*, 3, 73-93.

<sup>15</sup> XIII Olympic Congress, (2009). Recommendations, Denmark.

<sup>16</sup> Fuchs Ebaugh, H. (1988) *Becoming an Ex. The Process of Role Exit.* (pp.1) Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press. p.1

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Athletes should be included in overall decision-making processes. About role of athletes in the Olympic Movement institutions:

“Athletes must be included within the decision-making bodies of the Olympic Movement through Athletes’ Commissions and other positions that carry full voting rights.”<sup>18</sup>

This doesn’t mean, of course, that will solve all the problems. Availability to take part in may not fully resolved issues in relational triangle (community-athletes-Olympic Movement organizations) as McFee argued “One cannot, for instance, resolve all difficulties in a particular sport by making new rules for that sport, rules which deal with every situation unequivocally”.<sup>19</sup> Informal ties usually become praxis that in many cases become “wall” formal interests of the NSF. One of the most obvious reasons serving as a braking mechanism could be explained by Cashmore:

“Crisis of legitimacy of contemporary dispute resolution mechanisms, which are contested due to the commercialization and professionalization of sport.”<sup>20</sup>

Fully aware that this is not an ordinary constellation within NSF it is important to note that formational historical background of NSF (the socialist period/public ownership up to mid 80s and the introduction of capitalism principles with the lack of legal institutionally protection from 90s) force on only possible constellation in order to put athletes in a position to be heard and to take part of the responsibility in the managing of NSF. Begging of the transformation should start by adapting existing Statutes and since majority of National Sport Federation are dominantly (over 90%) financed by state funds to welcome public representatives on the managing positions.<sup>21</sup> Having in mind that NSF are state oriented organizations it is important to encourage formation of individual association of athletes, coaches, referees, parents and pull of sponsors within NSF and to take an equal role in decision-making process. Above, constellation of relations within NSF with importance of autonomy in sports could serve as protection from any kind of mistreatment in specific sport allowing all participants to be equally represented. In the section of the IOC recommendations from 2009 Congress, “The Structure of the Olympic Movement”, autonomy of sport is noted as an essential segment in order to promote diversity and individuality:

“The relevant intergovernmental organizations and governments should acknowledge the necessary and essential autonomy of the Olympic Movement including, in particular, respect for and enforcement of the rules of good governance, equality and fairness in sport and sport administration, as established by the Olympic Movement and set out in the Olympic Charter, to ensure the best and fairest possible practice of sport... All constituents of the Olympic Movement should review their rules and activities to ensure that they fully comply with the Olympic Charter and the fundamental principles and values of Olympism.”<sup>22</sup>

Perception of autonomy within Montenegrin Olympic Movement (mainly at NSF structures) is mostly missed used as term for being sovereign, especially when it comes to making strategic decisions for development of sport system or within specific sport on one hand and way of spending state funds (allocated for athletes development) on another hand.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> McFee, G (2000) *Spoiling: an Indirect Reflection of Sport’s Moral Imperative?* pp. 172-182 in Tännsjö, T and Tamburrini, C (eds.) *Values in Sport - Elitism, Nationalism, Gender Equality and the Scientific Manufacture of Winners*, London: E & FN Spon.

<sup>20</sup> Cashmore, E (2005) *Making Sense of Sports*. London: Routledge. In work of: Dino Numerato, D. and Persson, H.T.R., (2010). “*To Govern or to Dispute? Remarks on the Social Nature of Dispute Resolutions in Czech and Danish Sports Associations*”, *Entertainment and Sports Law Journal*, ISSN 1748-944X, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Information regarding funding of NSF and other sport organizations (clubs) could be found at: <http://www.infomladi.me/index.php?IDSP=19976&jezik=lat> and <http://www.infomladi.me/index.php?IDSP=20257&jezik=lat>.

## Conclusion

It was deliberately taken into consideration the institutional position of athletes with aim of disclosing organizational structure of Montenegrin Olympic Movement with emphasis on National Sport Federations as a essential segment (organizational). There are two main reason why is this approach has been chosen. First, there were not many studies on relational aspects within sporting organization regarding athletes position. Second one is that in a country of transition, legal basis should be considered as a vital foundation for construction of relations. Relational forms included via construction of institutions in order to protect athletes position on one hand and to enhance an opportunities for developing overall state potential through Montenegrin Olympic Movement. The aim of this paper is not to oppose to the existing structure, but to note vulnerable position of athletes and to serve as guidance (athletes to take responsibility in their own hands) for improvement of the organizational structure of the Montenegrin Olympic Movement.

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