

Apresentação de Comunicação - Some ideas concerning Public Relations in sports organizations

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Structured Abstract

Purpose

This paper addresses the second phase of an ongoing project that involves mixed methods analysis and that has as its main purpose to understand the role of the communication professionals in the third sector, or what some authors call, the non-for-profit sector (Neto, *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, the way these organizations understand what can be considered under the scope of the functions of these professionals was also under investigation.

After a work that dealt with the mainstream of the area, the Non-Governmental Organisations for development, the researchers turned their look to almost an unknown field, the national sports federations. These are important actors in the civil society in Portugal, as in so many other countries, due to the fact that they are responsible entities for the promotion of sports at all levels of society.

Design/methodology/approach

From a research design perspective, the approach taken in the empirical study that is being presented here is included in the framework of what is, in general, designated as a mixed methodology of sequential explanation (Creswell, 2014). After a documental analysis that offered the researchers some descriptive data, all the 56 national sports federations were contacted both by phone and mail. From the 52 that the researchers were able to contact only 32 did agree to be interviewed for this study. In order to produce the data, semi-structured interviews were conducted in all the sports federations respondents (32) by a researcher, and the data collected analyzed with the help of a qualitative text/content analysis software, NVivo.

Findings

The study highlights the lack of a consistent work in the communication area as well as the total absence of any kind of a strategic thinking when communication aspects are being considered, in the great majority of the sports federations in Portugal. The Public Relations (communication) professionals seem to be seen only as performing operational tasks that do not belong to the realm of the strategic thinking of these organizations. Moreover, the understanding of what belongs to the realm of "communication" or "public relations" seems to have stopped somewhere in the middle of the twentieth century as media relations continue to be the only relevant aspect that is said to be developed.

Originality/value

In spite of the importance of their missions, the total lack of research and the opacity (from a communication point of view) of the overwhelming majority of these institutions led researchers to focus their attention on them. Focusing their interest in this specific kind of organizations enabled researchers to fulfill a double mission, understand how the civil society organizations see Public Relations functions and simultaneously understand how sports organizations tend to consider the scope of the Public Relations professionals (L'Etang, 2013).

Key Words: sports public relations; professional practice; organizational contexts; mixed methods research