

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

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Corporate Communication in sports organizations: navigating among peripheries

Abstract

The specific research question that this paper will be addressing may be summarised as an interrogation about the role that the communication professionals are called to fulfill in the sports federations in Portugal. Do the communication professionals have operational and strategic responsibilities in the Portuguese sports federations? How do these organizations understand the concept of "strategic communication"? Is institutional or corporate communications still understood as a function that belongs exclusively to the realm of private companies? Under the umbrella concept of strategic responsibilities, we've considered aspects as the definition of the communication priorities in a strategic and planned way or the mapping and management of the stakeholders. Questions as the existence of a media relations plan or a risk and crisis communication plan were also addressed. Under the idea of a more operational approach, we've considered aspects that have to do with events and actions that are dealt in a merely responsive or casuistical way.

The research was conducted according to an interpretivist approach to investigation. After a documental analysis that offered the researchers some descriptive data, all the 56 federations were contacted both by phone and mail. From the 52 federations 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. Even though the main realm of the research was not concerned with questions of center or peripheries, the results can be read, precisely with the lenses of this dichotomy.

When speaking about center and peripheries due to its geographical, historical or urbanistic roots we usually have a visual idea (maybe not as up to date as we may think due to the digital globalized world) of the political and economical heart of the big cities, surrounded by its peripheries that metaphorically represent also all those that do not belong to the realm of the strategic decision realms. Here,

when analyzing sports federations, we came to the margins of what is the non for profit sector, and we were confronted by hazard, in our results, by this dichotomy. The communication professionals, the communication activities, can be said to be in the margins of the worries and preoccupations of these organizations. The study that will be presented here highlights the lack of a consistent work in the communication area as well as the total absence of any kind of a strategic thinking in the great majority of these federations. The 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. Among the organizations themselves, we can read them as concentric circles with football in the center and the federations that represent the Olympic sports, with expression in our public schools, at the next levels. The great majority of federations that didn't have anyone available to speak with our researchers were from non-Olympic sports.

Key-words: Communication as the periphery, sports communications, sport federations