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Developmental processes and motivations for linkages in cross-sectoral sport clusters

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ABSTRACT

Interorganisational linkages are a widely studied topic in sport management. However, most researchers focus on public or non-profit organisations and analyse one focal organisation rather than a network of interrelated organisations. The purpose of this study was to address both of these shortcomings by investigating interorganisational linkages in sport clusters, a type of cross-sectoral network. The authors address three main questions: (a) what is the nature of interorganisational linkages in sport clusters; (b) how do linkages in sport clusters develop; and (c) what are the organisational motivations for creating or joining linkages in sport clusters? A multiple case study approach explores two sailing clusters in France and New Zealand. Results show that interorganisational relationships tend to be formalised, while interorganisational networks tend to be informal. A circular development process from formal relationships to formal networks via informal relationships and networks was detected. Reciprocity is the most prevalent motive for the development of all types of interorganisational linkages. This research contributes to sport management practice by showcasing the potential multitude and variety of interorganisational linkages in a cross-sectoral sport context which are foundations for cooperation and collaboration. The theoretical contribution lies in the conceptualising of the IOR development process and different motivational patterns as antecedents.

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1. Introduction

Sport systems are complex and often vary in form, structure, and purpose across different countries. The actors within sport systems typically include for-profit organisations (e.g., sport equipment firms), non-profit organisations (e.g., amateur sport clubs), public organisations (e.g., Ministries of Sport), governing bodies (e.g., national sport federation), and unorganised stakeholders (e.g., customers of a sport brand) (Petry, Steinbach, & Tokarski, 2004; Shilbury, 2000). Previous research on sport systems focuses on policy issues in elite and professional sports (De Bosscher, De Knop, van Bottenburg,

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Shibli, & Bingham, 2009; Dickson, Arnold, & Chalip, 2005; Dickson, Phelps, & Waugh, 2010), governance aspects in non-profit sport organisations (Ferkins, Shilbury, & McDonald, 2005; Inglis, 1997), or the increased professionalisation of non-profit sport organisations (Macris & Sam, 2014). Few sport management researchers have focused on the group of for-profit organisations that manufacture sport equipment despite their relevance to the development and commercialisation of sport (Slack & Thurston, 2014).

While the literature on interorganisational relationships (IORs) in sport is growing (Misener & Doherty, 2013; Wäsche, 2015), the scholarly focus has primarily been on discrete cases of focal organisations and their partners (Dickson et al., 2005; Frisby, Thibault, & Kikulis, 2004). The management of linkages between organisations involved in sport is increasingly important and complex due to the heterogeneity of activities, goals, and outcomes. Researchers have examined the motives for IORs in cross-sector relationships in elite sport (e.g., access to resources, legitimacy seeking, reciprocity, and strategic positioning) and also in community sport development programs (Misener & Doherty, 2013). Scholars have also explored the challenges of balancing competition and collaboration (Babiak & Thibault, 2009; Babiak, 2007; Marlier et al., 2015). Other researchers have focused on IORs and key management practices in professional sport (Cousens, Babiak, & Slack, 2000), across municipal recreation organisations (Frisby et al., 2004), or in the context of sport organisations and corporate sponsors (Bee & Kahle, 2006; Benijts, Lagae, & Vanclooster, 2011; Cousens, Babiak, & Bradish, 2006). Recently, sport management researchers have examined IORs and cooperation in sport tourism networks, and in these networks, a central organisation (i.e., tourism organisation) was the pivotal actor of the network (Wäsche & Woll, 2010; Wäsche, 2015).

In this study, we investigate interorganisational linkages in a different interorganisational configuration – sport clusters – and discuss stakeholder motives for creating or joining IORs in these clusters. The cluster concept refers to a well-established field of research which Marshall (1920) pioneered with his work on industrial districts. Porter (2008) coined the modern understanding and use of clusters not only in research but also in national and regional economic policies. Sport clusters represent “all organisations and industries in a particular geographical area that have an interest in the same sport or related sports as either buyer or seller” (Gerke, Desbordes, & Dickson, 2015, p. 3). In other words, sport clusters are localised systems of production and demand around a sport or related sports including a mix of for-profit, non-profit, public organisations, and governing bodies (Gerke et al., 2015). While there is a growing body of research on IORs in the sport management field (Babiak & Thibault, 2009; Babiak & Willems, 2016; Babiak, 2007), there is little in the way of exploration of interorganisational linkages in sport clusters (Kellett & Russell, 2009).

Organisations in sport clusters studied here include companies providing equipment (e.g., core equipment manufacturers, systems suppliers, or accessory suppliers), services, media, or designs. These clusters also include professional and amateur sport organisations (non-profit organisations), governing bodies, and education/research institutes (public organisations) (Gerke et al., 2015). Given that collaboration plays a central role in the delivery of activities produced by different cluster members, a deeper understanding of the drivers to this form of structuring merits further investigation. To that end, in this study, we address three main questions: (a) what is the nature of interorganisational linkages in sport clusters; (b) how do linkages in sport clusters develop; and (c) what are the organisational motivations for creating or joining linkages in sport clusters?

2. Conceptual framing of interorganisational linkages

IORs are established through interactions or transactions between two organisations with the common aim of serving mutually beneficial purposes (Babiak, 2007; Oliver, 1990). The simplest IOR is an economic transaction; however, this type of IOR is rarely subject to IOR research. We acknowledge simple transactional IORs as a first level of relationships, and focus on repeated or regular interactions between the same parties (transactional or other) that are based on trust and collaboration aiming at mutually beneficial purposes.

Interorganisational networks (IONs) develop as soon as two IORs are linked; hence, three or more organisations are involved (Dickson et al., 2005; Provan, Fish, & Sydow, 2007). Similar to IORs, the simplest form of IONs is based on economic transactions. However, also in terms of ION, we focus on mid- or long-term, collaborative or cooperative, trust-based ION with a shared goal or mutual beneficial purposes (Wäsche & Woll, 2010).

Most existing sport cluster studies simply apply Porter's (2008) cluster model to a sport context (Chetty, 2004; Stewart, Skinner, & Edwards, 2008), while some develop the concept of a sport cluster (Gerke et al., 2015; Shilbury, 2000). However, all of these studies focus on determinants and features of cluster development rather than on dynamics and interactions between cluster members. This is where we extend knowledge on sport clusters. The geographical concentration of interconnected companies and associated institutions in one field – usually denominated as industrial districts (Marshall, 1920) or clusters (Porter, 2008) – provides a rich empirical context to study IORs and IONs (Capo-Vicedo, Exposito-Langa, & Molina-Morales, 2008; Connell & Voola, 2013; Gomes & Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, 2013).

3. Formalisation of interorganisational linkages

Interorganisational linkages are characterised by ambiguity and uncertainty due to different structures, cultures, functional capabilities, cognitive frames, terminologies, management styles, and philosophies. This is especially the case when organisations have different histories, belong to different industries, and possess dissimilar belief systems (Vlaar, Van den Bosch, & Volberda, 2006). Dana and Granata (2013) argue that formalisation strengthens collaborations and creates a

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