Teaming-Up for Social Responsibility Programs: The Case of Belgian Nonprofit Sport Organizations

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Background/Purpose
Sport organizations are continually pressured to adapt, embrace new approaches, and refine their practices in order to survive (Misener & Doherty, 2012). Much emphasis of such practices is increasingly given towards addressing their social responsibilities in an impactful way (Kihl, Babiak, & Tainsky, 2014; Walker, Hills, & Heere, 2015). Over the recent years a proliferation of studies has managed to capture these practices by drawing on the ‘umbrella’ notion of corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Breitharth et al., 2015; Chelladurai, 2016). Indeed, empirical insights have now shed light on a number of issues. These include, but are not limited to, the strategic implementation of CSR (e.g., Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Heinke, Soderstrom, & Zdroik, 2014); the financial benefits derived from implementing CSR (e.g., Inoue, Kent, & Lee, 2011); or the charitable foundation model of delivering community programs (e.g., Anagnostopoulos, Byers, & Shilbury, 2014; Anagnostopoulos & Shilbury, 2013; Walters & Chadwick, 2009). Much of this literature draws on the context of professional teams to examine the determinants, processes and outputs of such social involvement (Anagnostopoulos, Inoue, Kihl, & Babiak, 2016). An overlooked area in the extant CSR in sport literature, however, is the interaction between the sport federations and sport clubs for the practice of socially responsible programs. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to ‘unpack’ the interorganizational relationship in this nonprofit sport setting and to examine the implementation process for socially responsible programs.

Theoretical Background
Interorganizational relationships (IORs) exist in a variety of forms such as alliances, joint ventures, supply agreements, licensing, co-branding, franchising, cross-sector partnerships, networks, trade associations, and consortia (Parmigiani & Rivera-Santos, 2011). According to Babiak and Thibault (2008), IORs in the sport setting are “voluntary, close, long-term, planned strategic action between two or more organizations with the objective of serving mutually beneficial purposes in a problem domain” (p. 282). Scholars have currently investigated IORs in the sport sector in a range of different settings, such as elite sport policy (Babiak, 2007; Sotiriadou et al, 2016), sport tourism (Devine et al, 2011; Huxam and Vangen, 2005), sport participation (Dobbels et al., 2016; Vos et al., 2016), community development (Marlier et al., 2014; Misener & Doherty, 2013) or sport for development (Lindsey & Banda, 2011). The literature suggests that engagement in IORs is a critical dimension of overall organizational capacity in nonprofit sport organizations (Hall et al., 2003; Misener & Doherty, 2009). A widely used theoretical approach of studies drawing on IORs is the resource-based view (RVB) that postulates that organizations will form IORs to obtain access to complementary resources (Barney, 1991; Penrose, 1959). In this respect, Misener and Doherty (2012) note that sport organizations at the community level are connected to multiple partners across different sectors such other sport clubs and national sports organizations. In the present case, beyond the institutional linkages prevailing in the Belgium sporting system between National and Regional Sport Organizations (NSOs- RSOs) and the Sports Clubs (SCs) to achieve their sports-delivery missions (Sotiriadou et al., 2016; Winand et al., 2014), we study IORs from the perspective of the extra-voluntarily interaction in which these actors have decided to work together for the delivery of socially responsible programs. In line with previous research (e.g., Austin & Seitanidi, 2010; Babiak, 2007, 2009; Dowling et al., 2013; Heinez et al., 2014; Kihl et al., 2014; Oliver, 1990; O'Toole, 1993; Parent & Harvey, 2009; Walters & Anagnostopoulos, 2012), we examine the three stages in the evolution and implementation of IORs by nonprofit sport organizations (Sotiriadou et al., 2016). The formation stage reflects to the contextual, shared and organizational determinants, motives and antecedents to enter a relationship. The management stage refers to the managerial factors, control mechanisms and challenges of the management of the interaction. Lastly, the evaluation stage outlines the outcomes and effectiveness of the
relationship on the implemented program(s).

Method
This study employs an interpretive approach though a single case study in the context of field hockey in the French speaking community of Belgium. Sport organizations from three different organizational levels were selected: the national federation, the regional federation, and seven clubs that were actively involved in community involvement programs (mostly diversity and environmental initiatives). Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews (n = 16) were conducted with key organizational actors from the federations and the clubs as well as with external stakeholders such as public sport governing bodies. Interviews centered on the motives for engaging in socially responsible programs through IOR; on the ways the relationships take place; on the role and responsibilities of the actors; and on the formalization of this social engagement. Each interview lasted between 0.45min-1.5h, it was recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data are complemented by documentation (official documents, strategy plans, websites and archival records). Employing an abductive approach (Koenig, 1993; Peirce, 1955) data were analyzed with the assistance of the NVivo content analysis software.

Preliminary Results and Conclusions
This study is in progress, but preliminary findings indicate that hockey federation and clubs play a significant role in supporting and encouraging shared socially responsible practices, which reveal the collaborative value creation (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012) and the ‘collective impact’ (Kramer & Pfitzer, 2016) dynamics in the implementation of social responsibility. Through both formal and informal control mechanisms, the federations and the clubs are engaged in a top down and bottom up process via the resource availability and sharing. Individual level factors such as personal or network of contacts and strategic determinants have interestingly attracted our attention and will be investigated further. IORs remain one of the most challenging undertakings within the sport context. We contend that this organizational challenge is also evident within the context of ‘CSR’ in and through nonprofit sport organizations. We intend to elaborate a conceptual model which reveals the type of IOR, the motives and the management mechanisms driving the relationship and influencing the development of social responsibility within this nonprofit sport context.