How are Cross-Sectoral Sport Networks Structured and Governed? Insights through Social Network Analysis in Surfing Clusters

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Introduction and relevance of the topic
The objective of this study is to investigate the structure of cross-sectoral sport networks and to understand how they are governed. Actors from the public, commercial, and non-profit sectors co-create value in sport systems, and hence create value networks (Woratschek, Horbel, & Popp, 2014). The interorganizational linkages in these networks require governance. Previous studies on interorganizational linkages in sport deal with interorganizational relationships and partnerships (Babiak, 2007; Babiak & Thibault, 2009; Frisby, Thibault, & Kikulis, 2004) on the one hand, and sport tourism networks on the other hand (Wäsche, 2015; Wäsche & Woll, 2013). Sport clusters are another example for cross-sectoral sport networks including public, commercial, and non-profit organizations (Gerke, Desbordes, & Dickson, 2015). An investigation of interorganizational linkages in sport clusters provides useful insights to better understand the underlying governance structure and mechanism that influence their performance and outcomes.

Objectives of the study
The objective of this study is to investigate how cross-sectoral sport networks are structured and what conclusions for the governance form of those networks can be drawn based on a social network analysis (SNA). This research analyzes the structure of two surfing clusters to generate explorative insights on social network structure and governance forms in sport networks.

Review of relevant literature
Sport systems consist of organizations from the public, commercial, and non-profit sector (Babiak, 2007; Frisby et al., 2004). These organizations are linked in different ways and to varying degrees. The different types of linkages include short-term connections (e.g., transactional linkages) but more interestingly longer-term connections through formal agreements, e.g., partnerships, joint ventures, and other forms of formal agreements (Frisby et al., 2004). Interorganizational linkages can also be informal based on various forms of proximity including geographic, cognitive, organizational, social, and institutional proximity (Boschma, 2005). Besides different types of linkages in sport networks, they differ with regard to strength (Granovetter, 1983).

Previous research focused on bilateral cross-sectoral interorganizational linkages (IOR) or partnerships (Babiak, 2007; Frisby et al., 2004). However, a network perspective is indicated by Frisby et al. (2004) through “the web of partner relationships”. Also Babiak and Thibault (2009) highlight the challenges related to partnerships with multiple organizations from different sectors (public, commercial, and non-profit). However, there is not much research that analyses cross-sectoral sport networks explicitly using SNA (Wäsche, 2015; Wäsche & Woll, 2013). The value of using SNA to investigate sport networks lies in the true reflection of the nature of the sport sector as a value network rather than a static or linear value creation process (Woratschek et al., 2014). Using a social network approach allows to identify key actors in sport networks’ value co-creation processes. It allows to address questions concerning the positioning of actors within the network and the consequences of their positioning, e.g., on governance (Borgatti & Li, 2009). Furthermore SNA allows to better understand governance in sport networks.

Given the exploratory nature of our research in asking how sport cluster networks are structured and what the consequences for network governance are, a mixed methods approach is promising in providing a comprehensive view of the analyzed cases (e.g., Wäsche & Woll, 2013). In this research sport clusters as cross-sectoral networks are investigated. In an explorative study, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, structures and governance modes in sport cluster networks are analyzed and discussed.
Methodology
This research is based on qualitative data collected for two case studies in the surfing industry (France and Australia). The empirical context are two different surfing industry clusters consisting of various surf product and service providers, sport providers, regional sport and public governing bodies, and universities. Semi-structured interviews (49 in total) were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed. We interviewed several organizations per type of cluster organization and treated them as aggregate in the SNA. The ten types of sport cluster organizations suggested by Gerke et al. (2015) were used.

The first analysis round was screening the interview transcripts for any element that indicated a linkage between the interviewed organization and another cluster organization. Linkage included here short-term and long-term exchange of knowledge or resources in formal or informal ways. The pre-coded data were then revisited and synthesized qualitatively and quantitatively in a table. Depending on the number of sources indicating a connection between organizations a strength of tie was associated to a linkage, i.e. zero sources indicate connections means no link, one or two sources indicate connections means a weak link, more than two sources indicate connections means strong link. This simplified perception of the interconnections between the members of the sport cluster served as basis for SNA.

Results
Initial results indicate three core actors in both cluster networks: boardsport brands, equipment specialist, and governing bodies. Boardsport brands and equipment specialist are commercial organizations that produce and/or market core sports equipment (e.g., surf board, wet suits) and essential equipment to practice the sport (e.g., leashes, surf wax). Their leading role can be explained partly by their size and hence their internally available resources to develop R&D and marketing activities. Governing bodies such as for example a formal cluster governing body in the French surfing cluster, have an important intermediary role and are the industry’s united voice to interact with the government and other public entities. Further data and data interpretation will be presented at the conference.