Hybridity in Non-profit Sport Organisations: Organisational Challenges

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This study examines the concept of organisational hybridity and its applicability in non-profit sport organisations (NPSOs). In the non-profit sector, hybridity refers to “the complex organizational forms that arise as voluntary, charitable, and community organizations confront differentiated task, legitimacy, or resource environments” (Skelcher & Smith, 2015, p. 433). For instance, hybridity is illustrated by corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices increasingly implemented by NPSOs, that might eventually create a diversion of time, energy and money away from their core mission (Jones, 2007) potentially lead to mission drift. Understanding what hybridity means for non-profits and its impact on governance and management is timely as the hybridization process encapsulates important issues and paradoxes this study examined.

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of hybrid NPSOs and the organisational implications. To learn more about the governance and management challenges, this study explores what hybridity means for organisational members, their experiences and reflections, and investigates what strategies are used to manage hybridity. In the sport literature, this topic is emerging (Lucassen & De Bakker 2016; Svensson & Seifried, 2017; Svensson, 2017). Dees and Anderson (2003) highlighted possible benefits and risks that may accrue from merging their existential social goals through, for example CSR, and business-like activities. Lucassen and De Bakker (2016) suggest four coping strategies to manage hybridity including: manoeuvring, hybridization, selection and re-identification.

This study employs a case study research design. Two cases were chosen because they provide a unique opportunity to study the core characteristic of hybrid organisations with differing governance and organisational challenges. Interviews were conducted with 16 key informants from a national (soccer) and a regional (golf) sport federation in Belgium. Thematic content analysis of the transcripts was performed building on Lucassen and De Bakker’s (2016) four coping strategies and analysed using Nvivo Software.

Results from this study show different narratives and strategies deployed by NPSOs to manage hybridity. It identifies several key characteristics of sport organisations, in particular: tensions between sport purposes (sport for all and elite sport) and commercial purposes (professional league, media, and sponsors), inter-organisational relationships with external stakeholders including member association boards, and internal conflicts leading to mission drift (i.e., tension in the mission and identity of the NPSOs). Results from this study will be further discussed during the presentation. It will also consider the impact of hybridity in different sport systems such as Australia, the USA and Belgium. More work should examine the implications on governance and management of these transformations. This study suggests a promising research stream on this topic, which could be of considerable academic and practical significance.