SPORT CLUSTERS AS SELF-SUSTAINING SYSTEMS – MEMBERS, RELATIONSHIPS, BEHAVIOURS

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Aim of abstract/paper - research question

The aim of this article is to elucidate the concept of *sport cluster*. We aim at answering this question by exploring its key characteristics using preconceived concepts such as various location-specific factors (LSF), cluster member organisations (CLOR) as cluster stakeholders, interorganisational relationships (IORE) and networks (IONE), and interorganisational behaviours (IOBE) such as interorganisational citizenship behaviour (ICB). The aim is to descriptively sketch the investigated case in order to then conclude general organisational and structural features of sport clusters.

Theoretical background or literature review

Our literature review starts with fundamental literature on industrial districts from pioneering economic geographers like Alfred Marshall (1890) who combined sociological and economic perspectives in his work on localised industries. Extensive research has been conducted around the same concept since giving it different names such as cluster (Porter, 1998). The cluster concept has been transferred in the context of sport and sport related industries by a number of researchers. We notably build on Shilbury (2000) who puts forward the idea of sport clusters as future sport delivering systems. He analyses the development of different localised sport industries contrasting the notion of the sport industry as one generic industry versus the development of separate sport-by-sport clusters formed around one sport or multiple related sports. We build on this idea by exploring the nature and organisational structure of a sport cluster and especially interorganisational relationships and behaviours such as ICB (Autry, Skinner, & Lamb, 2008).

Methodology, research design and data analysis

We use a single-case study design exploring in-depth one case that is suspected to be classified as sport cluster (Yin, 2009). We chose a case from the nautical industry in France (€ 4.6 bill. annual turnover), the offshore sailing industry in Brittany, France, which concentrates 100 enterprises and 1000 employments in the region generating an annual turnover of €130 Mio. Brittany is the region with the biggest nautical sector in France accommodating 1100 predominantly small- and medium-sized firms, about 5000 employments, and €0.5 bill. annual turnover. The centre of the cluster is located in South Brittany between Brest and Vannes, a coastal region spanning 186 kilometres. 33 Interviews have been conducted of which28 interviews were formalised and followed a semi-structured interview guideline covering the following subjects: introduction of organisation, the role of location and location-specific factors, the local cluster including other cluster member organisations and relationships to them, as well as interorganisational behaviour in the cluster. Furthermore seven observations were conducted at different occasions in the cluster such as trade shows, sport events, professional seminars, and networking events.
Interviews were transcribed and observations were summarised in reports. Transcripts and reports were analysed and imported into Nvivo for content and thematic analysis (Yin, 2009). A code system was developed deductively based on preconceived concepts derived from the research question as overall coding themes. This coding system was complemented through during the coding process emerging sub themes that feed into our coding themes and finally inform our research question "What is a sport cluster?". The analysis consisted in allocating continuous cited excerpts from the transcripts and observation reports to our sub themes. In the second step we analysed the quantity and quality of allocated quotes in order to draw conclusions with regards to coding themes and the overall research question.

Results, discussion and implications/conclusions

The results presented in this section are preliminary and will be amended until the conference. We derive six different LSF as sub themes: geo-economic, geographical, historical, political, socio-economic, and sport related LSF finding that geo-economic factors are the dominating theme in our data followed by geographical factors and social-economic factors. A typology of nine cluster member organisation types emerged. The CLOR that interviewees refer the most often to are shipyards, governing bodies, professional sport teams, and marine equipment firms. Education/Research institutes, marine services, naval architects, and sail maker/rigging firms play a minor role and lastly marine media/communication firms complete the cluster. Bilateral relationships (IORE) and multilateral networks (IONE) appear to be equally important. Interviewees refer more often to formalised than to informal interorganisational links. The most distinctive behavioural theme is collaborative behaviour followed by cooperative behaviour. Also ICB appears to be an identifiable interorganisational behaviour in this cluster, notably the dimensions loyalty, advancement, and altruism. These findings mirror opportunities for competitive advantage through collaboration and cooperation. Firms are encouraged to reflect on these results and revise their own approach to interorganisational relations and behaviours and how they can take advantage of them for their own well-being and the sustainability of the local industry.

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