

Social entrepreneurship and elite football clubs – an oxymoron?

Author: Magnus Forslund

Institution: Linnaeus University, School of Business and Economics, Sweden

E-mail: magnus.forslund@lnu.se

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Aim of abstract/paper - research question

As any other organization, elite football clubs need to engage in innovation processes. Adding new products/services is one possible option. In several countries one such new service is providing football related activities for children in the community. By doing this football is used as a tool for promoting healthy behavior or improving personal and social skills. Often termed 'football in the community' this type of innovation could also be understood as one of the latest buzz words, social entrepreneurship.

Mainly, social entrepreneurship concerns the creation of social value and/or the resolution of social challenges. While the concept has gained a lot of attention in the general management area with a few exceptions it has received little attention in the area of sport. When it is discussed, it is seen as a promising concept to understand sport organizations but also as a way for clubs to improve fundraising.

However, the process of engaging in social entrepreneurship has not been studied in depth. Thus the research question is: What happens when an elite football club engage in social entrepreneurship? What are the main challenges? How is different conflict of interests between stakeholders managed? How is this new service related to existing products/services?

Theoretical background or literature review

Recently, social entrepreneurship has gained a lot of attention (Bacq & Janssen, 2011; Choi & Majumdar, 2014; Short, Moss, & Lumpkin, 2009) also in the area of sport (Ratten, 2011; Gallagher, 2012 #4241). While there are different perspectives on the concept, scholars seem to agree that social entrepreneurship concerns the creation of social value and/or the resolution of social challenges. It is suggested that at the heart of social entrepreneurship there is the need of combining social objectives and profitability (Mair & Marti, 2006). It is also suggested however that social entrepreneurship does not need to be restricted to economic activity (Ziegler, 2009) as entrepreneurship in general can be understood as a process occurring in all sectors of society (Berglund, Johannisson, & Schwartz, 2012). That there might be some kind of trade-off between different interests and stakeholders however remains as a central feature. Scholars suggest that we need more close-up studies on the practices of social entrepreneurship in order to understand how such trade-offs are made (Johannisson, 2012; Austin, 2006).

However, social entrepreneurship is not made up of a distinct theoretical field. Instead it is possible to distinguish between different perspectives (Bacq & Janssen, 2011; Dees & Anderson, 2006; Hoogendoorn, Pennings, & Thurik, 2010). This needs to be linked to discussions on social entrepreneurship in the context of elite football clubs. We might also add that critical reflections largely are missing when social entrepreneurship in the world of sports is discussed. What might be the negative

side of engaging in social entrepreneurship? Here, we can find research on 'football in the community' suggesting that such activities are isolated from other club activities (Mellor, 2008). What is unclear however, is to what extent this is actually a problem or not.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

This paper is an answer to calls for studies on the practices and processes of social entrepreneurship and calls for studies on the management of (elite) football clubs. The study uses material from Swedish elite football clubs. Most of them are in the top league and one is currently in the third league, aiming for the top league. Some clubs have a rather long history of working with social entrepreneurship while others are at early stages. Interviews, documents and newspaper material are used in order to trace practices and processes of social entrepreneurship in the studied clubs..

Results, discussion and implications/conclusions

Results, discussion and implications are currently not finished. This will be finalized in due time before the conference. Preliminary the paper will discuss the difficulties inherent in linking social entrepreneurship to other club activities but also how much work has to be devoted to motivating the activities in the first place.

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