

## **SPORT COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: A NEW APPROACH**

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### **Context**

Dutch sport associations face dramatic and structural changes in their community context. A first trend is the continuously retreating government that on the one hand is giving less financial support to sport associations, and on the other is asking for more societal effects in return. Simply providing good sport for local citizens is becoming not enough anymore. Local governments ask sport associations e.g. to be involved in organizing sports at primary schools and in local neighborhoods. Sport needs to play a more prominent role in revitalizing local neighborhoods.

A second trend is a change in the ways that (local) businesses support sport associations. In the last ten years major Dutch companies have been changing their sponsoring activities into broader business community activities, such corporate volunteering (Meijjs and Van der Voort, 2004) and donations in kind. This also leads to a change in policies on involvement with sport associations where boosting employee morale and achieving more societal impact are becoming more important than traditional marketing and public relations goals. Businesses want to be able to donate also manpower and means, and want to see connections of sport associations with local communities, including the local stakeholders, customers and the families of employees. This means that, in order to secure business support, only achieving successful results is not enough anymore.

Although these trends are not very prominent in every municipality yet, the first effects can be found. The effect of the combined trends is that sport associations face the need to change their current policies of concentrating on achieving sport results into broadening their scope on the community/local neighborhood, and must develop new ways of using corporate support. The paper presents the reactions of local sport associations in two local areas in the Netherlands. This reaction is placed in a wider theoretical and empirical research in changing relations between non-profit organizations (such as sport associations), commercial businesses and (local) governments (see Burke, 1999). Boards and managements of local sport associations need to develop policies and actions to create broader propositions to the environment in general and supporting businesses in general.

### **Methods**

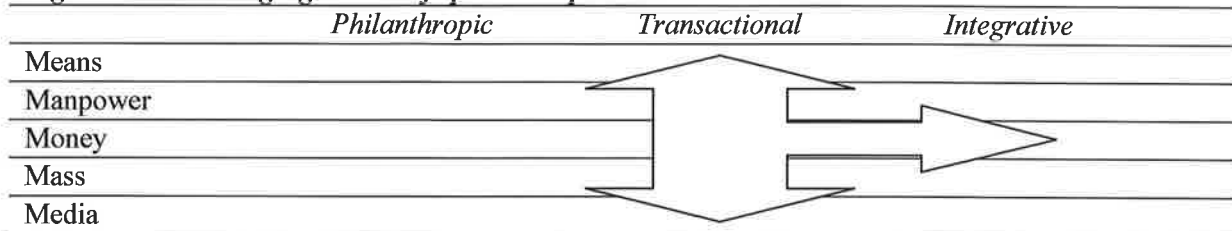
The paper is based on a literature review of business community involvement and sport sponsoring, combined with two related but separated empirical qualitative studies. The first was based on case study research into 25 randomly selected local associations in different sports. For these 25 associations the current state of and trends in business, government and community relations was analyzed. The main goal of this research was to look at the relation between getting support from the community to giving back to the community. The second study looked at the same relations, but in this case businesses were the focus, the cases being selected according to the reputation of the business. Businesses that are known for supporting local sport associations were asked what they thought about this relation. The main goal was to find out if sport associations are getting enough out of this relation and are giving back the right things. Representatives from 8 sport associations and 24 businesses were interviewed.

### **Results**

The literature review presented a partnership model based on Austin (2000) that can be used to analyze the changing relations between sport associations and businesses and government. This change is twofold. First there is a change from philanthropic to transactional to even integrative partnerships. This means that the supporting business or government wants to get more results from the partnership and wants to be more involved. Second, there is a change to broaden the exchange. Traditionally sport associations ask for and businesses give 'money'. Broadening the exchange means

also involving ‘manpower’, ‘means’, ‘media’ and ‘mass’ (Van der Voort and Meijs, 2004 –see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: The changing nature of sponsorship relations in the Netherlands**



The two empirical studies clearly showed that sport associations need to change to adapt to this. The first study showed there is no real difference in support from businesses and government between sport associations that achieve top sport results or good community results. But sport associations that do not achieve top sport results are better off concentrating on giving back to the community, to secure business support. And even the top sport organizations need to look to their community impact. The research introduces the concept of sport business-community involvement to present new actions for local sport associations. The second study showed that many companies are somehow frustrated by the extreme concentration of sport associations on financial support. Especially those companies which have a tradition of being involved in sport are looking for other ways of helping sport associations. Most local boards lack the know-how and creativity to achieve this.

### **Discussion/Implications**

The research shows that sport associations need to change to adapt to changing circumstances. Based on the theoretical model and good practices in the empirical studies, there are two different lines of action. A first is to concentrate on giving back to the local community in general, and by specific projects. Just like businesses, sport associations need to support other organizations and good causes too. Examples of this are to open up the sport association to hard-to-serve groups (minorities etc.), to participate in or even organize community activities like festivals, or to organize and participate in fundraising activities for local community foundations. Anecdotal evidence shows this can lead to attracting more and other business sponsors. A second action is to broaden the scope of possibilities for companies to support the sport associations. Corporate volunteering in particular seems to be an interesting possibility, as is shown by the fast development of ‘sport en zaken’ (sport and businesses) which concentrates on arranging ‘free’ corporate advice for sport associations. In many cases this means less cash support and more in-kind and in-time support. Sport associations need to develop a broader proposition for businesses with more ‘return on investment’ involved than the usual PR and marketing. HRM motives, like motivating and developing employees as strategic motives, such as safeguarding the local license to operate also must be addressed in new plans to attract business support.

Needless to say, many local sport associations will have difficult times in trying to live up to these new expectations. Board members, managers and leading players must play an active role in this. The paper will discuss lessons from sport associations and other organizations.

### **References**

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