

Session: **Workshop: Sport management and stakeholders - Panel session 1.**
Abstract nr: **EASM-0001**

Implementing Corporate Responsibility through Partnerships in the Football Industry

C. Anagnostopoulos¹, G. Walters²

¹*University of Salford, Salford Business School, Salford Greater Manchester, United Kingdom*

²*Birkbeck College, Sport Business Centre, London, United Kingdom*

chrisanagno@yahoo.gr

Over the last three decades the notion of corporate responsibility (CR) has attracted considerable interest in the management discipline. One of the key areas within CR research is stakeholder engagement (Lindgreen and Swaen, 2010), an aspect that has become widely accepted among contemporary business organisations. Nevertheless, it is extremely dynamic in that stakeholders change as the company's context of reference changes (Russo & Perrini, 2010). It is only recently that CR and stakeholder engagement have penetrated into the sport management research agenda. Indeed, Sheth and Babiak (2009) write that very few contributions from an academic perspective shed light on the function, importance, objectives or executive perceptions of CR in professional sport. This is perhaps rather surprising when one considers that sport presents some unique features such as youth appeal, mass media contribution and communication power as well as positive health impacts (Smith and Westerbeek, 2007).

Despite these unique features of sport, professional football itself has received relatively little attention from the academic community in relation to the CR construct. Notable exceptions have been Breitbarth and Harris' effort (2008) to provide a conceptual framework for CSR in football; the attempt by Walters and Chadwick (2009) to illustrate the strategic benefits that a football club can gain from a community trust model of governance; Walters' (2009) empirical qualitative case study research that substantiates Smith and Westerbeek's (2007) conceptual model; Walters & Tacon's (2010) empirical study that examines CSR in the English football industry through the lens of stakeholder theory; and Anagnostopoulos and Sharifi's (2010) empirical qualitative work that looks at the sensemaking of CSR managers in professional football in the UK.

What becomes evident from all the above-mentioned works is that the actual implementation of CR-related programmes within the football industry draws on cross-sector partnerships. Although the notion of partnerships has long been recognised as a mechanism for addressing social problems (Waddock, 1988), more recently the notions of partnership and CR seems to increasingly provide a fruitful platform for scholarly research (see, for example, Seitanidi and Crane, 2009; Seitanidi, 2005; Selsky and Parker, 2005; Loza, 2004).

In contemporary football, given the ever-increasing commercial focus, along with the increased pressure from a growing number of stakeholders (i.e. governments, local councils, media, sponsors, fans), there are many examples where football organisations undertake CR activities through various forms of partnerships. Considering the growing propensity of football organisations to engage with partners to deliver CR, an examination of this (new) type of stakeholder management may be of significant interest for both parties involved and the sport scholar community alike. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to examine CR implementation by

looking at the established partnerships between football organisations with public and/or non-profit organisations.

The authors draw on the results of empirical qualitative case study research undertaken at two major football organisations: UEFA, the governing body for European football, and the Premier League (EPL), the organising body for top-tier football in England. Semi-structured qualitative interviews with senior representatives responsible for the CR agenda from both football organisations were conducted. Additional interviews were undertaken with representatives from some of their corresponding partners including 'Football against Racism in Europe', 'Cross Cultures Project Association' (UEFA's partners), 'Prince's Trust Football' and 'Primary Care Trust' (EPL's partners). In so doing, the authors seek a more thorough understanding of CR partnerships in sport by considering issues such as 'why does the partnership exist?'; 'what are the benefits that UEFA/EPL gain from the partnership?'; 'what are the benefits for the partner organisations?'; and 'are any areas in which the partnerships could be more effective?'.

The interviews were recorded, transcribed and confirmed by each interviewee before being imported into NVivo which was used to manage the data analysis process. Examining the two case studies, the objectives have been to develop critical thinking (Alvarez et al., 1990) focused on the process of partnership building and in particular on partnership management (Seitanidi and Crane, 2009).

Seeking a deeper understanding of the factors that initiated or shaped such CR partnerships is a critical step in the development of a more refined model of partnership implementation not only, and particularly, in CR and stakeholder management, but also in sport management research.