

Corporate? Social? Responsibility? In sport: stepping back, to move forward

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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to systematically review the current literature on corporate social responsibility (CSR) in sport with a critical conceptual lens. The field of CSR developed out of the management field of Corporate Social Performance (CSP) – i.e. how well an organisation performs against its social obligations. At its core, the concept investigates the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary elements of an organisation (Carroll, 1979), through the analysis of its principles, processes and outcomes of its operations (Wood, 1991). The aims of the review are to a) map the social responsibility territory in the sport industry, b) critically appraise the field's direction for the purpose of advancing scholarly inquiry in the area.

Literature review

CSR research in the field of sport can be generally divided into CSR in and through sport. While latter focuses on research on organisations outside the sport industry which use sport as a medium for their CSR activities (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007), this research only considers publications about sport organisations and their social responsibility measures. Reviewing the literature on CSR in sport it becomes obvious a universally accepted definition of CSR does not exist within the academic literature as well as within the sport management domain. This results in a very broad and diverse understanding of CSR. Consequently, the scope of CSR management practice in the field of sport seems to be endless (Paramio-Salcines, Babiak & Walters, 2013). Additionally, the CSR in sport literature increasingly merges with other and related fields of sport management research e.g. sport for development, sport volunteerism, community sport. In the last decade CSR in the context of sport was a topic of extensive research from different perspectives (fans, sport organisation, stakeholders), using various methods and theories as well as different research lenses. A systematic and extensive review of the CSR research in other management fields provided valuable knowledge and guidance for future research avenues but has not been done in the context of CSR in sport, yet.

Method

At present, the best method available to research and practitioners to measure this phenomenon is the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI). The report "conveys disclosures on an organization's impacts – be they positive or negative – on the environment, society and the economy" (Global Reporting Initiative, 2013, p. 3). This review uses the 'Standard Disclosures' (organisational profile; economic; environmental, and social) to structure a review of social responsibility in the last decade (2006-2015). We conducted a systematic literature search based on four sequential steps with the following two

key search terms in combination: social responsibility and sport. As the first step, we searched nine sport management related journals - identifying 615 initial articles that cover the topic social responsibility in the area of sport. The second step focused on additional management and sport science journals with a special issue on social responsibility and sport - 22 more articles were identified. The third step included key books and book chapters and extended the number of publications by 28. As a final step, we included 40 additional publications from a follow-up search using Google Scholar. In total we identified 705 initial articles which were subsequently reviewed by the authors.

Conclusion and future research

Results are not available at the time of publication. From preliminary analysis the review indicates a heavy focus on compartmentalised approaches to social responsibilities that particularly focus on highly commercial sport organisations. Preliminary findings also indicate an overrepresentation of studies that looked at discretionary and environmental activities of these organisations (i.e. community programs and environmental changes), and relatively few that investigated economic and legal concerns. In general, multi-dimensional empirical work was underrepresented. With a view to prompting discussion at the workshop we feel that discussion on the following questions hold potential to shape the future of the field. Is CSR simply organisational performance? Why isn't social performance measured extensively in non-profit sport organisations? If CSR is multidimensional where is the research on compliance and harm avoidance? Is a GRI sport sector supplement a realistic progression of the field? Future research can build on the discussions within this workshop to shift the direction of the concept from a management fad toward a more critical approach to organisational behaviour and performance.

References

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