

Organisational Behaviour Of Meta-Organisations In Sports: A Life-Cycle Approach

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This abstract outlines an ongoing PhD research relating to an organisational study on international sport organisations. In particular, the study aims on examining organisational behaviour of meta-organisations in sport across their organisational life-cycle. The focus of the study is on international sport associations, with SportAccord as a case study organisation.

The research idea originated following an organisational crisis at this association in 2015, resulting from a governance failure that led to member federations distancing themselves from the organisation. This response was somehow contrasting to that of members in other associations with a similar organisational structure within similar organisational fields, such as international federations themselves, where, as opposed to withdrawal or suspension of membership, proposing reforms and collaboration was the common response to governance problems.

This paradox sheds light on the lack of depth, both theoretically and empirically, in the literature on meta-organisations in sports. By drawing from the meta-organisation theory of Ahre and Brunsson (2005), the research aims to develop this theory further, add depth to current literature on sport meta-organisations and address the following questions:

- Why and how meta-organisations such as SportAccord are created in sport and how their stakeholders react to their emergence?
- To what extent different purposes of meta-organisations in sport can result in generation of different problems and solutions?
- How would this organisation be able to make decisions, stay relevant to its stakeholders, cope with governance failures and efficiently manage its interdependencies if there are more and more members with greater differences and the external environment is rapidly changing?

Although vast majority of decision making entities in sports, such as national and international governing bodies, are theoretically meta-organisations, the sport management literature that has addressed governance and organisational behaviour, has mostly focused on mainstream management theories that have been formulated upon studies on firms, not associations. It was only until recently that sport organisations were investigated via meta-organisation theoretical lens (Malcourant, Vas, & Zintz, 2015). Nevertheless, whilst reconciling the differences, mainstream organisational theories such as agency theory, resource dependency theory and institutional theory are referred to in order to complement meta-organisation theory and fill niche but essential gaps in those theories. The main theoretical arguments of meta-organisation theory that are examined relate to purpose of creation, the link between heterogeneity of members and power of the meta-organisation as well as conflict resolution strategies.

Furthermore, the sport management literature pays insufficient attention to the impact of time on organisational dynamics of sport organisations. As mentioned by notable scholars of organisational life-cycle studies (Greiner, 1998), vital considerations such as organisational threats, opportunities, strengths and weaknesses change over time. Conceptualising and examining the life-cycle of an organisation yields fruitful insights because it creates a platform for analysing the current stage of maturity of the organisation and characterising that stage. Organisational life-cycle as a tool is even more relevant to international sport associations, given their cyclical nature of operation. Nonetheless, organisational life-cycle model has been absent in organisational studies in sport. It has not been applied to meta-organisations either. This study uses the life-cycle model of D'Aunno and Zuckerman (1987), that has been developed based on studies on federations of organisations, not firms. As recommended by other scholars, the life-cycle model is utilised primarily a tool to guide the research and the study does not intend to propose a new life-cycle model.

This inductive study leans towards the interpretivist side of the research philosophy continuum and adopts qualitative approach. Adhering to the guidelines proposed by Pettigrew (1979), the study uses the organisational life-cycle as a guideline. Secondary data, archival data and a brief set of primary data feed into the retrospective data collection phase, whilst semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires are the main methods for primary data collection.

The data collection is ongoing. The main interviewees are members of SportAccord, that are essentially international federations. So far, 9 interviews have been conducted with seniors of international federa-

tions (e.g. presidents, secretary generals, vice presidents). They are asked to discuss the extent which they value their membership at an international association such as SportAccord. One of the arguments of meta-organisation theory is that the more differentiated the members are, the weaker the meta-organisation would be. Primary findings indicate that although SportAccord has a heterogeneous member-base, similar to associations such as ASOIF or international federations themselves, it still has a weaker centre of authority compared to those aforementioned meta-organisations due to the differences in organisational purposes, lower organisational identification and resource-distribution mechanisms amongst key stakeholders.

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