

Supporting Startups Within A Sport Entrepreneurial Eco System

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Aim

The interest of sport managers and academics in the combination of sport and entrepreneurship is growing (Ratten, 2012). Next to entrepreneurship in sport (in which practicing sports is a leading activity in the supply of product and services), entrepreneurship with sport (sports is a supporting element in the supply of product and services), entrepreneurship for sport (in which sport is an objective that the organisation will facilitate/optimize) a new category is emphasised: entrepreneurship through sport (sport functions as a catalyst to support and make activities of entrepreneurs possible). The last category is going to play a more important role in the world of sports, especially for professional sport organisations. In order to pay more attention to entrepreneurship through sport the following research question was formulated: What role does sport play in a cooperative partnership, with a professional sport organisation as a platform, to support entrepreneurial activities aiming to create multiple-values?

Theory

The development of sports as a social phenomenon is linked to the shift in economic development from ego to eco (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013). One of the most important aspects in this shift is the development of cooperative partnerships. A cooperative partnership consists of a professional sport organisation together with its business club partners and startup organisations. Such a partnership can lead to a sport entrepreneurial ecosystem (SEES) that impacts i) each individual organisation, ii) the cooperative partnership/SEES and iii) the region.

The theoretical framework of this research was constructed by combining an entrepreneurial model based on the system theory (Groen, 2005) and a more dynamic cooperating entrepreneurial process model (Stam, 2015). Based on this framework, some essential characteristics of an SEES are described, including the role of sports. With empirical findings from an embedded case study, these characteristics are verified and enriched.

Research Design

The case study involved the professional sport organisation Donar. Donar is a professional basketball organisation in Groningen (NL). The team is playing in the European Cup competition and is the current Dutch-national champion. Donar, together with its business club partners and several startup organisations, has formed the Donar Start Up Assist (DSUA) to boost entrepreneurial power in individual organisations, the cooperative partnership/SEES and region. This case study consists of a longitudinal study of a one-year period with a mixed-method approach with participants that include the professional basketball club, business club partners and startup organisations.

Results

The cooperative partnership/SEES in the case study led to entrepreneurial processes and the creation of several multiple values including economic, social and sustainable values at the different levels. The role of sport in this SEES is identified in the following functions:

- The experience function: sport makes connecting with people easier. By sharing sport experiences in conversation, the contact can go broader to extend to business;
- The identification function: by linking performances of the professional sport and everything that goes along with the people involved, a sense of commitment exists, that creates a strong connection to one and another;
- The reference function: organisations want to supply and cooperate with a professional sport organisation. Involvement with the professional sport organisation provides other external organisations confidence in that involved organisation;
- The metaphor function: sport is used as a metaphor for managing and operating a company or business in general which leads to recognition in, for example, processes and challenges and creates understanding for each other;
- The test-playing field function: in and around sport organisations with a culture of winning or/and losing and mutual dependence, an organisation can test prototypes of products, services or other innovations. The setting provides good feedback and criticism to improve different innovations.

Conclusion and Implication

Based on the findings, a contribution will be possible to professionalism of SEES' and educational sport management programs that support entrepreneurship through sport. Some specific knowledge and skills are required for these kind of systemic innovations. Awareness and knowing how to manage the functions of sport are useful in these processes. In addition to sport and business knowledge and skills, entrepreneurship through sport and SEES' requires hospitality skills of sport professionals. Effective hospitality accommodates partners and brings together the several interests of individuals, the SEES, and the region.

References

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