

SPORT SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AS A DRIVER FOR ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE ON EXAMPLE OF POLISH SPORT ORGANISATIONS

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Abstract:

Organisations within sport industry are playing an important role in society nowadays. They influence fans attitudes through their activities, which in many cases may be classified as CSR. Those include volunteerism, educational initiatives, philanthropic/charitable donations, community development and initiatives, fan appreciation, health-related initiatives, and community-based environmental programs (Aubrey & Walker, 2009, p. 747). The emphasis is given to create competitive advantages on the market but mostly to improve image of the organisation through community involvement and building relationships (Bouris & McGowan, 2012, p. 398). This study highlights the importance of implementing CSR as a part of business strategies of sport organisations. During quantitative research fans of sport organisations were sampled (N=120), with results suggesting that CSR is seen as an evidence of a sport club being a responsible member of a community focused not only on sport results. The research revealed that CSR events organised by sport clubs are usually short-ranged, prepared spontaneously and focused on local community. The results suggest that even though managers of sport clubs are aware that CSR is one of the factors creating reputation it still does not play an important role in overall business strategy of those organisations.

Keywords: community, management, SSR/CSR, sport, reputation

1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization and the rapid development of competitors have changed the way companies are managed nowadays. They have begun to focus more on creating value for their stakeholders, especially customers. A good example of such action is an adaptation of Corporate Social Responsibility, which is defined by World Business Council For Sustainable Development as “continuing commitment by business to contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the community and society at large” (Holme & Watts, 2000, p. 78). Social responsibility is a challenge for companies because it often means changing not only a technology but also attitudes of managers and communication strategies focused on actions of an organisation proofing pro-social behaviour and management. SCR is a voluntary strategy of an organisation that takes into account social, ethical and ecological interests, by also achieving its business goals. It assumes caring of ethical or fair competition principles, employees rights, human rights, social environment and the natural environment.

Sport organisations also follow idea of CSR as they are important members of community. As Hu, Lee, Wong & Kao (2012, p. 56) suggest, CSR is unavoidable in sport industry, because sports organisations are perceived as social institutions that “seeking to redefine its legitimacy within society”. In case of that industry there is a concept of Sport Social Responsibility (SSR), which is adaptation of CSR in sport organisations where activities are focused on building relationships and interactions within local, national or even global communities (Skinner, 2010, p. 72). Those activities include volunteerism, educational initiatives, philanthropic/charitable donations, community development and initiatives, fan appreciation, health-related initiatives, and community-based environmental programs (Aubrey & Walker, 2009, p. 747). Sport organisations have a huge potential to make a change in society, because sport shapes cultural values (Trujillo 2013, p. 69). What distinguishes sport organisations on the market interest for the product or service offered (team, event, game, player) that is strong among consumers (fans, supporters) and brings them together (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009, p. 722). Enthusiasm, identification and passion for sports create links between fans (supporters) and sport organisations, teams, players and also other fans by building strong interpersonal relationships through experiencing different but strong emotions together (Hunt, *et al.* 1999, p. 440). Even more than regular brands on the market, sport organisations give their fans opportunities to practise their beliefs (about a game, rules, fair play, strategy) and engage in rituals (rooting, chanting, wearing teams’ colours, watching game together) that develop and strengthen connectivity to their ideologies (Head, *et al.* 2012, p. 209). That emotional attachment is a consequence of identification of the fan (supporter) with a geographic area (where he or she was born, studied or lived, or where the sport team has its roots).

Pro-social activities are the key factor influencing image and reputation of sport organisations, and help them become more visible on the market (for stakeholders and even potential sponsors). Organisational images can be intentionally or unintentionally shared by an organisation and can take form of corporate actions, media stories and press releases, advertisements, conferences, and annual statements, events, games, publications etc. (Corley, *et al.*, 2000, p.58). In case of sport organisations, they can get involved in social activities what will create an image convincing that the team is an important member of a local community that brings benefits (Hunt, *et al.*, 1999, p. 448). Positive reputation, spread this way, may ensure citizens and lead to creation of strong emotional bonds, loyalty and support (Walsh, *et al.* 2012, p.4).

Sport event may be an occasion to build those strong relationships because they share specific values, images and associations, emotions (Grohs & Reisinger 2005, p.44). Organisations that have CSR included in their marketing strategies often organise events (not only games) to achieve objectives of social responsibility and to build positive reputation that will lead them to market superiority.

The purpose of this research is twofold: first, the opinions of fans on what influences corporate image of sport organisations in Poland are analysed; second the reaction of local community activities of Sport Social Responsibility is explored. Growing awareness of importance of CSR among managers in sport industry followed by organisational changes, is important, but still not all of sport organisations include these activities in their strategies. This paper is divided into two sections. First, the background describing influence of sport on local community, importance of SSR/CSR and reputation of sport organisation as a factor in perceiving those activities. Second the research method, results and conclusions are presented.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Sport and sense of community

Sport may be considered as of the three most important prototypical human endeavours, which are: war (related to patriotism), spectator sports and religion (Mael & Ashforth, 2001 p.197). It is well known for bringing people together and creating communities with strong bonds among participants (Schimmel, 2003, as cited in Warner, et al. 2012, p. 984). It develops networks of social relations between people and organisations that share the same sport interests, values, or live in the same region. People support teams who they identify with. The satisfaction of local fans is often a result of an association between a team (or a team member, athlete, discipline, stadium, product) and a local or geographic aspect important for a fan (Hunt, et al. 1999, p. 446). This may be due to origins of a team or athlete (hometown, region, country) or 'alma mater alliance', and also experiences from childhood, family tradition, etc. (Head, et al. 2012, p. 209). The impact of a culture of a country is important, because it determines what types of sport are played and how they are perceived by citizens (as cited in Ratten 2011, p. 681). Those communities of sport supporters, that are being built, share not only interests but also ideologies about sport discipline, game rules, teamwork, strategies on a sport court, decisions of managers or coaches, what all together arouses emotions and discussions among them. It is often mentioned, in literature, that communities created are important for fans, because they can experience sense of community.

Social interaction is one of the nine sports fan motivations (achievement, acquisition of knowledge, aesthetics, drama, escape, family, physical attraction, physical skill, social interaction) analysed by Trail and James (2001). The commitment in sport is voluntary and often it is a trigger for development of motivation, integration and relationships what can bring even a pedagogical value (Leber, 2012, p. 34). On the other hand the relation between customers and sport organisation may be built through formal ways like ticket purchase or membership, which are subscription-type arrangements that may build sense of ownership among fans and stronger commitment (Arnett, et al. 2003, p. 92).

Local communities of fans and participants and even sponsors and local government are important for sport organisation because rely on them and they are strongly conditioned to those stakeholder groups (Kitchin & Lewis, 2010, p.88). Also the city, state or the community may feel the impact of sport, which brings investors, influences community pride and solidarity or city's image (Douvis, 2008, p. 22). Sport may change how people feel about themselves or the region they live in. The relationship between sport and the community that is being built is strong and influences everyone, the citizens, the city (region) and sporting organisation itself.

Sport is often considered as powerful tool for community building (Warner, et al. 2012, p. 1000). It may also yield images of healthy lifestyle that may be distributed among community members. Sport organisations are aware of it and often decide to encourage social responsibility of supporters and participants through activities that involve supporting community or charitable societies (Ratten, 2011, p. 766). That involvement brings benefits and positive effects for both sport organisation (better organisational image, loyalty and stronger relationship with community and fans) and the community (integration, support, awareness, health, patronage intentions of sport consumers, emotional relationship with the sport organisation) (Walker & Kent, 2009, 759).

2.2. Sport Social Responsibility (SSR)

Social marketing directs sport organisation's activities towards the society and social changes, nowadays. It creates new ideas and features of products while using achievements of value based marketing in order to increase the value and usefulness of offers. The concept of Sport Social Responsibility, that is was built on basic concepts of CSR, "derives from an increasing awareness that the business of sport does not operate within vacuum where only the team, the spectators and the fan base are affected by the operation of the sport" (Skinner, 2010, p. 69). Development of CSR in sport industry is based on increasing the value of a corporate image and the brand by integrating economic and social aims. Sport organisations are aware nowadays that not only sport results create a positive image of a team but they are three most important factors: business conduct, social conduct, and contributions (Filo, et al. 2010, p. 629). Consumers, sport fans too, demand integrating elements of social responsibility into business operations of both sport and non-sport organisations (Walker & Kent, 2009, p. 744). That is why organizations started to consciously and constantly implement

corporate social responsibility activities to promote and shape social and environmentally friendly attitudes (Ratten, 2011, p. 766).

It is possible in case of many industries (also sport), what Pompering & Dolnicar (2006) found in their research in Australian banks, that consumers' awareness of CSR activities may be low, but the social issue is important for them so social responsibility of a firm may be a factor in purchase decisions. That is why organisations focus more on promoting their social tasks to make them more visible and noticeable by customers and other stakeholders. People prefer socially responsible companies because they believe that while they care mostly about corporate image, they also help others (Mohr, et al. 2001, p. 67). It is no secret for both society and managers that the aim of CSR (or SSR) is twofold: first building the reputation and secondly supporting community (Shockley, et al. 2008, p. 84). Smith (2000, p. 26) pointed out three main limitations, that may effect consumers reaction to CSR, which are: people must know that the company has a SCR strategy, they should also know and understand those initiatives to consider them as a factor in purchase decisions and they should be able to distinguish the company's' offer from competitors product and services. Philanthropic responsibility in case of sport organisations may take a form of making cash or in-kind donations, inviting children to attend games for free, sponsorship events organised by community, and active employee voluntarism (meetings with team members and players at schools to promote healthy lifestyle and physical activities) (Skinner, 2010, p. 78). Engagement in supporting community and social activities should be parallel to task focused on building corporate reputation.

2.3. Corporate reputation of sport organisation

All stakeholders like employees, customers, fans, members, supporters, partners, sponsors, and suppliers share opinions, values, perceptions and associations of an organisation. The set of those element together become a reputation of an organisation (Chun, 2005, p. 93). It is a subject of marketing strategies of companies that focus on keeping the corporate reputation clear and positive so it is possible to build strong relationships between them and society. The corporate reputation whether is good or bad, it always affects market performance of an organisation (sales, success of advertising, potential cooperation) (Davies, et al. 2010, p. 530). In case of sport organisation fans share similar ideologies and believes about the game and its rules, players, coaches and managers. (Head, et al. 2012, p. 209). Their self-esteem may depend on performance of a team, what is mentioned by Arnett, et al. (2003, p. 92). It means that sport organisations have to focus not only on general reputation and sport results. Good reputation may result with more fans attending games, more potential sponsors, support from local government and media attention. On the other hand reputation is created not only by an organisation itself but it depends on stakeholders opinions (customers, consumer activists, suppliers, competitors, industry associations, industry opinion leaders, media, fans of an enemy team) (Boros, 2009, p. 646). Reputation may influence behaviour of two most important groups for an organisation, which are employees (their retention, attitudes to customers, service quality) and customer (their satisfaction, loyalty, purchase decisions, willingness to recommend to others, game attendance) (Chun, 2005, p. 91). When focusing only on customers as the most important stakeholder group, there are four main factors effecting reputation: customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, trust and word of mouth (Walsh, et al., 2009, s. 191-192) Involvement in CSR by sport organisation means is an fulfilling of social goals and improving the reputation especially for customers (fans and supporters) who are a part of a community (Hu, et al. 2012, p.46).

2.4. Organisational change

It is clear that consumers must be aware of a social responsibility activities of company before they can consider it as a factor important in their purchase decisions (Mohr et al. 2001, p. 47). It means that focusing only on fulfilling social tasks by an organisation is not enough to make a real change. Only when those activities are visible and reputation of an organisation is common, its activity is successful (it becomes a competitive advantage and socially responsible attitudes are spread among community members). It has to be planned carefully because once customers perceive actions of an organisation as not unethical, the reputation becomes weaker and it is hard to rebuild it (Brunk, 2010, s. 275). On the other hand organisations that manage their reputation incompetently and inefficiently, will not easily promote their socially responsible activities and ethical behaviour (Borgerson, et al. 2009, s. 209). A corporate image as well as a reputation and how they are managed by an organisation influences perception of customers how human a company is (McKean, 2003, p. 155).

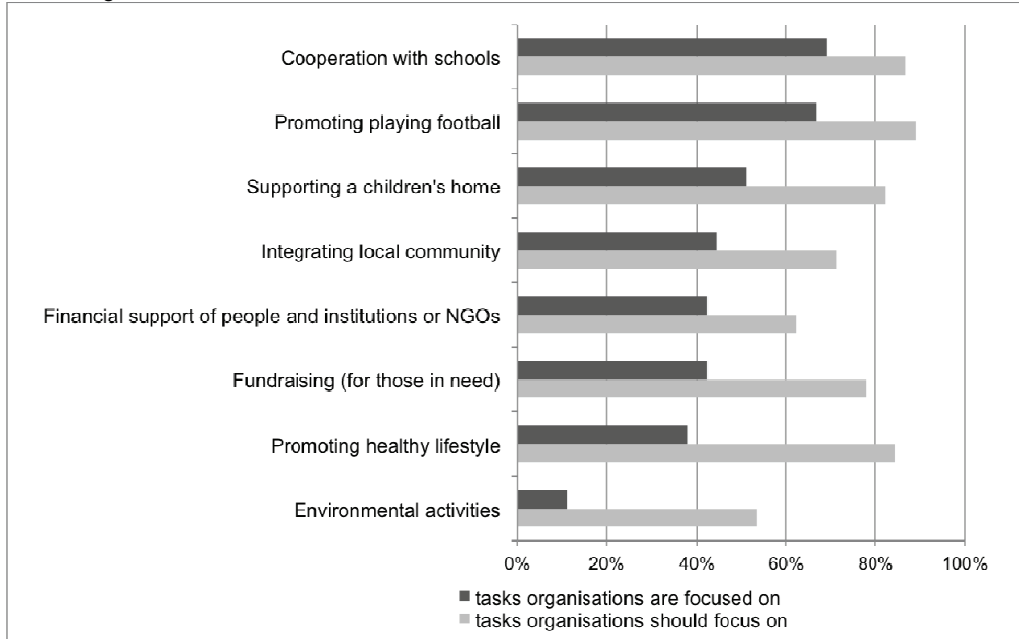
CSR and reputation strategies have to be balanced and carefully planned and considered. Change in a company policy, values and procedures might be changed this way. Sport organisations that want to become more prominent should adopt customer-centric culture and prosocial behaviour (Buhler & Nufer, 2010, p.39). Fans and supporters of a team become charismatic “brand ambassadors” who share values and qualities of an organisation (their identity is blended with the team) and believe in them so they are able to spread the word, promote socially responsible activities and make a positive influence on reputation (Hopwood, 2010, p. 140). In a research Arnett, *et al.* (2003, p.100) came with a conclusion that to encourage fans (and customers) to represent an attitude of social responsibility they should “encouraging them to develop salient identities related to organization”. Sport organizations that bring people together represent positive values have that potential. They can influence people and their attitudes, but most importantly make a big change in a local community and whole society. This way tying people as well as a team to the local community, basing on shared ideologies and values, will affect in a social bond between them and a team (organization) (Hunt, *et al.*, 1999, p. 446). This way social sport responsibility is a powerful tool making good changes in a society as well as in corporate reputation of a sport organisation. For example during a sport event that has a social cause, attitudes and social awareness of fans may be changed and an image of an organisation itself may be improved.

3. FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

This study has a preliminary character and it highlights the importance of implementing CSR as a part of business strategies of sport organisations. During quantitative research fans of sport organisations (football clubs) were sampled (N=120), with results suggesting that CSR is seen as an evidence of a sport club being a responsible member of a community. Men and women between 20 and 32 years old were surveyed. Those young people represent generation of conscious and independent consumers, for whom sport plays an important element of life.

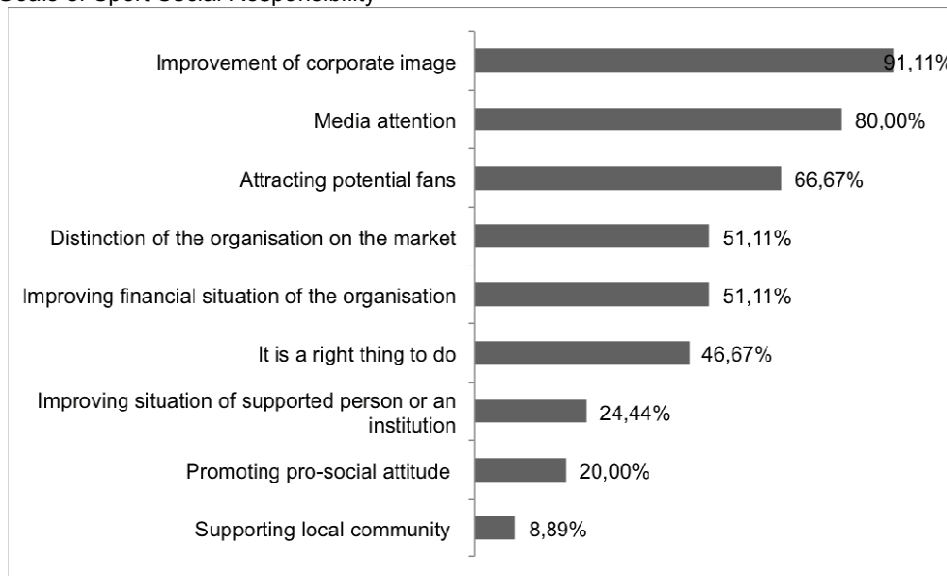
The research revealed that in community’s mind football clubs focus on financial profits the most. Respondents were asked to line up five main goals by assessing priority (from 1=highest to 5=lowest). In their opinion achievement of financial profits is the main goal followed by entertaining the society, sport education, development of sport and serving society as the least important. Those fans and supporters understand that sport organisations are business institutions that exist for entertaining customers, and promoting sport disciplines through that, rather than playing an important role in a society as its supporter and member. In respondents’ opinion, main social goals of Polish football clubs (see Picture 1) are: cooperation with schools, promoting playing football and supporting children’s homes. Those activities are mostly focused on educating children and teenagers. Sport organisations promote healthy lifestyle and physical education through sport that way. They also promote certain behaviour and attitudes while bringing both children and teenagers together (as potential customers and players) to play football and enjoy the game. In opinion of respondents, promotion of healthy lifestyle, what is surprising, and ecology are two areas that sport organisation focus the least. They do not think environmental activities are important and for football clubs this area does not have to be changed in a future, however healthy lifestyle should be promoted through sports more.

Picture 1: Social goals of Polish football clubs



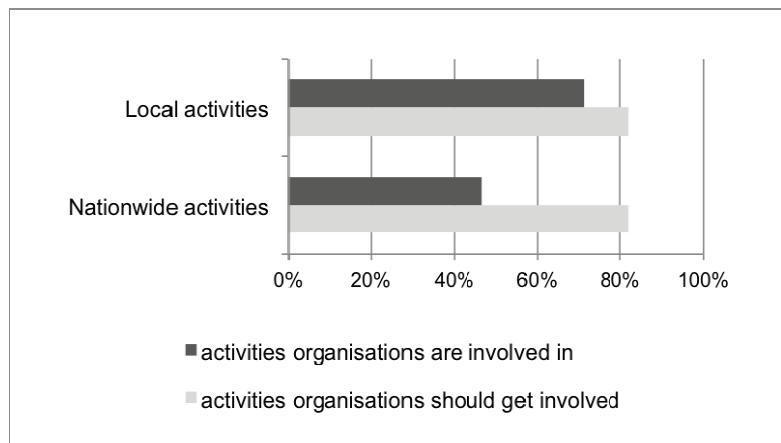
Respondents of the survey find improvement of corporate image, gaining media attention and attracting potential fans as three most important goals of Sport Social Responsibility (see Picture 2). It means that local community members think that sport organisations fulfil principles of CSR only for promotional reasons. It may be understood that socially responsible organisations actually focus more on themselves rather on community or their attitude toward community and general behaviour does not proof genuineness and honesty of intentions. Maybe if members of community felt that a sport organization is fully engaged in making a change and supporting the community, people would perceive those activities as truly altruistic.

Picture 2: Goals of Sport Social Responsibility



Polish football clubs get involved in both local and nationwide initiatives. As members of local communities they focus rather on solving local problems. In opinion of respondents (see Picture 3) sport organisations (Polish football clubs) focus mostly on local activities and it is a good direction. As local organisations activities on a local market are more visible for community members, are more permanent and operating within that local community helps an organisation understand problems and need of it. Respondents also believe that social activism of football clubs is a great opportunity for them to improve image among those who are not fans and supporters.

Picture 3: Local vs nationwide activities



Findings of the presented research revealed that people find social activities of sport organisations as focused mostly on improving corporate image and reputation. Fans and supporters believe that football clubs should focus more on promoting healthy lifestyle. In their opinion those organisations fulfil their own goals only (financial and promotional) rather than actually help and support local community. They believe that sport organisation should focus on nationwide activities as much as they focus on local ones. This may be surprising since the impact of prosocial activities is stronger on local communities. This preliminary study should be followed by deeper analysis of needs of local communities and social tasks of sport organisations that actually meet with those needs.

Managers of sport organisations should find a balance between using SSR for promotion, attracting potential fans and supporters, enriching corporate image and building trust among local community. Members of society should feel safe and truly believe that activities taken by sport organisations are designed for supporting community leaving business goals behind as secondary. This may mean for managers that they should change their attitudes, become more prosocial personally to better understand needs of members of society. That change should be a trigger for changing strategy of whole organisation, its personality, and as a result corporate image and reputation.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The research revealed that CSR tasks run by Polish football clubs are usually focused not only on local community but mostly on achieving business goal (rather than social goals). The results suggest that fans and supporters of sport clubs are aware that SSR is one of the factors influencing corporate reputation of an organisation and it plays mostly promotional role in overall business strategy of those organisations. Those activities influence image or brand equity, consequently building reputation, loyalty, patronage intentions, and financial performance and it eclipses the most important influence on local community making it minor. Those tasks and their goals should be parallel. Polish football clubs may be inspired by mission of NBA: “to be the most successful and respected professional sports league in the world, guided by two principles: (1) we will grow and celebrate the game of basketball and (2) we understand the popularity and visibility of our teams, players, and league obligate us to demonstrate leadership in social responsibility”¹. It means that sport organisations can achieve business goals what gives them strengths and popularity to promote discipline and itself, healthy lifestyle and help others (support local community, promote prosocial behaviour and values). As Walsh, *et al.* (2009, p. 198) suggest, organisations should focus less on corporate image as a good employer, reliable business partner, socially and environmentally responsible company, and focus more on customers and their needs. Fulfilling customer’s needs (fans, supporters, members) and improving service quality leads to satisfaction, loyalty and better reputation. When sport organisations will become a devoted and faithful member of a community, the community will perceive activities of the organisation as honest and truly socially responsible. It will build strong social bonds between consumers and local community. But to do so an organisation has to invest both time and energy to produce positive interpersonal relationships (Buhler & Nufer, 2010, p.27). Those social bonds will bring both financial and immaterial profits. An organisation will become a responsible member of society,

¹ http://www.nba.com/careers/mission_statement_article.html

and community members will share reputation of the organisation, support social tasks of the organisation which will make an organisation and its activities (also sport ones) more permanent and visible on the market.

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