Chapter 17

Sport Management and Sustainability Innovation Challenges

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ABSTRACT

In the first part of the book, the focus was on introducing the conceptual (Transition Studies) and first practical tools (sustainable innovation) to set the scene to a deeper analysis of the effective role of grassroots innovation in sport for a sustainable future. This chapter opens the second part of the book by analyzing how sport management studies have analyzed the role of and relationship between innovation and sustainability. From a theoretical and practical perspective, the corporate social responsibility (CSR) function seems to be the area of study and application that could better create a relationship between sustainability and innovation in sport. Innovative CSR seems to be the managerial approach that from mainstream organizations and practices could give grassroots sports organizations practical guidelines to design and develop novel solutions for societal needs. The chapter concludes that a different approach (niche) should be considered for grassroots sport organizations.

INTRODUCTION

An organization can be defined as any group of people working together to achieve a common purpose or goal that could not be attained by individuals working separately. If the organization is the hardware, the software is composed of the set of managerial functions. These functions need the coordination of all human, material, technological, and financial resources that the organization exploits to achieve its goals. As introduced by (Covell, Walker, 2013), one way to look at the responsibility of the management, especially in sport industry, is the responsibility for performance. According to this perspective, sport managers are always responsible for the organization’s realization of its goals that means that sport management is the responsibility for the performance and success of these organizations. The

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continuous improvement of performances of sport organizations can depend on a multiple set of factors, especially functions and role as presented by classical studies. For Mintzberg (1980), the performance of the organization depends on how the managers perform their role, and indicate ten key managerial roles. Among these, on the base of the innovative organization definition as a dynamic and learning organization, the most prominent are the role of Liaison (interacting with other organizations); Monitor (receiving information critical for performance) and Disseminator (sharing information within the organization) and Spokesperson (presenting information outside the organization); Entrepreneur (initiating change to improve performance); Disturbance handler (dealing with issues and crises inside and outside of the organization).

Although these basic concepts are still valid today, the landscape for sport organizations has changed and accelerated a shift toward new business models and functions. The most important changes in the sport management landscape has affected the following areas: first, the shift from performance responsibility to shared responsibility for performance (internal vision, engagement of internal stakeholders). Second, the introduction of a dynamic and complex perspective on management and organization summarized in the concept of Sport Management in Transition. Third, the constant pressure to increase the performance though the delivery of better services and products according to evolving quality standard. Fourth, driving continuous improvements toward higher quality standards (compare to ISO 9001: 2015 for the latest two points). This implies that the focus on innovation is an essential need for contemporary sport organizations that want to innovate in terms of services, products and processes. Quality and innovation require flexibility to grow and stay competitive. Fifth, growth and competition depends on the capacity of the organization to stay sustainable, here intended as growing at a rate, and to a size that can be maintained over the long term. It refers to the economic and financial aspect of sustainability.

Finally, the sixth point is the development of integrity as the guiding principle by which all organizational decisions and actions are articulated and activated.

It is evident that, although some words refer to concepts of sustainability, here the approach is purely managerial.

Complexity, sharing and engagement, dynamicity, flexibility, quality and innovation, integrity all of these terms and concepts refer to the paradigm shift that occurred in the second half of the last century also in business and management sciences. Modern contributions to this management thinking came evidently from Systems theory (von Bertanlaffy, 1979), network theory, stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), Contingency theory and Learning organization theory (Senge, 1990). The main advantages of this new approach to the firm is that some important concepts guide the development of innovation policies and processes both at the political and business levels. In particular, Systems and network theories recognize the importance of factors and events occurring outside the organization and in the surrounding environment. Stakeholder theory focuses on firm’s relationships with many constituent groups, or “stakeholders,” that affect and are affected by its decisions. Contingency theory focuses on the firm’s capacity to adapt to new situations and requirements. The Learning organization theory focuses on the investment on internal learning processes as the main resource for the growth of the organization and the exploitation or exploration of innovative solutions.

As such, the link between sustainability as the main normative goal also for sport organizations and sport management is not resolved. This perspective otherwise opens the field to the introduction of innovation as the main tool and goal for sport organizations and for the development of a specific research field.