

Balancing between Team and Organisation: The Relationship between Stakeholders' Influence and Trust and Cohesion in Post-transitional South-East European Basketball Teams*

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Abstract

This explorative study examines whether the involvement of different stakeholders in South-East European basketball team activities significantly correlates with two crucial constructs often reported to be predictors of well-functioning teams in interacting sports, namely trust and cohesion among team members, and discusses what might cause these relationships. The Group Environment Questionnaire and a four-dimensional “competence-benevolence-integrity-predictability” trust scale were used for a sample of 73 basketball clubs from South-Eastern Europe (559 athletes, 73 head coaches, 73 directors). Correlation analyses showed that team cohesion is in a negative relationship with the influence of media, while trust within teams positively correlates with the influence of professional athletes in team activities. The trust relationship between athletes and coach is weaker in the case of private sponsors' interference, while the coach's trust in the athletes positively correlates with the influence of volunteers. These findings combined with the literature review show that in the context of post-transitional South-East European sport clubs' higher level of professionalisation appears to make it easier to achieve trustworthy relationships and higher team cohesion, while an increase in private sponsors' interference might impair the coach–athletes relationship. The study provides a robust quantitative starting point and a set of new research questions for further examination of the causality between stakeholder activities and sport team dynamics, whereas from a practical point of view it points to relationships in need of greater attention in the stakeholder management process.

Keywords: stakeholders, trust, cohesion, basketball, team, South-East Europe

JEL Codes: L83, M12, M14

Introduction

The stakeholders' management literature in the field of sport stresses that ensuring compatibility between the organisation and its key stakeholders is a crucial managerial objective (Junghagen 2018; Ivašković/Čater/Čater 2017; Breitbarth/Harris 2008). This requires effort to assure a good fit between the organisation and specifics of its environment which, especially for sport clubs by default closely attached to their local community, is supposed to make organisational success more likely (Ivašković 2019). During the stakeholder management process, sport club executives face three issues: a) whether to meet

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a given stakeholder's demand; b) when to meet a stakeholder's demand; and c) how to meet a stakeholder's demand (using a customised or standardised approach) (Minoja 2012). The usual decision-making process regarding these issues is well known and elaborated in the scientific literature. Club management is supposed to focus on meeting the needs of key stakeholders (Junghagen 2018; Minoja 2012). Yet, a problem arises in organisations that have the so-called dual organisational structure, where the processes in one part of the organisation are significantly different from the processes in other parts (Ivašković et al. 2017). Sports clubs in post-transitional South-Eastern Europe are a typical example of such organisations where under the umbrella of non-profitability professional (including full- or part-time employees) and amateur (club members working without payment) often play together, and where measures taken on the organisational level aimed at boosting the performance of the sports club as a whole are not always optimal for the sports team by being focused on 'on field' sport performance, which must be distinguished from organisational performance (Seippeel 2019; Kern/Schwarzmann/Wiedenegger 2012). Therefore, an interest group that might be important from the aspect of organisational financial performance perhaps should not be in a position to influence the team dynamics. Consequently, despite numerous studies on stakeholders' influence on sport club performance, studies on the stakeholders–team relationship seem to be lacking. This especially refers to the post-transitional European context where the hierarchies of stakeholders differ from the stakeholders' structures of sport clubs in other European countries (Ivašković 2019). Neglecting the importance of mentioned Minoja's questions on the team level might bring long-term negative effects for the sport club as a whole since team performance is the crucial leverage for long-term organisational success (Kern et al. 2012). The main aim of this explorative research is thus to shed light on the relationship between various stakeholders' involvement in post-transitional sport team activities and two crucial constructs often reported to predict well-functioning teams in interacting sports: trust and cohesion among team members. We thereby seek to enable future in-depth research of causality in individual relationships, while the practical aim (from the aspect of sport clubs' managers) is to highlight the need to include the team dynamics perspective in stakeholder management by pointing out the relationships in need of greater attention.

Team Dynamics in the Context of Stakeholder Management in South-East European Sport Clubs

Specifics of South-East European Sport Clubs

Freeman and Reed (1983) defined stakeholders as any interest group or individual who is affected or can affect the organisational operations. Regarding sport clubs, Junghagen (2018) divided interest groups into members and supporters,

media, sponsors and community, further dividing supporters into temporary, local, devoted, fanatical, casual and dysfunctional. The mentioned author notes that in reality an individual might be a member of several interest groups, and that it is necessary to identify stakeholders for each industry separately. The literature shows that interest groups interfere in various ways in organisational activities (Barringer/Bluedorn 1999; Berman/Wicks/Kotha/Jones 1999; Selvin/Covin 1997), and because they differ regarding sources of power and interests they also cause different organisational effects and, of course, some of them might be harmful from an organisational aspect. Since a larger number of stakeholders with similar power increases the potential for conflicts, Minoja (2012) suggests that each interest should be observed through three dimensions of a decision: whether, when and how to meet the given stakeholder's demand. In this context Junghagen (2018) identifies three tensions. Given that some supporters are not just spectators, their participation in creating the atmosphere means they should also be seen as co-producers who help attract consumers to events, especially those who do not actually come for the match itself but enjoy the atmosphere created by the mass of active supporters, the first tension arises between consumption and co-production. The second tension (club identity vs. sponsorships) concerns whether to accept all sponsors and increase the financial income or preserve the club's identity by signing only a few long-term sponsorship contracts. The third (supportership and club responsibility) tension relates to the management of fanatic supporters who if hooliganism is involved might also be dysfunctional. Here, it is important to emphasise two aspects:

- 1) the potential double-edged sword problem is not simply limited to fans, which calls for broader research into stakeholder influence on various aspects of sport club performance; and
- 2) not all stakeholder effects on a sport club are direct, making extensive research to illuminate possible causal relationships initially desirable.

The vast majority of post-transitional South-East European sport clubs, even those at the top-quality level, still operate as non-profit organisations. Another feature of clubs in this area is that the main sponsor rarely stays in the position of external stakeholder. More often, it places its representative in the formal managerial body of the sport organisation, implying a merging of economic and formal power. Differences in stakeholder hierarchies compared to their Western Europe counterparts are seen in their budget structures; they still obtain most of their funds from large enterprises that were once mainly owned by public institutions (state or municipality) (Ivašković 2019; Škorić/Bartoluci/Čustonja 2012; Andreff/Dutoya/Montel 2009). However, the lion's share of the main sponsors (that still seem to be linked with public institutions) are nowadays privately owned. Further, in this part of Europe considerable differences in budget sizes are seen between amateur and professional clubs (Sanchez/Barajas/Sanchez-Fernandez 2019; Barget/Chavinier-Rela 2017), causing changes in stakeholder hi-

erarchies (Ivašković 2019). During the centrally-planned times, sport clubs in post-transitional South-East Europe were controlled by politicised organisations (e.g. large state-owned companies, army, police, labour unions etc.) on the municipal or (for clubs chosen to represent the country in international leagues) state level. The political system also created the legal framework that prevented the outflow of athletes abroad that, apart from increasing the competitive potential of sport clubs at the expense of individual freedoms, made athletes less mobile. The latter enabled more predictive environment for sport teams, which as a side effect also caused easier achievement of team cohesion and trust among team members. Yet, the change in political system stimulated new interest groups to engage in sport clubs' operations and gradually liberalised the athlete market. This implied a shift in stakeholders' structures and increased fluctuation, which might have caused consequences at the sport team level. Therefore, we assume that, although clubs have largely remained non-profit, embracing new philosophy and placing profit motives of private stakeholders in the context of club's formally non-profit mission changed athletes' mentality in post-transitional sport clubs.

The Relation between Trust, Cohesion and Stakeholder Management

Being a coach in a sport team demands various types of knowledge, especially in cases where intrateam competition and rivalry are inherently attached to the process of building top sport result. Riesman (1953) described this as antagonistic cooperation. Forming a competitive sport team is therefore always a multidimensional process (Chelladurai 2007), in which trust and cohesion are (unlike in coaching independent sports) (Carron/Coleman/Wheeler/Stevens 2002; Carron/Chelladurai 1981; Landers/Luschen 1974) often described as the key constructs for team performance in interacting sports (Cormier/Bloom/Harvey 2015). However, although often related (Ivašković 2014), trust and cohesion are definitely not the same constructs. On one hand, trust is often described as “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party” (Mayer/Davis/Schoorman 1995:712). On the other, cohesion is “a dynamic process which is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs” (Carron/Brawley/Widmeyer 1998:213). Cohesion is therefore an intragroup phenomenon, while trust can develop among one or more persons, or regard a place, event, object, organisations and even between organisations (Mayer et al. 1995; Johnson-George/Swap 1982; Gulati 1995; Zaheer/McEvily/Perrone 1998). Trust might have several foci within the same team, and demands examination from different perspectives in particular relationship (Gillespie/Dietz 2009; Laequddin/Sahay/Sahay/Abdul Waheed 2010;

Shockley-Zalabak/Ellis/Winograd 2000; Tzafrir 2005). In a sport team context, the latter implies the differentiation at least between the trust among athletes and the trust of athletes in coach (and vice versa). At the same time, there is only one team cohesion, which could be measured only on team level. Yet, both constructs have several dimensions, and various scholars confirmed they are often related, especially in the interdependent teams in military and sport contexts (Hansen/Morrow/Batista 2002; Luria 2008; Mach/Dolan/Tzafrir 2010; Dirks 1999). Indeed, trust enables an individual athlete to have positive feelings and perceptions regarding other team members which stimulates the positive cycle of reinforcement within the team, and could be the reason for the increase of team cohesiveness. The literature offers the explanation for that effect, saying that the degree of trust differentiates teams with high level of trust from those teams with lack of trust at the time of increased risk. In those critical moments, trust affects team members to accept their role and to perform unpleasant tasks (Mayer et al. 1995; Dirks 2000). If athletes trust their coach, they are likely to accept his/her instructions and cooperate with teammates, thus fostering team cohesiveness. Trust also reduces perception of risk, vulnerability, and uncertainty, while lack of trust implies lower efficiency, which might cause lower sense of cohesion (Dirks/Ferrin 2001). The latter is often an issue in sport teams due to high fluctuation, which suggest difficulties in establishing trustworthy relationships and cohesive teams, and makes the examination of these constructs a priority in sport management and sport psychology research (Matheson/Mathes/Murray 1997).

Interestingly, the coach–athlete relationship has mostly been examined in the context of individual sports, although it might be more important in team sports (De Backer/Boen/Ceux/De Cuyper/Høigaard/Callens/Fransen/Vande Broek 2011). Indeed, in team sports setting coach-athlete relationship seems to be more complex due to presence of other trust relationships and team cohesion (Nikbin/Hyun/Iranmanesh/Fooughi 2014). Moreover, multiple trust relations and cohesiveness within team are affected by team members' relationships with other individuals and groups outside of the team. Lusher, Kremer and Robins (2014) suggest that the presence of other trust relationships might be placed in the context of trust-generating and in trust-inhibiting structures. In this regard, little is known about the relationship between stakeholders' interfering and the team dynamics. This problem was indirectly mentioned with Cote, Salmela and Russell's coaching model, which involves creating a mental image of the athletes' potential, and takes account of the athletes' and coach's personal characteristics as well as the contextual setting (Cote/Salmela/Russell 1995). The latter clearly includes relationships with individuals and interest groups outside of a team, which in some cases might be perceived as stressors, defined as "the environmental demands encountered by an individual" (Fletcher/Hanton/Mellalieu 2006:359). Stakeholder management accordingly forms part of a coach's task of

controlling the environment, which is an important piece of the 'planning and organisation' function, and a precondition for the coach's action (Szedlak/Smith/Greenless 2015). Indicatively, scholars proved that proper stakeholder management and high level of intrateam trust bring similar consequences and positively affect organisational outcomes (Ivašković 2019; Mach et al. 2010). Some authors also suggested a negative correlation between the quality of social events outside of the team setting on the one side, and intrateam competition and rivalry on the other (Cormier et al. 2015). Moreover, Carron, Widmeyer and Brawley (1985) explicitly viewed cohesion as a multidimensional construct, such that members integrate information from diverse aspects of the social world relevant to the group, including stakeholders from the team's environment. This is in line with the claims that coaches have responsibility first to form a team of individuals with personality traits adapted to team environment (Bell 2007), then to shape a cohesive environment (Bloom/Stevens/Wickwire 2003), and that teams with a more positive environment are more cohesive (Murray 2006). We may therefore assume that stakeholder management represents the context for building trust relationships and thus for increasing the degree of team cohesion (Ivašković 2014). Thus, although causality cannot be prejudiced, the influence of context on team dynamics seems to be more likely than vice versa. Still, the question remains of which stakeholders hold a positive relationship and which a negative one with intrateam trust and team cohesion. We hence propose the following research question and two sub-questions.

Research question: *Do various stakeholders' interferences in team activities significantly correlate with trust and cohesion among team members in post-transitional South-East European basketball teams?*

Research sub-question 1: *Are there certain stakeholder groups whose interference in team activities significantly positively correlates with the level of trust and/or cohesion in post-transitional South-East European basketball teams?*

Research sub-question 2: *Are there certain stakeholder groups whose interference in team activities significantly negatively correlates with the level of trust and/or cohesion in post-transitional South-East European basketball teams?*

Materials and Methods

Sample

The research was performed on athletes from South-East European male basketball teams. First, we pre-tested the survey questionnaire on 15 athletes and

removed any identified ambiguities. Invitations to participate in the research were then sent to 249 clubs from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia. It was guaranteed that participation was completely voluntary and anonymous, and that each participant was free to withdraw at any stage of the survey. In the end, 73 clubs out of 249 (response rate of 29.3 %) were willing to participate with their club president (or director), the first-team head coach and with at least six of their first-team athletes. The final sample included 10 (out of 47) clubs from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 24 (out of 66) from Croatia, 22 (out of 49) from Slovenia, and 17 (out of 87) from Serbia. Among the total of 73 clubs, 27 (out of 56; response rate of 48.2 %) were first-division clubs, 31 (out of 73; response rate of 42.5 %) clubs were participating in second national divisions, while 15 (out of 120; response rate of 12.5 %) clubs were competing at the time in lower divisions.

The questionnaires were fully completed by 559 athletes out of 2,988 (in 249 clubs), meaning a response rate of 18.7 % on the athlete level. They were aged on average 22.17 (SD = 4.73) years. On average, they had been with the current sport team for 4.81 (SD = 4.51) consecutive seasons and cooperated with the current head coach for 2.45 years (SD = 2.44). The clubs' presidents (or directors) had on average 4.87 (SD = 3.70) years' management experience in the current club and had held their presidential position for 2.53 (SD = 1.36) years. Head coaches had on average been with the current club for 6.56 (SD = 7.11) years and held their head coach position for 2.97 (SD = 2.76) years.

Data and Statistical Analysis

The stakeholders' influence on team activities. Stakeholders in South-Eastern Europe cannot be divided on the same basis as proposed by Freeman and Reed (1983) or Junghagen (2018) since formal, economic and political power are not clearly separated due to the described historical and cultural specifics of the studied societies in South-East European countries. Therefore, we first had to identify which interest groups have the largest influence on sport club teams in observed area. For that purpose, we requested four national basketball associations to recommend a few managers who would be willing to participate in the study. We obtained 53 e-mail addresses. Twelve managers, each holding at least 5 years' work experience in sport organisations similar to those examined in this research, responded and helped us form the stakeholders' list. They were asked (without discussing it with the other group members) to list the most influential interest groups in terms of their contacts and possibility of affecting the team dynamics. Similar answers were later combined to create 10 stakeholder groups, namely: volunteers (members of the club who do their work without payment; athletes and non-athletes), professional non-athlete employees (full- or part-time employees), professional athletes (athletes with professional

contracts), private sponsors, local community, national sport federation, municipal authorities, media, state authorities and general public. While collecting the data, the club's president and club's head coach from each basketball club were asked to assess each stakeholder's influence on the team's activities on a 7-point Likert scale, anchored at the extremes (1) 'does not influence the team at all' and (7) "has the greatest influence among the listed stakeholders". The average value of both responses was then used in the data analysis.

Trust. A four-dimensional ('competence', 'benevolence', 'integrity', 'predictability') 20-item (5 items per dimension) trust scale was used in the research since it was developed in the context of military units (Adams/Waldherr/Sartori 2008), which operate in conditions similar to sport teams. We used a single questionnaire tool for three different relationships (athlete–teammates, athlete–coach, coach–athletes), modifying the scales only by changing the referent person to "teammates", "coach" and "athletes". Answers were provided on a 7-point Likert scale anchored at the extremes by 'strongly disagree' (1) and 'strongly agree' (7). Cronbach's alphas were .82 (for trust among athletes), .89 (for the athletes' trust in the coach) and .80 (for trust of the head coach in the athletes).

Cohesion among team members was measured with the Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ) (Carron/Widmeyer/Brawley 1985). It contains 18 items and measures 4 different aspects of cohesion ("Individual Attractions to the Group-Task" – IAGT, "Individual Attractions to the Group-Social" – IAGS, "Group Integration-Task" – GIT, and "Group Integration-Social" – GIS). Although the scale validity and its usefulness were verified (Carron/Brawley 2012), some scholars have suggested using only IAGT and GIT in the context of sport teams as the two social components showed a much weaker influence on the team's performance (Carron/Brawley 2012; Schutz/Eom/Smoll/Smith 1994; Li/Harmer 1996; Hogg/Abrams/Otten/Hinkle 2004; Carron/Bray/Eys 2002). We accepted this suggestion and only measured IAGT and GIT on a 7-point Likert scale, anchored at the extremes by "strongly disagree" (1) and "strongly agree" (7). Six of the nine claims were reverse-coded. Cronbach's alpha was .77, indicating a sufficient level of reliability.

In order to justify the aggregation of trust among athletes, athletes' trust in the head coach, and team cohesion on the team level, we conducted intraclass correlation (ICC) analysis for each team. The ICC coefficients ranged from .53 to .91, where lower values were obtained for both trust relationships and higher ones in the case of perceptions of team cohesion. In addition, we tested the suggested structures of cohesion and trust constructs with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), which showed these structures fit the data fairly well (CFI, NNFI, NFI > .9, RMSEA < .1). We were therefore able to continue by conducting correlation analysis.

The measured constructs, especially various trust relations, are interdependent, which makes it difficult to distinguish direct causal relationships (Lusher et al. 2014). Discovering the direct relationship was therefore not the primary aim of this research. Instead, the aim was to identify associations between stakeholders' influence and team dynamics with a view to providing a robust quantitative starting point for further examinations of potential causality. Correlation analysis is from this aspect the most appropriate exploratory tool for extensive research (Luijstens/Symons/Vuyksteke-Wauters 1994).

Results

Table 1 shows there is a similar perception of some stakeholders' involvement in team activities, meaning that club presidents and head coaches might perceive them as part of the same (similar) interest groups. High correlations are mainly found in the triangle between the local community, the general public, and the media (correlation coefficients (r) ranged between .57 and .71), while a relatively high correlation was also established between the municipal authorities and local community's influence ($r = .43$), as well as between municipal and state authorities ($r = .42$). This should be taken into account when designing future research on stakeholder impacts. Among other results, the high negative correlation between the influence of volunteers and private sponsors is particularly interesting since it might indicate that private sponsors are more involved in professionalised South-East European sports clubs and teams, where the majority club members are full- or part-time employees. In the next step, before conducting the second set of correlation analyses, we used a t-test and ANOVA (analysis of variance) in order to test the data regarding potential significant differences between groups of clubs from various countries and levels of competition. Interestingly, there were no significant differences between clubs according to their nationality, although they did exist in terms of the quality of the competition in which the clubs were participating. Volunteers and municipal authorities interfere significantly less in first-division teams, whereas private sponsors and employees interfered more in this segment of clubs. At the same time, the local community interfered more in the lowest ranked teams, while second-division clubs experience a significantly lower impact of national sport federations on their activities.

In the following stage, we examined the correlations between the perceptions of the stakeholders' influence on the team processes on one side, and the actual reports of trust (on all three measured relationships) and team cohesion on the other (see Table 2).

Table 1. Means and correlations between stakeholders' involvement in team activities

Stakeholder	M	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1) Volunteers (athletes and non-athletes)	5.36									
2) Professional employees (non-athletes)	4.44	-.24*								
3) Professional athletes	5.80	-.01	.12							
4) Private sponsors	3.60	-.46**	.06	-.06						
5) Local community	3.77	.16	-.09	.03	-.20					
6) National sport federation	3.80	.13	.05	.03	-.16	-.08				
7) Municipal authorities	4.58	.20	-.28*	.06	-.19	.43**	.22			
8) Media	3.05	-.10	-.17	-.26*	-.04	.62**	-.17	.24*		
9) State Authorities	1.74	-.12	-.03	.05	-.05	.19	-.04	.42**	.08	
10) General public	2.93	.01	-.27*	-.02	-.14	.71**	-.30**	.39**	.57**	.30**

Notes. M = Mean; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Volunteers' involvement in team activities clearly does not have a significant relationship with trust among athletes, nor with trust in the head coach. On the other side, it is significantly correlated with the head coach's trust in the athletes, principally due to a better perception of their benevolence, as well as a slightly better perception of their integrity and predictability. The perception of the athletes' competence, however, from the coaches' point of view did not correlate significantly with the influence of particular stakeholder groups. However, there was a negative significant correlation between the influence of volunteers and the team cohesion.

Professional athletes' greater influence in team activities positively correlates with the mutual trust among the team members ($r = 0.36$, $p < 0.01$), with the coach's perception of the athletes' competencies ($r = 0.25$, $p < 0.05$) and predictability ($r = 0.28$, $p < 0.05$), and with team cohesion ($r = 0.29$, $p < 0.05$). On the other hand, the influence of professional employees on team activities does not correlate significantly with either of the two aspects of athletes' trust. For this sample of sport teams, we also cannot confirm its significant correlation with the coach's trust in the athletes. However, it has a positive correlation with two components of the coach's trust, namely the coach's perceptions of the athletes' integrity and their competencies, but coefficients are relatively low ($r_{(integrity)} = 0.26$, $r_{(predictability)} = 0.23$) and significant only at $p < 0.05$. The

influence of professional non-athlete employees on the other hand positively correlates with the perception of team cohesiveness among team members ($r = 0.27, p < 0.05$).

Table 2. Correlations between trust, perceived cohesion and stakeholders' influence on team activities

	Trust and cohesion				Stakeholder						
	Volunteers (athletes and non-athletes)	Professional employees (non-athletes)	Professional athletes	Private sponsors	Local community	National sport federation	Municipal authorities	Media State authorities	General public		
1. Trust among athletes	.05	.03	.36**	-.18	.08	-.01	.04	-.15	-.14	.04	
a) Benevolence	.01	.07	.34**	-.17	.16	-.14	-.06	-.03	-.20	.06	
b) Integrity	.21	-.04	.36**	-.21	.04	.04	.04	-.21	-.16	-.03	
c) Predictability	-.04	.06	.29*	-.15	.08	.04	.06	-.17	-.17	.00	
d) Competence	.03	.03	.31**	-.11	-.00	.04	.12	-.14	-.01	.04	
2. Trust of athletes in coach	.05	-.01	.15	-.23*	-.12	.21	.05	-.04	-.03	.04	
a) Benevolence	.12	-.02	.14	-.27*	-.18	.24*	.08	-.08	-.07	-.02	
b) Integrity	.09	-.03	.16	-.24*	-.12	.24*	.06	-.05	-.01	.01	
c) Predictability	-.02	.01	.13	-.20	-.02	.03	.14	.05	.01	.18	
d) Competence	-.00	.02	.12	-.17	-.12	.24*	-.05	-.06	-.03	-.01	
3. Trust of coach in athletes	.31**	.20	.18	-.46**	.21	.06	.11	.04	.13	.17	
a) Benevolence	.62**	.06	.10	-.50**	.26*	.15	.23	.09	.10	.17	
b) Integrity	.29*	.26*	.01	-.48*	.20	.04	.06	.06	.14	.18	
c) Predictability	.23*	.08	.28*	-.34**	.12	-.03	-.03	-.01	.02	.10	
d) Competence	-.15	.23*	.25*	-.19	-.01	.02	.06	-.02	.05	.01	
4. Cohesion	-.27*	.27*	.29*	.17	-.29*	-.04	-.18	-.34**	-.07	-.24*	

Notes. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

The involvement of private sponsors in team activities does not correlate with the overall level of trust among the athletes, and is not significantly related to the team cohesiveness, neither negatively nor positively. Still, this particular interest group's interference has a negative correlation and could have an impairing effect on the coach–athletes relationship in both directions (athletes' trust in head coach: $r = -0.23, p < 0.05$; coach's trust in athletes: $r = -0.46, p < 0.01$). A closer look shows that the private sponsors' influence significantly correlates with the coach's trust in the athletes' benevolence ($r = -0.50, p < 0.01$), integrity ($r = -0.48, p < 0.01$) and predictability ($r = -0.34, p < 0.01$).

A higher level of local community interference in team activities shows a negative correlation with the perception of team cohesion ($r = -0.29, p < 0.05$). On the other hand, this stakeholder group shows no significant correlation with any of three measured trust relations, except the coaches seem to have slightly better perception of the athletes' benevolence when local community members interfere in team activities ($r = 0.26, p < 0.05$).

The influence of national sports federations on team activities generally speaking also does not significantly correlate with any of the measured constructs. Yet, there are some indications that the athletes might have somewhat better perceptions of the coach's benevolence ($r = 0.24, p < 0.05$), integrity ($r = 0.24, p < 0.05$) and competence ($r = 0.24, p < 0.05$).

The results show that media and general public interferences into team activities do not significantly correlate with any dimension of the measured trust relations, and at the same time the interference of both in team processes negatively correlates with the team's cohesiveness. The correlation in the case of the media is somewhat stronger ($r = -0.34, p < 0.01$) than between the general public and the sports team ($r = -0.24, p < 0.05$).

Finally, the involvement of the post-transitional South-East European state and municipal authorities in team work does not correlate with any of the measured constructs of team dynamics.

Discussion

Theoretical Implications

The positive correlation between volunteers' involvement in team activities and the head coach's trust in the athletes, chiefly due to a better perception of their benevolence, holds a few potential implications worthy of further research. First, this result may allow us to hypothesise that in post-transitional South-East European sports clubs on a lower level of professionalism coaches primarily build their trust with players on their assessment of the athletes' benevolence. Second, since volunteers also include amateur basketball players, we could explain this result as reflecting the fact that coaches perceive as more benevolent those athletes who engage in team activities without a financial motive. This relationship between financial investment and the perception of benevolence seems logical and calls for further research even beyond the framework of post-transitional sports clubs, especially where athletes give up part of their payment. For example, in some football clubs (e.g. FC Barcelona and Juventus) athletes accepted a salary reduction during the COVID-19 pandemic to help protect the club from bankruptcy. Trust in these footballers has in response most probably grown among the fan population, but it would be interesting to check whether this is also the case from the coach's perspective. Similarly, in some cases top

basketball athletes in the NBA agreed to play for the prescribed minimum wage in order to help the club comply with the salary-cap regulations and thereby increase the club's chances of winning the championship. It would hence be interesting to examine the trust these players enjoy before and after the cut in their pay.

Although we have to preserve some degree of scepticism due to $p > 0.01$, the significant ($p > 0.05$) negative correlation between the influence of volunteers and the team cohesion, and simultaneously the better perception of cohesiveness in the case of higher professionals' impact, allow the assumption that the shared financial interest among professionals seems to act as some kind of glue that holds the team together. In contrast, volunteers' greater influence on team activities means the absence of this common denominator creates the potential for conflict between the different interests of team members. While the latter remains at the level of the hypothesis, which must be verified in future studies, we can find some support for it in other results of a certain study. Accordingly, professional athletes' greater influence in team activities also positively correlates with the mutual trust among the team members ($r = 0.36, p < 0.01$). Again, this is very likely to be an outcome of the greater degree of athletes' awareness that every team member is part of the particular sport team due to business reasons. On one side, this narrows the spectrum of unpredictability, while on the other the fact that athletes are being paid for their participation also raises their teammates' trust in their competencies. The same effect is also indicated from the coach's perspective. His/her perception of the athletes' competencies ($r = 0.25, p < 0.05$) and predictability ($r = 0.28, p < 0.05$) also positively correlates with professional athletes' higher influence on the team. Nevertheless, it is somewhat surprising that the athletes' mutual perception of their teammates' benevolence and integrity is also growing in this case. This finding to some extent challenges the conclusion of some studies (e.g. Wicker/Breuer 2013) that having more volunteers engaged in a non-profit sport club means it has fewer problems. This could also be an implication of the higher level of determining the team processes in the case of professionals' stronger engagement, which then reduces the potential for ambiguities on an operational basis and hence leads to fewer conflicts. The higher level of trust among the team members then also spills over onto the mentioned better perception of the team's cohesion ($r = 0.29, p < 0.05$). Mixed South-East European sport teams that include amateur and professional athletes are in this respect no less desired than completely amateur teams, but the higher level of professionalisation could according to this finding imply that trustworthy relationships and team cohesion are more easily achieved.

The positive correlations between the influence of professional employees and the coach's perceptions of the athletes' integrity and their competencies may suggest that the involvement of other professionals in the team's operations

(e.g. fitness coach, club doctor, nutritionist etc.) implies raising team activities to a higher level of professionalism. In turn, this raises the competency of the athletes and narrows the space in which a lack of athletes' integrity could manifest, which should be further tested in future studies. The influence of professional non-athlete employees positively correlating with the perception of team cohesiveness among team members is interesting. We may thus assume that giving the professionals a bigger opportunity to shape team activities reduces the opportunity for conflicts between team members as responsibility is transferred to professionals outside the team. The previous finding also allows to assume that, besides the higher level of sport team professionalisation, professionalising the whole organisation seems to also be beneficial from the team cohesion aspect.

While there are some doubts in the case of negative relationship between the involvement of private sponsors in team activities and the athletes' trust in the head coach ($p < 0.05$), these results clearly indicate a dramatic negative correlation with respect to the coach's trust in athletes ($r = -0.46$). We may therefore hypothesise that with the increase in private sponsors' influence, the coach significantly loses his/her trust in the athletes' benevolence, integrity and predictability. We might also hypothesise that this happens due to the coach's loss of authority, which might be damaging in crucial moments on the sports field. The interference of this particular stakeholder in team matters is therefore potentially undesired, regardless of any financial benefits it might bring to the organisation as a whole.

A higher level of local community interference in team activities shows a negative correlation with the perception of team cohesion. This is especially evident in mid-level quality clubs transiting between amateur and professional levels where members of the local community often ensure that a certain number of athletes is given more playing time than they actually deserve according to their abilities, which might ruin the sense of cohesiveness among team members. On the other hand, the fact that the coaches seem to have a slightly better perception of the athletes' benevolence when local community members interfere in team activities might be explained by noting that in such mid- and lower-level quality clubs a bigger share of athletes plays for free, purely for recreational and social engagement reasons.

Although a matter for future studies, the finding that athletes have a somewhat better perceptions of the coach's benevolence, integrity and competence when national sport federations interfere in team activities may be explained by the fact that a certain number of the observed South-East European clubs does not compete at the highest quality level or stress the development function in their missions. National associations appoint coaches to these clubs, thus trying to take care of the proper development of young athletes. This seems to have a

positive effect on the three mentioned dimensions of athletes' trust in the coach, which partly justifies such a development strategy.

The correlations between media interference in team processes and the trust and cohesiveness of a team are obviously related to the general public's relationships with the same constructs. The general public indeed becomes acquainted with the team through the media. Therefore, the general public can only be involved in the team if the media shows an interest and informs the public about the sport club's activities. The results show that neither of them significantly correlates with any dimension of the measured trust relations, and at the same time the interference of both in team processes negatively correlates with the team's cohesiveness. The correlation when it comes to the media is somewhat stronger, which is in line with the assumption of a spillover effect from the media to the relationship between the general public and a sports team. This is also consistent with the thesis that fame might ruin the cohesion within team in post-transitional context. As the media and general public start to pay more attention to the team, not all team members attract the same level of interest. While this, according to these results, obviously does not undermine trust relationships within team, it might encourage certain other feelings, such as envy, which then impair the sense of cohesion within the team. This is certainly an interesting starting point for future studies, which should first confirm the causality and then explore through which channels the causal link between media interference and the perception of the cohesiveness of sports teams operates.

The involvement of post-transitional South-East European state authorities in team work is usually low in all teams. It is thus not surprising that state authorities' interfering does not correlate with any of the measured constructs of team dynamics, although it is somewhat surprising that the same can be said for the relationship between the influence of municipal authorities and the constructs of trust and cohesiveness. Yet, the municipal authorities have a slightly greater influence, especially in sports clubs on a lower quality level (Ivašković/Čater 2018), but this involvement obviously does not correlate with the team relations, either positively or negatively.

Overall, a comparison of these results with findings from previous studies (Junghagen 2018; Ivašković 2019) provides support for the hypothesis that sport club–stakeholders and sport team–organisational stakeholders relationships might operate on different bases and that the tools chosen for organisational development could be often in conflict with declared organisations' aims. Besides being a crucial starting point for enhancing the business results of an organisation, a team within a sports club is also a specific organisational part which demands special attention in the context of stakeholder management. Although the presented results demand additional verification and should thus be used only as a starting point for future studies on team sports, it seems that

in the post-transitional context particularly team cohesion might be endangered if there is less professional influence and more interference in team activities by volunteers, the local community, the media and the general public. Here it is therefore crucial to appropriately manage external stakeholders as part of successful balancing between attracting publicity to the club, which might boost the organisation's income, and simultaneously protecting the team dynamics from negative interference. At the same time, increasing the level of professionalism across the whole organisation might provide a more secure environment for ensuring team cohesion. On the other hand, professionalisation is also often linked to larger amounts of funding, for which the organisation needs publicity as leverage for increasing interest among potential sponsors (Ivašković et al. 2017). Yet, the latter, although beneficial for financial results, might harm the trust between the athletes and the coach in both directions. These findings therefore demonstrate the complexity of relationships in post-transitional sport clubs and stress the key issues of stakeholder management. Evidently, in this setting the overriding questions are which and to what extent should the external and internal stakeholders of the organisation be allowed to influence team matters, which is a key recommendation for further studies.

Practical Implications

The study offers empirical support foremost for altering post-transitional South-East European sport club managements given that the stakeholders–sport team relationship often operates on a different basis than the stakeholders–club relationship. Moreover, the results enable easier anticipation of potentially disruptive external influences. Managerial executives should therefore prepare appropriate regulative mechanisms in such a way that the club will not lose key stakeholders and at the same time protect the team from interference which might impair the team's cohesion and/or trust relations among team members. This is especially important in competitive sport teams where trust and cohesiveness are fragile due to the competitive-cooperative relationship by default and can easily be disrupted. Although they cooperate with teammates against sport opponents, athletes indeed compete among each other for the head coach's trust in order to be given more playing time on court. The crucial role in this context is still held by the head coach as they have the responsibility for monitoring the team dynamics, identifying potentially damaging interference, and informing the club's management in such cases. This study thus permits the easier anticipation of potentially harmful interference in team activities by head coaches as well.

Finally, the dilemma which stakeholders should be allowed to influence sport team may be placed in the context of tension between pursuing the sport results versus the goal of engaging local community into sport activities (Ivašković 2019). Inevitably, the nature of sport club operations creates a strong attachment

of the club to its environment. The latter should be even stronger in case of post-transitional South-East European sport clubs due to their nominal non-profitability. How much of that attachment is club management willing to sacrifice for better sport result depends on the mission statement of a given sport club, and should therefore be assessed on a club-by-club basis. Acknowledging the above, correlation analysis between the stakeholders' influence and team cohesion and trust in post-transitional South-East European countries' sport clubs may help determine how a given interest group positions itself in this dichotomy. This should also enable the avoidance of disruptive stakeholders that could lead to poor sport team performance.

Limitations and Recommendations

In this study we relied on the use of subjective data, which might raise some concerns about common method variance bias. Since the nature of measured constructs demanded the use of self-report measures, it was impossible to completely avoid that problem. However, we tried to reduce the latter with the additional analysis. Moreover, some authors (e.g. Alfes/Truss/Soane/Rees/Gatenby 2013) argue that self-report measures are actually the most valid for evaluation of human resource related constructs since individuals are best placed to report their own perception of HRM phenomena like perception of team cohesion and trust. The second concern arises from the fact that our data were collected at only one point of time and only correlation analyses were conducted, which limits the conclusions regarding the causal order in the examined relationships. However, interpretation of our results relies on the theory and results of previous studies. Finally, the third limitation of particular study is the fact that the data were only collected among basketball clubs in four post-transitional South-East European countries with a similar historical background, which shows the specifics of the observed area, but might limit generalisation of the results. We therefore recommend further research on team sport clubs over a longer period of time, in different environments, and especially from different sport branches.

Executive Summary

This study shows that the perception of team cohesion significantly correlates with the influences of several stakeholders. It has a positive relationship only with the influence of professional employees (non-athletes and athletes), and at the same time negatively correlates with the influence of: volunteers, the local community, the media, and the general public. On the other hand, the construct of trust among teammates has a positive relationship with the influence of professional athletes, while the athletes' trust in the head coach and the head coach's trust in the athletes are in a negative relationship with the influence of private sponsors. This negative correlation is particularly strong with the coach's

trust in the athletes, which also showed a positive correlation with volunteers' engagement in basketball team activities.

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