

Institute of Sport Economics and Sport Management

German Sport University Cologne

Head of Institute: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Christoph Breuer

**Strategic management in non-profit sport clubs: an analysis of perceived competition
from commercial sport providers and potentials for collaboration**

Doctoral thesis accepted for the degree

Doktorin der Sportwissenschaft (Dr. Sportwiss.)

by

Lea Rossi

from

Coesfeld

Cologne (2024)

First reviewer: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Christoph Breuer
Second reviewer: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Katie Misener
Chair of the doctoral committee: Univ.-Prof. Mario Thevis
Thesis defended on: February 1, 2024

Affidavits following §7 section 2 No. 4 and 5 of the doctoral regulations from the German Sport University Cologne, February 20th 2013:

Hereby I declare:

The work presented in this thesis is the original work of the author except where acknowledged in the text. This material has not been submitted either in whole or in part for a degree at this or any other institution. Those parts or single sentences, which have been taken verbatim from other sources, are identified as citations.

I further declare that I complied with the actual “guidelines of qualified scientific work” of the German Sport University Cologne.

Date, Signature

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my PhD advisor Univ.-Prof. Dr. Christoph Breuer for the opportunity to write my dissertation thesis at the Institute of Sport Economics and Sport Management and for opening the world of academia to me. Further, I would like to thank my former fellow colleagues at the institute, especially Svenja Feiler and Dr. Sören Dallmeyer, for many fruitful discussions – both research-related and of personal nature.

I would like to express my gratitude to my family and friends who have provided relentless support throughout this journey and endured many talks on the challenges of publishing a paper. I am deeply grateful for your patience in listening to things that sometimes seem incomprehensible. Last but not least, special thanks to Christoph for his unwavering love and support and for sticking by my side through the good and the bad.

Table of contents

List of abbreviations.....	iv
List of figures	v
1 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Research problem and overall contribution	1
1.2 Literature review.....	3
1.2.1 Relationship between NPOs and FPOs in the general non-profit context.....	3
1.2.2 Relationship between NPOs and FPOs in the sport context.....	5
1.2.3 Research gap.....	7
1.3 Theoretical background	7
1.4 Research questions	11
1.5 Outline and contribution of each chapter	13
1.6 References	16
2 Study 1: Determinants of non-profit sports clubs‘ perceived competition from commercial sports providers.....	25
3 Study 2: Organizational capacity building in non-profit sport clubs: exploring the role of competition as a capacity building stimulus	26
4 Study 3: Strategic collaboration in sports: Analyzing multiple cross-sectoral partnerships in non-profit boxing	27
5 Discussion and conclusion	28
5.1 Theoretical implications	30
5.2 Practical implications	32
5.3 Limitations and future research.....	33
5.4 References	35
Abstract	38
Kurzfassung.....	39

List of abbreviations

DOSB	German Olympic Sports Confederation
DSSV	Employers Association of German Fitness and Health Facilities
EMS	Electrical Muscle Stimulation
EUR	Euro
FPO	For-profit organization
M	Mean value
NPO	Non-profit organization
PEST	Political, economic, social, technological
PESTLE	Political, economic, social, technological, legal, environmental
RQ	Research question
SDR	Sport Development Report
STEEPLE	Social, technological, economic, environmental, political, legal, ethical
SWOT	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats

List of figures

Figure 1: Strategic sport management process (own adaptation, based on O'Brien et al., 2019, p. 4).....	9
--	---

1 Introduction

1.1 Research problem and overall contribution

Non-profit sport clubs (also referred to as community sport clubs or voluntary sport clubs) are important providers of sport participation opportunities for the overall population, e.g., in many European countries, Australia, and Canada (Breuer et al., 2015; Hallmann & Petry, 2013). They generally offer opportunities for low-cost sport participation for diverse population groups and present the entry point to the competitive sport system (Hallmann & Petry, 2013). In Germany, non-profit sport clubs are the major providers for sport-for-all programs with approximately 87,000 sport clubs and 27 million memberships (DOSB, 2022). They play an important role in society as besides offering sport programs to the public, they are assumed to fulfill societal functions such as health promotion, integration of minority groups, and the conveyance of a democratic lifestyle (Nagel et al., 2020).

However, non-profit sport clubs just like other sport organizations are affected by changes in the environment they are situated in (Breuer et al., 2015; Varmus et al., 2021). Changes in public policies such as new public management and scarcity of public funding (McSweeney & Safai, 2020) and societal developments such as a more sedentary lifestyle or increasing individualization (Borgers, Pilgaard et al., 2018) affect the operation of sport organizations. Moreover, economic fluctuations, technological developments (e.g., digitalization), and the introduction of new legislation such as a safe sport code or anti-bribery legislation (Gurgis & Kerr, 2021) present sport organizations with further tasks.

Another major development in the environment of sport organizations is the growing commercialization of the sport market and the corresponding changes in the supply and demand of sports. Commercial sport providers are characterized by offering services for active sport participation, acting organizationally independent, and employing paid staff (Schubert, 2008). The sport market landscape is becoming increasingly commercialized with a constant growth of the private fitness market and the entrance of new products such as digital network hubs (i.e., “Urban Sports Club” in Germany), online fitness services, and EMS studios (Laine & Vehmas, 2017). While the number of all commercial sport providers globally is not known, the size and growth of the fitness industry – as the biggest part of the commercial sport sector in many countries (Gratton & Taylor, 2000) – is known. The market of the global health club industry amounts to almost 97 billion USD, generated by more than 200,000 health and fitness clubs with around 174 million members (Gough, 2023). In

Germany alone there are 9,149 commercial fitness clubs with 10.3 million members. The number of members in German fitness centers has steadily increased until 2019, experienced a sharp decline during the COVID-19 pandemic, but has seen rising membership figures again in the past year (DSSV, 2023).

At the same time, the demand for sport programs is changing. While sport participation overall has increased (Breuer, 2004; Klostermann & Nagel, 2014), the pattern of participation has changed. Sport participation patterns are moving from traditional team sports and organized sport participation towards more flexible, individual, and informal sport activities (Borgers et al., 2015; Harris et al., 2017; Klostermann & Nagel, 2014). Potential causes for these changes in sport participation could be institutional changes in the form of increasing self-interest and decreasing legitimacy of traditional forms of sport participation (Borgers, Pilgaard et al., 2018) or societal trends such as individualization (Klostermann & Nagel, 2014).

The developments in the sport market in general and the growth of the commercial market in specific as well as the corresponding changes in sport participation patterns can present non-profit sport clubs with potential problems. For one, sport clubs traditionally have quite inflexible organizational structures which are defined by their voluntary memberships, organizational goals oriented on members' interests, democratic and participatory decision-making processes, voluntary engagement, and autonomy in their operations (Horch, 1994). This weakens their ability to react quickly to changes in their environment (Thiel & Meier, 2004). Moreover, sport clubs traditionally offer quite formal, long-term programs which require a high commitment by members (Borgers, Pilgaard et al., 2018). Thus, the changing sport participation patterns could lead to a decline in sport club memberships as individuals look for more flexible ways to practice sport, e.g., in private fitness clubs (Klostermann & Nagel, 2014). Empirical evidence on this substitution effect of commercial sport participation on participation in non-profit sport clubs has so far been inconsistent (Hallmann et al., 2015; Storm & Hansen, 2021). Moreover, the growth of commercial sport opportunities can pose a threat to non-profit sport clubs as it increases the competitive pressure on sport clubs in terms of members, coaches, and financial resources. While the detrimental effects of the growth of the commercial market and the changes in sport demand have been stated in both research (e.g., Seippel et al., 2023) and practice (e.g., Watzke, 2023), empirical evidence on the effects on sport clubs is still scarce. The present dissertation addresses this research gap and aims to identify in how far non-profit sport clubs are affected

by the growth of the commercial sport sector. More specifically, it is investigated in how far non-profit sport clubs act as strategic actors in the market by responding to the growth of the commercial market as an external market development.

By providing empirical evidence on how sport clubs respond to their changing environment, the present thesis adds to current sport management literature on the strategic management of non-profit sport organizations. Moreover, the findings provide insights for sport policy makers and sport managers as they shed light on the extent of competitive pressures for non-profit sport clubs and identify support measures for those non-profit sport clubs that experience competition from commercial sport providers. The findings consider the wide variety and diversity of non-profit sport clubs (Breuer et al., 2015; Hoyer et al., 2022), thus presenting no “one-size fits all” solution.

The dissertation thesis is structured by first providing a general introduction into the topic. This introduction contains a literature review on competition between non-profit and for-profit organizations both in the general non-profit context and specifically in the sports context, followed by an overview of the theoretical background of the dissertation. This leads to the research questions which this dissertation aims to answer. In the second part, the three studies are presented which were conducted to answer the research questions. The third part contains an overall discussion of the findings in the studies, as well as an overview of limitations and pathways for future research.

1.2 Literature review

1.2.1 Relationship between NPOs and FPOs in the general non-profit context

To shed light on the relationship between non-profit sport clubs and commercial sport providers, the literature review draws from both the general non-profit context and the sport context to get a richer background of the research conducted on this topic. Based on the definition of Salamon and Anheier (1992), non-profit organizations (NPOs) are characterized by being formal, private, non-profit distributing, self-governing, and voluntary organizations. In contrast, for-profit organizations (FPOs) do not fall under the non-distribution constraints and thus strive to maximize economic profit (Breuer & Wicker, 2011). Research in the general non-profit context has shown that FPOs have entered market sectors which have traditionally been served by NPOs, e.g., in elderly care, community care, and health services (Bode, 2006; Henriksen et al., 2012). Thus, there is a trend towards increasing commercialization and marketization in the non-profit sector (Bode, 2006;

Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Sandberg, 2013), which leads to an increasing competition between NPOs and FPOs (Kramer, 2000). Competition has been identified to occur in two ways (Tuckman, 1998): either NPOs enter a market where FPOs already exist (e.g., in the housing market; Ballard, 2003) or NPOs create a profitable product that attracts the interest of FPOs (e.g., in the social services market; Marwell & McInerney, 2005).

Research into the effects of competition between NPOs and FPOs has identified different ways that NPOs are affected by competition. In the housing development market, Ballard (2003) showed that while FPOs have more political influence, NPOs develop more accessible housing and are thus an important provider of social housing. This role of NPOs as low-price providers of services has also been shown in the hospital market. Keeler et al. (1999) showed that in areas with higher competition between FPOs and NPOs, prices for hospital services were lower than in areas with lower competition. However, this competitive price fight in general decreases the financial health of NPOs (Paarlberg et al., 2018; Prentice, 2016) and can lead to an exit of NPOs out of the market (Brown & Fan, 2022).

On the contrary, NPOs have been found to have a competitive advantage as they are perceived as more trustworthy compared to FPOs (Hirth, 1999). Hirth (1997) and Grabowski and Hirth (2003) showed in the context of hospitals and nursing homes, that competition between NPOs and FPOs can also have a positive effect on the overall market as the presence of NPOs serves as a signal of quality which leads to spillover effects to FPOs. FPOs are pressured to offer similar levels of quality to be able to compete. On the other hand, the presence of FPOs can affect the management of NPOs as competitive pressures lead to a diffusion of management practices and organizational setups as a signal of good practice (Leiter, 2013).

This diffusion of management practices and organizational setups has led to another phenomenon, the so-called “sector blurring” (Dees & Andersson, 2003). Societal and global changes have obscured the lines between NPOs and FPOs as they become increasingly alike (Bromley & Meyer, 2014). Indeed, much evidence has been collected on the increasing marketization of NPOs and the stronger share of commercial income that NPOs generate over time (Adams & Perlmutter, 1991; Maier et al., 2016; McKay et al., 2015). Some research has found a negative relationship between the increase in commercial revenue and the extent of donations of NPOs, thus providing evidence for a crowd out effect (Guo, 2006; Hung, 2021). The increasing marketization of NPOs and the resulting blurring of sectors has led to a new form of organizations, so-called “hybrid organizations” (Carré et al., 2021;

Haigh et al., 2015). Hybrid organizations follow similar social or environmental missions as NPOs but resemble FPOs in their revenue structures and income generation (Haigh et al., 2015).

Overall, research in the general non-profit context has shown that there is a trend towards marketization which increases competition between NPOs and FPOs. While this can have negative effects on NPOs in terms of financial health, there are also positive effects such as a quality spillover in the market and diffusion of effective management practices. While research in the general non-profit context on the topic of NPO-FPO competition is quite advanced, insights are missing in the specific field of non-profit sports.

1.2.2 Relationship between NPOs and FPOs in the sport context

Studies on the relationship between NPOs and FPOs in the sport context have so far been scarce. While the phenomenon of sector blurring has been stated to also be present in the sport context (Misener & Misener, 2017), there has been little research dedicated to this phenomenon, especially with the focus of sector blurring between non-profit sport clubs and commercial sport providers. One line of research has investigated the effects of competition from commercial sport providers on non-profit sports clubs based on theoretical considerations and first empirical analysis. This line of research has concluded that competition has increased in the non-profit sport sector (Gratton & Taylor, 2000; Jütting & Marker, 2011). As reasons for this development, Gratton and Taylor (2000) identified an unsatisfied market demand, a large heterogeneity in market demand, and an increase in available income in the general population. Based on these theoretical considerations, the authors argued that competition in the sport context is most likely to occur in the health and fitness sector (Gratton & Taylor, 2000; Jütting & Marker, 2011).

First empirical evidence on the effects of competition on non-profit sport clubs showed that competition from commercial sport providers had no effect on the pricing of non-profit sport clubs in terms of membership fees (Feiler et al., 2019). Moreover, the extent of perceived competition from commercial sport providers, compared to other organizational problems, such as recruitment and retention of members and volunteers, has been found to be rather low (Wicker et al., 2015). In the Belgian context, Vos and Scheerder (2014) uncovered that non-profit sport clubs perceiving higher competitive pressure from other organizations were more likely to cooperate with for-profit fitness and health clubs. These relationships with commercial sport providers correlate in turn with organizational problems such as the availability of sport facilities (Wicker et al., 2013).

A second line of research has investigated the relationship between NPOs and FPOs in the sport context from an individual perspective by exploring the determinants of individual sport participation in the different settings (Borgers, Pilgaard et al., 2018; Deelen et al., 2018; Hallmann et al., 2015). Hallmann et al. (2015) provided first insights by investigating sport participation determinants in non-profit sports clubs, commercial providers, and state-run programs in the German city of Munich. The authors uncovered that participants in commercial settings were mostly female, with higher education, working longer hours and without disabilities. In contrast, typical participants in non-profit sports clubs were predominantly young men, with fewer working hours and less time spent on care work, living in bigger households and without migration background. Other studies showed additionally that participation in organized and non-organized settings differ based on sport participation during childhood (Borgers, Pilgaard et al., 2018) and motives for sport participation (Deelen et al., 2018). Thieme (2015) concluded based on a review of studies on sport participation behavior of children and adolescents that commercial sport providers are an attractive setting for adolescents who are not traditionally members of non-profit sport clubs, i.e., adolescents with a migration background.

While previous research has investigated the determinants of participation in different organizational settings, there is little evidence on how participation in organizational settings is interrelated. Downward and Rasciute (2010) provided the first insights into the interrelationship between general sport participation and participation in other leisure activities and uncovered a substitution effect. Thus, the decision to participate in sports is a trade-off between sports and other leisure activities. In the context of sports in different organizational settings, Borgers, Vanreusel et al. (2018) tracked individuals' participation in club-organized sports, non-club organized sports and no sports over a period of 33 years and investigated in how far participation (respectively non-participation) changed or stayed the same. In this context, no spill-over effects between club-organized and non-club organized sports activities were detected. In line with this, Hallmann et al. (2015) found evidence for a substitution effect between commercial and non-profit sport providers as the number of commercial programs available had a significant negative effect on participation in non-profit sports clubs. However, the authors also found a complementary effect as different target groups were reached in non-profit sport clubs and commercial sport providers (Hallmann et al., 2015). In contrast, Storm and Hansen (2021) could find no significant effect of the presence of non-profit fitness centers on the number of commercial fitness centers in the Danish context. The authors interpreted this finding as a supplementary effect, meaning

that the different types of sport providers complement each other in their provision of sport programs and thus contribute to overall sport participation (Storm & Hansen, 2021). While these findings provide first insights in the effects of the presence of commercial sport providers on sport participation in non-profit sport clubs, they highlight the inconsistencies in the findings. Moreover, the studies lack data on the organizational structures of the sport settings and thus provide no insights on the effects of competition on non-profit sport clubs overall.

1.2.3 Research gap

The literature review has shown that while the relationship between NPOs and FPOs has been investigated for several years in the general non-profit context, research in the sport context is young and still emerging. Previous studies have relied either on descriptive data and theoretical argumentation or empirical analysis of individual sport participation. First empirical evidence has been collected on the effects of competition between non-profit sport clubs and commercial sport providers, however these effects were not the central focus of the research conducted so far. There is a lack of research on the effects of the changes in the sport market on non-profit sport clubs from an organizational level, meaning in how far the growth of the commercial sector affects non-profit sport clubs in their structures and developments. The present dissertation aims to contribute to closing this research gap by (1) providing empirical analyses on the organizational level of non-profit sport clubs, (2) offering theoretical arguments on the effects of the growth of the commercial market on non-profit sport clubs from a strategic management perspective, and (3) using longitudinal data to identify causal effects of competition on the development of non-profit sport clubs.

1.3 Theoretical background

As the literature review has shown, the environment that non-profit sport clubs are operating in is changing and these changes can affect the development of non-profit sport clubs. Sport club development has been investigated in the past based on sociological and economic approaches (Breuer et al., 2015). Resource dependency theory and institutional theory have been major theoretical approaches in explaining the relationship between non-profit sport clubs and their environment (Vos, 2012). The present dissertation employs a strategic management perspective to conceptualize the effects of the growing commercial market on non-profit sport clubs as it allows to research the effects in-depth in different steps of the strategic management process. Moreover, as competition in the sport market is assumed to

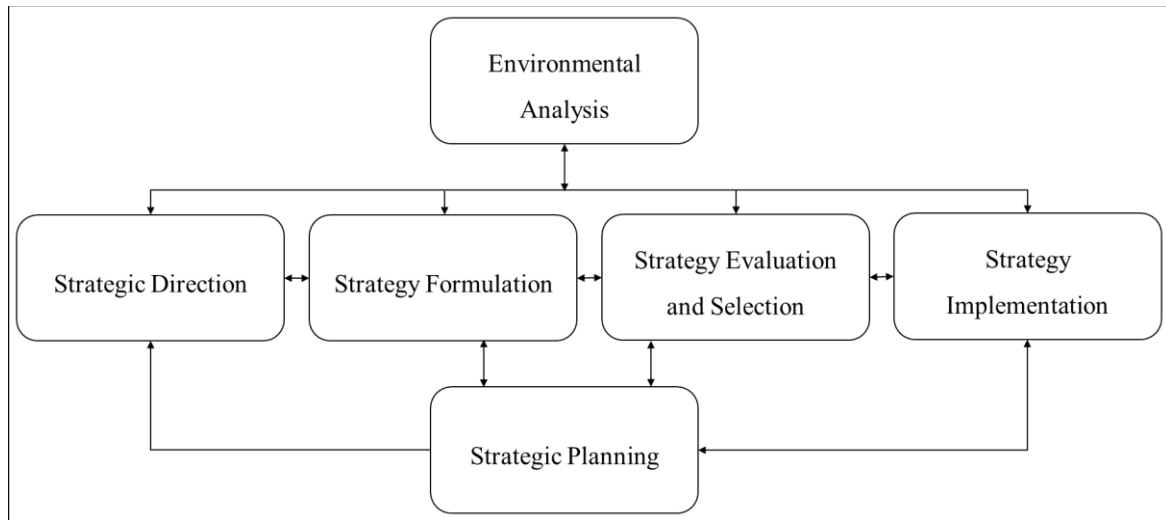
be growing, the application of strategic management principles is getting increasingly important for sport organizations (Kim et al., 2020).

There exist various definitions of strategic management. Most definitions are based on an understanding that strategic management is a long-run perspective that is aimed at reaching the company's mission and ensuring the company's success by creating a competitive advantage (O'Brien et al., 2019; Varmus et al., 2021). Based on a systematic review, Nag et al. (2007) defined strategic management as "the major intended and emergent initiatives taken by general managers on behalf of owners, involving utilization of resources, to enhance the performance of firms in their external environments" (Nag et al., 2007, p. 944). In the sport context, Harrison and St. John (2014) proposed the following definition of strategic management: "Strategic management is the process through which organizations analyze and learn from their internal and external environments, establish strategic direction, create strategies that are intended to help achieve established goals, and execute those strategies, all in an effort to satisfy key organizational stakeholders" (Harrison & St. John, 2014, p. 4). What these definitions have in common – and which sets the theoretical base for this dissertation – are the following principles: Strategic management is understood as a (1) deliberate process that is undertaken based on (2) an evaluation of the internal and external environment to address changes and (3) create strategies to (4) ensure the organization's success.

These principles are mirrored in the strategic management process. This process consists of an environmental analysis followed by the identification of a strategic direction, strategy formulation, strategy evaluation and selection and finally strategy implementation. As strategic management is not a linear but rather an iterative process, strategy implementation is translated into strategic planning which then guides the way for future strategic direction. Moreover, all steps of the strategic management process are interconnected (see Figure 1; O'Brien et al., 2019).

Figure 1

Strategic sport management process (own adaptation, based on O'Brien et al., 2019, p. 4)



The first step of an environmental analysis is directed both at the external and internal environment. As the dissertation aims to investigate non-profit sport clubs' response to changes in their external environment (i.e., the growth of the commercial market), the following description focuses on the analysis of the external environment. The external environment can be distinguished in the general and task environment (Slack et al., 2021). The general environment refers to broad-level factors that affect all organizations in a given context. A common approach to analyzing the external environment is based on the STEEPLE approach (formerly characterized as PEST or PESTLE). Thereby, the general environment is analyzed in terms of sociocultural, technological, economic, ecological/environmental, political, legal, and ethical developments (O'Brien et al., 2019). The results of this analysis can then be transferred into a SWOT-analysis in the form of opportunities and threats to the organization. In contrast to the general environment, the task environment refers to the organization-specific stakeholders (Slack et al., 2021). A common approach to analyze the task environment and thereby identify key stakeholders is the application of Porter's five forces or a stakeholder analysis (O'Brien et al., 2019).

Non-profit sport clubs can be affected by changes both in their general and task environment. In the general environment, sociocultural developments such as changes in sport participation preferences or global trends such as individualization affect sport clubs as they pose a threat to their member base or create a pressure to adapt their sport programs (Koski, 2012). In the task environment, the entrance of new competitors, e.g., in the form of new commercial sport programs, can increase the competitive pressure on sport clubs (Gratton &

Taylor, 2000). As the environment that sport clubs operate in is dynamic and undergoing changes (Koski, 2012), an iterative analysis of the environment is necessary to keep track of changes and be able to react to it in time.

Based on the analysis and evaluation of the environment, organizations need to identify their strategic direction. This refers to setting the goals of the organization in form of mission and vision statements (O'Brien et al., 2019). In the context of sport clubs, the mission of clubs is mostly defined in club statutes. In contrast to commercial sport providers, non-profit sport clubs do not strive for economic profit but rather aim for social profit in form of providing low-barrier sport opportunities (Vos, 2012). Moreover, non-profit sport clubs are oriented on their members interests as a guiding principle for their decision-making (Horch, 1994).

Once the strategic direction has been set, organizations need to formulate strategies to achieve their goals. These strategies can be emergent or deliberate (Slack et al., 2021). While emergent strategies occur but are not necessarily intended, deliberate strategies are purposely planned and executed. In an early conceptual work on strategy in non-profit sports, Thibault et al. (1993) identified six imperatives that need to be considered in developing strategy in the non-profit context, namely fundability, size of client base, volunteer appeal, support group appeal, equipment costs, and affiliation fees. These imperatives were summarized in the two factors “program attractiveness” and “competitive position”, resulting in a 2x2 matrix with four potential strategies that national sport organizations follow (Thibault et al., 1993, 1994). Other club strategies that have been identified by previous research are diversification strategies (Zimmer et al., 2018), membership growth strategies (Morrison & Misener, 2022), and Porter's generic business strategies, namely cost leadership, differentiation, and focus (Wicker et al., 2015).

As organizations can choose from a variety of strategies to reach their goals, they need to evaluate the different strategic approaches and choose the strategy that best fits with their organizational structures (Slack et al., 2021), their organizational capacities (Corthouts et al., 2023), and which promises most success in achieving a competitive advantage (O'Brien et al., 2019). In the context of non-profit sport clubs, the existing organizational structures and more importantly the organizational capacities need to be considered in choosing the strategy as sport clubs mainly rely on volunteers to implement the strategy who need to serve as a strategic champion driving along the strategic planning process (Morrison & Misener, 2021).

The final step consists of implementing the strategy, meaning setting the strategy in practice. Depending on the scope of the strategy, this implementation process leads to organizational change as structures and processes need to be adapted (O'Brien et al., 2019). In the context of non-profit sport clubs, organizational change can mean adaption of programs and services but also changes in the resources and capacities, e.g., substituting voluntary work with paid work (Breuer et al., 2012). However, previous research has also identified barriers to change as non-profit sport clubs are reluctant to change based on their member-orientation and shared decision-making structures (Thiel & Meier, 2004). When organizational change is occurring, it can lead to new internal and external assessments of the environment, which in turn requires the strategic direction to be flexible and if necessary to be adapted (Varmus et al., 2021).

The strategic management process guides the investigation in the present dissertation thesis as it provides a framework for why and how the growth of commercial sport market should affect non-profit sport clubs. However, the application of this process is based on the assumption that non-profit sport clubs are strategic actors in the market that monitor their environment and react strategically to changes in their environment. Previous research on the role of strategic management in non-profit sport clubs has so far been inconclusive. While there are studies identifying strategic management choices in the non-profit sport context (Corthouts et al., 2023; Morrison & Misener, 2021, 2022), other studies pointed out the limited role of the environment in the development of non-profit sport clubs (Cunningham & Ashley, 2001; Thiel & Meier, 2004). Thus, it is not clear if non-profit sport clubs act strategically in response to environmental developments. The present dissertation therefore adds to the discussion on strategic management in non-profit sports as it investigates the effect of one environmental development, namely the growth of the commercial sport market.

1.4 Research questions

The overall research question that the present dissertation thesis aims to answer is therefore:

RQ 1: Do non-profit sport clubs act strategically in response to the growth of the commercial sport market?

This research question is further broken down in sub-questions, aiming at different steps of the strategic management process as described in the theoretical framework. The first question aims at the environmental analysis as a precondition for the strategic management process. In order to react strategically to the growth of the commercial market, non-profit

sport clubs need to be aware of this development and identify it as a potential threat to their organization. While previous research has assumed the increase in competitive pressure on non-profit sport clubs (Gratton & Taylor, 2000; Jütting & Marker, 2011), the present dissertation provides empirical evidence on the extent of competitive pressure from the perspective of non-profit sport clubs by investigating the question:

RQ 1.1: In how far do non-profit sport clubs perceive competition from commercial sport providers as a problem?

Based on the environmental analysis, non-profit sport clubs that are perceiving the growth of the commercial sport market as a problem are assumed to take strategic action. The strategic response to the competitive threat could be manifold, addressing either the setup of sport programs such as in the form of diversification strategies (Zimmer et al., 2018) and membership growth strategies (Morrison & Misener, 2022) or addressing the setup of organizational operations, for example in the form of business strategies (Wicker et al., 2015). While previous research has identified these strategic approaches in non-profit sports clubs, there is a lack of evidence on the strategic response of non-profit sport clubs to the competitive pressure from commercial sport providers. Thus, the present dissertation thesis poses the following question:

RQ 1.2: How do non-profit sport clubs respond strategically to perceived competition from commercial sport providers?

Apart from competing for members and resources, non-profit sport clubs and commercial sport providers can also act as partners to join forces and address complexities in their environments together. In terms of the strategic management process, the entrance of such a partnership would present another strategic option to respond to environmental uncertainties and changes. While much research has investigated inter-organizational relationships of non-profit sport clubs (for an overview, see Babiak et al., 2018; Misener et al., 2022), there is a dearth of research into the specificities of partnerships between non-profit sport clubs and commercial sport providers. Moreover, there is a lack of evidence in how far the decision to enter such a partnership can be characterized as a strategic one and in how far non-profit sport clubs can benefit from such a partnership. The present dissertation thesis therefore aims to answer the third question:

RQ 1.3: How do non-profit sport clubs use cross-sectoral partnerships with commercial sport providers strategically?

1.5 Outline and contribution of each chapter

The overall research question and the corresponding sub-questions of the dissertation were answered in three separate studies. All studies have been published in international sport management journals (*Sport Management Review*, *European Sport Management Quarterly*, *Managing Sport and Leisure*).

The first study presented in chapter 2 is entitled “Determinants of non-profit sports clubs’ perceived competition from commercial sports providers” and addresses the first sub-question of the dissertation. More explicitly, the aim of the study was to uncover in how far non-profit sport clubs are aware of competition from commercial sport providers and identify which clubs are more likely to be affected by it. Potential determinants of competition were identified based on a strategic group map analysis (Porter, 1980). To answer the research question, a mixed-methods study was conducted with a dominant-status sequential design. In a first step, quantitative data from the sixth wave of the Sport Development Report (SDR) were used to estimate the share of non-profit sport clubs perceiving competition from commercial sport providers as a problem and identify determinants of competition. A sample of $n=4,456$ non-profit sport clubs in Germany was drawn in which 35.3% of clubs indicated competition from commercial sport providers to be some form of problem. The results of the logistic regression analysis highlighted key characteristics of non-profit sport clubs that increased the likelihood of perceiving competition from commercial sport providers as a problem. In a second step, a qualitative study was conducted to explore the reasons why non-profit sport clubs perceive competition from commercial sport providers as a problem and which countermeasures they have taken. Based on the results of the regression analysis, $n=6$ non-profit sport clubs were identified that represented the characteristics of clubs with a higher likelihood of perceiving competition as a problem. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with one official per club. The interviews highlighted that the reasons for perceived competition stemmed from similar sports programs, financial aspects, club characteristics and market characteristics. However, the interview partners also confirmed the results of the quantitative study that the overall competitive pressure from commercial sport providers on non-profit sport clubs is perceived to be rather low. The study contributes to the overall dissertation by (1) providing empirical evidence on the extent of the competitive pressure from commercial sport providers on non-profit sport clubs, (2) identifying reasons for competition, and (3) uncovering characteristics of non-profit sport clubs that increase the likelihood of perceiving competition from commercial sport providers as a problem.

Following the strategic management process and addressing the second sub-question, the second study in chapter 3 entitled “Organizational capacity building in non-profit sport clubs: exploring the role of competition as a capacity building stimulus” explored in how far non-profit sport clubs take strategic action to counteract competition. More specifically, the study aimed to uncover how competition from other sport organizations (other non-profit sport clubs, commercial sport providers) serves as a stimulus for non-profit sport clubs to build capacity. Non-profit sport clubs rely on organizational capacity (i.e., human resource capacity, financial capacity, structural capacity; Hall et al., 2003) to offer their sport programs and services (Misener & Doherty, 2009). Based on the capacity building process model by Millar and Doherty (2016), it was assumed that non-profit sport clubs that are faced with competition from other sport clubs or commercial sport providers take strategic action by investing in their organizational capacity and thus starting the capacity building process. Based on data from five waves of the SDR (survey years between 2011 and 2020), the impact of perceived competition on organizational capacities was estimated using linear and logistic regression analysis on $n=1,366$ to $n=5,315$ observations. As competition was assumed to act as a stimulus which initiates the capacity building process, the empirical analysis contained a four-year lag between the independent variable (competition) and dependent variables (organizational capacities). The findings showed that non-profit sport clubs that perceived competition from commercial sport providers as a problem had higher numbers of paid staff, lower numbers of volunteers, and a lower likelihood of breaking even four years later. The study contributes to the present dissertation by highlighting the strategic response that non-profit sport clubs take once they have identified competition from commercial sport providers as a problem in their environmental analysis.

One strategic response that was not investigated in the second study is the formation of partnerships between non-profit sport clubs and commercial sport providers as a response to environmental uncertainties and as a measure to decrease competitive pressures. The third study in chapter 4 thus addresses the third sub-question of the dissertation, more specifically in how far cross-sectoral partnerships with commercial sport providers can present a strategic option for non-profit sport clubs. Based on qualitative data from a case study of one non-profit sport club that entertained several partnerships with commercial sport providers, the study aimed to uncover why and how partnerships were formed, which outcomes were achieved, and which management skills were needed to keep the partnerships effective and alive. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with club officials and officials of one commercial partner organization ($n=7$), documents from social media channels,

homepages, and local newspaper articles and an in-person survey of the athletes involved in the competition team of the non-profit sport club ($n=19$). The qualitative data were analyzed along the cross-sector collaborations framework by Bryson et al. (2006) using qualitative content analysis. The insights of the case study highlighted that the reasons for entering the partnerships were opportunistic based on personal acquaintances rather than a strategic response to environmental dynamics. Moreover, the case study illustrated challenges in forming stable partnerships between non-profit sport clubs and commercial sport providers as formal contractual arrangements proved ineffective and partnerships were based mostly on personal relationships and trust. This related also to the required management skills which referred to the formulation of shared goals, communication, and leadership. The study contributes to the dissertation by illustrating in how far non-profit sport clubs can use partnerships with commercial sport providers as a strategic response. At the same time, the study also highlights how non-profit sport clubs do not enter these partnerships strategically as the partnerships were not formed based on an environmental analysis. Thus, the study also identifies opportunities for improving the management of non-profit sport clubs.

1.6 References

- Adams, C., & Perlmutter, F. (1991). Commercial Venturing and the Transformation of America's Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 20(1), 25-38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089976409102000104>
- Babiak, K., Thibault, L., & Willem, A. (2018). Mapping Research on Interorganizational Relationships in Sport Management: Current Landscapes and Future Research Prospects. *Journal of Sport Management*, 32(3), 272-294. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2017-0099>
- Ballard, M. J. (2003). Profiting from Poverty: The Competition between For-Profit and Nonprofit Developers for Low-Income Housing Tax Credits. *Hastings Law Journal*, 55(1), 211-244.
- Bode, I. (2006). Co-governance within networks and the non-profit – for-profit divide. *Public Management Review*, 8(4), 551-566. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719030601022932>
- Borgers, J., Pilgaard, M., Vanreusel, B., & Scheerder, J. (2018). Can we consider changes in sports participation as institutional change? A conceptual framework. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 53(1), 84-100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690216639598>
- Borgers, J., Thibaut, E., Vandermeerschen, H., Vanreusel, B., Vos, S., & Scheerder, J. (2015). Sports participation styles revisited: A time-trend study in Belgium from the 1970s to the 2000s. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 50(1), 45-63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690212470823>
- Borgers, J., Vanreusel, B., Lefevre, J., & Scheerder, J. (2018). Involvement in non-club organized sport: organizational patterns of sport participation from a longitudinal life course perspective. *European Journal for Sport and Society*, 15(1), 58-77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16138171.2018.1438079>
- Breuer, C. (2004). Dynamics of Life-Span Demand for Sport. *Sport and Society*, 1(1), 50-72. <https://doi.org/10.1515/sug-2004-0105>
- Breuer, C., Hoekman, R., Nagel, S., & van der Werff, H. (2015). *Sport clubs in Europe: A Cross-National Comparative Perspective*. Springer Cham.

- Breuer, C., & Wicker, P. (2011). For-Profit Organizations. In L. E. Swayne & M. Dodds (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Sports Management and Marketing (Vol.2)* (pp. 554-555). Sage.
- Breuer, C., Wicker, P., & von Hanau, T. (2012). Consequences of the decrease in volunteers among German sports clubs: is there a substitute for voluntary work? *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 4(2), 173-186. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2012.656681>
- Bromley, P., & Meyer, J. W. (2014). "They Are All Organizations": The Cultural Roots of Blurring Between the Nonprofit, Business, and Government Sectors. *Administration & Society*, 49(7), 939-966. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399714548268>
- Brown, E., & Fan, C. Q. (2022). Lower Prices for Customers, and Less Charity Care? The Prospects for Mixed-Market Competition With Nonprofit and Hybrid Firms. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, Online First. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08997640221131050>
- Bryson, J. M., Crosby, B. C., & Middleton Stone, M. (2006). The Design and Implementation of Cross-Sector Collaborations: Propositions from the Literature. *Public Administration Review*, 66(s1), 44-55. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00665.x>
- Carré, B., Suykens, B., & Verschuere, B. (2021). Balancing Legitimacy in a Context of Nonprofit-Business Hybridity: The Case of the Flemish Wellbeing and Social Economy Sector. *Voluntas*, 32, 944-963. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-021-00320-2>
- Corthouts, J., van der Roest, J.-W., Winand, M., Borgers, J., Claes, E., Vos, S., & Scheerder, J. (2023). A longitudinal analysis of organisational capacity determinants of the perceived need for change, adoption of 'light' sports initiatives and organisational growth in voluntary sports clubs. *European Journal for Sport and Society*, Online First. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16138171.2023.2182496>
- Cunningham, G. B., & Ashley, F. B. (2001). Isomorphism in NCAA Athletic Departments: The Use of Competing Theories and Advancement of Theory. *Sport Management Review*, 4(1), 47-63. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1441-3523\(01\)70069-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1441-3523(01)70069-1)

- Deelen, I., Ettema, D., & Kamphuis, C. B. M. (2018). Sports participation in sport clubs, gyms or public spaces: How users of different sports settings differ in their motivations, goals, and sports frequency. *PLoS ONE*, 13(10), e0205198. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0205198>
- Dees, J. G., & Anderson, B. B. (2003). Sector-bending: Blurring lines between nonprofit and for-profit. *Society*, 40, 16-27. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-003-1014-z>
- Downward, P., & Rasciute, S. (2010). The Relative Demands for Sports and Leisure in England. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 10(2), 189-214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184740903552037>
- DOSB (2022). *Bestandserhebung 2022*. DOSB. https://cdn.dosb.de/user_upload/www.dosb.de/uber_uns/Bestandserhebung/BE-Heft_2022.pdf
- DSSV (2023). *Eckdaten '23 der deutschen Fitnesswirtschaft*. DSSV. <https://www.dssv.de/eckdaten2023/>
- Eikenberry, A. M., & Kluver, J. D. (2004). The Marketization of the Nonprofit Sector: Civil Society at Risk? *Public Administration Review*, 64(2), 132-140. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2004.00355.x>
- Feiler, S., Wicker, P., & Breuer, C. (2019). Nonprofit Pricing: Determinants of Membership Fee Levels in Nonprofit Sports Clubs in Germany. *International Journal of Sport Finance*, 14(4), 262-277. doi.org/10.32731/IJSF/144.112019.06
- Gough, C. (2023). *Health & fitness clubs – statistics & facts*. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/topics/1141/health-and-fitness-clubs/#topicOverview>
- Grabowski, D. C., & Hirth, R. A. (2003). Competitive spillovers across non-profit and for-profit nursing homes. *Journal of Health Economics*, 22(1), 1-22. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0167-6296\(02\)00093-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0167-6296(02)00093-0)
- Gratton, C., & Taylor, P. (2000). *Economics of sport and recreation*. Spon Press.
- Guo, B. (2006). Charity for Profit? Exploring Factors Associated with the Commercialization of Human Service Nonprofits. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 35(1), 123-138. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764005282482>

- Gurgis, J. J., & Kerr, G. A. (2021). Sport Administrators' Perspectives on Advancing Safe Sport. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*, 3, 630071. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2021.630071>
- Haigh, N., Walker, J., Bacq, S., & Kickul, J. (2015). Hybrid Organizations: Origins, Strategies, Impacts, and Implications. *California Management Review*, 57(3), 5-12. <https://doi.org/10.1525/cmr.2015.57.3.5>
- Hall, M., Andrukow, A., Barr, C., Brock, K., de Wit, M., Embuldeniya, D., Jolin, L., Lasby, D., Lévesque, B., Malinsky, E., Stowe, S., & Vaillancourt, Y. (2003). *The Capacity to Serve: A Qualitative Study of the Challenges Facing Canada's Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations*. Canadian Centre for Philanthropy.
- Hallmann, K., Feiler, S., & Breuer, C. (2015). Design and delivery of sport for all programmes: should it be market, non-profit, or state-run? *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 7(4), 565-585. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2015.1088051>
- Hallmann, K., & Petry, K. (2013). *Comparative Sport Development: Systems, Participation and Public Policy*. Springer.
- Harris, S., Nichols, G., & Taylor, M. (2017). Bowling even more alone: trends towards individual participation in sport. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 17(3), 290-311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2017.1282971>
- Harrison, J. S., & St. John, C. H. (2014). *Foundations in Strategic Management* (2nd ed.). South-Western, Cengage Learning.
- Henriksen, L. S., Smith, S. R., & Zimmer, A. (2012). At the Eve of Convergence? Transformations of Social Service Provision in Denmark, Germany, and the United States. *Voluntas*, 23, 458-501. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-011-9221-5>
- Hirth, R. A. (1997). Competition Between For-Profit and Nonprofit Health Care Providers: Can It Help Achieve Social Goals? *Medical Care Research and Review*, 54(4), 414-438. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107755879705400402>
- Hirth, R. A. (1999). Consumer information and competition between nonprofit and for-profit nursing homes. *Journal of Health Economics*, 18(2), 219-240. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0167-6296\(98\)00035-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0167-6296(98)00035-6)

- Hung, C. (2021). Decomposing the Effect of Commercialization on Nonprofit Donations. *Voluntas*, 32, 448-459. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-020-00246-1>
- Horch, H.-D. (1994). On the socio-economics of voluntary organisations. *Voluntas*, 5, 219-230. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02353987>
- Hoye, R., Misener, K., & Naraine, M. L. (2022). *Sport management: principles and applications* (6th ed.). Routledge.
- Jütting, D. H., & Marker, U. (2011). Sportvereine in Deutschland – aktuelle Entwicklungen und Herausforderungen in einer turbulenten Umwelt [Sport clubs in Germany – current trends and challenges in a turbulent environment]. In A. Zimmer (Ed.), *Jenseits von Bier und Tulpen: Sport, Kultur und Soziales in den Niederlanden und Deutschland [Beyond beer and tulips: Sports, culture, and social in the Netherlands and Germany]* (pp. 183-202). Waxmann.
- Keeler, E. B., Melnick, G., & Zwanziger, J. (1999). The changing effects of competition on non-profit and for-profit hospital pricing behavior. *Journal of Health Economics*, 18(1), 69-86. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0167-6296\(98\)00036-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0167-6296(98)00036-8)
- Kim, E., Qian, T. Y., & Zhang, J. J. (2020). Strategic visionary management as enabler of commercial sport management. In A. Goslin, D. A. Kluka, R. López de d'Amico, & K. Danylchuk (Eds.), *Managing Sport Across Borders* (pp. 41-63). Routledge.
- Klostermann, C., & Nagel, S. (2014). Changes in German sport participation: Historical trends in individual sports. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 49(5), 609-634. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690212464699>
- Koski, P. (2012). Finnish sports clubs as a mirror of society. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 4(2), 257-275. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2012.656852>
- Kramer, R. M. (2000). A Third Sector in the Third Millenium? *Voluntas*, 11(1), 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1008914531485>
- Laine, A., & Vehmas, H. (2017). *The Private Sport Sector in Europe: A Cross-National Comparative Perspective*. Springer Cham.
- Leiter, J. (2013). An Industry Fields Approach to Isomorphism Involving Australian Nonprofit Organizations. *Voluntas*, 24, 1037-1070. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-012-9298-5>

- Maier, F., Meyer, M., & Steinbereithner, M. (2016). Nonprofit Organizations Becoming Business-Like: A Systematic Review. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 45(1), 66-86. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764014561796>
- Marwell, N. P., & McInerney, P.-B. (2005). The Nonprofit/For-Profit Continuum: Theorizing the Dynamics of Mixed-Form Markets. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 34(1), 7-28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764004269739>
- McKay, S., Moro, D., Teasdale, S., & Clifford, D. (2015). The Marketisation of Charities in England and Wales. *Voluntas*, 26, 336-354. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-013-9417-y>
- McSweeney, M., & Safai, P. (2020). Innovating Canadian sport policy: towards new public management and public entrepreneurship? *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 12(3), 405-421. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2020.1775678>
- Millar, P., & Doherty, A. (2016). Capacity building in nonprofit sport organizations: Development of a process model. *Sport Management Review*, 19(4), 365-377. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2016.01.002>
- Misener, K., Babiak, K., Jones, G., & Lindsey, I. (2022). Great Expectations: A Critical Review of Interorganizational Relationships in Amateur Sport. *Journal of Sport Management*, 36(3), 277-288. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2021-0240>
- Misener, K., & Doherty, A. (2009). A Case Study of Organizational Capacity in Nonprofit Community Sport. *Journal of Sport Management*, 23(4), 457-482. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.23.4.457>
- Misener, K., & Misener, L. (2017). Grey is the New Black: Advancing Understanding of New Organizational Forms and Blurring Sector Boundaries in Sport Management. *Journal of Sport Management*, 31(2), 125-132. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2017-0030>
- Morrison, K. A., & Misener, K. (2021). Exploring the conditions for strategic planning in nonprofit community sport. *Sport Management Review*, 24(5), 747-769. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14413523.2021.1906054>
- Morrison, K. A., & Misener, K. (2022). A Framework of Strategic Approaches to Membership Growth in Nonprofit Community Sport. *Journal of Sport Management*, 36(5), 420-432. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2021-0066>

- Nag, R., Hambrick, D. C., & Chen, M.-J. (2007). What is strategic management, really? Inductive derivation of a consensus definition of the field. *Strategic Management Journal*, 28(9), 935-955. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.615>
- Nagel, S., Elmoose-Østerlund, K., Ibsen, B., & Scheerder J. (2020). *Functions of Sports Clubs in European Societies: A Cross-National Comparative Study*. Springer Cham.
- O'Brien, D., Parent, M. M., Ferkins, L., & Gowthorp, L. (2019). *Strategic Management in Sport*. Routledge.
- Paarlberg, L. E., An, S.-H., Nesbit, R., Christensen, R. K., & Bullock, J. (2018). A Field Too Crowded? How Measures of Market Structure Shape Nonprofit Fiscal Health. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 47(3), 453-473. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764018760398>
- Porter, M. (1980). *Competitive Strategy: Techniques for Analyzing Industries and Competitors*. Free Press.
- Prentice, C. R. (2016). Understanding Nonprofit Financial Health: Exploring the Effects of Organizational and Environmental Variables. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 45(5), 888-909. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764015601243>
- Salamon, L. S., & Anheier, H. K. (1992). In search of the non-profit sector. I: The question of definitions. *Voluntas*, 3, 125-151. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01397770>
- Sandberg, B. (2013). The Road to Market. *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, 35(1), 28-45. <https://doi.org/10.2753/ATP1084-1806350103>
- Schubert, M. (2008). Kommerzielle Sportanbieter. In K. Weis & R. Gugutzer (Eds.), *Handbuch Sportsoziologie* (pp. 143-151). Hofmann Verlag.
- Seippel, O., Breuer, C., Elmoose-Østerlund, K., Feiler, S., Perényi, S., Piatkowska, M., & Scheerder, J. (2023). In Troubled Water? European Sports Clubs: Their Problems, Capacities and Opportunities. *Journal of Global Management*, 8(1), 203-225. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24704067.2020.1806493>
- Slack, T., Byers, T., & Thurston, A. (2021). *Understanding Sport Organizations: Applications for Sport Managers* (3rd ed.). Human Kinetics.

- Storm, R. K., & Hansen, B. O. R. (2021). Commercial fitness centres in Denmark: a study on development, determinants of provision and substitution effects. *Annals of Leisure Research*, 24(4), 468-491. <https://doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2019.1692684>
- Thibault, L., Slack, T., & Hinings, B. (1993). A Framework for the Analysis of Strategy in Nonprofit Sport Organizations. *Journal of Sport Management*, 7(1), 25-43. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.7.1.25>
- Thibault, L., Slack, T., & Hinings, B. (1994). Strategic Planning for Nonprofit Sport Organizations: Empirical Verification of a Framework. *Journal of Sport Management*, 8(3), 218-233. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.8.3.218>
- Thiel, A., & Meier, H. (2004). Survival through Resistance – About the Learning Capability of Sports Organizations. *Sport and Society*, 1(2), 103-124. <https://doi.org/10.1515/sug-2004-0202>
- Thieme, L. (2015). Kommerzieller Sport. In W. Schmidt, N. Neuber, T. Rauschenbach, H.-P. Brandl-Bredenbeck, J. Süßenbach, & C. Breuer (Eds.), *Dritter Deutscher Kinder- und Jugendsportbericht: Kinder- und Jugendsport im Umbruch* (pp. 162-178). Hofmann Verlag.
- Tuckman, H. P. (1998). Competition, Commercialization, and the Evolution of Nonprofit Organizational Structures. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 17(2), 175-194. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1520-6688](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1520-6688)
- Varmus, M., Kubina, M., & Adámik, R. (2021). *Strategic Sport Management: Sustainability of Sports Clubs*. Springer.
- Vos, S. (2012). *Triangle relationships in mass sport provision: analysing similarities, differences and interorganizational relationships across civic, public and market sectors* [Doctoral dissertation, KU Leuven]. Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.
- Vos, S., & Scheerder, J. (2014). Fact or Fiction? An empirical analysis of cooperation between mass sport providers at the local level. *European Journal for Sport and Society*, 11(1), 7-34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16138171.2014.11687931>
- Watzke, M. (2023). *Digitalisierung im Breitensport: Wie Sportvereine sich digitaler aufstellen* [Digitalization in mass participation sports: How sport clubs become more digital]. Deutschlandfunk. <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/digitalisierung-sportvereine-ehrenamt-100.html>

- Wicker, P., Soebbing, B., Feiler, S., & Breuer, C. (2015). The effect of Porter's generic strategies on organisational problems of non-profit sports clubs. *European Journal for Sport and Society*, 12(3), 281-3017. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16138171.2015.11687967>
- Wicker, P., Vos, S., Scheerder, J., & Breuer, C. (2013). The link between resource problems and interorganizational relationships: a quantitative study of Western European sport clubs. *Managing Leisure*, 18(1), 31-45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13606719.2012.742226>
- Zimmer, A., Hoemke, P., Pahl, J. B., & Rentzsch, C. (2018). *Resilient organizations in the third sector*. Westfälische-Wilhelms-Universität Münster.

2 Study 1

Determinants of non-profit sports clubs' perceived competition from commercial sports providers

This chapter has been published as:

Rossi, L., Breuer, C., & Feiler, S. (2020). Determinants of non-profit sports clubs perceived competition from commercial sports providers. *Sport Management Review*, 23(4), 736-749. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2019.10.001>

Abstract:

The purpose of the study was to investigate if non-profit sports clubs are affected by the growth of the commercial market and, if so, which clubs are affected and why. The authors employed a mixed-method design, collecting quantitative data from a sample of 4,456 non-profit sports clubs in Germany and then conducting a follow-up qualitative study including semi-structured interviews with 6 sports clubs. Descriptive results showed that 35.3% of clubs perceived competition from commercial sports providers as a problem. The logistic regression analysis revealed that clubs offering sports for health and fitness, rehabilitation sports, martial arts, and dancing are more likely to perceive competition as a problem. Clubs aiming at social integration are also more likely to report a problem, while clubs following a strategic management approach are less likely to be affected by competition. The interviews unveiled that the reasons for competition are the different types of sports offered, financial aspects, characteristics of clubs, and markets. The findings suggest that organizational characteristics and types of sports offered are better suited as strategic group variables in the sports market than organizational strategies. Measures to counteract competition include the use of strategic management principles, cooperative relationships with commercial providers, and quality and specialization of services.

Keywords: Non-profit sports organizations; Mass sports market; Strategic groups; Strategic management; Mixed methods

3 Study 2

Organizational capacity building in non-profit sport clubs: Exploring the role of competition as a capacity building stimulus

This chapter has been published as:

Rossi, L., Feiler, S., Dallmeyer, S., & Breuer, C. (2023). Organizational capacity building in non-profit sport clubs: Exploring the role of competition as a capacity building stimulus. *European Sport Management Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2023.2203191>

Abstract:

Research question: Non-profit sport clubs are operating in an increasingly competitive market due to the growth of the for-profit sport sector and changes in sport participation patterns. To counteract competition, clubs are expected to take strategic action by investing in their organizational capacities. The aim of the present study is to explore if and how perceived competition from other organizations acts as an external capacity building stimulus for non-profit sport clubs.

Research methods: Longitudinal data were drawn from a nationwide online survey of non-profit sport clubs in Germany between the years 2011 and 2020 (ranging between $n=1,366$ to $n=5,315$ observations).

Results and findings: The results highlight that clubs faced with competition from commercial providers are driven to invest in paid staff, whereas the number of volunteers decreases and clubs are less likely to break even. Clubs faced with competition from other clubs are less likely to report having a strategic concept. The possession of club-owned facilities and gyms remains unaffected.

Implications: The findings reveal the limited effects of competition on the development of organizational capacities, with significant effects occurring only in the human resource capacity as a driver of professionalization. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

Keywords: strategic management, competitiveness, organizational change, quantitative research

4 Study 3

Strategic collaboration in sports? Analyzing multiple cross-sectoral partnerships in non-profit boxing

This chapter has been published as:

Rossi, L. & Breuer, C. (2023). Strategic collaboration in sports? Analyzing multiple cross-sectoral partnerships in non-profit boxing. *Managing Sport and Leisure*.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/23750472.2023.2216233>.

Abstract:

Rationale: To address complexities in their environment, non-profit sports clubs enter partnerships with other organizations. While partnerships between non-profit sports clubs and commercial sports providers are increasing, research into these types of partnerships has been scarce. The aim of the present study is thus to analyze cross-sectoral partnerships between sports clubs and commercial providers to explore why, how, and with which outcomes these partnerships are formed.

Research design: A case study was conducted on a non-profit boxing club entertaining several cross-sectoral partnerships. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, documents, and an in-person survey.

Findings: The results show inconsistencies in the strategic management of partnerships. Stable partnerships were based on personal relationships and trust rather than formal arrangements.

Practical implications: To ensure stable partnerships, clubs need to communicate constantly with their partners to form strong personal relationships. Shared goals should be formulated to create partnership value.

Research contribution: The study highlights the extent of strategic collaboration in sports.

Keywords: Interorganizational Relationships, Strategic Management, Competitive Advantage, Case Study

5 Discussion and conclusion

The findings of the three studies have illustrated the effect that the growing commercial market has on non-profit sport clubs and their response to this growth. However, the results have also shown that not all non-profit sport clubs are affected equally by this development as only a fraction of non-profit sport clubs perceives competition from commercial sport providers as a problem and that these differences need to be taken into account when developing support measures for non-profit sport clubs.

When it comes to the extent of the competitive pressure from commercial sport providers (research question 1.1), the findings have shown that only a fraction of non-profit sport clubs in Germany are affected by competition from commercial sport providers. The analysis unveiled that especially non-profit sport clubs offering similar types of sports as commercial sport providers – especially health and fitness sports – perceive competition from commercial sport providers to be a problem. Thus, when discussing the effects of the growing commercial market on non-profit sport clubs, the type of sport clubs needs to be considered as the majority of non-profit sport clubs do not face competitive pressures from commercial sport providers. The low level of competition contrasts the developments which have been identified in the general non-profit context (Bode, 2006; Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Sandberg, 2013). The reason for this could be that research in the general non-profit context often investigates bigger, public-centered organizations rather than smaller and less professionalized member-centered organizations such as non-profit sport clubs (Zimmer, 1999).

Following the strategic management process model introduced in the first section of the dissertation, the environmental analysis regarding the competitive pressure on non-profit sport clubs is followed by some form of strategic response (research question 1.2). The findings of the second study have illustrated a limited strategic response of non-profit sport clubs to competitive pressures. Once competition from commercial sport providers is perceived as a problem by non-profit sport clubs, it leads to professionalization in the clubs in terms of employing more paid staff and relying less on volunteers. The reason for this could be – as uncovered already in the first study of the dissertation – that non-profit sport clubs and commercial sport providers compete for coaches and instructors rather than members. As commercial sport providers pay their coaches and instructors a salary, the incentive for individuals to offer their services as a coach or instructor in a commercial setting is much higher than in the non-profit setting where voluntary engagement without

financial compensation is the norm. Thus, different than in the general non-profit context where NPOs and FPOs compete for customers and thus decrease their prices to stay competitive (Brown & Fan, 2022; Keeler et al., 1999), the competitive pressure on non-profit sport clubs is not with regards to the recruitment and retention of members but rather in the recruitment and retention of coaches and instructors. This finding is notable as it increases the problem of volunteer recruitment and retention which has been found to be the most critical problem for non-profit sport clubs in previous research (Cuskelly et al., 2006; Wicker & Breuer, 2011).

While the second study identified increasing professionalization as the primary strategic option that non-profit sport clubs pursue in response to competition from commercial sport providers, another option to address competitive pressures – especially in light of existing problems of recruiting coaches and instructors – would be to enter partnerships with commercial sport providers. The third study provided an in-depth analysis of such a partnership and thus addressed research question 1.3. The findings show that the partnerships under study were not entered strategically as a way to increase club memberships or recruit new coaches and instructors, but rather were formed based on opportunities and existing personal relationships. Thus, it is arguable in how far non-profit sport clubs are aware of cross-sectoral partnerships as a strategic option in response to competitive pressures. This contradicts findings from a Belgian context that perceived competition increases cooperation between non-profit sport clubs and for-profit fitness and health clubs (Vos & Scheerder, 2014). One explanation for the lack of strategic use of cross-sectoral partnerships could be the challenges in terms of differing institutional logics – as illustrated in the third publication of the dissertation – and the requirements regarding organizational capacity and management skills in organizing such cross-sectoral partnerships effectively (Misener & Doherty, 2013).

Bringing all these findings together and relating them to the strategic management process, it can be concluded that there is no clear yes or no answer to the underlying research question of this dissertation, namely if non-profit sport clubs act strategically in response to the growth of the commercial market. For one, as the majority of non-profit sport clubs reports to be unaffected by competition from commercial sport providers, there is no need to respond strategically to the growth of the commercial market. It appears that non-profit sport clubs and commercial sport providers in general offer different services and thus do not compete for members or resources, which supports the interpretation of findings by Storm and Hansen (2021). Second, even when non-profit sport clubs perceive competition from commercial

sport providers as a problem, the findings reveal that they react by substituting voluntary work with paid work while neglecting the increased financial demands that this substitution requires. From a sport management perspective, this strategic response needs to be seen critical as non-profit sport clubs already face major challenges in recruiting and retaining coaches and instructors and substitution with paid staff can only partially offset this problem as previous research has shown (Breuer et al., 2012). Moreover, there seems to be a lack of awareness regarding cross-sectoral partnerships with commercial sport providers as a strategic response to competitive pressure. As previous research has identified positive effects of cross-sectoral partnerships for non-profit sport clubs (Misener & Doherty, 2013; Wicker et al., 2013), this also needs to be seen critical from a sport management perspective. Therefore, it is concluded that the strategic response of non-profit sport clubs towards the growth of the commercial sport market leaves room for improvement. These findings lead to implications for theory and practice which are discussed in the following sections.

5.1 Theoretical implications

The findings of the dissertation contribute to understanding the application of strategic management principles in non-profit sport clubs. First and foremost, the findings highlight the importance of considering the heterogeneous nature of non-profit sport clubs in sport management research and education. While current research on the strategic management of non-profit sport clubs has also highlighted the importance of organizational capacity in strategic management processes of non-profit sport clubs (Corthouts et al., 2023; Morrison & Misener, 2021), conclusions and management implications in sport management handbooks are often generalized to the overall market of non-profit sport clubs (Varmus et al., 2021). However, non-profit sport clubs differ substantially in terms of organizational structures such as membership size, age, and location (Breuer et al., 2015) and regarding their organizational capacities (Doherty et al., 2014). These differences have an impact on the relationship of non-profit sport clubs with their environment as illustrated by the lack of competitive pressure from commercial sport providers on the majority of non-profit sport clubs in the first study. Thus, not all non-profit sport clubs are affected equally by the environmental developments and the turbulent times that are often cited in research and practice. This needs to be considered when applying strategic management principles to non-profit sport clubs.

Second, the findings of the dissertation highlight the relatively low level of competitive pressure from commercial sport providers on non-profit sport clubs. While previous research

has come to inconclusive results on the existence of substitution effects between non-profit sport clubs and commercial sport providers (Hallmann et al., 2015; Storm & Hansen, 2021), the findings from the dissertation add to this discussion by providing evidence that the relationship between non-profit sport clubs and commercial sport providers seems to be unproblematic from the perspective of non-profit sport clubs. Thus, for the majority of non-profit sport clubs, there seems to be no problem of individuals substituting sports in the non-profit context with more flexible offers in the commercial context. This supports the interpretation by Storm and Hansen (2021) that non-profit sport clubs and commercial sport providers offer different services to different target groups and therefore their relationship can be characterized as complementary rather than substitutionary.

Third, the findings of the dissertation provide insights into the mechanisms of competition between non-profit sport clubs and commercial sport providers. While it is commonly assumed that the growth of the commercial market poses a threat to the membership base of non-profit sport clubs (Seippel et al., 2023), the findings of the dissertation have highlighted that the organizations are competing for coaches and instructors rather than members. Commercial sport providers appear to have a competitive advantage in terms of financial reimbursement for coaches and instructors which decreases the incentive for individuals to volunteer their time for similar services in non-profit sport clubs. Thus, competition between non-profit sport clubs and commercial sport providers is occurring on the market for coaches and instructors rather than on the market for members.

Fourth, the dissertation illustrates the lack of strategic response that non-profit sport clubs that indicated to be affected by competitive pressures have taken in response to the growth of the commercial market. The findings have shown that regarding the potential strategic responses investigated in this dissertation (i.e., organizational capacity building, cross-sectoral collaborations), non-profit sport clubs have relied on an increasing professionalization in terms of employing more paid staff and less volunteers as a strategic response to perceived competition from commercial sport providers. While non-profit sport clubs could also invest in their strategic or infrastructure capacities, it appears that these strategic options have not yet been explored by clubs. In terms of cross-sectoral partnerships, the findings of the dissertation imply that non-profit sport clubs in Germany are little aware of the strategic use of these partnerships as a response to competitive pressures. Thus, the findings of the dissertation imply that non-profit sport clubs are only partially acting as strategic actors in the market.

5.2 Practical implications

Implications from this dissertation can also be drawn for practice – both for sport policy makers in governments and federations and sport managers in non-profit sport clubs. For sport policy makers it is important to take the heterogeneous nature of non-profit sport clubs into account by developing more individualized support measures. Support to counteract competitive pressure from commercial sport providers is especially needed for non-profit sport clubs operating in the health and fitness sector. One potential support measure for these clubs from the governmental side could be an increase in the reimbursements from health insurance companies to enable non-profit sport clubs to pay their coaches and instructors and thus be able to compete with commercial sport providers on the labor market. Other ways could be direct financial subsidies for offering health and fitness sports in a non-profit setting.

From the side of sport federations, sport policy makers should encourage non-profit sport clubs to explore the option of entering partnerships with commercial sport providers. Both settings attract different target groups, thus partnerships between the organizations can help to enlarge the geographical and demographic reach of both non-profit sport clubs and commercial sport providers. Moreover, these partnerships can create synergies in terms of human resources and infrastructure, as both this dissertation and previous research has shown. Thus, entering cross-sectoral partnerships can support non-profit sport clubs in other organizational problems and prevent challenges of employing paid staff as the strategic response to competition from commercial sport providers would be collaboration rather than professionalization. However, sport federations should be aware that these partnerships lack effective formal arrangements. Thus, it should be considered in how far sanctionable mechanisms could be introduced so that formal, contractual arrangements can be effective in ensuring stability of partnerships independent of personal relationships.

On the level of non-profit sport clubs, sport managers are advised to build financial capacity when they face competition from commercial sport providers. This can be a preventive act on the organizational level to stay competitive on the market for coaches and instructors. Potential ways to build financial capacity could be the introduction of course fees, sponsorships, or public subsidies as pointed out above. Moreover, non-profit sport clubs faced with competition should try to proactively increase commitment from voluntary coaches and instructors to prevent to offer their services in the commercial context.

Strengthening personal relationships and appreciation of the work done by volunteers can be effective ways to increase volunteer commitment.

Moreover, non-profit sport clubs should invest in their strategic planning capacity as first, the results of the dissertation and previous research have shown that the application of strategic management reduces the competitive pressure from commercial sport providers. Second, it enables clubs to proactively scan their development, identify potential risks earlier and consider a wider range of strategic options in response to competitive pressures.

Lastly, the findings of the dissertation encourage a change of perspective on the relationship between non-profit sport clubs and commercial sport providers. Non-profit sport clubs do not have to view commercial sport providers as competitors but should rather switch perspectives and understand commercial sport providers as potential collaborators. Even though non-profit sport clubs and commercial sport providers follow different objectives and different institutional logics, they can still work together to share resources, decrease organizational problems, and reach a wider target group as the research in this dissertation has shown.

5.3 Limitations and future research

While the research presented in this dissertation leads to implications for both practice and theory, some limitations of the work must be addressed as well. First, the scope of research conducted in this dissertation focused only on the perspective of non-profit sport clubs. The competitive situation and the effects of it were investigated solely with regards to non-profit sport club development. While this has provided insights into the effects of the growth of the commercial market on non-profit sport clubs, it has neglected the perspective of commercial sport providers. Thus, the findings on the competitive situation of the sport market must be handled with caution as the situation might be perceived differently from the perspective of commercial sport providers. For example, non-profit sport clubs might have a competitive advantage in terms of low levels of membership fees or trust as identified in the general non-profit context (Hirth, 1999). Integrating the perspective of commercial sport providers on the issue will yield a more holistic view on the relationship between non-profit sport clubs and commercial sport providers.

Second, not all aspects of the strategic management process were covered in the dissertation. Most importantly, the development of strategic options has not been investigated in the studies included in the dissertation. It could potentially be the case that non-profit sport clubs

have developed a range of different strategies and after evaluating these strategies concluded that investing in paid staff is the best strategic option. This process was not covered in this work and therefore no statements can be given in how far non-profit sport clubs evaluate different strategic options. Moreover, not all strategic options were included in the investigation of this dissertation. For example, no evidence was collected on the adaptation of sport programs or changes in membership fees as strategic options in response to competition from commercial sport providers. However, as previous research has shown no effect of competition on non-profit pricing (Feiler et al., 2019) and no further countermeasures against competition were mentioned in the interviews in the first study of this dissertation, it can be assumed that the main strategic options were covered in this work.

Third, the research conducted in this dissertation did not consider any COVID-related effects as all data referred to the time before the COVID-19 pandemic. Both commercial sport providers and non-profit sport clubs experienced a decline in membership figures during the pandemic, but with memberships increasing again in both settings after returning to sports. However, it is yet unclear in how far the pandemic has influenced both non-profit and commercial sport organizations in the long-run and in how far this affected the relationship between them. This needs to be investigated in future research.

Furthermore, future research should investigate the scope and functions of the commercial sport market. So far, there is a lack of information on the size of the overall commercial market (except for the fitness and health industry) and the challenges from the perspective of commercial sport providers. Moreover, future research should provide further empirical evidence on the effects of environmental changes on sport organizations. It could be that other environmental developments such as governmental actions or societal changes are more central to non-profit sport clubs' actions and affect non-profit sport clubs thus more than competition from commercial sport providers. Lastly, future research should keep the heterogeneous nature of non-profit sport clubs into account. Investigating more in-depth the differences in non-profit sport clubs and potentially clustering them in sub-groups might yield more differentiated insights for both theory and practice.

5.4 References

- Bode, I. (2006). Co-governance within networks and the non-profit – for-profit divide. *Public Management Review*, 8(4), 551-566. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719030601022932>
- Brown, E., & Fan, C. Q. (2022). Lower Prices for Customers, and Less Charity Care? The Prospects for Mixed-Market Competition With Nonprofit and Hybrid Firms. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, Online First. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08997640221131050>
- Breuer, C., Hoekman, R., Nagel, S., & van der Werff, H. (2015). *Sport clubs in Europe: A Cross-National Comparative Perspective*. Springer Cham.
- Breuer, C., Wicker, P., & von Hanau, T. (2012). Consequences of the decrease in volunteers among German sports clubs: is there a substitute for voluntary work? *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 4(2), 173-186. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2012.656681>
- Corthouts, J., van der Roest, J.-W., Winand, M., Borgers, J., Claes, E., Vos, S., & Scheerder, J. (2023). A longitudinal analysis of organisational capacity determinants of the perceived need for change, adoption of ‘light’ sports initiatives and organisational growth in voluntary sports clubs. *European Journal for Sport and Society*, Online First. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16138171.2023.2182496>
- Cuskelly, G., Taylor, T., Hoye, R., & Darcy, S. (2006). Volunteer Management Practices and Volunteer Retention: A Human Resource Management Approach. *Sport Management Review*, 9(2), 141-163. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1441-3523\(06\)70023-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1441-3523(06)70023-7)
- Doherty, A., Misener, K., & Cuskelly, G. (2014). Toward a Multidimensional Framework of Capacity in Community Sport Clubs. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 43(2_suppl), 124S-142S. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764013509892>
- Eikenberry, A. M., & Kluver, J. D. (2004). The Marketization of the Nonprofit Sector: Civil Society at Risk? *Public Administration Review*, 64(2), 132-140. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2004.00355.x>

- Feiler, S., Wicker, P., & Breuer, C. (2019). Nonprofit Pricing: Determinants of Membership Fee Levels in Nonprofit Sports Clubs in Germany. *International Journal of Sport Finance*, 14(4), 262-277. doi.org/10.32731/IJSF/144.112019.06
- Hallmann, K., Feiler, S., & Breuer, C. (2015). Design and delivery of sport for all programmes: should it be market, non-profit, or state-run? *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 7(4), 565-585. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2015.1088051>
- Hirth, R. A. (1999). Consumer information and competition between nonprofit and for-profit nursing homes. *Journal of Health Economics*, 18(2), 219-240. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0167-6296\(98\)00035-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0167-6296(98)00035-6)
- Keeler, E. B., Melnick, G., & Zwanziger, J. (1999). The changing effects of competition on non-profit and for-profit hospital pricing behavior. *Journal of Health Economics*, 18(1), 69-86. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0167-6296\(98\)00036-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0167-6296(98)00036-8)
- Misener, K., & Doherty, A. (2013). Understanding capacity through the processes and outcomes of interorganizational relationships in nonprofit community sport organizations. *Sport Management Review*, 16(2), 135-147. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2012.07.003>
- Morrison, K. A., & Misener, K. (2021). Exploring the conditions for strategic planning in nonprofit community sport. *Sport Management Review*, 24(5), 747-769. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14413523.2021.1906054>
- Sandberg, B. (2013). The Road to Market. *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, 35(1), 28-45. <https://doi.org/10.2753/ATP1084-1806350103>
- Seippel, Ø., Breuer, C., Elmoose-Østerlund, K., Feiler, S., Perényi, S., Piatkowska, M., & Scheerder, J. (2023). In Troubled Water? European Sports Clubs: Their Problems, Capacities and Opportunities. *Journal of Global Management*, 8(1), 203-225. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24704067.2020.1806493>
- Storm, R. K., & Hansen, B. O. R. (2021). Commercial fitness centres in Denmark: a study on development, determinants of provision and substitution effects. *Annals of Leisure Research*, 24(4), 468-491. <https://doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2019.1692684>
- Varmus, M., Kubina, M., & Adámik, R. (2021). *Strategic Sport Management: Sustainability of Sports Clubs*. Springer.

- Vos, S., & Scheerder, J. (2014). Fact or Fiction? An empirical analysis of cooperation between mass sport providers at the local level. *European Journal for Sport and Society*, 11(1), 7-34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16138171.2014.11687931>
- Wicker, P., & Breuer, C. (2011). Scarcity of resources in German non-profit sport clubs. *Sport Management Review*, 14(2), 188-201. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2010.09.001>
- Wicker, P., Filo, K., & Cuskelly, G. (2013). Organizational Resilience of Community Sport Clubs Impacted by Natural Disasters. *Journal of Sport Management*, 27(6), 510-525. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.27.6.510>
- Zimmer, A. (1999). Corporatism Revisited – The Legacy of History and the German Nonprofit Sector. *Voluntas*, 10(1), 37-49. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021439703650>

Abstract

Non-profit sport clubs are operating in an increasingly dynamic and complex environment. The aim of the dissertation is to uncover the effects of the growth of the commercial sport market on non-profit sport clubs. More specifically, the dissertation addresses the question how non-profit sport clubs respond strategically to the growth of the commercial market. Based on a strategic management framework, the dissertation investigates (1) in how far non-profit sport clubs perceive competition from commercial sport providers as problem, (2) how non-profit sport clubs respond strategically to this competition, and (3) in how far cross-sectoral partnerships can present a strategic option to counteract competition.

The research questions were answered in three separate studies using qualitative and quantitative research designs. Quantitative data were gathered from the Sport Development Report, a nationwide online survey of non-profit sport clubs in Germany that has been conducted since 2005 and provides longitudinal information on non-profit sport clubs' situation over eight waves. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with officials of non-profit sport clubs ($n=6$) and a case study on cross-sectoral partnerships between a non-profit sport club and commercial sport providers including $n=7$ semi-structured interviews, documents, and an athlete survey ($n=19$).

The results of the studies highlight the low level of competitive pressure from the perspective of non-profit sport clubs. Competition between non-profit sport clubs and commercial sport providers occurs mostly in health and fitness sports. When non-profit sport clubs are perceiving competition from commercial sport providers as a problem, they are driven to professionalize by employing more paid staff and relying less on volunteers. Cross-sectoral partnerships with commercial sport providers can be beneficial for non-profit sport clubs but appear to not be used strategically as a response to competitive pressures.

The findings lead to several implications for theory and practice. Sport management researchers need to consider the heterogenous nature of non-profit sport clubs when investigating the effects of environmental dynamics on sport club development. Moreover, non-profit sport clubs and commercial sport providers compete for coaches and instructors rather than for members. Sport policy makers and sport managers in non-profit sport clubs are advised to provide financial support in response to competition from commercial sport providers, encourage cross-sectoral partnerships, and invest in strategic management to improve the ability to respond to environmental developments.

Kurzfassung

Gemeinnützige Sportvereine bewegen sich in einem zunehmend dynamischen und komplexen Umfeld. Ziel dieser Dissertation ist die Untersuchung der Auswirkungen des Wachstums des kommerziellen Marktes auf gemeinnützige Sportvereine. Die Dissertation geht der Frage nach, wie gemeinnützige Sportvereine strategisch auf das Wachstum des kommerziellen Marktes reagieren. Auf der Grundlage eines strategischen Management Rahmens untersucht die Dissertation (1) inwieweit gemeinnützige Sportvereine Konkurrenz durch kommerzielle Sportanbieter als Problem wahrnehmen, (2) wie Sportvereine strategisch auf diese Konkurrenz antworten und (3), inwieweit sektorenübergreifende Partnerschaften eine strategische Option bieten können, um Konkurrenz zu begegnen.

Die Forschungsfragen wurden im Rahmen dreier Studien beantwortet, in denen qualitative und quantitative Forschungsdesigns genutzt wurden. Quantitative Daten stammten aus dem Sportentwicklungsbericht, einer bundesweiten Onlinebefragung gemeinnütziger Sportvereine in Deutschland, die seit 2005 durchgeführt wird und über acht Wellen hinweg Längsschnittinformationen zur Situation der Sportvereine liefert. Qualitative Daten wurden mittels halbstrukturierter Interviews mit Funktionär*innen gemeinnütziger Sportvereine ($n=6$) sowie einer Fallstudie zu sektorenübergreifenden Partnerschaften zwischen einem gemeinnützigen Sportverein und kommerziellen Sportanbietern gesammelt. Im Rahmen der Fallstudie wurden Daten mittels halbstrukturierter Interviews ($n=7$), Dokumente und einer Athletenbefragung ($n=19$) gesammelt.

Die Ergebnisse der Studien verdeutlichen den geringen Wettbewerbsdruck aus Sicht der gemeinnützigen Sportvereine. Konkurrenz zwischen gemeinnützigen Sportvereinen und kommerziellen Sportanbietern findet vor allem im Gesundheits- und Fitnesssport statt. Wenn gemeinnützige Sportvereine die Konkurrenz zu kommerziellen Sportanbietern als Problem wahrnehmen, führt dies zu Professionalisierungstendenzen, indem mehr bezahltes Personal eingestellt wird und weniger Ehrenamtliche eingesetzt werden. Sektorenübergreifende Partnerschaften können Vorteile bieten, werden aber offenbar bislang nicht als strategische Maßnahme als Antwort auf den Konkurrenzdruck eingesetzt.

Aus den Ergebnissen ergeben sich Implikationen für Theorie und Praxis. Sportmanagementforscher*innen müssen die Heterogenität gemeinnütziger Sportvereine in der Untersuchung der Auswirkungen von Umwelteinflüssen auf die Entwicklung der Sportvereine berücksichtigen. Darüber hinaus konkurrieren gemeinnützige Sportvereine und kommerzielle Sportanbieter eher um Trainer*innen und Übungsleiter*innen als um

Mitglieder. Sportpolitiker*innen und Sportmanager*innen in gemeinnützigen Sportvereinen wird empfohlen, als Reaktion auf die Konkurrenz zu kommerziellen Sportanbietern finanzielle Unterstützung bereitzustellen, sektorenübergreifende Partnerschaften zu fördern und in strategisches Management zu investieren, um besser auf Umweltentwicklungen reagieren zu können.