

Who are the decision-makers in non-profit sport clubs from transition countries?

Igor IVAŠKOVIĆ^a

^a School of Economics and Business, University of Ljubljana, Kardeljeva ploščad 17, SI-1000, Slovenia

Abstract

The article discusses the hierarchies of decision makers in non-profit sport clubs. On the basis of data, collected in 73 sport clubs from four South-East European countries, author identifies: a) who carries the largest part of responsibility for the organizational performance; b) who has the most important influence on HRM activities; and c) are those results in relation with the hierarchies of interest groups. The results indicate that private sponsors' involvement significantly increases in top quality clubs, while the interferences of volunteers, local community, the state and municipal authorities are stronger in lower ranked clubs. The greatest responsibility for the clubs' performance is on coaches, athletes, and clubs' presidents. In the field of HRM the influences of the sports directors, sponsors' representatives and agents increase, while the influence of the clubs' presidents decreases with the level of quality. Volunteers' interference in clubs' activities stimulates presidents' influence on HRM, decreases the degree of director's performance responsibility, and decreases head coaches' and sport directors' influence on HRM. On the other hand, the interference of private sponsors puts more pressure on the functions of head coach and top management.

Keywords: non-profit clubs, organizational structure, HRM, responsibility

1. Introduction

Sport clubs in South-Eastern Europe are raising the interest of scholars' society in the last two decades. In those former centrally planned states even highly professional top sport clubs still operate as non-profit organizations (Ivašković, 2019). This fact often implies their vague ownership structure and unclear hierarchies of their beneficiaries. The root of those problems seems to be the lack of transparent identification of all interest groups and the amount of their financial participation in clubs' budgets. Some studies showed how important are the sources of funds on sport clubs' strategic decisions (Ivašković, Čater and Čater, 2017). However, it is still unclear how the hierarchies of stakeholders reflect on the distribution of power within their organizational structures, especially on the field of human resources management (HRM), which has been found to be crucial for the success of sport clubs (Ivašković,

2015). At the same time it is also unclear who and to what amount bears the responsibility for the organizational performance in those organizations.

The aim of this study is therefore to shed new light on the process of decision-making in South-East sport clubs by analysing the hierarchy of interest groups and the identification of most powerful positions within clubs' organizational structures. Moreover, this study intends to expose not only beneficiaries, but also the responsibility structure within non-profit sport clubs, and finally to compare the findings among those organizations on different quality levels. Theoretically, the study enables better understanding of the relationships between stakeholders and organizational structures of non-profit sport clubs. From the practical point of view, the results should be useful to managers in those sport organizations to anticipate the pressures from various interest groups, and to align their hierarchies with clubs' missions and organizational objectives.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

Sport clubs represent specific type of organizations which are tightly connected with their local environments. The dependence relationship seems to be even stronger in the case of non-profit sport clubs. Moreover, non-profitability frequently implies lack of transparency and many different interest groups might have important role in clubs' activities although they are unnoticed for the external observers. Identification of hierarchy of stakeholders is thus fundamental thing in order to understand operations of non-profit sport clubs (Ivašković, 2019). Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) claimed that certain interest group may belong to inner or external organizational environment, while Freeman and Reed (1983) defined them as any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the organizational activities. More powerful interest groups have the ability to control the organization by withholding resources or/and support, limiting its access to new markets or boycotting its products (Seeger, 1997, p. 9). The literature provides plenty of evidences that stakeholders' hierarchy affects the organizational plans and strategies (Ivašković, 2019; Barringer and Bluedorn, 1999; Berman et al, 1999; Selvin and Covin, 1997). However, there are still some ambiguities among scholars regarding so called "key stakeholders". Some authors argued that internal stakeholders are formally responsible for the strategy determination and are thus also "the key decision makers" (Mintzberg, 1983, p. 26–30, Pučko, 1999, p. 365), while others showed that in non-profit organizations external stakeholders might have powerful influence as well (e.g. Ivašković, 2019). The fact is, however, they usually do not affect organizational activities directly, but rather use various ways and means to influence certain positions in organizational structures and consequently shape organizational behaviour in line with their ambitions (Mintzberg, 1983). Therefore, certain positions within organizational structures might be in dependent relationship

with external stakeholders, which causes obedience of inner groups to external interests (Frooman, 1999). Apparently, the organizations which formally do not pursue profit seem to have more interest groups engaged in their operations. The consequences are not only multiple relations between them (Drucker, 1992), but often also contradicting objectives which are pushed in front of organizational management by different interest groups and individuals.

Sport clubs from South East Europe more or less still operate as non-profit organizations, and at the same time their managements are reluctant to transform the organizations even though the legislation in some of those countries enables that (Ilešič, 2004; Ivašković and Čater, 2018). In the post-communist era this caused the space for potential collision of public and private interests, and placed the clubs' managers in the position to decide to which side a particular club will incline. Usually clubs with top sport ambitions have to seek funds mostly among profit-driven private enterprises (Ivašković, Čater and Čater, 2017), which causes strong criticism by those who advocate the idea of non-profit sport clubs transformation into private profit-oriented clubs with transparent ownership and interest group structure (Bergant-Rakočević, 2008). On the other side, other part of scholars (e.g. Ben-Ner and Van Hoomissen, 1991; LeRoux, 2009) defend the position that non-profit organizations, including sport clubs, are usually influenced by those interest groups who wish to provide benefit to vulnerable segments of society and without purely profit motives. According to that position, it would be unfair to cut those organizations from public funds, due to the fact they emphasize the engagement of youth and enable consequential sport values proliferation among the whole society. It seems that the arguments of each position are understandable, and are therefore the driving force for this research.

The interest groups interfere in clubs' activities depending on their degree of interest and the power to impose their ambitions (Mendelow, 1991; Polonský 1995). Stakeholders with great power and simultaneously high level of interest have the highest potential to benefit or harm an organization and are thus usually denoted as key players (Mendelow, 1991). In the most cases those are individuals or groups, who provide significant percentage of annual funds for an organization (LeRoux, 2009), thus the process of dividing club's budget funds usually discloses the most powerful stakeholders (Baroncelli and Lago, 2006; Kern, Schwarzmann and Wiedenegger, 2012). If an organization is a subject of interfering by numerous interest groups with similar power and similar degree of interest, and of course with mutual conflicting objectives, the number of potential conflicts increases (Drucker, 1992). The consequences might be seen as unproductive processes and the loss of organizational focus, which is usually also the cause for poor organizational performance.

Unlike US sport competitions European sport clubs compete in leagues, which include professional and amateur organizations at the same time. In those leagues profit sport

clubs often compete against non-profits. For the latter pursuing top sport results versus an aim of developing the local community is claimed to be the key strategic dilemma (Breitbarth and Harris, 2008; Ivašković, 2015; Kern, Schwarzmann and Wiedenegger, 2012). This is actually a clash of two opposing concepts. According to the first one sport result is a value by itself (Ibsen, 1999), while the second sees an organization as a part of the local community with the main aim of providing benefits to that community. Although sometimes both aims are presented as complementary, sooner or later every manager has to decide whether the club is going to encourage the involvement of the local population in club's activities or will it pursue obtaining the best skilled athletes from wider (international) markets (Taylor, Doherty and McGraw, 2008, p. 28). The top sport results ambitions are usually the driving force for attracting better skilled athletes. Unavoidably this leads also to necessity of higher financial investments, which is an opportunity for profit-oriented private sponsors, which are generally willing to take greater risks than their public counterparts (Cuervo and Villalonga, 2000; Megginson, Nash and Mathias, 1994; Zahra, Neubaum and Huse, 2000). In line with that assumption some studies showed that public organizations interfere more in those organizations, which are attached to local community and are less profit-driven (Brouthers, Gelderman and Arens, 2007; Cuervo and Villalonga, 2000; De Castro et al, 1996; Lioukas, Bourantas and Papadakis, 1993; Whitley and Czaban, 1998; Zahra, Neubaum and Huse, 2000). Therefore we suggest our first hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: Private and profit-oriented sponsors interfere more in the operations of sport clubs from higher ranked divisions.

Results of previous studies show that sport organizations from the studied area of South-Eastern Europe are mostly financed by profit-oriented private enterprises, followed by the municipality and state, while the third sector's organizations rarely participate in sport as sponsors or donors (Škorić, Bartoluci and Čustonja, 2012). Other empirical studies show that higher ranked clubs are not getting only larger amounts of money, but they also engage significantly larger number of professionals (Ivašković, 2018). Due to larger annual budgets higher ranked clubs are more professionalized organizations with larger organizational structures, which should result with the process of decentralization. Thus, we propose the following two hypotheses.

Hypothesis 2: Decision making on the HRM field in lower ranked clubs is more centralized.

Hypothesis 3: Responsibility for the organizational performance is in higher ranked clubs dispersed among larger number of positions in the organizational structure.

In line with abovementioned argumentation and the derived hypotheses we can logically assume the correlation between private sponsors' interference in clubs' activities and the degree of responsibility and influence on HRM of certain positions within organizational structures of observed clubs.

Hypothesis 4: Interference of private sponsors in clubs' activities is in positive correlation with the degree of head coaches' responsibility for organizational performance.

Hypothesis 5: Interference of private sponsors in clubs' activities is in positive correlation with the degree of head coaches' involvement in the HRM.

Hypothesis 6: Interference of volunteers in clubs' activities is in positive correlation with the degree of clubs' presidents' responsibility for organizational performance.

Hypothesis 7: Interference of volunteers in clubs' activities is in positive correlation with the degree of clubs' presidents' involvement in the HRM.

3. Methods

Sample and Data Collection

The study was performed among men's basketball clubs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia. Although only one branch of the sport industry, basketball organizations might be, according to their size and financial budgets, considered as representative one for other South-East European sport branches with mostly non-profit sport clubs. Indeed, those basketball clubs are relatively small organizations, usually with fewer than 50 club members and an average budget of 0.4 million EUR. Despite the disintegration of Yugoslavia cooperation among observed basketball clubs remained strong as the clubs established the regional Adriatic Basketball League (ABL), which offers the opportunities for the best clubs from different national leagues to compete against each other. Due to similar legal heritage the vast majority of basketball clubs also retained their status of non-profit organizations.

Clubs' presidents were used as the main source of information, because they usually have the best overview regarding the decision-making processes in their organizations. 249 of basketball clubs were invited to participate in this study during seasons 2013/2014 and 2014/2015. 73 clubs' presidents agreed to participate, which represents the response rate of 29.3%. The sample consisted of 27 (out of 56; 48.2% response rate) first-division clubs, 31 (out of 73; 42.5% response rate) second-division clubs and 15 (out of 120; 12.5% response rate) clubs from the third divisions of national competitions in four selected countries. The participants had on average 4.87 (SD = 3.70) years of management experience in the current club and on average had held their presidential position for 2.53 (SD = 1.36) years. Of the 27 first-division clubs, 9 (out of 11; 81.8% response rate) also participated in the Adriatic Basketball League and other international competitions (EuroChallenge cup, Eurocup, or Euroleague). Apparently, only among the third division clubs the response rate was relatively low, which implies lower reliability of results for this particular segment.

Measures

Hierarchy of interest groups. For the purpose of this study we invited a group of 12 experts from the field of sport management, each with at least five years of work experience in non-profit basketball clubs. All experts were invited to form a list of most influential interest groups regarding their influence on non-profit sport clubs. After that we combined similar answers and made the following list of interest groups:

- Volunteers - include all club members who are not employed in the club and do not get paid for their work in particular club.
- Professional employees - include all organizational members who have an employment contract (full-time or part-time working relationship).
- Private sponsors – include all private organizations that provide funds to the club and are not predominantly state or municipally owned.
- The municipal and state organizations – include all state or municipal organizations including state- or municipally-owned enterprises.
- Local community – include local residents from the particular municipality, where the club is registered and/or plays home games, and are at the same time not members of the club.
- Media – include all media organizations.
- National sport associations - include organizations that provide a framework of the competitions in which a club participates.
- The general public.

Due to the fact that there are no clear borders between different interest groups, there is a possibility that an individual could be a potential member of two or more interest groups. This, however, is not unusual since an individual always engages in different social groups and plays various social roles in his/her life. In order to assess the influence of particular group on organizational activities, respondents in this study had to make an assessment on the actual interference of group on a 7-point Likert scale that was anchored at the extremes (1) "does not interfere in organizational activities at all" and (7) "interferes in organizational activities more than any other listed group."

Influence on HRM activities. The same group of 12 experts from the field of sport management formed a list of the most influential individuals and groups regarding their influence on HRM policy and activities (e.g. signing athletes etc.). After combining similar answers we made the following list: club's president (individual), top management (group), sponsors' representatives, head coach, athletes' agents, and sport director. The clubs' presidents had to assess the influence of an individual or an interest group on the determination of the HRM processes on the 7-point Likert scale that was anchored at the extremes (1) "does not have impact on HRM activities at all" and (7) "influences HRM more than any other individual or group."

Responsibility. The same respondents also defined to what extent the same individuals or groups within the clubs' organizational structures are responsible for the overall performance of the club. They assessed the degree of responsibility on the 7-point Likert scale, which was anchored by extremes (1) "the individual or club's body do not bear any responsibility at all", and (7) "the highest degree of responsibility within the club".

Data analysis

The data processing started with the classical statistical analysis and an analysis of the differences among groups of clubs from different quality levels. Then the measure of performance was obtained by employing explorative factor analysis (EFA). Finally, we assessed associations between variables with correlation analysis.

4. Results and discussion

The analysis started with the comparison of interest groups' interference in clubs' activities. Table 1 shows that volunteers were in average perceived as the most active group regarding interfering in the activities of observed non-profit sport clubs. Volunteers were followed by the state and municipal organizations, while the general public was perceived to be the least active group from this aspect.

More detailed analysis showed that private sponsors were among the first division clubs the group which was perceived to interfere most in clubs' activities. They were followed by the professional employees on second position, while, once again the general public and media were perceived to interfere the least. In the segment of top quality clubs (international competitors), the interference of private sponsors was even larger, while the clubs from the second and third quality level experienced strongest interference by volunteers, followed by the state and municipal organizations on the second position. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) resulted with confirmation of statistical differences in cases of six stakeholders' interference in clubs' activities. The differences among clubs were also compared with post hoc tests (i.e. LSD and Tamhane), which resulted with findings listed in the last column of the Table 1.

In line with our expectations results showed that private sponsors interfere more in the sport clubs from first national divisions, while interest groups like volunteers, state and municipal authorities show relatively more interest in affecting second and third division clubs. Further analysis disclosed that the local communities interfere more in lower division clubs' activities, while professionals affect relatively stronger the organizations from the first national divisions. Additional t-test also showed that private sponsors (MD = 2.13, t = 7.70, p = .000) interfere in the operations of higher ranked clubs, while the state and municipal authorities (MD = -2.14, t = -4.32, p =

.000), volunteers (MD = - 4.52, t = -8.60, p = .000), and local community (MD = -1.44, t = -3.63, p = .002) interfere significantly less in those clubs.

Table 1. Interest groups' interference in club's activities

Interest group	M	Level of national competition			Statistically significant differences among groups
		1. (ABL)	2.	3.	
Volunteers	5.39	3.81 (1.44)	6.34	6.40	1. and 2.; 1. and 3.
Private sponsors	4.36	5.44 (6.22)	3.77	3.57	1. and 2.; 1. and 3.
The state and municipal authorities	4.54	3.74 (2.67)	4.94	5.21	1. and 2.; 1. and 3.
Professionals	3.97	4.69 (4.11)	3.19	4.14	1. and 2.
Local community	3.71	3.63 (2.44)	3.29	4.79	1. and 3.; 2. and 3.
Media	2.94	3.23 (2.33)	2.70	2.93	no significant differences
National sport federation and sport clubs	4.01	4.07 (2.33)	3.57	4.86	2. and 3.
The general public	2.65	2.96 (3.22)	2.63	2.07	no significant differences

Note. M – mean; ABL - Adriatic Basketball League.

Similar as in the case of interference in clubs' activities Table 2 indicates differences between groups of clubs regarding the influence on the HRM activities. Apparently, the top managements are the most active in the second divisions' clubs, the head coaches in the first divisions' clubs, and clubs' presidents in the lower divisions' clubs. Interestingly, in the sub-segment of the top quality clubs sports directors are showing the greatest interest in those activities. Moreover, the results indicate the influence of the clubs' presidents decreases with the quality level of competition, while the influence of private sponsors increases. Among the first divisions' clubs, head coaches have stronger influence on the HRM, as well as sports agents and sports directors, while there were no statistically significant differences found regarding their influence in the second and lower divisions' clubs. Athletes are the most active from this aspect in the lower divisions' clubs, which is not surprising, due to the fact that in those clubs the same person usually combines several positions within organizational structure. Organizational growth and process of professionalization shape the organizational structure such that middle and lower managerial levels emerge, which affects transferring HRM decisions and activities to the specialized bodies that do not exist in lower divisions' clubs. T-test disclosed that in the top quality clubs the clubs' presidents have weaker influence on HRM, while sponsors, athletes, and sports directors have more important role in those activities than in other clubs.

Table 2. Influence on HRM

Subject	M	SD	Level of competition			Differences between groups*
			First national division (ABL clubs)	Second national division	Lower national divisions	
Club's president	5.05	1.91	4.00 (3.33)	5.19	6.67	Differences between all groups
Top management	5.38	1.43	5.19 (5.56)	5.26	6.00	No significant differences
Sponsor's representatives	3.22	1.71	4.22 (4.33)	3.13	1.60	Differences between all groups
Head coach	5.05	1.53	5.89 (5.22)	5.03	3.60	1 st and 2 nd ; 1 st and lower
Agents	2.00	1.24	2.96 (3.56)	1.55	1.20	1 st and 2 nd ; 1 st and lower
Athletes	4.31	1.34	4.07 (3.56)	3.83	5.67	1 st and lower; 2 nd and lower
Sports director	4.40	2.10	5.65 (5.89)	4.07	2.80	1 st and 2 nd ; 1 st and lower
Others	1.83	1.46	1.67 (3.00)	2.21	1.00	No significant differences

Note. * - statistically significant differences at $p < 0.05$.

Table 3 on the other hand shows that the function of the head coach bears the greatest responsibility for the clubs' success in all three quality segments. Head coaches indeed feel the strongest consequences of good or bad result at the end of the season. As for other functions, in the sub-segment of top quality clubs, the clubs' presidents are slightly more exposed to the pressure of the result. Otherwise, athletes are on the second position (after the head coach) regarding the degree of responsibility for performance. However, this is more the case with the first division clubs, while in lower quality competitions they carry somewhat less responsibility. Apparently, higher degree of professionalization (and consequential higher financial investments in athletes) reflects through higher degree of responsibility for organizational performance. We can see that in the clubs' responsibility hierarchy athletes are followed by the club's president and the top management. We can also notice that sports directors' responsibility for organizational performance increases with the quality of the competition in which clubs participate. Thus, in the segment of first divisions clubs' sport directors bear more responsibility than the clubs' presidents.

Table 3. The degree of responsibility

Subject	M	Level of competition			Differences between groups*
		First national division (ABL clubs)	Second national division	Lower national divisions	
Club's president	5.42	5.19 (7.00)	5.34	6.00	No significant differences
Top management	5.31	5.22 (6.67)	5.34	5.40	No significant differences
Sponsor's representatives	2.82	3.26 (3.33)	2.10	3.40	Significantly lower responsibility in second division clubs

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Head coach	6.39	6.44 (6.89)	6.34	6.40	No significant differences
Agents	2.67	2.73 (2.78)	1.62	4.60	Differences between all groups
Athletes	5.61	6.19 (5.44)	5.59	4.60	Significantly lower responsibility in lower division clubs
Sports director	4.31	5.63 (6.00)	3.86	2.80	Significantly higher responsibility in first division clubs
Others	1.93	3.33 (4.00)	2.17	1.00	Significantly higher responsibility in first compared to lower division clubs

Note. * - statistically significant differences at $p < 0.05$.

In the next phase of the research we conducted a correlation analysis between the activity of interest groups within observed non-profit sport clubs and the degree of HRM influence of their members (Table 4). Although not many statistically significant correlations were found, some of them are surprising. However, the fact that volunteers' interference in clubs' activities stimulates presidents' influence on HRM and decreases head coaches' and sport directors' influence is in line with our expectations. The organizations with stronger volunteers' impact are usually less professionalized and thus have simpler organizational structures, which also causes concentration of decision-making power in presidential function. On the other hand, the interference of private sponsors implies more pressure on the functions of head coach and top management. Private sponsors, indeed, are usually more profit driven, and thus seek ways and means to improve sport results of particular club. In order to achieve that sponsors have to ensure that decision-making process regarding the key decisions on the field of HRM are under influence of people with more knowledge. This causes broadening of decision-making processes at the top of the organizational structure, and transfers power from clubs' presidents to top management, and at the same time causes specialization. This especially the case of decision-making regarding HRM in sport team, which results with greater head coach's influence. The surprising result, however, is the fact that athletes' influence on HRM decreases with greater interference of professional employees, which is the interest group that also includes professional athletes. One of possible logical explanations for that could be the desire of professional athletes to specialize for solely sport activities and thus do not spend their time for other parts of organizational processes, including HRM. On the other hand greater interference of this group affects the top management's influence in this segment of organizational activities in a similar way as private sponsors' interference does. The surprising finding is also the result which shows that the degree of local community members' interference in clubs' activities positively correlates with the HRM influence of private sponsors and agents. This might be a result of local community members' ambition to transfer the key decision-making to those club's

members who are more in contact with local environment, especially if sponsors representatives and agents are members of particular local community. From the aspect influencing crucial HRM decisions national federations' interference in organizational activities has similar effect like local communities' engagement does. This result seems logical, since national sport federations in observed countries are mostly financed from their member clubs, and are therefore interested in strengthening sponsors' position in decision-making process. The engagement of the state and municipal authorities, media, and general public did not result with statistical significant correlations from this aspect.

Table 4. Correlations between interest groups' interference in club's activities and the degree of influence on HRM (N = 73)

Interest group interference/ Influence on HRM	President	Top management	Private sponsors	Head coach	Agents	Athletes	Sport director
Volunteers	.28*	.18	-.17	-.27*	-.02	-.05	-.25*
Private sponsors	-.02	.30*	.04	.31*	.10	-.10	-.12
The state and municipal authorities	.07	.14	-.14	-.23	-.13	-.10	-.20
Professionals	.15	.34**	-.05	.17	.11	-.34**	.18
Local community	.03	-.04	.24*	-.13	.33**	-.22	.22
Media	-.10	.06	.00	-.01	.15	-.21	.09
National sport federation and sport clubs	.17	.14	.26*	.04	.14	.05	.00
The general public	-.12	-.08	-.02	-.06	-.01	-.17	.17

Note. ** P < .01; * P < .05.

In the last stage of statistical analysis we used correlation analysis once again in order to disclose the connection between the activity of interest groups within observed non-profit sport clubs and the degree of responsibility for organizational performance within organizational structures (Table 5). Similar as in previous analysis volunteers' interference in clubs' activities affects sport director's position; apparently it decreases the degree of director's responsibility. However, it does not have impact on other positions within organizational structure. The state and municipal authorities' engagement in clubs' activities causes from this aspect the same effects like volunteers' interference, while the general public engagement causes the opposite result; it increases sport director's responsibility. On the other hand, the interference of private sponsors has almost precisely the same impact like in the case of HRM influence; it puts more pressure on the functions of head coach and top management, which is the consequence of already explained sponsors' profit motives. Once again results showed that the degree of local community members' interference in clubs' activities affects athletes' agents; it increases their degree of responsibility for organizational outcome. Other interest groups' engagements did not result with

significant correlations between them and the degree of responsibility within organizational structures.

Table 5. Correlations between interest groups' interference in club's activities and the degree of responsibility (N = 73)

Interest group interference/ responsibility	President	Top management	Private sponsors	Head coach	Agents	Athletes	Sport director
Volunteers	-.06	-.13	-.16	-.18	-.01	-.08	-.35**
Private sponsors	.14	.26*	-.09	.40**	-.03	.17	.07
The state and municipal authorities	-.14	-.14	-.14	-.06	-.11	-.02	-.27*
Professionals	-.06	.02	-.17	.21	.04	-.12	.20
Local community	-.11	-.21	.11	-.10	.31**	-.08	.19
Media	-.27	-.23	-.07	.10	.11	.07	.14
National sport federation and sport clubs	-.14	-.18	.19	.01	.12	.23	-.12
The general public	-.08	-.10	-.00	.01	-.06	.02	.30*

Note. ** P < .01; * P < .05.

5. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to provide the following answers: 1) who carries the largest part of responsibility for the performance in non-profit sport clubs; 2) who has the most important influence on HRM activities in those organizations; and 3) are those results in relation with clubs' hierarchies of interest groups (stakeholders).

In line with the first hypothesis, private sponsors represent by far the most influential interest group among the organizations from the first national divisions, and even more in the sub segment of top clubs which compete in international competition, and thus interfere in clubs' activities the most. They are followed by the professional employees (the group which include professional athletes) in the second place. The least influential stakeholders in this segment of sport clubs are local community, media and the general public. On the other hand, differences between second and third division clubs are not so significant. Volunteers interfere in activities of those clubs more than any other interest group.

Regarding the ability to enforce the decisions on the field of HRM the top managements have the most power in the second division clubs, the head coaches in the first division clubs, and clubs' presidents in the lower divisions' clubs. The influence of the clubs' presidents decreases with the quality level of competition, while the influence of private sponsors increases. Among the first division clubs, the head coaches have stronger influence on the HRM, as well as sports agents and sports

directors, while athletes are the most active from this aspect in the lower division clubs, which is not surprising, due to the fact that in those clubs the same person usually combines several positions in organizational structure. On the other hand the paper shows that the function of the head coach bears the greatest responsibility for the clubs' success in all three quality levels. Athletes are in the second position regarding the degree of responsibility in the first division clubs (in lower quality competitions they bear somewhat lower responsibility) and are followed by the club's president and the top management. We can also notice that sports directors' responsibility for organizational performance increases with the quality of the competition in which clubs participate. Therefore, we can also confirm the second and the third hypothesis.

Volunteers' interference in clubs' activities stimulates presidents' influence on HRM and decreases head coaches' and sport directors' influence, which is in line with our seventh hypothesis. On the other hand, the interference of private sponsors puts more pressure on the functions of head coach and top management, which confirms the fifth hypothesis. Interestingly, athletes' influence on HRM reduces with greater interference of professional employees, which is the interest group that also includes professional athletes. On the other hand greater interference of this group affects top management's influence in this segment of organizational activities in a similar way as private sponsors' interference does. The degree of local community members' interference in clubs' activities positively correlates with the HRM influence of private sponsors and agents.

Volunteers' and the state and municipal authorities' engagement in clubs' activities decreases the degree of director's responsibility, while the general public engagement causes opposite effect. However, we are unable to confirm our sixth hypothesis that interference of volunteers in clubs' activities is in positive correlation with the degree of clubs' presidents' responsibility for organizational performance. On the other hand, the interference of private sponsors puts more pressure on the functions of head coach and top management, which is in line with the fourth hypothesis, while local community's engagement increases athletes' agents' responsibility.

This research contributes to a better understanding of the stakeholders' influence in non-profit organizations, especially in the South-eastern European context. It represents one of the first attempts to investigate how stakeholder structure affects non-profit club's organizational structure from the aspect of HRM and responsibility for performance. The findings from this study have several practical implications. They might offer the empirical support for the change of policy in those countries, where sport clubs still operate as non-profits, foremost to reconsider the transformation of top sport clubs in profit-oriented organizations. The identification of the most important interest groups and their impact on organizational structures might help

the managements of non-profit sport clubs to anticipate the potential conflicting processes.

From the aspect of limitations, this study used only subjective survey-based data, which were collected only from non-profit sport clubs in four countries with similar historical background. This might influence the ambition to generalize the results. Also the response rate among the clubs from lowest quality levels was relatively low, which implicates lower reliability of the results for this segment. Therefore, we suggest additional empirical research on sport clubs from different environments.

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