

**Actor Engagement as Marketing Objective in Service  
Ecosystems – Empirical Insights and Conceptualisations at  
Different Levels of Analysis**

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**FOR MY BELOVED WIFE AND FAMILY**

## ABSTRACT AND FOREWORD

In service management and marketing, the question of how to engage customers and other relevant actors becomes increasingly important. Customer and actor engagement are actors' contributions to an organisation exceeding typical roles and transactional behaviours. From a corporate perspective, a key marketing objective is to foster the engagement of customers and other actors. Accordingly, Jan Schönberner addresses with his dissertation a highly relevant topic in service management and marketing research.

Customer and actor engagement facilitated by virtual and physical engagement platforms leads to increased revenues, reputation, and cost savings. This emphasises the active role of all actors as contributors to the creation of value for companies and organisations. Therefore, value co-creation is an appropriate theoretical foundation for addressing this phenomenon. Various actors integrate resources to co-create value in service ecosystems. However, value co-creation is a theory on a higher level of abstraction. Thus, applying concepts, such as actor engagement and engagement platforms, is essential to break down abstraction and enable accessibility for empirical research. Engagement platforms are virtual and physical touchpoints. They are provided by focal actors to enable and facilitate actors' interactions and are embedded in service ecosystems. Jan Schönberner contributes to a better understanding of the co-creation of value by multiple actors on various engagement platforms from both an academic and a practical perspective.

Although the concepts of actor engagement and engagement platforms have been introduced into the service management and marketing literature, there remain several calls for further research. Therefore, this doctoral thesis aims to advance the understanding of how actors and engagement platforms are interconnected within service ecosystems and how actors' resource exchange is facilitated by engagement platforms.

Jan Schönberner contributes to research with clear argumentation and a very comprehensible structure. The dissertation shows a careful documentation and analysis of the empirical data as well as a very good readability. The connection between the various research projects is also explained in an exemplary manner and substantiated in detail.

This dissertation uses empirical insights to extend the theoretical conceptualisations of actor engagement at different levels of analysis. Hence, the analyses were conducted at organisational and dyadic levels (intra- and micro-levels) as well as in triadic relationships and networks (meso- and macro-levels) to allow for a multi-perspective consideration of the research question. As the

research context, sport sponsorship and sport management in a broader sense were selected as specific parts of the service industry. By examining various research questions within the sport context in the understanding of a service industry, insights for marketing and service management emerge. The dissertation suggests that actor engagement is a marketing objective for service companies in general.

The articles included in this dissertation are characterised by a coherent combination of theory and empirical research. The results of Jan Schönberner's dissertation significantly extend the studies available to date and provide valuable conceptual foundations for further research. Furthermore, important implications for practice can be derived through his dissertation. Hence, Jan Schönberner contributes to the necessary knowledge transfer from academia to practice and society.

I hope Jan Schönberner's work will gain broad acceptance in academia and practice. I wish him all the best, good luck, health, and success in both his further career and his personal life. May all his wishes come true.

*Prof. Dr. Herbert Woratschek*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*“Life is a journey, not a destination.”*

*(Ralph Waldo Emerson)*

This quote, in my opinion, describes very accurately my time as PhD candidate and research assistant at the department of Marketing & Service Management at the University of Bayreuth. The reward is not the submitted thesis but the journey to that point. This is mainly because I was accompanied on that way by a lot of wonderful people to whom I am incredibly grateful. As with any great trip, some of the “travel companions” got on and off and others stayed for the entire trip. Every single one of them has made valuable contributions through an advice, a hint, a feedback, a kind word, a nice gesture, or simply through a round of sports.

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*Jan Schönberner*

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Motivation and Aim of Research

From a service management and marketing perspective, it becomes increasingly important to foster the engagement of customers and other relevant stakeholders. Engagement is thereby understood as social and economic actors' services for an organisation that go beyond the typical roles and transactional behaviours. For example, (electronic) word-of-mouth, product co-development, innovation alliances, recommendations, and reviews, are manifestations of engagement (e.g., Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; van Doorn et al., 2010). Previous research has shown that, in particular, customer engagement is an aspirational marketing objective. Customer engagement marketing leads to increased firm's performance (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014), reputation (van Doorn et al., 2010), revenues (Azer & Alexander, 2020), and cost savings (Harmeling et al., 2017). This highlights the novel consideration of customers from pure consumers of products and services to value co-creators for companies and organisations.

Importantly companies nowadays strive not only to engage customers, but also many relevant stakeholders, such as customers, media organisations, politicians, business partners, competitors, and citizens in general. Actors, in this sense, can be individual people as well as their collectives, such as organisations (Storbacka et al., 2016). These actors' interactions with an organisation beyond their typical roles are called actor engagement. Accordingly, the concept of customer engagement was extended to actor engagement broadening the scope from customers to all value co-creating actors (Brodie et al., 2019).

Actor engagement is facilitated by engagement platforms understood as virtual and physical touchpoints that provide the infrastructure for interactions and resource exchanges between multiple actors (Breidbach et al., 2014). Engagement platforms are provided by central actors who regulate access. Physical platforms are, for example, events, congresses, workshops, and exhibitions. The increasing importance of virtual platforms as connection points can be seen as exemplary in the emergence of information and communication technologies, such as social media, apps, online marketplaces, websites, forums, and digital collaboration tools.

Value co-creation offers a sound theoretical foundation for actor engagement and engagement platforms because it addresses multiple actors' resource exchanges that lead to the co-creation of value. In contrast to traditional thinking in marketing, which focuses on firms as profit-maximising

producers of goods in which value is embedded and sold to and consumed by customers, value co-creation states that no single actor produces value in isolation; value is always co-created through interaction by multiple actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008). The focus lies on the exchange of intangible operant resources (i.e., skills, knowledge, competencies), which are applied to operand resources (i.e., raw materials, tangibles) (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Moreover, value is always determined individually by the beneficiary and depends on how an actor uses the value proposition of another actor (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Over the last years, value co-creation has been established as a prevailing theory in marketing and service management. Furthermore, value co-creation has been taken up and adapted from other disciplines, such as management (e.g., Alves et al., 2016; Goermar et al., 2021), sport management (e.g., Woratschek et al., 2014), entrepreneurship (e.g., Shams & Kaufmann, 2016), and tourism (e.g., Cabiddu et al., 2013).

Value co-creation occurs through actors' interactions on engagement platforms. Actors can exchange resources with different actors on different platforms. Thus, engagement platforms are interconnected in networks of platforms called service ecosystems in service management and marketing literature. Service ecosystems provide the institutional framework for value co-creation and consist of specific institutions (e.g., norms, rules, laws etc.) that guide value co-creation processes (Vargo & Lusch, 2016).

However, value co-creation is a theory at a high level of abstraction (Woratschek et al., 2020). Therefore, concepts are needed to capture the generalising foundational premises of the theory, to make the theory empirically accessible through constructs and variables, and finally, practically applicable (Ulaga et al., 2021). Accordingly, the concepts of actor engagement and engagement platforms can be used to bring together the theoretical perspective of value co-creation with empirical observations (Alexander et al., 2018).

Although the concepts of actor engagement (e.g. Brodie et al., 2019; Kullak et al., 2021; Storbacka et al., 2016) and customer engagement (e.g. Harmeling et al., 2017; Kumar et al., 2019; Verhoef et al., 2010) are widely discussed in the service management and marketing literature, there remain several aspects to investigate more in detail. Accordingly, there are various calls for further research in the field. For example, Brodie et al. (2019, p. 183) demand "further research that expands the extant domain of engagement research through consideration of the focal actors, engagement contexts, levels of aggregation and analysis, theoretical foundations, and research methodologies." Storbacka et al. (2016) call for more research on the issues of engagement

practices, network effects of actor engagement, and the roles of engagement platforms and actors in value co-creation. Alexander et al. (2018, p. 347) highlight the need for research on the “ways in which firms should create, facilitate and react to engagement behaviours within a service ecosystem.” Accordingly, this doctoral thesis addresses some of these calls to advance the understanding of how actors and engagement platforms are interconnected within a service ecosystem and how actors’ multilateral resource exchange is facilitated on engagement platforms leading to value co-creation processes.

To follow this purpose, the author chooses a specific research context, which is reasonable for both empirical investigations and detailed conceptualisations. It is necessary to break down abstract theories and apply general concepts to a specific research context to establish compatibility for business and derive sound and actionable implications for practitioners. In particular, as it is known that engagement can differ across different contexts (e.g., Alexander et al., 2018), it is important to take specific context characteristics into account. As the research context, sport management and, in particular, sport sponsorship were selected as specific parts of the service industry.

Sport management represents an appropriate research context for this thesis due to several reasons. First, there are often highly identified customers who regularly interact with sport organisations. Thereby, their interactions often exceed the usual transaction behaviours (Woratschek et al., 2014) and, especially, fans show extra-role behaviours (Yoshida et al., 2014). For example, fans chanting in a sport stadium and thereby creating a unique atmosphere or fan clubs organising bus trips to away games on their own. Second, sport events are a good example of physical engagement platforms that connect several actors, such as spectators, teams, sponsors, media organisations, event organisers, marketing agencies, politicians etc. (Woratschek et al., 2014). If the events are broadcasted on television and/or streamed on the Internet, they additionally represent virtual engagement platforms. Third, sport management is a context in which emotions play an important role (Biscaia et al., 2012), and the sense of belonging to a community is usually strong (Chalip, 2006). This fosters the engagement of the involved actors. This can be seen, for example, in the high number of volunteers at both the professional and the non-professional level. Fourth, value co-creation has already been introduced into the sport management context by Woratschek et al. (2014) in terms of the sport value framework. This means that, although this was only a first and general approach, there are already initial starting points that the author of this thesis can follow up on. Nevertheless, looking at the current state of research in sport management,

it becomes apparent that the literature is still dominated by the logic of sport products that considers sport as a good produced by a sport organisation, which is an equivalent to the traditional goods-focused thinking in marketing (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020).

Finally, sport sponsors pursue mainly marketing objectives and strive to acquire new customers and business partners and to bind the existing ones more firmly. Therefore, sponsors address the customers and partners of the sponsee, which can be existing or potential customers and partners of the sponsor itself, to benefit from a positive image transfer (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999). Consequently, these five reasons suggest that sport management including sport sponsorship is a well-suited context in which to study and develop the concepts of actor engagement and engagement platforms through the lens of value co-creation.

From the results gained in the specific research context, conclusions can be drawn for the general concepts in service management and marketing, such as actor engagement and engagement platforms and the general value co-creation theory. In addition, findings from the sport management context can support researchers and practitioners alike to apply engagement concepts to other contexts taking their respective specific characteristics into account.

To sum it up, the purpose of the present doctoral thesis is to contribute to a more profound understanding of actor engagement as a marketing objective and resource exchanges on interconnected engagement platforms embedded in service ecosystems by using the research context of sport management. Thus, the overarching research question of this thesis is:

*How does actor engagement in terms of exchanging resources on engagement platforms contribute to value co-creation in service ecosystems?*

## 1.2 Structure of the Thesis

The present doctoral thesis is a cumulative one, which means it comprises an accumulation of the different research projects that the author developed during his time as a PhD candidate. In order to structure the projects within the thesis, they are divided into scientific and knowledge transfer papers. The scientific papers are published having undergone or are currently undergoing a double-blind peer review process (except for the research handbook article).

The transfer papers' purpose is to mitigate scientific knowledge gained in research projects to practitioners and students alike. Accordingly, they are less detailed (e.g., in methodological terms) and written in "non-scientific" language to facilitate understanding for any potential reader. Creating such transfer papers contributes to the knowledge transfer pillar of the Third Mission of the University of Bayreuth (University of Bayreuth, 2017). Knowledge transfer is thereby understood as a mutual exchange of knowledge between actors from the university and from society, business, culture, and politics through certain communication channels such as conference presentations, congresses, business events, workshops, or publications (University of Bayreuth, 2017).

Furthermore, the author contributed to the 2030 Internationalisation Strategy of the University of Bayreuth, in particular to the two central strategy pillars of communication and global networks (University of Bayreuth, 2021). The scientific papers included in this thesis have been published or submitted to renowned international scientific journals from Europe, Australia, or the United States of America. The aim was to raise international awareness of research made at the University of Bayreuth and communicate the research results to an international audience. Moreover, the author contributed to the development of a global survey-based journal ranking for sport management journals, which is an important step for the discipline and sharpens the reputation of the University of Bayreuth as one leader in the field. Another contribution to the international network is the co-authorship with foreign researchers and researchers working at universities abroad. In addition, all transfer papers, except one, are published in English to make the content accessible to international practitioners, students, and researchers.

Moreover, the author and his co-authors presented their research at several international conferences on different continents, including Europe, South America, and Oceania. The purpose of the many international conference presentations was, on the one hand, to foster the reputation of the University of Bayreuth and, on the other hand, to extend and maintain the international



research network. A list of the author's conference contributions can be found in appendix A. Each conference submission underlay a double-blind review process and required acceptance of the respective conference scientific committees.

### 1.2.1 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

For a better overview and understanding of the connections between the different research projects in this doctoral thesis, the scientific papers (paper 1-7, shaded green), as well as the knowledge transfer papers (paper A-I, shaded grey), are classified into a research framework with two dimensions and two characteristics each. Accordingly, the research framework consists of four categories. Figure 1 visualises the dimensions of the methodological approach and the level of aggregation. The methodological approach is divided into conceptual and empirical articles. The aggregation level combines the intra- and micro-levels and distinguishes them from the meso- and macro-levels.

#### 1.2.1.1 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The fundamental aim of research is to generate new knowledge. Approaches to systematically gather this knowledge vary. The choice of the methodological approach depends on the underlying research paradigm, the research design, and the specific research questions. Separating between conceptual and empirical research reported in conceptual and empirical articles is a common differentiation of scientific work (MacInnis, 2011; Yadav, 2010). However, it needs to be mentioned that many academic articles include a combination of conceptual research (e.g., conceptualisations, conceptual thinking) and empirical research (e.g., testing conceptual frameworks and hypotheses with data) (MacInnis, 2011). Therefore, in this thesis, the author defines, in line with Yadav (2010), conceptual articles as articles that comprise purely conceptual thinking without data. Empirical articles are specified as both purely empirical and blends of empirical and conceptual research. In other words, empirical articles contain data. Accordingly, the various research projects included in this thesis are classified into purely conceptual and empirical articles (see Fig. 1).

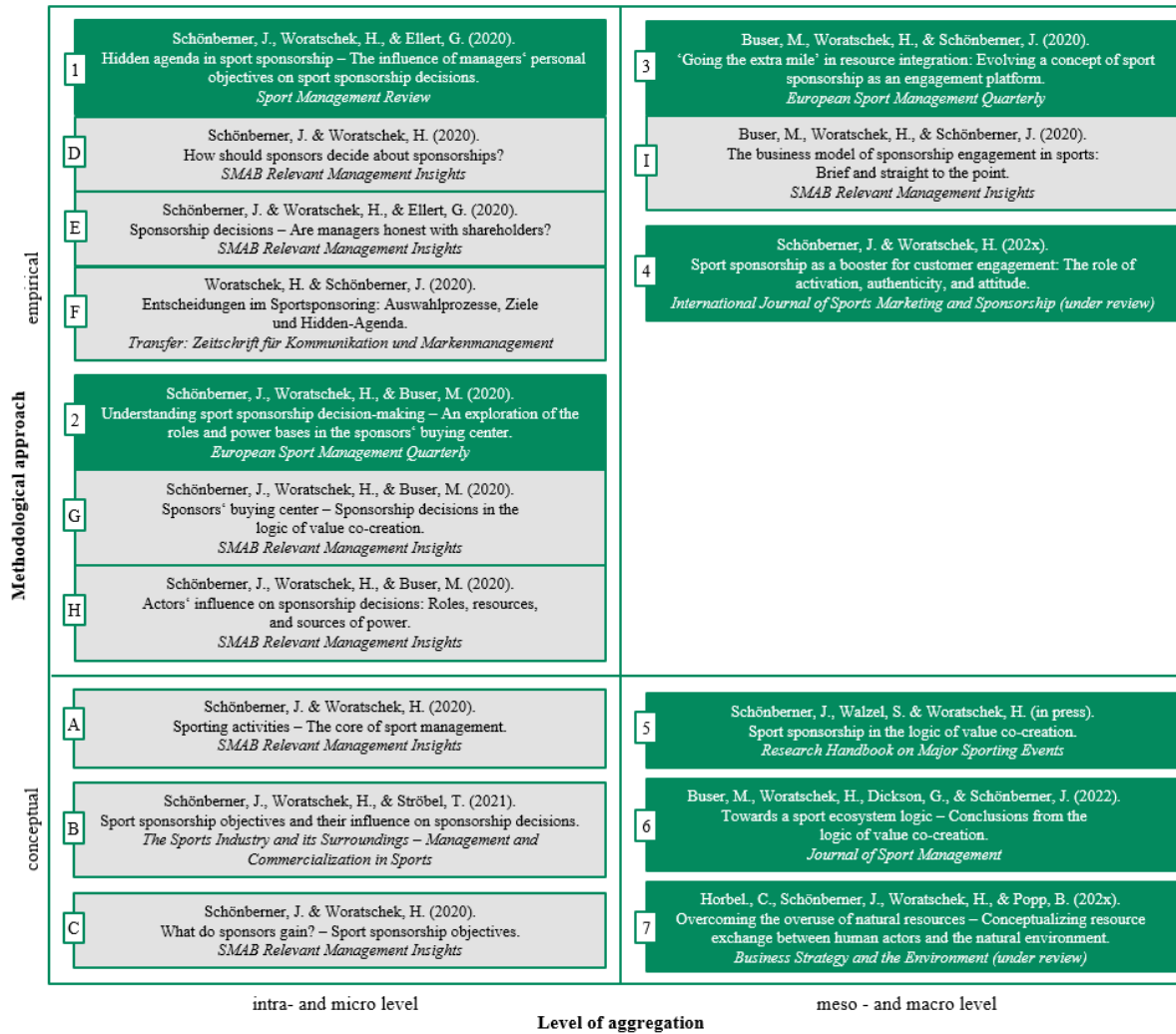
*Conceptual articles.* The importance of conceptual articles is generally recognised in service management and marketing (Yadav, 2010). MacInnis (2011) goes so far as to claim that “conceptual thinking is at the heart of the scientific enterprise” (p. 141). Conceptual research consists, among others, of the development of conceptualisations, conceptual frameworks,

integrative models, state of the art reviews, and builds the foundation for successive empirical work (Stewart & Zinkhan, 2006).

Furthermore, conceptual articles “bridge existing theories in interesting ways, link work across disciplines, provide multi-level insights, and broaden the scope of our thinking” (Gilson & Goldberg, 2015, p. 128). Such purely conceptual articles aim to advance a theory without data usage (Yadav, 2010) and draw evidence from synthesising or adapting existing theories enriched with convincing and consistent logic and argumentation (Vargo & Koskela-Huotari, 2020). In service and marketing research, there are usually four types of conceptual articles: theory synthesis, theory adaption, typology, and model (Jaakkola, 2020). The papers classified as conceptual articles in the present thesis aim to synthesise and adapt theories and/or develop conceptual models.

*Empirical articles.* Theoretical concepts are usually operationalised into empirical constructs and variables, and hypotheses stating the main, moderating, or mediating effects are derived from research propositions (Ulaga et al., 2021). Then the hypotheses are tested (Deighton et al. 2010). Accordingly, empirical articles substantiate theoretical developments with empirical data (Krafft et al., 2015) by measuring and/or observing the phenomena under investigation (Vargo & Koskela-Huotari, 2020). Thus, empirical research in connection with theoretical considerations is an essential part of science (Vargo & Koskela-Huotari, 2020). Empirical articles contain specific applications from a wide range of qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Every article classified as an empirical article in this thesis contains a combination of conceptual and empirical research. First, conceptual thinking was used to develop a conceptual framework or model, which was then tested using empirical data obtained with a specific research method.



**Figure 1.** Research framework.

### 1.2.1.2 LEVEL OF AGGREGATION

The second dimension of the research framework is the level of aggregation. More complex research questions are usually analysed at various levels of aggregation (Woratschek et al., 2020). Common distinctions are made between three levels of aggregation, namely the micro-, meso-, and macro-level (e.g., Alexander et al., 2018; Breidbach & Brodie, 2017; Brodie et al., 2019; Frow et al., 2014; Storbacka et al., 2016; Taillard et al., 2016; Woratschek et al., 2020). In the sport value framework, the first application of value co-creation theory to the sport management context, Woratschek et al. (2014) also introduces the intra-level of aggregation. Analysis at the intra-level focuses on single actors (e.g., organisations or individuals). This can comprise actors' motivations, attitudes, intentions, or behaviours (Woratschek et al., 2014).

The micro-level of aggregation describes dyadic relationships between two actors and/or an actor and an object (Alexander et al., 2018). In the context of value co-creation, this include mutual resource exchanges within such dyadic relationships (Brodie et al., 2019). These interactive resource exchange and integration processes can be defined as actor engagement which comprises actors' disposition to engage and actual engaging behaviour. Actor engagement represents the micro-foundation for value co-creation processes on engagement platforms in service ecosystems (Storbacka et al., 2016). The meso- and macro-levels can emerge from the micro-level of aggregation (Taillard et al., 2016).

Analysis at the level of engagement platforms is assigned to the meso-level of aggregation (Breidbach & Brodie, 2017). At the meso-level, triadic settings up to networks comprising multiple actors and their relations can be investigated by using, for example, actor mappings (Woratschek et al., 2020). Dynamic changes and social mechanisms between actors can best be understood at the meso-level (Storbacka et al., 2016).

The macro-level as a high level of aggregation encompasses whole (service) ecosystems (Frow et al., 2014). Applied to the value co-creation context, analysis at the macro-level facilitate a holistic understanding of the interconnectedness of engagement platforms within service ecosystems (Breidbach & Brodie, 2017). Service ecosystems are shaped by institutions and higher-level institutional arrangements (Alexander et al., 2018; Vargo & Lusch, 2016).

In this thesis, for reasons of practicability, the two characteristics of the dimension of the level of aggregation, the intra- and the micro-level as well as the meso-and macro-level are combined. Accordingly, each research project is arranged to one of those categories (Fig.1).

### 1.2.2 CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE RESEARCH PROJECTS

The classification of the projects included in the present doctoral thesis gives the reader a structured overview (Fig. 1). In the following section, the author provides guidance on the logical and thematic connections between the research projects.

First, the theoretical foundation for this thesis is built by gaining a thorough understanding of value co-creation, which contrasts the goods-dominant logic and its application and adaptation to the sport management context (chapter 2.1, 2.2, transfer paper A). Its connection with the current thinking of sport sponsorship from a relationship and network perspective follows (chapter 2.4). Sponsorship is a powerful tool in relationship marketing.

After the theoretical foundation is set, the author starts with investigating the motives of sport sponsors to gain access to a sponsorship network by entering a sponsorship deal with a selected sponsee. This research question was first approached conceptually by extensively reviewing the literature on sponsorship objectives, which results in transfer papers B and C. The conceptualisation then builds the basis for the subsequent empirical investigation (scientific paper 1). The revelation of a hidden agenda and its positive and negative effects for the sponsor can be partly attributed to the author's and co-authors' thinking in the logic of value co-creation. This mindset enables to broaden the scope beyond traditional thinking in sport sponsorship to detect hidden personal objectives of managers. Moreover, examining the effects of such personal objectives that influence sponsorship decisions showed that, although there might be diverging objectives between the sponsoring company and the managers, positive effects instead of only negative ones can occur. This is in contrast to traditional theories, such as agency theory, that only speaks of negative effects due to agency conflicts. The aspects of value co-creation that value is always value-in-use, and that perceived value is always determined individually by the beneficiary can explain the findings from this research project. Transfer papers D, E, and F emerged from scientific paper 1 translating the empirical findings into a language that is easier to understand for practitioners and students.

After knowing more about the sponsors' objectives, the author was interested in how such decisions are made by the sponsors. Scientific paper 2 resulted from that consideration and showed that sponsorship decisions are usually group decisions with several actors involved. Inspired by value co-creation thinking, the research indicates that different individuals playing specific roles collaborate in decision-making for or against a sponsorship. Moreover, such decision-making units

that co-create sponsorship decisions are influenced beyond the boundaries of the sponsoring company. Transfer papers G and H are derived from scientific paper 2.

Expanding the understanding of sponsorship networks by introducing the concept of engagement platforms, which are touchpoints that connect the actors involved in sponsorship networks, was the aim of scientific paper 3. The second purpose was to investigate the actors' engagement behaviour on such sponsorship engagement platforms, particularly the resource exchanges between the various sponsors and the sponsee. Findings revealed various types of resource integration beyond or without sponsorship contracts, which was labelled sport sponsorship engagement. Transfer paper I relates to scientific paper 3. The results are then taken up and enriched conceptually by scientific paper 5, which adds further explanations on the various actors on sport engagement platforms and how they contribute to value co-creation. Thereby the perspectives of both the sponsee as an engagement platform provider and the sponsors as focal actors on such platforms are taken.

Scientific paper 4 focuses on the effects of the interaction of the actors on sport sponsorship engagement platforms. For this purpose, the triad of sponsors, sponsees and sponsee's customers (here: spectators) was investigated. The causal effects of the interaction between sponsors and sponsee's customer were examined in detail, considering the sponsor-sponsee relationship. The findings of our experimental study show that sport sponsors' activations as a form of sponsorship engagement drive customer engagement disposition and customer engagement behaviour. Thereby, it is shown that customer engagement is positively and negatively influenced by sponsorship authenticity and attitudes towards the sponsor, and that the value for the actors involved can thus be positive or negative.

The aim of scientific paper 6 was to broaden the view from a platform to a systemic level. Therefore, the authors conceptually describe the interconnectedness of the sponsorship engagement platform with other sport engagement platforms embedded in the whole sport ecosystem. Institutions (i.e. rules, norms, laws etc.) shape the sport ecosystem and are in turn shaped by the resource-integrating actors.

Scientific paper 7 works on extending the theorising on resource exchanges by including the natural environment as focal actor and the integration of natural resources. This provides an ecological in addition to the social and economic perspective on value co-creation. The aim is to establish a balanced resource exchange between social and economic actors and the natural

environment to reduce the overuse of natural resources. The sport context is used as a research subject for this theory extending conceptual article.

### 1.2.3 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH PROJECTS AND THE AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

The first scientific paper (*[Hidden agenda in sport sponsorship – The influence of managers' personal objectives on sport sponsorship decisions](#)*) analyses the sponsoring company at an intra-level to find out why sponsors strive to enter into sport sponsorship networks. Accordingly, we investigated the sponsors' objectives and developed a step-by-step decision-making process from a sponsor's perspective. For this purpose, the authors conducted a qualitative Delphi study with three rounds. The findings revealed that in addition to corporate sponsorship objectives, the managers' personal interests influence sponsorship decisions to a certain degree. Twelve different types of managers' objectives, such as identification, prestige in peer-group, or personal benefits and fun, were identified. Thus, results show that managers, the ones with the authority to decide in the name of the sponsoring company, follow their hidden agenda when making sponsorship decisions and do not act exclusively in the company's interest. Accordingly, the personal objectives may differ from the corporate objectives, and agency effects occur, resulting in either negative or positive consequences for the sponsor. Interestingly, the study indicated that even if a sponsorship decision is pre-determined due to the personal interests of the deciding managers, the decision-making process changes only marginally and is still carried out, giving managers the possibility to better justify the decision afterward internally or externally. This phenomenon is called ex-post rationalisation.

The author of this thesis – from now on only named as the author – contributed to this paper as follows. As the first and leading author, he developed the theoretical framework and further collected and analysed the empirical data. In addition, he wrote the first draft of the paper, which was then refined through ongoing discussions with the co-authors Herbert Woratschek and Guido Ellert. Both co-authors assisted in framing the research aim and revised the paper repeatedly. Guido Ellert also gave advices for designing the Delphi study. Herbert Woratschek provided the initial idea for the paper.

The second scientific paper (*[Understanding sport sponsorship decision-making – An exploration of the roles and power bases in the sponsors' buying center](#)*) investigated sport sponsorship decisions within decision-making units. Sponsorship decisions are usually group decisions where

multiple actors collaborate. The buying center concept from industrial marketing management served as the theoretical foundation for this research. A three-round qualitative Delphi study with two expert samples was carried out. We identified eight different roles comprising the sponsors' buying center (SBC), namely deciders, signatories, coordinators, users, experts, initiators, negotiators, and networkers. Moreover, the various members of the SBC fulfil different tasks and draw their influence from different sources of power. The study further found several organisational and environmental factors affecting the SBC. Interestingly, some roles of the SBC are outsourced to external partners, which shows that the decision-making is not exclusively influenced from within the sponsoring company.

The author contributed to this research by leading the project and designing the research idea together with the co-author Herbert Woratschek. He then developed the theoretical framework and conducted the data collection and analysis. The first version of the paper was also written by the author. Herbert Woratschek provided support and guidance during the development of the theoretical and empirical framework and revised the paper regularly. Markus Buser also served in the whole process as a partner for discussions and revised the paper. Moreover, the author was awarded for this paper second place at the New Researcher Award 2019 of the 28th European Association of Sport Management (EASM) Conference 2019 in Seville.

The scientific paper three (*[‘Going the extra mile’ in resource integration: Evolving a concept of sport sponsorship as an engagement platform](#)*) introduces the concept of engagement platforms to the sport management literature by a conceptualisation of sponsorship engagement platforms in sports. Then, the conceptualisation was backed by empirical data. Results from another three-round Delphi study demonstrate that sport sponsorship engagement, which is resource integration behaviour beyond transactions, occurs between sponsors and between the sponsors and the sponsee on a sponsorship engagement platform. The voluntarily exchanged resources include technical competencies, management competencies, innovative ideas, networking skills, and products and services.

The author engaged in discussions with the two co-authors on the theoretical framework of the paper, provided support and advice during the data collection and analysis stage and revised the paper repeatedly. Additionally, Herbert Woratschek contributed to the research vision. The first author Markus Buser who led the project, carried out the major part of the empirical work.



The research aim of the fourth scientific paper (*Sport sponsorship as a booster for customer engagement: The role of activation, authenticity, and attitude*) was to examine the marketing tool of sponsorship activations and to test its effects on customer engagement. Customer engagement was investigated as customer engagement disposition and customer engagement behaviour. The influencing role of sponsorship authenticity and attitudes towards the sponsor was also included in the research model. The findings from the online experiment showed that sponsors' activations drive both positive and negative customer engagement depending on the context, respectively sponsorship authenticity and attitudes towards the sponsor. Moreover, there are direct effects of sponsorship authenticity on customer engagement disposition and behaviour and of attitudes towards the sponsor on customers' disposition to engage.

The author conducted the main work on this paper. His contributions range from designing the research idea, developing the theoretical and empirical foundations, and analysing the experimental data to writing the first version of the paper. The co-author Herbert Woratschek engaged in fruitful discussions on a regular basis on the theoretical framework and the experimental design and revised the paper.

In the fifth scientific paper (*Sport sponsorship in the logic of value co-creation*) for the Research Handbook on Major Sporting Events the authors built on the results of scientific paper three (*'Going the extra mile' in resource integration: Evolving a concept of sport sponsorship as an engagement platform*) and extended and enriched the conceptualisation of sport engagement platforms. The paper provides an overview of relevant stakeholders participating on such platforms and uses an illustrative case to describe the value co-creation of actors involved in sport (event) sponsorships. The paper thereby takes the perspective of both the sponsors and the sponsee. In particular, the role of the sponsee as a platform provider and the associated tasks, namely administrating access, mediating, informing, caring, organising, and cooperating, are emphasised. Theoretical and especially managerial implications are derived.

The author's contribution to this paper was to develop the theoretical and conceptual foundation and to provide the first draft of the paper. Stefan Walzel provided the explanatory example of the EHF Men Handball Champions League Final Four, engaged in fruitful discussions, and revised the paper repeatedly. Herbert Woratschek served as a sparring partner in regular discussions and also revised the paper.

Scientific paper six (*[Towards a sport ecosystem logic – Conclusions from the logic of value co-creation](#)*) is the conceptualisation of a new logic for the sport ecosystem. Therefore, theories from various literature streams, such as ecosystems in management, network approaches in sport management, and service ecosystems in marketing, are synthesised and connected with the logic of value co-creation. The sport ecosystem logic explains the central role of sporting activities as actors' shared interests, the interconnectedness of the actors and engagement platforms, and the influence of institutions in the sport ecosystem. Therefore, the conceptual paper provides five fundamental premises that comprise the sport ecosystem logic.

The author engaged in various discussion rounds with the co-authors on the conceptual framework and revised the paper repeatedly. The research vision was developed by all authors in extensive discussions during a meeting at the University of Bayreuth and then further evolved mainly by Markus Buser and Herbert Woratschek. Markus Buser did the main work both in writing and in revising the paper during the reviewing rounds.

In the seventh scientific paper (*[Overcoming the overuse of natural resources – Conceptualizing resource exchange between human actors and the natural environment](#)*), the authors extend the logic of value co-creation by adding the role of the natural environment as an actor without agency. The natural environment integrates – that is, uses and provides – natural resources and thereby contributes to value co-creation. Hence, we propose a conceptualisation of resource integration that combines three levels of analysis, namely a static, a dynamic, and a systemic perspective. The static, actor-centric perspective differentiates between resource integration of actors with and without agency, their roles and resource integration behaviours, and the generated outcome. The dynamic, dyad-centric perspective illustrates the resource exchange between actors with agency and the natural environment over time. In the systemic perspective, the resource integration of actors and its effects within a network is described. As natural resources are usually pure public resources, resource exchanges between the natural environment and actors with agency are imbalanced. Therefore, a 'patronage model' is proposed, which would provide the natural environment with an actor with agency who acts in its best interest and regulates access to its natural resources. This could establish a balanced resource exchange between social and economic actors and the natural environment leading to a reduction of the overuse of natural resources. The study uses the sports context as research subject.

Herbert Woratschek and Chris Horbel provided the initial research idea, which was then shaped and framed by all authors equally. The author's contributions to this paper can be found in the development of the theoretical foundation and the co-created evolution of the conceptual model. Moreover, the author created in collaboration with Chris Horbel the first draft and constant revisions of the paper. Herbert Woratschek and Chris Horbel engaged together with the author in multiple discussions developing and re-framing the conceptual model of the paper. Bastian Popp regularly participated in the discussions and revised the paper repeatedly.

The transfer papers A to I (Figure 1, shaded grey), that is the paper in a practitioner journal, the book chapter, and the seven *SMAB Relevant Management Insight* papers, were led and predominately created by the respective first authors in supportive collaboration of the co-authors in terms of discussions and revisions. The exception from this is the transfer paper F (*Entscheidungen im Sportsponsoring: Auswahlprozesse, Ziele und Hidden-Agenda*) where both authors contributed equally.

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## **CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVE ON ENGAGEMENT AT THE INTRA- AND MICRO LEVEL OF AGGREGATION**

### **2.1 (Service) Marketing Perspective**

#### **2.1.1 GOODS-DOMINANT VS SERVICE-DOMINANT LOGIC**

Until the early 2000s, the dominant logic in marketing focused on the exchange of goods (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Goods are produced and distributed by the firm. Therefore, the value is embedded in the products, which are seen as operand (i.e., tangible) resources. The focus lies on maximising the profit for the firm (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). In short, value is created by the firm, embedded in produced goods, and sold to the customers. Then the customers use the goods, thus consuming up the value. Accordingly, it becomes apparent that this goods-centred logic has limited ability to explain the value that arises from interactions and collaborations of multiple actors that constitute an essential part of today's business.

Therefore, in their seminal article, Vargo and Lusch (2004) introduced an alternative perspective on economic exchanges beyond goods that emphasises the integration of intangible in addition to tangible resources, the importance of relationships, and value co-creation. They called the new perspective for marketing the service-dominant logic.

The core of the new logic was shifting the focus from goods as produced value to the exchange of service, which is “the application of specialized skills and knowledge” (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, p. 6). Goods are vehicles of operand resources (i.e., skills and knowledge embedded in products) that are used by other actors, such as customers. Hence, the customers, also considered an operand resource, contribute to value creation through using the service (Vargo & Lusch, 2008).

Consequently, value cannot be created solely by the firm. The firm can only offer a value proposition, which other actors, such as customers, use. Thus, value creation is always co-creation through interaction (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Notably, the “value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary” (Vargo & Lusch, 2008, p. 7). This means the valence of an actors' value depends on how the actor, for example a customer, perceives the use of a certain value proposition. The valence of the perceived value is on a continuum from positive to negative. In the understanding of the service-dominant logic, value consists not only of financial value but also of social, contextual, meaning-laden, and experiential value (Vargo & Lusch, 2008).



Moreover, the perceived value depends on the context of the actors' use of a value proposition. Context is defined here as a "unique set of actors and the unique reciprocal links among them" (Chandler & Vargo, 2011, p. 41). The main focus in the value co-creation literature lies on social context, namely value-in-social-context, as "social forces have a major impact on value co-creation, and on how value is defined and perceived" (Edvardsson et al., 2011, p. 333). In other words, actors' value perceptions are influenced by their interactions with other social actors while using a firms' value proposition.

Value co-creation takes place in service ecosystems, which are "a relatively self-contained, self-adjusting system of resource-integrating actors connected by shared institutional arrangements and mutual value creation through service exchange" (Lusch & Vargo, 2014, p. 161). Service ecosystems are shaped by institutions and institutional arrangements, such as norms, rules, and laws (Vargo & Lusch, 2016).

### **2.1.2 ACTOR ENGAGEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT PLATFORMS**

While service ecosystems observe value co-creation at a macro-level, engagement platforms analyse co-creation practices at a meso-level of aggregation. Engagement platforms are defined "as physical or virtual touch points designed to provide structural support for the exchange and integration of resources, and thereby co-creation of value between actors in a service system" (Breidbach et al., 2014, p. 594). This means that engagement platforms are the connection points of the interactions of multiple actors.

On engagement platforms, engagement practices of the participating actors occur, which can be called actor engagement (Brodie et al., 2019). Actor engagement is defined as "both the disposition of actors to engage, and the activity of engaging in an interactive process of resource integration within the institutional context provided by a service ecosystem" (Storbacka et al., 2016, p. 3009). Accordingly, actor engagement comprises the intention to behave as well as actual behaviour. Actor engagement in terms of multiple actors' resource exchanges happens on an engagement platform, which is embedded in an entire service ecosystem consisting of multiple interconnected platforms (Breidbach & Brodie, 2017).

Consequently, value co-creation can be analysed at different levels of aggregation, in terms of actor engagement at an intra- and micro-level, engagement platforms at a meso-level, and within service ecosystems at a macro-level.

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## 2.2 Sport Management Perspective

In the sport management context, traditional approaches can be subsumed under the term “logic of sport products” (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020). Such approaches segment the sport sector according to product and buyer types, where the production of sport goods is at the centre stage (Pitts et al., 1994). Another model describes the sport industry as sport producing sector, such as event producers, supported by various subsectors, such as manufacturers, facilities, media, and associations (Li et al., 2001). Thus, sport events are produced by sport organisations by combining various resources (Chelladurai, 2014).

These traditional approaches in sport management were first questioned by Woratschek et al. (2014), who pointed out the limitations of the goods-centred perspective to explain the collaborations in the sport context. An illustrative example is the fans’ contributions to the stadium atmosphere at a sport event, which makes attending sport events so appealing for many spectators. Hence, the perspective of a sport organisation producing a sport event and selling it to customers falls short of explanatory power.

Therefore, the sport value framework was developed, which is an application and adaptation of the service-dominant logic by Vargo and Lusch (2004) to the sport management context (Woratschek et al., 2014). Using the example of sport events, the authors argue that sport organisations can only offer a value proposition in terms of a platform, which can be used by multiple actors (i.e., individuals and organisations). Value is then co-created through interactions and resource exchanges of different stakeholders on the event platform. In line with the service-dominant logic, co-created value is always value-in-use and value-in-context (Woratschek et al., 2014).

Woratschek et al. (2014) consider the peculiarity of the sport management context, the sporting activities, as the central component of the sport value framework. Sporting activities are the pivotal linking point of value co-creation. They represent the common interest of all stakeholders on a sport platform and thus foster interactions among them. The role of sporting activities is described more in detail in the following chapter (transfer paper A).

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## 2.3 Sporting Activities – The Core of Sport Management (Transfer Paper A)

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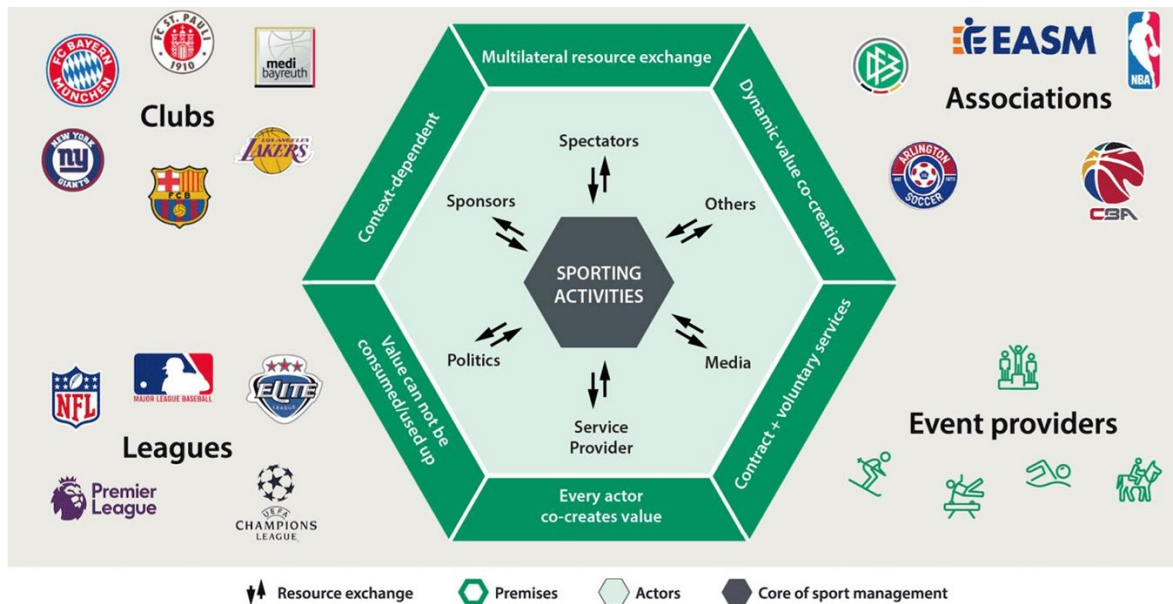
There are various definitions of sport in academia and business. For example, according to McIntosh (1970, p. 553), sport “refers to all physical activities which are not necessary for the survival of the individual or the race and which are dominated by a compulsory element.” Ibrahim (1975, p. 37) states that “sport is basically a human kinetic activity.” In addition, another important element in many sport definitions is competition (Meier, 1981), i.e. co-opetition as a constitutive characteristic of sport events because sport teams and/or athletes compete with each other and at the same time cooperate in specific activities (Robert, Marqués, & Le Roy, 2009, p. 25). In the Cambridge Dictionary (2020), sport is defined as “a game, competition, or activity needing physical effort and skill that is played or done according to rules, for enjoyment and/or as a job” and as “all types of physical activity that people do to keep healthy or for enjoyment.” Although there is no universal definition of sport, physical or kinetic activities can be found in nearly every definition.

In sport management, there are models, e.g. the sport activity model of Li, Hofacre, and Mahony (2000), which describe sporting activities as being key in sport management. Accordingly, “sporting activities and sport competitions are the core of sport management” (Woratschek et al., 2014, p. 16).

Building on this assertion, Woratschek, Schafmeister, and Ellert (2019, p. 13) conceptualised sport events as platforms (see hexagon in Figure 1), where multiple actors, such as spectators, sponsors, media organisations, and athletes exchange resources to co-create value. The sporting activities represent thereby the reciprocal links between these actors and build the pivotal point for actors’ value co-creation in sport management (Woratschek, 2020). Without sporting activities, no sport event would occur; neither sport team brands nor sport league brands would exist, which provide a platform for actors’ resource integration in order to co-create value.

Furthermore, all brands in Figure 1 can be regarded as such platforms where actors are linked. In this connection, the essential task of the brand owner is to orchestrate and promote activities on

the brand platform in a way that resource integration for value co-creation is facilitated based on the related sporting activities (Griebel, Ströbel, & Woratschek, 2020, p. 2).



**Figure 1.** Sporting Activities as the Core of Sport Engagement Platforms (adapted from Woratschek et al., 2019).

Another platform that would not exist without sporting activities is the sport sponsorship platform (Woratschek & Buser, 2018, p. 35). Sport sponsorship without sporting activities is unimaginable as sponsoring is only made possible by specific sporting activities. E-sport events can also be called platforms, e.g. FIFA which is based on football as a sporting activity. This is also the case with all fantasy sports, which are game event platforms where every fantasy sport player chooses a team of real sport athletes and wins points depending on the real athletes' performance. More precisely, the sport related platforms are defined as engagement platforms (Buser, Woratschek, & Schönberner, 2020a; 2020b). Engagement platforms are “physical or virtual touchpoints designed to provide structural support for the exchange and integration of resources, and thereby co-creation of value between actors in a service ecosystem” (Breibach, Brodie, & Hollebeek, 2014, p. 594).

Going a step further, we claim that sporting activities are not only the basis of the whole sport industry with its various sport platforms such as sport events, sport brands, and sport sponsorships, but also for a service ecosystem which includes links outside the sport industry, e.g. law firms and consultancies. Sport industry sectors, such as sports goods manufacturers, sports facility construction, sports technology companies, and sports consultancy are formed around sporting

activities (Woratschek & Buser, 2018, p. 35). Without somebody doing sporting activities such as running in the forest, sporting goods manufacturers would not sell their sport products. Without athletes running a marathon, no marathon event could take place, so the sports goods manufacturers would not sell any sport goods, the sponsors would have no sponsees to sponsor, the sport media companies nothing to report, fantasy sports would not exist, etc. In conclusion, sporting activities are fundamental to every kind of sport engagement platform and the whole sport industry. Therefore, they represent the pivotal point of the value co-creation core in sport management.

### **To put it in a nutshell:**

1. Most definitions of sport refer to physical or human kinetic activities.
2. Sporting activities are the core of sport management.
3. Sporting activities represent the reciprocal links between actors.
4. Sporting activities build the pivotal point for actors' value co-creation.
5. Sporting activities differentiate the sport industry from other industries.
6. Sport events, e-sport events, sport sponsorship, sport brands, and fantasy sports are sport engagement platforms.
7. Sport engagement platforms are physical or virtual touchpoints for actors' resource integration to co-create value.
8. Sport engagement platforms determine a service ecosystem based on sporting activities.

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## 2.4 Sport Sponsorship Perspective

Sport sponsorship as a marketing tool represents a specific part of sport management and was mainly used as a research context in this thesis (exceptions are scientific paper 6, which analyses the whole sport ecosystem, and scientific paper 7, which aims to theory expansion of the logic of value co-creation by ecological aspects). For this reason, the author deems it reasonable to provide a brief overview of the current state of thinking in the sport sponsorship literature in this chapter.

Frequently used definitions of sport sponsorship show that sponsorship is viewed predominantly through the lens of the logic of sport products in academia (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020). For example, sponsorship is defined as “an investment, in cash or in kind, in an activity in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that activity” (Meenaghan, 1991, p. 36) or an “acquisition of rights to affiliate or directly associate with a product or event for the purpose of deriving benefits related to that affiliation or association” (Mullin et al., 2014, p. 231). Accordingly, sponsorship represents the reciprocal economic exchange of one service for another. Thus, the value of sponsorships is embedded in the rights acquired by a sponsor from a sponsee (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020). Based on contractual agreements, the sponsor provides the sponsee with a payment in cash or in-kind and receives advertising rights in return (Woratschek & Buser, 2018).

However, when looking at the evolution of sport sponsorship in academia over the last decades, a change of perspectives becomes apparent. Since the philanthropic approach (sponsorship as gift) that prevailed until the 1980s, sponsorship has advanced from market-centric approaches (sponsorship as investment) and consumer-centric approaches (sponsorship as meaning) to strategic resource approaches (sponsorship as a source of competitive advantage) (Ryan & Fahy, 2012).

Since the early 2000s, a relationship and network approach has emerged, that emphasises interactions (Ryan & Fahy, 2012). Some authors have adopted this perspective and described sponsorship as interorganisational dynamics of sponsoring companies (Cobbs, 2011) or as a bilateral relationship between sponsor and sponsee (Fahy et al., 2004). Furthermore, Morgan et al. (2014) extended this bilateral relationship to a network of corporate sponsors. Wagner et al. (2017) described sponsorship networks as interconnected business relationships that are orchestrated by the sponsee. Olkkonen (2001) introduced a “trinity”, including sport organisations, business, and media.

However, further actors (e.g., spectators/fans, athletes, politicians, marketing agencies, associations, leagues, etc.) are involved in a sponsorship network, which were not addressed by previous research. More importantly, none of the previous studies investigated the interrelation of the various actors in the sponsorship network in detail and the resource exchanges between these actors. Consequently, the network perspective in sport sponsorship is still underdeveloped in academic literature (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020; Ryan & Fahy, 2012).

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## 2.5 Sport Sponsorship Objectives and their Influence on Sponsorship Decisions (Transfer Paper B)

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Sports sponsorship has been continuously growing over the past years. The global sponsorship spending was a total of US\$65.8 billion in 2018. In comparison, worldwide spending in 2008 was US\$43.1 billion, which shows an increase of more than 34% over ten years (Statista, 2018). Sports sponsorship demonstrates the most significant economic relevance among the various types of sponsorship, such as arts, causes, entertainment, and culture (Ukman, 2017).

With this in mind, sports sponsorship appears as an important marketing tool in the strategic communication portfolio of companies. Thereby, it is essential to consider sponsorship as an integrated marketing activity into a broader program of marketing communication, e.g., advertising, public relations and promotions (Copeland, Frisby & McCarville, 1996). But, why do firms invest so much money in sports sponsorships? Which objectives do they have?

Along with its growing economic relevance, the professionalisation of sports sponsorship increased. Sponsorships are strategic marketing tools, which follow strategic management processes (Hartland, Skinner & Griffiths, 2005; Schönberner, Woratschek, & Ellert, 2020). As a consequence, long-term contracts with a duration of three to five years are established (Chadwick & Thwaites, 2004; Copeland et al., 1996). Based on this strategic understanding and the ongoing professionalisation, the intra-organisational legitimisation pressure of sponsorship budgets increases (Crompton, 2004). It is therefore essential to evaluate the effectiveness and the return on investment of sponsorships (Meenaghan, 2013). However, effectiveness can only be evaluated based on objectives. Sports sponsorship objectives build the foundation for the evaluation of sponsorship effectiveness.

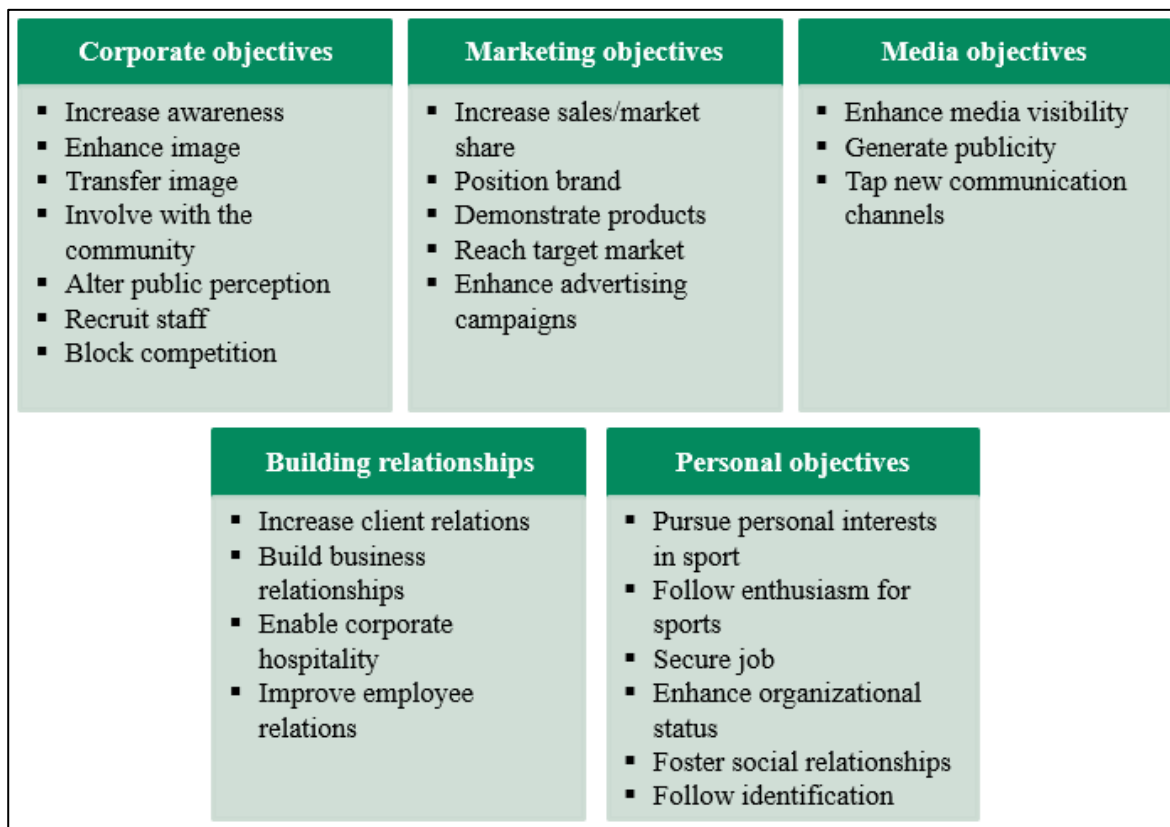
### 2.5.1 SPORTS SPONSORSHIP OBJECTIVES

Without clearly defined sports sponsorship objectives, it is challenging to measure the success of the investment (Chadwick & Thwaites, 2004). Sponsorship objectives also guide the implementation and activation of the sponsorship. Missing the objectives is one of the main reasons why sponsorships are terminated (Copeland et al., 1996). The objectives differ among companies based on preferences and resources. Moreover, it is common to determine multiple objectives for a sponsorship commitment (Apostolopoulou & Papadimitriou, 2004).

Sports sponsorship objectives are largely investigated in academic literature. Some authors tried to categorise the number of different sponsorship objectives stated over time. Hartland et al. (2005) summarise these objectives as corporate objectives, marketing objectives, media objectives, building relationships, and personal objectives (see Fig. 1). Corporate objectives are mainly centred on increasing awareness and image enhancement. Involvement with the community, alteration of public perception, staff recruitment and blockade of competition are relatively minor objectives (Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013). Increase in sales and market share are the primary marketing objectives and the ultimate goals of every corporation, though they are seldom directly reached (Hartland et al., 2005). Other marketing objectives focus, amongst others, on brand positioning and demonstration of special products. The generation of media visibility and publicity are important media objectives. Especially through social media, sponsors can tap the communication channels of the property (Weeks, Cornwell & Drennan, 2008). Further important objectives are the enhancement of relationships with customers, business partners, and employees. An effective tool to achieve these objectives are guest hospitalities in sports sponsorships (Hartland et al., 2005). To define the scope of our analyses, we subsume corporate, marketing, media and relationship objectives in organisational objectives. Organisational objectives are supposed to be a guideline for managers' decisions. Basically, personal objectives can be complementary, conflictive or neutrally related to them. If personal objectives are in conflict to organisational objectives, a manager could make a bad sponsorship decision from the organisation's perspective.

While focussing on organisational objectives, an aspect widely neglected in academic sponsorship literature consists of the personal objectives of decision-makers. Two studies which reveal personal objectives with an empirical study are these of Thwaites (1995) and Thwaites and Carruthers (1998). Their results show that personal objectives are low ranked and that their importance decreases with the size of the company and its professionalisation regarding

sponsorships. Berrett and Slack (1999) discover the relevance of social relationships for sports sponsorship objectives. They argue that personal friendship leads to sponsorship commitments, even if they are not in line with organisational objectives. With an experiment, Eberharter (2014) discovered the role of identification with a sport as an additional personal objective. Other articles mention the occurrence of personal objectives without further empirical examination. Cornwell (2008) and Meenaghan (1983) indicate enthusiasm and personal interest of the CEO towards a particular sport. In the following, we discuss how organisational and personal objectives influence sponsorship decisions.



**Figure 1.** Categories of sports sponsorship objectives (adapted from Hartland et al., 2005)

### 2.5.2 INFLUENCE OF OBJECTIVES ON SPONSORSHIP DECISIONS

Strategic sponsorship decisions should be made based on the organisational objectives of sponsors. If this is the case, marketing managers can evaluate the effectiveness of the sponsorship and justify the sponsorship budget within the organisation or company. However, matters are sometimes different in practice. Johnston (2010) indicates that the actual sponsorship decision-making by managers does not always match the company's organisational objectives. Meenaghan (1983)

points out that setting objectives is often used as ex-post rationalisation of a certain sponsorship activity. But why is this even necessary? This is where the managers' personal objectives come into play.

As proposed in Figure 2, Cornwell (2008) and Thwaites (1995) indicate that sponsorship decision-making is influenced by both organisational objectives and the managers' personal objectives. Arthur, Scott and Woods (1997) argue in the same direction. They state that each decision-maker has its own personal motives that together with the organisational objectives influence their decisions. Hartland et al. (2005) admit the existence of an influence of personal objectives on sponsorship decisions in the past. However, they claim organisational objectives are the main priority nowadays while personal objectives have the least if any influence on sponsorship decisions. Dolphin (2003) sees sponsorship as an entire rational business transaction. In general, academic literature declares a shift of relevance from personal to organisational objectives in line with the professionalisation of sports sponsorships.



**Figure 2.** Influence of sports sponsorship objectives on the sponsorship decision

In contrast, Eberharter (2014) came up with empirical evidence for the influence of personal objectives on sponsorship decisions. She discovered that identification with a certain sport influences the manager's decision to allocate sponsorship budget against market research insights.

Consistent with this result, a sponsorship expert interviewed by Hohenauer (2016) stated that many decisions are based just on gut feeling and because the CEO fancies it. This indicates that a switch of the CEO or her/his interest in sports may be enough to exchange the sponsored entity. In a further study, Berrett and Slack (1999) found out that some personal motivated sponsorships contradict any strategic business sense. While interviewing marketing managers they receive answers referring to sponsorship deals like “sometimes if the president likes it, that’s all it takes”, “the chairman wanted it, so you had to write it in a way that you should do it, and that was against our better judgement” and “it’s incredible how the feelings of the chairman affect the way we do things” (Berrett und Slack, 1999, p. 131). This can turn out to be a critical issue as Amis, Slack and Berrett (1999) stated that sponsorships selected due to managers’ personal interests are not as successful as sponsorships with strategic organisational objectives. Walliser (2003) indicated that even if these sponsorships might be successful on the first hand, their effects are not sustainable. Such sponsorships do not just harm the company, but also damage the reputation of sports sponsorships in general as a fully adequate marketing tool (Thwaites, 1995). In a recent empirical study, Schönberner et al. (2020) showed that managers are in fact influenced by their personal objectives when deciding about sports sponsorships. The so-called hidden agenda can lead to negative effects for the sponsoring company such as revenue loss, reputation damages, employee demotivation, and a misleading strategic orientation. There can also be positive consequences if a manager is personally motivated, as this could lead to higher expertise, stronger support, and better activation of the sponsorship. However, the negative effects usually dominate the positive ones.

### **2.5.3 CONCLUSION**

In summary, there are several organisational sponsorship objectives, which are largely investigated in academic literature. In contrast, the managers’ personal objectives were widely neglected so far. Sports sponsorship was seen as a rational marketing tool motivated by organisational objectives. However, recent studies showed that academics and practitioners alike must consider the influence of managers’ personal objectives on sponsorship decisions. Especially if they are in conflict to organisational objectives, personal objectives can lead to negative effects for the sponsoring company. This is why the moderating effect of personal sponsorship objectives should be considered in theory and practice. Future studies may well discover additional insights about moderating factors of sports sponsorship decision-making. Moreover, it is important for sport management professionals to understand the role of personal objectives besides organisational



objectives. This understanding helps sports marketers to prepare more precisely before sponsorship negotiations. To be aware of the counterpart's specific interests might turn out as an important advantage. Sports marketers can further use this knowledge when creating appropriate sponsorship proposals. Moreover, companies should implement incentive systems to reduce the influence of managers' personal interests on sports sponsorship decisions, which might not fit appropriately into their organisational strategy. Finally, both organisational objectives and managers' personal objectives are important for sports sponsorship decisions.

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## 2.6 What Do Sponsors Gain? – Sport Sponsorship Objectives (Transfer Paper C)

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Sponsors invest billions of dollars annually in sponsorships, with the majority allocated to sports (Statista, 2017). But why do sponsors spend so much money on this? What specific objectives do they pursue?

### 2.6.1 SPORT SPONSORSHIP OBJECTIVES

In general, sponsors target different stakeholders such as customers, internal employees, or suppliers and pursue multiple objectives with sponsorships (Meenaghan, McLoughlin, & McCormack, 2013, p. 447). The objectives vary depending on the sponsors' expectations and the resources available (Amis, Pant, & Slack 1997, p. 83). The size of the sponsoring company and the disposable budget also play a significant role.



**Figure 1,** Literature overview of the categorised sport sponsorship objectives.

Hartland, Skinner, and Griffiths (2005, p. 23-25) developed an approach for categorising sport sponsorship objectives into corporate, marketing, media, relationship building, and personal objectives. In Figure 1, we provide an overview of sport sponsorship objectives discussed in the literature by assigning them to the respective categories. This information was synthesised from the following studies: Chadwick and Thwaites (2004, 2005); Cliffe and Motion (2005); Cobbs (2011); Cornwell, (2008); Greenhalgh and Greenwell (2013); Gwinner and Eaton (1999); Hartland et al. (2005); Kourovskaja and Meenaghan (2013); Smolianov and Shilbury (2005); O'Reilly & Madill (2009, 2012); Thwaites (1995).

Moreover, sponsors do not merely consider sponsorships as a business-to-customer (B2C) marketing tool anymore, but increasingly recognise the potential of achieving business-to-business (B2B) objectives with sponsorships.

### **2.6.2 SPONSORSHIP EFFECT MEASUREMENTS**

An accurate definition of objectives helps to derive specific activities for implementing and activating sponsorships (Meenaghan, 2013, p. 387). It further facilitates effect measurements during and after the partnership (Tripodi 2001, p. 85). The latter is of paramount importance, as the managers increasingly have to justify their sponsorship expenditures (O'Reilly & Madill, 2012, p. 51).

Nevertheless, sponsorship objectives cannot be measured precisely with “hard” return on investment (ROI) figures. On the one hand, this seems problematic in the light of the growing pressure to measure and justify sponsorship investments (O'Reilly & Madill, 2012, p. 51). On the other hand, assessing sponsorship only with “hard” figures does not cover the full potential of sport sponsorships since they also create emotional bonds, which tie customers to their brand (Cliffe & Motion, 2005). A strong emotional bond can hardly be achieved with “classic” advertising campaigns. Consequently, “soft” measurements have to be applied in sport sponsorship, such as recall, recognition, image increase, purchase intention, or word-of-mouth intention. Sport organisations can use the knowledge about the versatile application areas and objectives shown in Figure 1 to specify their sponsorship proposals.

**To put it in a nutshell:**

1. Sponsors target different stakeholders with sponsorships.
2. Sponsors pursue multiple objectives.
3. Categories of sport sponsorship objectives are corporate objectives, marketing objectives, building relationships, media objectives, and personal objectives.
4. In the past, sponsors mainly addressed B2C relationships, whereas nowadays B2B relationships become increasingly relevant.
5. Effective sponsorships require an accurate definition of objectives.
6. There is an increased need to justify the high sport sponsorship investments.
7. Sport sponsorship effectiveness cannot be measured only by “hard” figures.
8. One special feature of sport sponsorship is the potential to create strong emotional bonds with customers.
9. Sport sponsorship can only leverage its full potential if sponsorship creates emotional bonds.
10. “Soft” figures nourish effect measurement in sport sponsorship.

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## 2.7 How Should Sponsors Decide About Sponsorships? (Transfer Paper D)

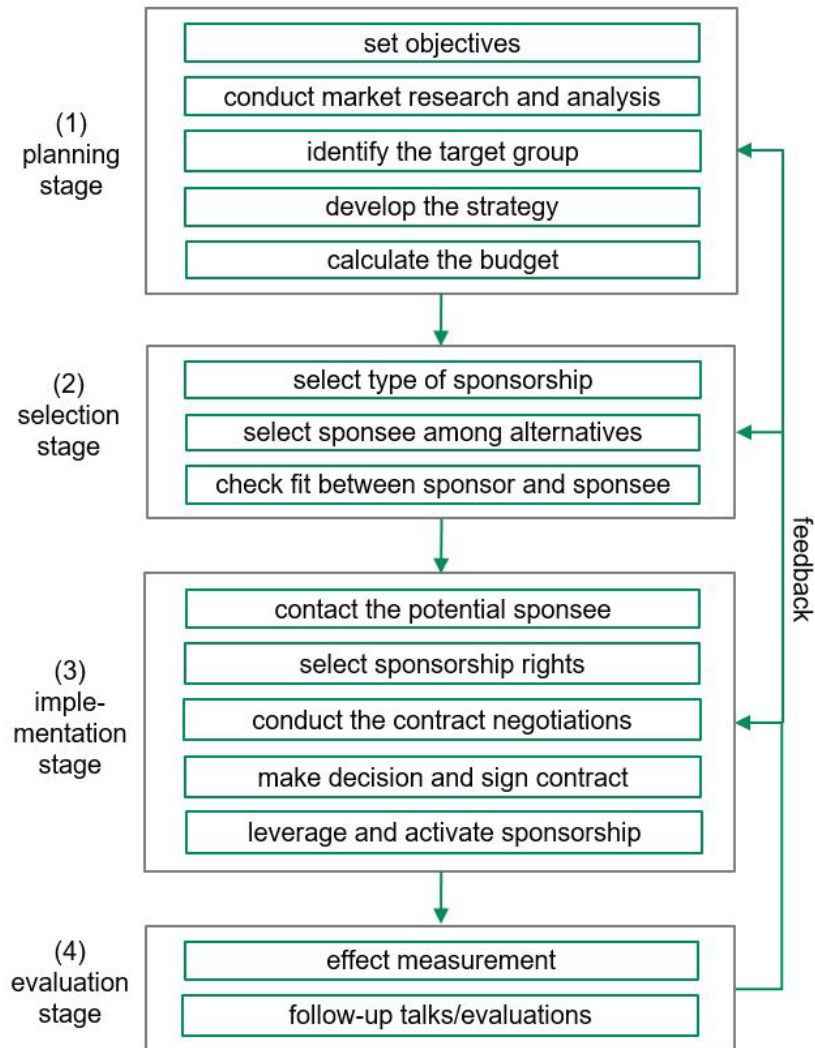
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Sponsorship decisions have a significant impact on sponsoring companies. But how do sponsors make strategic sponsorship decisions?

Only a few authors have addressed the decision-making process in the sponsorship literature. For example, Chadwick and Thwaites (2005, p. 330) proposed a five-step decision-making process from the sponsor perspective, while Irwin and Asimakopoulos (1992, p. 44) advocated six slightly different steps. However, in both approaches setting sponsorship objectives, selecting a sponsorship based on various criteria, executing the deal, and evaluating the sponsorship represent essential steps. Schönberner, Woratschek, and Ellert (2020) created a more detailed version of an ideal-typical sponsors' decision-making process. They show that the strategic sponsorship decision-making process consists of three consecutive stages, namely planning stage, selection stage, and implementation stage. Yet, neither the implementation nor the activation of sport sponsorship are addressed. This is why, in this paper, we add the activation in the implementation stage. Furthermore, in line with Chadwick and Thwaites (2005) and Irwin and Asimakopoulos (1992), we introduce the evaluation stage in our conceptualisation, which is illustrated in Figure 1.

Strategic sponsorships are individual solutions for marketing needs and problems. Therefore, we base our conceptualisation on the value shop, which is an adequate value configuration model for individual problem solutions (Stabell & Fjeldstad, 1998, p. 420-427). The value shop consists of activity categories, which are necessary for gaining valuable solutions: problem-finding and acquisition, problem-solving, choice, execution, and control and evaluation. To get a more detailed overview, please watch the video “SMAB Clip: Value Configurations” cited below. As the value shop is iterative, each conducted activity provides feedback on the preceding activity categories. This feature also applies to strategic sponsorship decisions. In line with the value shop, we conceptualise four stages with feedback loops, whereby we combine problem-solving and choice activities in one stage, namely selection stage. Furthermore, we included the problem-finding activities in the planning stage and adjusted the activities to fit the sport sponsorship decision-making process.



**Figure 1.** Sponsorship decision-making process from the sponsor perspective (adapted from Schönberner et al. (2020)).

The planning stage comprises all planning activities including setting objectives, identifying target groups, and calculating budgets. The selection stage includes all selection activities such as selecting sponsorship types and sponsees. The implementation stage contains all activities related to sponsorship contracts, rights, and leveraging. The evaluation stage refers to the effect measurement and following feedback-talks. If the evaluation does not lead to satisfying results, all stages of the sponsorship decision-making process should be undertaken again until a satisfying solution is found. This is called an iterative, cyclical value creation process (Stabell & Fjeldstad, 1998, p. 422).



The results of Schönberner et al. (2020) indicate that stages follow a consecutive order, each stage providing feedback on the preceding one. In contrast, the activities do not necessarily follow a consecutive order, especially in the planning and selection stage. Depending on the sponsoring company, the sequence of activities can be modified and/or activities can be carried out simultaneously in each stage.

Typically, sponsors receive sponsorship proposals from the sponsee (Chadwick & Thwaites, 2005). Sometimes, however, it is the other way round (Athanasopoulou & Sarli, 2015). The acquisition and screening of sponsorship proposals are included in the activity “select potential sponsee among alternatives” (see Fig. 1). Therefore, the sponsorship decision-making process covers both cases, i.e. when the sponsor receives a sponsee’s proposal and when the sponsor seeks out a sponsee actively.

Managers from sponsoring companies and sport marketing agencies can use the ideal-typical decision-making process as a guideline and template for making sponsorship decisions. This helps managers to justify sponsorship decisions, even if effect measurement is difficult, as it indicates that the decision is strategically derived.

**To put it in a nutshell:**

1. Strategic sponsorships are individual solutions for challenges in marketing.
2. To make valuable sponsorship decisions, it is useful to orientate sponsorship decision-making on the value shop.
3. The value shop is an adequate business model for individual problem solving.
4. An ideal strategic sponsorship decision-making process is based on the value shop.
5. The sponsors’ strategic decision-making process consists of four stages: planning stage, selection stage, implementation stage, and evaluation stage.
6. The stages of the sponsorship decision-making process follow a consecutive order.
7. Each stage in the sponsorship decision-making process provides feedback on the preceding one.
8. The order of the single activities within the stages is adaptable to the needs and structure of the sponsoring company.

## Video

Please watch the SMAB Clip “Value Configurations” on Prof. Woratschek’s YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZoAyF6t5eno>



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## CHAPTER 3: EMPIRICAL PERSPECTIVE ON ENGAGEMENT AT THE INTRA- AND MICRO-LEVEL OF AGGREGATION

### 3.1 Hidden Agenda in Sport Sponsorship – The Influence of Managers’ Personal Objectives on Sport Sponsorship Decisions (Scientific Paper 1)

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#### ABSTRACT

Despite companies spending billions of dollars on sport sponsorship every year, little is known about how sponsoring companies make sponsorship decisions. Sponsors are expected to enter into sponsorship agreements strategically, so as to achieve corporate objectives. However, managers who make sponsorship decisions could also be motivated by their own personal interests. As soon as managers’ personal objectives manifest themselves to influence their sponsorship decision-making, we speak of a hidden agenda. In our empirical study, we investigated corporate objectives and managers’ personal objectives, and their respective influence on sport sponsorship decisions. We conducted a three-round qualitative Delphi study with 18 participants employed at sponsor organisations, sport clubs, and sport marketing agencies. The results of our study contribute to our understanding of corporate objectives in the sport sponsorship literature. We reveal 12 different personal objectives of managers underlying sponsorship decision-making. In addition, we develop the steps and stages of the sponsorship decision-making process from a sponsor perspective. We reveal the existence of a hidden agenda in sponsorship decisions. Due to divergences in objectives, a hidden agenda leads to agency effects between the shareholders/owners of the sponsoring company (principal) and the managers (agent). The emerging agency effects can have either negative or positive effects for the sponsor. We derive a model showing the decision-making in sport sponsorship, considering managers’ hidden agendas. Managerial implications are discussed.

**KEYWORDS:** Sport sponsorship; sponsorship objectives; Decision-making; Hidden agenda; Delphi study

### 3.1.1 INTRODUCTION

The steady growth of global sponsorship expenditure during the last few years reflects the increasing relevance of sponsorship as a communication tool in the marketing portfolio of companies. Total global sponsorship expenditure was projected to reach US \$65.8 billion in 2018, the highest annual growth (4.9 %) within the last five years (IEG, 2018). Due to its growing economic relevance, sport sponsorship is regarded as a strategic marketing decision that requires strategic planning (Cornwell & Kwon, 2019). As sponsorship involves strategic decisions, there is an increasing need for managers to evaluate and justify their sponsorship expenditures both internally and externally (O'Reilly & Madill, 2012; Olson & Thjøømøe, 2009).

Sport sponsorship is often used to achieve strategic objectives including: increased awareness, enhanced image, increased sales/market share, building customer retention, building business relationships, and motivating employees (e.g., Chadwick & Thwaites, 2005; Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013; Hartland, Skinner, & Griffiths, 2005; O'Reilly & Madill, 2009, 2012). However, sponsorships may also be motivated by the personal objectives of decision-making managers (e.g., Cornwell & Kwon, 2019; Johnston, 2010). While some authors have argued that the personal objectives of managers no longer influence sponsorship decisions (Hartland et al., 2005), others have argued that the influence remains (Eberharter, 2014; Hohenauer, 2016; Morgan, Adair, Taylor, & Hermens, 2014). However, we know little about the management process of how and why sponsorship decisions are made (e.g., Berrett & Slack, 1999; Cornwell & Kwon, 2019; Daellenbach, 2012; Walliser, 2003).

Individuals play an important role in organisational decisions (e.g., Berson, Oreg, & Dvir, 2008; Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Hambrick & Quigley, 2014). Organisational decision-making is thus influenced by both corporate objectives and managers' personal preferences (e.g., Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992; Webster & Wind, 1972). The same is true in sponsorship (Arthur, Scott, & Woods, 1997; Meenaghan, 1983). It is well documented that the individual often drives sponsorship decisions (Daellenbach, Thirkell, & Zander, 2013; Long, Thibault, & Wolfe, 2004). It has been noted that sponsorships are "fertile ground for agency effects" with managers placing their personal preferences above the company's objectives (Cornwell & Kwon, 2019, p. 5). These goal conflicts can be considered through the lens of agency theory, in which the shareholders/owners of a

sponsoring company (principal) delegate decision-making authority to managers (agents) (e.g., Clark, Cornwell, & Pruitt, 2002; Jensen & Cornwell, 2017). Due to the asymmetric distribution of information, managerial decision-making is barely observable by the shareholders/owners (Pratt & Zeckhauser, 1985). Accordingly, we refer to a manager's self-interested sponsorship decision-making as a hidden agenda.

Sponsorship decisions are strategic ones that have a significant impact on the sponsoring company. Accordingly, considering potential hidden agendas is essential, since negative effects, such as damage to reputation, could arise for the sponsor when sponsorship decisions are not in line with corporate objectives (e.g., Amis, Slack, & Berrett, 1999; Hohenauer, 2016; Walliser, 2003). However, there is a lack of consensus in the literature as to how managers' personal objectives influence sponsorship decisions. We do not know whether there is in fact a hidden agenda in sponsorship decisions and what consequences a hidden agenda has for the sponsoring company. To address this gap in the literature, our study examines the interplay between corporate objectives, and managers' personal objectives when entering into a sponsorship agreement, and the influence of a hidden agenda on sponsorship decisions.

### **3.1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **3.1.2.1 SPORT SPONSORSHIP OBJECTIVES**

Before entering into a sponsorship agreement, sponsors need to set clear strategic objectives, which are essential for sponsors in order to identify appropriate sponsees and to subsequently measure sponsorship success (Hohenauer, 2016; Meenaghan, McLoughlin, & McCormack, 2013). There are several studies which have investigated sport sponsorship objectives. The most common objectives in the literature include increased awareness (e.g., Cliffe & Motion, 2005), enhanced image (e.g., O'Reilly & Madill, 2009), increased sales/market share (e.g., Smolianov & Shilbury, 2005), building customer retention (e.g., Kourovskaja & Meenaghan, 2013), increased media coverage (e.g., Chadwick & Thwaites, 2005), (re-)positioning the brand (e.g., Hartland et al., 2005) building business relationships (e.g., Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013), involvement with the community (e.g., Thwaites, 1995), and employer branding (e.g., O'Reilly & Madill, 2012). A literature overview of sport sponsorship objectives is also provided by Schönberner and Woratschek (2020). We refer to all the aforementioned objectives as corporate objectives, which

are defined as those “authorised by the [company’s] core bodies and thus declared binding for the organisation” (Kirsch, 1971, p. 129).

However, Hartland et al. (2005) mentioned another sponsorship objective category, that of personal objectives, which differentiate themselves from corporate objectives, because they do not relate directly to the objectives of the sponsoring company. Individual objectives are referred to as values that the individual, as a participant in the political process, uses as a basis for decision-making (Kirsch, 1971). We followed this definition and applied it to the context of sport sponsorship: Personal objectives are the managers’ individual interests and preferences, which managers use as a basis for sport sponsorship decisions.

In the sponsorship context, Meenaghan (1983) mentioned the relevance of decision-makers’ personal interests in a sports activity and the associated potential gain in prestige within a peer group. We further know that the decision-makers’ social network or personal relationships can influence sponsorship decisions in small sports businesses (Berrett & Slack, 1999; Zinger & O’Reilly, 2010). Other potential personal objectives include managers’ own enthusiasm for sports (Cornwell, 2008), job security, and status within the organisation (Arthur et al., 1997). However, personal objectives in the sponsorship context require further investigation (Brennan, Binney, & Brady, 2012; Hartland et al., 2005). In the general management literature, once again very few studies which have investigated managers’ personal objectives explicitly, were found. England (1967), for example, examined managers’ personal value systems over 50 years ago and identified, sorted by importance, achievement, success, and creativity as key manager motivations. Job satisfaction, individuality, money, influence, prestige, autonomy, dignity, security, power, and leisure represented lower-level motivations (England, 1967). Rallapalli, Vitell, and Szeinbach (2000) found that the personal values of excitement, fun and enjoyment in life, warm relationships with others, and a sense of accomplishment are related to marketers’ norms such as pricing and distribution.

### 3.1.2.2 SPORT SPONSORSHIP DECISION-MAKING PROCESS FROM A SPONSOR PERSPECTIVE

Sport sponsorship requires a strategic and professional planning process (Athanasopoulou & Sarli, 2015). The steps of this decision-making process include setting specific objectives (Chadwick & Thwaites, 2005), identifying the target group (Kourovskaja & Meenaghan, 2013), calculating the available budget upfront (Meenaghan, 2013), acquiring sponsorship proposals (Brennan et al., 2012), evaluating the alternatives based on selection criteria (Copeland, Frisby, & McCarville, 1996), and selecting an appropriate sponsee (Irwin & Asimakopoulos, 1992). Then, the sponsorship deal is negotiated (Athanasopoulou & Sarli, 2015), a decision for or against the sponsorship is made, and eventually a contract is signed (Chadwick & Thwaites, 2005).

The role of the deciding managers in the sponsorship decision-making process, however, remains largely unclear. From the management literature, we know that the individual characteristics and values of top managers affect the performance of a company both directly (Hambrick and Quigley (2014) and indirectly (Berson et al., 2008). Furthermore, organisational decision-making is influenced by a complex combination of corporate objectives and managers' personal objectives (Webster & Wind, 1972), especially when the decisions themselves are complex and political (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992).

In the sponsorship context, key individuals also influence sponsorship decisions independently from their formal position in the company (Daellenbach et al., 2013). Stieler, Germelmann, and Walliser (2019) showed further that sponsorship decisions are usually not driven exclusively by emotional or rational motivations, but by a mixture of both. There are also indications that corporate objectives and managers' personal objectives can influence sport sponsorship decisions (e.g., Arthur et al., 1997). Long et al. (2004) stated that sport organisations consist of individuals pursuing rather different objectives. Furthermore, Johnston (2010) noted that managers' sponsorship decisions are not always in line with corporate objectives. Eberharter (2014) showed that managers allocate more sponsorship budget, even contrary to market research advice, when they identify strongly with a particular sport. Besides, Morgan et al. (2014, p. 278) emphasised that "the personal preferences and interests of CEOs and senior managers still influence sponsorship decision making". Berrett and Slack (1999) found that CEOs, motivated by friendly relationships, assigned marketing managers to close sponsorship deals, which do not benefit the company strategically. The managers then had to justify and administer the sponsorship afterwards. Meenaghan (1983) named this phenomenon post-facto rationalisation. When the underlying

personal objectives of managers manifest themselves in influencing sponsorship decision-making, we consider this a hidden agenda. This hidden agenda is a critical issue, because according to Amis et al. (1999), sponsorships based on strategic objectives are more successful from a sponsor perspective than ad hoc decisions. Sponsorships entered into because of personal interests are generally regarded as detrimental to the company (Hohenauer, 2016), successful if at all only temporarily (Walliser, 2003), and damaging to the reputation of the sponsor (Chadwick & Thwaites, 2005) and of sport sponsorship as a marketing tool in general (Thwaites, 1995).

However, all previous studies either investigated another sponsorship type (Daellenbach et al., 2013), considered only the sponsee perspective (Long et al., 2004), had another research focus (Berrett & Slack, 1999; Eberharter, 2014), did not assess the personal objectives empirically (Arthur et al., 1997), or only as a side issue (Johnston, 2010; Morgan et al., 2014). Studies in the organisational culture field (e.g., Berson et al., 2008; Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Hambrick & Quigley, 2014) and executive decision-making literature (e.g., Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992) have investigated the role of personal values of top managers on organisation culture, firm performance, and decision-making, but not the goal conflict between shareholders/owners and decision-making managers. This highlights the need for our empirical study, which focuses on the hidden agenda in sport sponsorship decisions.

Our literature review shows that sponsorship is indeed “vulnerable to agency effects in which managers act in their interest rather than that of the firm they represent” (Cornwell & Kwon, 2019, p. 17). When a company receives no or negative effects from a sponsorship because managers follow their hidden agenda, an agency problem occurs (Eisenhardt, 1989). Pursing this idea, we followed the examples of Clark et al. (2002) and Jensen and Cornwell (2017) and used agency theory as a theoretical underpinning for our study.

### 3.1.2.3 SPONSORSHIP DECISIONS AND AGENCY THEORY

Agency theory postulates that two parties, the principal and the agent, related through a contractual arrangement, act to maximise their individual utility (Ross, 1973). Agency theory is based on the notion that companies are a legal environment in which a network of contractual relationships between individual bodies exists (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). The centre stage in agency theory is the contractual relationship between principal and agent, with the shareholders/owners of a company often determined as principal, and the non-owner management as agent (Eisenhardt, 1989). Jensen and Meckling (1976, p. 308) define the relationship “as a contract under which one



or more persons (the principal(s)) engage another person (the agent) to perform some service on their behalf which involves delegating some decision making authority to the agent.” According to agency theory, there is generally not a symmetric distribution of information. The principal has less information about the contractual relationship than the agent (Pratt & Zeckhauser, 1985). The principal’s information deficit allows the agent scope to act in his own personal interest unobserved by the principal (Eisenhardt, 1989). Furthermore, conflicts of interest arise because both the principal and the agent pursue their own objectives and strive for individual utility maximisation (Ross, 1973). Therefore, a valid and comprehensive contract is necessary to control the agent’s decision-making. The conflicts of interest and differences in the distribution of information result in transaction costs, so-called agency costs (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). Agency costs include a loss in welfare through the pursuit of diverging objectives (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). Although agency costs are impossible to eliminate entirely, there are instruments such as outcome-based contracts (Eisenhardt, 1989) and control systems (Jensen & Meckling, 1976) for reducing agency costs even after the contract has been formulated and entered into.

In the sport sponsorship context, agency theory has already been applied to the relationship between shareholders/owners as principal and non-owner managers as agent of the sponsoring company. For example, Clark et al. (2002) stated that managers are inclined to make sponsorship investments due to such personal benefits as ego gratification, free tickets, and contact with the rich and famous, but found no empirical evidence to substantiate that claim. Jensen and Cornwell (2017) hypothesised the existence of agency effects, but found no significant influence of agency conflicts on sponsorship dissolutions. Nonetheless, Cornwell and Kwon (2019) emphasised the existence of agency effects in the sponsorship context in their latest literature review, and encouraged the investigation of agency effects in future studies.

Our literature review revealed gaps in the sponsorship literature comprising articles that empirically address sport sponsorship decision-making in general, and the hidden agenda in sponsorship decisions in particular. Furthermore, the literature review helped us to specify our research questions: (1) What are the relevant corporate objectives in the sport sponsorship context? (2) What personal interests of managers underlie sport sponsorship decisions? (3) How is the sponsorship decision-making process structured, from a sponsor perspective? (4) To what extent do managers follow a hidden agenda when making sponsorship decisions?

### 3.1.3 METHOD

#### 3.1.3.1 STUDY DESIGN

The limited academic knowledge of sponsorship decision-making indicates the need for an exploratory study design. Accordingly, we conducted a qualitative Delphi study (Toperzer, Anderson, & Barcelona, 2011). Day and Bobeva (2005, p. 103) defined the Delphi method as “a structured group-communication method for soliciting expert opinion about complex problems or novel ideas, through the use of a series of questionnaires and controlled feedback”. The key characteristics and significant advantages of the Delphi technique are the anonymity of participants, iterative questioning, structured feedback between rounds, and (statistical) compression of group answers (Rowe & Wright, 1999). The main downsides of a qualitative Delphi study are the high expenditure of time and limited generalisation of results (Häder, 2014).

One of the versatile application areas of the Delphi method is “distinguishing and clarifying real and perceived human motivations” (Linstone & Turoff, 1975, p. 4), which made it suitable for assessing the mostly hidden personal objectives of managers. The method supports participants in truthfully answering questions on sensitive topics through anonymity and the absence of direct confrontation. The Delphi method originated from the forecasting literature, but has subsequently been developed into four types: (1) aggregating ideas, (2) forecasting uncertain situations, (3) determining stable expert opinions, and (4) building consensus (Häder, 2014). We have chosen Delphi type (3), the results of which are considered to be exploratory rather than normative. We elicited the participants’ opinions on how they believe decision-making was and is motivated in the sponsorship context. One characteristic of Delphi type (3) is the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Accordingly, we applied semi-structured interviews in the first round and proceeded with online questionnaires with both open- and closed-response questions in the second and third rounds.

#### 3.1.3.2 PARTICIPANTS AND DATA COLLECTION

Through purposive sampling (Hasson, Keeney, & McKenna, 2000), we selected participants who were involved in sponsorship decision-making. As further selection criteria, we set a minimum of two years as a professional in the sport sponsorship business and the availability to participate in all Delphi rounds. Based on the selection criteria, 44 potential participants were contacted, of whom 18 agreed to participate. A sample size of 10–18 is generally acceptable for qualitative Delphi

studies (e.g., Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004). In our study, participants were between 26 and 48 years old ( $M = 33.67$ ) and had professional experience in sponsorship, ranging from 2 to 25 years ( $M = 8.17$ ). The sample consisted of three female (16.67 %) and fifteen male (83.33 %) participants. Following Daellenbach et al. (2013), we recruited not only top-level managers, but also representatives of middle management. The reason for this was that Daellenbach (2012) and Daellenbach et al. (2013) found that individual influence on sponsorship decisions is not necessarily related to a high formal position in the organisation. Furthermore, ten participants were employed in sponsoring companies, five in sport marketing agencies, and three in sport clubs. Applying a multi-perspective approach, we wanted to increase the trustworthiness of the study (Werner, Dickson, & Hyde, 2015). Consequently, our study includes participants from organisations other than sponsors who play an important role in the formation of sponsorship agreements, in order to gain more comprehensive insights into the sponsorship decision-making process.

The number of Delphi rounds typically does not exceed three iterations (Day & Bobeva, 2005). According to Delphi type (3), we aimed to obtain stable opinions from the sponsorship managers, which thus represent the stop criterion for this study. Data were collected in three Delphi rounds between June and November 2017. In the first round, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The questions in the interview guideline were derived from an extensive literature review. One participant was interviewed in person and seventeen by phone. The interview duration ranged from 34–76 min ( $M = 52$  min). All interviews were audio-recorded with the interviewees' permission. In the second and third rounds, an online questionnaire with open- and closed-response questions, interspersed with the anonymised feedback, was sent to the participants. In our study, the feedback consisted of graphical presentations, which included tables and figures enriched with sample quotations from the participant opinions of the previous round. We used text boxes for the open questions and seven-point Likert scales ('1 - strongly disagree' to '7 - strongly agree') for the closed questions, as proposed by Costa (2005). After analysing the participants' responses to the three rounds, the research team evaluated the opinions as stable. Therefore, the pre-defined stop criterion for our study was met, and no further rounds were conducted.

### 3.1.3.3 PARTICIPANTS AND DATA COLLECTION

The audio files were transcribed verbatim. The data analysis followed the five-step procedure of structured content analysis from Mayring (2015). First, the coding system was derived from theoretical considerations, and five main categories were developed. Second, the main categories were defined and underpinned with an example from the transcripts. Third, sub-categories were added both deductively and inductively to our coding system. Fourth, the most appropriate excerpts were extracted. Finally, the results were edited and converted into figures and tables. The visualised results were then included as feedback in the online questionnaire of Delphi round two. The data from the second and the third rounds was either directly exported into Microsoft Excel spreadsheets (open-response questions) or analysed using mean comparisons with SPSS 23 (closed-response questions).

To assure the quality of our results, we tested for intercoder-reliability, which showed a match of 92 % ( $r = 0.92$ ) in the results, which represents very good reliability (Rust & Cooil, 1994). The intracoder-reliability test (Raupp & Vogelgesang, 2009) also indicated very good reliability ( $r = 0.98$ ). Communicative validity was addressed by presenting and discussing the research results with the participants (Steinke, 2000).

## 3.1.4 RESULTS

### 3.1.4.1 SPORT SPONSORSHIP OBJECTIVES

In the first round, the participating managers were questioned as to which objectives sponsors pursue with sport sponsorships. In total, 16 corporate objectives were listed. Increase awareness (18 mentions of 18 managers), increase sales/market share (17 of 18) (Table 1) and enhance image (15 of 18), were the most frequently mentioned corporate objectives in the first round. Employer branding (13 of 18) and building business-to-business relationships (15 of 18) were also named by more than half of the participants. Interestingly, two infrequently mentioned objectives were identified, namely to produce content for storytelling (6 of 18) and to generate leads (6 of 18). Telling stories which are emotional and move people is highly relevant for reaching the target group in the increasing clutter that inevitably occurs nowadays (P4).

**Table 1.** Corporate objectives and managers' personal objectives after Delphi round three (n=18).

Corporate objectives	M	SD	Personal objectives	Sample Quotations	M	SD
Increase awareness	6.50	0.62	Identification with a sport/team	"If one is a football fan, then there is different decision-making to when he is not a fan." (P16)	5.78	0.65
Enhance corporate image	6.50	0.86	Regional loyalty	"Loyalty to the city and the whole region." (P12)	5.28	0.90
Transfer image	6.22	0.81	Personal benefits/fun	"Very simple private amusement activities that can be linked to the sponsorship." (P4)	5.00	1.14
Produce content for storytelling	5.61	1.09	Prestige in peer-group	"The factor looks and is seen is not to be underestimated." (P3)	4.72	1.13
Increase sales/market share	5.56	1.20	Power	"Of course, this also demonstrates once again who has the power in such a big [company]." (P10)	4.72	1.53
Build business-to-business relationships	5.50	0.86	Social relationships	"Honestly, I believe that has a lot to do with relationships fundamentally. One is a buddy of someone else." (P10)	4.61	1.46
Generate media coverage	5.39	1.20	Personal success	"You also boast a bit that [you] have reached a contract with this big club." (P13)	4.61	1.79
Enhance customer retention	5.33	1.09	Status within the organisation	"I think that sometimes the position in a company, especially in larger companies, is important." (P18)	4.50	1.76
Position brand	5.33	1.14	Influence on sponsee	"It is just about appearing there as a co-decision-maker." (P13)	4.44	1.04
Hospitality opportunities	5.28	1.13	Personal rejection	"[The] owner does not like [sport]." (P1)	4.17	1.47
Generate leads	5.11	0.96	Competitive thinking	"Of course, you are happy when you have taken away another club from a rival." (P13)	3.50	1.10
Employer branding	4.56	1.15	Job security	"You want to do the job in a way that guarantees you a secure job." (P13)	3.06	1.43
Acquire new customers	4.56	1.25				
Open up new channels	4.50	1.30				
Involve with the community	4.22	0.88				
Block competition	3.00	1.24				

Notes: M = mean. Mean scores are based on a seven-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree. SD = standard deviation.

Generating leads means receiving customers' contact details, which the sales representatives use and attempt to convert into actual purchases (P1). In the second round, all corporate objectives, together with their number of mentions in the first round, were depicted in a bar chart for the managers. The managers rated the relevance of the corporate objectives on a seven-point Likert scale ('1 - strongly disagree' to '7 - strongly agree'). In the third round, the results of the second round were presented to the managers, in the form of mean and standard deviation scores in a table. Based on these results, the managers evaluated the relevance of the corporate objectives, again on a seven-point Likert scale. Table 1 shows the results after the third Delphi round.

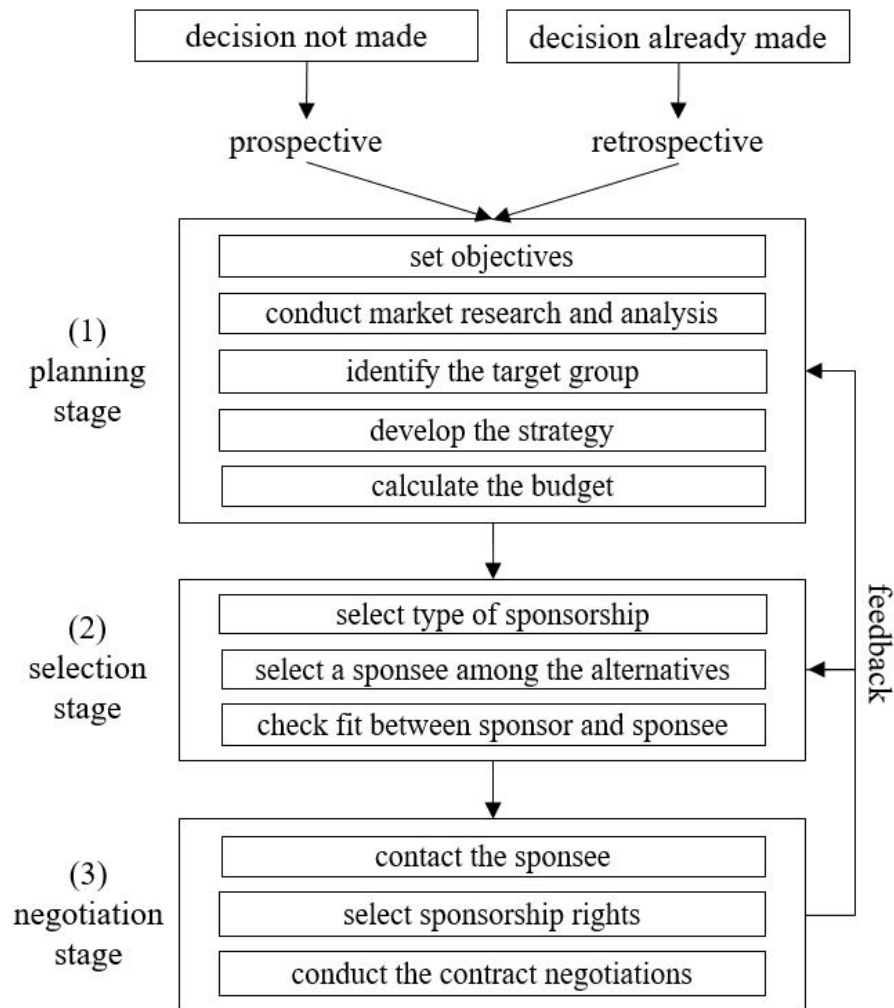
In the next section of the interviews, the participants were asked if managers involved in sponsorship decisions might also have personal interests or preferences and what these might be. By identifying 12 different personal objectives from the interview material of the first round, our study is the first to provide an empirically assessed list and explanations of managers' personal objectives in the sport sponsorship context. The personal objective we could identify most often (14 mentions of 18 managers) was identification with a sport/team. For example, P9 stated that if the decision-making manager is a fan of a team, he/she is inclined to support it with a sponsorship. Furthermore, the impact depends on how deeply a sponsorship manager and his/her family are involved in a particular sport (P10). The underlying objective prestige in the peer-group was mentioned by half of the participants (9 of 18). In the sponsorship business, their personal reputation within a group or club is especially important for managers (P10). The third most frequently mentioned personal objective was personal benefits/fun (7 of 18). P7, for example, indicated that receiving weekly tickets for home games corresponds to the personal interests of sponsorship managers. We also identified that personal rejection could underlie sponsorship decisions, which means that if a manager simply does not like or is not interested in eSports, for example, there will be no sponsorship (P11). Competitive thinking arises when managers enter into a sponsorship agreement to prevent a competitor from receiving the sponsorship deal (P14). Further explanations of personal objectives identified in the first round interviews can be found in the fifth column of Table 1. In the second round, we showed the managers all the personal objectives identified in the first round, complemented with explanatory sample quotations. The managers rated the personal objectives on a seven-point Likert scale. The same procedure was followed in the third round, with the feedback of the second round provided in a table with means and standard deviations. Table 1 presents the findings after the third Delphi round.

### 3.1.4.2 DECISION-MAKING FROM A SPONSOR PERSPECTIVE

In the first round, we asked the managers to explain step-by-step how a sponsorship concept evolves in a company until a decision is made. P5 highlighted the importance of a general structure for a sponsorship decision-making process, which is adjustable for individual cases, as the process could differ between sponsoring companies (P1; P15). After the interviews, we analysed all the steps mentioned by the managers and tried to order the steps chronologically. We created a draft of a generalised decision-making process in a roughly estimated chronological order, complemented with the number of manager mentions of each step.

In the digital questionnaire of the second round, the managers designed a sponsorship decision-making process based on our draft. Using the managers' responses, we then reordered the steps chronologically. The steps, which less than 80 % of the managers included in the decision-making process, were eliminated. It is important to mention that the order is not strict and depends on the characteristics of the sponsoring company. Some steps may be adjusted situationally in different contexts, and some may be performed simultaneously. Furthermore, we divided the decision-making process into three main stages, which are undertaken sequentially: (1) planning stage, (2) selection stage, and (3) negotiation stage.

In Delphi round three, we asked the managers how the decision-making process would change if a top-level manager of the sponsoring company were to select the sponsee beforehand, due to his personal objectives. The managers' prevailing opinion was that the decision-making process would nevertheless be undertaken, but in this case retrospectively instead of prospectively (see Figure 1). The managers stated that in this case, the chronological order of some single steps might change or be conducted less thoroughly, while the order of the three stages remains the same. The "backward argumentation" (P4), which is in line with the post-facto rationalisation mentioned by Meenaghan (1983), provides a strategic concept which enables managers to ex-post justify the sponsorship decision internally and externally.



**Figure 1.** Structure of the sport sponsorship decision-making process from the sponsor perspective.

### 3.1.4.3 INFLUENCE OF CORPORATE AND PERSONAL OBJECTIVES ON SPORT SPONSORSHIP DECISIONS

#### *Hidden agenda in sport sponsorship decision-making*

After asking the managers in the next part of the interviews about the impact of corporate objectives and managers' personal objectives on sport sponsorship decisions, it becomes clear that a hidden agenda in sport sponsorship decision-making does indeed exist. Sixteen managers denied, and only two managers confirmed the question of whether sport sponsorship decisions are influenced entirely and exclusively by corporate objectives. Next, we asked whether the managers have the impression that sponsorship decision-making is based on personal influences, and whether they have experienced cases in their career where personal objectives played a major role. We deliberately did not ask directly if they decide themselves according to personal preferences, in



order to reduce socially accepted answers. The managers made diverging statements in response (Figure 1) to this question in the first-round interviews. On the one hand, some managers indicated that personal objectives influence sponsorship decisions. P10 openly acknowledged that “there are certain sponsorship deals, which we close following entirely managers’ or board members’ individual preferences” and “there are no sponsorship decisions in any company, which are not based to some extent on personal interests.” P13 admitted that “of course you have individual objectives”. Moreover, P17 mentioned that “among the majority, personal [objectives] play a role.” On the other hand, in the opinion of P1 “nobody can nowadays afford” to decide only on personal objectives. Additionally, P6 amended that “in most cases, decisions were ultimately determined by corporate objectives” and P11 argued, “because several people participate in the decision-making process it finally comes down to an unemotional and balanced decision.” In the second round, the managers re-evaluated this question, based on the anonymised feedback from the first round. Especially this case reveals the value of the more time-intensive questioning of the Delphi design in shaping a more precise picture of a complex problem. After the second round, 13 of 18 managers stated that managers’ personal objectives do influence sport sponsorship decisions. P7, for instance, emphasised that “sport sponsorship cannot be done free from emotions, and this influence resonates naturally with otherwise rational motivations.” In the words of P17, “a decision can never be reduced to just one or the other.” Four managers made statements considered by the researchers as neutral, and only one basically denied the influence of personal objectives on sponsorship decisions, as such cases “are predominantly exceptions” (P4). The results after the third Delphi round, retrieved from a seven-point Likert scale, showed that the managers mainly agreed ( $M = 5.78$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ) on the influence of personal objectives on sport sponsorship decisions. This finding showed the existence of a hidden agenda in sport sponsorship decision-making.

Finally, the managers were asked if a sponsorship that is influenced by managers’ personal objectives affects success from the sponsor perspective. Success was defined literally by the interviewer as the achievement of a sponsor’s corporate objectives set prior to sponsorships. A consensus among the managers was found after the third Delphi round ( $M = 4.83$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ), that a hidden agenda in sport sponsorship decisions really does affect the success of a sponsorship. However, interestingly no consensus was reached about the valence of the effects. On the one hand, the managers acknowledged negative effects of a hidden agenda on sponsorship success. The findings of our study showed four types of negative consequences for the sponsor: financial loss,

reputational damage, internal problems with employees, and a misleading strategic orientation. The sponsor loses financial resources because “budget was invested pointlessly” (P12) due to sponsorships based on managers’ personal objectives, and such sponsorships “mostly harm the company and tend not to achieve a return” (P10). The sponsor may also suffer reputational damage if it comes to “cases of bad press because of nepotism or patronage etc.” (P7). Furthermore, problems occur with employee motivation when employees “realise [you] waste budget with a sponsorship, but perhaps some budget is cut internally [. . .] it certainly will become an internal issue” (P17). Finally, sponsorships based on managers’ personal interests may send misleading signals about the sponsor’s strategic orientation, because they “do not match the strategic direction of the company” (P18). The findings indicated that if a hidden agenda, understood as the manifestation of personal objectives, negatively affects the success of a sponsorship, agency conflicts between the shareholders/owners of the company and the managers occur.

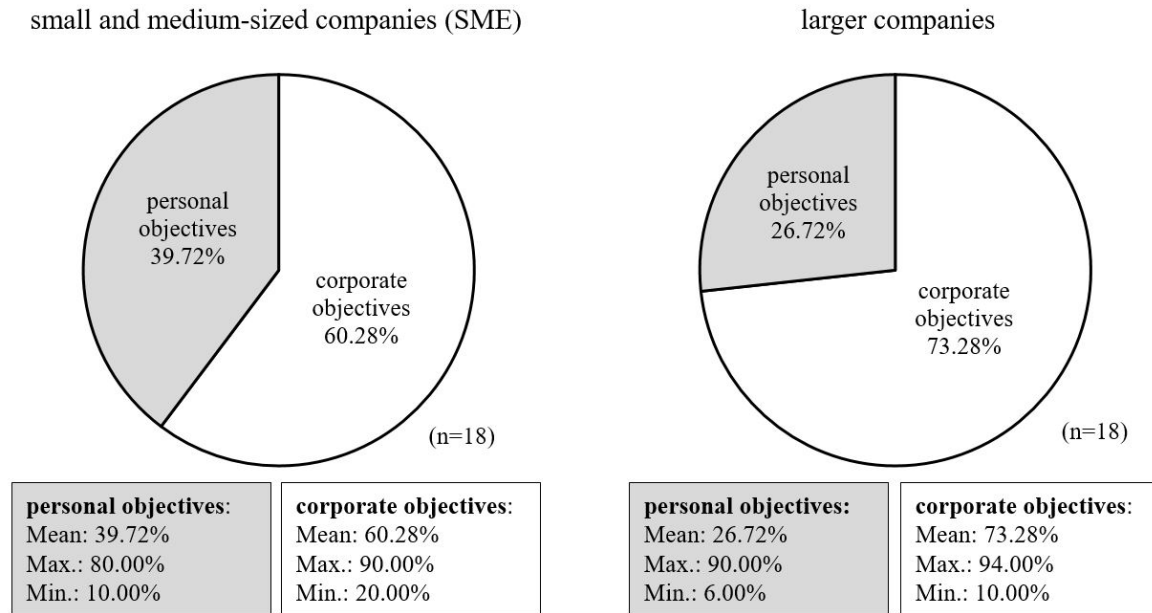
On the other hand, the managers recognised three types of positive effect of a hidden agenda on sponsorship success from a sponsor’s perspective: greater expertise, stronger support, and better activation of the sponsorship. Managers may have more expertise about a sponsorship for which they have personal preferences, so that “according to the decider’s know-how, a sponsorship can be successful although he had personal interests (P18).” The manager’s self-interest in a sponsorship can lead to stronger support of the sponsorship, as P13 stated, “managers’ personal interests may entail a stronger and more successful engagement.” Finally, the manager’s “involvement is normally higher” (P1) when he/she has personal interests in the sponsorship, which may result in “more consistent usage and activation of the sponsorship rights” (P17). The results after the third Delphi round, retrieved from a 7-point Likert scale, also showed no convergence on whether the managers’ personal objectives tend to affect the success of a sponsorship positively ( $M = 4.22$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ) or rather negatively ( $M = 4.39$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ) from the sponsor perspective.

#### *Contextual factors regarding the hidden agenda in sponsorship decisions*

Our findings showed that managers’ personal objectives might influence the sponsorship decision-making process in all steps and stages. In Delphi round two, P1 stated: “the point of time is not crucial, but rather the structure, industry, and management [of the company]”. P3 added, “a director or owner of a company can make different decisions than a committee which needs a three-quarters majority [. . .] it depends on the structure of the company”. Therefore, we included in the questionnaire of the third round whether the organisational structure of the sponsoring company

affects how corporate and personal objectives influence sponsorship decisions. The managers strongly confirmed the relevance of the contextual factor of organisational structure, with a mean score of  $M = 6.06$  ( $SD = 0.73$ ).

Already from the interviews of the first round, the opinion emerged that the size of the company affects the influence of corporate and personal objectives on sport sponsorship decisions. Most of the managers stated that the influence of managers' personal objectives is greater in smaller companies than in larger ones. For instance, P2 indicated that "personal preferences are probably much stronger in smaller companies." According to P16, "the larger the company, the more difficult it is to assert personal interests, because [you] finally need to justify [yourself] to [your] boss." In contrast, P12 was of the opinion that "particularly in larger companies, there are not only rational decisions, but also personal interests of certain deciders." P8 justified this opinion with the argument that "the larger the industry, the more generously money is handled [because] a hundred thousand [euros] do not hurt". In the second round, the results based on the feedback of the first round remained stable. Eleven managers took the view that the influence of personal objectives is more significant in smaller companies than in larger ones, although two managers argued the precise opposite. Five managers stated that personal objectives could influence sponsorship decisions in larger companies as well as in smaller ones. The managers were finally asked in the third Delphi round to estimate the percentage of influence of both corporate objectives and managers' personal objectives on sport sponsorship decisions for small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) and for larger companies. The definition of SMEs was from the European Union's guidelines, which define SMEs as companies with less than 50 million euros annual turnover and less than 250 employees (EU-Commission, 2003). The managers estimated that the percentage of influence of managers' personal objectives on sport sponsorship decisions is 39.72 % in SMEs and 26.72 % in larger companies. Consequently, our managers rated the influence of managers' personal objectives as greater in SMEs than in larger companies. Figure 2 illustrates the findings after the third Delphi round.



*Note:* No significant differences were found in the estimated percentages between the different genders, the level of experience, and the type of employment of the study participants.

**Figure 2.** Percentage of influence of sponsorship objectives on sponsorship decisions.

### 3.1.5 DISCUSSION

#### 3.1.5.1 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate which objectives sponsors pursue when entering into a sport sponsorship agreement, and how managers' personal objectives, which manifest themselves in a hidden agenda, influence sponsorship decisions. By shedding light on how and why sport sponsorship decisions are made, our study (Figure 2) contributes to the sponsorship literature in several ways. First, the results of the corporate objectives both update and predominantly confirm the corporate objectives that sponsors pursue with sport sponsorships. In line with previous studies, we found that increased awareness and enhanced corporate image remain the most frequently mentioned corporate objectives. Interestingly, an objective that is not often referred to in the literature that of producing content for storytelling was evaluated at the fourth rank in our study. Due to the increasing clutter in sport sponsorship, sponsors consider it essential to stand out with an emotional and unique story and to bond emotionally with customers (Cliffe & Motion, 2005). Furthermore, when looking at the corporate sponsorship objectives, it is clearly evident that most of them are difficult to measure as "hard" facts (see Table 1). For example, the outcomes of producing content for storytelling or transferring image are barely assessable with quantitative

performance indicators. This again highlights the potential of sponsorship as the communication tool most appropriate for pursuing both corporate and personal objectives (Meenaghan, 1983) and thus the potential for the emergence of a hidden agenda in sponsorship decisions.

Second, we extend the sponsorship literature by identifying and defining 12 different personal objectives of managers underlying sport sponsorship decisions. The managers' personal key motivations were identification with a sport/team, regional loyalty, and personal benefits/fun. According to Wann and Branscombe (1993), team identification is the attachment of an individual to or caring about a sports team. From the audience response perspective, Madrigal (2001) emphasised the importance of team identification in sport sponsorship as a moderator between the effect of consumer attitudes towards a sponsor and purchase intention. However, we were the first to discover the importance of identification with a team from the sponsorship management perspective, or as a personal objective underlying managers' sponsorship decision-making. Our finding is complemented by the study of Eberharter (2014), who revealed that identification with a sport influences managers' sponsorship budget allocation. Regional loyalty was ranked as the second most important personal objective. Although Clark et al. (2002) and Jensen and Cornwell (2017) could find no negative, or at least no significant influences of managers' regional solidarity on sponsorship decisions, our findings confirm the theoretical assumptions of both studies, that managers prefer local sport sponsorships. This shows that if a manager has the chance to sign a local club or an outsider club, for example, he may be tempted to choose the local one, partly to support the region he lives in and partly, to acquire free tickets. The ticket example is also related to the personal objective ranked at third position, personal benefits/ fun, the existence of which was confirmed empirically for the first time in our study. Thereby, we again reinforce the theoretical assertion of Clark et al. (2002) that managers are inclined to make sponsorship investments due to such personal benefits as ego gratification, free tickets, and contact with the rich and famous. This finding corresponds with the existing notion of a hobby motive in sponsorship (Thwaites, 1995), enthusiasm towards sports (Cornwell, 2008), fun and enjoyment in life (Rallapalli et al., 2000), and president's whim (Chadwick & Thwaites, 2005). Interestingly, although social relationships were already highlighted in the studies of Berrett and Slack (1999) and Zinger and O'Reilly (2010), the participating managers in our study evaluated this personal objective only as moderately important. One explanation could be that sponsorship as a marketing tool has experienced growth and professionalisation in the last years (IEG, 2018). Thereby, the personal relationships between

managers have weakened and the so-called “buddy business” has lost importance, as more and more sponsoring companies and organisations have entered the sponsorship business. The personal objectives stated by Arthur et al. (1997), namely status within the organisation and job security, represent minor motivations in our study. A comparison with the older study of England (1967) shows that personal objectives have changed in the new manager generation. For example, personal success was found by England (1967) to be a key motivation, but our results indicated its low relevance in the context of sport sponsorship. Furthermore, the personal objectives of prestige within the peer-group and power are more important in our study than in England (1967). In addition, we identified some personal objectives, which the sponsorship literature has not considered so far, namely personal rejection and competitive thinking (see Table 1), although they are considered lower-level motivations in our study.

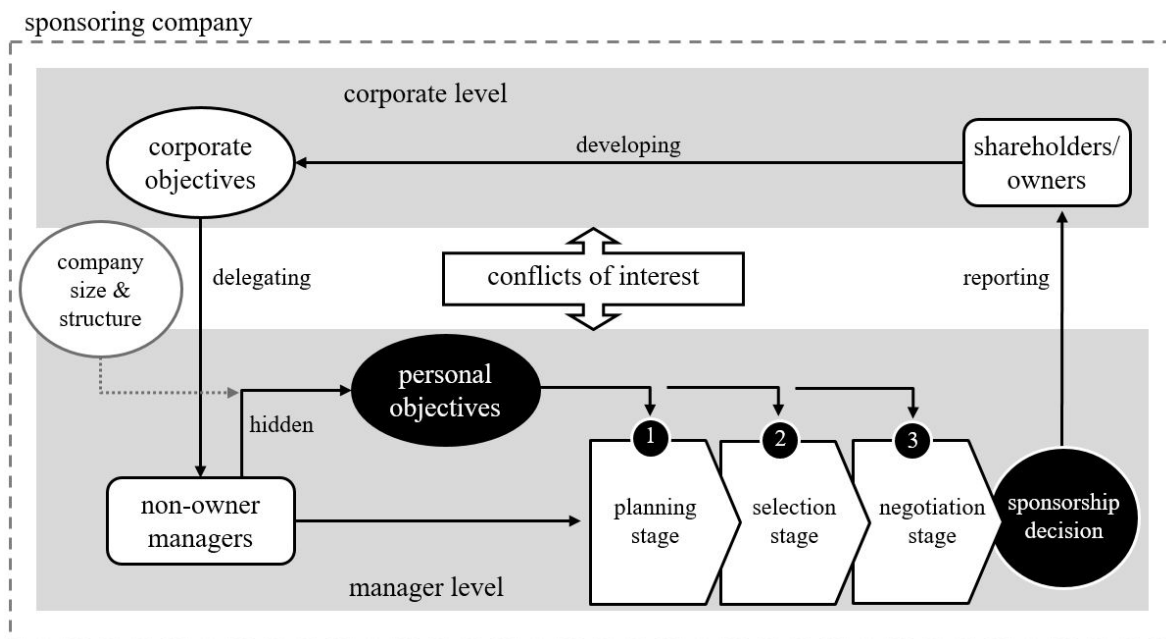
Third, we refine the sponsorship decision-making process from the sponsor perspective by exploring detailed steps and three main phases, namely planning, selection, and negotiation stages (see Figure 1). By connecting the sponsorship decision-making process to the influence of personal objectives on sponsorship decisions, we revealed a novel finding. If a top-level manager of a sponsoring company has already selected the sponsee for personal objectives, the decision-making process changes only marginally. The majority of managers still intended to follow the steps of the process, although possibly in another order and less thoroughly. We call this phenomenon backward argumentation, which means that even if the sponsorship decision is already made, the decision-making process nevertheless proceeds, so as to justify the sponsorship decisions retrospectively. In their study of sponsorship negotiations, Stieler et al. (2019, p. 50) indicated that if a sponsorship decision is already made, one emerging model is that the negotiation team still follows the normal process as a “sensemaking exercise” in order to make the “emotional deal look rational.” The studies of Berrett and Slack (1999) and Chadwick and Thwaites (2005) also discovered cases of CEOs assigning the marketing or sponsorship manager to set objectives and derive a strategic concept, although the decision was already made, based on the CEO’s personal interests. Such so-called post-facto rationalisation (Meenaghan, 1983) is highly relevant, as sponsors must nowadays more intensively evaluate and justify their sponsorship budget allocations (O’Reilly & Madill, 2012; Olson & Thjømøe, 2009). Consequently, post-facto rationalisation or backward argumentation can be regarded as a consequence of a hidden agenda in sponsorship decisions.

Fourth, with our empirical study, we are the first to find a hidden agenda in sport sponsorship decisions. Our results showed that the underlying personal objectives in fact manifest themselves in a hidden agenda and thus influence managers' sponsorship decision-making in this way. Our findings reinforce the statements of Webster and Wind (1972) and Arthur et al. (1997) that managers' decisions are always influenced by a complex combination of corporate and personal objectives. Accordingly, our results confirm the assumption of Cornwell and Kwon (2019) that sponsorship decisions are prone to agency effects. Managers decide in their own interests, which do not necessarily align with the corporate objectives of the company they represent, so as to maximise their individual utility (Ross, 1973). Then, an agency conflict occurs between the shareholder/owners (principal) and the non-owner managers (agent) (Eisenhardt, 1989). However, as there is an asymmetric information distribution (Pratt & Zeckhauser, 1985), the shareholders/owners cannot actually observe how managers decide on sponsorships. Consequently, agency costs in the form of a residual loss for the principal through diverging objectives have to be assumed (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between the shareholders/owners (principal) and the non-owner managers (agent) by highlighting the hidden agenda in sport sponsorship decisions.

Sponsorship decisions are strategic marketing decisions that have a far-reaching impact on the organisation (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992). Accordingly, bias in sponsorship decision-making is of substantial significance for the sponsoring company. This emphasises the relevance of finding a hidden agenda in sponsorship decisions for both sponsorship literature and practice. Our results indicate several potential effects of a hidden agenda for sponsors. In line with agency theory, managers have indicated that a hidden agenda in sponsorship decisions leads to negative effects for the sponsoring company, such as financial or reputational losses, internal problems with employees, and a misleading strategic orientation. The prevailing opinion in the sponsorship literature is also that sponsorships driven by managers' personal objectives are not as successful from the sponsor perspective as sponsorships derived strategically from corporate objectives (e.g., Hohenauer, 2016; Walliser, 2003).

Interestingly, in contrast to agency theory, our managers acknowledged that a hidden agenda in sponsorship decisions does not necessarily reveal only negative agency effects, but can also have positive effects due to greater expertise, stronger support, and better activation of the sponsorship. This finding also seems reasonable, as it is well known that intrinsic motivation is a strong driver

of job performance (e.g., Grant, 2008; Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006). If a manager has a personal interest in a sponsorship, he is inclined to devote more effort to the implementation of the respective sponsorship, which in turn can lead to a positive outcome for the sponsor. Our results also showed that the extent of influence of a hidden agenda on sport sponsorship decisions depends on the contextual factors of size and organisational structure of the sponsoring company. As previous studies have suspected (e.g., Zinger & O'Reilly, 2010), our findings indicated that the influence of personal objectives on sponsorship decisions usually decreases with the size of the sponsoring company. However, a hidden agenda in sponsorship decisions does exist even in large companies.



**Figure 3.** Managers' hidden agenda and its influence on sport sponsorship decisions.



### 3.1.5.2 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Based on our study, we derive specific implications for practitioners in the sport sponsorship business. From the structured decision-making process displayed in Figure 1, both sponsors and sport marketing agencies can draw conclusions on which steps and stages should be followed in the strategic planning of a sponsorship. However, it is necessary to bear in mind that the chronological order is not entirely fixed and needs to be adjusted to a specific context. Importantly, with respect to hidden agendas in sponsorship decisions, we provide sponsorship managers with a strategy on how to deal with such cases where a top-level manager had already selected a sponsee before the normal decision-making process started. The finding of the backward argumentation shows that managers could still carry out the steps and stages of the decision-making process (see Figure 1) retrospectively to obtain arguments that constitute a retroactive justification of the sponsorship to others within and outside the company. Furthermore, backward argumentation also becomes important, as our study revealed that a hidden agenda has the potential to lead to positive effects. Consequently, even if the sponsorship decision-making process (Figure 3) is undertaken retrospectively, the concepts made in the planning stage provide the basis for a targeted implementation of the sponsorship. The sponsorship can then be successful for the company, even if it was not derived strategically from corporate objectives.

Furthermore, sport organisations and sport marketing agencies can take advantage of the managers' personal objectives underlying sponsorship decisions. Accordingly, they should address potential sponsors not only on a rational level, for instance, with facts about the sport organisation, but also on an emotional level. On the one hand, this could lead to a higher chance of attracting potential sponsors and, on the other hand, if the first contact has already been established, the reaction time of the sponsoring company could be reduced (Stieler et al., 2019). The basis for attracting sponsors to sponsorship opportunities on an emotional basis is to identify the appropriate individual from the sponsoring company and his/her personal preferences (Daellenbach et al., 2013). Furthermore, establishing social relationships with other actors in the sponsorship business helps to build bridges between the organisations, agencies, and sponsors and to initiate potential sponsorships (Berrett & Slack, 1999).

In addition, knowledge as to whether the counterpart has some personal interests in the sport organisation or a particular sport provides valuable advantage in sponsorship negotiations. In the negotiation process, the sport organisation could utilise the pre-identified personal objectives of

the manager from the sponsoring company by offering personal benefits such as free tickets or an opportunity to meet the star players. However, it is advisable to play the hidden agenda card at an early stage in the negotiation process, given that Stieler et al. (2019) observed that in later stages the sponsors attempt to act more rationally. On the other hand, sponsors should try to keep the corporate objectives in the negotiation process in mind and evaluate whether a sponsorship with the respective sponsee has the potential to achieve corporate objectives (Stieler et al., 2019). Furthermore, to reduce the risk of negative effects on sponsorship success, the shareholders/owners can decrease the managers' self-interested decision-making with the development and implementation of instruments that are familiar from agency theory, such as incentive and/or controlling systems (Eisenhardt, 1989; Jensen & Meckling, 1976).

The finding of a hidden agenda also impacts on the sponsorship effect measurement. Although Olson and Thjømmøe (2009) and O'Reilly and Madill (2012) noted an increasing need for sponsors to justify sponsorship investments, Meenaghan (2013) recognised a deficit in measuring sponsorship effectiveness. Meenaghan et al. (2013) added that even if sponsors know about the shortage, they do not always feel obliged to take action. This statement is confirmed by the industry study of O'Reilly (2019), which showed that in 2018 only 3.7 % of the sponsorship rights fee was spent on evaluation. However, the study also showed that the main concern of the participating managers was how best to measure sponsorship effectiveness. Our findings of the existence of a hidden agenda in sponsorship decisions can explain some of the challenges academics and practitioners have to overcome to assess sponsorship effects. For example, the backward argumentation shows that if a case of hidden agenda in sponsorship decisions appears, sponsors attempt to rationalise decisions ex-post by conducting the decision-making process retrospectively. However, by revealing a hidden agenda in sponsorship decisions, our study sheds light on the need to address and reduce agency effects, if sponsorship is to be fully legitimised as a strategic marketing tool. While we believe that the hidden agenda in sponsorship decision-making will never fully disappear, we see possibilities to reduce it. One tool for reducing hidden agendas is the development and use of reliable effect measurement instruments for sport sponsorship.

### 3.1.6 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite the originality of the results, there are some limitations to our research, which provide directions for future research. First, we exclusively investigated the for-profit sport context and thereby neglected the non-profit sport sector. In the non-profit sector, other sport sponsorship objectives, such as good corporate citizenship, good community participation, and corporate social responsibility, are considered the main motivations (Brennan et al., 2012).

Second, we did not include the amount of sponsorship investment in our study. It may make a difference whether a sponsorship contract entails a sum of fifty thousand dollars, as opposed to five million, regarding a hidden agenda in sport sponsorship decisions. For example, Brennan et al. (2012) showed that the higher the dollar value of a sponsorship, the more likely the involvement of several individuals. Such decisions in a group could reduce the probability of emergence of agency effects (Cornwell & Kwon, 2019). Furthermore, the sponsorship sum needs to be set in relation to the characteristics of the sponsoring company, such as annual turnover and marketing budget. Accordingly, future studies should clarify the role that the amount of the sponsorship investment plays in sponsorship decisions, in particular regarding the hidden agenda.

Third, we did not differentiate between different sponsorship types. Clark, Cornwell, and Pruitt (2009), for example, indicated that sponsorships with high media impact and interest, such as title sponsorships, might be less prone to agency effects. Consequently, future research could consider the different sponsorship types.

Fourth, no significant differences were found on the influence of personal objectives on sponsorship decisions between the gender and level of experience of the study participants. This is in line with Johnston (2010), who found that gender and level of experience are not decisive factors in sponsorship decision-making. Furthermore, the responses from the three types of the participants' employment did not differ significantly. However, the descriptive data show divergences in the means. For example, participants employed at sponsors assign on average an influence of 31.00 % of personal objectives to sponsorship decisions in SMEs. By contrast, the participants employed at agencies ( $M = 51.00\%$ ) and clubs ( $M = 50.00\%$ ) rated the influence higher. The differences between the internal (sponsors) as opposed to the external perspective (agencies and clubs) might be due to socially acceptable responses, despite our efforts to reduce them. However, the differences in the descriptive data must be interpreted cautiously, as the sub-

samples in our study are small. Accordingly, this is subject to future research, which could investigate the relevance of the different perspectives on sponsorship decisions in more detail.

Fifth, given its exploratory nature, our work exhibits the general limitations of any qualitative Delphi study. The results contribute to theorising about sponsorship decisions and can be used to generate hypotheses, but cannot be generalised, as they rely on the opinions of the 18 participants, and the interpretation of the researchers (Häder, 2014). Although we regard our approach as appropriate, further studies could test managers' hidden agenda in sponsorship decisions with other samples and methods in order to validate and generalise our findings.

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## 3.2 Sponsorship Decisions – Are Managers Honest with Shareholders? (Transfer Paper E)

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Sport Sponsorships have become an essential part of companies' marketing strategies (Cornwell & Known, 2019, p. 1). Hence, sponsorship decisions have significant consequences for the company.

### 3.2.1 WHO MAKES SPONSORSHIP DECISIONS IN SPONSORING COMPANIES?

Shareholders or owners of a sponsoring company give managers the authority to make decisions on their behalf. This illustrates a principal-agent-relationship, with the shareholders or owners as principal and the managers as agents (Jensen & Meckling, 1976, p. 308). There are doubts that the managers' decisions are always in line with the strategic marketing objectives of the company (Cornwell & Known, 2019, p. 5; Johnston, 2010, p. 366; Zimmer, 2017). From the industrial marketing literature, we know that strategic decisions can be motivated by a complex combination of corporate and personal objectives (Webster & Wind, 1972, p. 18). This is shown in figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Objectives in sponsorship decisions.

If the personal interests of managers (agents) differ from the principal's objectives, agency effects occur (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 58). In the sponsorship context, we speak of a hidden agenda when personal objectives influence the managers' sponsorship decision-making.

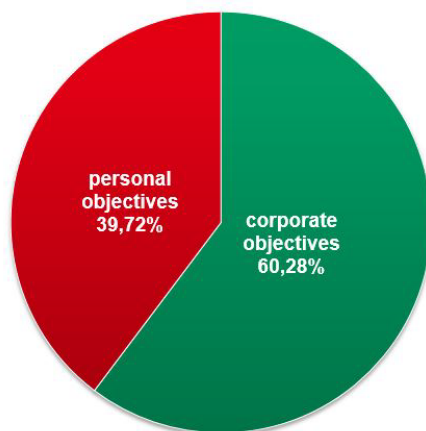
Schönberner, Woratschek, and Ellert (2020) applied the Delphi technique to assess the expert opinions of 18 sport sponsorship managers in three rounds of interviews. The Delphi method enables researchers to "distinguish and to clarify real motivations" (Linstone & Turoff, 1975, p. 4). Key characteristics of the Delphi method are anonymity of the participants, iterative questioning in different rounds, structured feedback between the rounds, and the (statistical) compression of group answers (Rowe & Wright, 1999, p. 354). This study reveals 12 different types of managers' personal objectives. The most important personal objective is the identification with a team or a particular sport, followed by regional loyalty, and personal benefits/fun such as free tickets and meeting the rich and famous. Furthermore, prestige in managers' peer-groups, exertion of power, and social relationships also represent relevant personal objectives of managers. Some minor-level motivations are personal success, status within the organisation, influence on the sponsee, personal rejection, competitive thinking, and job security.

### 3.2.2 DO PERSONAL OBJECTIVES INFLUENCE SPONSORSHIP DECISIONS?

Yes, they do!

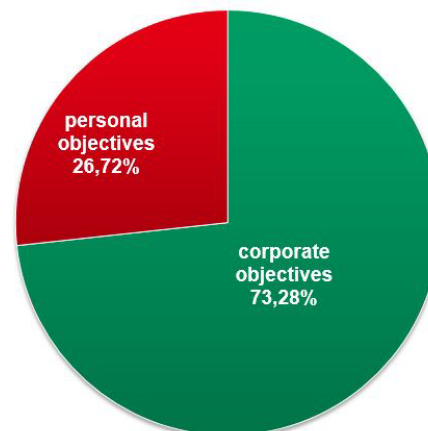
#### small and medium-sized enterprises:

< 50 Mio. EUR annual turnover  
< 250 employees



#### large-scale enterprises:

> 50 Mio. EUR annual turnover  
> 250 employees



**Figure 2.** The influence of personal objectives on sponsorship decisions in companies of different sizes.

More specifically, the results show that the size and the organisational structure of the sponsoring company determine the influence of personal objectives. As displayed in Figure 2, the influence of personal objectives on sponsorship decisions is larger in small and middle-sized enterprises (39.72%) than in large-scale enterprises (26.72%). Consequently, the personal objectives of managers influence the decision-making in sponsoring companies of all sizes, which implies that a hidden agenda in sponsorship decisions exists.

### **3.2.3 WHAT DOES THE EXISTENCE OF A HIDDEN AGENDA MEAN FOR SPONSORING COMPANIES?**

A hidden agenda in sponsoring decisions leads to agency conflicts that have negative effects on the sponsor. The findings of Schönberner et al. (2020) demonstrate four types of negative consequences for the sponsor: financial loss, reputational damage, internal problems with employees, and the signalling of a misleading strategic orientation. Interestingly, the study also reveals three types of positive effects of a hidden agenda on sponsorship success from a sponsor's perspective: greater expertise, stronger support, and better activation of the sponsorship. One explanation for these positive effects is that when a manager has a personal interest in a sponsorship, the intrinsic motivation to put more effort into implementing the sponsorship is stronger. However, agency conflicts dominate the positive effects.

### **3.2.4 HOW CAN MANAGERS ADDRESS THE HIDDEN AGENDA ISSUE PRACTICALLY?**

From the sponsee perspective, sport organisations and sport marketing agencies can address potential sponsors not only on a rational level, for instance, with facts about the sport organisation, but also on an emotional level. In the negotiation process, the sport organisation could try to pre-identify the personal objectives of the sponsor's manager and, thus, utilise them by including personal benefits, such as free tickets or the opportunity to meet the star players in the sponsorship proposal.

From the sponsor's perspective, thorough and consistent sponsorship effect measurements and incentive systems, as well as controlling systems, should be implemented to reduce agency conflicts. The agency literature includes several such systems (e.g., Eisenhardt, 1989; Jensen & Meckling, 1976), which should be discussed and applied in the context of sponsorship decisions.

**To put it in a nutshell:**

1. Sponsorship decisions are motivated by both corporate and personal objectives. A hidden agenda in sponsorship decision exists.
2. A hidden agenda occurs when personal objectives, such as identification with a team/sport, regional loyalty, or personal benefits/fun, influence sponsorship decision-making.
3. The level of influence of managers' personal objectives on sponsorship decisions depends on the size and the structure of the sponsoring company.
4. A hidden agenda leads mainly to negative effects for the sponsoring company, namely financial loss, reputational damage, internal problems with employees, and the signalling of a misleading strategic orientation. However, positive effects can also occur.
5. Sponsors, sport organisations, and sport marketing agencies should leverage the knowledge about hidden agenda in sponsorship decisions to their own benefit.

**Video**

Please watch the SMAB Clip “Hidden Agenda in Sponsorship Decisions” on Prof. Woratschek’s YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/YAkPYsttQ-c>

**3.2.5 REFERENCES**

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### 3.3 Entscheidungen im Sportsponsoring: Auswahlprozess, Ziele und Hidden–Agenda (Transfer Paper F, in German)

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66(3), 62–66.  
<https://essentials.ebsco.com/search?query=Entscheidungen%20im%20Sportsponsoring:%20Auswahlprozess,%20Ziele%20und%20Hidden%E2%80%93Agenda&language=de>

#### ABSTRACT

Unternehmen geben jedes Jahr weltweit Milliarden Euro für Sportsponsoring aus. Daher sollte ein strukturierter Auswahlprozess stattfinden, der die unterschiedlichen und spezifischen Zielsetzungen berücksichtigt. Allerdings verfolgen Manager bei Sponsoring-Entscheidungen neben den Unternehmenszielen auch persönliche Interessen. Aus dieser „Hidden-Agenda“ können sowohl negative als auch positive Auswirkungen für Unternehmen resultieren. In diesem Artikel stellen wir einen strukturierten Auswahlprozess vor, analysieren die heterogenen Zielsetzungen und untersuchen die Auswirkungen einer Hidden-Agenda auf das Sportsponsoring und leiten daraus Handlungsempfehlungen ab.

**KEYWORDS:** Sportsponsoring, Entscheidungen, Auswahlprozess, Ziele, Hidden-Agenda



### 3.3.1 EINLEITUNG

Sponsoren investieren weltweit jährlich Milliardenbeträge in Sponsoring-Partnerschaften, wovon der größte Teil in das Sportsponsoring fließt (Statista, 2017). Dies zeigt, dass Sportsponsoring mittlerweile ein fester und bedeutender Bestandteil der Marketingstrategien von Unternehmen geworden ist (Cornwell & Known, 2019). Sponsorings werden als strategische Entscheidungen eingestuft, welche einen erheblichen Einfluss auf die sponsernden Unternehmen haben (Athanasopoulou & Sarli, 2015). Es ist allerdings wenig über die Sponsoring-Entscheidungsprozesse bekannt, die innerhalb der Unternehmen ablaufen (Cornwell & Known, 2019). Außerdem treten immer wieder Berichte darüber auf, dass persönliche Ziele der Manager einen Einfluss auf Sportsponsoring-Entscheidungen haben (Zimmer, 2017). Dem gegenüber stehen wiederum Meinungen, dass dieses oft auch „Buddy-Business“ genannte Phänomen der Vergangenheit angehört und heutzutage keine Rolle mehr spielt (Hartland, Skinner & Griffiths, 2005). Hier herrscht unserer Meinung nach Klärungsbedarf. Demzufolge gehen wir in diesem Artikel den folgenden Fragen näher auf den Grund: Wie treffen Sponsoren strategische Sponsoring-Entscheidungen? Welche Zielsetzungen verfolgen Unternehmen im Sportsponsoring? Welche Ziele verfolgen die verantwortlichen Manager dabei und welche Einfluss haben persönliche Interessen auf die Sportsponsoring-Entscheidung?

### 3.3.2 AUSWAHLPROZESS IM SPORTSPONSORING

Sponsoring-Entscheidungen sind strategische Entscheidungen, die eines strategischen und professionellen Auswahlprozesses bedürfen (Athanasopoulou & Sarli, 2015). Allerdings haben sich bisher nur wenige Autoren in der Sponsoring-Literatur mit diesem Prozess befasst. Deshalb erarbeiteten Schönberner, Woratschek und Ellert (2020) in Zusammenarbeit mit einem Expertenpanel aus der Praxis einen detaillierten Auswahlprozess mit drei Phasen: Planungs-, Selektions- und Umsetzungsphase. In diesem Artikel bauen wir auf diesem Prozess auf und erweitern ihn konzeptionell um eine vierte Phase, die Evaluationsphase.

Für Sponsoren stellen strategische Sponsoring-Partnerschaften individuelle Lösungen für bestimmte Marketingbedürfnisse dar (Schönberner & Woratschek, 2020a). Demzufolge stützen wir uns bei der Konzeptualisierung des Auswahlprozesses auf die Logik des sogenannten Wertshops, der ein adäquates Wertschöpfungsmodell für individuelle Problemlösungen darstellt (Stabell & Fjeldstad, 1998). Sponsoren werden dabei als Auftraggeber verstanden, auf dessen

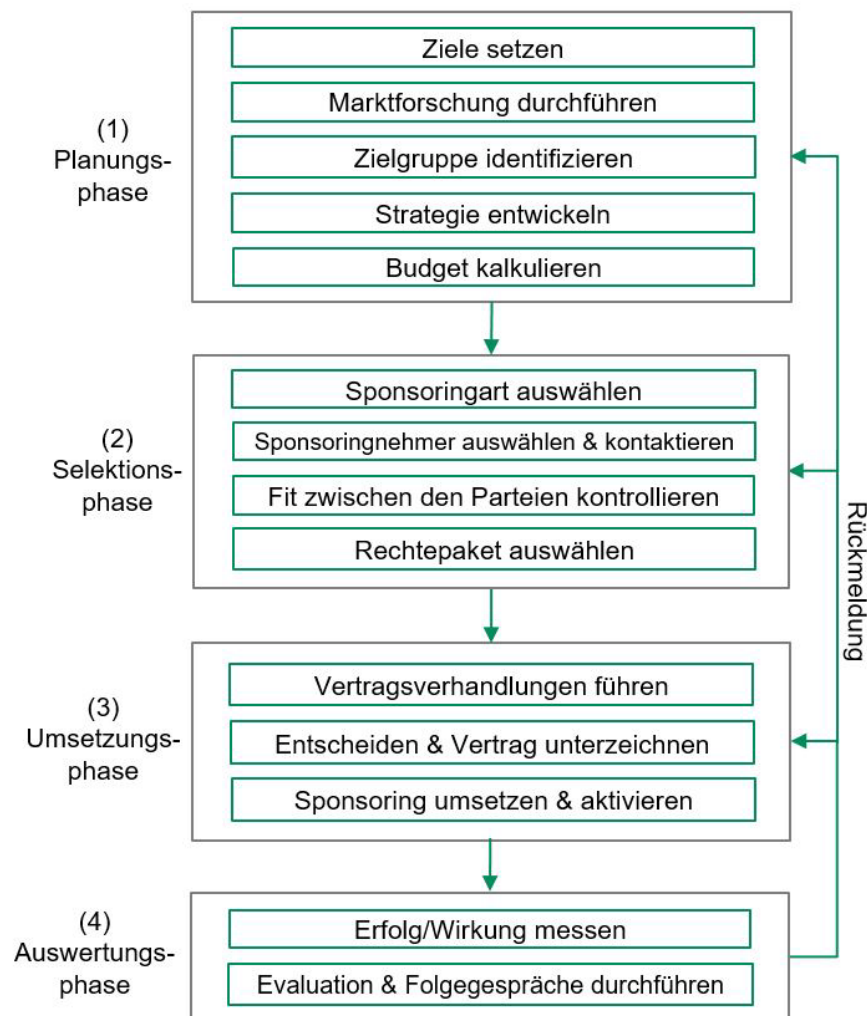
spezifische Anforderungen der Sponsoringnehmer im Sinne eines Dienstleisters möglichst individuell einget. Der Wertshop besteht aus den aufeinanderfolgenden Wertschöpfungsaktivitäten Akquisition und Problemfindung, Lösungsalternativen, Entscheidung, Ausführung sowie Evaluation (Popp, Horbel & Woratschek, 2017). Bei der Akquisitions- und Problemfindungsaktivität werden Informationen über die Marktteilnehmer eingeholt und die individuellen Bedürfnisse des Auftraggebers eruiert. Anschließend bietet der Dienstleister Lösungsalternativen an, mit denen die Bedürfnisse befriedigt werden können. Nach der Entscheidung für eine geeignete Alternative kommt es zu deren Ausführung. Während und nach der Ausführung wird das Ergebnis evaluiert.

In Anlehnung an die Logik des Wertshops konzipieren wir im Folgenden einen detaillierten idealtypischen Sponsoring-Auswahlprozess mit vier Phasen inklusive Feedbackschleifen und vierzehn Einzelschritten (Abbildung 1). Die erste Phase stellt die Planungsphase dar, welche grundsätzlich die Akquisitions- und Problemfindungsaktivitäten des Wertshops widerspiegelt. Die Planungsphase beim Sponsoring umfasst die Festlegung von Zielen, die Durchführung von Marktforschung, die Identifikation der Zielgruppen, die Strategieentwicklung und die Kalkulation des Budgets. Die anschließende Selektionsphase umfasst diverse Auswahlaktivitäten wie zum Beispiel die Auswahl der Sponsoring-Art, des Sponsoringnehmers und des Rechtepakets. Dies entspricht dem Eruiern von Lösungsalternativen im Wertshop.

In der dritten Phase des Sponsoring-Auswahlprozesses, der Umsetzungsphase, fassen wir die Entscheidungs- und Ausführungsaktivitäten des Wertshops zusammen. Hier finden demnach die Prozessschritte der Vertragsverhandlung, der finalen Entscheidung und der Aktivierung der Sponsoringrechte statt. Die abschließende Evaluationsphase entspricht der Evaluationsaktivität des Wertshops und bezieht sich auf die Wirkungsmessung des Sponsorings sowie Feedback-Gespräche. Wenn die Evaluation während der Vertragslaufzeit nicht zu zufriedenstellenden Ergebnissen führt, sollten alle Schritte des Auswahlprozesses erneut durchgeführt werden, bis eine geeignete Lösung gefunden ist. Jeder durchgeführte Prozessschritt liefert dabei Feedback zu vorangegangenen Aktivitäten. Dies wird als iterativer, zyklischer Wertschöpfungsprozess bezeichnet (Stabell & Fjeldstad, 1998).

Das Ergebnis der maßgeschneiderten Problemlösung stellt den Wert für den Sponsor und somit den Schlüsselfaktor für eine Vertragsverlängerung dar. Eine langfristige Partnerschaft sollte das Ziel sein, da ein längerfristiges Sponsoring erwiesenermaßen für beide Parteien Vorzüge aufweisen

(Morgan, Taylor, & Adair, 2020). Die damit einhergehende Reputation des Sponsoringnehmers ist zudem entscheidend für die Gewinnung weiterer Sponsoren (Stabell & Fjeldstad, 1998).



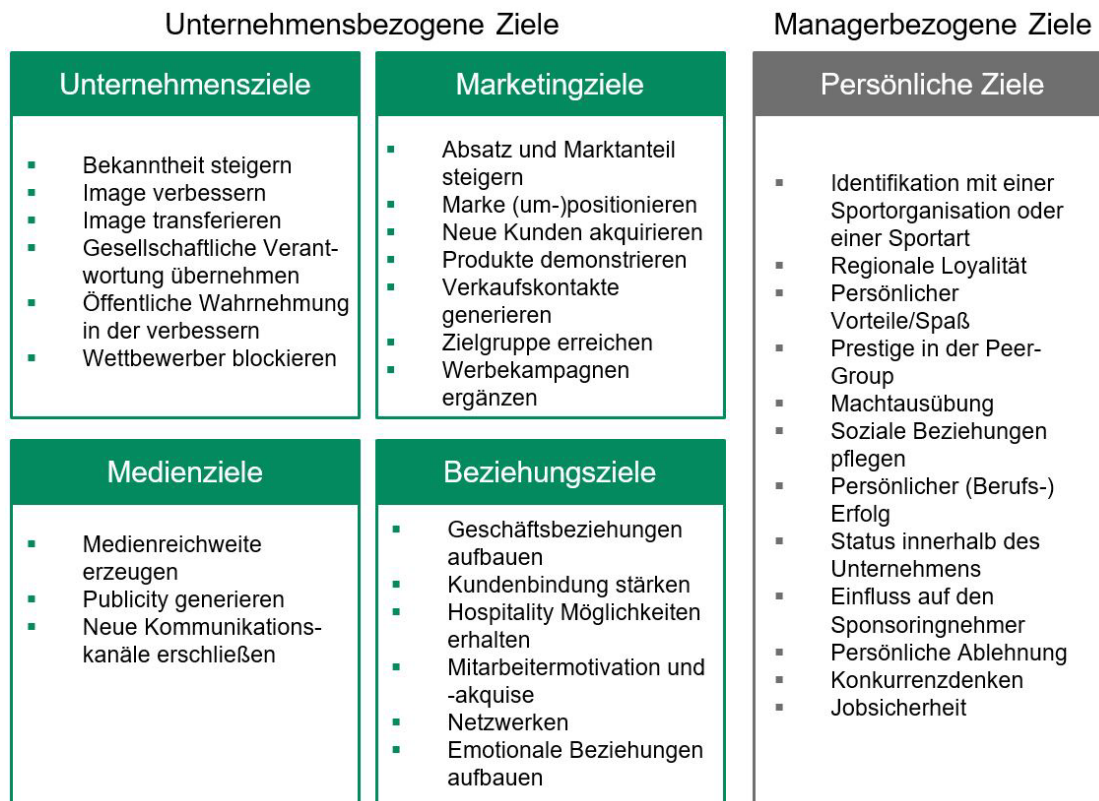
**Abb. 1.** Auswahlprozess im Sponsoring. In Anlehnung an Schönberner et al. (2020).

Die Ergebnisse von Schönberner et al. (2020) zeigen auf, dass die Phasen des Auswahlprozesses nacheinander ablaufen. Im Gegensatz dazu folgen die einzelnen Prozessschritte innerhalb einer Phase nicht zwangsläufig einer festgelegten Reihenfolge. Insbesondere in der Planungs- und Selektionsphase können die einzelnen Schritte individuell an die Bedürfnisse des Sponsors angepasst und/oder gleichzeitig durchgeführt werden. Dies verdeutlicht auch den Charakter des Wertshops, der eine individuelle Problemlösung anstelle eines standardisierten Transformationsprozesses darstellt (Popp et al., 2017).

### 3.3.3 ZIELE IM SPORTSPONSORING

Für den Sponsoring-Erfolg ist entscheidend, dass im Auswahlprozess konkrete Ziele gesetzt werden (Schönberner & Woratschek, 2020b). Sponsoren adressieren mit ihren Sponsoring-Partnerschaften zumeist verschiedene Interessensgruppen, zum Beispiel Kunden, Geschäftspartner oder Mitarbeiter, und verfolgen zeitgleich mehrere Ziele (Meenaghan, McLoughlin & McCormack, 2013). Die vielfältigen Zielsetzungen der Sponsoren reichen über die Steigerung der Bekanntheit und der Verbesserung des Markenimages über die Neukundenakquise, die Bestandskundenbindung und den Aufbau von Geschäftsbeziehungen zur Erzielung hoher Medienreichweiten und Erschließung neuer Kommunikationskanäle (bspw. nachzulesen bei O'Reilly & Madill, 2012 oder Nielsen Sports, 2018).

Um einen besseren Überblick über die möglichen Sponsoring-Ziele zu erhalten, entwickelten Hartland et al. (2005) eine Kategorisierung in Unternehmens-, Marketing-, Medien-, Beziehungs- und persönliche Ziele. Darauf aufbauend ergänzen wir die in der Literatur diskutierten Sponsoring-Ziele und ordnen sie den einzelnen Kategorien zu (Abbildung 2).



**Abb. 2.** Ziele im Sportsponsoring. In Anlehnung an Schönberner und Woratschek (2020b).

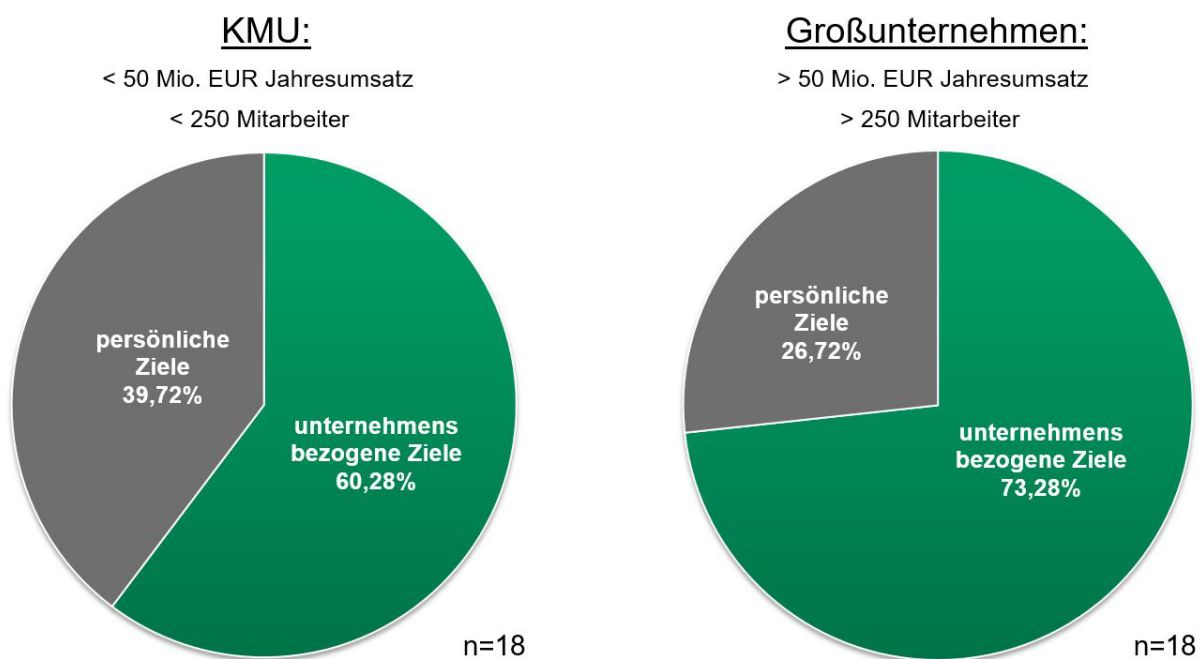
Eine Besonderheit stellt hierbei die Kategorie der persönlichen Ziele dar, da diese sich nicht auf das Unternehmen, sondern die Manager bezieht, die die Entscheidungen treffen. In ihrer empirischen Studie können Schönberner et al. (2020) zwölf verschiedene Arten von persönlichen Zielen der Manager identifizieren. Die wichtigsten persönlichen Ziele sind demnach die Identifikation mit einer Mannschaft oder einer bestimmten Sportart, gefolgt von regionaler Loyalität und persönlichen Vorteilen und Spaß, zum Beispiel Freikarten und Treffen mit den Stars. Darüber hinaus stellen auch Prestige in den Peer-Groups von Managern, Machtausübung und soziale Beziehungen relevante persönliche Ziele dar. Weniger stark ausgeprägte Motivationen sind der persönliche Erfolg, der Status innerhalb der Organisation, der Einfluss auf den Sponsoringnehmer, die persönliche Ablehnung diverser Sportarten oder -organisationen, das Konkurrenzdenken gegenüber Mitstreitern und die Jobsicherheit.

Die entscheidende Frage, die sich für Sponsoren hier nun stellt: Welche Auswirkungen haben die persönlichen Ziele der Manager auf den strategischen Sponsoring-Auswahlprozess der Unternehmung? Bislang ist die Rolle der für die Sponsoring-Entscheidungen verantwortlichen Manager weitgehend ungeklärt. Dementsprechend widmen wir uns im Folgenden der Frage nach dem Einfluss der persönlichen Ziele der Manager auf Sponsoring-Entscheidungen.

#### **3.3.4 HIDDEN AGENDA BEI SPONSORING-ENTSCHEIDUNGEN**

Zur Analyse der Rolle der Manager bei Sponsoring-Entscheidungen ist es notwendig, deren Beziehung zum sponsernden Unternehmen zu erläutern. Dazu hilft die sogenannte Principal-Agent-Theorie. In einer Principal-Agent-Beziehung treten die durch die Aktionäre, bzw. Eigentümer, repräsentierte Unternehmung als Auftraggeber und die Manager als Auftragnehmer auf (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). Demnach überträgt das Unternehmen (Sponsor) diversen angestellten Managern die Befugnis, Sponsoring-Entscheidungen im Namen des Unternehmens zu treffen. Es bestehen dabei allerdings immer Zweifel, ob die Entscheidungen der Manager ausschließlich im Einklang mit den strategischen Sponsoring-Zielen des Unternehmens stehen (Cornwell & Known, 2019). Gemäß Webster und Wind (1972) werden strategische Entscheidungen durch eine komplexe Kombination aus Unternehmens- und persönlichen Zielen motiviert. Sobald die persönlichen Interessen von Managern (Agents) von den Zielen des Unternehmens (Principal) abweichen, treten Interessenskonflikte auf (Eisenhardt, 1989). Diese Interessenskonflikte können Transaktionskosten für das sponsernde Unternehmen zur Folge haben.

Mit ihrer Delphi-Studie, bei der 18 Sponsoring-Manager über drei anonymisierte und mit Feedback angereicherte Runden befragt wurden, belegen Schönberner et al. (2020), dass persönliche Ziele in der Tat einen Einfluss auf die Entscheidungsfindung im Sportsponsoring haben. Dies bezeichnen sie als Hidden-Agenda in Sponsoring-Entscheidungen. Die Ausprägung der Hidden-Agenda ist dabei abhängig von der Größe der Unternehmen. Der Einfluss persönlicher Ziele auf Sponsoring-Entscheidungen ist bei kleinen und mittleren Unternehmen (KMUs) größer (39,7 Prozent) als in Großunternehmen (26,7 Prozent) (Abbildung 3). Dennoch beeinflussen offensichtlich die persönlichen Ziele von Managern deren Entscheidungsfindung bezüglich Sponsorings in Unternehmen aller Größen.



**Abb. 3.** Hidden-Agenda in Sponsoring-Entscheidungen.

In Anlehnung an Schönberner et al. (2020).

Sponsoring-Entscheidungen als strategische Marketing-Entscheidungen haben einen weitreichenden Einfluss auf die sponsernden Unternehmen. Dementsprechend ist die Hidden-Agenda von hoher Relevanz, da diese zu Interessens-Konflikten zwischen Aktionären bzw. Eigentümern und den Managern führt, welche negative Auswirkungen auf das Unternehmen haben können. Schönberner et al. (2020) identifizieren in der Tat vier Arten von negativen Folgen für Sponsoren: Finanzielle Verluste, Rufschädigung bei Bekanntwerden, interne Probleme mit

Mitarbeitern durch willkürlich eingesetzte Budgets und Signalisierung einer irreführenden strategischen Ausrichtung.

Es werden allerdings auch drei Arten von positiven Auswirkungen einer Hidden-Agenda auf den Erfolg des Sponsorings aus Sponsorenperspektive aufgezeigt: Höheres Fachwissen der beteiligten Manager, stärkere finanzielle und personelle Unterstützung und bessere Aktivierung des Sponsorings. Die positiven Effekte können durch eine höhere intrinsische Motivation bei persönlich präferierten Sponsoring-Engagements erklärt werden, da Manager sich verstärkt für effektive Aktivierungsmaßnahmen einsetzen. Allerdings übertrumpfen in der Regel die negativen die positiven Auswirkungen einer Hidden-Agenda.

### **3.3.5 MANAGEMENTEMPFEHLUNGEN**

Der strategische Sponsoring-Auswahlprozess beim Auftreten einer Hidden-Agenda ändert sich nur marginal. Wenn ein Manager eines Unternehmens den Sponsoringnehmer bereits aufgrund persönlicher Ziele ausgewählt hat, sollten die Phasen des Auswahl-Prozesses dennoch durchgeführt werden (Schönberner et al., 2020), um ein besseres Controlling des Sponsoring-Engagements zu gewährleisten. Zu beachten ist hierbei, dass sich einzelne Prozessschritte verändern können. Zum Beispiel könnte die Marktforschung zur Effektivität des Sponsorings zur Rechtfertigung einer bereits getroffenen Entscheidung dienen. Wir bezeichnen dieses Phänomen als „Ex-Post-Rationalisierung“. Das heißt, selbst wenn der Sponsoringnehmer bereits ausgewählt wurde, könnte der Auswahlprozess grundsätzlich dennoch dokumentiert werden, um die Sponsoring-Entscheidung nachträglich intern und vor allem extern rechtfertigen zu können. Wenn die weiteren Schritte des strukturierten Auswahlprozesses weiter durchlaufen werden, steigt durch eine weitgehende Transparenz zudem die Wahrscheinlichkeit dafür, dass das Sponsoring trotz Auftreten einer Hidden-Agenda positive Effekte für das Unternehmen hat. Für ein Unternehmen sind demnach die Vorgabe und die Durchführung eines strukturierten Auswahlprozesses im Sportsponsoring in jedem Fall empfehlenswert. Sportmarketing-Agenturen können sich das Wissen um den Auswahlprozess ebenfalls zunutze machen, wenn sie als Mediator Sponsoring-Partnerschaften vermitteln.

Sponsoren sollten grundsätzlich versuchen, das Auftreten einer Hidden-Agenda zu reduzieren. Eine vollständige Vermeidung wird jedoch kaum möglich sein. Eine Reduktionsstrategie kann hierbei die Erfolgsmessung von Sponsoring-Engagements durch unabhängige Dritte darstellen. Wird der Erfolg eines Sponsorings stringent gemessen und der Mitteleinsatz nachvollzogen, kann

dies Manager davon abhalten Sponsorings vorwiegend aus persönlichen Interessen zu verfolgen. Dabei ist zu beachten, dass Sponsoring-Erfolg nicht ausschließlich mit "harten" Return on Investment-Kennzahlen gemessen werden kann. Zudem reichen einfache Kennzahlen zu Reichweiten, Recognition und Recall nicht aus, um die Effektivität und Effizienz von Sportsponsoring-Entscheidungen fundiert zu beurteilen. Es sollten weitere Kennzahlen, wie beispielsweise Imagezugewinn, Customer Engagement, Kauf- und Weiterempfehlungsabsichten, in die Wirkungsmessung mit einbezogen werden. Zusätzlich sollten Sponsoren Anreiz- und Kontrollsysteme implementieren, um die aus einer Hidden-Agenda entstehenden Interessenskonflikte zu reduzieren. In der Literatur finden sich mehrere Vorschläge für solche Systeme (z. B. bei Eisenhardt, 1989 und Jensen & Meckling, 1976), die im Zusammenhang mit Sponsoring-Entscheidungen diskutiert und angewandt werden können.

Sponsoringnehmer und Sportmarketing-Agenturen wiederum sollten sich das Wissen um die Existenz einer Hidden-Agenda zunutze machen. Sie sollten demzufolge die verantwortlichen Manager von potenziellen Sponsoren nicht ausschließlich auf rationaler Ebene, zum Beispiel mit Fakten zur Medienreichweite, sondern auch auf emotionaler Ebene ansprechen. Dazu ist es sinnvoll zu versuchen, die persönlichen Ziele der verantwortlichen Manager einer Unternehmung zu identifizieren und diese in den Verhandlungen und Angebotsstrukturen zu berücksichtigen. Zum Beispiel können persönliche Vorteile wie „Freikarten“ oder die „Möglichkeit Starspieler zu treffen“ einbezogen werden.

Abschließend ist festzuhalten, dass eine Hidden-Agenda bei Sportsponsoring-Entscheidungen in erheblichem Ausmaß existiert. Aus dieser Hidden-Agenda entstehen Interessenskonflikte, welche durch diverse Maßnahmen und vor allem durch die Vorgabe und die Kontrolle eines strukturierten Auswahlprozesses reduziert werden können.

### **3.3.6 MANAGEMENT-TAKEAWAY**

Sportsponsoring-Entscheidungen werden durch eine Vielfalt von Unternehmenszielen beeinflusst. Zudem spielen auch die persönlichen Ziele der Manager eine maßgebliche Rolle. Die negativen Auswirkungen dieser sogenannten Hidden-Agenda können Unternehmen durch die Durchführung eines strukturierten Sponsoring-Auswahlprozesses inklusive Erfolgsmessung und diversen Anreiz- und Kontrollsystemen reduzieren.



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### 3.4 Understanding Sport Sponsorship Decision-Making – An Exploration of the Roles and Power Bases in the Sponsors' Buying Center (Scientific Paper 2)

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#### ABSTRACT

**Research question:** Despite increasing global sponsorship expenditures, research on sponsorship decision-making remains limited. Sponsors are considered holistically as organisations that make sponsorship decisions. However, sponsorship decisions are usually group decisions on which several individuals collaborate. Although the industrial marketing literature introduced the concept of buying centres for analysing group decisions, sponsorship decision-making as group decision-making is underresearched. The purpose of the study is to address this gap in the sport management literature by examining the roles of individuals involved in sponsorship decision-making and their power bases.

**Research methods:** The study uses a qualitative Delphi technique with three rounds and two samples of sponsorship managers ( $N_1=18$ ,  $N_2=13$ ) from Germany and Austria.

**Results and Findings:** The results show that the sponsors' buying center (SBC) comprises eight different roles: *deciders*, *users*, *coordinators*, *experts*, *signatories*, *negotiators*, *initiators*, and *networkers*. The findings also reveal that individuals occupying the various roles fulfil different tasks and rely on different power bases. The SBC is influenced by organisational and environmental factors. The study further demonstrates that sponsors can outsource roles to external partners.

**Implications:** This study is the first to investigate the SBC empirically by taking the characteristics of the sponsorship context into account. This article, thereby, contributes to our theoretical understanding of sponsorship decision-making by examining the individuals' roles in the SBC, the external and internal influences, and the involvement of external partners. Finally, the results have managerial implications for both sponsors and sponsees.

**KEYWORDS:** Sponsorship, decision-making, buying centre

### 3.4.1 INTRODUCTION

Sponsorship represents a vital revenue stream for sports organisations and a strategic marketing activity for the sponsoring companies (Cornwell & Kwon, 2019). Sponsors invest billions of dollars annually in sponsorships, with the majority allocated to sports (IEG, 2018). Accordingly, we focus on sport sponsorship. Despite their importance in the process, sponsorship decisions have received little attention in the literature (Jensen & Cornwell, 2017; Walliser, 2003).

Cornwell and Kwon (2019, p. 1) describe sponsorship as a “multifaceted strategic decision.” One facet, the steps in the sponsors’ decision-making process, was addressed by previous studies (e.g., Athanasopoulou & Sarli, 2015; Chadwick & Thwaites, 2004, 2005). Lee and Ross (2012) investigated the factors influencing sponsors’ decision-making, such as specific sport team characteristics or country-related factors, which represent another facet of sponsorship decisions. However, the further facet, which is that usually multiple individuals decide as a group about sponsorships has been largely neglected in the literature. In previous studies, sponsors are considered holistically as organisations that make decisions.

Although the industrial marketing literature has already postulated that “no marketing manager can ignore the fact that most buying decisions are not made by a single individual” (Wind, 1978, p. 75), only the two studies of Arthur et al. (1997) and Aguilar-Manjarrez et al. (1997) addressed this issue in the sponsorship literature. Both studies applied the buying center (BC) concept of Webster and Wind (1972a) from the industrial marketing literature to the sponsorship context. The original BC comprises five different roles, the deciders, users, gatekeepers, influencers, and buyers, which are occupied by the individuals involved in organisational buying decisions (Webster & Wind, 1972a).

However, both studies reveal certain shortcomings, as the authors applied the roles of the original BC analogously to the sponsorship context, thereby neglecting the fact that context is a relevant determinant for research in sport management (Woratschek et al., 2014). The sponsorship context has some very specific characteristics. Due to the high degree of sponsorship customisation, contract negotiations are an important element in the sponsorship decision-making process (e.g., Chadwick & Thwaites, 2005; Cornwell & Kwon, 2019). Furthermore, sponsors frequently collaborate with external partners when making sponsorship decisions (O’Reilly & Madill, 2012). Since this was largely ignored in the studies of Arthur et al. (1997) and Aguilar-

Manjarrez et al. (1997), O'Reilly and Madill (2012) proposed exploring the roles that external partners play in sponsor decision-making. Moreover, even though Arthur et al. (1997) emphasised the importance of understanding the relationships between the members of the BC, they did not investigate the power related to the roles of the sponsors' buying center (SBC).

Hence, Arthur et al. (1997, p. 231) called for further research: "Is the buying center in sport sponsorship similar in composition to that exhibited in the general industrial purchasing literature?" Consequently, the purpose of this study is, on the one hand, to address this call for research, and on the other hand, to extend the literature on sponsorship decision-making by investigating cooperation with external partners as well as the external and internal determinants of the SBC.

### **3.4.2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **3.3.2.1 SPORT SPONSORSHIP AND MANAGERIAL DECISION-MAKING**

Cornwell and Kwon (2019) identified shortcomings in the research on managing the sponsorship process, which includes the sponsors' initial sponsorship decision. Other authors have indicated that research on sponsors' decision-making is generally limited (Jensen & Cornwell, 2017; Walliser, 2003). Despite the well-known fact that several individuals are involved in organisational decision-making (Webster & Wind, 1972a), in the sponsorship literature, authors mostly consider sponsors from a holistic perspective as organisations that make decisions. Only Arthur et al. (1997) and Aguilar-Manjarrez et al. (1997) studied sponsorship decisions through the lens of group decision-making by applying the BC concept of Webster and Wind (1972a). Arthur et al. (1997) indicated that the four roles from the original BC, namely deciders, buyers, gatekeepers, and influencers, but not the role of users are involved in sponsorship decisions. They further claimed that the composition of the SBC is influenced by the buying situation and interaction processes, but they lack evidence. Consequently, Arthur et al. (1997) called for further research that investigates empirically the applicability of the original BC to the sponsorship context. Aguilar-Manjarrez et al. (1997) were, to the best of our knowledge, the only ones to have responded to this call. In their study, they showed that all five roles of the original BC could be found in sponsorship decision-making.

However, both studies focused on an analogous transfer of the original BC roles to the sponsorship context, which implies several shortcomings. First, the context itself is an essential determinant of the analysis, and influences, for example, value co-creation in sports stadiums

(Stieler et al., 2014) and the perceived value of a sport event (Woratschek et al., 2014). These studies rely on context definitions from the service-dominant logic literature, where Chandler and Vargo (2011, p. 40) define context as “a set of unique actors with unique reciprocal links among them.” Accordingly, we expect the context of sponsorship to impact on sponsor decision-making.

Second, the original BC stems from the industrial marketing literature, which focuses mainly on industrial goods. However, sponsorship is allocated to the service sector, where services are differentiated between standardised and customised. Roth et al. (2006) found that in the case of customised services, negotiating is a better strategy than setting fixed prices. Sponsorships can be considered as customised services, where the sponsors’ demands are integrated into the sponsorship contract. Accordingly, negotiations over the conditions of the contract seem to represent an important element in the sponsorship decision-making process. Yet, this has not been addressed in the previous studies, although other authors have already highlighted contract negotiations in the sponsorship literature (e.g., Chadwick & Thwaites, 2005; Cornwell & Kwon, 2019). From these gaps in the literature, our first research question emerged. RQ1: To what extent can the original BC concept be applied to the sponsorship context and how should the composition of the SBC be modified?

Third, Arthur et al. (1997) and Aguilar-Manjarrez et al. (1997) focused on the roles within the sponsoring company. However, Abratt et al. (1987) already found that external marketing agencies assume 20% of the responsibility for sponsorship promotions. O’Reilly and Madill (2012) further stated that the cooperation of sponsors with other organisations regarding sponsorship decision-making represents another characteristic of the sponsorship context. Although Aguilar-Manjarrez et al. (1997) mentioned that external partners could be involved in sponsorship decisions, they did not investigate their assertion. Accordingly, O’Reilly and Madill (2012) emphasised the need to investigate the sponsor cooperation with external partners, which led to our second research question. RQ2: How do sponsors cooperate with external partners regarding sponsorship decision-making?

Despite the shortcomings of the previous studies, the basic idea of applying the BC concept to explain sponsorship decision-making is reasonable. Detailed knowledge of the roles of the involved individuals represents the prerequisite for understanding organisational decision-making behaviour (Wind, 1978). Consequently, we used the BC concept as a theoretical underpinning.

### 3.3.2.2 THE BUYING CENTER CONCEPT AND ITS EXTERNAL DETERMINANTS

The BC “includes all members of the organisation who are involved in [an organisational buying] process” (Webster & Wind, 1972a, p. 14). To understand this process, it is necessary first to identify the roles of the members involved in the BC (Webster & Wind, 1972a). In this article, roles are defined as “common patterns of behavior manifested by people in their interaction with other people concerned with purchasing” (Calder, 1978, p. 78).

The BC contains the five organisational roles of deciders, users, gatekeepers, influencers, and buyers (Webster & Wind, 1972a). Later Bonoma (1982) added a sixth role, the initiators. Webster and Wind (1972b) emphasised that one individual can occupy more than one role, and one role can be occupied by more than one individual. The roles are defined as:

- (1) Deciders: those with the authority to choose among alternative buying actions.
- (2) Users: those members of the organisation who use the purchased products and services.
- (3) Gatekeepers: those who control the flow of information (and materials) into the buying center.
- (4) Influencers: those who influence the decision process directly or indirectly by providing information and criteria for evaluating alternative buying actions.
- (5) Buyers: those with the formal responsibility and authority for contracting with suppliers (Webster & Wind, 1972a, p. 17).
- (6) Initiators: recognise that some company problem can be solved or avoided by acquiring a product or service (Bonoma, 1982, p. 113).

In the initial considerations of the BC, the focus was exclusively on members of the buying organisation (Bonoma & Zaltman, 1978; Webster & Wind, 1972b). Later, Wind and Robertson (1982) added a concept with an inter-organisational focus to the BC literature, namely the “linking pin” or “boundary role” concept. According to Wind and Robertson (1982) “linking pins” are not organisational roles, but internal members of the BC who have intra- and interorganisational contacts and represent the organisation externally. They further found that “linking pins” could exert a strong influence on buying decisions, and called for further research on the connection between the “linking pins” and the organisational roles. Consequently, we clarify empirically the “linking pin” concept in the sponsorship context.

Furthermore, the BC is influenced by external determinants, such as environmental and organisational factors (Johnston & Lewin, 1996; Webster & Wind, 1972a). Environmental factors

are of a physical, economic, legal, technological, cultural, and political nature (Webster & Wind, 1972a). Lee and Ross (2012) also found that political and economic factors, which they called country factors, influence sponsorship decisions. The frequently researched organisational factors are company-specific determinants that influence the composition of the BC (Wood, 2005). Organisational factors include the buying situation (Fortin & Ritchie, 1980), company size (Crow & Lindquist, 1985), product type (Jackson et al., 1984), purchase complexity (Brown et al., 2012), novelty of purchase (McQuiston, 1989), formalisation and centralisation (Johnston & Bonoma, 1981), purchase importance (Lewin & Donthu, 2005), time constraints (Lau et al., 1999), purchase uncertainty (Spekman & Stern, 1979), perceived risk (Garrido-Samaniego & Gutiérrez-Cillán, 2004), and the company's technological infrastructure (Osmonbekov et al., 2002).

In the sponsorship context, Aguilar-Manjarrez et al. (1997) and Arthur et al. (1997) only investigated the influence of the buying situation, which is classified in straight rebuys, modified rebuys, and new tasks, on the SBC. New task situations usually require the highest number of individuals, the most information, and include the evaluation of many different alternatives (Arthur et al., 1997), whereas straight rebuys are regarded as “nobrainers” (Aguilar-Manjarrez et al., 1997, p. 16). From the observed discrepancy between the extent of research on organisational determinants of general BCs and of SBCs, we derived research question three. RQ3: What organisational factors influence the SBC in the sponsorship context?

### 3.3.2.3 THE POWER BASES OF THE ROLES WITHIN BUYING CENTERS

The interaction processes within the BC are considered internal determinants of the buying decision (Crow & Lindquist, 1985). “Since members of the buying center differ in their influence” (Töllner et al., 2011, p. 713), it is important to understand the relationships within BCs. The relationships between the roles can be explored by considering each role's power bases (Bonoma, 1982; Johnston & Bonoma, 1981). In this article, power is defined as an individual's ability to influence the behaviour of other members of the BC (Wind & Robertson, 1982).

Bonoma (1982) applied the five bases of social power from managerial decision-making by French and Raven (1959) to the BC: reward power, coercive power, attraction power, expert power, and status power. Reward power is the capacity to provide others with material or non-material rewards for their compliance. Coercive power is the ability to punish other individuals with monetary or non-monetary sanctions for non-compliance. Attraction power refers to the ability to ensure others act according to his/her preferences because they like him/her. Expert power relates



to the capacity to exert influence on a decision through specialised knowledge. Status power is the formal or informal authority individuals possess due to their position in the company. Kohli (1989, p. 53) concluded that “each of the five bases of power is hypothesised to be related directly to manifest influence.”

Furthermore, in his study Kohli (1989) found that expert and reinforcement (the combination of reward and coercive) power represent strong influences within a BC, while attraction and status power are less influential power bases. Thomas (1984) also demonstrated the superior relevance of expert power over attraction and status power. In the sport management literature, the power base concept is mainly applied to studies on the leadership of sport organisations (e.g., Megheirkouni, 2019) and coach-athlete relationships (e.g., Rylander, 2015; Turman, 2006). Since there is limited research in the sponsorship literature on group decision-making, studies about the power bases are also scarce. However, in the sponsorship context, Long et al. (2004) investigated the influences on sponsorship decisions in a university athletics department (sponsee perspective). They found that, amongst other elements, an individual’s positional power and expertise influence a sponsorship decision, which could be compared to French and Raven’s (1959) status and expert power. Aguilar-Manjarrez et al. (1997, p. 18) mentioned that power and status are “key influences on the decision” and Arthur et al. (1997, p. 230) emphasised the importance of understanding the “relative influence” of each BC member. Since the authors did not elaborate further on their assertions, we identified another gap in the sponsorship literature and pose research question four. RQ4: What are the power bases of individuals occupying the roles in the SBC, and what level of influence can be attributed to the various power bases?

### 3.4.3 METHOD

The aim of our research, combined with the limited knowledge of the roles in sponsorship decision-making suggests a need to apply an exploratory research design. Therefore, we chose to conduct a qualitative Delphi study, which is well suited for exploratory research (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004). The Delphi method is a broadly used research technique, which has already been introduced to the sport management literature (Costa, 2005). We considered the Delphi technique appropriate, because it can be used for “putting together the structure of a model” (Linstone & Turoff, 1975, p. 4). Day and Bobeva (2005, p. 103) defined the Delphi technique as “a structured group communication method for soliciting expert opinion about complex problems or novel ideas, through the use of a series of questionnaires and controlled feedback.” The anonymised feedback comprises an aggregated analysis of the results from one round, and is returned to the participants in the questionnaire of the next round (Hasson et al., 2000).

The number of iterations in Delphi studies depends on the research objective, but usually does not exceed three rounds (Dietz, 1987). We aimed to reach stable opinions or consensus between the participants, which represent the stop criterion. To address our research questions, we considered the Delphi technique superior to the one-time expert interviews used in previous studies (e.g., Töllner et al., 2011). The Delphi technique encompasses the collaborative theorising approach, which entails academics theorising together with practitioners and not about them (Nenonen et al., 2017). The multi-round design and the anonymised feedback lead to results that are “strengthened by reasoned argument in which assumptions are challenged, thus helping to enhance validity” (Hasson et al., 2000, p. 1013).

#### 3.3.3.1 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

In the first Delphi round, semi-structured interviews with a duration of 25 to 34 minutes (Mean=27) were conducted. Seventeen interviews were conducted by phone and one in a face-to-face setting. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission. The aggregated results of the first round were edited graphically by the research team and returned to the participants in the second round. In that round, we used an online questionnaire with open-response questions, where the participants evaluated the results of the first round. After the second round, the participants predominantly reached consensus about the roles involved in sponsorship decision-making and

added no further roles. Therefore, the predefined stop criteria were met, and we stopped data collection with this sample.

For the third round, we recruited another sample of participants. With this type of triangulation, we aimed to increase the confirmability of the research by discussing the first-rounds results with other members of the research population (Day & Bobeva, 2005). In the third round, we chose semi-structured interviews to reduce the risk of bias in the results, due to misunderstandings by the new participants. The interviews took between 35 and 76 minutes ( $M=49$ ), were all conducted by phone and audio-recorded. The detailed interview materials were derived from our thorough literature review and informed by the results of the respective preceding round.

### 3.3.3.2 PARTICIPANTS

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants throughout our study (Hasson et al., 2000). Based on the selection criterion of having at least two years of professional experience in sport sponsorship, we contacted 44 sponsorship managers from Germany and Austria, of whom 18 participated (40.91% response rate). The age of the participants in the first two rounds were from 26 to 48 years ( $M=33.67$ ) and had professional experience in sport sponsorship from 2 to 25 years ( $M=8.17$ ). Ten managers were from sponsoring companies, five from sport marketing agencies, and three from sports clubs. By including the perspective of intermediaries and sponsees, we were able to gain more holistic insights into the sponsorship decision-making process, which led to increased trustworthiness of our study (Werner et al., 2015).

The sample of the third Delphi round comprised 13 sponsorship managers, who were purposively selected, based on the same experience criterion as before. The response rate was 41.94% (13 of 31). Furthermore, we ensured that each manager had already taken part in sponsorship decision-making. The managers were between 25 and 53 years ( $M=36.92$ ) old and had professional experience ranging from 2 to 23 years ( $M=9.31$ ). All managers were employed at sponsoring companies, because profound insights from actual members of a SBC were required to answer the questions in the third round.

### 3.3.3.3 DATA ANALYSIS

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and uploaded to MAXQDA®, which we used for data analysis. As in previous qualitative studies on BCs (e.g., Töllner et al., 2011), we conducted a qualitative content analysis. We performed structured content analysis, using the five-step process proposed by Mayring (2015): deriving the coding system, defining main categories and anchoring examples, coding the text material, extracting appropriate excerpts, and processing the results. Given the exploratory nature of our study, we coded deductively and inductively, in order to reveal new patterns and/or relationships (Merriam, 1998). Finally, we edited the results and converted them into graphics. The graphically prepared results were then included in the online questionnaire of the second Delphi round, or to the interview guideline of round three. The results of the second round were analysed by coding the responses relating to each role according to their valence. The data retrieved from the third round interviews were analysed following the same procedure as in the first round, by using an adapted coding system.

The quality criteria credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability should be considered, to ensure the trustworthiness of Delphi studies (Day & Bobeva, 2005). We accounted for credibility by discussing the results with the participants, which yielded concurrent validity. Furthermore, the sufficient experience of the participants increases content validity (Hasson et al., 2000). Addressing the dependability criterion, we ensured intercoder-reliability (Misoch, 2015). Two researchers coded the extracted text excerpts independently using the previously discussed coding systems. The agreement results of 0.88 in the first round, 0.92 in the second round, and 0.90 in the third round showed good to very good intercoder-reliability (Rust & Cooil, 1994). The selection of a second sample for the third Delphi round as a form of triangulation, and the extensive discussion of our findings with other sponsorship researchers, implies confirmability of the results. We attempted to ensure transferability by the purposive sampling of our participants and the detailed description of the procedure of our empirical study. However, a qualitative Delphi study inherently exhibits limitations in applying its findings to other contexts (Day & Bobeva, 2005).

### 3.4.4 RESULTS

#### 3.3.4.1 DELPHI ROUND 1

Following Webster and Wind (1972a), our aim in the first round was to identify the roles of the members involved in the context-specific SBC (RQ1). Consequently, we asked the managers unaided who is involved in sponsorship decision-making. The focus was on new task situations, where sponsors make initial sponsorship decisions. In what follows, we coded the participants according to the type of their organisation. However, we found no significant differences in the responses of the participant types and therefore made no further distinctions in reporting the results.

From the managers' responses, we identified six roles that are involved in sponsors' decision-making. Two of the identified roles in the sponsorship context represented equivalents of the roles deciders and users from the original BC concept. Furthermore, our results identified three roles that had similarities but did not resemble the respective roles of the original BC, at least not identically. Consequently, these roles were modified. In the sponsorship context, the gatekeepers are more appropriately described as coordinators, influencers as experts, and buyers as signatories. While gatekeepers only control the flow of information into the BC (Webster & Wind, 1972b), the coordinators additionally supervise and manage the decision-making process by ensuring that each role integrates the appropriate resources at the right time. For example, S9 stated that she "take[s] care in this case and check[s] in due time how long it will take until everything is signed and returned, because only when the budget release is there, the contract can go into circulation." According to the managers' responses, we modified the role influencers to experts who bring expertise from different departments into the SBC. For instance, S5 indicated that he "receives feedback from the R&D department on the amount of work that needs to be done internally, which of course helps [him] to assess whether the investment is worthwhile or not." We could not identify the role of buyers in our data, at least not as defined originally. However, all participants emphasised the role of the individuals who sign the sponsorship contract, which we named signatories.

Interestingly, we found a new role which was not included in the original BC. These are networkers, who on the one hand, establish and maintain relationships internally and, on the other hand, primarily become active beyond the boundaries of the sponsoring company "to be on the market and know what's going on" (A3) and "to establish contacts with potential partners" (S7).

However, we could not identify the role of initiators from our interviews. The results further showed that one person could occupy more than one role, and vice versa.

#### 3.3.4.2 DELPHI ROUND 2

In the online questionnaire, we returned the results on the six roles of the SBC, interspersed with selected sample quotations, as feedback to the managers. We then asked the managers to evaluate the roles identified in the first round and offered them the opportunity to add any missing roles (RQ1).

The results after the second round showed consensus among the managers regarding four roles, and majority agreement regarding two roles. The managers reached consensus, for which we set the required agreement rate at 80%, on the roles deciders (100% agreement), experts (94.12%), signatories (93.33%), and coordinators (87.50%). A majority of the participants approved the roles networkers (66.67%) and users (60.00%). The managers added no further role. Accordingly, the stop criteria were predominantly met, and we decided not to conduct any further round with this sample.

From the results, we developed the first draft of the SBC model, which contained six roles of the individuals involved in sponsorship decision-making. However, the first- and second-round participants only reached consensus on four roles: deciders, experts, signatories, and coordinators. In addition, the service research literature indicates that negotiations are superior in the context of customised services (Roth et al., 2006). Since sponsorship contracts are customised, several authors highlighted the relevance of negotiations between the sponsor and the sponsee (e.g., Chadwick & Thwaites, 2005; Cornwell & Kwon, 2019). As the first rounds did not reveal the importance of negotiations, we decided to add the role negotiators conceptually to the SBC model. We deliberately did not merge the roles signatories and negotiators, because S1 and S10 emphasised that the individuals who sign the contract often do not execute any other tasks concerning sponsorship decision-making. To further examine our SBC model extended by the negotiators, we set up the third Delphi round with participants who are unbiased from the previous rounds. Consequently, we recruited the second sample.

### 3.3.4.3 DELPHI ROUND 3

At the beginning of the third-round interviews, we discussed our extended SBC model with the new participants. We then questioned them on the SBC and additionally sought their opinion about the role of initiators, which was not found in the previous rounds (RQ1). We were wondering about the lack of initiators because this role is well established in the industrial marketing literature (e.g., Bonoma, 1982). First, we saw no logical reason why there would be no initiators in the sponsorship context. Second, experience shows that respondents in unaided interviews often do not mention self-evident facts. Hence, we confronted the respondents with the role of initiators in the third round.

The results showed that all 13 sponsorship managers unanimously approved all roles of the SBC and proposed explicitly including both the initiators and negotiators. For example, S15 stated that “we are not just waiting to receive a [sponsorship] proposal [...], you certainly start to think for yourself about what fits where and how.” These initiators can be from specialist departments such as marketing, sales, product, or human resources. The negotiators are “only one or two people on each side” (S25), and they negotiate both new sponsorship contracts and contract renewals. After discussing the eight roles with the interviewer, all 13 managers approved the composition of the SBC. For instance, S11 said “from my point of view, nothing is missing anymore”, S15 indicated that “all these roles are involved”, and S19 added that “all these roles are relevant, I would confirm them all.”

Interestingly, the participants of the first two rounds gave no indications regarding the negotiators and initiators. The participants of the third round were confronted with the SBC and, aided by the present concept, included both roles unanimously. This discrepancy shows that the role concept is complex for practitioners, so that it is challenging to give all-encompassing answers. However, as previous studies about unaided and aided recalls of sponsor brands show (e.g., Biscaia et al., 2014), participant responses in aided questionings are more comprehensive and accurate. For this reason and because consensus (100% agreement) was reached in the third Delphi round, we added the roles of initiators and negotiators to the SBC model. This extension of the findings from the first rounds highlights the value of the iterative research design of the Delphi method when investigating complex problems (Day & Bobeva, 2005).

Subsequently, the managers were asked about the tasks that the different roles of the SBC perform concerning sponsorship decision-making. The findings demonstrate that each role has a

different set of tasks and thus help to clearly define and distinguish each role (see Table 1). The experts and signatories display the smallest variety of tasks. The networkers and the coordinators perform the most extensive set of tasks.

**Table 1.** Role-related tasks of the SBC members.

<b>Roles</b>	<b>Tasks</b>
<i>Deciders</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• evaluate the prepared decision-supporting propositions</li> <li>• make the final sponsorship decisions</li> <li>• carry the main responsibility for decisions</li> </ul>
<i>Users</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• create ideas for leveraging sponsorships</li> <li>• collaborate with specialist departments and external partners regarding sponsorship-linked marketing campaigns</li> <li>• implement and activate the sponsorship with on-site or online activities</li> </ul>
<i>Coordinators</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• control the information flow</li> <li>• ensure that timelines are met and decisions made</li> <li>• facilitate collaboration in the SBC</li> <li>• involve all other roles in the decision-making process</li> </ul>
<i>Experts</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide expertise from specialist departments</li> <li>• prepare selection criteria to support <i>deciders</i> in their decision-making</li> </ul>
<i>Signatories</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• check the formalities of the contract</li> <li>• sign the sponsorship contract</li> </ul>
<i>Networkers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• connect relevant actors and maintain the relationships</li> <li>• know who is in the market, who is bound long-term, and the possibilities to contact potential sponsees</li> <li>• sensitise other roles internally for the topic of sponsorship</li> <li>• inform specialist departments about the potential for and advantages of sponsorships</li> </ul>
<i>Negotiators</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• conduct negotiations with potential sponsees about contract conditions</li> </ul>
<i>Initiators</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• recognise sponsor needs that can be satisfied by a sponsorship</li> <li>• initiate sponsorship decision-making processes by pointing out needs</li> </ul>

Below, we discuss RQ4, as its results were retrieved from the third Delphi round. The answers to RQ2 and RQ3 were synthesised from all three Delphi rounds and will be reported subsequently. The RQ4 was about assessing the roles' power bases and the level of influence attributed to them. For this purpose, the participants were asked to allocate the five types of power bases by French and Raven (1959) – reward, coercive, attraction, expert, and status power – to the eight roles of the



SBC. After explaining each power base thoroughly, we used a 4-point scale (no, low, moderate, and strong influence) on which the managers could assign how they perceive the level of influence that the roles exert on sponsorship decisions, by using the various power bases. From the managers' responses, we were able to determine which roles use which power bases, the level of influence of each power base, and the resulting roles' overall levels of influence on a sponsorship decision (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Power bases of the roles in the SBC.

Roles	Power bases					Mean	Rank
	<i>Expert power</i>	<i>Status power</i>	<i>Attraction power</i>	<i>Reward power</i>	<i>Coercive power</i>		
<i>Deciders</i>	●●○	●●●	●●○	●●●	●●○	2.15	1.
<i>Negotiators</i>	●●●	●●●	●●○	●●○	●●○	2.05	2.
<i>Initiators</i>	●●●	●●○	●●●	●●○	●○○	1.87	3.
<i>Coordinators</i>	●●○	●●○	●●●	●●○	●○○	1.79	4.
<i>Signatories</i>	●○○	●●●	●○○	●●○	●●○	1.74	5.
<i>Networkers</i>	●●●	●●○	●●●	●○○	●○○	1.68	6.
<i>Experts</i>	●●●	●●○	●●○	●○○	●○○	1.56	7.
<i>Users</i>	●●●	●●○	●●○	●○○	●○○	1.50	8.
<i>Mean</i>	2.31	2.15	2.10	1.41	0.98		
<i>Rank</i>	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.		

Our results show that each role uses each type of power base to influence a sponsorship decision. However, Table 2 demonstrates that the degree to which each role draws on the respective power bases varies considerably. For example, deciders exert influence mostly through the use of status and reward power, while also relying at least moderately on the other three power bases. Signatories draw merely on status and reinforcement (reward and coercive) powers, whereas their remaining

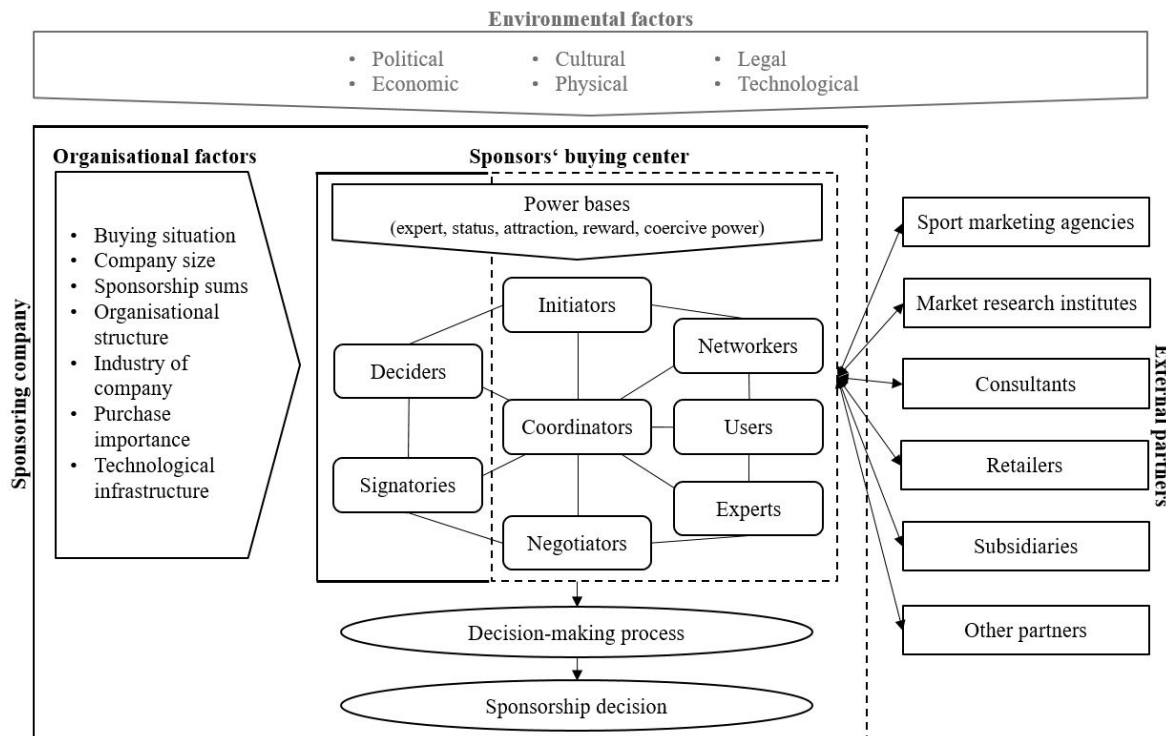
power bases are low. Other roles like experts and users, almost exclusively use expert power (strongly) and attraction power (moderately).

Furthermore, the results indicate different levels of influence of the power bases across all roles (see Table 2). Overall, the various roles make the most use of expert power to influence sponsorship decisions. All roles, besides the signatories, draw at least moderately on expert power. The second-strongest influence is exerted by the use of status power, closely followed by attraction power. The reinforcement powers, reward and coercive power, show the lowest level of influence. However, the reinforcement powers are relatively more important for the roles with the most status power: namely deciders, signatories, and negotiators.

Considering the level of influence of the roles aggregating all power bases, the deciders were ranked as the most influential role in the SBC (see Table 2). The second most influence on sponsorship decisions is exerted by the negotiators, followed by the initiators. The experts and users represent the least influential roles.

#### 3.3.4.4 RESULTS RETRIEVED FROM ALL DELPHI ROUNDS

After conducting three Delphi rounds, we developed the sport sponsorship decision-making model, which is based on the SBC with its roles (see Fig. 1). The connective elements between the roles represent the internal collaboration necessary for group decision-making. Thereby, the role-related usage of different power bases to different degrees determines the roles' influence within the SBC. Furthermore, the conceptual model includes the empirically investigated external partners (RQ2) and organisational factors (RQ3), and the conceptually added environmental factors, which all influence the composition of the SBC. The members of the SBC, in turn, influence the steps of the sponsorship decision-making process, which results in a final sponsorship decision.



**Figure 1.** The sport sponsorship decision-making model.

The sponsors' cooperation with external partners regarding sponsorship decision-making is depicted by dotted lines in Figure 1 (RQ2). The managers stated that sponsors outsource roles to external partners when the capacity to occupy all roles internally is missing. External partners can be sport marketing agencies, consultants, market research institutes, subsidiaries, and retailers. The managers indicated that sports marketing agencies, retailers, and subsidiaries could occupy the six roles of experts, networkers, users, coordinators, negotiators, and initiators. External consultants could assume the roles of experts, networkers, and initiators, while market research institutes were only involved as experts. In general, all roles of the SBC can be outsourced to external partners except the deciders and signatories (depicted by continuous lines in Fig. 1). This can be explained on the basis that both roles are situated on a higher hierarchical level within the sponsoring company and have more responsibility than the other roles.

Moreover, according to the managers, various organisational factors influence the composition of the SBC (RQ3, see Fig. 1). The complexity of the buying situation and the size of the sponsoring company impact on the SBC. The larger the company and the more complex the buying situation, the more individuals are involved in the SBC (S19). In smaller companies, for example, all roles are occupied by only two or three individuals. The SBC also depends on the organisational structure

of the sponsor, which could contain flat or strongly hierarchical structures. Furthermore, the amount of sponsorship investment influences the involvement of the roles in the SBC. This depends on fixed and predetermined sums for sponsorships, and determines who is responsible for a final decision or signature. The importance of the purchase depends on the corporate-political or strategic relevance of the sponsorship. If a company has the chance to contract with a prestigious sponsee, individuals from a higher hierarchical level are involved. Moreover, the technological infrastructure influences the processing of information within the SBC. For instance, if the information is entered into a software system and forwarded automatically to the appropriate roles, the coordinators would lose importance. The last organisational factor mentioned by the managers was the industry in which the company operates. Although captured in the sponsorship context, our results predominantly conform to the organisational factors from the industrial marketing literature.

### **3.4.5 DISCUSSION**

#### **3.3.5.1 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS**

Our research contributes to the discussion on sponsorship decision-making by identifying eight roles involved in the SBC. Two roles, deciders and users, are analogous to the original BC (Webster & Wind, 1972a). Through finding the previously neglected initiators, we expand our understanding of sponsorship initiation. The dominant opinion in the sponsorship literature was that sponsees commence sponsorships by sending proposals to the sponsors (e.g., Athanasopoulou & Sarli, 2015; Cornwell & Kwon, 2019). We found that there is in fact a reverse process, where sponsors actively seek sponsees that match their corporate marketing strategy. The modified role of experts, which is similar to the original influencers, provides expertise from different departments and facilitates decision-making by developing selection criteria. The coordinators are central to the formal process of sponsorship decision-making, as they pull the strings and manage collaboration within the SBC (see Fig. 1). Furthermore, we added the role of negotiators. Although the roles of negotiators and signatories seem similar to the buyers from the original BC, we separated these two roles because those who conduct the negotiations are not always those who sign the contract. The confirmation of the negotiators role by managers in the third Delphi round is plausible, as the service research literature indicates the importance of negotiations in the context of customised services (Roth et al., 2006).

Interestingly, we identified a new role, the networkers, in the sponsorship context. The networkers have contacts in the market and link the appropriate actors within and beyond the SBC in the right situations. Accordingly, the networkers can be regarded as a manifestation of Wind and Robertson's (1982) "linking pin" concept, in an organisational role within the SBC. Wind and Robertson (1982) attributed a strong influence on buying decisions to the "linking pins", whereas in our study the networkers show a moderate overall influence on sponsorship decisions (see Table 2). However, finding the networkers contributes to the current discussion in the literature, where sponsorship is increasingly considered from a network perspective (e.g., Chanavat et al., 2016). Sponsors enter into sponsorships to use networking opportunities so as to establish business relations (Wagner et al., 2017). Our study shows that sponsors even involve external partners in their sponsorship decision-making. Hence, the networkers are of paramount importance for sponsor decision-making, because they are not only responsible for establishing and maintaining the relationships with different actors in the sponsorship network, but also with the external partners assuming roles of the SBC.

Moreover, our study is the first to examine empirically the power bases of the various roles and the level of influence attributed to them. To achieve a better understanding of the roles' relationships, it is important to know that the different roles exert different levels of influence on sponsorship decisions, which is determined by the use of the various power bases.

Across all power bases, the deciders, followed by the negotiators and initiators, exert the strongest influence within the SBC (see Table 2). Accordingly, they are the main drivers of sponsorship decisions. The negotiators' strong influence highlights the importance of contract negotiations in the context of customised services, as proposed by Roth et al. (2006). Interestingly, although the experts and users draw most heavily on the most influential power base, expert power, they are not the main drivers of sponsorship decisions. Since external partners can occupy roles in the SBC, they also gain influence on sponsorship decisions. The level of influence depends on the role they assume. However, the most influential role, the deciders, always remains within the sponsoring company, which shows that the sponsors retain control over the final sponsorship decision.

When looking at the power bases themselves, we observe that across all roles, expert power is the most influential power base (see Table 2). This finding is in line with previous studies in the marketing literature, which also stated that expert power has the most influence on purchasing

decisions (Kohli, 1989; Thomas, 1984). However, within the SBC both reinforcement powers show the least influence, which contrasts with the results from Kohli (1989), who assigned the second most influence to these powers. Our result can be explained by the high emotionality of the sponsorship context, in which, according to S21, the employed managers inherit a high intrinsic motivation and attach less value to extrinsic motivation. This explanation may also account for the relatively higher relevance of attraction power in comparison to reinforcement powers in the SBC. However, this finding is also contrary to the results from Kohli (1989) and Thomas (1984), where reinforcement powers were superior to attraction power. Interestingly and again in opposition to the results of Kohli (1989), status power is the second most influential power base in the SBC. Although S21 stated that the hierarchies are nowadays flatter in many sponsoring companies, status remains an important determinant of power. The differences between our findings in the sponsorship context and those from studies in the industrial marketing literature show the importance of considering the characteristics of the research context. Finally, we need to point out that in our study, we could not directly measure the abstract power construct, but rather assessed the levels of influence of the roles with respect to the power bases, as perceived by the members of the SBC (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 1994).

Furthermore, the present study addressed the calls for further research about sponsor group decision-making by considering the characteristics of the sponsorship context (Arthur et al., 1997) and the cooperation of sponsors with external partners (O'Reilly & Madill, 2012). Our results show that sponsorship decisions, especially new task situations, are usually group decisions with several individuals involved in the SBC. Furthermore, the SBC differs from the original BC from Webster and Wind (1972a). This is due to the characteristics of the sponsorship context, such as the high relevance of contract negotiations. Especially the finding of the new networkers role underlines the frequent cooperation with external partners.

Finally, our study demonstrates that the Delphi technique can contribute to theory-building through its iterative design (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004) and the rigour of collaborative theorising with managers (Nenonen et al., 2017). Accordingly, the Delphi study's results are relevant for both scholars and practitioners.

### 3.3.5.2 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

According to Webster and Wind (1972a), for managers, it is important to know the internal processes within a BC. Drawing on our findings on the tasks and power bases associated with the various roles, managers of sponsoring companies can better understand the composition of a SBC. This knowledge supports the appropriate allocation of human resources (Töllner et al., 2011), which is the assignment of the right individuals to the SBC roles. For example, when individuals are required for the role of coordinators, sponsors should look for someone who can control the flow of information in the SBC, manage the collaboration between all members, and ensure that decisions are made in time. Furthermore, the coordinators should be able to use mainly attraction power, followed by expert and status power. By comparison, for staffing experts, sponsors should know that experts almost exclusively provide expertise and prepare selection criteria for decision-making, so that their influence stems primarily from their high expert power. Importantly, experts could be technical staff from departments other than sponsorship or marketing (Osmonbekov et al., 2002).

If sponsors do not have the required human resources in-house, our findings emphasise the potential to outsource some roles to external partners. All roles, except for the deciders and signatories, can be outsourced to external partners. When dealing with external partners, ensuring that an appropriate individual occupies the role of networkers is important.

Furthermore, conflicts are unavoidable in group decision-making, due to diverging expectations of the BC members (Johnston & Bonoma, 1996), but they can be resolved by effective leadership (Tellefsen, 2006). Our findings on the roles' different power bases support sponsors in managing conflicts within the SBC. According to Lambert et al. (1986), there are four possible conflict resolution strategies in BCs: problem-solving, persuasion, bargaining, and politicking. Interpersonal problem-solving and persuasion strategies are applied more frequently than competitive or confrontation strategies (politicking). With knowledge of the roles' power bases, sponsors can assign appropriate roles to resolve a conflict according to the required strategy. For example, for problem-solving and persuasion strategies, the roles of coordinators, networkers, and initiators seem appropriate, because they have the strongest attraction power, paired with moderate status power underpinning their authority. If, on the other hand, a politicking strategy is required, the deciders, negotiators and signatories would represent suitable options for the conflict-solving

task, since they are the roles with the strongest reinforcement (reward and coercive power) and status power in the SBC (see Table 2).

For sponsees and external partners, the identification of roles in the SBC is essential since, on the one hand, they could influence the different members of the SBC effectively towards a decision in favour of their proposal (Töllner et al., 2011). On the other hand, a targeted approach to the appropriate role is the most efficient form of communication (Wood, 2005). For example, when contacting a sponsor about a potential partnership, it seems reasonable to look for initiators or deciders, who exert a high level of influence within the SBC. When the topic is about implementation strategies or organisational issues, targeting the users or coordinators would be a good choice. Contacting an inappropriate member of the SBC could lead to inefficient communication and unsuccessful proposals, ultimately resulting in lost revenue (Herbst & Kemmerling, 2015).

### 3.3.5.3 LIMITATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND CONCLUSIONS

Our study provides insights into sponsorship decision-making by exploring the SBC, with its internal and external influences, and the cooperation with external partners. However, the study is subject to some limitations, which provide a basis for future research. First, qualitative research about BCs is well established in the literature (e.g., Töllner et al., 2011). However, due to the exploratory nature of the study, we acknowledge some limitations in generalising our results and applying them to other contexts. The findings of qualitative Delphi studies convey no more and no less than the aggregated opinion of the research sample (Day & Bobeva, 2005). Furthermore, as we focused on new task situations, we cannot assert the veracity and validity of the SBC in contract-renewal situations (straight rebuys).

Second, although we advise occupying all roles of the SBC, we cannot judge the quality of the sponsorship decisions. Further research, for example a large-scale quantitative study, is needed to determine whether the quality of a decision differs when all SBC roles are occupied, compared to when specific roles remain vacant.

Third, we investigated corporate sponsorships in the professional sports sector. In the non-professional sports sector, the sponsoring companies are generally smaller and more locally orientated. This, of course, would influence the composition of the SBC, which would still comprise eight roles, but involve fewer individuals, so that one individual would occupy many roles in the SBC. If, however, a sponsorship decision is made by one single individual, the SBC



model becomes redundant.

Fourth, although we are confident of our sport sponsorship decision-making model displayed in Figure 1, further research would help to consolidate and refine our findings. Further studies could build on the fact that the results on the power bases were obtained only from the third Delphi round, while the remaining results were retrieved from all three rounds. The discrepancy that the roles of initiators and negotiators were only acknowledged by the managers in the third, but not in the first two Delphi rounds, could represent another starting point for future research. Moreover, it should be investigated empirically how environmental factors affect the SBC and how the organisational factors determine the composition of the SBC in its detail.

Our findings of the networkers role and sponsor cooperation with external partners emphasise the importance of looking beyond the dyadic sponsor-sponsee relationship when researching sponsorship decision-making. In conclusion, our sport sponsorship decision-making model contributes to theory and theorising about sponsorship decision-making and facilitates generating hypotheses for future research.

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### 3.5 Sponsors' Buying Center – Sponsorship Decisions in the Logic of Value Co-Creation (Transfer Paper G)

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In most approaches in the sponsorship literature, sponsorship decisions are considered holistically as decisions of the sponsoring company. From the perspective of value co-creation (Woratschek, 2020), this assumption is not comprehensive. In fact, it is rarely the case that only one individual as a representative of the company decides. Sponsorship decisions usually are group decisions involving several collaborating individuals, and this aspect is reflected in the logic of value co-creation.

#### 3.5.1 WHAT ROLES DO VARIOUS INDIVIDUALS PLAY IN SPONSORSHIP DECISION-MAKING?

In the industrial marketing literature, the so-called buying center concept describes different roles of individuals involved in corporate purchasing decisions. The original buying center includes the organisational roles of deciders, users, influencers, gatekeepers, buyers, and initiators (Webster & Wind, 1972, p. 17; Bonoma, 1982, p. 113). Thereby, each role can be occupied by several individuals, and one individual can play more than one role.

However, an analogous application of the original buying center to the sponsorship context does not seem appropriate, as sponsorship has some special characteristics (Arthur, Scott, & Woods, 1997, p. 231). On the one hand, sponsorships are customised services in which contract negotiations are an essential part of the decision-making process (Cornwell & Kwon, 2019, p. 5). Yet, the industrial marketing literature mainly focuses on goods and standardised services instead of customised ones. On the other hand, the aspect of value co-creation in decision-making is not regarded.

Moreover, sponsors often collaborate with external partners when making sponsorship decisions (O'Reilly & Madill, 2012, p. 51). This aspect has largely been ignored in the discussion about the original buying center, which points to the key role of the logic of value co-creation in research and practice.

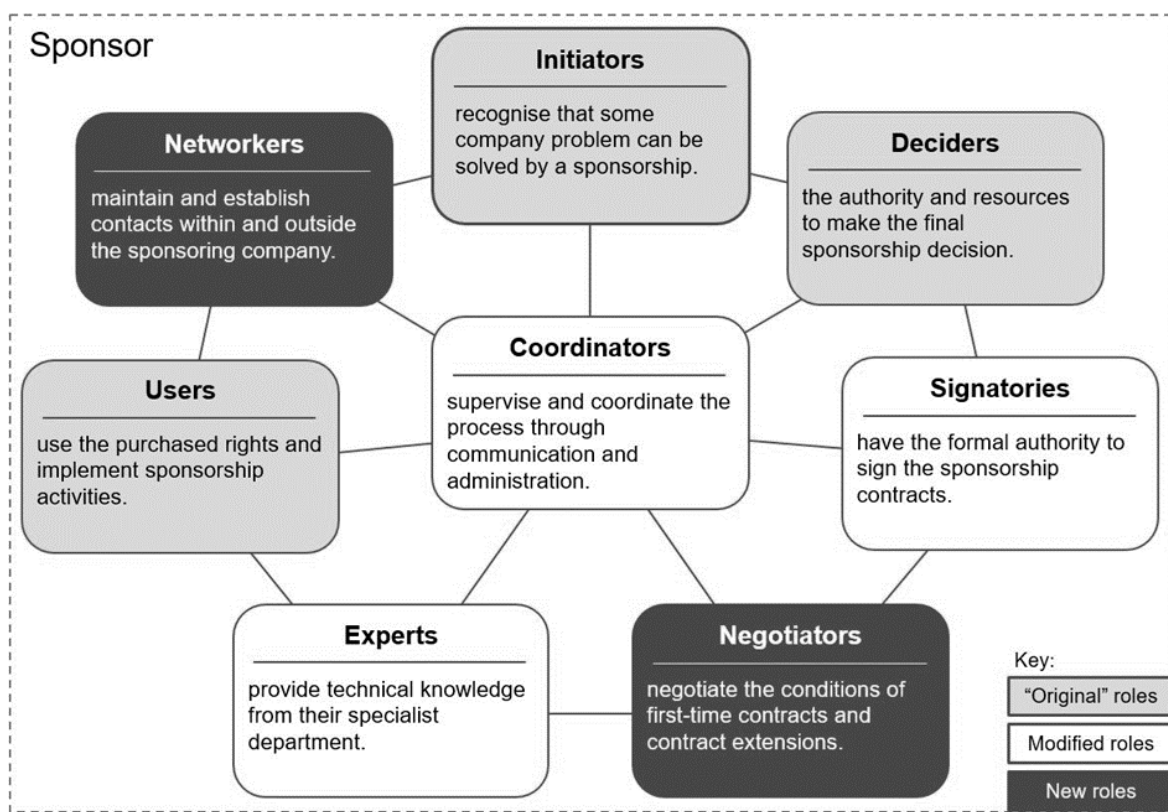


### 3.5.2 HOW SHOULD THE ORIGINAL BUYING CENTER BE MODIFIED TO FIT THE SPONSORSHIP CONTEXT?

In their empirical study, Schönberner, Woratschek, and Buser (2020) show that the sponsors' buying center (SBC) consists of eight different roles, with each role having its own set of specific tasks (see Figure 1). Three of the roles of the original buying center can be found in the SBC, namely deciders, users, and initiators.

Furthermore, three roles had to be modified to fit the sponsorship context. The roles of influencers changed into experts and gatekeepers into coordinators. The original role of buyers was separated into two distinctive roles, namely the signatories and negotiators, a new role added in the SBC.

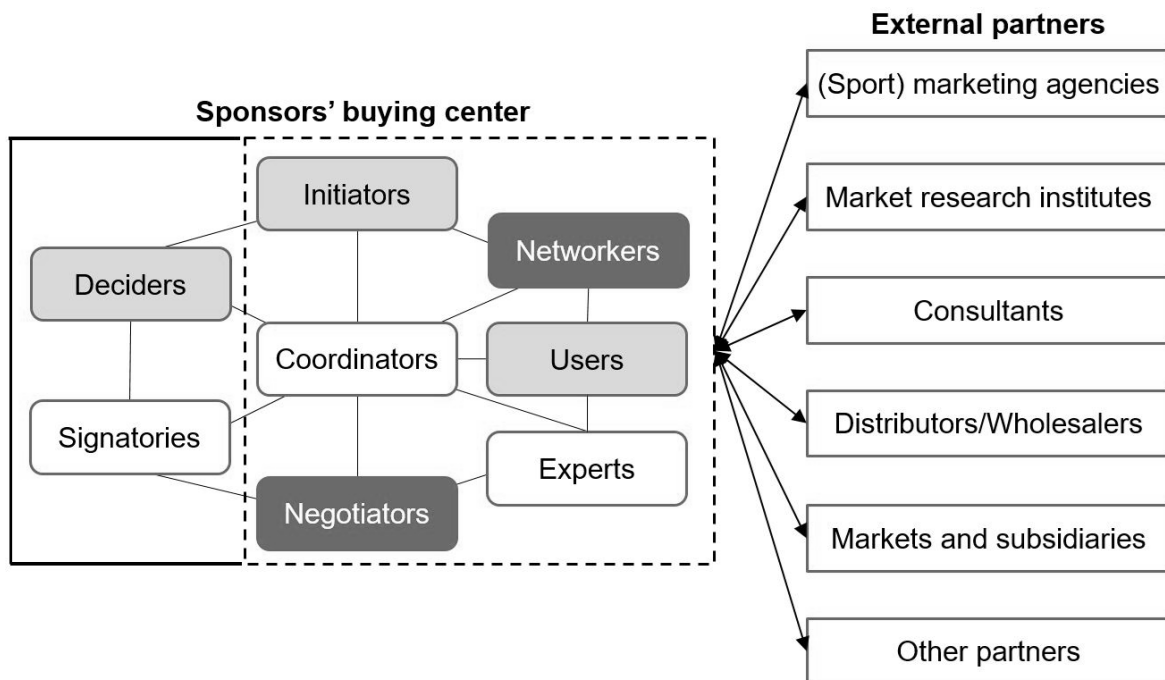
Interestingly, another new role was identified: the networkers. They are mainly oriented outside the company and have connections in the market. Thus, the networkers indicate the collaboration of sponsors with external partners. It may be that the original buying center neglected those collaborations with external partners because the logic of value co-creation was neither established in the management literature nor considered as guidance in academic thinking.



**Figure 1.** The roles of the sponsors' buying center (SBC).

### 3.5.3 HOW DO SPONSORS INCLUDE EXTERNAL PARTNERS IN THEIR DECISION-MAKING?

The study of Schönberner et al. (2020) revealed the relevance of the cooperation with external partners when making sponsorship decisions. If sponsors do not have the required expertise or capacity in-house, they outsource various roles to external partners. External partners can be, amongst others, sport marketing agencies, market research institutes, consultants, distributors/wholesalers, and markets and subsidiaries (see Figure 2). Accordingly, external partners gain influence on sponsorship decision-making of companies. Therefore, the logic of value co-creation addresses the importance of internal and external collaborations better than the logic of sport products. However, not every role can be outsourced. The findings indicate that the roles of deciders and signatories always remain within the sponsoring company. Hence, the main responsibility for the decisions lies with the sponsor.



**Figure 2.** The cooperation with external partners (adapted from Schönberner et al., 2020).

### **3.5.4 HOW CAN MANAGERS USE THE INFORMATION GAINED FROM THE SBC PRACTICALLY?**

The SBC allows sponsors to understand the composition of decision-making teams better. The knowledge about the roles and their specific tasks supports sponsors to assign their staff appropriately to fitting roles. If sponsors lack human resources to occupy all roles, they can outsource specific roles to external partners.

The identification of the roles of the SBC is significant for sponsees, as it leads to more efficient ways of communication (Wood, 2005, p. 272). Addressing the right role with a sponsorship proposal saves time and effort for both parties and increases the prospect of success for the sponsee.

#### **To put it in a nutshell:**

- (1) Most approaches in the sponsorship literature assume that individual decisions represent sponsors' decision-making processes.
- (2) From the perspective of value co-creation, this assumption is limited.
- (3) Sponsorship decisions are usually group decisions.
- (4) In industrial marketing, buying centers are introduced as group decision-making processes.
- (5) Sponsorship decisions have some special characteristics because sponsorships are collaborative and customised services.
- (6) The sponsors' buying center contains eight different roles with different task sets, namely coordinators, deciders, users, initiators, signatories, experts, negotiators, and networkers.
- (7) Especially the newly introduced role of networkers emphasises the importance of the logic of value co-creation in sport management.
- (8) Sponsorship decisions include internal as well as external collaborations.
- (9) Sponsors cooperate with external partners in sponsorship decision-making by outsourcing specific roles.
- (10) Sponsors can use the knowledge of the SBC for appropriate human resource allocation.
- (11) Sponsees can generate more efficient and promising ways of communication.

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### 3.6 Actors' Influence on Sponsorship Decisions: Roles, Resources, and Sources of Power (Transfer Paper H)

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Individuals rarely decide alone about sport sponsorships in a company. Sponsorship decision-making is mainly group decision-making. The so-called sponsor's buying center (SBC) describes the roles of the individuals involved in sponsorship decisions. These roles are the deciders, signatories, initiators, experts, users, coordinators, negotiators, and networkers (Schönberner, Woratschek, Buser, 2020, p. 10). Each role has its specific set of tasks in the SBC, but it remains unclear which resources the actors need in their roles.

#### 3.6.1 WHAT RESOURCES ARE REQUIRED FOR SPECIFIC ROLES?

In this article, resources are defined as an individual's skills, competencies, and knowledge, which Vargo and Lusch (2004) refer to as operant resources (Woratschek, Horbel, & Popp, 2014, p. 11).

**Table 1.** Required resources for different roles.

Resources	Roles							
	Decid-ers	Initia-tors	Users	Net-works	Nego-tiators	Coord-inators	Exp-erts	Signa-tories
Technical knowledge	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
General communication skills	○	○	●	●		●	●	
Negotiation skills					●			
Strategic thinking	●	●		○	○	●		○
Social competencies	○	○	○	●	○	●		
Analytical abilities	●	○	○				○	○
Networking capabilities		○		●			○	
Creativity		○	●					
Decision-making skills	○							
Implementation capabilities			●					
Affinity for sports			○					

○ = low degree, ● = moderate degree, ● = strong degree

In our empirical study, we revealed 11 different types of resources that are integrated into the SBC, namely technical knowledge, general communication skills, negotiation skills, strategic thinking, social competencies, analytical abilities, networking capabilities, creativity, decision-making skills, implementation capabilities, and affinity for sports. The results further show that several types of resources overlap in the roles of the SBC. Still, each role requires different degrees and combinations of the resources (see Table 1).

Actors who play specific roles need specific resource combinations. Additionally, each role is equipped with various sources of power, which exert a leverage effect on operant resources. Actors playing specific roles integrate sources of power in order to significantly influence a sponsorship decision. To examine the level of influence of each role, an analysis of the sources of power of the roles can be applied (Bonoma, 1982, p. 115).

### 3.6.2 WHAT SOURCES OF POWER ARE ENDOWED IN EACH ROLE?

The five sources of power are reward power, coercive power, attraction power, expert power, and status power (French and Raven, 1959). Reward power is the ability to provide others with rewards, while the opposing coercive power is the capacity to punish. Attraction power refers to influence based on liking a person. Influencing someone's behaviour by specialised knowledge is called expert power. Status power is associated with the formal or informal position within an organisation.

**Table 2.** Sources of power (adapted from Schönberner et al., 2020).

Roles	Sources of power					Rank
	Expert power	Status power	Attraction power	Reward power	Coercive power	
Deciders	●	●	●	●	○	1.
Negotiators	●	●	●	●	○	2.
Initiators	●	●	●	○	○	3.
Coordinators	●	●	●	○	○	4.
Signatories	○	●	○	●	●	5.
Networkers	●	●	●	○	○	6.
Experts	●	○	●	○	○	7.
Users	●	○	●	○	○	8.
Rank	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	

○ low degree,      ● = moderate degree,      ● = strong degree

Schönberner et al. (2020) have shown in their study that each role of the SBC uses – to a certain degree – each source of power to influence sponsorship decisions (see Table 2). Furthermore, the most influential source of power is expert power, followed by status and attraction power. Reward and coercive power seem to be no significant determinants of sponsorship decisions.

The deciders, followed by the negotiators and initiators, are the most influential roles across all power sources, while the experts and users exert the least influence on sponsorship decisions (see Table 2). Accordingly, the roles of deciders, negotiators, and initiators are considered the main drivers of decisions in the sponsorship context.

The knowledge about the resources and sources of power is important for managers in order to understand better the actors' roles, resources and sources of power in the SBC. If a specific role in a company has to be filled in the SBC, it makes sense to look specifically for people who have the necessary resources to perform the role. For example, when individuals are required for the role of coordinators, it is recommended to hire someone who can integrate the following resources: strategic thinking, communication skills, technical knowledge, and social competencies. Coordinators should also have mainly attraction, expert, and status power. In comparison, persons occupying the role of experts integrate smaller sets of resources with a focus on technical knowledge and rely almost exclusively on expert power.

**To put it in a nutshell:**

- (1) Sponsorship decisions are mainly group decisions made in a sponsors' buying center.
- (2) Actors play specific roles in a sponsor's buying center.
- (3) Each role requires the actor to have and use specific operant resources.
- (4) Sources of power exert a leverage effect on operant resources, and therefore, significantly influence sponsorship decisions.
- (5) Expert power, status power, and attraction power are the most influential sources of power across all roles in the sponsorship context.
- (6) Deciders, negotiators, and initiators are the main drivers of sponsorship decisions.
- (7) Managers should ensure that the person to be hired has the relevant resources for a specific role in sponsorship decisions.

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## CHAPTER 4: EMPIRICAL PERSPECTIVE ON ENGAGEMENT AT THE MESO- AND MACRO LEVEL OF AGGREGATION

### 4.1 ‘Going the Extra Mile’ in Resource Integration: Evolving a Concept of Sport Sponsorship as an Engagement Platform (Scientific Paper 3)

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#### ABSTRACT

**Research question:** The few publications discussing sport sponsorship from a network approach lack sufficient explanations for resource integration. Building on the sport value framework, sponsorship, and engagement literature, our objective is to conceptualise sport sponsorship as an engagement platform on which the sponsee grants access and both sponsees and sponsors integrate resources. As such, we differentiate between contractual resource integration and sponsorship engagement. Furthermore, we aim to investigate empirically what types of resources are integrated within multiple sponsor–sponsee networks for a better theoretical foundation of our conceptualisation.

**Research method:** We apply a three-stage qualitative Delphi method with 61 experts from sport sponsorship practice in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland.

**Results and Findings:** The results indicate that multiple sponsors, as well as the sponsee, integrate resources beyond the sponsorship contract. These resources include *management competencies, technical competencies, networking skills, innovative ideas, and products and services*.

**Implications:** This study conceptualises sport sponsorship as an engagement platform. This understanding contributes to theorising about sport sponsorship. Sponsorship serves as more than a pure promotional and sales tool. The results show that voluntary resource integration can lead to strategic partnerships with access to knowledge and expertise. These findings enable us to refine our conceptualisation of sport sponsorship as an engagement platform. Consequently, sponsors can co-create business networks, leading to technology transfer and benefits from economic

specialisation. Sponsees gain a better understanding of their role as facilitators of sponsors' resource integration. That is, they take over the operator role, thus increasing their monetary and non-monetary value.

**KEYWORDS:** Sport sponsorship, engagement platform, resource integration, sport value framework, Delphi study

### 4.1.1 INTRODUCTION

Sponsorship is a useful marketing tool for companies in general and is fundamentally important in financing sport organisations. For sports clubs, the revenue from sponsorships represents a significant part of the profit structure. Sponsorship revenue of the 'Big-Five' European football leagues in England, Germany, Spain, France, and Italy totalled 4 billion euros and accounting for 27% of the total revenues (Deloitte, 2018). These numbers, however, only represent the exchange of sponsorship rights for money. Accordingly, Mullin et al. (2014, p. 231) define sport sponsoring as 'acquisition of rights to affiliate or directly associate with a product or event to derive benefits related to that affiliation or association'. In return for the granted rights by the sponsored institution or athlete, the sponsor provides 'assistance, either financial or in-kind' (Meenaghan, 1983, p. 9). Similar to these definitions, much of the academic discourse focusses on economic exchange and thus neglects sponsors' and sponsees' voluntary give-and-take. This voluntary integration of resources is not stipulated in contracts or agreements. The overall exchange and, thus, the value generated in sport sponsorship is likely much higher than documented in reports or reflected in financial figures.

Furthermore, sponsorship portfolios of sport organisations exceed the dyadic relationship between sponsee and sponsor, which is mainly the focus of analyses in both practice and academia (Apostolopoulou & Papadimitriou, 2004; Mullin et al., 2014). The importance of sponsorship as a relationship, however, remains under-developed in the sponsorship discourse (Ryan & Fahy, 2012). Within the network of business partners, many relationships exist (e.g. on game days in VIP areas, during specific business events, online via social media or specialised networking apps). Thus, sponsorship practice extends the view of the dyadic perspective to a wider network. Some studies have applied a relationship and network approach to sponsorship (e.g. Meenaghan et al., 2013; Olkkonen, 2001), but none investigated the inter-relationship of actors in the sponsorship network or their behaviours within the relationship.

In summary, the strong focus on dyadic, contract-based performance and consideration in the academic literature paired with the multilateralism of relationships in practice, and the shortcomings of network approaches capturing the complexity of relationships require new conceptual foundations. Therefore, engagement platform (EP) literature (e.g. Breidbach & Brodie, 2017a, 2017b), provides suitable ideas and principles.

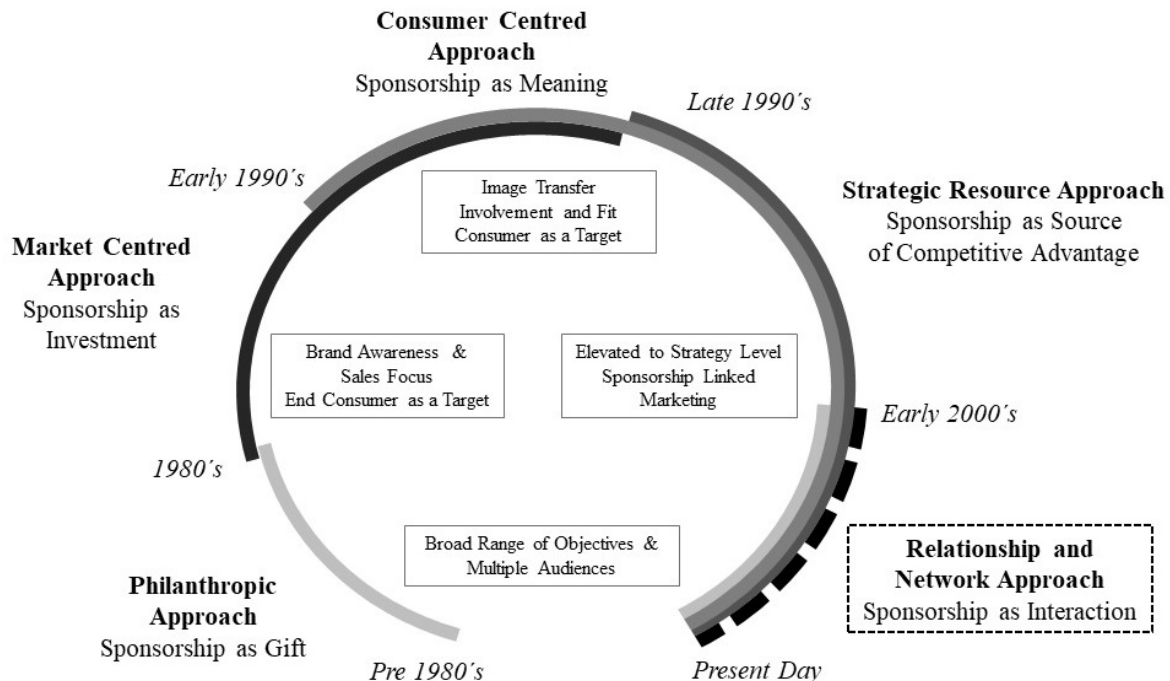
Thus, this paper has three main goals. First, it aims to conceptualise sport sponsorship as an EP theoretically. Second, it aims to contribute to a better understanding of sponsorship engagement (SE). As such, it empirically investigates sponsees' and sponsors' resource integration on the EP, by differentiating contractual resources and sponsors' and sponsees' voluntary effort to engage beyond the contractual agreements by 'going the extra mile'. Third, drawing on our empirical insights, we validate our theoretical considerations and present a more precise concept of sport sponsorship as an EP.

Accordingly, we present synopses of literature on the relationship and network perspectives in sponsorship, as well as on EP and resource integration. For this research, we refer to platforms as intermediaries of connections between market participants (Thomas et al., 2014). EPs are 'physical or virtual touchpoints designed to provide structural support for the exchange and integration of resources, and thereby co-creation of value between actors in a service ecosystem' (Breidbach et al., 2014, p. 594). As such, EPs enable interaction and collaboration of actors and facilitate resource integration (Storbacka et al., 2016). From this, we evolve a concept of sport sponsorship as an EP. As a theoretical basis, we use EP, actor engagement, and the sport value framework (SVF) by Woratschek et al. (2014). The next step explores contractual and voluntary resource integration (SE) empirically using a three-stage Delphi method, conducted with managers in sport sponsorship. Finally, we validate the theoretical conceptualisation and present a refined concept of sport sponsorship as an EP. Consequently, we outline contributions to theory and practice in sport management.

## **4.1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **4.1.2.1 RELATIONSHIP AND NETWORK PERSPECTIVE IN SPONSORSHIP**

Various approaches have characterised the academic discourse on sport sponsorship in the past decades. In recent years, some scholars have described sponsorship from a relationship marketing approach, while others have used a network perspective. Ryan and Fahy (2012) display this development in their overview of how sport sponsorship has been addressed in the literature. Figure 1 shows the academic discourse in sport sponsorship over time.



**Figure 1.** Periods of dominating approaches in sport sponsorship (Woratschek & Buser, 2018, p. 33; adapted from Ryan & Fahy, 2012, p. 1139).

Ryan and Fahy (2012) differentiate among five different periods, each with its specific approaches: a philanthropic, market-centred, consumer-centred, strategic resource, and relationship and network approach of sport sponsorship. The network perspective is still subject to further research (Ryan & Fahy, 2012). Chanavat et al. (2016) also argue that there is a discrepancy between literature and reality in sponsorship, as do Cornwell and Kwon (2020). They call for more work to capture the complexity of relationships in sport sponsorship.

Most research on sponsorship focusses on the relationship between one sponsee and only one sponsor (e.g. as co-marketing alliances) (Farrelly & Quester, 2005) or win-win relationships between a sports entity and its sponsor (Nufer & Bühler, 2010). Extension of the dyad of sponsor and sponsee, however, has stimulated academic discussions. That is, various research streams now add more actors to the sponsorship picture. Cornwell (2008), for example, suggests considering third-party relationships because of the increasing number of intermediary actors, such as consultants, sports right marketers, and other kinds of agencies, that mediate dyadic relationships. Morgan et al. (2014) extend the dyadic alliance of sponsor and sponsee to a complex, dynamic interorganisational relationship with a strong focus on sponsors' business-to-business networks. Furthermore, Olkkonen (2001, p. 312) argues that a 'network approach of sport sponsorship goes

beyond dyadic relationships to networks of relationships'. As such, the author requests a broader understanding of sport sponsorship by considering more actors and their relationships within the network. So far, however, researchers adopting the network and relationship approach have not provided a holistic set of multilateral relationships and interactions by various actors.

Cobbs (2011) and Farrelly (2010) conceptualise sport sponsorship interactions mainly as inter-organisational dynamics between sponsoring companies. Chanavat et al. (2016) highlight the influence of multiple sponsors in the network and the respective perception of consumers of not only the co-sponsored entities but ambushers as well. Morgan et al. (2014) also extend the bilateral relationship of sponsor and sponsee, postulated by Renard and Sitz (2011) and Fahy et al. (2004), to a network of corporate sponsors. The sponsee acts as a broker in facilitating relationships within the network of sponsors (Cobbs, 2011; Wagner et al., 2017).

In such interorganisational relationships, Demir and Söderman (2015) visualise the exchange of resources from the resource-based view of strategic management. However, they describe neither the type of resources exchanged in sponsorship relationships nor the interaction of stakeholders within the network. Such limitations stem mainly from the theories underlying previous studies – for example, the industrial marketing and purchasing group-related network approach (Olkkonen, 2001) or shared relational value (Morgan et al., 2014). To gain a better understanding of the integration of resources and, by that, relationships in sport sponsorship, this paper uses actor engagement and related EP literature as theoretical foundation. This perspective has the potential to enlighten the sponsorship discourse by investigating resource integration between actors on the sport sponsorship platform (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020). Therefore, we use the sport sponsorship EP as a kind of middle-range theory and also substantiate the SVF as a general theory in accordance to Gerke et al. (2020) and Brodie et al. (2011). In such interorganisational relationships, Demir and Söderman (2015) visualise the exchange of resources from the resource-based view of strategic management. However, they describe neither the type of resources exchanged in sponsorship relationships nor the interaction of stakeholders within the network. Such limitations stem mainly from the theories underlying previous studies – for example, the industrial marketing and purchasing group-related network approach (Olkkonen, 2001) or shared relational value (Morgan et al., 2014). To gain a better understanding of the integration of resources and, by that, relationships in sport sponsorship, this paper uses actor engagement and related EP literature as theoretical foundation. This perspective has the potential to enlighten the sponsorship discourse by

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#### 4.1.2.2 ENGAGEMENT PLATFORM AND RESOURCE INTEGRATION

This paper applies engagement literature to the context of sport sponsorship and aims to generate understanding about sport sponsorship as an EP, including actors' resource integration. Such complex problems require analysis on different levels of aggregation (Woratschek et al., 2020). For this reason, we follow the commonly proposed distinction of three levels of analysis (Chandler & Vargo, 2011; Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2006; Storbacka et al., 2016): (1) the micro-level (actors' engagement), (2) the meso-level (sets of actors on platforms), and (3) the macro-level (ecosystems and institutions).

At the micro-level, individual actors draw on their resources and competences to serve others and to benefit from others' resource integration (Chandler & Vargo, 2011). That is, '[actor engagement] practices result from actor interactions on EPs' (Breidbach & Brodie, 2017a, p. 767). 'As many actors engage, various resource integration pattern emerges, which transform extant resource configurations by each actor, thus leading to value co-creation' (Breidbach & Brodie, 2017a, p. 767). Resources can be differentiated as operand (raw materials, physical products) and operant (human skills, knowledge) resources (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Hunt and Derozier (2004) suggest a more detailed classification by sub-dividing resources in

financial (e.g. cash, access to financial markets), physical (e.g. plant, equipment), legal (e.g. trademarks, licenses), human (e.g. the skills and knowledge of individual employees), organisational (e.g. competences, controls, policies, culture), informational (e.g. knowledge from consumer and competitive intelligence), and relational (e.g. relationships with suppliers and customers) resources. (Hunt & Derozier, 2004, pp. 7–8)

Actors' reciprocal exchange of different kinds of resources is regarded as actor engagement. Actor engagement builds on the concept of customer engagement, which focusses on the dyadic relationship between customer and company. In the academic literature, customer engagement has two characteristic streams. On the one hand, Brodie et al. (2011, p. 260) define customer engagement as a 'psychological state' expressed on a cognitive, emotional, and behavioural level

(multi-dimensional). In the same vein, Kumar and Pansari (2016, p. 498) describe engagement as the ‘attitude, behavior, [and] the level of connectedness (1) among customers, (2) between customers and employees, and (3) of customers and employees within a firm’ (multi-dimensional). On the other hand, Van Doorn et al. (2010, p. 254) regard customer engagement as ‘behavioral manifestations [that] go beyond transactions’ (one-dimensional). Jaakkola and Alexander (2014) agree with Van Doorn et al. (2010) that the focal actor, in most cases the firm, can foster desired engagement behaviours and thus provides a suitable platform for this behaviour. Consequently, an observable activity, or engagement as behaviour, and the tendency to engage, or engagement as a disposition, should be differentiated (Fehrer et al., 2018).

At the meso-level, EPs perform their facilitative role according to the institutional logic embedded in the service ecosystem (Breidbach et al., 2014; Breidbach & Brodie, 2017b). In contrast with economics, engineering, and management literature, marketing and service research explores the interactions of actors, with ‘no isolated focus on the platform itself’ (Breidbach & Brodie, 2017a, p. 765). Given our goal to conceptualise sport sponsorship as EP and investigate resource integration herein, we refer to the understanding of platforms originating in marketing and service research. EPs are touchpoints for the support of value co-creation (Breidbach et al., 2014). As such, they are embedded within service ecosystems and thus enable and support continuous interaction between actors (Ramaswamy, 2009). At the starting point of academic discourse, researchers only took EPs in contexts mediated by information and communication technologies into account (e.g. Ramaswamy, 2009; Sawhney et al., 2005). However, many scholars soon recognised that EPs not only occur within virtual environments, such as the internet, social media, or other online communities, but also exist as physical touchpoints (e.g. Breidbach et al., 2014; Frow et al., 2015). Accordingly, recent conceptualisations regard EPs as being embedded within service ecosystems, both online and offline (Breidbach & Brodie, 2017a). EPs foster value co-creation between actors and, guarantee the availability of resources ‘at the right time and place’ (Storbacka et al., 2012, p. 57).

At the macro-level, service ecosystems span the boundaries and define the context in which actors integrate resources (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). Service ecosystems represent ‘relatively self-contained, self-adjusting systems of resource-integrating actors connected by shared institutional arrangements and mutual value creation through service exchange’ (Lusch & Vargo, 2014, p. 161). Multilateral resource integration builds a complex net of inter-dependent



relationships between actors, manifested in a service ecosystem (Frow et al., 2014). The service ecosystem builds a holistic unit of analyses in the exchange between actors (Maglio & Breidbach, 2014) facilitated by EPs (Breidbach & Brodie, 2017a).

#### **4.1.3 CONCEPTUALISATION OF SPORT SPONSORSHIP AS AN ENGAGEMENT PLATFORM**

Yoshida et al. (2014) were the first to discuss fan engagement as a specific form of customer engagement in the sport management context. They differentiate four types of engagement behaviour: sport-related, relationship-building, impression-management, and fan engagement behaviours. From these dimensions, they deducted management cooperation, prosocial behaviour, and performance tolerance as three defining attributes of fan engagement. Nevertheless, their conceptualisation and measurement of engagement mainly focus on the interaction of sports fans with their favourite teams. This perspective is very specific and does not allow adaptation to other actors and relationships (e.g. sponsors and sponsees).

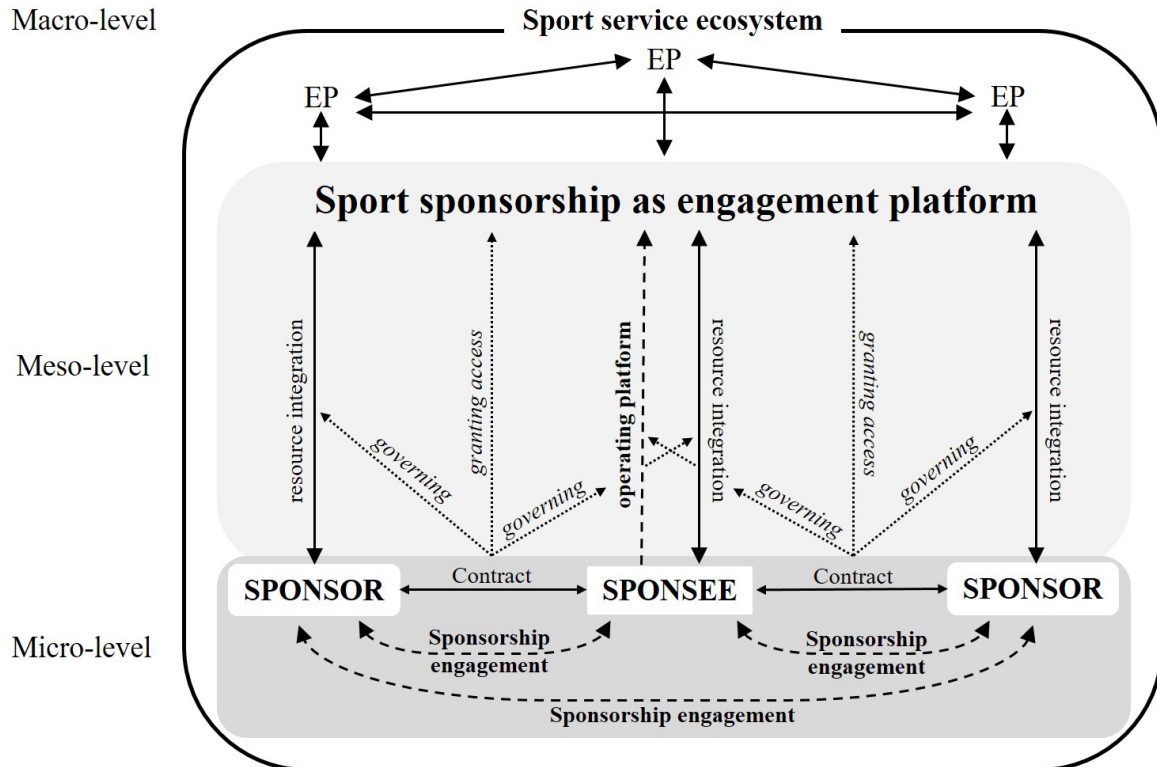
A concept describing voluntary resource integration and thus being similar to engagement as behaviour is citizenship behaviour, which is defined as ‘interfirm behavioural tactics, generally enacted by boundary personnel, that are discretionary, not directly or explicitly included in formal agreements, and that in the aggregate promote the effective functioning of the supply chain’ (Autry et al., 2008, p. 54). The interorganisational citizenship behaviour concept was introduced to the sport management literature by Gerke et al. (2017). The authors empirically identify seven dimensions of interorganisational citizenship behaviour reflected by 16 practices over the different phases of the innovation process of organisations within the New Zealand sailing industry cluster. Interorganisational citizenship behaviour is a concept which stems from management research, whereas sport sponsorship is mainly addressed as a marketing concept. Therefore, we have chosen EPs and resource integration as concepts from marketing research.

To do so, the SVF (Woratschek et al., 2014) provides helpful ideas. According to the SVF, sports events are perceived as platforms on which sport customers integrate resources primarily from their social groups. Sport firms offer value propositions, mainly from the configuration of a mediating value network (Stabell & Fjeldstad, 1998; Woratschek et al., 2014). This is exactly what happens in sport sponsorship; sponsors are linked with sport fans, and other actors mediated by the sponsee. However, sponsees can only mediate different actors if sporting activities take place, as sporting activities are the pivot of sport events (Woratschek et al., 2014) and, thus, sport sponsorship. Nevertheless, the SVF does not provide a sufficient explanation of what kind of

resource integration characterises a particular platform. Woratschek et al. (2014) do not incorporate conceptualising actors' resource integration on the platform.

Regardless, given the basic ideas of the SVF, a sport service ecosystem can be defined at the macro-level as a compilation of linked EPs. One focal EP in the sport service ecosystem is the event platform based on sporting activities and competition (Woratschek et al., 2014). Other EPs, such as sport sponsorship and fantasy sports, depend on sporting activities. On the one hand, linked EPs are pivotal for the cohesiveness of the ecosystem surrounding sporting activities (at a macro-level); on the other hand, sport EPs emerge because resource integration occurs (at a micro-level) from sporting activities.

Sport sponsorship constitutes a sub-system within the sport service ecosystem (Tsiotsou, 2016). Within this system, sponsorship activities of various types of organisations or stakeholders (e.g. sports clubs/events/athletes, business partners, private partners) emerge as the foundation of sporting activities. The sponsorship EP emerges when a sponsee and at least one sponsor enters into a sponsorship agreement. To connect the network approaches of sports sponsorship to the EP literature, we refer to Breidbach and Brodie (2017a) in the representation of the different relationship levels of EPs, which assigns studies on resource integration to the micro-level. Resource integration forms the EPs at the meso-level that are linked with other EPs in a service ecosystem at the macro-level. Figure 2 illustrates these inter-relationships.



**Figure 2.** Conceptualisation of sport sponsorship as an EP (adapeted from Beidbach & Brodie, 2017a, p. 766).

Sponsors' main interest is the pursuit of their sponsorship objectives, which can cover a wide range from promotion to sales to networking objectives. Therefore, sponsors enter into contracts with sponsees (continuous lines at the micro-level). The contract establishes the central exchange of resources (meso-level) that governs resource integration (dotted lines at the meso-level). In other words, the sponsorship agreements form part of the institutions that determine how and to what extent resources are integrated on the respective EP. Institutions are referred to as all types of laws, rules, values, expectations, standards, and practices, and cultural–cognitive beliefs (Scott, 2013). Those institutions can be formal (sponsorship contract) or informal (polite and professional treatment business guests) (Brodie et al., 2019). Sponsors and sponsees are linked through rights and obligations within a sponsorship contract. Sponsees, however, not only act as an operator of the EP, but also as a resource integrator in a collaborative process of value co-creation. The sponsee as the operator (broken line in Figure 2 at the meso-level) grants access based on a contract (dotted line) to others, who then give and take resources (resource integration at the meso-level) to co-create value. As the platform operator, the sponsee serves as an intermediary between actors being responsible for the selection of actors (Stabell & Fjeldstad, 1998; Woratschek et al., 2014). That

is, the sponsee grants access to sponsors and other actors to make the platform more attractive and facilitate value co-creation. The selection process is an essential primary activity, which is called network promotion (Stabell & Fjeldstad, 1998). Simultaneously, as another primary activity, the sponsee links sponsors, players, coaches, fans, media, politicians, and others to enable them to co-create value, for example, when coaches give interviews to the sponsors in the hospitality areas or when players have dinner with sponsors. These kinds of activities are network services (Stabell & Fjeldstad, 1998). Finally, the operator role refers to setting up the right infrastructure, for example, the hospitality area, parking lots, catering, VIP seats, and online-based networking apps. These kinds of primary activities are called network infrastructure (Stabell & Fjeldstad, 1998).

In addition to operating the SE platform, the sponsee as resource integrator is also using the platform like any other actor for economic and social exchange. This might be the case, when a sponsee acquires new sponsors with the help of existing ones, when selling merchandise within the hospitality area or by celebrating victories with the sponsors. Within regional contexts or lower levels of professionalism, contracts per se sometimes even do not exist. In these cases, decision-makers agree on performance and consideration without any contractual obligation. Even in these kinds of sponsorship environments, actors engage in SE. In addition to the contractual or non-contractual components of sponsorship deals, the voluntary exchange of resources that exceed the core transaction in sport sponsorship constitutes SE as behaviour (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; Van Doorn et al., 2010). Consequently, we define SE as actor's behavioural manifestations and the integration of resources beyond (or without) the sponsorship contract. Underlying these resources is everything actors integrate, from a voluntary basis to a more open sponsorship setting with few or no contractual components. Figure 2 shows SE at the micro-level (broken lines).

SE always requires the integration of resources that can lead to co-creation of value. The interaction between actors and their integration of resources thus form the core of an EP (Storbacka et al., 2016). Consequently, it is necessary to raise the question of what type of resources are exchanged through SE to specify relational exchange on the EP of sport sponsorship. To answer this question, we conduct an empirical study to investigate sport sponsorship as an EP, and we contribute to building theory on actor engagement in the context of sport sponsorship.

The conceptualisation of sport sponsorship as an EP applies the SVF to the sponsorship context. Thereby, the SVF is considered as a general theory (Brodie et al., 2011; Woratschek et al., 2014). As general theory is broad in scope by nature and features a high level of abstraction, middle-range

theory is needed to address a subset of phenomena that is relevant within a particular context (Brodie et al., 2011; Weick, 1989). Therefore, we follow Gerke et al. (2019, notably Figure 1) and Brodie et al. (2011) and use our empirical findings to conceptualise sport sponsorship as an EP, which verifies the SVF as a general theory in sport management.

As theorising in marketing disciplines tends to widen the theory-practice gap (Jaworski, 2011; Nenonen et al., 2017), we strive for a collaborative approach with sponsorship managers that will provide theoretical implications to support our concept as well as practical relevance. To do so and to get empirical insights into actors' SE behaviours, we use the Delphi method. This technique serves as a critical component to build theory around the unexplored phenomenon of engagement on a sponsorship platform through collaborative theorising (Nenonen et al., 2017). The two-way process between academic literature and practitioners' perspectives to gain understanding is crucial (Brodie et al., 2017). This approach has the ability to pave the way to evolve the concept of actor engagement on the sponsorship platform by allowing us to go back and forth between the chosen theories and evidence from our empirical study in the sport sponsorship context (Li et al., 2017).

For our research, the micro-level of analysis is of paramount importance as it represents the foundation of our conceptualisation. On the micro-level, actors engage in resource integration (Storbacka et al., 2016). To our knowledge, actors' resource integration in sport sponsorship beyond the dyadic and contract-based performance and consideration has not been analysed to this point. For this reason, our conceptualisation of sport sponsorship as an EP uses sponsors' and sponsee's resource integration on the micro-level to build theory around SE.

#### **4.1.4 EMPIRICAL STUDY OF SPONSORSHIP ENGAGEMENT BEHAVIOUR IN SPORTS**

To build our concept on a solid fundamental basis, micro-level resource integration among the sponsee, a sponsor, and all other sponsors are in the centre of interest in our empirical study. The study exceeds the pure economic exchange because it examines resource integration by both the sponsee and sponsors beyond the sponsorship contract. Consequently, we contribute to the exploration and understanding of voluntary resource integration in sport sponsorship, namely SE. For this purpose, the study raises the question of what type of resources are integrated in the light of SE behaviour.

#### 4.1.4.1 RESEARCH METHOD

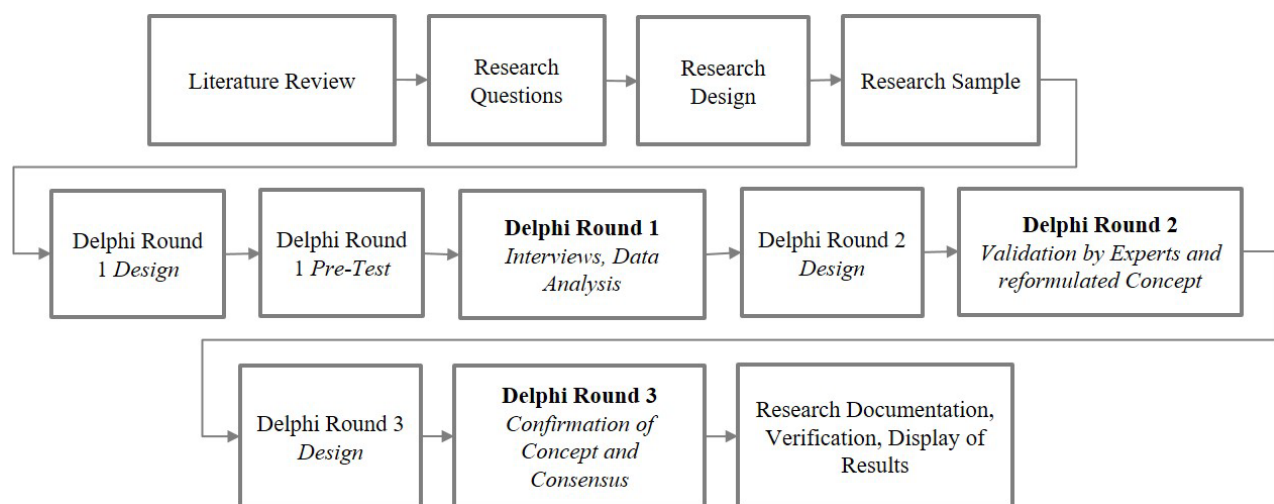
As engagement behaviour in sport sponsorship has not been discussed in the sport management literature, we choose an exploratory research approach. To answer the research question, we carried out an empirical study with experts from sport sponsorship, using the Delphi method. The Delphi method is ‘a structured group communication method for soliciting expert opinion about complex problems or novel ideas, through the use of a series of questionnaires and controlled feedback’ (Day & Bobeva, 2005, p. 103). This method combines flexibility in data collection and represents a more exploratory than descriptive research design (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004; Skulmoski et al., 2007).

The Delphi design, as an iterative and multi-stage method of qualitative research, most often contains two or three rounds of questioning and re-evaluation of participating experts (Day & Bobeva, 2005). The main advantage of this method is that researchers can make use of the evaluation of anonymised feedback provided to the respondents after each round. This feedback serves as a unique way to improve participants’ judgements (Häder, 2014). The multi-round Delphi design enables researchers to increase validity by gaining experts’ consensus within a new field of study. Because assumptions are challenged and, thus, strengthened by experts’ reasoning over multiple rounds of a Delphi study, validity is increased (Hasson et al., 2000). In addition, the multi-stage questioning of industry experts goes hand in hand with a higher level of reliability than data evaluation of independent researchers (Linstone et al., 1975). In our Delphi study, we used three rounds to gather insights into interaction on the EP and respective resource integration by actors. To select information-rich cases that are exceptionally knowledgeable and experienced, we used purposeful sampling (Hasson et al., 2000; Patton, 2002). In total, we chose 61 experts from sport sponsorship practice who were willing to share their experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner (Palinkas et al., 2015).

In the first round, from March to April 2018, we conducted semi-structured, guideline based interviews face-to-face and by telephone. Appendix 2 (see online supplementary material) shows the interview guideline. Experts had backgrounds in sports clubs or organisations (25), sponsoring companies (29), and intermediaries such as agencies or right marketers (7), from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. We split the sample between a national and an international focus of organisations. Appendix 1 (see online supplementary material) shows the list of participating experts. The broad acquisition of experts from different backgrounds and industries allowed us to

gain a comprehensive perspective on SE. Interviews lasted 40 min on average, with a maximum of 63 min and a minimum of 16 min. Interviews were audio-recorded with expert's permission and transcribed verbatim. To analyse the data, we used qualitative content analyses and applied a systematic, theory-guided approach to text analysis using a category system following Mayring (2015). Mayring (2015) describes the theory-driven analysis of specific topics and content from the data as contextual structuring. Thus, we derived main and sub-categories using paraphrases from the interview material and developed categories inductively as well as deductively, with roughly 20% of the data. Deductive development of categories followed the theoretical implications of customer engagement as behaviour (VanDoorn et al., 2010) as well as on EPs (Breidbach et al., 2014). Two independent researchers revised the material with the final coding system (Kohlbacher, 2006; Mayring, 2015). Categories and coding system are developed with the MAXQDA12 software.

For the second ( $n = 50$ ) and third ( $n = 45$ ) rounds, conducted between May and July 2018, we edited the data according to the experts' feedback. The decreasing number of experts is due to time constraints, with some managers no longer being able to reconcile the time spent on the second and third Delphi rounds with their daily work. We delivered the results of previous rounds to the experts after textual and graphical edit. Experts could re-evaluate answers on the basis of the anonymous feedback of their counterparts (Hallowell & Gambatese, 2010). Thus, experts validated the results of the final round until reaching consensus on the proposed conceptualisation. Figure 3 illustrates the whole process of the implemented Delphi study.



**Figure 3.** Delphi design (adapted from Skulmoski et al., 2007).

#### 4.1.4.2 EMPIRICAL RESULTS

The empirical Delphi study serves as a way to contribute to the conception of sport sponsorship as an EP by applying a creative synthesis of existing ideas. We co-opt the experts' opinions to discover inter-relationships between theoretical contexts. The study mainly aims for voluntary resource integration, defined as SE. We categorise resources on the basis of experts' contribution to the Delphi study following a typological style of theorising (Cornelissen, 2017).

The data reveal that sponsors and sponsees exchange resources beyond or without a contract. For the contractual components, the experts agreed on the dyadic exchange of financial and in-kind payment or services related to the core business from the sponsoring company's perspective and performance and usage rights from the sponsee's perspective. Performance rights manifest themselves as corporate logo placements on jerseys or boards within the stadium or at the pitch, whereas usage rights need to be activated (e.g. the integration and use of a sponsee's assets in social media campaigns).

The integration of resources among sponsee, sponsor, and other sponsors in the network of partners beyond or without the contract manifests in SE behaviour. SE is observable either on a physical platform (e.g. partner events) or in a virtual environment (e.g. online, social media, mobile networking apps). Resources integrated in SE are categorised into five types: *management competencies*, *technical competencies*, *networking skills*, *innovative ideas*, and *products and services* that are not part of the sponsorship contract.

To build and maintain the best possible partnership, both sponsors and sponsees provide additional resources. On one side, sponsors integrate *management competencies*, which include all kinds of knowledge, entrepreneurial professionalism, and experience, as far as business management is concerned, into the sponsor–sponsee relationship. This might be the case when a 'tax consultant is also a sponsor and then advises us [sponsee] without billing, for the most part, at least' (exp\_8). Sponsors also assist the sponsee's employees with time or human resource capacity as

there are marketing and sales specialists in the big companies. (...) Why should I [sponsee employee] be so stupid and not even ask how they do it? I am not the omniscient. They [sponsor employees] are sometimes much longer in business than me; they can give me advice. (exp\_4)



In certain constellations, skills and knowledge are provided that add a technical component. In this regard, sponsors engage beyond the contract by integrating *technical competencies*, such as access to technical infrastructure for the use of the sponsee. ‘The sponsor is involved in the development of our boats. They provide us with wind tunnels to improve our performance’ (exp\_45). The sporting success of the sponsee positively reflects on the sponsor’s brand.

In addition, sponsors integrate their *networking skills* by promoting the platform among their business partners and giving recommendations for other actors to join the network. The experts agree that sponsors encourage their partners or customers by ‘put[ing] in a good word for us...[sponsee]’ (exp\_16) or ‘even bring him [business partner] along, [so] that we [sponsee] personally can convince them’ (exp\_16). These recommendations by a sponsor in favour of the sponsee’s platform help sports clubs, organisations, and athletes enlarge their network and increase attractiveness. Positive recommendations are often the basis for the mediation of business partners: ‘[Sponsee] purposefully use our [sponsor] contacts to open up new contacts, or rather sponsors for their network’ (exp\_48). Integrating networking skills allows sponsees to benefit financially through sponsorship deals. Networking skills include positive referrals and the ability to act as an intermediary. ‘And there we [sponsee] are this mediator who then brings the right people together’ (exp\_11).

Sponsors also provide additional *products and services* that are not initially agreed on in the sponsorship contract, simply because they want to support the sponsee and foster a multilaterally beneficial relationship. ‘For example, if players move, they mostly use the moving company [sponsor]. Of course, with relatively good conditions’ (exp\_6).

On the other side, sponsees integrate resources such as *management competencies* and *networking skills* into the sponsor–sponsee relationship. Mainly as a mediator between actors on the platform, sponsees provide sponsors with the possibility ‘to get to know company XY. (...) Companies ask us [sponsee], and we establish contacts with the other company’ (exp\_28). In a virtual context, sponsees integrate networking skills, such as a specially designed online platform, which is ‘comparable to Xing or LinkedIn. Then, when you partner with us [sponsee], each partner will (...) gain access and then choose a partner directly and get in touch with them. This is the network idea for us’ (exp\_25).

Furthermore, sponsees integrate *innovative ideas* such as new ways of leveraging the sponsorship and assisting the sponsor by communicating with its respective target audience.

Therefore, sponsees ‘basically bring the ideas’ (exp\_5) as ‘they have their own event department that helps with the implementation. So they are creating and have tools that

they use and that you can use as a partner’ (exp\_46).

Sponsors have the opportunity to actively use relationships with the sponsee so that all actors benefit equally. If both sponsor and sponsee are willing to override contractual limitations and go in new routes together, a fruitful relationship can emerge. Moreover, sponsoring companies interact with other sponsors (sponsor–sponsor relationships). For example, sponsors exchange *management competencies* and discuss latest business developments with the industry as well as use the platform to develop business contacts as, in their opinion, ‘it’s all about networking and accessing decision-makers’ (exp\_47). Using sport sponsorship and the contract with the sponsee to gain access to the EP and, thus, to decision-makers from other industries and potential business partners is a crucial objective for sponsors.

Similar to the sponsor–sponsee relationship, sponsors integrate *technical competencies* in the form of technical knowledge in favour of other network partners. Sponsors from specific industries exchange technical knowledge for collaboration with other sponsors. For example, a ‘building contractor’ (exp\_16) needs to exchange knowledge with other service providers in the same industry, for example, ‘electrician, plumber’ (exp\_16) to improve own service provision.

By integrating *networking skills*, sponsors also recommend the platform to other decision-makers in their network and, in doing so, foster engagement of additional actors. In the Delphi study, the experts agreed that within the sponsorship network, sponsors integrate *products and services* from their company’s portfolio. As one expert stated, ‘they [other sponsors] not only get discounted products (...) but can also access our ticket contingents, merchandise discount, or money-cannot-buy experience’ (exp\_45).

Both sponsors and sponsees pursue SE. The participating actors ‘[go] the extra mile’ (exp\_16) and voluntarily exchange service-for-service to benefit from the sponsorship while also reaching their own goals. ‘In the end, a win-win situation should arise, from which both partners benefit’ (exp\_21). Sponsees aim to ‘[bind] with the sponsor’ (exp\_6), ‘enlarge the existing network’ (exp\_16), and ‘decrease fluctuation’ (exp\_8), while sponsors use the network to ‘make contacts and to do business’ (exp\_7).

#### 4.1.5 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

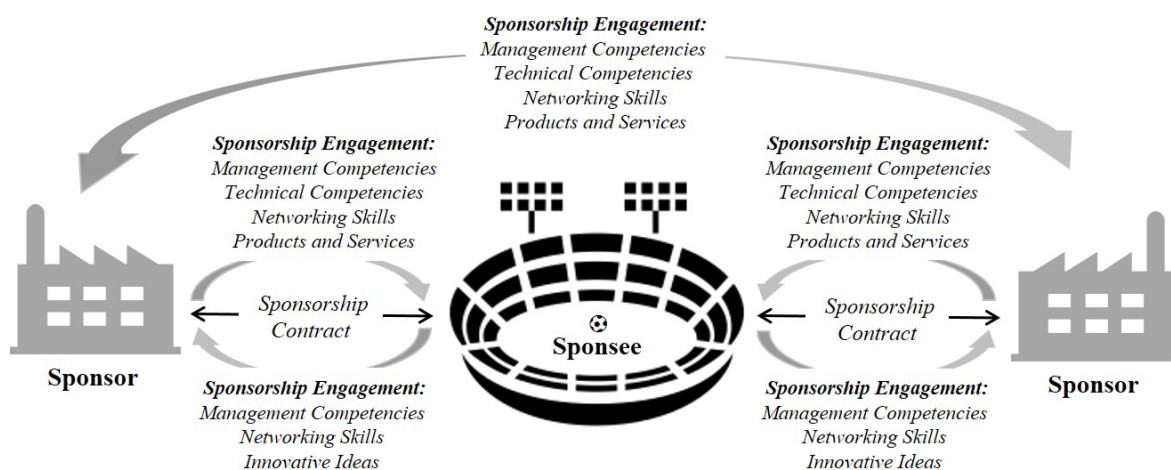
Despite the existence of network approaches in sport sponsorship (Chanavat et al., 2016; Cobbs, 2011; Morgan et al., 2014; Olkkonen, 2001), the real practical aspects of this phenomenon are not conceptualised sufficiently. The overall value in sport sponsorship, however, is not limited to the rights and obligations determined in bilateral contracts but rather is more comprehensive. Resource integration exceeds the contract components and is examined as a behavioural manifestation of engagement (Van Doorn et al., 2010).

Our empirical study reveals sponsors' and sponsees' integration of *management competencies*, *technical competencies*, *networking skills*, *innovative ideas*, and *products and services* beyond the sponsorship contract. The identified types of resources can be assigned to the resource categorisation of Hunt and Derozier (2004). Management competencies can be assigned to human resources, as both sponsors and sponsees integrate knowledge, expertise, and their respective employees' time in sport SE. Technical competencies in SE can be identified as access to physical resources; for example, sponsoring companies provide access to technical infrastructures, such as R&D facilities, or ways to develop or improve materials. Relational resources represent networking skills that are integrated in sport SE; for example, the mediating role of the sponsee has the potential to build relationships between two or more sponsors. From these alliances with other business partners, sponsors derive additional value (e.g. in the form of future business). Innovative ideas are considered as organisational resources. Finally, products and services are the result of a combination of different resources, such as human and physical resources. We refer to the resources integrated on the basis of contractual agreements by the sponsee as legal resources, while sponsors integrate financial resources as well as products and services (resource combination). Table 1 provides an overview of the empirical findings and the assignment to resource categories according to Hunt and Derozier (2004).

**Table 1.** Contractual and voluntary resource integration in sport sponsorship.

	Type of resources	Sample quotation	Assignment to resource categorisation (Hunt & Derozier, 2004)
Contractual resources	Financial payment	‘the main benefit from the sponsor is financial, of course, there are also contributions in kind’ (exp_22)	Financial resources
	Payment in kind	‘payments in kind are of growing interest’ (exp_39)	Resource combination
	Services (related to core business)	‘services are becoming increasingly important because sponsors have recognised that they can generate additional value’ (exp_40)	Resource combination
	Performance rights	‘performance rights unfold a performance out of themselves, e.g. the logo in the sense of visibility and brand presence’ (exp_51)	Legal resources
	Usage rights	‘usage rights only unfold their performance if sponsors leverage the rights’ (exp_51)	Legal resources
Voluntary resources (sponsorship engagement)	Management competencies	‘tax consultant is also a sponsor and then advises us [the sports club] without billing, for the most part, at least’ (exp_8)	Human resources
	Technical competencies	‘the sponsor is involved in the development of our boats. They provide us with wind tunnels to improve our performance’ (exp_45)	(Access to) physical resources
	Networking skills	‘put(ing) in a good word for us ... [the sports club]’ (exp_16) or ‘even bring him [the partner] along, that we [the sports club] personally can convince them’ (exp_16).	Relational resources
	Innovative ideas	‘we basically bring the ideas’ (exp_5) as ‘they have their own event department that helps with the implementation. So they are creating and have tools that they use and that you can use as a partner’ (exp_46).	Organisational resources
	Products and services	‘for example, if players move, they mostly use the moving company [sponsor]. Of course, with relatively good conditions’ (exp_6).	Resource combination

No contractual commitment exists among the different sponsors. However, sponsors also engage and exchange resources, including management competencies, technical competencies, networking skills, and products and services. This circumstance makes the sponsor–sponsor relationship special in consideration of sport sponsorship as an EP. Through the bilateral agreement with a sponsee, corporate sponsors gain access to other resource integrators on the sponsorship EP; company representatives then act as resource providers while also benefitting from other actors' resources. This perspective lends support to Olkkonen's (2001, p. 317) idea that sponsorship 'can be described as a value-adding exchange network'. Figure 4 illustrates the types of resources that are integrated into the sport sponsorship network beyond the sponsorship contract.



**Figure 4.** Resource integration in sport sponsorship.

In addition to the distinct and well-discussed objectives in sport sponsorship, corporate sponsors benefit from their own and other actors' SE. Underpinned by the empirical results, SE is a widespread phenomenon confirmed by our empirical study and is theoretically based on actor engagement and EP literature. The reason for sponsees to show engagement behaviour is to foster sponsor satisfaction and retention. Sponsors engage beyond the contract to develop multilaterally beneficial partnerships with sport properties. On some prominent platforms, such as FIFA or the IOC, or for global football brands, such as Bayern Munich, Real Madrid, and Manchester United, sponsors engage to extend their contract with the property and not lose it to a competitor. In addition, sponsors use their access to the network and engage to develop business contacts. Ideally, these business contacts lead to increased turnover and thus can be traced back to the original idea of sport sponsorship.

Sponsorship revenue accounts for a substantial share of the total sports market (IEG, 2018). The leveraging of purchased rights requires additional investments as it involves the total amount of sponsorship spending beyond the purchased rights (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020). These leveraging measures do not necessarily need to be regulated by a contract but are often the output of platform actors' innovative collaborations.

In addition, financial figures on sponsorship (e.g. Deloitte, 2018; IEG, 2018) do not include the voluntary, non-contractual share of benefits discovered in the current study. The potential to generate monetary value from sport sponsorship, therefore, should be estimated as significantly higher. Sponsees also should pay more attention to the effects of SE, so that the hidden potential for generating value, both monetary and non-monetary, can be realised. It is also essential for sponsee's managers to understand their role as operators of a platform granting access to other actors. In sponsorship practice, operations that facilitate interactions include sponsor workshops, business speed-dating, or sport games for the business club. There is no value to the isolated sale of sponsorship rights, as the value only results from the use of the rights. The price for sponsorship rights represents an indicator of the scarcity of access to a sponsorship EP. Expenses for mere access are not sufficient. SE is a necessary condition for the creation of value from sponsorship contracts. The empirical results contribute to raising awareness of sponsorship partners about which resources they can integrate to increase the value of sport sponsorship.

#### **4.1.6 CONTRIBUTIONS**

The contributions to the literature are manifold. First, we conceptualise sport sponsorship as an EP at the meso-level embedded within a sport service ecosystem at the macro-level. Therefore, we contribute to a broader understanding of the network approach in sport sponsorship. Second, building on our conceptualisation of sport sponsorship as an EP, we empirically analyse what types of resources sponsors and the sponsee integrate within and especially beyond the contract at the micro-level. This enables us to validate our conceptualisation. Third, we present a more precise concept of sport sponsorship as an EP. In doing so, we specify voluntary resource integration as SE. Fourth, we show that sponsees grant access to an EP in which actors' expertise and knowledge aid in the co-creation of value. Fifth, we develop sport sponsorship beyond a pure promotional and sales tool to a networking tool for sponsoring companies using economic specialisation and technology competencies of other actors. Sixth, we model sponsees as gatekeepers and operators of EPs, which increases their monetary and non-monetary value.

By engaging in resource integration on the EP, sponsors and sponsee co-create value in sport sponsorship. In these relationships with knowledgeable resource integrators, all actors benefit collaboratively. Voluntary resource integration by reciprocal SE helps to establish and continue multilaterally beneficial partnerships in sponsorship. Sporting activities are at the fundamental core for the emergence of different types of EPs, one of which is sport sponsorship (Woratschek et al., 2014; Woratschek & Buser, 2018). Managers and decision-makers in the sports industry need to be aware of the unique opportunities provided by resource integration in sport sponsorship. Using the EP to build relationships with other actors not only serves as a way to leverage the sponsorship but also helps to develop business contacts and enlarge sponsors' and sponsees' networks. On the one hand, sponsors can improve their strategic focus by collaborating with other actors, which might lead to joint campaigns or innovative ideas. On the other hand, for sponsees, enlarging their business network by increasing the attractiveness of the EP leads to benefits from others' economic specialisation and technology transfer. In general, value can be monetary and non-monetary.

The sponsorship platform is more than a pure promotional and sales tool for companies to reach their strategic objectives. SE in a business network opens the door to access knowledgeable actors and benefit from the integration of physical, human, organisational, informational, and relational resources. With access to the EP, which is granted by the sponsorship contract, sponsors can co-create their business network together with the sponsee and benefit from others' resource integration. The platform itself represents the venue for innovation through the access and integration of resources (Aal et al., 2016). Given the importance of business relations in sponsorship networks, it is essential to be aware that sponsorship value can be derived beyond a dyadic relationship and is not limited to contract components. Therefore, the underlying concept of sponsorship as an EP provides a foundation for actors' collaboration and the co-creation of value through resource integration. Furthermore, the empirical study shows what types of resources can be integrated, leading to benefits from economic specialisation and technology transfer.

#### 4.1.7 LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Whereas our conceptualisation of sport sponsorship is embedded within a service ecosystem, we only conceptualise sport sponsorship as an EP at the meso-level and give empirical insights into actors' resource integration on the micro-level. The knowledge about the different type of resources integrated within SE among the sponsee, a sponsor, and all other sponsors on the EP builds a solid basis for future analysis. Further research could investigate other EPs in sports at a meso-level as well as the relationship between EPs at a macro-level. The sport service ecosystem can contain mutually dependent EPs. Sport management research and practice have yet to analyse adequately the inter-relationship of these platforms. In addition to the platform of the sporting event (SVF) and sport sponsorship (SE), multiple EPs need to be taken into account to consider the whole picture. Such EPs might be organisations' appearance in different competitions (e.g. national league vs multi-national league), sports betting (e.g. fantasy sports), or digital sport gaming (e.g. esports). Similarities and differences between EPs should be examined to gain a better understanding of the sports system and how value is co-created from a systemic perspective. Digging deeper into the inter-dependencies between actors, networks, and networks within networks would enlighten the nature of sport management and the discussion on various unique characteristics of sports industries. Therefore, management-related literature streams, such as interorganisational citizenship behaviour (Gerke et al., 2017) or ecosystems (Adner, 2017) paired with service marketing concepts can describe and conceptualise the interconnectedness of actors, platforms and networks more holistically. For our conceptualisation of sport sponsorship as an EP, we draw on marketing-related concepts actor engagement, EP, and the SVF to support the nature of sport sponsorship as a marketing concept. The academic discourse on SE as behaviour, however, would benefit from the comparison, the complement, and ultimately the merger of the two literature streams of sport marketing and organisational management. This will subsequently open new fields of conceptual as well as empirical research.

In our concept, we treat sponsees and sponsors as engaging actors. At the meso-level, other actors, such as politicians, media organisations, spectators, fans, and sport authorities, also integrate resources in multilateral relationships, which are worthwhile to be elaborated. Besides other actors' influence on the sponsorship platform, the effects of SE on the financial value of sport sponsorship need to be analysed in future research. Industry reports, such as Deloitte (2018) or IEG (2018) do not directly cover voluntary resource integration as part of SE. Indirect effects of SE by sponsees,



however, certainly influence the future financial value of sponsorship contracts. Sponsees might build a positive reputation for their SE behaviours, include it in contract negotiations with potential sponsors and increase their sponsorship revenue. Sponsors, on the other hand, might choose an engaging sponsee because of the reputation and pay a premium for this partnership. Our empirical study is limited to resource integration of a sponsee and multiple sponsors. Future research could highlight other actors' engagement to integrate resources at the micro-level. Other actors such as spectators and home and away team fans could integrate a different type of resource on a sponsorship EP. Broader theorising under the application of actor engagement, EP, and network theories by using platforms within sport management is required to foster innovation and shape new markets and business models in the sport industry.

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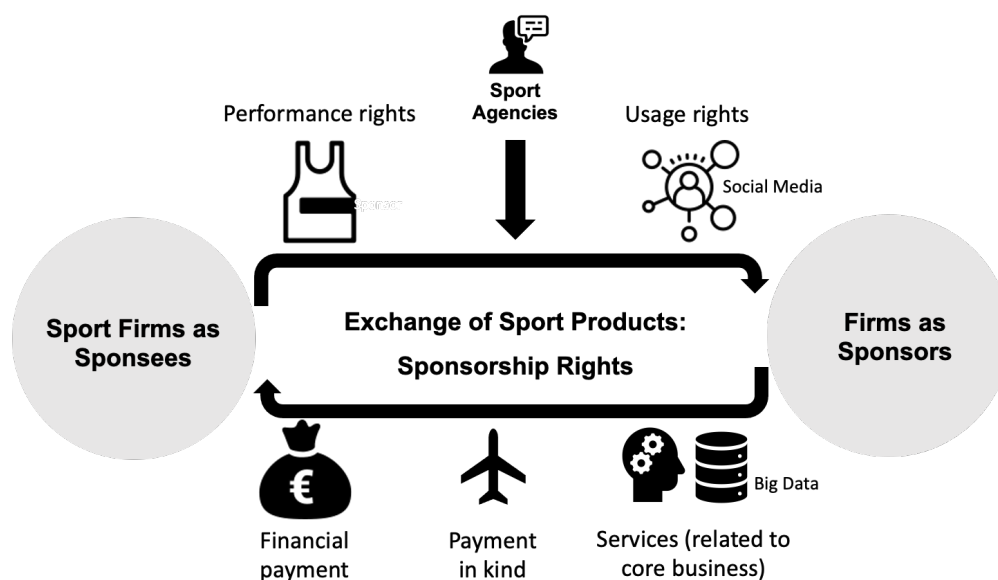
## 4.2 The Business Model of Sponsorship Engagement in Sports: Brief and Straight to the Point (Transfer Paper I)

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### 4.2.1 THE LOGIC OF SPORT PRODUCTS

The sponsorship incomes of the “Big Five” European football leagues (England, Germany, Spain, France and Italy) totalled for 4.3 billion euros, i.e. 27% of total revenues, in 2017/18 (Deloitte, 2019). However, sponsorship income of the Big Five is not equally distributed (Woratschek & Griebel 2020), and such figures only cover financial value. In the best case, those financial figures only depict the exchange of the acquired association rights for financial or in-kind assistance (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2014; Meenaghan, 1983). However, traditional approaches in sport management focus on the financial value of sponsorships because it is implicitly assumed that value is embedded in the sponsorship rights, and therefore, firms buy them.



**Figure 1.** Sport sponsorship – logic of sport products (images partly provided by <https://icons8.com>).

According to the traditional approach, figure 1 shows the market relations between sponsor and sponsee. In sport sponsorship, rights (performance rights, usage rights) are exchanged for money,



payments-in-kind or services. In principle, sponsorship rights are seen as products that contain a certain value for the buyers.

Often the sponsorship rights are brokered through sport agencies, which act as “matchmakers,” so to speak. Matchmakers are a form of platform business models (Fehrer, Brodie, Kaartemo, & Reiter, 2020) and serve as intermediaries because they link actors in one or more markets. They also correspond to a value net (Stabell & Fjeldstad 1998). Value nets analyse intermediaries’ primary activities that directly lead to value for sponsors and sponsees.

The platform business model also corresponds to sponsees because they link sponsors with the fans, spectators and other sponsors. Sport agencies and sponsees as platform business models share the same value configuration, i.e. how value is created for the customers. For more details about different value configurations, please watch the video cited below.

However, the difference between the two business models lies in the fact that sports agencies act as intermediaries for the actors in one market (one-sided market: sponsorship rights) and sponsees as intermediaries for the actors in multisided markets (sports market, advertising market, labour market).

#### **4.2.2 THE LOGIC OF VALUE CO-CREATION**

From the perspective of the logic of value co-creation (Woratschek, Horbel & Popp 2014; Woratschek, 2020), the platform business model “matchmaker,” or rather the value configuration “value net,” is not sufficient.

On the one hand, sponsors and many others also contribute to value creation, not only the sponsee. The sponsee provides sponsorship rights so that valuable awareness is created in the sponsors’ target groups (customers, fans, employees). This implies, for example, that fans, sponsee’s customers, and employees are excited to watch sponsored sporting activities. Hence, value is not embedded in sponsorship rights, it is co-created by different actors.

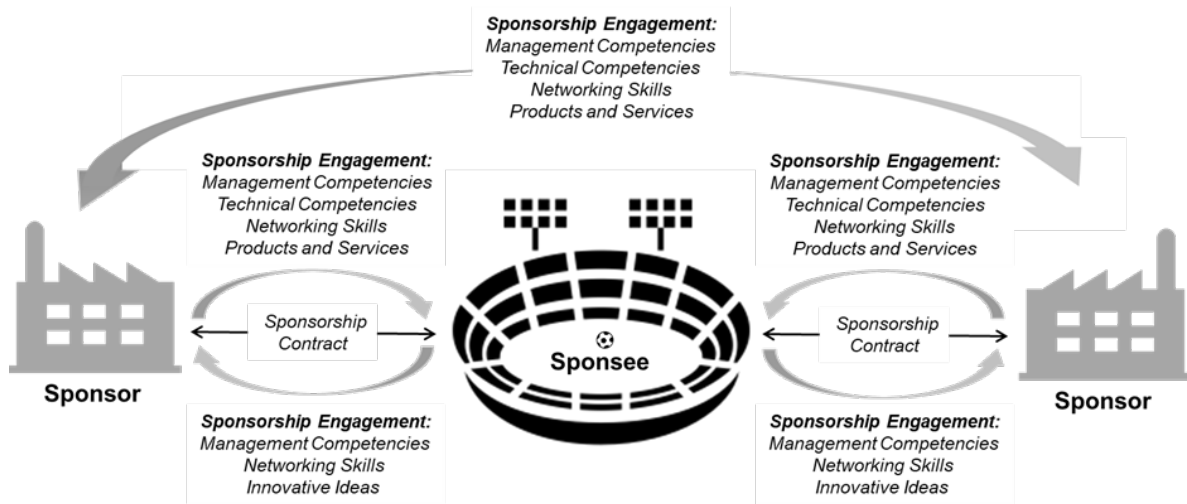
On the other hand, sponsors do not only provide financial resources or payments-in-kind. Inspired by the logic of value co-creation, engagement literature generates an understanding of voluntary resource integration in sport sponsorship. The collaboration of actors can materialise on physical platforms, such as hospitality areas, business meetings, or sponsor roadshows. Furthermore, those relationships can unfold on virtual platforms. This includes shared content via social media channels or digital network apps designed to facilitate the interaction of sponsors. The Dutch Bundeling company, in cooperation with PSV Eindhoven or other sports organisations,

serves as an example (Kürbs, 2019, p. 9). Their app aims to connect business partners. Moreover, it represents a further possibility for sport organisation to inform its partners or to invite them to special events. Besides, users can display companies sorted by sector, which facilitates networking (Bundeling, 2019).

Engagement platforms (EPs) are defined as “physical or virtual touchpoints designed to provide structural support for the exchange and integration of resources, and thereby co-creation of value between actors in a service ecosystem” (Breidbach, Brodie, & Hollebeek, 2014, p. 594). Following this definition, EPs enable interaction and collaboration of actors, both online and offline, and facilitate resource integration (Storbacka, Brodie, Böhmman, Maglio, & Nenonen, 2016). The difference to matchmakers or value nets is based on the different logics how value is created in sport sponsorship (Woratschek & Buser, 2018).

Following definitions of engagement as behaviour (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; van Doorn et al., 2010), sponsorship engagement (SE) is defined as actor’s behavioural manifestations and the integration of resources beyond (or without) the sponsorship contract. The sponsee acts as an operator of the EP, but also as resource integrator in a value co-creation process. All other actors, who gained access to the sport sponsorship EP, can interact with others. They provide and use resources simultaneously. Consequently, all actors engaging in sport sponsorship benefit from multilateral resource integration. Thereby, the operator facilitates SE.

To illustrate what kind of resources are integrated, we focus on the relations between different sponsors and a sponsee. Our empirical study reveals five types of voluntary resources integrated on a sport sponsorship EP (Buser, Woratschek, & Schönberner 2020): management competencies, technical competencies, networking skills, innovative ideas, and products and services that are not part of the sponsorship contract. For the sake of clarity, figure 2 shows a sport organisation as an operator of an EP with two sponsors and the resources integrated based on contracts and voluntary provision.



**Figure 2.** Sport sponsorship – logic of value co-creation.

No contract exists among the different sponsors. However, they likewise exchange resources and show SE. This circumstance makes the sponsor–sponsor relationship very special. Table 1 gives insights into voluntarily integrated resources as part of the actors’ SE behaviour.

**Table 1.** Resource integration in sport sponsorship as part of SE.

	Type of resources	Sample quotation
Resource integration beyond (or without) the contract (SE)	Management competencies	“tax consultant is also a sponsor and then advises us [the sports club] without billing, for the most part, at least“ (exp_8)
	Technical competencies	“the sponsor is involved in the development of our boats. They provide us with wind tunnels to improve our performance“ (exp_45)
	Networking skills	“put(ing) in a good word for us ... [the sports club]“ (exp_16) or „even bring him [the partner] along, that we [the sports club] personally can convince them“ (exp_16).
	Innovative ideas	“we basically bring the ideas“ (exp_5) as “they have their own event department that helps with the implementation. So they are creating and have tools that they use and that you can use as a partner“ (exp_46).
	Products and services	“for example, if players move, they mostly use the moving company [sponsor]. Of course with relatively good conditions“ (exp_6).

Having empirical evidence about voluntary resource integration in sport sponsorship in mind, industry reports about financial figures on sponsorship, such as Deloitte (2018), fail to provide a holistic picture of value creation as their numbers do not include SE. The potential to generate value from sports sponsorship, however, is significantly higher. Therefore, it is essential for sport managers to understand their role as resource integrators as well as EP operators granting access to others.

The isolated exchange of sponsorship rights has no value in itself. Value only results from the usage, respectively from leveraging or activating these rights, which implies that expenses for the mere access to the EP are not sufficient.

Furthermore, sponsorship is more than a pure promotional and sales tool for sponsors to target their strategic objectives. Given the importance of business relations in sponsorship networks, it is essential to be aware that sponsorship value is not limited to contract components. Therefore, the concept of sponsorship as an EP provides a foundation for contract-based as well as voluntary value co-creation. Conclusively, the financial value covers only a small part of value potential in sport sponsorship, whereas the logic of value co-creation reveals the full potential of that value.

**To put it in a nutshell:**

- (1) Traditional sport sponsorship approaches focus on sponsorship rights and their financial value.
- (2) Traditional sport sponsorship approaches follow the logic of sport products.
- (3) Sponsorship rights are often brokered by sport agencies implementing a platform business model in the sense of a matchmaker or a value net in a one-sided market.
- (4) Sponsees also operate a platform business model or a value net, but in multisided markets.
- (5) In the logic of value co-creation, value emerges through interactions and different actors' co-creation on physical and virtual engagement platforms.
- (6) Sponsorship engagement is actor's behavioural manifestations beyond (or without) the sponsorship contract.
- (7) Sponsorship engagement platforms are touchpoints to facilitate exchange, and therefore actors' resource integration.
- (8) Empirical findings show five different types of resources (voluntarily) integrated by sport sponsorship engagement: management competencies, technical competencies, networking skills, innovative ideas, and products and services.

(9) Sport managers' roles are twofold: they serve as operators granting access to an engagement platform and, simultaneously, they are resource integrators.

(10) The logic of value co-creation reveals the full potential of value in sport sponsorship.

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### **4.3 Sport Sponsorship as a Booster for Customer Engagement: The Role of Activation, Authenticity, and Attitude (Scientific Paper 4, Extended Abstract)**

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#### **4.3.1 RESEARCH AIM**

In an increasingly sensitive society, the sport sector needs to adapt its value system and engage authentically with current political and social issues. For sport sponsors and sport organisations, which are central stakeholders in today's sports system, this means that it becomes increasingly relevant to pay attention on how sponsorships in sports are perceived by society, in particular among sport spectators and fans. In today's world, consumers are sensitive to (over-)commercialism in sports (Trachsler et al., 2015), and want brands' marketing activities to be authentic, meaning in line with certain values and purpose (Charlton & Cornwell, 2019; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Inauthentic marketing messages misleading consumers may be detrimental for brand equity (Vredenburg et al., 2020). However, effects of authenticity on sport sponsorship success have to be empirically assessed yet (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020).

Nevertheless, it is well-known that sport sponsors need to engage in specific activation activities to stand out from the clutter, differentiate themselves from ambush marketers, and leverage the full potential of their acquired sponsorship rights (O'Reilly & Horning, 2013). In sports business practice, there exist certain heuristic recommendations on the activation-to-rights fee-ratio ranging from 2.2 to 1 (IEG, 2016) to 1.2 to 1 (NielsenSports, 2018). However, there is little known on how to activate sponsorships and what are the effects. The topic of sponsors' activations still "has not received adequately sophisticated empirical work" in the sponsorship literature (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020, p. 624), both in terms of potential positive but especially in terms of potential negative effects.

Sponsorships are engagement platforms where different stakeholders, such as sponsors, sponsees, and sport consumers etc., interact to co-create value (Buser et al., 2020). The interaction on the sponsorship platform takes place in terms of transactional and voluntary behaviour. The

latter is named customer engagement and comprises first the disposition or readiness to engage with a brand (Fehrer et al., 2018) and second, the actual engagement behaviour that goes beyond transactions (van Doorn et al., 2010). Customer engagement (e.g. Harmeling et al., 2017) is widely discussed in the business literature. Customer engagement is driven by customer engagement marketing and leads to higher revenues and cost savings (Harmeling et al., 2017). However, customer engagement is rarely addressed in sport management, and there is still no research on how sponsoring can drive customer engagement. Hence, we use both customer engagement disposition (CED) and customer engagement behaviour (CEB) as outcome variables in our study. In sport sponsorship, activations are an important practice in customer engagement marketing which drives the sponsors' revenues. However, in line with the above-mentioned sponsorship literature, we do not believe sponsorship activations automatically lead to higher revenues. The sponsors' revenues also depend on the customers' perceptions of activation practices, sponsorship authenticity and spectators' attitude to the sponsor.

Consequently, our research aims to close the above-mentioned gaps in the sponsorship literature by empirically investigating the positive and negative consumers' (here: spectators') responses following different sport sponsorship exposures. Therefore, we investigate the effects of differently perceived sponsors' activations and different perceptions of sponsorship authenticity on customer engagement in terms of CED and CEB by taking the spectators' prior attitude towards the sponsor into account. The psychological processing of the content of sponsorship activations and the resulting reactions can be explained by balance theory (Heider, 1958).

#### **4.3.2 DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

The theoretical foundations for the experimental research design are based on customer engagement literature in connection with balance theory to assess the effects of sponsors' activations on sponsorship engagement platforms. Additionally, we included the increasingly important construct of sponsorship authenticity by assessing the consumers' prior attitudes towards the sponsors. This results in the following hypotheses.

*H1: Positively perceived sponsors' activations are more likely to evoke positive customer engagement of spectators, such as a) CED and b) CEB, while negatively perceived activations are more likely to evoke negative customer engagement.*

*H2: Spectators' negative reactions following sponsors' activations are stronger than positive ones.*



*H3: Sponsor-sponsee relationships perceived as authentic relate more positively to spectators' customer engagement, such as a) CED and b) CEB, than sponsorships perceived as non-authentic.*

*H4: Spectators' favourable attitudes towards the sponsor relate directly a) to more positive CED and b) indirectly to more positive CEB than unfavourable attitudes towards the sponsor.*

*H5: The spectators' disposition for customer engagement (CED) is positively related to actual customer engagement behaviour (CEB) in the sport sponsorship context.*

*H6: Sponsorship authenticity moderates the effects of sponsors' activations on a) CED and b) CEB.*

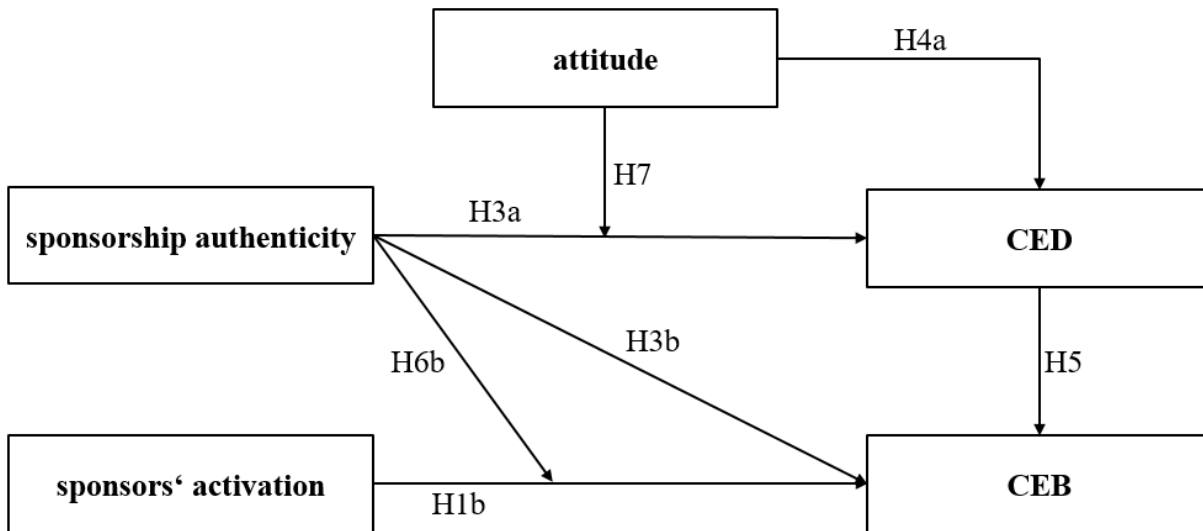
*H7: Attitudes towards the sponsor moderates the effects of sponsorship authenticity and sponsors' activations on CED.*

For testing our causal hypotheses, we conducted an online experiment with a factorial 2 (sponsors' activation) x 2 (sponsorship authenticity) plus one (attitude towards the sponsor) between-subjects design. The inclusion of attitude towards the sponsor allowed us to assess additional moderating effects. The study is based on the fictitious situation that, firstly, a brand is presented as a new sponsor of a sport event. Secondly, this sponsor carries out an activation as part of the new fictitious sponsorship. As sponsee, we chose one of the largest German sport events outside soccer, the Berlin marathon. McDonald's and Subway were selected as sponsors from the same food industry. In a recent sponsorship study, Shoffner and Koo (2020) also used both brands and found a significant difference regarding their authenticity as sport sponsors, delineating Subway as an authentic and McDonald's as a non-authentic sponsor.

After conducting a pre-test, 529 sports enthusiasts (48.6% female) were recruited via sports-related – especially running-related – German online forums and social media platforms in January 2021 using random sampling. Manipulations were done for activations and authenticity using press releases. Attitudes towards the sponsor were measured at the beginning of the questionnaire. Since our manipulation of the activation is from the nutrition domain, we used the construct nutrition awareness to control whether the participants' baseline attitude towards nutrition impacts the dependent variables. As we place our study in the sports context, in particular running, we also controlled for the influence of participants' involvement in this domain.

### 4.3.3 RESULTS

After ensuring the manipulations took effect, we conducted mediation analyses using Hayes' PROCESS macro (model 4) to test the hypothesised research framework (Fig. 1).



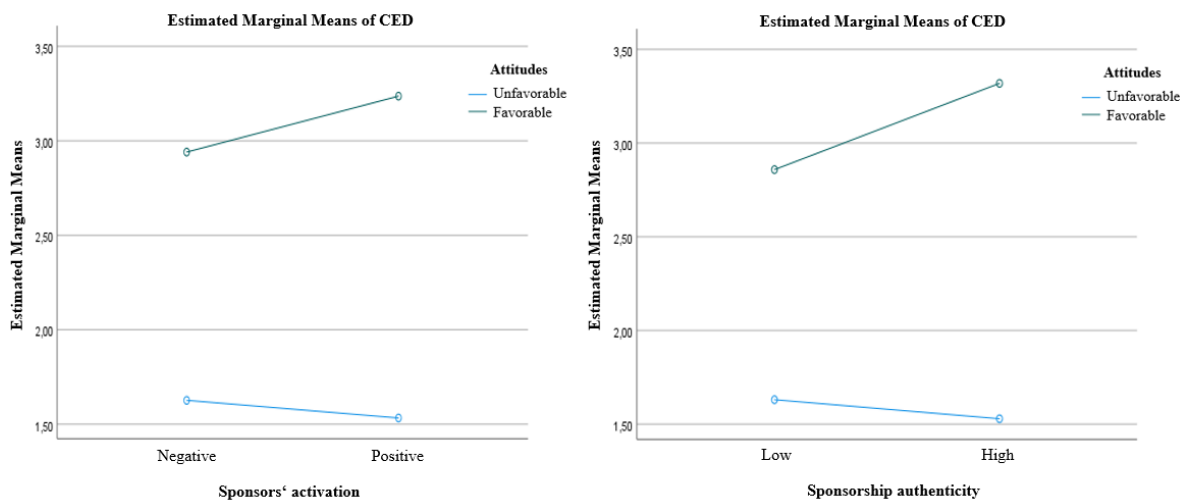
**Figure 1.** Conceptual model.

Then, we tested the effects of sponsors' activations, perceived sponsorship authenticity, and attitude towards the sponsor on CED controlling for participants' nutrition awareness and sport involvement in a 2 (activation) x 2 (authenticity) x 2 (attitude) ANCOVA. ANCOVA results are shown in detail in Table 1.

**Table 1.** ANCOVA for CED.

Source of variance	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	91.50	1	91.50	86.67	<0.001
Nutrition awareness	8.64	1	8.64	8.18	<0.01
Sport involvement	0.02	1	0.02	0.01	0.91
Sponsor's activation (A)	1.30	1	1.30	1.23	0.27
Sponsorship authenticity (B)	4.06	1	4.06	3.85	0.05
Attitude towards the sponsor (C)	282.87	1	282.87	267.94	<0.001
A x B	0.04	1	0.04	0.04	0.84
A x C	4.82	1	4.82	4.56	0.03
C x B	9.84	1	9.84	9.32	<0.01
A x B x C	0.66	1	0.66	0.63	0.43
Error	542.64	514	1.06		

Moreover, there are significant interaction effects between sponsors' activations and participants' attitude towards the sponsor and between sponsorship authenticity and attitude towards the sponsor as shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** The interaction effects on CED.

To test behavioural effects, a binary regression analysis with dummy-coded variables on CEB was performed with sponsor' activations, sponsorship authenticity, attitude towards the sponsor, CED, and the co-variates nutrition awareness and sport involvement. After computing the binary regression analysis (stepwise backward), the variables attitude towards the sponsor, nutrition awareness, and sport involvement were excluded from the model due to insignificance (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Logit regression model of CEB.

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>
Constant	0.09	0.46	0.04	0.84	1.10
CED	0.72	0.16	21.44	<0.001	2.06
Activation (neg.)	-2.50	0.41	38.09	<0.001	0.08
Authenticity (low)	-1.65	0.39	18.22	<0.001	0.09
<i>Excluded variables</i>					
Attitude	-	-	-	0.57	-
Nutrition awareness	-	-	-	0.68	-
Sport involvement	-	-	-	0.47	-

*Note.* Method: stepwise (backwards); dependent variable: CEB (0|1); cases included in the model: 213; model fit:  $\chi^2 = 100.664$  ( $p < .001$ ); Nagelkerke's  $R^2 = .505$ ; Hosmer-Lemeshow-Test (HLT):  $p = .478$ .

Our results in Table 2 show a significant positive effect of CED on CEB ( $B = 0.72$ , Wald = 21.44,  $p < .001$ ). This means that the probability of engaging in positive CEB increases when the level of CED increases. The results further show significant main effects for sponsors' activation ( $B = -2.50$ , Wald = 38.09,  $p < .001$ ) and sponsorship authenticity ( $B = -1.65$ , Wald = 18.22,  $p < .001$ ) on CEB. Our results further show a significant positive effect of CED on CEB. Accordingly, the probability of engaging in positive CEB increases when the level of CED increases. Calculating a follow up binary logistic regression analysis further revealed that when the isolated main effects of activation and authenticity were added, the findings indicate a predicted probability of 91.49%, if activation is negatively and the sponsorship as lower authentic perceived, 65.00% (negative and higher), 49.75% (positive and lower), and 14.60% (positive and higher) that spectators engage in negative CEB (see table 3).

**Table 3.** Probabilities to engage in negative vs. positive CEB in different scenarios.

	Non-authentic	Authentic
<b>Negative activation</b>	91.49% vs. 8.51%	65.00% vs. 35.00%
<b>Positive activation</b>	49.75% vs. 50.25%	14.60% vs. 85.40%

#### 4.3.4 THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

*Theoretical implications.* So far, there is no article that examines the effects of sponsorship engagement on the customer engagement of the sponsees' customers and thus the triad of sponsors, sponsees and sponsees' customers (here: spectators). Therefore, this study makes a significant contribution to addressing the research gap by shedding light on the impact of sponsorship engagement on customer engagement. As a form of sponsorship engagement, sponsorship activations are considered to enrich both the customer engagement and the sport sponsorship literature.

The findings of our experimental study show that sport sponsors' activations drive customer engagement with the sponsor brand. Furthermore, consumers' engagement depends on the context, respectively sponsorship authenticity and attitudes towards the sponsor. Interestingly, sponsors' activations do not per se evoke positive sport consumer (here: spectators) reactions. Negative reactions in terms of customer engagement also occur in cases where sponsors' activations are perceived as negative, sponsor-sponsee relationships are non-authentic, and prior attitudes towards

the sponsor are unfavourable. Data further show that the consumers' disposition to engage leads to actual engagement behaviour and vice versa.

Moreover, our findings on CED demonstrate that favourable attitudes towards the sponsor and an authentic sponsor-sponsee relationship directly enhance the consumers' disposition and readiness to show customer engagement. Moreover, consumers who have a favourable attitude towards the sponsor beforehand show higher CED even when the activation is perceived as negative and the sponsorship as non-authentic.

Next, regarding actual consumers' behaviour as sport sponsorship evaluation, our study demonstrates that the perceived valence of an activation and an authentic sponsor-sponsee relationship directly affects CEB expressed either positively or negatively. Consumers talk more negatively about the sponsor to others when they perceive the activation as negative and the sponsor-sponsee relationship as non-authentic. More interestingly, the probability of negative effects following a negatively perceived activation is reduced around a quarter when the sponsor-sponsee relationship is perceived as authentic. In other words, this finding emphasises that sponsors' negatively perceived actions can be compensated by consumers' perception of an authentic sponsorship. In turn, the probability of positive CEB after a positive activation is strongly reduced to only around 50% when the sponsorship is rated as non-authentic. In other words, a positive activation in a non-authentic condition has an almost equal probability of consumers speaking positively as negatively about the sponsor. This highlights the importance of considering the authenticity construct not only when assessing sponsorship effects (Charlton & Cornwell, 2019; Shoffner & Koo, 2020) but also as a general "semi-autonomous driver of consumer decision making" (Nunes et al., 2021, p. 32).

To explain these findings, we can draw on the theoretical basis of value co-creation in sport management (Woratschek et al., 2014), which indicates that consumers perceive value propositions of firms (here: sponsors) individually and derive either positive or negative value from it (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). The underlying psychological process going on here can be explained by balance theory (Heider, 1958). If people perceive a psychological imbalance evaluating the relationship between two objects, they strive to restore balance.

Finally, another noteworthy finding is that negative sponsorship evaluations are stronger than positive ones. This means when consumers feel upset about a sponsor's activation, they are more likely to tell others about it than when they feel happy about it.

*Managerial Implications.* The study results show that activations do not automatically lead to positive consumer evaluations. Accordingly, sponsorship managers should carefully check an activation for possible pitfalls before launching it. This shows sponsoring managers that despite there being heuristic activation:rights ratios promoted in practice, it is not enough just to activate the sponsorship rights but to be careful how to activate them.

Moreover, the prior attitude towards the sponsor also plays an important role in the consumers' disposition to engage with the sponsor. An implication for management may be that with activations mainly consumers who already like the sponsor, such as existing customers, should be addressed. Sponsees should also be aware of sponsors' activation and support the sponsors by providing information on the characteristics of their fans and usual spectators. Hence, it is important for sponsees to watch out how sponsors act on their platform, as negatively valenced co-creation may be detrimental for the entire sponsorship platform and may even reflect other participating actors via spillover effects (e.g. Cobbs et al., 2016; Kelly et al., 2016).

The other influencing factor on sponsorship success is the perceived authenticity of the sponsor-sponsee relationship. Authenticity encompasses the dimensions of continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolism (Morhart et al., 2015). So, managers should pay attention to each dimension and may pre-evaluate the perception regarding those authenticity dimensions before entering a sponsorship deal. The 4-item short-scale developed by Charlton and Cornwell (2019) can be used to assess sponsorship authenticity within the potential target group quickly. Sponsoring managers can use this knowledge to better allocate their financial resources in terms of marketing budget more carefully by pre-checking whether a potential sponsorship is perceived as authentic and then if an activation might provoke negative perceptions.

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## CHAPTER 5: CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVE ON ENGAGEMENT AT THE MESO- AND MACRO LEVEL OF AGGREGATION

### 5.1 Sport Sponsorship in the Logic of Value Co-Creation (Scientific Paper 5, Extended Abstract)

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#### 5.1.1 RESEARCH AIM

Major sport events, such as continental championships in team and individual sports, and also mass sports events, such as marathons or e-sports events, attract many spectators in multisided markets. Sport events are marketed in arenas, on TV and via the radio, news and social media. They are not only important events for the sport itself but are also highly relevant from an economic and societal perspective. Consequently, sport events require substantial financial resources. Sport sponsorship has developed into an important – if not the most important – funding source.

Although some authors have regarded sponsorship from a network perspective, they have limited the sponsorship network either to the sponsee and its multiple sponsors (B2B) (Morgan et al., 2014; Wagner et al., 2017) or to a ‘trinity’ including sponsees, sponsors and media (Olkkonen, 2001). However, there are many more stakeholders (e.g. spectators/fans, athletes, politicians) involved in a sponsorship network. More importantly, none of the previous studies have investigated the interrelation of the stakeholders in the network and the interaction between them. Consequently, the network perspective of sport sponsorship is still underdeveloped in business as well as in academia (Cornwell & Kwon, 2020).

All these previous studies consider sport sponsorship from the logic of sport products (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020). The logic of sport products states that a sport event is a product created by the event organiser. However, this logic fails to acknowledge that stakeholders other than the sponsee also contribute to the value creation of the event sponsorship. The logic of value co-creation in sport management offers an approach to overcome these limitations (Woratschek,

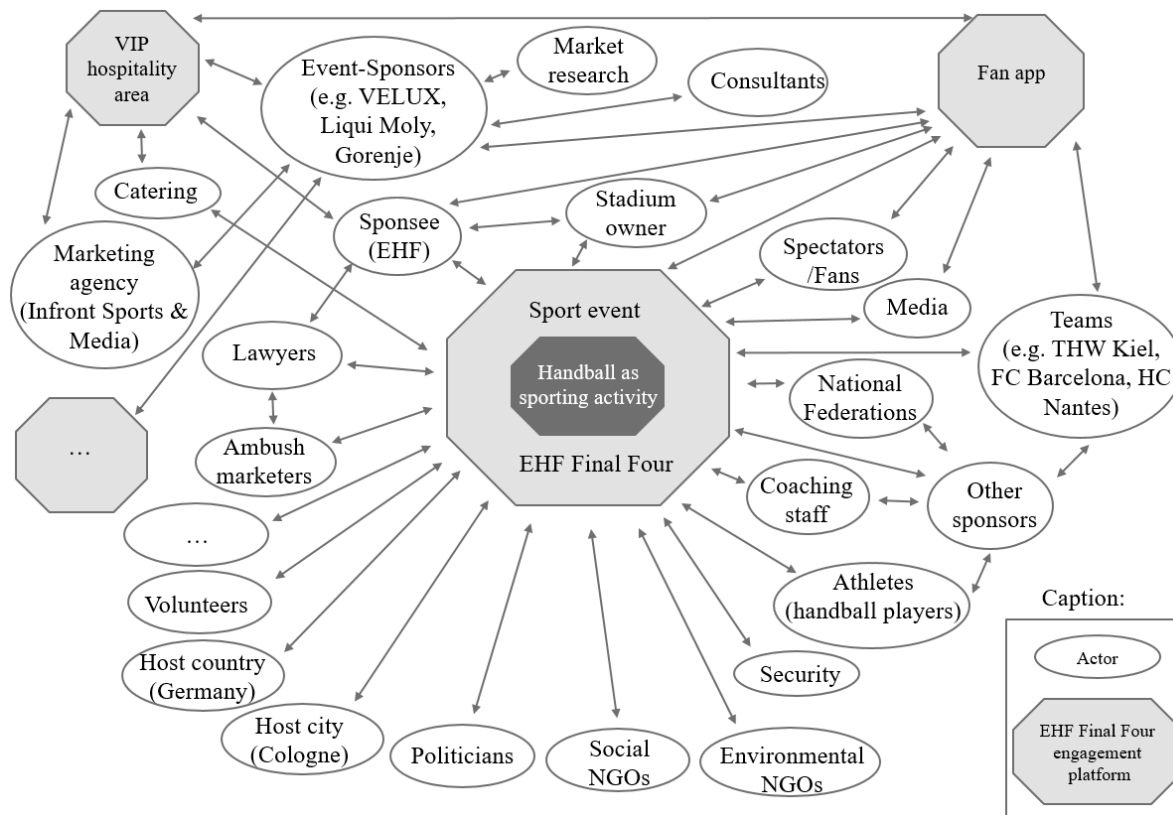
2020). Therefore, the logic of value co-creation in sport management (Woratschek, 2020; Woratschek et al., 2014) and the engagement platform literature (e.g., Breidbach et al., 2014; Storbacka et al., 2016) help to describe and investigate fundamental principles of sport event sponsorship from a network perspective in detail. Woratschek et al. (2014) paved the way with developing the sport value framework, which applied the logic of value co-creation to the sport management context for the first time.

In this chapter, we focus on the sponsorship of major sport events with an international scope, such as continental championships and World Cups in various sports or the Olympic and Paralympic Games. To illustrate our conceptualisation, we use the EHF Men's Handball Champions League Final Four as the exemplary major sport event in this chapter (EHF, 2021).

With this article, we aim to contribute to a conceptualisation of sport event sponsorship where multiple stakeholders co-create value on a sport engagement platform (SEP). An SEP is operated by the event organiser (sponsee), who facilitates exchanges between other stakeholders on the platform, such as sponsors, media companies, spectators, and fans. Such a concept builds the foundation for understanding how the value is created for the different stakeholders of a sport event sponsorship and what influences the perceived value. The conceptual article is enriched by an illustrative case of a major sport event, namely the EHF Men's Handball Champions League Final Four.

### **5.1.2 SPONSORSHIP ON SPORT ENGAGEMENT PLATFORMS**

Before focusing in on sponsorships on SEP, we deem it valuable to map out the various stakeholders that are involved in a major sport event. Thereby it is important to remember that all these stakeholders are connected by their common interest in event-related sporting activities. Figure 4 gives a comprehensive, but certainly not all-encompassing, overview of the relevant stakeholders that usually participate in an SEP. Throughout this section, we will use the EHF Men's Champions League Final Four as an illustrative case of a major sport event to exemplify and underline our theoretical arguments. Moreover, it is important to note that there are other engagement platforms related to the sporting activities and these are connected to the focal SEP. Some stakeholders are active on several of these platforms (see Fig. 4)



**Figure 1.** Overview of relevant stakeholders participating on a sport event platform (here EHF Men's Champions League Final Four) and associated platforms based on sporting activities.

#### 5.1.2.1 SPONSEE'S PERSPECTIVE

The sponsee, here the event organiser, as one central stakeholder, links the stakeholders in the sponsorship network (e.g. Wagner et al., 2017). Consequently, the sponsee provides and operates the SEP. The engagement platform itself represents no participating stakeholder but serves as a touchpoint, where interaction between the stakeholders is facilitated (Storbacka et al., 2016). Accordingly, the sponsee (here EHF marketing) is the provider of the platform and performs several important tasks in this role, which are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Tasks of the sponsee as provider and operator of the SEP (adapted from Woratschek et al., 2019).

<b>Task</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>(1) Administrating access</b>	Acquire requests from other stakeholders and carefully decide who gains access to the platform.	EHF marketing negotiates with its partner Infront Sports and Media the service contract for the sponsorship and media rights of the event.
<b>(2) Mediating</b>	Enable and facilitate interaction between the different stakeholders on the platform and actively foster exchange among them. This task can also include engaging in conflict solving.	The sponsorship agreement with Nord Stream II caused some political tensions for the participating Polish clubs. EHF marketing mediated here between the clubs and the sponsor and provided a solution.
<b>(3) Informing</b>	Transfer and share information regularly about the event and the event-related activities with the relevant stakeholders.	Information about media rights sold in individual countries is an important detail for sponsors for their individual sponsorship-linked marketing activities in the target markets.
<b>(4) Caring</b>	Act as a service provider for the stakeholders by supporting them and ensuring they feel comfortable interacting on the platform.	EHF marketing takes pro-active measures to prevent any ambush-marketing activity close by or within the event venue.
<b>(5) Organising</b>	Coordinate activities on the platform and make sure that timetables are met and necessary tasks are carried out, for example, creating side events.	EHF marketing organises operational meetings with all sponsors in order to coordinate the different sponsorship-linked marketing activities during the event.
<b>(6) Cooperating</b>	Act as a kind of key account for the various stakeholders and be the direct contact for all situations.	Various forms of rivalries exist in handball as in many other sports. EHF marketing is in close contact with the clubs of rival teams and communicates more intensively with the club managers to avoid any negative publicity, which might damage the reputation of the event sponsors.

### 5.1.2.2 SPONSOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Sponsors aim to gain access to an SEP to interact with other stakeholders on that platform and further achieve previously defined sponsorship objectives. Access is usually granted by entering a sponsorship agreement with the event organiser, i.e. the sponsee, in exchange for sponsorship rights. There are various objectives for which sponsors aim when entering such platforms. These sponsorship objectives can be differentiated into five categories: corporate, marketing, media, building relationships and personal objectives (Hartland et al., 2005).

However, how do sponsoring companies decide to acquire access to a particular SEP? Within a sponsoring company, several individuals are usually involved in the sponsorship decision-making process, and each individual plays at least one role in such group decision(s). These decision-making units can be called the sponsors' buying centre and consist of eight different roles (Schönberner et al., 2020). Thereby, one role can be occupied by more than one person, and vice versa, one person can play more than one role in the sponsors' buying centre. There are eight different roles and short descriptions: coordinators, initiators, deciders, signatories, negotiators, experts, users and networkers. In particular, the role of networkers, those who connect with and build relations with other stakeholders, highlights the advantage of the logic of value co-creation. For example, the networkers connect sponsoring companies with sport marketing agencies or market research firms to support their decision-making on whether or not to enter a particular sport event platform. Accordingly, this perspective is an eye-opener to the fact that already in the initial decision to enter a sport event platform, stakeholders from outside the sponsoring company are involved.

### 5.1.3 VALUE OF SPORT EVENT SPONSORSHIP

In the logic of sport products, value is limited to monetary terms with the goal of profit-maximisation (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020). In contrast, the logic of value co-creation encompasses different types of value, such as economic, social, ecological, experiential or contextual value (e.g. Grohs et al., 2020; Vargo & Lusch, 2008). The latter two mean that value is individually perceived and dependent on how and under what circumstances a stakeholder experiences a sport event.

Research on major sport events and the associated sponsorships have predominantly focused on economic value, e.g. in terms of employment, tourism and so on (Preuss, 2006) or in increased

advertising investments (Gijsenberg, 2014). Nevertheless, next to economic value, the social (Cook et al., 2021) and especially the ecological value (McCullough, Orr, & Watanabe, 2020; McCullough, Orr, & Kellison, 2020) of major sport events has been becoming increasingly important (Müller et al., 2021). Accordingly, sponsors and sponsees need to be aware of this development and the rising expectations in society. Major sport events and their sponsors can contribute to society by supporting initiatives for gender equality and empowerment by fostering a sense of community among the host citizens (Cook et al., 2021) and by providing job opportunities, thus creating social value. As it is widely known in the literature that the image of a sport event shapes the sponsor's image (e.g. Gwinner & Eaton, 1999), positive social outcomes related to the event can enhance the sponsor's reputation and image (Uhrich et al., 2014).

In contrast, negative social outcomes of a sport event can damage a stakeholder's reputation (Kulczycki & Koenigstorfer, 2016), as some recent occasions have shown, for example, the LGBTQ<sup>1</sup> debate during the European football championship in 2021. In response to the adoption of a disputed anti-LGBTQ law in Hungary, the Allianz Arena in Munich should be lit up in rainbow colours to show solidarity with the LGBTQ community during the match Germany vs Hungary. The UEFA as event organiser denied the request and was heavily criticised in public by different stakeholders (Ramsay, 2021). Amongst others, official sponsors of the Euro 2020 responded with posts via social media using rainbow colours. Another example is the ongoing critical discussion about the World Cup 2022 in Qatar due to the violation of human and labour rights in the country in general. There are even voices calling for a boycott of the event by sponsors and national teams (Foxman, 2021). For instance, the Dutch company, Limburg, has already withdrawn from supplying the grass for the World Cup stadia in Qatar due to human rights violations (Cloutier, 2021).

With respect to the big global issue of 'climate change', major sport events are increasingly under pressure to become more ecologically sustainable (McCullough, Orr, & Watanabe, 2020). Although the ecological value of sport events and thus their sponsorship is difficult to assess, efforts have been made towards implementing reporting and monitoring systems (McCullough, Orr, & Kellison, 2020). With respect to sponsorship, there are the potential of negative effects when greenwashing activities become public, as this could damage the reputation of the SEP, and therefore the attractiveness for stakeholders to join decreases, for example, when sponsees select

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<sup>1</sup> LGBTQ is a collective term that stands for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community.

sponsors, which are far from producing sustainable products or services, e.g. gas or petroleum companies, and help them by transferring the predominantly positive sport event image to the sponsor's image (Miller, 2018). On the other side, sponsors can make a contribution by supporting climate-friendly and ecologically sustainable major sport events and then benefit from this through a positive image transfer.

#### 5.1.4 IMPLICATIONS

Our conceptualisation contributes to the understanding of value co-creation in sport (event) sponsorship, using the illustrative case of the EHF Men's Champions League Final Four in several ways. First, we discussed the limits of the traditional view on sport sponsorship, i.e. the logic of sport products, which focuses on the exchange of sponsorship rights for cash or in kind and on dyadic or triadic relationships. Then, we extended the idea of Olkkonen (2001, p. 317) that sponsorship 'can be described as a value-adding exchange network' by conceptualising an SEP by synthesising the logic of value co-creation and the concept of engagement platforms with sponsorship network approaches and providing illustrative examples for our arguments. Sporting activities are the touchpoint that connects all stakeholders and therefore are the fundamental core of an SEP. On the SEP, various stakeholders, not just the sponsors and the sponsee, interact and thus co-create value. In chapter three, we have provided an overview of the relevant stakeholders (see Fig. 1).

Second, we emphasised that the value of sport events and their associated sponsorships exceed the mere monetary value. In addition to economic value, the social and ecological value have become increasingly important in today's society. Furthermore, the value of a major sport event occurs before, during and after the event and is perceived individually by each stakeholder. Thus, the sport event and its sponsorship can be negatively or positively evaluated.

Third, the sponsee, i.e. the event organiser, acts as the provider and operator of the SEP. Marked by its dual role, the sponsee also interacts with other stakeholders as a stakeholder. We described the six main tasks of the sponsee on the SEP, namely (1) administrating access, (2) mediating, (3) informing, (4) caring, (5) organising and (6) cooperating (see Table 1).

Fourth, we showed what objectives sponsors usually pursue with sponsorships and have provided a better understanding of how they decide to engage on an SEP by describing eight roles of the sponsor's buying unit involved in the decision-making process. The networkers are especially important because they mainly link the sponsor with the sponsee and other stakeholders.

The objectives from the building relationship category emphasise the sense in viewing sponsorship from a network or platform perspective.

Practitioners in the field can use the knowledge of value co-creation on SEP for enhancing economic, social and ecological value for themselves and other stakeholders. First, sponsees must understand that they are not a producer of a sport event but the provider and operator of a platform where various stakeholders interact with each other. This is a crucial point because then it becomes clear that the value of a sport event is not created solely by the sponsee but by many different stakeholders. The event organiser/sponsee is still playing a major role on the platform. However, it is less about producing, i.e. organising, an event and more about mediating the stakeholders involved. For this, we provided sponsees with guidelines on how they can successfully manage the sport event platform.

Moreover, with the knowledge in mind about how value is co-created on an SEP, sponsors may extend their focus beyond the assets and rights offered by the sponsee towards the relationship opportunities with other stakeholders, such as other sponsors, media firms and politicians. The exchange with other stakeholders can be used to strategically leverage the sponsorship and simultaneously enhance the sponsor's business network (Buser et al., 2020). Even joint sponsorship-linked marketing activities might then become a promising option from which several sponsors as well as other stakeholders can benefit. This suggests that sponsorship is more than just a promotional or sales tool. The concept of sponsorship engagement, the exchange of resources without or beyond a contractual agreement, shows further that the value of a sponsorship is created beyond dyadic sponsor-sponsee relationships and is not constrained by contracts.

### **5.1.5 CONCLUSION**

The conceptualisation of an SEP provides a solid basis for a holistic understanding of managing sport (event) sponsorship, which goes beyond the dyadic sponsee-sponsor relationship, and sheds light on the opportunities for creating economic, social and ecological value and enhancing the value through sponsorship on the SEP for the stakeholders involved. The research on sport sponsorship based on the logic of value co-creation is just beginning, but it is already changing the way of thinking in sport management and significantly expanding the horizon of knowledge. Therefore, it offers several promising avenues for researchers and managers.



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## 5.2 Toward a Sport Ecosystem Logic

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### ABSTRACT

Network approaches in sport management are mainly guided by the logic of sport products, where firms produce value that is used-up by consumers. This logic neglects the fundamentally collaborative nature of sport. On the contrary, the logic of value co-creation provides a perspective where actors collaborate to co-create value in sport networks. Thus, this purely conceptual research aims to examine approaches to value co-creation in sport ecosystems to offer a holistic perspective on the interconnectedness of actors and engagement platforms. Using the concepts of value co-creation, engagement platforms, and sport network approaches, this paper conceptualizes the Sport Ecosystem Logic as a general to promote innovative research. Comprising five fundamental premises, the Sport Ecosystem Logic explains how actors' shared interests in sporting activities evolve into an entire sport ecosystem. The Sport Ecosystem Logic advances our understanding of actors' resource integration on sport engagement platforms and how these platforms are interconnected in a sport ecosystem.

**KEYWORDS:** sport ecosystems, sport institutions, resource integration, value co-creation, engagement platforms

The sport ecosystem is a complex network of relationships which is affected by a variety of economic, political, ecological, technological, and social dynamics. Existing work in sport management research utilizes various network approaches to provide aggregated perspectives on the sport system (e.g., Meiklejohn et al., 2016; Richelieu & Webb, 2019; Wolfe et al., 2002). Sport network approaches usually analyze interorganizational relationships (IORS; e.g., Werner et al., 2015) or the dyadic or triadic connections between sport actors such as sponsors and sponsee (e.g., Wagner et al., 2017). Thereby, they consider the value to be produced by organizations and used-up by consumers. This perspective is referred to as the logic of sport products (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020). These sport network approaches and their underlying theoretical foundation neglect the collaborative nature of sport.

The logic of value co-creation provides an opportunity to better understand collaboration in sport and to understand how actors' integrate resources within a sport network. Value co-creation states that many different actors contribute to the value of a sport network, and that no single actor produces value in isolation (Woratschek et al., 2014). Whilst there is an emergent literature stream about value co-creation in sport, most of these studies focus on relationships between a limited set of actors (see Supplementary Material [available online]). The relationships between and amongst sport actors and the interconnectedness of the whole sport ecosystem are without a complete conceptualization in the sport management literature. Consequently, there is no systemic approach to understanding the number and variety of actors within sport ecosystems (i.e., leagues, teams, associations) and their stakeholders (i.e., suppliers, partners, sponsors, government).

Accordingly, and using value co-creation as a cornerstone, the purpose of this article is conceptually advance our understanding of how actors and platforms are interconnected, and how multilateral resource integration impacts systemic governance within the sport industry. We refer to this systemic approach as the Sport Ecosystem Logic (SEL). The SEL aims to provide sport management scholars with a general theory about the co-creation of value in sport ecosystems. This will enable sport management scholars to pursue novel research questions and subsequently advance theory by developing empirically supported models. Conceptual research enables scholars to answer unresolved questions and to stimulate additional research (Ladik & Stewart, 2008). Conceptual research produces systematic structures that can both explain and predict phenomena (Hunt, 1983).

Accordingly, we believe the SEL offers following contributions to a holistic understanding of value co-creation in sport ecosystems. The SEL is the first systematic approach that integrates sport networks, value co-creation in sport, ecosystems, and service ecosystems to produce a general theory about the relationships between and amongst multiple actors interested in sport. Second, the ecosystem and service ecosystem literature does not refer to sporting activities, the fundamental “building block” of sport networks. Sport network approaches, on their part, are largely silent on the importance of value co-creation. This is despite the sport-related value co-creation literature, including the sport value framework, recognizing sporting activities as the core of sport management (Woratschek et al., 2014). The SEL therefore combines nonsport and sport management literature to enrich discussions on various levels regarding value co-creation in sport management. Third, service ecosystem and ecosystem literature captures holistic perspectives to elaborate actors’ position, power, influence, behavior within constellations of networks, or systemic governance and relationships of those networks (Adner, 2017; Vargo & Lusch, 2016). With no equivalent models in sport management, the SEL bridges theories and links different literature streams. Consequently, the SEL provides the opportunity to broaden both researchers’ mind-sets and their scopes of thinking (Gilson & Goldberg 2015).

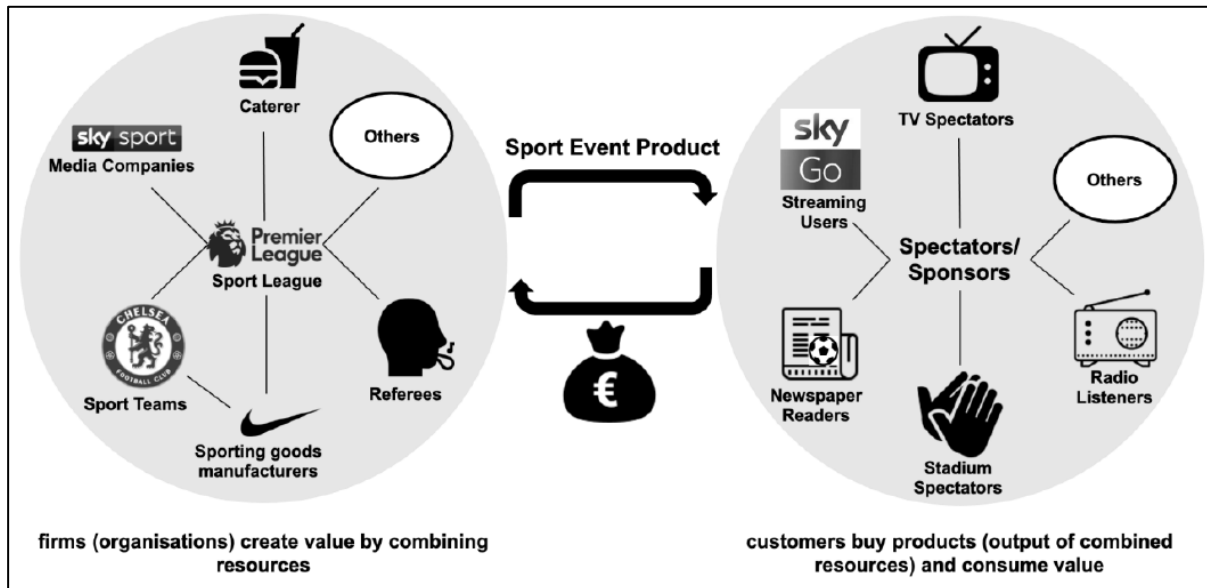
The remainder of the article is organized as follows. We first review the literature related to network approaches within sport management, ecosystems, and service ecosystems. Reflecting a proposition based style of theorizing (Cornelissen, 2017), we then develop five theoretically derived premises to explain how shared interest in sporting activities evolves into a sport ecosystem replete with institutions. For illustration purposes, we also apply each of the fundamental premises to the Olympic Games. The article concludes with a discussion and directions for future research.

## **5.2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **5.2.1.1 SPORT NETWORK APPROACHES AND VALUE CO-CREATION IN SPORT MANAGEMENT**

The sport industry is very often segmented according to product types (Eschenfelder & Li, 2007; Pitts & Miller, 1994). For example, organizations or firms produce a sport. In sport event production, organizations combine different types of resources. These can be financial, physical, legal, human, organizational, informational, or relational resources (Hunt & Derozier, 2004). In general, it is assumed that sport consumers pay for the output of combined resources because they want to consume the value which is embedded within sport products and services. This logic is

deeply embedded in management research (Agha & Dixon, 2021, Li et al., 2001). Woratschek and Griebel (2020) refer to this as the “logic of sport products”. Figure 1 depicts the logic of sport products.



**Figure 1.** Logic of Sport Products (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020)

However, sport event offers need different organizations to collaborate. These would typically include sport leagues, sport teams, referees, manufacturers, venues/facilities, and the media. At its core, the sport event is built on two teams (or athletes) which cooperate and compete simultaneously, a concept widely known as co-opetition (Robert et al., 2009). Another feature is that sport events can be sold at multisided markets (i.e., markets that link two or more distinct but interdependent groups of customers) (Budzinski & Satzer, 2011).

Despite the collaborative nature of sport, only a few sport management studies have applied a network perspective (see Wäsche et al. (2017), for a review of this literature). These studies also used different approaches to ground interactions and linkages between actors. Nearly all of them incorporate the logic of sport products (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020). Chelladurai (2014) argued that sport organizations are part of open systems, defining an open system as a “set of interrelated parts making up an integrated whole” (p. 95). To investigate systems of organizations within sport, Chelladurai nominated stakeholder theory, institutional theory, and resource dependence theory. Those theoretical foundations have partly been addressed within network approaches in sport management.

Specifically, Wolfe et al. (2002) investigated the relationships of sport organizations, governing bodies, the media, and corporate sponsors using network theory. Their paper emphasized issues of power, dependency, and relationships in sport. With new emerging relationships and innovations within the industry, the authors argued that shifts in position, role, and distribution of power provide mutual benefit for network actors (Wolfe et al., 2002). In a similar direction, Thibault and Harvey (1997, p. 46) portrayed interorganizational linkages as “complex arrays of relationships between firms.” The authors based their research on resource dependency theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) and the premise that organizations collaborate to acquire resources and achieve objectives.

Richelieu and Webb (2019) used actor-network theory to conceptualize convergence, contrasts, and coherence of two sport-for-development-and-peace networks. Actor-network theory provides a general understanding of heterogeneous networks of aligned interests between human and nonhuman actors (Law, 1992; Richelieu & Webb, 2019). The authors provided literature-based answers about how and why sport-for-development-and-peace networks develop as well as to what extent collaboration maintains relationships within the networks (Richelieu & Webb, 2019).

Meiklejohn et al. (2016) applied the IOR perspective to sport leagues. The authors empirically analyzed networks within rugby unions in New Zealand conceptualizing collaborating affiliations as cliques, or rather a “group of mutually connected actors within a larger network” within networks (Provan & Sebastian, 1998, p. 454). The determinants of IOR (Oliver, 1990)—stability, reciprocity, efficiency, and knowledge sharing—are also the determinants of cliques Meiklejohn et al. (2016). Interorganizational linkages not only occur in sport leagues but are also discussed and analyzed in the context of mega-events. Werner et al. (2015) empirically investigated the perceived impact of the 2011 Rugby World Cup on relationships and tie strength between regional tourism and its partner organizations. Sport (mega-) events influence both inter- and intra-organizational behavior within the respective destination marketing environment (Werner et al., 2015). Gerke (2016) provides evidence that IORs, more specifically clusters, facilitate innovation.

A different stream in sport management literature uses value co-creation as a theoretical explanation for collaboration (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). In contrast to traditional the logic of sport products (Woratschek & Griebel, 2020), value co-creation does not assume that value is embedded in sport products and services. Rather, value emerges through the collaboration of multiple actors sharing the same interests in sporting activities. Woratschek et al. (2014) were the first to introduce this logic to sport management. The sport value framework posits



that “sporting activities are the core of sport management” (Woratschek et al., 2014, p. 14). Following this idea, a sport event platform is founded on actors’ sporting activities and competition. Consequently, the sport value framework views events as a platform where actors integrate resources and where value is co-created by a network of firms, athletes, fans, service providers, and other stakeholders (Woratschek et al., 2014). Gerke et al. (2020) used the sport value framework to develop a middle-range theory, namely the sport cluster concept.

Although there are studies about the context-dependency of value co-creation (i.e., public viewing, sport bars, and television) (Horbel et al., 2016), none have provided a detailed description of sport event platforms and nor have they examined how these platforms are embedded within a larger sport ecosystem. Existing work on value co-creation in sport management only considers dyads or triads of resource integrating actors and are subsequently limited to micro- or macro-level aggregation (see Supplementary Material [available online]). In contrast, the SEL offers a more holistic perspective by including actors’ systemic contributions and the relationships between and amongst actors, as well as extending industry boundaries.

#### 5.2.1.2 ECOSYSTEMS—A MULTILATERAL PERSPECTIVE

Adner (2017, p. 42) defined an ecosystem as “the multilateral set of partners that need to interact for a focal value proposition to materialise.” Jacobides et al. (2018, p. 2264) suggested that an ecosystem is a “set of actors with varying degrees of multilateral, non-generic complementarities that are not fully hierarchically controlled.” Both definitions put special emphasis on multilateralism. Although an ecosystem is multilateral by nature, Adner (2017) highlighted that an ecosystem consists of multiple partners that are characterized by a joint goal. The interactions and relationships between those partners cannot be broken down into a series of bilateral interactions. Partners are united by the common objective to act collaboratively to ensure that the focal value proposition for relevant stakeholders materializes. Members need to be aware of their alignment, role, and position within the ecosystem (Adner, 2017; Adner & Kapoor, 2010).

Within a business environment, an ecosystem is a “community of organisations, institutions, and individuals that impact the enterprise and the enterprise’s customers and supplies” (Teece, 2007, p. 1325). Companies within a business ecosystem may transcend industry boundaries. By doing so, they cooperate and compete to support innovations within the community to better serve customers’ needs (Moore, 1993). Those communities refer to intentional gatherings of economic actors whose business activities serve the community as a whole (Iansiti & Levien, 2004; Moore,

2006). Business ecosystems, however, are only one stream within what Adner (2017, p. 39) characterized as a “cornucopia of constructs” where ideas and different streams are interrelated in terms of overlaps, boundaries, redundancy as well as applicability in academic and practical analysis.

Jacobides et al. (2018) differentiated between business ecosystems, innovation ecosystems, and platform ecosystems. Business ecosystems focus on actors, such as organizations, institutions, and individuals within an economic community as well as on their activities beyond industry boundaries (Jacobides et al., 2018; Teece, 2007). Innovation ecosystems are built on a focal innovation and the constellation of interdependent players that interact to develop (research economy) and commercialize (commercial economy) the product or service innovation (Adner, 2006; Oh et al., 2016). Platform ecosystems are created by the interactions between the platform operators and their complementors, such as platform users, advertisers, and content providers (Eloranta & Turunen, 2016; Jacobides et al., 2018).

In contrast to business nets or networks, ecosystems are more than the direct and indirect linkages of actors (Aarikka-Stenroos & Ritala, 2017; Möller, 2013). By including outside-actors, organizations, and technologies ecosystems are characterized by a much looser and less formal affiliation of actors (Aarikka-Stenroos & Ritala, 2017). Membership of the ecosystem is determined by interdependencies based on relational concepts, such as shared fate (Iansiti & Levien, 2004), shared purpose (Moore, 2013), institutional arrangements (Vargo & Lusch, 2016), or affiliation (Adner, 2017).

A key characteristic of ecosystems is coopetition (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 2011; Hannah & Eisenhardt, 2018). Coopetition “describes how businesses simultaneously compete and cooperate with competitors, suppliers, customers, and other ‘players’ in their environments” (Dobbs, 2010, p. 35). The balance between cooperation and competition is evident throughout multiple ecosystem levels, including product or service level interactions within the ecosystem and even between ecosystems (Hannah & Eisenhardt, 2018).

Coopetition is also discussed in the sport management and marketing literature. Studies on coopetition in sport marketing and management are widely spread over different fields, such as sport tourism (Lorgnier & Su, 2014), nonprofit (Wemmer et al., 2016) and for-profit (Robert et al., 2009) sport clubs, or sport brands (Rodrigues et al., 2009).

### 5.2.1.3 SERVICE ECOSYSTEMS—A VALUE CO-CREATION PERSPECTIVE

Value co-creation is useful for understanding how actors collaborate for mutual benefit. The co-creation of value “involves the joint creation of value by the firm and its network of various entities” (Perks et al., 2012, p. 935). These social or economic actors benefit from integrating others’ resources.

Resource integration is most often perceived positively, given its link to value co-creation. Here we acknowledge that the outcome of the collaborative value-creating process can be positive or negative for an individual actor. Negative outcomes reflect what some authors call value co-destruction (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011; Plé & Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010). In our opinion, value is never totally destroyed but can be disrupted or diminished to a certain degree. This is possible given that value co-creation is dynamic and multi-dimensional. For example, fans chanting songs of abuse may be positive for them, but likely negative for others. At the same time, all spectators may still enjoy the game and the thrill of their favorite team winning. Furthermore, value does not vanish because it is always determined by the beneficiary (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). Even corruption, doping, or cheating creates some benefits for other actors. Although we prefer the term value disruption, we acknowledge the relevance of value co-destruction to understanding value.

Value co-creation requires interaction between two or more resource-integrating actors (Breibach & Maglio, 2016). For value co-creation to emerge, one actor needs to initiate the process with a value proposition. Chandler and Vargo (2011, p. 8) defined value propositions as “invitations from actors to one another to engage in service.” Here, service is defined as “the application of specialized competences (knowledge and skills) through deeds, processes, and performances for the benefit of another entity or the entity itself” (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, p. 3).

In its early years, academic discussions on value co-creation were concerned with interactions between only two actors, in most cases, a firm and a customer. Over the last 15 years, however, researchers have pursued multi-actor settings, or ecosystems of actors (Akaka & Vargo, 2015). Scholars argue that dyadic interaction represents the starting point for the emergence of broader systems of actors and a holistic picture of the co-creation of value (Chandler & Vargo, 2011). A service ecosystem is defined as “relatively self-contained, self-adjusting system of resource-integrating actors that are connected by shared institutional logics and mutual value creation through service exchange” (Vargo & Lusch, 2016, p. 10). Institutions and the above-mentioned institutional logics are important in service-dominant logic, because they coordinate value co-

creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). Institutions are defined as all types of “rules, norms, meanings, symbols, practices, and similar aides to collaboration” (Vargo & Lusch, 2016, p. 6). Scott (2013) described institutions as multifaceted social structures that consist of symbolic and material elements, as well as social activities. Institutions can be formal (laws by legal authorities) or informal, and reflect the culture, beliefs, norms, values, and morals within a society (Brodie et al., 2019; North, 1990). Scott (2013) differentiated between three categories of institutions, so-called institutional pillars. There is the regulative pillar (i.e., rules and laws by governing bodies), the normative pillar (i.e., social values, norms, and obligations), and the cultural-cognitive pillar (i.e., common societal beliefs and shared understanding).

Institutions are dynamic, meaning that they are subject to constant revision, change, and adaption by the actors (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). Vargo and Akaka (2012) consider institutions as necessary operant resources for value co-creation, as they influence and guide actors’ behavior and by that enable social interaction. Complex problems and interrelationships within a service ecosystem can be observed throughout different levels of aggregation (Woratschek et al., 2020a). The three aggregation levels are micro (i.e., actors), meso (i.e., sets of actors on platforms), and macro (i.e., ecosystems and institutions) (Storbacka et al., 2016).

Engagement platforms support continuous interaction and value co-creation between actors (Breidbach & Brodie, 2017; Ramaswamy, 2009). Chakrabarti and Ramaswamy (2014, p. 1286) conceptualized engagement platforms as “assemblage(s) of artefacts, persons, interfaces, and processes” that support value co-creation. In addition to that, Breidbach et al. (2014, p. 594) defined engagement platforms as “physical or virtual touch points designed to provide structural support for the exchange and integration of resources, and thereby co-creation of value between actors in a service system”. In other words, engagement platforms facilitate continuous interaction (Ramaswamy, 2009), orchestrate resource exchange between actors within a service ecosystem (Breidbach & Brodie, 2017), and are therefore an enabling resource for value co-creation (Frow et al., 2015).

### 5.2.2 CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Sport network approaches have embraced the logic of sport products and widely neglected the collaborative resource integration of sport actors. An exception is the connection between the cluster concept as a sport network approach with the idea of value co-creation (Gerke et al., 2020). Studies on value co-creation in sport management typically consider only a limited set of actors or the specific contexts. The context refers to a “unique set of actors and the unique reciprocal links among them” (Chandler & Vargo, 2011, p. 41). Most of these articles only take a micro- or meso-perspective. However, there is a lack of conceptual research that extends this perspective beyond an event platform and answers the question of how platforms are embedded in a larger sport ecosystem. Theoretical advances regarding management and service ecosystems can explain the contributions of actors and the interconnectedness of platforms in the sport ecosystem. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the uniqueness (or at least the defining characteristics) of sport management and the wider sport ecosystem. The unique/defining characteristics of sport management are discussed by various researchers (Andrew et al., 2019; Chalip, 2006; Hoye et al., 2008). Sport is based on emotionally loaded and cooperative sporting activities (Woratschek et al., 2014). This is not reflected in the service-dominant logic.

Sport management scholars identify overlapping interests with other fields, and the competitive and cooperative nuances of sport (Agha & Dixon, 2021; Andrew et al., 2019; Chalip, 2006; Hoye et al., 2008). Common themes are the creation of value, branding, business development, product and service innovations as well as market expansion. Organizations in sport place particular emphasis on defeating on-field opponents, winning trophies, sharing revenue with others, and handling unique relationships to athletes as employees and fans as customers (Foster et al., 2006; Smith & Stewart, 2010). Woratschek et al. (2014, p. 13) also discussed the defining characteristics of sport management, “for instance, the mix of volunteers and professionals, cooperation, events sold directly and via different media and emotional customers.” In addition to the defining characteristics of the sport ecosystem, there is a need to also consider the wide variety of sport. Richelieu and Webb (2019, p. 3) described this variety of sport as a continuum “from kids playing hockey in the street, to jogging with a dog, to highly coded, structured, politicized, and disciplined events, sport is a term that academic literature applies to a bewildering spectrum of human activities.” The sport ecosystem covers a tremendous spectrum of actors, from for-profit to nonprofit, from governmental to nongovernmental, from professional to amateur. These actors and

their relationships create the sport ecosystem. Theoretical approaches covering the networks and interconnections of actors are not able to provide a holistic picture. This might be because underlying theories, for example stakeholder theory, institutional theory, and resource dependence theory (Chelladurai, 2014), focus too much on actors' roles and special characteristics (i.e., power, convergence, or motives) without considering a macro-level perspective. We argue that the SEL offers a foundation for an aggregated, macro-level perspective of sport ecosystems.

With theoretical foundations in place, we can now articulate the five fundamental premises that constitute to the SEL. This ensures that the SEL is "based on a novel and distinct set of theoretical grounds" (Cornelissen, 2017, p. 4). We build the SEL from the micro- to the macro-level (i.e., bottom-up approach) and use examples to contextualize our argument.

#### 5.2.2.1 FP 1: ACTORS HAVE JOINT INTERESTS IN SPECIFIC SPORTING ACTIVITIES

Fundamental Premise 1 (FP1) is derived from the sport value framework (Woratschek et al., 2014). To develop a systemic approach, it is necessary to place sporting activities at the center of the discussion. Actors on an individual level (athlete, teams, physically active) agree to compete or do sport as a leisure activity. Therefore, the process needs to be initialized with a value proposition (Chandler & Vargo, 2011). One actor (individual sport) or a set of actors (team sport) invite another actor or other actors to engage in sport. The value proposition equals another actor's interest in sporting activities and desire to compete against others on an elite, nonelite but also on an informal physical activity level. Actors consequently have joint goals and specific complementarities (Jacobides et al., 2018) to engage in sporting activities that are core to sport management (Woratschek et al., 2014).

Actors are inclined to act collaboratively when pursuing a common objective (Adner, 2017). This shared objective is based on each actor's interest in sport. However, even with a shared interest in sporting activities, actors also have additional interests. Subsequently, the management of stakeholders' diverse additional interests is a major governance task (Amis, et al., 2020). Individual actors, or groups of actors, interact in three ways. First, their additional interests, besides the shared interest in sporting activities, can be complementary. For example, fans' interests in posting positive stories about a sport team on social media leads to better image of the team. This is also in the interest of the sponsor, as the sponsor benefits from image-transfer. Second, actors' additional interests can stay in conflict to each other. Amis et al. (2020) call for a theory of stakeholder governance where conflicts between multiple stakeholders can be resolved. Such a multilateral

conflict might occur when the league suspends a player for an off-field miscreant behavior. The player's team protests the decision, as does the player's association. Fans speculate on the nature of the miscreant behavior on social media, as do pundits on late night sport television shows. The betting market may also become uncertain because the player is unavailable for the championship game. Third, interests amongst actors can be neither complementary nor conflicting but neutral to each other. At live events, fans enjoy having drinks and cheering with their peers, whereas sponsors in the hospitality area focus on creating business contacts.

Sporting activities and the corresponding actors, who initiate value co-creation with their shared interest, have network-wide power, meaning that they cannot be excluded from the network (Markovsky et al., 1988). In other words, if a sport game is scheduled and one actor does not attend, the competition and all associated sporting activities will not occur. With FP1, we propose that the fundamental basis of the sport ecosystem is each actors' interest in being involved in sporting activities and competition.

To illustrate, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the Tokyo Olympics from occurring in 2020. With like-minded actors not allowed to compete against each other, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) postponed the event. Consequently, the Olympic ecosystem was not able to be established in 2020.

#### 5.2.2.2 FP 2: ACTORS INTEGRATE RESOURCES TO CO-CREATE VALUE BASED ON SPORTING ACTIVITIES

FP2 is that actors integrate resources to co-create value based on sporting activities. In doing so, actors provide resources and simultaneously use other's resources in a micro-level value co-creation process (Storbacka et al., 2016). The interactions and relationships between those partnering actors are characterized by a common objective (Adner, 2017). The objective is to create (elite, nonelite, or informal) sporting activities. Collaboration occurs because actors on an individual level (i.e., athletes, teams) agree to compete or be physically active (FP1). The joint creation and acceptance of a value proposition thereby sets the stage for resource integration. Hence, firms, customers, and other actors, provide and use resources and integrate them in a collaborative value co-creation process (Woratschek et al., 2020a).

Resource integration can be imbalanced or balanced. Imbalanced resource integration is a predominant topic in sport management. It implies that actors voluntarily provide their own resources without expecting to benefit in the short term. This is often the case in sport event management, where event organizers, but also various other actors, benefit from the resource

integration of volunteer workers. Those volunteers provide their time and expertise to support the co-creation of sport events. At the same time, other actors, such as sponsors and sponsees voluntarily engage beyond the sponsorship contract and integrate resources for the use of other actors (i.e., sponsors, media, league officials, politicians) (Buser et al., 2020). In a balanced exchange of resources, actors provide resources and at the same time benefit from using the other actor's resources. This is the case when a sponsor provides payment in cash or in kind to a sport organization and receives in exchange sponsorship rights incorporating access to hospitality at the game, athletes for commercial purposes, and the placement of corporate logos. Consequently, the sponsor also accesses the media, politicians, or sport fans, which moves beyond a bilateral relationship to multilateral resource integration.

Consider the example of the 100-m sprint final at the Olympic Games. Here, the eight finalists integrate their talent, passion, and hard work to create the race within the wider athletics program. However, the eight finalists have already integrated their resources with the resources of nonfinalists during the heats, quarter, and semi-finals. Amongst others, the eight finalists also benefit from the contributions of World Athletics, the IOC, their national Olympic committees and national athletics federations, event volunteers, sponsors, and broadcasters as part of the value co-creation process.

### 5.2.2.3 FP 3: ACTORS CO-CREATE VALUE ON SPORT ENGAGEMENT PLATFORMS

A sport event provides a platform where actors co-create value within a network (Woratschek et al., 2014). The event attracts other actors to provide resources while at the same time using other's resources to co-create value. Those actors might be spectators, media, sponsors, volunteers, service providers, and others. On this basis, we propose FP3, which is that actors co-create value on sport engagement platforms.

Business ecosystems focus on actors within an economic community as well as on their activities beyond industry boundaries (Jacobides et al., 2018; Teece, 2007). Sport events have economic links and activities beyond sport industry boundaries, such as tax consultancy, politics, and construction industry, and serve as intermediaries between actors, for example, between the different sponsors and different spectator groups. In the management literature, platforms are defined as intermediaries of connections between market participants (Thomas et al., 2014). Businesses based on platforms can shape markets and blur lines between B2B and B2C (Ehret et al., 2013). This is why sport platform providers such as the IOC or Local Organizing Committees



(LOC) cannot be precisely categorized as B2B or B2C as the service ecosystem literature shifts the focus to actor to actor (A2A). Platform providers facilitate networks of partnerships (i.e., sponsorship networks, athlete networks, and political networks). The networks of partnerships surrounding platform providers are called platform ecosystems (Fehrer et al., 2018).

Sport event organizers provide different types of platforms. These refer to multisided markets and link different actors to co-create value via resource integration. Following Breidbach and Brodie (2017) and Storbacka et al. (2016), individuals' micro-level engagement (i.e., dyads and triads) facilitate different actors to integrate resources on engagement platforms at the meso-level. A focal actor is responsible for the platform's virtual and physical infrastructure. The engagement platform represents a resource integrated by the platform operator. The sport engagement platform supports value co-creation in multilateral relations and interaction between resource integrating actors based on sporting activities. Besides the provision of the engagement platform itself, the platform hosting focal actor at the same time also integrates other resources. The engagement platform perspective allows us to apply theoretical ideas to various contexts and settings. The resource integrating actors and the type of resources, however, change depending on the context. That is to say, the situational factors impacting the resource-integrating process (Löbler & Hahn, 2013) and the characteristics of reciprocal links among the actors (Chandler & Vargo, 2011) depend on the engagement platform. Consistent with FP1 however, sporting activities are always considered as the fundamental basis and actors' shared interest on engagement platforms.

The IOC contracts a LOC to provide engagement platforms for the IOC to host the competitions of the different disciplines. Within these venues, all actors provide their own and use other's resources to co-create value (FP1 & FP2). Using the event platform, they facilitate other actors to join the platform (i.e., fans, sponsors, media) and integrate their resources. In addition to physical event platforms, the LOC may also provide virtual platforms, such as fan apps, to connect the various actors.

#### 5.2.2.4 FP 4: MUTUALLY DEPENDENT NETWORKS OF SPORT ENGAGEMENT PLATFORMS COMPRISE THE SPORT ECOSYSTEM

In this section, we propose FP4, which is that mutually dependent networks of sport engagement platforms comprise the sport ecosystem. The sport value framework recognizes that sporting activities provide many types of platforms, not just an event platform. Consequently, various different engagement platforms emerge. One might be the esport platform, which replicates real

world sporting competitions. For example, there is Fédération Internationale de Football Association Online, a series of online sport games developed by Electronic Arts. The sport betting platform integrates actors such as betting agencies, government, and consumers with resource integrating actors such as sport organizations, sponsors, facilities, broadcasters, and so on. Sporting activities are the fundamental basis for all of these engagement platforms. On these engagement platforms, actors integrate resources for value co-creation. This constitutes the meso-level of the SEL. Thus, the mutually dependent engagement platforms comprise an ecosystem on the macro-level (Breidbach et al., 2014; Storbacka et al., 2016). Transferring this argument to the SEL, meso-level platforms (FP3) based on micro-level sporting activities (FP1 & FP2), create macro-level sport ecosystems.

The next step of the SEL is to describe how engagement platforms are interconnected. Sport actors' resource integration is not limited to one particular engagement platform. The integration can occur across multiple platforms. A sponsor can be associated with multiple sport event platforms. A sport club can participate in a national championship (i.e., English Premier League) as well as in international competitions (i.e., Union of European Football Associations champions league). An athlete's image can appear on a breakfast cereal box and as an avatar in an esports game. An organization can make available sport statistics to sport teams as well as fantasy sport businesses. These platform-spanning connections create a myriad of direct and indirect linkages (Aarikka-Stenroos & Ritala, 2017). Clearly, actors can integrate resources on different platforms. Actors that belong to more than one platform link platforms, which creates mutual dependency between networks of platforms.

We want to emphasize that a sport ecosystem is different to the sport industry. Whilst it is well accepted that sport organizations comprise the sport industry, actors from outside the sport industry are members of the sport ecosystem. Some actors, organizations, and technologies have a looser and less formal affiliation to the platform (Aarikka-Stenroos & Ritala, 2017). However, they still belong to the sport ecosystem because they share interests in respective sporting activities. This is contrary to the sport industry approach, which is based on outputs as resource combinations (products and services), and therefore following the logic of sport products. Following a sport industry approach, contributions from actors outside the industry are excluded. From the SEL perspective, all actors, even those outside of sport can contribute through resource integration in the sport ecosystem. Consequently, the sport ecosystem is built through mutually dependent

networks of sport engagement platforms by extending the industry boundaries to all actors contributing in resource integration.

To contextualize this premise, we note that during the Olympic Games various sporting activities and disciplines are staged in the same community over a short period of time. At the event, there is the resource integration of dyads and triads of actors (microlevel: e.g., fans-sponsors-sport organization), sport engagement platforms (mesolevel: e.g., sport event, hospitality area, fan app), and mutually dependent networks of platforms (macrolevel: e.g., Olympics ecosystem, League of Legends ecosystem) arise. Actors are integrating resources on more than one platform. It is possible for a volunteer to drive corporate sponsors to the Olympic sponsorship engagement platform and to drive drug testers to the sport event engagement platform. Olympic partners might also integrate resources on other sport engagement platforms. Coca-Cola, an Olympic partner, for example, may also partner with the National Basketball Association or National Collegiate Athletic Association or even advertise during the TV show *American Idol* (Coca-Cola, 2020). Whilst Coca-Cola is not a sport actor, it is undeniable that the soft-drink manufacturer integrates resources within various sport ecosystems. Within the sport ecosystem there are many actors without a direct connection to sport. Their interest in sporting activities (i.e., sponsorship, broadcasting) embeds them within the sport ecosystem.

#### 5.2.2.5 FP 5: THERE IS A CYCLE OF INSTITUTIONS FORMING ACTORS' BEHAVIORS AND ACTORS' BEHAVIORS SHAPING INSTITUTIONS

With FP5, we propose that the ecosystem is characterized by shared institutions (Vargo & Lusch, 2016) and that formal and informal rules (Brodie et al., 2019) form actors' behaviors. At the same time, actors' behaviors shape institutions in a virtuous or vicious cycle. The valence of this cycle individually depends as value is always determined by the beneficiary (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). The circular process of institutions forming actors' behaviors and actors' behaviors shaping institutions is continuously reinforcing itself. This is also reflected in sociological theories where humans' actions create society and at the same time are shaped by the society around them (Giddens, 1982).

The cycle of institutions consists of both formal and informal institutions. Formal institutions include rules and laws that can result in sanctions if violated. Such institutions are summarized under the regulative pillar (Scott, 2013). In sport, governing bodies monitor actor behavior, or rather the compliance with the formal institutions (i.e., leagues, federations, anti-doping agencies). Governing bodies sanction actors that violate formal institutions. Rules and regulations in sport are

followed not only by the sport competitors but also applied by other actors. For example, the rules of golf define equipment characteristics, which constrain the design and manufacture of golf clubs and golf balls. Informal institutions in sport are much more complex. Such institutions are summarized under the normative and cultural-cognitive pillar (Scott, 2013). Informal institutions include values, norms and social obligations (i.e., normative) as well as common beliefs within a shared understanding (i.e., cultural-cognitive) (Scott, 2013). In sport, informal institutions include sportspersonship and the underpinning values of fairness, inclusiveness, excellence, friendship and respect. Koenigstorfer and Preuss (2018) label these values as appreciation of diversity, friendly relations with others, and achievement in competition. Informal institutions also include cultural beliefs such as fan identification (Gwinner & Swanson, 2003) or fan engagement (Yoshida et al., 2014). Institutions are enduring elements in social life that affect actors' dispositions and behaviors (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Sport actors are guided by institutions. Institutions form actors' behaviors. These institutions are necessary for the integration of resources, because they influence actors' behaviors and therefore the interactions that underpin value co-creation.

Actors within the sport ecosystem utilize and adapt both formal and informal institutions to integrate resources within the ecosystem. Institutions form actors' behaviors. For example, behaviors are guided because violations are sanctioned by governing bodies. On the contrary, social belongingness requires the adaption of normative and cultural-cognitive institutions. Sport actors, both athletes and spectators, need to adapt values and a shared contextual understanding to be part of the platform.

In addition, actors' behaviors shape and refine institutions by creating knowledge and practices that serve other actors to govern aspects of social life (Scott, 2013), and thus co-create benefits for other actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). Institutions are not permanent; they are always subject to change and further development (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). The development and adjustment to actors' behaviors is part of a recurring process. Therefore, FP5 is that institutions forming actors' behaviors and actors' behaviors shaping institutions are reinforcing themselves in a cycle.

Many institutions form the Olympic Games. Each participating international sport federation has its own rules and regulations. This is underpinned by the IOC's commitment to safeguard the integrity of sport. In addition to that, the IOC has its own set of rules and regulations. For instance, the ability of athletes to use social media is constrained. The ability of athletes to promote their personal sponsors is limited. The behavior of partners is regulated via detailed contracts. Athletes

follow stringent and intricate anti-doping policies. These formal institutions are part of the regulative pillar by Scott (2013). Besides formal institutions, the Olympic Games also contain a set of informal intuitions. Actors are encouraged to follow the Olympic values of excellence, friendship and respect. These normative and cultural-cognitive institutions are promulgated by the IOC and wider Olympic Movement. Actors are also able to shape institutions. The global interest in esports, specifically on the Asian continent, paired with growing economic power and professionalism of esports caused the IOC to partner with Intel, one of the world's leading multinational technology corporations, and stage an esports tournament for the first time in Tokyo 2021 and Beijing 2022. The Intel World Open led-up to Tokyo 2021. Shaping the institution to allow digital sport stakeholders to integrate their resources at the Olympics is certainly innovative.

### 5.2.3 THE SPORT ECOSYSTEM LOGIC

Put simply, the SEL states that sport actors have joint interest in sporting activities on an elite, nonelite or informal level (FP1) and integrate their resources to co-create value (FP2). Based on these sporting activities, actors' collaborative resource integration occurs on sport engagement platforms (FP3). Because actors integrate resources on more than one interconnected engagement platform, the sport ecosystem is comprised of mutually dependent networks of sport engagement platforms. The sport ecosystem, in contrast to the sport industry perspective, includes all relevant resource integrators that share an interest in sporting activities (FP4). Ultimately, institutions within the sport ecosystem form actors' behaviors and actors' behaviors shape institutions in a cycle (FP5). Those fundamental premises contribute to the bottom-up approach of the SEL. Table 1 provides an overview over the fundamental premises, their theoretical origins, and explanation.

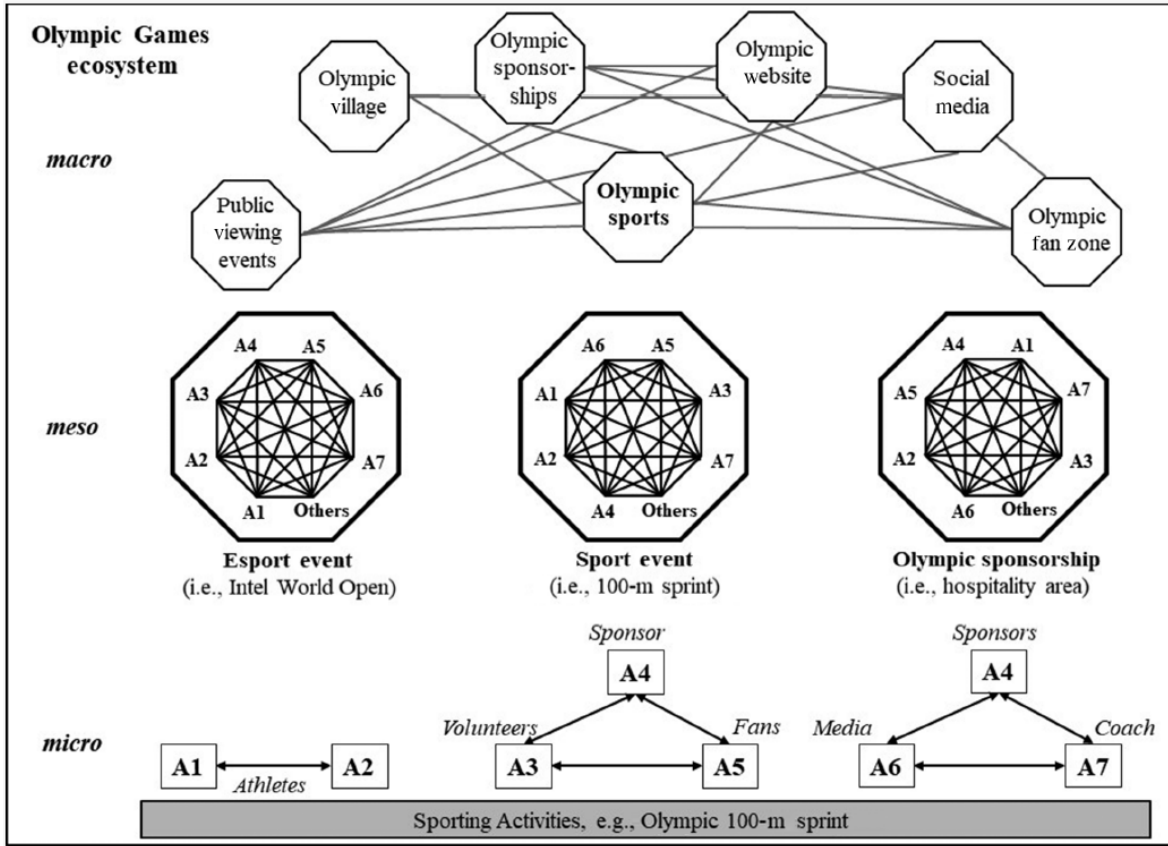
**Table 1.** FPs of the SEL.

	Fundamental Premises	Theoretical Origin	Explanation
FP1	Actors have joint interests in specific sporting activities.	<i>Ecosystem and service ecosystem literatures both emphasize collaborative joint goals and specific complementarities. The SVF by Woratschek et al. (2014) states that sporting activities are in the core of sport management.</i>	Athletes compete or sportsmen and—women leisurely participate in sports. These sporting activities are fundamental for other actors to join.
FP2	Actors integrate resources to co-create value based on sporting activities.	<i>Ecosystem literature highlights the need to interact. Service ecosystem literature introduces resource integration as basis for value co-creation. SVF describes considers all stakeholders in specific sporting activities to be resource integrators in their specific networks.</i>	Resource integration is both resource provision and resource usage. Actors provide resources for the benefit of others and they use resources from others for their own benefit. Resource integration leads to value co-creation.
FP3	Actors co-create value on sport engagement platforms	<i>Ecosystem literature refers to business platforms where focal actors create multisided markets. Service ecosystem literature introduces engagement</i>	Focal actors provide sport engagement platforms to enable and facilitate all actors' value co-creation. Furthermore, they grant access to other actors and

		platforms as offline and online touchpoints to support value co-creation. <i>SVF</i> refers platforms to sport events where actors spend their business and leisure activities.	also use the platform for their individual benefit. In the SEL, sport engagement platforms are defined as online and offline touchpoints to support value co-creation in multilateral relations based on sporting activities.
FP4	Mutually dependent networks of sport engagement platforms comprise the sport ecosystem	<i>Ecosystem literature</i> emphasizes multilateral sets of actors in networks. <i>Service ecosystems</i> are “dynamic constellations of mutually dependent engagement platforms” (Breidbach et al., 2014, p. 600). In <i>sport management</i> , authors use network theory to describe the context-dependent relations of actors and their power.	Actors are not solely integrating resources on one platform. Those platforms are interconnected and build networks. Sport industries are based on outputs as resource combinations (products and services). Sport ecosystems are based on sporting activities and include platforms from other industries as long as they have interests in sporting activities. A sport ecosystem includes all relevant actors contributing to value co-creation in sport management.
FP5	There is a cycle of institutions forming actors’ behaviors and actors’ behaviors shaping institutions	<i>Ecosystems</i> are not fully hierarchically controlled, but based on relational concepts, like shared fate or shared purpose. In <i>service ecosystems</i> institutions form actors and are shaped by actors. In <i>sport management</i> literature institutions influence (inter- and intra-) organizational behavior.	Institutions form actors’ behaviors in a sport ecosystem but can also be shaped by actors in a cycle. Those institutions are very prominent and powerful in the sport context. Sport institutions are formal (i.e., rules, regulations) as well as informal (i.e., values, beliefs). Institutions are always subject to change and further development (i.e., adaption or rules, fan movements or behaviors) and can therefore lead to innovation.

*Note.* FP = Fundamental Premise; SVF = Sport Value Framework; SEL = Sport Ecosystem Logic.

Figure 2 illustrates the bottom-up approach within the Olympic Games ecosystem. On a micro-level of aggregation, at least two actors collaborate with a joint interest in sporting activities, ‘i.e., the Olympic 100-m sprint’. Microlevel analyses mostly are based on dyads or triads. As more and more actors with shared interest in sporting activities collaborate, engagement platforms emerge, and actors integrate resources on those engagement platforms at the mesolevel of aggregation. Those actors (A) might be athletes (A1 & A2), volunteers (A3), sponsors (A4), fans (A5), media (A6), coaches (A7), officials, event staff, politicians, and further actors. Based on this specific sporting activities (Olympic 100-m sprint), various other engagement platforms, such as the Olympic village, Olympic public viewing, Olympic sponsorship, and others emerge. Those engagement platforms are connected because actors participate in more than one platform, provide resources, and benefit from using the resources provided by other actors in the network of engagement platforms. This network of mutually dependent sport engagement platforms comprises the Olympic Games ecosystem on the macrolevel of aggregation.



**Figure 2.** Olympic Games ecosystem: microlevel, mesolevel, and macrolevel of aggregation.

**5.2.4 CONTRIBUTIONS**

With the conceptualization of the SEL, we aimed to contribute to a holistic understanding of the interconnectedness of actors and engagement platforms and the co-creation of value within sport ecosystems. The SEL supports sport management and marketing academics in explaining phenomena of relationships and connections as part of value co-creation. The SEL is a general theory about value co-creation in sport ecosystems that provides a broader understanding compared to existing network approaches in sport management, which are mostly based on the logic of sport products. The value co-creation perspective represents the collaborative nature of sport and how actors integrate resources multilaterally.

The key contribution of the SEL is an explanation of the interorganizational relationships amongst micro-, meso- or macrolevel actors and the connections through multilateral resource integration to actors from outside the industry. The SEL is premised upon theory synthesis (i.e., conceptual integration across multiple theories or literature streams) and theory adaption (i.e., amend an existing theory by using other theories) (Jaakkola, 2020). The integration of management

and service-related ecosystem literature (i.e., synthesis) serves as a theoretical underpinning of actors' contributions and the interconnectedness of engagement platforms in the sport ecosystem (i.e., adaption). To advance our understanding of the relationships within and beyond the sport industry, the SEL conceptualizes value co-creation (originating from service-dominant logic) based on shared interest in sporting activities (originating from the sport value framework) on multiple levels of the sport ecosystem (see Figure 2).

The SEL is a general theory about value co-creation in sport ecosystems. As such, it provides some distinct contributions to the sport management literature. First, the SEL takes the perspectives on theory building of Gioia and Pitre (1990) and Peters et al. (2014) and describes and explains observable processes and phenomena through a set of premises. These premises situate sporting activities at the center of value-creating relationships in the sport ecosystem. Sporting activities offer the opportunity to co-create value through resource integration on sport engagement platforms. In contrast to sport network approaches where value is produced by sport firms and destroyed by consumers, the SEL proposes that value emerges through the engagement and joint collaboration of many actors in the same sporting activity. Within the SEL, actors integrate resources on different mutually dependent platforms, which build networks in a sport ecosystem. Institutions form how actors integrate resources, but actors can also shape those institutions.

Second, by combining different literature streams, the SEL conceptually advances our understanding of sport ecosystems and how multiple actors co-create value through resource integration. Ecosystem literature states that multilateral set of actors with specific complementarities need to interact. Service ecosystem literature indicates how value emerges through resource integration formed by actor-shaped institutions. Sport network approaches in sport management emphasize the value of coordination and collaboration amongst competitors. Value co-creation literature in sport management emphasizes that sporting activities are the foundation of sport networks.

Third, the SEL explains why and how sporting activities are the basis for value-creating relationships. Actors provide and use resources in multilateral relationships on a sport engagement platform with both physical and virtual touchpoints. Given that actors can integrate resources on different engagement platforms, sport engagement platforms are linked to each other. This is why explanations of how value emerges in the sport ecosystem should oscillate between dyads and triads (micro-level), sport engagement platforms (meso-level), and networks (macro-level). In



contrast to the service-dominant logic, the SEL includes sport engagement platforms with all the defining characteristics of sporting activities. For instance, sporting activities lead to voluntary engagement of sport fans (i.e., rituals, word-of-mouth communication) (Woratschek et al., 2020b). Moreover, sponsors can engage in interorganizational citizenships behaviors (Gerke et al., 2017) by voluntarily integrating resources (i.e., management competencies, technical competencies, and innovative ideas) above and beyond the terms of the contract (Buser et al., 2020). Other actors also engage in voluntary activities and contribute to value co-creation on sport engagement platforms. For example, politicians can provide patronage of a sporting event. The SEL explains how connections between these platforms create a sport ecosystem with all its defining characteristics.

In contrast to a sport industry perspective based on the logic of sport products, the SEL clearly states that value emerges because many actors integrate resources in multilateral relationships in a complex system. Value is not solely created by sport organizations. Hence, unlike other approaches, all value-contributing actors are incorporated within the SEL.

Overall, the SEL enhances the capacity of sport management researchers to understand the perspective and position of an actor within a sport ecosystem. The different levels of aggregation provide useful guidelines for classifying both actors and engagement platforms. Moreover, the SEL conceptualizes the interconnectedness of actors with shared interests in sporting activities, their multilateral resource integration on engagement platforms, and ultimately the interaction of cooperative and competitive behaviors within the sport ecosystem. This systemic perspective enhances traditional sport network approaches by amplifying the importance of value co-creation in sport management.

Future researchers can utilize the SEL to pursue a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships between and amongst sport actors, sport engagement platforms, and sport ecosystems. Reflecting on the five fundamental premises of the SEL, we propose five themes to guide future research, each with several exemplary research questions. These ideas are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Future Research Themes.

	FPs	Future research theme	Exemplary research questions
FP1	Actors have joint interests in specific sporting activities.	Complementary and/or conflicting interests of actors beyond sporting activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are actors' interests beyond sporting activities?</li> <li>• How can actors manage conflicting interests and leverage complementary interests?</li> <li>• How can platform providers effectively resolve multilateral conflicts?</li> </ul>
FP2	Actors integrate resources to co-create value based on sporting activities.	Balanced and imbalanced resource integration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What motivates actors to integrate resources (voluntarily)?</li> <li>• How does context impact the voluntary integration of resources?</li> <li>• What types of resources are integrated voluntarily?</li> </ul>
FP3	Actors co-create value on sport engagement platforms	Role of sport engagement platforms to facilitate relationships and value co-creation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What platform infrastructure characteristics encourage resource integration amongst multiple actors?</li> <li>• How to manage the optimal combination of virtual and physical sport engagement platforms?</li> <li>• What are complementary and conflicting interests on sport engagement platforms?</li> </ul>
FP4	Mutually dependent networks of sport engagement platforms comprise the sport ecosystem	Systemic governance of mutually dependent sport engagement platforms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What characterizes powerful focal actors sport engagement platforms within the ecosystem?</li> <li>• How to design a system of engagement platforms for the benefit of all resource integrating actors?</li> <li>• What kind of engagement platforms have to be offered for actors with complementary or conflicting interests?</li> </ul>
FP5	There is a cycle of institutions forming actors' behaviors and actors' behaviors shaping institutions	Institutions influencing the economic, environmental, and social value within the sport ecosystem.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can actors collaboratively define and subsequently shape institutions within the ecosystem?</li> <li>• Under what circumstances do actors initiate collaborative shaping of institutions and how do they convince other actors to contribute and innovate?</li> <li>• How can actors leverage institutions to promote business innovation and shape markets?</li> </ul>

*Note.* FP = Fundamental Premise.

Sporting activities are the fundamental 'building blocks' for the emergence of sport ecosystems (FP1). The shared interest in those specific sporting activities, which initially are necessary for the emergence of value-creating relationships, are highly relevant when discussing value co-creation in sport management. In addition, actors' or group of actors' interests beyond the sporting activities can be complementary or conflicting – or somewhere in between; or perhaps even both simultaneously. Conflict is especially relevant when considering the economic and noneconomic interests of stakeholders in multilateral relationships (Amis et al., 2020). As a result, the motives and additional interests need to be further researched to understand multilateral relationships in sport management. First and foremost, conflicting interests represent a topic that is as interesting as it is complex.

With a sporting activity, actors participate in multilateral resource exchange with other actors. From professional sport and mega events through to informal sport gatherings, actors provide their own resources and use others' resources. The multilateral integration of resources can be balanced

or imbalanced. Imbalanced resource integration is mainly caused by voluntary behavior, ‘i.e., interorganizational citizenship behavior’ (Gerke et al., 2017) or engagement behavior (van Doorn et al., 2010). Moving beyond the traditional realm of people volunteering (i.e., Bang & Chelladurai, 2009; Hallmann & Harms, 2012), we should also seek a better understanding of the voluntary behaviors and voluntary resource integration enacted by sponsors, sponsees, government, and media.

The FP3 considers engagement platforms as touchpoints for multilateral relationships and thus value co-creation. Engagement platforms, therefore, need to ensure their relationship facilitating effect. Focal actors in sport engagement platforms need to change their self-conception from the seller of products and services (logic of sport products) to an enabler of social interaction. Therefore, focal actors need to understand platform participants’ interests and motivations outside of sport to unite them on their engagement platform and provide a valuable infrastructure for resource integration. A promising practice in this regard is FC. St. Pauli, a German professional football club. The club, arguably uniquely, unites stakeholders around political, social, and environmental issues. The club's initiatives include access to education and clean drinking water, political campaigns against the right-wing, and a music school (in cooperation with a sponsor) for people experiencing social deprivation. Questions about focal actors’ facilitating activities, the optimal infrastructure and combination of physical or virtual sport engagement platforms, as well as the identification of interests should also be considered.

In FP4, actors integrate resources on different sport engagement platforms that create a mutually dependent network centered on sporting activities. Given the need for actors to integrate resources from other platforms/ecosystems (and potentially also from outside the sport industry), it is clear that no organisation is in complete control of its destiny. From a systemic governance perspective, future research could analyse how to create an integrated system of virtual and physical engagement platforms. This helps to answer questions about the management of the structure and position of engagement platforms within a sport ecosystem, as well as how to design the infrastructure of engagement platforms to support actors’ multilateral resource integration. Moreover, the SEL approach helps to investigate dependencies on specific focal actors and their position on engagement platforms and subsequent impacts on network vulnerability and power (i.e., Cook & Yamagishi, 1992) or the change and adaption process of the system (i.e., complex adaptive systems) (i.e., Carmichael et al., 2019).

Sport ecosystems are influenced by sport- and non-sport-related institutions. Institutions and actors' behaviors influence each other iteratively. Whereas the mutual relationship between institutions and actors' behavior is well researched (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), this is not the case when it comes to understanding the collaborative co-shaping of institutions in sport. In addition, sport actors' institution shaping behavior, in the light of the SEL, has the potential to drive change, business innovation, and shape markets in sport. Consequently, actors' institution-shaping practices and their effect on the sport ecosystem represents a highly relevant and undeveloped research topic for future research. Within these topics, researchers are encouraged to explore the emergence of institutions that influence the economic, environmental, and social value of the sport ecosystem the design and conditions of institutions as well as the role and power of actors with the ability to shape institutions.

Ultimately, the SEL needs to be justified and strengthened with both conceptual refinement as well as empirical insights. Therefore, multiple methodological approaches should be deployed to gather empirical data using case studies, ethnographic, semantic, linguistic designs, or experiments (Brodie et al., 2019).

### **5.2.5 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The SEL may also change managers' mind-sets from a logic of sport products towards a systemic logic of value co-creation. In the paragraphs that follow, we use the Olympic Games to examine the implications of this new mind-set. With a sport product logic, the IOC would consider itself the owner of the Olympics. As such, the IOC would perceive that it has sole responsibility for the quality of the Olympic Games. Hence, the IOC alone determines the institutions and values of the Olympic Games, and regulate stakeholder behavior.

With a value co-creation logic, the IOC would see itself as operating engagement platforms to underpin the Olympic ecosystem. Consequently, Olympic values would be co-created by multiple actors sharing an interest in Olympic sporting activities. A value co-creation logic would enable the IOC to recognize that whilst it may legally own the Olympic Games, the IOC actually provides an engagement platform and that the values of the Olympic Games ought to be determined cooperatively. Consequently, relevant stakeholders (i.e., international social and environmental organizations as well as business representatives) can co-determine which potential host-city best integrates the ecosystem's ecological, economic and social values. So, even though the IOC cannot

fully control the quality of the Olympic Games, the IOC should still encourage other actors to participate given their ability to co-create additional value.

With a sport product mind-set, the IOC offers different products, and each product is controlled by a responsible manager. This leads to the danger of departmental egoism thus legacy is not a strategic focus. Opening the mind-set to value co-creation, every responsible IOC manager would comprehend the systematic relationships and the overarching value system. As a result, a manager not only maximizes the success of his/her own engagement platform but also pursues high-level priorities.

Furthermore, the value-creation mindset can be transferred to other relevant stakeholders (i.e., host-city governments). Following a sport product logic, democratically elected governments typically have to convince their constituents that hosting the Olympic Games is beneficial. Governments must provide ideas to overcome the opposition. In authoritarian states, the government decides, but often to the detriment of the well-being of broad sections of the community. However, by embracing the logic of value co-creation, governments can engage with their citizens by asking them to contribute ideas, as well as share concerns (i.e., environmental degradation, financial burden) and solutions.

With a SEL-driven mind-set based on the logic of value co-creation, sport management practitioners may improve decision-making because of an enhanced holistic understanding of other actors' contributions to value creation. They can subsequently refine their own role by acknowledging that sport organizations provide an engagement platform instead of producing valuable outputs. Following the SEL, those engagement platforms are embedded in a bigger sport ecosystem, where actors from inside and outside the sport industry collaborate to co-create value in sport.

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## Supplemental File

### *Value Co-Creation in Sport Management.*

Author(s)	Research Contribution
Grohs et al. (2020)	The perspective of sport events as an assembly of actors, such as event, athlete, sponsor, and place brands. An investigation how heterogeneous networks of actors co-create value from an event perspective.
Gerke (2016)	Network approach to shed lights on interorganizational linkages as sources of innovation sport clusters. An identification of eleven practices imitated by organizations located in nautical clusters or other settings.
Gerke et al. (2020)	Middle-range theory to connect empirical findings to the sport value framework. The Sport Cluster Concept (middle-range theory) explains value creation in localized sport industries.
Hedlund (2014)	Fan consumption communities are conceptualized as networks of like-minded and engaging fans. Results show that a feeling of membership and participation in fan rituals and traditions lead to increased intention to attend sport games, purchase of team's merchandise, and WOM.
Horbel et al. (2016)	The perspective of value co-creation in service ecosystems to the context of sports builds on the notion that co-created value can only be understood as value-in-context.
Koenig-Lewis et al. (2018)	Spectator-to-spectator interaction effects on value creation and WOM. Results show that customer-to-customer interaction was antecedent to overall satisfaction and team identification. Satisfaction and team identification led to WOM intention.
Kolyperas et al. (2016)	Identification of CSR value co-creation in professional team sport organizations. Theoretical insights from service dominant logic and consumer culture theory underpin the meaning of CSR on value co-creation as well as the types and process of resource integration.
Kolyperas et al. (2019)	Sport fans' role in value co-creation in sports by conceptually exploring the processes through which fans co-create and provide value propositions. Fans evaluate, redefine and reposition value propositions in sport and occupy the roles of assimilators, adaptors and authenticators in value co-creation.
Kolyperas and Sparks (2018)	Capturing the unique nature of Fan Fests as value co-creation ecosystem as well as the role of fans in such value co-creation environment. Drawing on service-dominant logic and consumer culture theory perspectives the research investigates the role of fans in value co-creation in Fan Fests
Lorgnier and Su (2014)	Creation of understanding of sport tourism networks through coopetition strategies. Proposition of a taxonomy of six coopetition strategies used by the non-profits to co-create value as well as a discussion of the potential risk of value co-destruction.
Stieler et al. (2014)	Introducing the concept of value co-destruction in sport spectators' stadium experience. Value co-destruction comprises a decline in experienced value, and negative deviation from the expected enhancement of well-being. Co-destruction mainly depends on prior value expectation: interactions in the stadium that co-create value for one actor can co-destroy value for another.
Thomas (2018)	Exploring actor relationships as well as the perceptions and antecedents across European football leagues. Results indicate that fanatical and regular fans view co-creation as a cynical, intrusive and disruptive process, while casual fans seem more willing to engage.
Tinson et al. (2017)	Acknowledgement of sport fandom as offering consumers the opportunity to engage and co-create value through network interaction, enhancing social well-being and social integration. Focusing on mothers and fathers the study examines how sport fandom intensifies or declines as a consequence of having and raising children.
Tsiotsou (2016)	Providing an understanding of sport experiences by proposing an integrative framework that combines the service-dominant logic ecosystem perspective with consumer culture theory. Identification of five factors that influence sport experiences – historical meaning, tribal logics, rituals and socialization processes, value-in-subcultural-context, and the co-construction/co-destruction of context.
Uhrich (2014)	Focus on the examination of customers' co-creation of value in professional sport leagues. The study develops a typology of co-creation platforms that distinguishes between customer sphere and joint sphere as well as between virtual and physical types of value co-creation platforms
Woratschek et al. (2014)	Criticizing traditional sports economic theory and management models, the sport value framework provides 10 foundational premises on value co-creation in sport management and suggests three levels for its analysis. The main contribution is a new theoretical basis for explaining phenomena in sport management.
Woratschek et al. (2020b)	Proposing a framework that includes the contributions of co-creating actors and identification with the firm as antecedents of customer satisfaction and loyalty. This framework can be adapted to a context by defining a context-specific set of actors and their unique reciprocal relationships.



### **5.3 Overcoming the Overuse of Natural Resources – Conceptualizing Resource Exchange between Human Actors and the Natural Environment (Scientific Paper 7, Extended Abstract)**

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**Under review at** *Business Strategy and the Environment*

#### **5.3.1 RESEARCH AIM**

Humans' overconsumption of natural resources shows increasingly extreme effects on the natural environment, such as climate change. Accordingly, the integration of natural resources in economic exchanges has to change. Although resources are generally at the focus of business and management studies, the explicit treatment of natural resources has been widely neglected. Examples include concepts and theories such as the resource-based view (e.g. Barney, 1991) or resource integration in the framework of value co-creation (e.g. Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2012). However, the natural environment and natural resources are often not explicitly considered (Woratschek et al., 2020), although natural capital is an essential condition for economic growth, underscoring the relevance of natural resources (e.g. Islam & Managi, 2019). Therefore, phenomena of overuse of natural resources, such as deforestation and overfishing, by economic actors for their value creation, but also the impact of natural resources on economic actors' value creation are not sufficiently explainable with these existing theories yet.

Therefore, the logic of value co-creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) – when enriched with specific consideration of natural resources – is particularly useful to understand economic actors' resource use, as it provides the opportunity to take the effects of the use of a single (natural) resource on multiple resources and both an individual actor's as well as other actors' value creation into account. Value co-creation builds on the assumption that economic and social actors engage voluntarily in exchanging and integrating resources to generate value that increases their well-being (Edvardsson et al., 2014; Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2012). Exchange with other actors is necessary to get access to resources owned by these other actors. Consequently, social and economic actors

integrate resources to co-create value. As the beneficiary uniquely determines value, integrating a resource can generate positive or negative value for the actors involved (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

However, in current conceptualisations of resource integration, natural resources are mostly not explicitly addressed or even ignored (Woratschek et al., 2020). Thereby, the existing understanding of value co-creation disregards the influence of the natural environment. Unlike other actors participating in economic exchange, the natural environment has no agency, i.e., it lacks the ability to act with choice (Archer, 2000). While the natural environment cannot consciously agree or disagree with the use of its resources, it is nonetheless clearly part of value co-creation. Accordingly, it is essential for the value creation of other economic actors and vice versa. However, resource exchanges between actors with agency and the natural environment are usually imbalanced (Peñaloza & Mish, 2011). This leads to the overuse of natural resources with significant consequences for the natural environment and then, in turn, for humankind, as climate change and its effects show. Consequently, Peñaloza and Mish (2011) call for a comprehensive and explicit theoretical internalisation of natural resources and imbalances into resource integration processes to better understand value co-creation in markets.

Therefore, this article aims to specify and refine the current – rather general – conceptualisation of resource integration and provide a theoretical foundation for economic actors' integration of natural resources and the resource exchange between the natural environment and other actors. This will allow for more balanced resource exchanges and resource integration that generates sustainable outcomes for all involved actors, including the natural environment. To achieve this aim, the article will focus on answering the following research questions:

*RQ1) How do actors with and without agency integrate resources and thereby contribute to value co-creation?*

*RQ2) What are the long-term consequences of value co-creation, including natural resources and actors without agency?*

*RQ3) What are the consequences of natural resource integration beyond a dyadic relationship?*

### 5.3.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

For a potential conceptualisation of natural resources, Woratschek et al. (2020) refer to economics where resources are commonly divided into public, club, common-pool, and private goods (e.g. Adams & McCormick, 1987; Ostrom, 2003) and apply these resource types to natural resources. Rivalry and excludability are used as distinguishing features (e.g. Mankiw, 2018; Varian, 1992). Excludability exists when actors can be denied access to a resource. If a resource's usage prevents other actors from harnessing it, it is called rivalrous. Public resources are classified as non-rivalrous and non-excludable (e.g. air), club resources are non-rivalrous but excludable (e.g. national parks), common-pool resources are rivalrous but non-excludable (e.g. freshwater), and private resources are both rivalrous and excludable (e.g. oil). In their original state, natural resources provided by the natural environment are always public resources. Woratschek et al. (2020) label them pure public natural resources (PPNR).

To illustrate our theoretical arguments, we use examples from the sports context. We believe the bi-directional relationship between the natural environment and sports is an appropriate example to support our argumentation, as natural resources are integral to the management of sports (McCullough, Orr, & Kellison, 2020). Skiing events require hills and snow, and, at the same time, sport organisations affect the natural environment by building the ski slopes. However, the effects of natural resources on sports, for example, sport events, are equally underresearched as the effects of sports on the natural environment (McCullough, Orr, & Watanabe, 2020).

In the following, we provide three different perspectives on three different aggregation levels on the integration of natural resources using illustrative examples from the sports sector: a static (intra-level), dynamic (micro-level), and systemic perspective (meso-level). Notably, these perspectives do not represent alternative explanations of natural resource integration but provide partial understanding. We 'zoom out' from a detailed actor description (intra-level) to the inclusion of an additional actor (micro-level) and then to further actors and their relationships (meso-level). Thus, the three levels need to be viewed together to capture the phenomenon in its entirety.

### 5.3.2.1 STATIC PERSPECTIVE

The static actor perspective concerns actors as resource integrators and specifies resource integration depending on actors' agency and their role in the resource integration process. The conceptualisation further sheds light on actors' resource integration behavior. Finally, we include value as the outcome of resource integration for each involved actor (see Fig. 1). Conceptualising resource integration along these dimensions provides a refinement of existing theory and allows for analyses of resource integration for co-creating actors at the intra-level. This forms the basis for assessing resource integration and value co-creation at higher levels of aggregation (Woratschek et al., 2020).

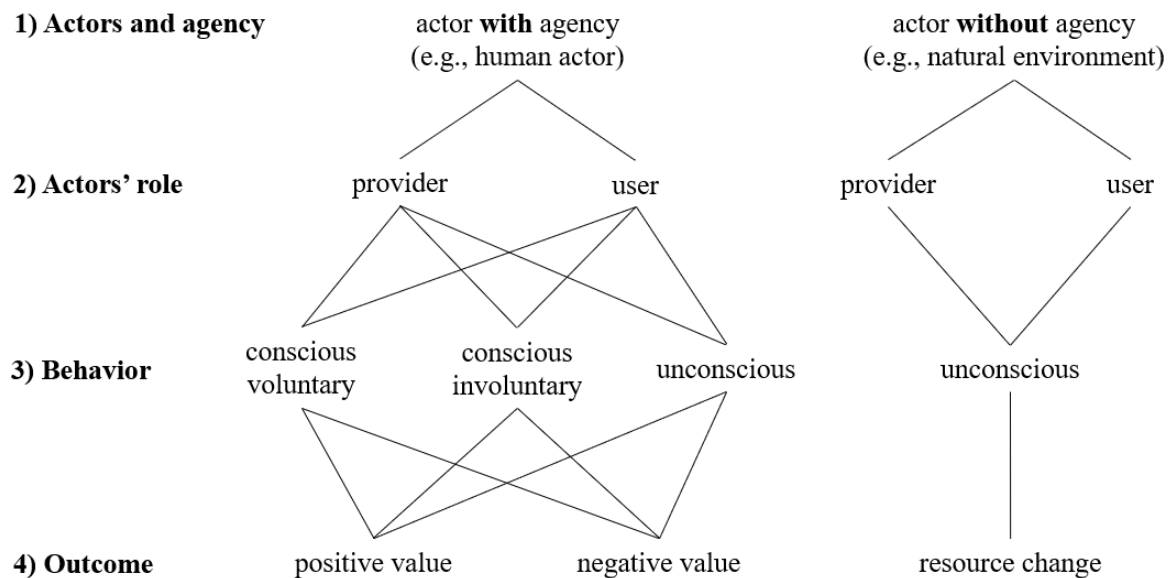
The first dimension of our conceptual model refers to actors' agency (see Fig. 1). Actors with agency have the ability to act with choice (Archer, 2000). For example, athletes can decide which specific equipment to integrate into their training. In contrast to the reasoning of Kleinaltenkamp et al. (2012), our conceptualisation suggests that including the integration of resources from actors without agency is mandatory. However, the integration of PPNR for value co-creation by other actors is always imbalanced. While actors with agency can prevent other actors from integrating their resources, negotiate with them about resource exchange and are able to evaluate the outcomes of value co-creation for their well-being, the natural environment as an actor without agency does not have these capacities of acting in their own interest. Hence, it cannot prevent other actors from overusing PPNR. Balanced resource exchange is only possible between actors with agency.

For a detailed understanding of resource integration, it is important to remember that resource-integrating actors have two main roles in this process: they are both providers and users of resources (see Fig. 1). This applies to actors with and without agency alike.

The case of PPNRs provided by an actor without agency clarifies that actors do not always engage consciously and voluntarily in resource integration. Hence, while actors without agency are involved in resource integration, they always do so unconsciously (see Fig. 1). The resource integration of actors with agency can also happen unconsciously. Nevertheless, actors with agency usually engage in resource integration consciously and voluntarily because they expect to benefit from it (Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2012). However, even actors with agency sometimes have no choice as to whether to integrate resources and thereby consciously — but involuntarily — integrate resources. So far, neither involuntary nor unconscious resource integration has been discussed in

the business or economic literature. Accordingly, we extend existing conceptualisations by adding these kinds of resource integration behaviour (see Fig. 1).

According to the logic of value co-creation, the value of a resource is only determined by the actor who integrates the resource (e.g. Edvardsson et al., 2014). Consequently, a resource itself is value-neutral; only the effects of the integration of resources can be positive or negative as perceived by the recipient (see Fig. 1). Hence, all types of resource integration behaviour can lead to positive or negative value for the actors involved.



**Figure 1.** Dimensions of resource integration from a static actor perspective (intra-level).

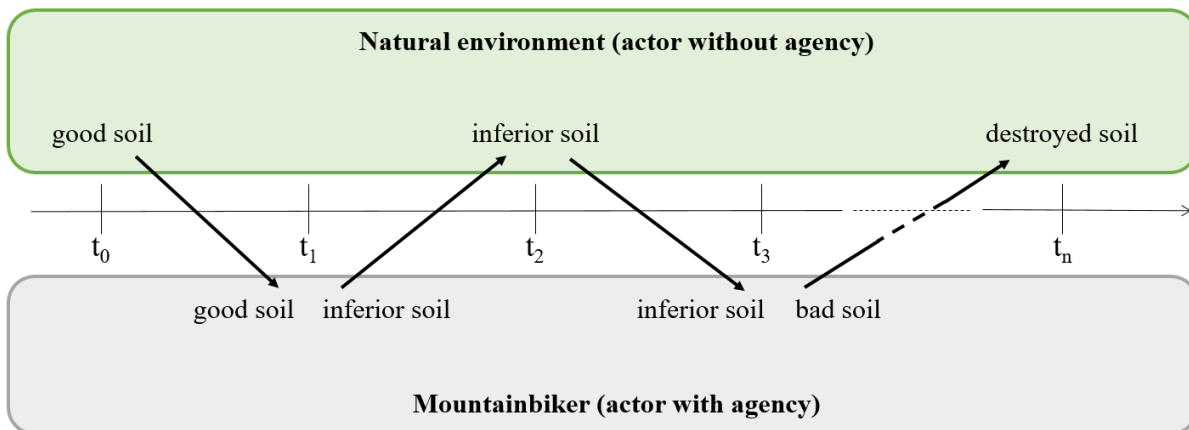
### 5.3.2.2 DYNAMIC PERSPECTIVE

Viewing resource integration from a higher aggregated perspective, the micro-level, it becomes observable that resource integration is dynamic. Sporting activities are often repeating, for example, athlete's training routines or regular sport events and competitions. Consequently, actors exchange and integrate resources repeatedly over time. During each incidence, the involved actors co-create value (positive or negative) for themselves and each other (micro-level). Thereby, resources are being changed.

For illustration, we can imagine the example of a mountain biking athlete who regularly rides in the forest (see Fig. 2). The underground and soil of the forest is an important resource for the athlete's practice. By integrating this natural resource in each training session, the athlete improves his/her mountain biking skills over time. However, the athlete does change not only its private

resources but also the natural resources, i.e. PPNR, that are used. Each training session impacts the forest's soil. As the soil cannot be renewed at the same pace as it is getting degraded through the training activity, this PPNR is changed (here: damaged) over time. Consequently, the athlete needs to integrate this changed resource, which may decrease the value that the athlete can create, as the integrated resource provides inferior opportunities for value creation.

Importantly, not only the athlete suffers from the changed PPNR, but also the natural environment because the worsening of the forest's soil may negatively affect other natural resources in the forest, such as plants, birds, or insects. As long as the forest's soil is a PPNR owned by an actor without agency, the continuous resource exchange and the degradation of the forest soil will first stop when the athlete cannot generate sufficient value for him-/herself by integrating the resource anymore. However, the 'ideal' point in time from the natural environment's perspective to discontinue the resource exchange might be much earlier. This example illustrates that there are long-term consequences of resource integration for actors with and without agency and also highlights the imbalance in resource exchange between actors with (here: mountain biker) and without agency (here: natural environment).



**Figure 2.** Dynamic perspective of natural resource integration (micro-level).

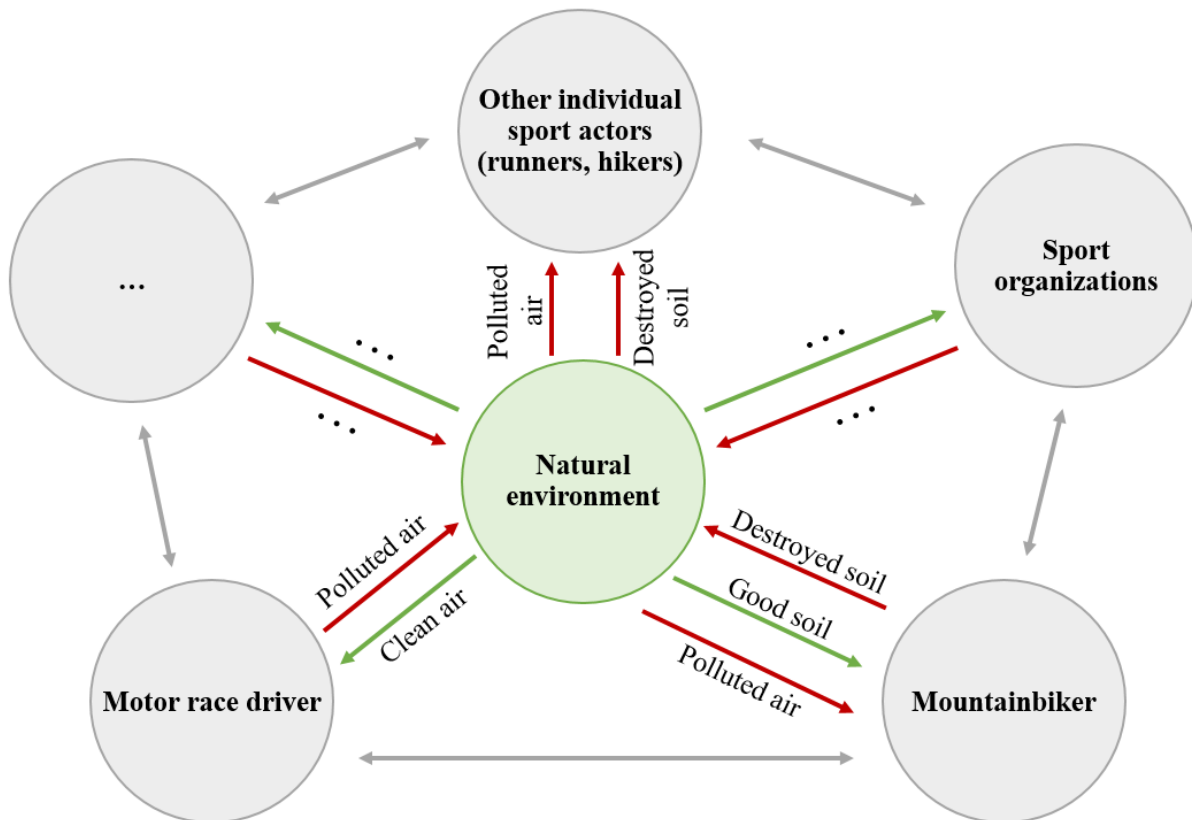
### 5.3.2.3 SYSTEMIC PERSPECTIVE

Value co-creation is a process that usually goes beyond the perspective of two resource-exchanging actors. Viewed from a meso-level perspective, to co-create value, actors must typically integrate diverse resources that they acquire in exchange processes with a variety of actors, either simultaneously or at different points in time. To fully understand the concept of natural resource

integration and its consequences, we need to apply a systemic perspective that includes the exchange processes with other relevant and affected actors (meso-level).

As Figure 3 illustrates, the mountain biker's integration of the forest soil and the resulting change of this PPNR does affect other actors, who integrate the same – non-excludable and non-rivalrous – natural resource in their value creation process. However, the mountain biker is also affected by other sporting actors' integration and change of natural resources. Ultimately, the change of PPNR affects also other actors that do not directly integrate these resources.

The systemic perspective enhances the static (intra-level) and dynamic (micro-level) perspectives by adding the network component. It considers that the process of (natural) resource integration involves multiple actors. Through providing and using resources, each individual actor influences other actors, either directly or indirectly, because resources are changed through integration. Hence, to capture resource integration and its influence on both actors with and without agency, the multilateral processes of resource exchange between actors and the change of resources through integration need to be considered on the meso-level.



**Figure 3.** Systemic perspective of natural resource integration (meso-level).

### 5.3.3 CONTRIBUTIONS

In this study, we apply three steps of analysis to better understand the integration of natural resources for value co-creation. By specifying four dimensions of resource integration processes of individual actors in our intra-level analysis, we were able to show the similarities and differences between resource integration of actors with and without agency.

The main difference between actors with and without agency lies in their resource integration behavior. While actors with agency may integrate resources and thus become involved in value co-creation consciously and voluntary, consciously, and involuntary, and unconsciously, actors without agency, such as the natural environment, always integrate resources unconsciously. Actors without agency cannot negotiate the conditions under which they provide or use resources or the quality and quantity of the resources they exchange with other actors. Hence, resource exchange that involves actors with and without agency is always imbalanced, as only actors with agency can make deliberate decisions about the conditions of the resource exchange.

In addition to analysing the bidirectional nature of resource integration, we include the dimension of time. This is an important extension because resources are often repeatedly used by the same and other actors over time. As resources are changed through resource integration, actors need to integrate these changed resources next time, at least if the resources cannot regenerate at the same pace as they are used. As a result, the value that the actors derive from future integration of the resource changes as well.

Our meso-level analysis accounts that resource integration is embedded in networks of actors and is, therefore, both influenced by and influencing other actors and their resource integration. While natural resources are changed in bilateral resource exchange and integration of two actors (e.g., clean water to wastewater), the changed resources are released back into the environment. They may then be used by other actors and impact these actors resource integration.

Consequently, several issues originate from the imbalanced nature of resource exchange, including actors without agency, such as the natural environment. While resources are generally changed through resource integration, the imbalance between resource integrating actors leads to a high likelihood of negative changes to resources of actors without agency. Changed - and likely inferior- resources have an impact on (1) other resources of the actor without agency, (2) future resource integration and value by the actor involved initially in resource exchange, and (3) other actors' resource integration and value, including future generations.



Consequently, it is critical to discuss how resource integration, including actors without agency could become more balanced and how the vulnerability of the natural environment could be decreased. Balanced resource exchange is only possible when agency is assigned to the natural environment. We, therefore, suggest alternative governance models for PPNR. Building on our analysis from the value co-creation perspective, we suggest a ‘patronage model’ where agency is assigned to the natural environment and enacted by a patron with the mission to act ‘in the best interest’ of the natural environment. Empowering the natural environment by endowing it with agency in the form of a patron enables negotiations with other actors with agency and (re-)establishment of balanced resource exchanges. This could reduce the overuse of natural resources.

However, the suggested change of governance for PPNR bears the challenge of identifying legitimate and adequate patrons that are willing and able to act in the interest of the natural environment and not or at least only secondarily in their own interest or the interest of other stakeholders. Accordingly, there remain several additional issues to be solved for the integration of natural resources and the patronage model. Therefore, we derive and provide topics and directions for future research and posit exemplary research questions (see Table 1).

**Table 2.** Avenues for future research on natural resource integration.

Research topics	Exemplary research questions
Resource integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the differences when integrating renewable, non-renewable, biotic, and abiotic natural resources?</li> <li>• How could the integration of resource bundles be analysed?</li> </ul>
Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do the dimensions of value (economic, social, and ecological) affect each other?</li> <li>• How can the dimensions of value be prioritised?</li> </ul>
Patrons/Guardians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are legitimate and adequate patrons that really act exclusively in the best interest of the natural environment?</li> <li>• Which criteria must be fulfilled by an adequate patron?</li> <li>• Which are the commitments of the patron?</li> <li>• Who appoints the patron?</li> <li>• How to control patrons?</li> <li>• How to compensate patrons?</li> <li>• Who is responsible for potential damages on a PPNR?</li> <li>• What are the consequences of a patron’s misbehaviour?</li> <li>• How to assign patrons for international natural resources, such as oceans or rainforests?</li> </ul>

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## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

In service management and marketing, the importance of engaging customers and other relevant actors is increasing. Customer and actor engagement is considered a key marketing objective, because it leads to increased performance, reputation, revenues, and cost savings for companies. Engagement platforms serve as virtual or physical touchpoints that enable structured interaction activities between multiple actors in terms of integrating their resources to co-create value. This shows that the traditional role of customers has been transformed from mere product and service consumers into active co-creators of value. However, companies aim to engage not only customers but also other relevant actors, such as business partners and media organisations, who contribute to the co-creation of value.

Thus, value co-creation represents a profound theoretical understanding of the concepts of actor engagement and engagement platforms. Value co-creation focuses on multilateral resource exchanges between various actors on engagement platforms embedded in service ecosystems to co-create value. The purpose of this thesis is to advance the understanding of the general value co-creation theory and, in particular its applicability to specific research contexts through the concepts of actor engagement and engagement platforms. Therefore, sport management, with a focus on sport sponsorship, was chosen as the research context.

To better understand how the author addressed this research aim, the seven scientific and nine transfer papers in this thesis were structured on two dimensions with two characteristics each. First, the research projects were divided into conceptual and empirical articles based on their methodological approach. Second, the level of aggregation separates between analyses at the intra- and micro-levels and meso- and macro-levels.

In chapter two, the author built the theoretical foundation for the present thesis by introducing the value co-creation theory and the concepts of actor engagement and engagement platforms. In addition, the current state of academic thinking in the sport management and sport sponsorship context was described, followed by a first conceptual application of the logic of value co-creation.

The third chapter comprises empirical investigations at the intra- and micro-level of aggregation. Therein, the main perspective adopted was that of sponsors as focal actors in sponsorship networks pursuing specific marketing objectives. The general aim of the projects in this chapter was to clarify why sponsors want to enter sponsorship networks in sports and how they decide to do so. These

projects revealed novel insights, such as the role of a hidden agenda in sponsorship decisions and new roles and external collaborations of sponsors' decision-making units. Even if not expressed explicitly, they are guided by the authors' inherent thinking in the logic of value co-creation.

The empirical analysis at the meso- and macro-level in chapter four set the stage for understanding actor engagement of various actors on sponsorship engagement platforms. In particular, the interaction between multiple sponsors and the sponsee revealed voluntary resource integration behaviours exceeding contractual agreements in the sponsor-sponsee and sponsor-sponsor relationships, which was labelled sport sponsorship engagement. In addition, the effects of sponsors' behaviour in terms of activation activities on sponsorship platforms on the dispositional and behavioural engagement of consumers were examined. It was shown that sponsorship activations drive customer engagement and that the effects depend on the context, in particular, sponsorship authenticity and attitude towards the sponsor. Moreover, the effects on customer engagement can be either positive or negative depending on the consumers' perception of the sponsors' behaviour. Accordingly, sponsorship activations are an effective marketing tool for companies.

In chapter five, the meso- and macro-level perspective on engagement was applied again. This time conceptual approaches were used, which are inspired by the empirical results presented in chapter four. For instance, the author and his co-authors provide a detailed actor mapping for sport engagement platforms using an exemplary illustrative case. Furthermore, it was shown that networks of interconnected sport engagement platforms constitute the entire sport ecosystem. Sporting activities represent the joint interest of all resource integrating actors and, therefore, the pivotal point of the sport ecosystem. Actor engagement within the sport ecosystem is determined by certain institutions (e.g., rules, regulations, and norms). Moreover, the institutions are also shaped and further developed by the actors' behaviours. Finally, value co-creation theory is extended by including the natural environment as an actor without agency, integrating natural resources and thus contributing to value co-creation. Natural resource integration is analysed from a static, dynamic, and systemic perspective. As resource exchanges between actors with and without agency are always imbalanced, a patronage approach is suggested in which actors with agency regulate access to natural resources in the best interest of the natural environment. This can lead to a reduction of the overuse of natural resources.

In conclusion, this doctoral thesis contributes to a better understanding of actor engagement as a marketing objective and resource exchanges on interconnected engagement platforms embedded in service ecosystems in the context of sport management and sport sponsorship. In addition to the contributions to the research context, which is a specific part of the service industry, the author believes that the findings can be applied to and refine the general actor engagement and engagement platform concepts in service management and marketing, thus extending the theory of value co-creation. Consequently, research and management implications can be derived from the results of this thesis, which guide both researchers and practitioners to understand and respond appropriately to the increasing importance of engaging customers and other actors to drive organisational performance.

## APPENDIX A: LIST OF INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CONTRIBUTIONS

Schönberner, J., Woratschek, H., & Lahey, J. (2021). *Leveraging sport sponsorship: The effects of activation activities and perceived authenticity*. 29th European Association for Sport Management Conference (EASM), online.

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Buser, M., Horbel, C., Popp, B., Schönberner, J. & Woratschek, H. (2020). *Conceptualising pure public resource integration on engagement platforms in sport – Using the COVID-19 crisis as an example*. 28th European Association for Sport Management Conference (EASM), online.

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Buser, M., Galinski, L., Woratschek, H., Germelmann, C. C., Schönberner, J. (2019). *Esport: The new frontier in sport sponsorship*. 3rd World Association for Sport Management Conference (WASM), Santiago de Chile, Chile.

Schönberner, J., Woratschek, H., & Ellert, G. (2019). *How are sport sponsorship decisions made? Revealing a hidden agenda in manager's decision-making*. 3rd World Association for Sport Management Conference (WASM), Santiago de Chile, Chile.

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- Buser, M., Woratschek, H., Schönberner, J. (2017). *Sport events as a platform for sponsoring engagement: A conceptual framework based on empirical insights*. 25th European Association for Sport Management Conference (EASM), Bern, Switzerland.