Corporate social responsibility in football – dutch and czech first divisions analysis

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Abstract
This study analyses and compares the presence of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in two highest football (soccer) leagues – the Dutch one and the Czech one. It was oriented only to the CSR present in the management of the clubs participating at these leagues in the 2014/2015 season. The main methods were a document analysis and a survey. As only few clubs answered the survey, document analysis was the main method. The results show the following: In the Netherlands, CSR is already quite developed and present practically in all clubs; in the Czech Republic, the level of CSR is quite low and many clubs did not practically perform any CSR activities.

Keywords: CSR, sport management, football league, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic

Introduction
Corporate social responsibility became an integral part of management and marketing in most industries of developed markets. It practically entered most industries in the rich countries. CSR entered the sports business some time ago. That was inevitable, because the influence of sports on the society and local economy have already been proven and are recognized as by both scientists and politicians.

It seems it became a necessity for North-American sports clubs in major sports. We can see its appearance also in European major sports, for instance in football (soccer). That happens at least for the international level and for the biggest clubs.

It is however interesting to see if CSR was introduced also by small clubs, mainly in smaller leagues. Therefore, this study analyses its presence in two different leagues – the Dutch one and the Czech one.

These leagues are from countries of a similar size and they do not make part of the internationally most followed European leagues. Probably one of the main differences is the fact that the Czech market economy is younger and has not accepted CSR as a necessary part of management for smaller firms, including sport.

By the means of a survey distributed to all participants of the chosen leagues and an accompanying document analysis of different sources, including the websites of the clubs, these two sets of clubs were compared.

CSR in Sports
Sport has always been a part of human activities. Of course, the types of sports were influenced by the natural conditions and by the respective society, including its culture. The modern state support to the sports began, when it showed that it improves the people's physical condition and readiness to fight. (Kössl, Štumbauer & Waic, 2008)

This fact inspired Coubertin in seeing the important role sports cab play for the society. The English example helped him to develop his ideas not only for France. However, he added also
ethical and moral development as other role of sports for the society to the physical readiness and endurance. (Chatzefstathiou, 2007)
The influence of sports to the society can be found even in the Olympic Charter. The right to do sports and the unacceptability of discrimination are between the major principles of Olympism. (Olympijská charta, 2013)
Fight against discrimination became one of the most visible parts of CSR in sports in Europe. UEFA made it a major topic they promote on sports channels and during UEFA football competitions transmissions. It actually became probably the most known part of their public relations. (Procházka, 2014)
Eliminating discrimination through sports is a part of a very strong effect of sports can to the society. It generally helps both the individuals and the society in developing more activities, with integration and as a mean of social development. (Kihl, Tainsky, Babiak, Bang, 2014)
The sociologists describe even some other influences of sports to the society. The presence of a sports club to the fans and surrounding society do have impact to their self-confidence and collective consciousness. (Sparvero, Warner, 2013) Even though North-American authors usually study only professional sports, we can extend this even to amateur and grassroots sports activities.
Sport professionalized and became a commercial activity, an business. Becoming an industry increased the consequences for the society. A a result, official studies and political documents such as the European Sports Charter (Evropská charta sportu, 2002) and the White Paper on Sport (2007) appeared. These explicitly underline different role(s) of sports for the society.
As sports became a business, it integrated also some modern management practices, such as CSR. One of the reasons is that sport managers realize how it – through models and model situations – helps “social integration” and “economic and social development”. (Chappelet, 2009)
There are different ways of implementing CSR in sports, because there are also many different groups of stakeholders: Not only fans, sponsors and direct partners, but certainly the surrounding society and economy as well. Moreover, sports are traditionally associated with ethics and also CSR was in the 1970’s related to ethics – even at the UNO level. (Haltofova & Adamek, 2014)
Sports itself develops its role in the society and with respect to CSR. Therefore, Dowling, Robinson & Washington (2013) consider it already makes a real part of modern sports management.
However, this might be true mainly for the North-American professional sports industry. It seems that Corporate Social Marketing (CSM) is very frequent by the North-American professional sports organizations (PSO's), as they "can be an effective communicator of voluntary behavior because they are likely to enjoy high credibility in promoting such behavior." (Inoue & Kent, 2012)
The same authors give some examples: "National Football League (NFL) launched the NFL Play 60 in 2006 to encourage children to engage in physical activity for the prevention of childhood obesity, and the Go Green program of the Philadelphia Eagles promotes environmental awareness, recycling, and energy conservation." (Inoue & Kent, 2012)
Of course, there are many other examples. Walker & Parent (2010) mention that PGA Tour donated more than one billion USD to charity, while "in 2006, the National Basketball Association (NBA), with the support of the Player’s Association (NBAPA), launched the $100 million NBA Cares initiative." Up to these authors, these associations consider such an activity a “giving back” to the society, and probably as something that is necessary or natural.
Such practices slowly come to Europe. FC Barcelona is active in promoting UNICEF and even paying it 1.5 million euro per year (Ferrand & McCarthy, 2009); UEFA “committed to allocating 0.7 per cent of annual revenue to social projects. That is probably why on the 13th
of February, 2013, they have handed a 100,000 Euro cheque to the International Committee of the Red Cross “to support the rehabilitation of land-mine victims in Afghanistan” (Walters & Tacon, 2010).

Probably the organization that is the most active in fight against discrimination in Europe, is FARE. These do not do it as a part of their pure CSR and marketing, but as a core activity. Anyone can inform them about any form of discrimination (FARE, 2014).

CSR in European sports is less developed at national and local level. FC Barcelona is more an international club than only a Spanish one. Other clubs can most efficiently be active on the local level, mainly in cooperation with local governments, institutions and NGO’s. (Kihl, Tainsky, Babiak & Bang, 2014) That would be the best case for less known football clubs that participate in the highest leagues of their countries. That is what we decided to investigate in this study.

Methods

This study was based on two methods: A survey and document analysis. The document analysis was based not only on scientific literature, but mainly on the analysis of websites and other documents regarding the football clubs and their leagues. (Baarda, 2014)

The survey was oriented to the clubs participating in the chosen leagues in the season 2014/2015. Thus, the questionnaire was distributed to all these clubs, by the means of email. (Baarda, 2014)

The survey consisted of a relatively small number of questions with the goal to investigate the following topics:

How do the clubs understand CSR
If and how the clubs cooperate with other firms in their implementation of CSR
If and how do the clubs perform their own CSR

In order to give the clubs more ease to answer, we chose for a set of a few open questions. In this way, the employees could deliberately decide about how much and how deep they want to answer. The questionnaire was sent in three language versions: In Czech to the Czech clubs, and in Dutch and English to the Dutch clubs. By sending an English translation accompanying the Dutch version, the authors wanted to ensure that the survey is understandable in the case of wrongly chosen notions in Dutch.

As mentioned earlier, the surveys were sent via email. Here, the first problem was encountered, because many teams have either only generic or no email contacts on their websites. That meant that the authors had to use these generic emails and/or other means of contacting the clubs.

This might have been one of the main reasons, why the rate of reaction was low. From the Czech teams, only two reacted: Dukla Prague sent the survey back with sufficient answers; Viktoria Plzeň sent a phone contact to a responsible person. However, communication with this person resulted as unsuccessful. The Dutch teams did not react much better: PEC Zwolle sent back full answers, accompanied by an official document regarding CSR; Vitesse Arnhem replied by sending links to corresponding parts of their websites; Ajax Amsterdam refused to supply any information.

The links sent by Vitesse Arnhem allowed a deeper re-inspection of the websites of all clubs, the survey was sent again to different emails. This round resulted in one reaction: The club of Dordrecht sent their answers.

During the first analysis of the websites and their re-inspection, some more information has been found. Websites of other institutions were added to the research. Because of the low response rate, this method became the most important one to get sufficient information to
answer the research questions.

**Results**

**Survey**

As mentioned earlier, this method was less successful than expected. From the 18 clubs that participate in the Dutch Eredivisie, two refused to supply information (Ajax Amsterdam and Excelsior Rotterdam) and two reacted with answers: PEC Zwolle in the first round, Dordrecht in the second one. From the 16 members of the Czech league, two reacted: Victoria Pilsen sent a phone contact (which did not help at the moment of the study) and Dukla Prague sent their answers.

Some of the answers were similar. Basically, all of the three answering teams consider CSR as something important that can improve the cooperation with the surrounding society or potentially “increase the value of the cohabitation” (PEC Zwolle). Thus, they do activities which can give something to everyone (PEC Zwolle).

Frequent activities regard hospitals. There is also frequent cooperation with schools and orphanages, potentially directed towards the youth. Players visiting such institutions are a frequent CSR activity of these clubs. For Dukla, it is a bit special, because as a club traditionally in relation with the Czech Army, they do visits to the veterans living in the Prague military hospital.

PEC Zwolle has tighter cooperation with the city and they cooperate also with their sponsors. As well as Dordrecht and most Dutch football teams and associations, they cooperate with the foundation Méér dan Voetbal, described later in the paper, and with the international institution Playing for Success. (PEC United, 2014)

PEC Zwolle participates at the Street League and Dutch Street Cup activities. These help to support social integration in Dutch cities, tolerance and better living style of the Dutch youth. (PEC United, 2014) They are also active with Playing For Success, an activity imported to the Netherlands from the United Kingdom. Its aim the Netherlands is to motivate children of 9 to 12 years to reach better results at school. (Playing for Succes Nederland, 2014)

Dukla also cooperated with local amateur clubs, both on the level of the players and coaching. They also have free tickets for children below 15 years of age. Players and other representatives of the club used to read literature to children or participated at a bicycle race aimed to promote safety on roads.

**Internet websites**

**Clubs**

As mentioned above, the survey did not result as a very successful method in finding relevant information. Therefore, the method of document analysis was deepened including more websites, of the clubs and other institutions. A new research question was added: How do the clubs inform their stakeholders about their CSR activities?

For this question, we found a clear difference between the countries. Most Dutch clubs have special parts of their websites that communicate their CSR policy and activities. For this, they use different titles and notions, which made it more difficult to search for the data. For many of these clubs, there is a link to a foundation performing these activities for the club (Ajax Amsterdam, NAC Breda, PSV Eindhoven, Excelsior Rotterdam, PEC Zwolle, Vitesse Arnhem, FC Utrecht; Feyenoordu Rotterdam and FC Twente have got even more of them).

On the other side, only one Czech club has such a website chapter: Sparta Prague. Some Czech teams have only some PR news and communications about activities that can be classified as CSR activities. Many of them have even not such information. Few of them have a link or at least a banner of the Zelený život (Green Life) foundation, which is analyzed below.
As mentioned above, most Dutch clubs have their own foundations. These cooperate with other foundations, institutions, amateur and non-profit organizations, and help some of them financially, organizationally and otherwise. CSR activities of the Dutch football clubs often regard both physical and mental health, learning abilities social integration and inclusion. Very often, they cooperate with hospitals, help to make sports activities available for all age groups including elderly people, they are active with above mentioned Playing For Success, Street League and Dutch Street Cup. The Dutch clubs often cooperate with lower league clubs and with amateur clubs. Ajax Amsterdam cooperates also with Ajax Cape Town from South Africa, which is beneficial for both clubs.

As we can see, the range of the Dutch Eredivisie participants' CSR activities is very broad. Many of these activities are connected with and partially coordinated by the foundation Méér dan Voetbal, which we shall describe below.

CSR activities of the Czech teams are much less visible on their websites. If they take place, they mostly regard hospitals and orphanages, potentially cooperation with local schools and other contacts with children, such as reading for them and supporting their sports activities including motivating them to come to home matches.

Sparta Prague has got a foundation which helps and supports former players of the club, both from the club finances and from the fans. They also try to educate people to be decent fans, which helps to attract more fans to the stadium.

As we can see, CSR is much more developed in the Netherlands than in the Czech Republic. Any argument that Czech teams are poorer and smaller than Dutch teams is irrelevant: For instance, Dordrecht is active in CSR since 1999, and it is definitely a small team with low budgets.

**Méér dan Voetbal and Zelený Život Foundations**

Both analyzed foundations are partially similar: They are oriented to help football teams with their CSR. Most information in this sub-chapter is originating from their websites Meer dan Voetbal (2014) and Zelený život (2014).

Méér dan Voetbal (More than football) is definitely older. It celebrated ten years of existence short ago. Its creation was actually motivated by the Dutch Prime Minister: He basically asked the clubs to take their responsibility regarding their influence to the society and behave in a more social responsibly way.

The difference in the reach of the foundations is much bigger. Zelený Život (Green Life) includes only the teams of the highest league and some teams from the second league. Their goal is to “promote social responsibility of the highest competitions” (Zelený život, 2014). As a result, 18 teams were cooperating with the foundation in December 2014.

Even the activities of Zelený Život foundation are very limited. Its website is more a platform to promote the CSR activities of the clubs. At the same time, there is not much done to motivate the clubs to perform CSR. As a result, almost all clubs perform only a few activities per year, some of them did no activity between January and December 2014, up to the website.

The foundation itself does not give much information about themselves either. There is basically one contact to a firm that makes marketing and administers the website (and probably the foundation itself) for the Football League Association, not much more.

On the other side, Méér dan Voetbal cooperated with 2000 sport clubs and associations at the end of 2014. This is because they cooperate also with every football club including amateur ones. The foundation even educates its members so that they can better perform their CSR. Their communication is very good, too. They inform about international events and happenings on their website. As well as Zelený život, they perform publicity campaigns to get...
better known. Up to their report, public knowledge about them increased from 9 to 39%. (Jaarverslag Méér dan Voetbal, 2012). A larger member basis is also a huge advantage. It helps promotion. As a way of promoting CSR and the clubs activities, there is an annual award for the best activities. Of course, this motivates the clubs to perform CSR more and better. Another award is quite important and visible for the large public: An award for the Eredivisie (Eredivisie is the highest Dutch league) Football player for the best individual CSR activity performed by the professional players. This award regards only 18 clubs a year, but even their fans get involved, which improves the public knowledge about the foundation and CSR (Vriendenloterij, 2014).

Discussion and Conclusion
Notwithstanding the very low response rate of the survey part, the study gave interesting results. It seems visible that CSR is not much developed in Czech football. This result might be slightly biased also by the fact that some activities performed by the clubs might not be made public, even though they would correspond to the practices usually understood under CSR. However, the probability of such a mistake is very low. Dutch clubs are much further in their CSR. It is certainly thanks to a longer tradition of CSR both in the countries and in the leagues. It is true that CSR is much less developed in the Czech Republic in general, either. However, that should not be an excuse for the Czech clubs. The foundations act differently and have too much different reach and activity. Zelený život wants mainly to inform about the activities of the 18 member clubs, which is not a very ambitious goal. Even other goals of the foundation are rather less ambitious:
“charity events,
community activities,
fans involvement,
events for the public.” (Zelený život, 2014)

Compared to the Dutch situation, these goals do not seem motivating. They even do not cover the most usual problems such as fight against discrimination and problems with fan behavior. At the same time, most clubs use it as their only communication channel about their CSR. They even do not get much motivated to do it. There was one “Green round” in the 2014 autumn, but that was an exceptional event so far.

As mentioned above, this might be caused by the fact that CSR is not much developed in the Czech Republic, which is probably a consequence of the younger market economy. It also seems that football clubs do not understand their influence on the public and society. Sparta Prague seems the only exception, up to their website. They perform their own activities regardless the goals of Zelený život and they inform about them. However, they do it in the website section for their fans, which is harder to find for journalists and other people.

Dutch football clubs are much developed in CSR policies. CSR level in the Czech football is really low, which is underlined by the fact that there are no Czech members of FARE, up to the list available on its website in December, 2014. Some even smaller countries with a short history of market economy – such as Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, or Hungary – have their members.

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