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## Introduction

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**Biographical notes:** Geoff Dickson teaches on the postgraduate papers 'Sport and Recreation Governance and Strategy' and 'Leadership and Management' as well as the undergraduate paper 'Managing and Marketing Sport and Recreation'. His research focuses on interorganisational linkages between sport organisations. Some of his recent research has investigated the cartel-like behaviour of the Australian Football League, the expansion of professional sports leagues, and the institutional pressures affecting the inclusion of Pacific Island rugby nations into elite professional rugby union competitions. He has published his research in such journals as *Sport Management Review*, *International Journal for Sport Management and Marketing* and *Youth Studies Australia*. He is Book Reviews Editor for *Journal of Football Studies* and an editorial board member for the *Annals of Leisure Research*.

Laura Cousens' research interests include organisational and field-level change, inter-organisational relationships, relationship marketing, and institutional theory. These concepts have underpinned her research into professional sports leagues as well as public, private, and voluntary recreation linkages at the municipal and regional level. She has published her work in *International Journal of Sport Marketing and Sponsorship*, *Journal of Sport Management* and the *European Journal for Sport Management*.

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Evidence of the Inter-Organisational Relationships (IORs) between sport organisations and commercial, public and voluntary sector organisations abounds. Whether it is the partnership between Manchester United and the Britannia Building Society to enhance customer loyalty of both organisations (Rowley, 2005), or the establishment of a

government funded agency to create leveraging opportunities for local businesses in conjunction with hosting the Olympic Games (O'Brien, 2006), various forms of linkages bind sport organisations to firms in their environment.

Over the last ten years, sport management scholars have enhanced our understanding of the relationship between sport organisations and their contexts by exploring various IOR perspectives. These perspectives have included partnerships (Frisby *et al.*, 2004; McDonald, 2005; Meenaghan, 2002), joint ventures (Flynn and Gilbert, 2001; Carlton *et al.*, 2004), networks (Cousens and Slack, 1996; Dickson *et al.*, 2005; Lonsdale, 2004; Sminia, 2003), mergers (Stevens, 2006), vertical integration (Stotlar, 2000), transaction cost analysis (Sam *et al.*, 2005), and strategic alliances (Farrelly and Quester, 2005) among others. This special issue of IJSMM focuses attention upon this stream of research, and binds together a collection of works that offer different ways of looking at interactions between sport organisations and the buyers, suppliers, and competitors that constitute their environment.

The manuscripts encompassed in this special issue offer diverse insight into IORs and their application by sport organisations in different competitive circumstances. The impact of sport organisations' dynamic environment on IORs between sport organisations and broadcasting companies is captured in the article by Turner and Shilbury. Specifically, these authors explored the impact of technological developments in broadcasting on the preconditions for IOR formation between sport organisations and broadcasting companies. Notwithstanding the thought provoking results of this scholarly effort, the authors' discussion of the preconditions of IORs offers seasoned scholars and students a comprehensive overview of relevant literature.

A multiple framework approach that draws upon the resource-based view of the firm, the resource dependency perspective, institutional theory and social network theory to explore sports sponsorship is offered in the manuscript by Davies *et al.* These authors argue for the utilisation of complementary theoretic through their analysis of New Zealand's premier domestic rugby competition. The authors discuss sponsorship formation, relationship durability, and perceptions of sponsorship effectiveness by drawing upon multiple theoretical perspectives.

The article in this issue by Stewart *et al.* offers an insightful example of how the evolving linkages between specialised commercial enterprises in a distant geographic region created sustainable competitive advantages for regional organisations such as Rip Curl and Quicksilver. The focus of these authors is on the evolution of IORs in the surfing industry of the Torquay region of Australia, and the strategic advantages that evolved from the unique features of the interaction among organisations in the local surfing locale. Similarly, the manuscript by Duquette and Mason considers the local network of political and business elites who shape sport related decision-making strategies. Drawing from the literature on urban regimes, these authors explore the role of networks of linkages among those involved in the strategic planning for local sport development. An intriguing view of the role of IORs in shaping sport in North American cities emerges from this contribution to the special issue. Geographic positioning is also highlighted by Lamertz *et al.* in their article. The importance of inter-organisational ties as conduits for informational and social cues is discussed by these authors in their study of the isomorphism among the field of soccer clubs in the UK. The inter-organisational interdependencies between the soccer clubs and stakeholders in their institutional environment are discussed in relation to the creation of the structural context for image management by these sport organisations.

The works of scholars seeking to capture the dynamic nature of IORs as they evolve over time and are artfully managed are also found in this special issue. The study by Alexander *et al.* offers insight into the development of a dyadic partnership over three years. This contribution's unique focus on the interpretations of linked partners, one public and the other a non-profit sport organisation, through the formation, management and outcome of their relationship provides insight into factors contributing to sustainable relationships. Managing relationships, likened by Babiak and Thibault to balancing several spinning plates simultaneously, is the focus of the manuscript by these authors. Attending to both the formal and informal control processes in IOR management, Babiak and Thibault highlight the complexities experienced by one Canadian Sport Centre as it managed several IORs concurrently.

The scope of the topics within the field of inter-organisational networks and relationships is considerably broader than the seven articles published in this edition of the journal. This special edition seeks to provide an opportunity for research on inter-organisational relationships between and among the organisations in the sports industry to be showcased. In doing so, we also seek to promote further scholarship in this area. In particular we argue that sport organisations can provide the context for the application and development of questions, methods and ultimately increased knowledge and understanding pertaining to inter-organisational networks that have not been previously evident in the literature. For example, Hibbert and McQuade's (2005) exploration of tradition within the context of inter-organisational collaboration could easily be explored and potentially *extended* by an examination of professional sports leagues and other networks comprised of sport organisations. In this way, it is our hope that scholars will continue to improve not only the way that sport organisations interact with other sport organisations, but provide insight as to the ways in which organisations interact with other firms in their environment.

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