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**Stakeholder and Quality Management in Regional Sports Tourism (RST)  
Networks**

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Sport tourism as a field has undergone various changes during the last decades. More and more organizations (for-profit, not-for-profit, public) have entered this market and research suggests that this development will continue over the next years.

This study was designed to find out how sport tourism field functions in terms of cooperation among different actors involved in it especially under the viewpoint that many actors/stakeholders have highly divergent needs and targets. As these so-called Regional Sports Tourism (RST) networks are a relatively new field in regard of academic research there has not been a high amount of academic literature and thus this study aimed to take the field a step further.

The main objective of this study was to find out how stakeholder and quality management is practiced within an RST network, the corresponding extensiveness of such network and the divergent needs of stakeholders. This was done through a case study setup with the main reference being Salzburger Land Fußball Camps (SLFC) – a sport business company in Austria which is organising training camps for professional football teams.

The data was collected through expert interviews with the CEO of the above-mentioned company and subsequently the most important stakeholders who were identified through expert interview. The expert interview was conducted as a personal open in-depth interview whereas the stakeholder interviews were done through email interview during the year 2018. In total four stakeholder interviews were conducted and analysed by using content analysis. Furthermore, the author of this study was part of the organization and thus, ethnographic methods were also used for data analysis.

The results show that - as already existing literature reveals - RST networks are highly extensive in terms of number of stakeholders and their relationships to each other. Furthermore, they revealed that this field is enormously heterogenic. This means that highly divergent needs exist within the field, which need to be considered in relationship creation. This can be done by using “soft” traits which are one of the most important factors for a successful cooperation. Trust, experience in the field, problem-solving skills and others are a key to create a long-lasting relationship between the coordinating organization and their stakeholders and thus, need to be taken into consideration when entering relationships with stakeholders.

Keywords: RST networks, Football, Stakeholder Management

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NPO	Non-profit organization	RST networks	Regional sports tourism networks
ION	Inter-organizational network	etc.	et cetera
SLFC	Salzburger Land Fußball Camps	IFCS	International Football Camps Styria
CEO	Chief Executive Officer	Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung (GmbH)	Limited liability company (Ltd.)
SPOC	Single Point of Contact	FPO	For-profit organization

## 1. INTRODUCTION

External pressure of the environment is one of the main issues of organizations within the business field. As the environment is becoming more and more complex, organizations may not be able to cope with this situation anymore alone. (Child & Rodrigues, 2011.) To diminish the effects of this pressure, organizations tend to collaborate with each other to achieve competitive advantages, maintain and strengthen quality and subsequently save their existence (Savage et al., 2010).

Also, in sport management, the trend of collaboration between many parties is prevalent. Research about collaboration in the field of sport management has been conducted heavily within sport tourism. Inter-organizational cooperation is crucial for the survival of an organization as within this network not only resources are shared but also knowledge, and core competencies. This sharing of resources enables the network to accomplish common goals, increase performance and show innovative behaviour. (Wäsche, 2015.) Even though inter-organizational networks may be a benefit to most of the stakeholders, their diversity makes it hard to streamline an overall strategy among them. Especially under the circumstance, that in sport tourism for-profit, not-for-profit, public, and voluntary actors must work together, it remains hard to satisfy every single party involved. This is usually due to highly diverse goals that every stakeholder pursues. A possible solution to this problem is to enhance understanding of collaboration among stakeholders. (Wäsche, Dickson & Woll, 2013.) Through better understanding of this collaboration it is subsequently possible to get to know how a product within a stakeholder network is shaped, for example in terms of quality.

Especially quality is an interesting topic to research as quality and subsequently quality management is one highly important part in any business or organizational related setup since quality management is often decisive, whether an organization can adapt to ongoing external processes or not. The better this adaption process is done, the better the chances that an organization can survive on a long-term basis. Thus, organizations should place a

focus on continuous quality improvement to satisfy the needs of both the customers and the cooperating stakeholders and secure their own survival in an extremely fast environment. (Wäsche & Woll, 2013.)

Quality management is a heavily contested field and many models exist in this part of research. In order to identify the quality levels for this case study, Donabedian's model of quality dimensions (1980) was used as it has proven successful already in various researches regarding sport management and sport tourism networks (Wäsche et al., 2013). This specific model uses three levels of quality – namely structure, processes and outcomes – which makes it valuable to this study because especially in inter-organizational networks these three attributes succeed each other and thus, determine the overall quality level of a product or a network (Wäsche et al., 2013).

To close this gap within the academic field, this study aims to find out how stakeholders within a sport-related setup think about and perceive quality management and how they apply it in a business case. The setup of this study focuses on how quality is perceived by different stakeholders; how involved parties work together to achieve the highest possible quality for their customers and how quality can be further improved in the future. To see these relations a sport business field, in which a high degree of collaboration is necessary for success, was chosen. Training camp organization for professional football teams is such a field as many stakeholders such as hotels, logistics, gastronomy, municipalities and other private businesses must work together to achieve high satisfaction levels for their end-customers. As a country, Austria has created a high-quality reputation for such camps and thus, is a very suitable environment to study this type of collaboration. One provider of such services is Salzburger Land Fußball Camps GmbH (SLFC) located in the federal state of Salzburg, which has become the market leader in Europe in terms of total numbers of training camps organized per year.

The taken approach for this study was a case study. Due to this setup, it was possible to firstly find out who the stakeholders in the chosen company are and how this stakeholder network perceives and exercises quality management. Specifically, intangible traits, such as trust, communication, experience and others, were of importance for this research, as

their importance is critical for a successful collaboration and thus a well-functioning stakeholder and quality management.

Data was collected through different qualitative research methods. Firstly, a personal in-depth interview with the CEO of SLFC was conducted to work out the stakeholders which surround the company. Secondly, e-mail questionnaires were sent to the identified most important stakeholders to get their opinion about quality management within the network. Thirdly, the author of this study was at some points employed by this company, which made it possible to give more detailed insights using participant observations and other ethnographical methods.

## **2. BACKGROUND LITERATURE**

To comprehend the topics of this study this chapter describes concepts that significantly shaped this paper. Firstly, professionalization in sport and football is looked at to see why for-profit organizations were able to penetrate the sport field and why training camp organization came to life within the sport business field. Secondly, the concept of stakeholder theory will be introduced to explain the underlying principles for the classification of stakeholders and the collaboration. This section also describes regional sports tourism networks and the principles of quality management within them. Lastly, on the one hand sport tourism will be explained shortly, and on the other hand how sport tourism – and particularly football tourism – is shaped in Austria.

### **2.1. Professionalization in sport**

Throughout the past decades, the external environment has been playing a big role as it has become more complex and challenging in the general business field (Child & Rodrigues, 2011). Thus, organizations are to some extent forced to adapt to their external environment to be able to survive (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). One way of adaption for organizations is to find appropriate ways to counteract new challenges (Tetenbaum, 1998), of which one can be to engage in adaption through learning and changing behaviours (Ashmos, Duchon & McDaniel, 2000). In relation to sport, professionalization is one field which makes both the internal and external environments more challenging and complex for sport organizations both within the public and corporate sectors, and non-profit organizations (NPO) (Ruoranen et al., 2016). For sport organizations these include but are not limited to complexity of demands (Kikulis, 2000), coping with stakeholder expectations and formalisation (Ruoranen et al. 2016), and legitimisation (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

One way how professionalization has shaped the sport sector is that organizations in sport have become more ‘business-like’ (Maier, Meyer & Steinbereithner, 2016). Furthermore, this process has led to the direction of getting away from ‘amateurism’, towards the incorporation of for-profit organization (FPO) tools (Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011).



Ruoranen et al. (2016) showed in their research that within sport organizations three topics of professionalization emerged:

*“(1) changed management philosophy, i.e. for-profit orientation, ..., (2) functional differentiation and specialization, i.e. ... competence orientation and paid staff; and (3) application of management tools, i.e. controlling, administration and communication tools.”* (pp. 60–61)

This shows that organizations should change according to the external environment and thus need to apply more tools that are professional in order to survive (Ferkins, Shilbury & McDonald, 2005). Through the implementation of economic tools, organizations try to change themselves into customer-oriented service providers, in which quality is a highly important indicator for success (Ruoranen et al., 2016). Professionalization and its' effects influenced sport not only in general but also in the various specific fields of sport. Another reason for this trend can be traced back to the influx of money being poured into sport. (Slack, 2004.) Slack (2004) furthermore states that media companies seek to engage themselves in broadcasting sport, that advertisers prefer sport to promote their products. Even though there was always a link between business and sport, those links have intensified over the last 25 to 30 years. Sport has become a big industry nowadays (Gratton & Kokolakis, 2018).

## **2.2. Professionalization in football**

Football has also undergone radical changes during the last years due to the commercial development and growth (Bridgewater, 2010). The emergence of mass media and sponsors has required organizations to create a product or service for people to buy (Bölz, 2013). Hackforth (2001) und Blödorn (1988) describe in their work the so-called “magical triangle” in sport, which subsequently can be transferred to football. This triangle consists of relationships between sport, business, and media, and is intertwining even stronger over the future. Hackforth (2001) further explains this relationship in the sense that the difference between the systems of business, sport, and media has diminished over the last years. Furthermore, he stated that business practices can easily

be applied in the world of sport and media, which shows again the path of professionalization mentioned above by Ruoranen et al. (2016).

In line with Schaffrath (1999), Bölz (2013) also realises that football has become more of a commodity than only a game. He stated that football has turned into an object for media (as a programme), for sport right agencies (for marketing purposes), for enterprises (as a form of business) and for the general audience (as entertainment).

In summary, it can be stated that through the ever-growing demands and complexity of sport – both in general and especially in football – some organizations might not be able to comprehend all requirements the external environment is throwing at them (Lucassen & de Bakker, 2016). In addition to the fact that more money has been pouring into sport in general and subsequently into football these demands will grow larger over the near future (Slack, 2004). Thus, a development which has been on its' way since the 1980's (Breesch, Vos & Scheerder, 2015), is that a vacuum in sport has been created, which was filled by private sport organizations as they saw the commercial possibilities of the field. These possibilities have opened the way for various providers of sport-related products and continue to open up even more as this business field is characterized by high pace and change. (Hanu & Teodorescu, 2015.) Pitts, Fielding & Miller (1994) analysed business segments within the sport industry over 20 years ago and were confirmed by nowadays scholars that sport business will become a vital part of sport.

### 2.3. Stakeholder theory

Freeman (1984) writes about stakeholder theory in proposing it to be used as a strategic management tool for organizations. His definition states that

*“a stakeholder in an organization is (by definition) any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives.”* (p. 46)

The intention of Freeman (1984) was to respond to the effects of globalization, competitiveness within an industry, and the growing complexity of company operations. With the help of his stakeholder theory, he tried to explain the relationship between the company and its external environment. He positioned the company as a focal point in the middle of a chart and showed the connections with each stakeholder. (Freeman. 1984.)

Jones and Wicks (1999) and Savage, Dunkin and Ford (2004) identified the basic premises behind stakeholder theory. They state that a focal organization must enter relationships with other stakeholders in order to achieve objectives. This means that the nature of this theory lies within relationships and processes that happen between the focal organization and the stakeholders. They further describe that interests of legitimate stakeholders can differ significantly and thus no general set of stakeholder interests can be obtained. This means that, the interests and values of all stakeholders must be firstly identified and secondly considered when taking decisions. Thus, stakeholder interests can influence decisions made by the focal organizations as stakeholders also try to be consistent with their needs, values and priorities. Concluding, this shows that a focal organization needs to understand the various needs of all legitimate stakeholders and balance all interests within this group.

Frooman (1999) phrased the situation of relationships between an organization and stakeholders also as resource dependency. Due to the fact, that an organization is rarely able to create value without resources from other partners or stakeholders, the management of stakeholders is important to secure (strategically) important resources and thus create an advantage for the company.

Pfeffer and Salancik (1987) have identified three attributes that further describe the concept of resource dependency. Firstly, the importance of the resource for an organization is key in determining how much dependency exists. Small sport clubs usually depend on various contributions of the municipal decision-makers to be able to survive and continue their operations. The second factor is concerned with the extent to which an organization, that supplies a resource, has control over the allocation and use of this resource. When an organization has a high degree of control over the dependent organization, it can use this control to get the best deals out of this dependence for them. This leaves the dependent organization in a state, where they might not be able to decide on their own because the providing organization has a high degree of power over them.

This leads to the last attribute, which concerns the availability of alternatives for the dependent organization. If there are many alternatives to choose from, the dependent organization can choose the most suitable for their operations. This gives it more freedom in their strategic decision-making, as they can obtain resources also from various different sources. To counteract this resource dependency, companies try to heavily engage with their environment. Managers use techniques which strengthen the collaboration between the two parties, such as joint ventures, or strategic alliances. (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1987.)

The diversity of prevailing interests of each stakeholder shows the complexity of this field and shows how important it is to manage them carefully and thoroughly. Stakeholder management according to Wagner Mainardes, Alves & Raposo (2011) happens on three levels. First and foremost, stakeholders need to be identified to ensure that legitimate stakeholders are identified. The second stage comprises the processes that are established to identify and to interpret needs and interests of the stakeholders. The last stage deals with the construction of relationships between the focal organization and its' stakeholders. Those relationships need to be aligned with the respective objectives of both the stakeholders and the focal organization. (Wagner Mainardes et al., 2011.)

The identification of stakeholders within an organization is a relatively contested area of this theory. Many theories, explanations, and definitions exist on how to identify and classify stakeholders within a company. It shows that the theory is often used in academic research and thus exceptionally rich. (Miles, 2015.) This richness is also seen as a central weakness of stakeholder theory, as the concept is vague and superficial and thus might turn into a meaningless term in the future (Crane & Ruebottom, 2011).

### **2.3.1. Stakeholder identification**

For the identification of stakeholders within an organization a specific model must be used to provide a suitable framework. Mitchell, Agle & Wood (1997) enriched the existing theory with their model of stakeholder identification. They base their analysis of stakeholders on three attributes: power, legitimacy, and urgency. Stakeholders are classified according to their possession of one, two, or all three characteristics. The more characteristics stakeholders possess, the more important they become for the focal organization. To identify stakeholder, Mitchell et al. (1997) conceptualized the three attributes in their work. With the help of Etzioni's (1964) definition of power, Mitchell et al. (1997) explained this attribute with the possibility that within a relationship one actor can use various methods to impose their will over others. Legitimacy, borrowed from Suchman (1995), is explained as a general assumption of actions that are in accordance with norms, values, and beliefs within a respective societal group. Thus, those actions become proper, appropriate, and desirable among this group (Mitchell et al., 1997). The last attribute – urgency – uses the involvement of timing (temporal) and criticality (claim's importance).

Using the three attributes within the identification Mitchell et al. (1997) could create three stakeholder groups, which can be further divided into 7 sub-groups. Table 1 shows the classification of stakeholder according to this logic.

Table 1. Stakeholder identification (Mitchell et al., 1997)

Stakeholder category		Power	Legitimacy	Urgency
Definitive		X	X	X
Expectant	Dominant	X	X	
	Dependent		X	X
	Dangerous	X		X
Latent	Dormant	X		
	Discretionary		X	
	Demanding			X
Non-stakeholder				
X ... attribute present				

Definitive (all three attributes are prevalent), expectant (two prevalent attributes), and latent stakeholders (one prevalent attribute) can be identified. Depending on which certain attributes can be identified, further classifications are done. For example, a stakeholder, which possesses the attributes of power and urgency, is called a dangerous stakeholder as it can affect the company on a short notice and with great impact. While on the other hand a stakeholder with the attribute of legitimacy only, can be classified as discretionary. The most important stakeholder is the one, which has all three attributes (power, legitimacy and urgency), as the impact of such a stakeholder could possibly jeopardize a business or an organization. (Mitchell, et al., 1997.)

### **2.3.2. Regional sports tourism (RST) networks**

Stakeholder management in sport is remarkably important, as various stakeholders are involved in the creation of sport services. Especially in sport tourism this feature is prevalent because many stakeholders facilitate the overall offer. (Wäsche et al., 2013.) A characteristic of sport tourism at a regional level is that many providers and stakeholders form a network of Regional Sports Tourism (RST) (Wäsche & Woll, 2010).

This network enables sport tourism to have a range of various consequences, such as economic, socio-cultural or ecological effects for regions or whole countries. The outcome of those effects can be either positive (e.g. for development projects in the region, image enhancement and/or brand creation), negative (e.g. cultural conflicts, environmental issues) or both. To maximize positive and minimize negative effects a deliberate management of this network is of utmost importance. (Breuer, 2004.) An effective management can also improve the image that local residents have about sport tourism. As it relies heavily on natural and public resources, RST networks need to find a way to solve problems, which might arise due to a higher frequency of tourism and an associated negative attitude towards sport tourism. (Orams, 2005; Roth, 2000.)

The management of RST networks is as the management of other stakeholder networks complex because many different values, ideas and interests prevail within it. This creates a highly heterogeneous structure in which many different actors usually try to maximize their own profit making this situation one of the key challenges in the management of such a network. (Sydow & Milward, 2003; Wäsche & Woll, 2010.) Given the heterogeneity of this network, it is logical that the stakeholders are in the private, public, and non-profit sector. Due to the possible impact on the regional or the national level, the stakeholders need to cooperate with each other, as the quality of the cooperation also affects the quality of provided services for the customer. (Weed & Bull, 2009.) The organizational form of a sport tourism network is a specification of the overall concept of inter-organizational networks (IONs). Those IONs act according to a particular form of collective action, which is based neither on the same market nor on the same hierarchy. (Powell, 1990.) Furthermore, IONs have four distinctive characteristics, which show the

focus on cross-border processes among the stakeholders. The four processes are as follows:

1. Communication across borders of different systems,
2. Coordination of different operations,
3. Bridging gaps between different cultures, and
4. Connection of different interests

Those characteristics align one to one to those in RST networks. Communication across borders exist among stakeholders, which are based in different sectors (for-profit, not-for-profit and public), whereas coordination of operations can be seen in the fact that for example accommodation, public transport and sporting facilities need to coordinate their actions to maximize positive effects. The same principles are also seen in the spheres of different cultures and interests. (Weyer, 2000a.) As stated in literature about stakeholder theory, also in regional sport networks a precondition and necessity of successful operations is a focal or central organization. In RST networks focal organizations are usually the local tourism associations. To avoid conflicts of interests these focal organizations are mostly not in competition with the associated members or stakeholders. The focal actor is responsible for overseeing the coordination of operations within the network and furthermore with the help of the stakeholders shape the long-term strategy of the network. (Sydow, 2003.)

The customer or visitor him/herself usually looks at the overall picture of the sport tourism product. Hence, the overall product is defined as a *“multi-dimensional combination of services and experience opportunities provided and influenced by different actors within the region”* (Wäsche et al., 2013, p. 83). Haugland, Grønseth, & Aarstad (2011) state that the customers perceive the product or the destination as a unit. Therefore, the overall experience is determined on how well the diverse products complement each other and stakeholders cooperate among them to create a positive image for the destination and the offered experience as a whole. (Flagestad & Hope, 2001; Woods & Deegan, 2006.) Wäsche et al. (2013) explain this bundle phenomenon using



winter sport tourists. Winter sport tourists heavily use the surrounding services, such as slopes, cross-country ski tracks, ice rinks and sledging tracks for sportive purposes combined with the local infrastructure such as hotels, gastronomy, and public transportation. Furthermore, friendliness of local residents and their attitude towards tourists, physical appearance and cleanliness of buildings and places, perceived safety, and access to medical institutions play a big role in the overall experience of the tourist. Thus, this example shows how important the collaboration between the different stakeholders is to supply the tourist with a high-quality experience during their stay. (Wäsche et al., 2013.)

Another way to state this problem is as Wilkinson and March (2008) put it. They state that, for the experience of the customer the overall appeal of the product is highly important. This appeal is a combination of the quality of the services and the complementarity of the involved stakeholders and services within a regional network. (Wilkinson & March, 2008.) Thus, it can be concluded that quality is of utmost importance within those networks and a quality management system might be able to provide the network with a sufficient tool to keep the current level of quality or even improve it.

### **2.3.3. Quality management in RST networks**

The overall state of research within quality management in RST networks is scarce, even though it is an important part in any management process or any organization. Only recently, quality management within this field has started to gain importance and thus first studies have utilised network theories and quality management models to understand and assess effectiveness within networks. (Baggio, Scott, & Cooper, 2010.) A main point why this field has just started to gain attention is the complexity within networks. While evaluation of a single organization is an easy and straightforward task, getting to know the whole extent of connections between the involved actors is very difficult. For example, processes between two actors might also result in consequences to others within the network, without the two starting actors not even noticing it. These network-level processes are hard to investigate and need a substantial amount of resources, such as

money and time. (Wäsche et al., 2013.) Organizations within the sport tourism field are often not capable of providing those resources and the need for external advisers, consultants, and evaluators is a logical consequence (Zieschang, 2004).

Understanding those concepts and processes within the network is essential for systematic quality management as they are the main drivers behind the cooperation between stakeholders. Again, the overall network and not only isolated organizations need to be considered (Provan & Sydow, 2008.), especially under the circumstance, that the cooperation of all involved stakeholders is essential for the quality of the overall product and that it is dependent on a sufficient degree of coordination and trust between the stakeholders. By taking all involved stakeholders into account this trust building process can already be started at the beginning of a professional relationship which means, that motivation to work together is higher as all stakeholders feel respected and valued. (Zieschang, 2004.)

A concept, which is used often within business and tourism, is “probe and learn”. Here, projects and/or processes are undertaken to check upon their effectivity and efficiency. With the help of this concept, knowledge sharing within and among stakeholders is prevalent resulting in enhanced creativity and innovation. Therefore, this circle of continuous improvement leads to various positive effects, such as enhanced destination image, benefits for the residents, and reduced seasonality in the sport tourism sector. This circle subsequently creates higher product quality and can be reached via sport events especially. (Noteboom, 2008.)

Another highly important factor for quality creation and management is the process of evaluation. Through this constant feedback loop either from the customers/tourists or the connected stakeholders, it is possible to identify ineffective or faulty processes. In other words, this process helps to create better quality for the customers. Enhanced quality shows itself through higher trust among stakeholders due to transparent processes within the network plus vital and the constant adaptation of important procedures concerning the product. This constant adaptation is needed to save the network from constant changes in

the external environment and make it more resilient against threats from outside. (Weyer, 2000b.)

To evaluate an RST network, it is necessary to have certain variables or dimensions against which the network can be measured. A framework developed by Donabedian (1980) is used in many works about quality management in such networks. He developed following dimensions: structure, process, and outcome. Table 2 shows those dimensions of quality and their potential corresponding criteria for evaluation. Naturally, these dimensions follow a logical order as structures determine processes and processes subsequently determine outcomes. Meaning that a functioning network can only exist when effective and efficient structures are in place. When those structures exist, the resulting processes can fully realize their potential. This is important as those processes need to be executed well and of high quality to reach the desired outcomes. (Röger, Rütten, Ziemainz, & Hill, 2010.)

As clearly seen in Table 2 various factors influence the overall quality of an RST network. First and foremost, policies - which are accepted by both the stakeholder and the focal point – are needed to ensure that both parties can agree to a common goal or strategy. This development helps to ensure trust development and relationship formation among the involved partners. (Wäsche et al., 2013.)

Table 2. Dimensions and potential criteria of quality in RST networks (Donabedian, 1980, as cited in Wäsche et al., 2013)

Dimensions of quality	Potential criteria of quality
Structures	Strategic concept (sport tourism strategy)
	Setup of the network organisation
	Network governance (focal actor leadership)
	Technical and financial equipment
	Human resources (people)
	System of interorganisational communication
	Regional infrastructure and resources
	Legal standards
Processes	Network management processes
	Project planning and coordination
	Knowledge management
	Direct and indirect interaction with visitors
	Marketing activities
Outcomes	Sport tourism products
	Competence and behaviour of staff members
	Innovation and network survival
	Economic success/performance
	Customer satisfaction
	Attitude of local residents
	Ecological effects

## 2.4. Sport tourism

One sector within sport where collaboration among stakeholders is clearly visible is sport tourism. Thus, this field can act as a benchmark for other fields in the realm of sport. (Sallent, Palau & Guia, 2011.)

Sport tourism started to gain increasing attention from the field of both sport and tourism since the mid-1990s. Throughout this time two types of sport tourism were identified – mainly the active and the passive form. As the field evolved academically a third type – which is known as nostalgia tourism – was established. (Gibson, 2006.) Thus, Gibson (1998) defines sport tourism as

*“leisure-based travel that takes individuals temporarily outside of their home communities to participate in physical activities [Active Sport Tourism], to watch physical activities [Event Sport Tourism], or to venerate attractions associated with physical activities [Nostalgia Sport Tourism].”* (p. 46)

The motivation behind active sport tourism lies mainly in participating in different kinds of sport. People either, attend or compete in sport events, try to improve their skills, or observe other athletes and meet with them to learn more. Within this section, professional athletes and teams, and amateurs are included. Furthermore, active sport tourism also includes those, who seek to be physically active on serious recreational grounds. They are focusing more on health and fitness activities, which do not have a competitive character. Golfing, skiing, hiking, climbing, running, cycling and various other activities fall in this group. Event sport tourists mainly plan their trips according to sporting events, which lie outside their home communities. They mainly travel to sport events to watch them as fans, spectators or to give peer support to relatives, which are participating in the event. (Huggins, 2013.)

Nostalgia sport tourists mainly focus on travelling to places and artefacts, which are related to sport, such as Hall of Fames, stadia, and musea. Furthermore, those tourists sometimes also travel to participate or watch sport, or to help voluntarily in sport events.

This is due to their motivation to extend any experiences or to relive personal past events, which were related to sport. (Fairley & Gammon, 2006.)

Another topic that receives significant attention in the field of sport tourism is based around sport events. Fierce competition exists between governments, cities and host communities to attract sport events to (potentially) benefit from them. In terms of size and occurrence of such events, a significant range is prevalent. (Gibson, 2006.) The most prolific events in the world of sport are so-called hallmark or mega-sport events. In terms of the size, the biggest sport events in the world are the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games, which take place every four years and attract a global audience. (Fourie & Santana-Gallego, 2011.)

Contrary to mega-sport events, non-mega events are usually smaller in various categories, such as size, scope, reach, and scale. The main research focus within this field is on mega-sport events, but more and more researchers are also taking interest in non-mega events, as their impact on the local community seems to be different compared to their bigger counterparts. Especially the possibility of creating tighter social networks, connectedness with and of the local population and collaboration among different partners within a specific region is a reason why this shift in focus exists. Creating local partnerships and coordinating them needs specific processes and actors, to create desired outcomes. (Taks, Chalip, & Green, 2015.)

## **2.5. Sport and football tourism in Austria**

Tourism plays an important role for Austria. In terms of gross value added for the Austrian economy, tourism supplied around 18.5 billion euros or 5.5 per cent of the total gross domestic product (GDP) in 2015 in total (Statistik Austria, 2016). Breaking it down to sport tourism, it can be said that winter sport is clearly the reason why Austria is doing well in this field. Considering the total impact of sport in Austria in terms of gross value added (4.03 per cent of the GDP for 2013), the sector would lose half of its impact if winter tourism would not be included. (Gaulhofer, 2015.)

Despite the importance of winter tourism, also summer tourism adds to sport-related tourism as tourists' motives for coming to Austria in the summer are heavily influenced by means of exercising sport and moving. Especially hiking, walking and swimming count as the main motives to come to Austria in the summer. (Vejchoda, 2017.) In terms of future developments for sport tourism, Standeven, & De Knop (1999) predicted that sport clubs – both professional and non-professional – will continue to travel domestically but also start to become more international in choosing where to participate in sport. Especially the possibility to go and test skills with teams from other countries, and the option for social and tourist opportunities were reasons why this development was likely to happen. Additionally, fans will follow their team and thus increase travelling as well. (Standeven, & De Knop, 1999.) In terms of this development, the researchers' prediction became true as a relatively new field in summer sport tourism in Austria has occurred. Organizing training camps for professional football teams from abroad has emerged as a line of business. This industry started around 20 years ago in the Southern Austria – specifically in Styria – where the first company – International Football Camps Styria (IFCS) – was founded. (IFCS, 2016a.)

Nowadays there are three major companies in Austria, which divide the majority of the business of organizing football camps between them regionally (Simentinger, 2014). Figure 1 shows the division of the Austrian federal states between the three largest operators for professional football training camps. IFCS (marked as green) operates mainly in the East and South of Austria including the federal states of Lower Austria, Vienna, the Burgenland, and Styria (IFCS, 2016b). GlobalSports (marked as red) uses Upper Austria as their main base of operations and SLFC GmbH (marked as blue) has their main operations in the federal states of Salzburg, the Tyrol, Carinthia and Vorarlberg (SLFC, 2017a). This clear division is though sometimes broken as the different providers of training camp services place their customers in different federal states or arrange test games against teams which are with the competition.

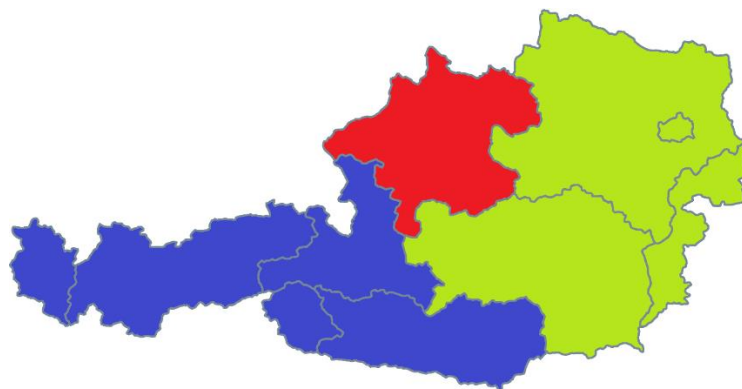


Figure 1. Division of training camp providers in Austria (Sametinger, 2014).

The development of training camps in Austria was remarkable over the last decade. In 2003, some tourism regions already evidenced the benefits of hosting international football teams in their area. Those regions found out that such training camps can have positive effects on the local economy, the local tourism figures and act as an image boost for the region. During the year 2003, eleven international football teams chose Austria as their destination to hold their training camp. This resulted in approximately 4 000 overnight stays solely by players and staff. The total sales volume for this period was at 4.5 million euros solely by teams. However, not only teams stay in this specific area. Taking fans, spectators and journalists into the equation over 10 000 additional overnight stays were added. This amounts to an overall sales volume of around 10 million euros. Due to this added economic input created by teams, managers of the clubs are sometimes able to negotiate deals with the local tourism boards. Free accommodation is sometimes granted because the teams argue that with their presence in the region, a boost in image will occur and thus the costs for the training camp will be covered with indirect returns for the region. (Illing, 2009.)

The trend of teams coming to Austria continued over the years, as Berrer et al. (2010) stated in their report about the economic significance of football in Austria. They calculated that, even though winter sport tourism is the most significant source of sport



tourism in Austria, football contributes heavily in active sport tourism in the summer. Compared to the figures for 2003, a significant change of overnight stays was recorded. In 2010, around 90 000 overnight stays were calculated, which means that within the timeframe of seven years, 75 000 additional overnight stays were traced back to football tourism and training camps in Austria. This increase in numbers also meant that economic indicators for this sector strengthened, as the gross value added accounted for approximately 6.7 million euros. (Berrer et al., 2010.)

Nowadays, Austria has established itself as a leading provider in this field. In 2016, over 40 internationally large clubs held their training camps in Austria. Among those, the most known were Borussia Dortmund and FC Schalke 04 from Germany, English champion Leicester City FC and globally known Chelsea FC from England, and clubs such as Ajax Amsterdam from the Netherlands and Besiktas Istanbul from Turkey (Austrian Press Agency, 2016). Additionally, national teams held their training camps in Austria to prepare for the UEFA EURO 2016, which took place in France this year. The representations of France, Spain, Czech Republic and Hungary used facilities in Austria to practice for the upcoming tournament. (EM-Vorbereitung: Prominente Trainingsgäste in Österreich, 2016.) Even though the above-mentioned teams are the most prestigious ones, smaller or not that well known teams make up most of the organized training camps in Austria.

### 3. SLFC COMPANY PRESENTATION

As mentioned in the previous chapter, SLFC (Salzburger Land Fußball Camps) has its main operation in Western Austria. Its' operations started in the year 2001 with only one training camp for a team from the Second German Bundesliga. Over the last decade, the number of teams which use Austria as their place for training camps and book their stay with SLFC has risen significantly.

Figure 2 shows this development until the year 2016. The three lines show the key numbers for SLFC. Reading the figure from the top, the first line in green is the number of test games which are organized within a year. Secondly, the line in blue represents the total number of organized camps and the third line in red shows the amount of overnight stays (in thousands) during a year. These numbers combine numbers both summer and winter camps. As clearly seen in Figure 2, a significant development occurred within the last decade. The breakthrough year was 2008 in which Austria and Switzerland were the hosts of the 2008 UEFA European Football Championship. The opportunity to brand Austria as a perfect place for preparations was taken and many football national teams had the opportunity to experience the possibilities given in Austria. Subsequently football teams were convinced of the opportunities in Austria and so a high frequency of returning teams (returning customers) was achieved.

Another interesting factor is that usually every two years the number of hosted teams rises. This is due to both the UEFA EUROS and the FIFA WORLD CUP competitions which are hosted every four years with a two-year gap between those two tournaments. This means that every two years, various national teams have the need to hold a pre-tournament camp to fully prepare for the competition and thus those spikes can be explained. (SLFC, 2012.) Nowadays, SLFC hosts around 80 teams in Austria in the summer and around 40 in the winter mainly in countries such as Malta, Portugal, Spain, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. Those numbers make them Europe's leading match

agency according to their CEO Hannes Empl (H. Empl, personal communication, November 11, 2016).

Additionally, various friendly or test games are being organized by SLFC. During the last year, approximately 240 games were organised and executed by SLFC and most of them happen between the months of June to August. This means, that every day on average two games are organized and executed for the hosted teams (SLFC, 2017b). As those operations are highly time intensive SLFC employs eight people all year round which take care of the overall organization of the training camps. To cover the vast number of teams during the busiest time in summer, the employment numbers rise even higher, with a total of around 40 people being employed during this period. During the summer, more people are needed because one of the services for the teams is a 24/7 team host at their disposal. Those team hosts stay at the team hotel and are the first contact point for the teams on-site to organize whatever the teams may need, e.g. transportation, training grounds, and other services. Furthermore, the hosts check that everything else is in place, so that the teams can have the best possible training and game experiences during the camp. The most important task for the team host is unarguably that the communication between all involved stakeholders flows as smoothly as possible.

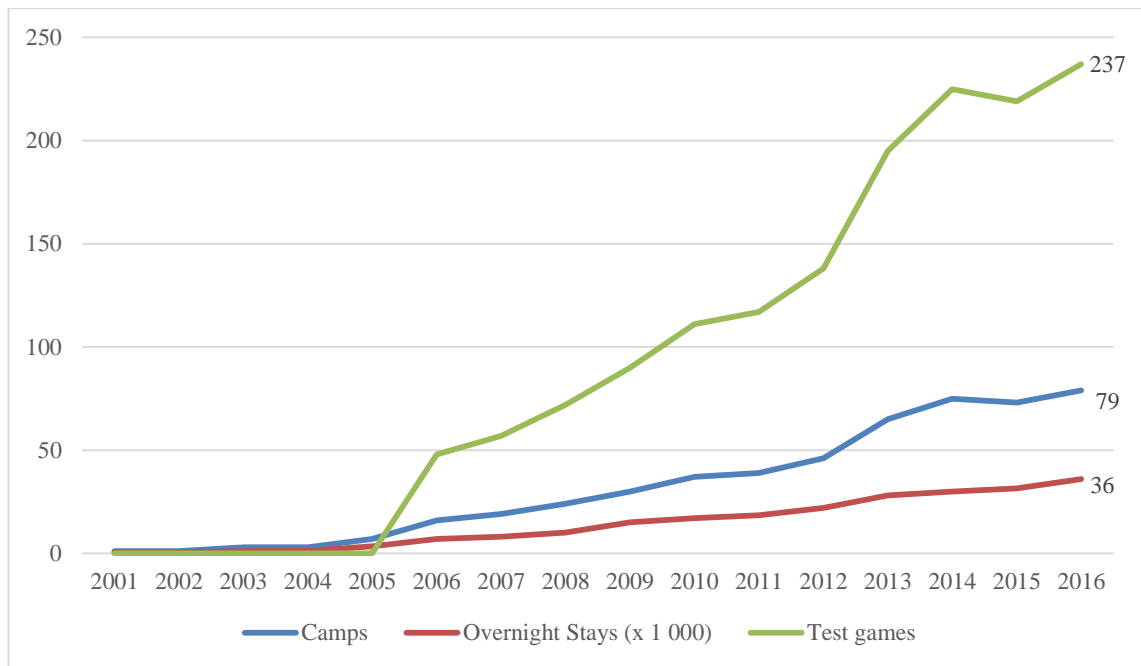


Figure 2. SLFC company development in number of organised camps, total overnight stays and number of organised test games (H. Empl, personal communication, November 11, 2016)

The organization of test or friendly games, is one of the reasons for another development within the company. As nowadays many games are broadcasted all over the world, SLFC had started their own TV and live-stream broadcasting services in the year 2011. Due to the success of this line of business a separation between SLFC and its broadcasting services was done in early 2015. Out of this separation “Hogmore Media AG” was created, which is now taking care of all broadcasting and production services plus media right distribution and media content consulting. (Hogmore Media AG, 2017.) Through this process of outsourcing SLFC was able to streamline and focus more on their core business, which lies in the provision of high quality training camps and their subsequent services. This task division is one of the reasons why SLFC had become the leading company in this business field in Europe – both in terms of revenues and the number of organized training camps.

#### **4. RESEARCH TASK, METHODOLOGY AND IMPLEMENTATION**

Due to the scarcity of research about professional football training camp providers both in Europe and specifically in Austria, this research aims to close the existing gap within this field of academics. This means that this research aims to understand some of the underlying mechanisms within sport tourism and RST networks with the help of a case study. The main research question in this study is

“How is stakeholder and quality management practiced within Regional Sports Tourism (RST) networks?”

To be able to find out the stakeholders within a network it was necessary to conduct a preliminary personal expert interview with the CEO of SLFC GmbH. Throughout this interview the most prominent stakeholders were identified by using the framework of Mitchell et al. (1997) and thus, contacted for their respective interviews. The most important stakeholders were asked about their viewpoints about the stakeholder management, quality management and outlooks on cooperation among an RST network.

The categorization of stakeholders in relation to their perceived importance of the focal organization within the network was done by using the model of stakeholder salience developed by Mitchell et al. (1997). Furthermore, the viewpoints of the focal organization about collaboration in the network were identified, especially under the circumstance that Lawrence, Hardy & Phillips (2002) argue the successful collaboration should be built upon a collective identity, particular membership ties, and cooperative and assertive communication.

The most important stakeholders and their (successful) collaboration with the focal organization are supposed to be key drivers for quality creation and its continuous existence for the end customer. Especially the reasons and benefits for entering a collaboration is of interest, as Savage et al. (2010) state, that collaboration allows companies to achieve goals that they could not achieve alone. On the other hand, it is

important to see, what hindering obstacles could be and what traits are necessary for a successful relationship. Again Savage et al. (2010) describe some factors in their work, such as divergent aims of the involved parties, different organizational structures, power differences and the inability to executing tasks effectively. On this remark, the RST network was examined towards measures of maintaining and building quality with the help of the work of Donabedian (1980).

In brief, a case study approach was taken to compare different cases with each other and thus, draw conclusions according to those cases. Edwards & Skinner (2009) state, that there is no single best approach to take when it comes to a research project. The most effective solution rather depends upon numerous variables and situations (Edwards & Skinner, 2009). Due to the fact that within qualitative research non-quantifiable traits, such as feelings, opinions, behaviours, and motivations can be researched (Gratton & Jones, 2010) qualitative tools are applicable for this study setup. Therefore, this study was based on a qualitative approach in order to find out viewpoints and opinions of the related parties within this particular case.

#### **4.1. Research design and approach**

Two specific approaches were taken in order to comprehend the complexity of this study and the processes which underline a successful RST network. Those two approaches are explained in detail in the following section.

##### **4.1.1. Case study**

According to Yin (1994) a case study is defined as:

*“an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.”* (p. 13)

Furthermore, it can be said that case studies often raise question of “how” and “why” (Yin, 2003). Another trait of case study research is that this approach is a good choice,

when dynamics within specific settings need to be understood and theory within this specific field is limited (Eisenhardt, 1989).

A case study approach is taken in this study due to the richness of the field it lies in. Because of the involvement of many parties and its' highly specific nature within professional football camp organization, it seems highly appropriate. This study uses a comparative, multi-case case study approach. Firstly, it examines the stakeholder management and the network underlining it with a special focus on identification of stakeholders and their perceived importance in the company SLFC and its most important stakeholders. The second part was concerned about the traits of quality management within the network to find out how it is managed in an RST network.

Especially the viewpoints of the following most important stakeholders were highly interesting and vital. This comes under the circumstance that relationships between stakeholders are usually not only one sided but rely on a highly cooperative environment. Thus, important personal traits – such as communication, trust, long-lasting relations, etc. – and structural traits – such as aligned strategies, processes, setup of the network, and others – were examined to find out how important they are for the success of an RST network. Within this example, the most important stakeholders perceived by SLFC were

1. team accommodation (hotels),
2. team practice facilities (whose responsibility usually lies with the municipality or the local football team)
3. the regional tourism boards, and
4. team hosts.

The case lies within one specific region in Austria in which training camps happen on a frequent – yearly – basis in the summer. Thus, only stakeholders which have their business in this specific area in the federal state of Salzburg have been asked to participate to this study and to share their opinions about the corresponding processes of quality management within RST networks.

The reason for choosing only one specific region in Austria is that the author of this study has experienced camps in a work-related relationship on-site and thus a familiarity with this topic and the area is given. Furthermore, through using only one region and its stakeholders, it is easier to work out what is important for the stakeholders, especially under the consideration that a trustful relationship is prevalent through the above-mentioned professional work experience of the author and thus, more reliable data was obtained. Another advantage of using only one region is that external parameters within the network do not change. In other regions, stakeholder networks differ sometimes quite considerably, as for example, some hotels have training facilities for the team included at their property and thus an important stakeholder – the training facility provider – would disappear. The last point for using this location is that all connected services are within a reach of five minutes, thus the cooperation is solely based within one place and does not cross considerable geographical borders. Therefore, the personal relationships of the mentioned stakeholders in this area is stronger and so, communication and trust can be evaluated on a more reliable basis.

#### **4.1.2. Ethnography**

Due to the fact that the author of this paper was at some point employed by the researched company there is the need to disclose this matter for this specific study. Almost all parts of this study – like planning, interviews and analysis of the collected data – were executed under this specific point of view. As stated by Allen (2017) ethnography pursues the purpose of getting a holistic understanding of a specific social or cultural group. In order to be able to do exactly that, it is necessary to engage and actively participate at happenings within the group to obtain insider information and a perspective which would not be open to externals (Allen, 2017.) For this research the cultural setting was the stakeholder network of SLFC and all other involved parties. Taking this into account, collection, interpretation and presentation of data was to a higher extent easier. Especially understanding ties and relationships between the identified stakeholders was helpful in interpreting the collected data. Ethnographical observations were done a frequent and regular – mostly daily – basis. They included participation in meetings, doing operational work with teams, coordination of team hosts and hotels and overseeing friendly games.



## **4.2. Data collection**

Due to the setup of this study, it is highly important to get access to data, which cannot be obtained through literature research or public means. Due to their nature, as being among the most effective methods for research in sport management (Edwards & Skinner, 2009), interviews were chosen. Interviews are especially applicable, when the interviewer wants to obtain in-depth knowledge about the respondents' personal experiences and perspectives about the investigated area of research (Goodman, 2001). Three generic interview types exist in the world of sport management research. Structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews are the most prevalent; though semi-structured are considered as the most favoured within sport management research (Edwards & Skinner, 2009). This study used semi-structured interviews to gain additional information about the researched subject. Open-ended questions - such as why, what, where, and how - are used for this style of interview and the respondent can elaborate almost freely (Olsen, 2012). The degree of freedom is set by the interviewer, which is guiding and directing the interview according to the pre-set topic of study (Doyle, 1994).

In summary, the traits of semi-structured interviews fit perfectly to this kind of study as subjective experiences of the stakeholders on collaboration and benefits were sought. The interview questions were thoroughly prepared to ensure that a benefit for all the involved parties in this research. Another aspect, which had to be considered, was language. The officially spoken language in Austria is German. Due to that, the interviews were conducted in German to ensure a higher quality of answers, considering the fact that as in doing so a language barrier does not exist. After the interviews were conducted, they were being transcribed in order to be able to analyse them. Another noteworthy point is that due to geographical distance between the interviewer and the interviewees it was not possible to conduct all of the interviews on a personal basis. Considering this circumstance, the interviews with the most important stakeholders were done using electronic communication. The e-Mails were prepared using an information letter for participating the study and the semi-structured questionnaire as an attachment in a Word and a PDF document. The two questionnaires and the information letter can be found in

the appendices 1 to 3. A detailed listing of used methods, interview partners and length of interviews can be found in Table 3.

Table 3. Interview table

<b>Interview partner</b>	<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Interview type</b>	<b>Interview length and no of transcribed pages</b>
SLFC GmbH	Focal organization	Personal	1,5 hours & 25 pages
Hotel	Hotel / Accommodation	E-Mail	3,5 pages
Tourism board	Tourism board	E-Mail	6 pages
Municipality	Training ground / facility	E-Mail	5 pages
Host from the 2017 summer season	Team host	E-Mail	4 pages

Data was collected from the various stakeholders of the focal organization. To be able to visualize the network that is surrounding the focal organization, an initial interview with a representative the CEO was conducted. The interview's main task was to find out the stakeholders and how collaboration with them is seen from the perspective of SLFC. Furthermore, classification of those stakeholders was done to identify the most important within the network. After the most important stakeholders were identified, interviews were held with them as well. During those interviews, the focus lied upon the collaboration between them and SLFC and how quality management is seen from their perspective. Furthermore, future developments were taken into consideration and in case there are any - which potentially could harm the quality of the product – what countermeasures would and could be taken.

### **4.3. Data analysis**

The data analysis phase can be understood as an activity of making sense of the data through interpreting and theorizing it. By connecting the data with the research questions, it can be organized and due to that it is easier to analyse the data accordingly (Schwandt, 2007). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that three procedures should be prevalent in order to analyse qualitative data. Firstly, data reduction is needed to make sense of the high volume of collected data. Coding, writing of summaries, and discarding irrelevant data are means to reduce the data. Secondly, displaying the data is a useful tool to draw conclusions from it. This display can be done through tables, charts, networks and other graphical formats. Thirdly, conclusion can be drawn and verified. With the help of the reduced data and graphical means of help, conclusions are to be developed.

One approach to tackle the analysis is content analysis. It is defined as a technique, which seeks to identify patterns and structures within the data (Krippendorff, 1980). To find those patterns the method of coding can be used. It is referred to as the organization of raw data into different categories. Through this method, the data is given a logical structure for the first time. For the process of coding, data has to be read first and all answers related to the research question are assigned to a code or category. This process of open coding is used to identify categories, which closely align with the research questions. Following, the categories are re-examined in order to find causalities within them. The point of finding connections is to start assembling the “big picture” of the research and to provide descriptive details of the phenomenon itself. After the two first stages, the researcher starts to become more analytical to look for further patterns and explanations. The fourth and last stage consists of selective coding. The raw data is skimmed again for examples and cases, which further illustrate the analysis – both on a contradictory and confirmatory level (Edwards & Skinner, 2009).

For this study, a content analysis was conducted. The first step is to transcribe the interviews in order to make them verbatim and analysable. Afterwards the transcripts were handled individually to find out what SLFC and the chosen stakeholders expect from

collaboration between SLFC and the stakeholders and between the stakeholders themselves. To identify patterns coding was used throughout this phase. Afterwards the codes were compared to each other to find emerging patterns deriving from the stakeholder's answers. The coding process was done using the framework by Donabedian (1980) and the respective quality criteria.

## **5. MAIN FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

To get a better overview and understanding of the gathered data, this chapter describes the main findings of the interviews and furthermore simultaneously reflect and discuss those findings towards the used framework which is elaborated earlier in this text. Firstly, stakeholder identification and classification using the model of Mitchell et al. (1997) and secondly, quality management using Donabedian's (1980) model of quality dimensions, will be examined by using the collected data.

### **5.1. Stakeholder identification and classification**

During the identification part of the interview, the CEO as the expert in this case study was asked for all the stakeholders without an actual evaluation of the perceived importance of those stakeholders. Therefore, it was possible to get an overview of the existing stakeholders. Table 4 shows the stakeholders mentioned during this interview and which are either actively or passively affected by the actions of SLFC and their respective business.

Naturally more stakeholders which might be affected but were not communicated by the CEO of SLFC during the interview exist. For example, local population, nature and infrastructure are also affected and thus stakeholders for SLFC. As they were not mentioned during the interview though, they are not included in this list. Even though they were not mentioned during the interview, this group should not be left out of consideration when taking decisions. Especially decisions regarding groups which might be able to shut down or harm operations need to be carefully taken (Wäsche et al., 2010.).

To get a better overview of this highly scattered landscape, Mitchell et al. (1997)'s system of stakeholder identification and classification was used and the stakeholders were clustered in their respective categories. For each of those categories a short explanation of why and how they possess the respective traits was done for better understanding according to the experiences the author of this study did during his professional relationship with the case company.

Table 4. Stakeholder identification and classification according to Mitchell et al. (1997)

<b>Stakeholders</b>	<b>Power</b>	<b>Legitimacy</b>	<b>Urgency</b>	<b>Classification</b>
Football team(s)	X	X	X	Definitive
Airline(s)			X	Latent (demanding)
Logistics			X	Latent (demanding)
Team accommodation	X	X	X	Definitive
Local football club(s)		X		Latent (discretionary)
Drinking water provider		X		Latent (discretionary)
Football federation(s)	X			Latent (dormant)
Referee(s)	X			Latent (dormant)
Training facilities	X	X	X	Definitive
Game facilities	X		X	Expectant (dangerous)
Safety and security organisations			X	Latent (demanding)
Police	X		X	Expectant (dangerous)
Ministry of Interior	X		X	Expectant (dangerous)
Television / Media	X		X	Expectant (dependent)
Marketing right holders			X	Latent (demanding)
Airport(s)			X	Latent (demanding)
Other training camp companies or game agents	X		X	Expectant (dangerous)
Tourism boards	X	X	X	Definitive
Professional greenkeepers			X	Latent (demanding)
Team hosts	X	X	X	Definitive
Company employees			X	Latent (demanding)

X ... attribute present

## **Latent stakeholders:**

### *1. Dormant:*

- a. Football federations
- b. Referee(s)

Dormant stakeholders only possess the power trait within the classification system of Mitchell et al. (1997). This means that each of them can force their will either intellectually, bodily or with other forces onto SLFC. Football federations in this context are the international football federation (FIFA), the Austrian football federation (ÖFB) and the local (federal) football associations. Within their rights they are able to either not allow games to happen or cancel them if potential sanctions against member countries are not allowing to compete against other nations. Thus, they can force SLFC into not holding a friendly game.

The same applies to referees as they might get the directive of not officiating a game from the respective federation. This would jeopardize one of the core services of SLFC which would cost a high degree of credibility and brand. Even though, they could harm the business of the case company their power is the only trait they possess as usually the claims of not hosting a game is neither urgent or has an impact in terms of legitimacy.

### *2. Discretionary*

- a. Local football club(s)
- b. Drinking water provider

Discretionary stakeholders only possess the legitimacy trait, which means that their influence in the company is such that their doing is within socially constructed system or norms and values (Mitchell et al., 1997). Local football clubs thus have only a symbolic meaning to SLFC as they are affected by their actions and thus need to be taken into consideration but do not really possess any power or urgency which could harm the brand or the actual work of SLFC. The same applies to the drinking water provider of SLFC which is a strong partner but could be substituted easily.

### 3. *Demanding*

- a. Airline(s)
- b. Logistics
- c. Safety and security organizations
- d. Marketing right holders
- e. Airport(s)
- f. Professional greenkeepers
- g. Company employees

Demanding stakeholders possess only the urgency trait which usually shows in timing (temporal) or in the importance of a claim of such stakeholder (Mitchell et al., 1997). This whole group of stakeholders can be easily explained with the fact that they are usually only important in a temporal manner. Flights (airlines) or material transporter(s) can be late or for some reasons not available which means that a time critical situation might arise. Even though their claim might be substantial a variety of alternatives are usually available within this group therefore their impact on the focal organization is relatively low. The same applies to the other stakeholders within this group. An important factor to consider within this group is to have alternatives for disposal at any time to be able to react quickly enough.

In general, it can be said that latent stakeholders (dormant, discretionary, and demanding) need to be considered on a small scale when taking decisions as their potential impact on the business operations is small. According to the CEO interview countermeasures for this group can be taken though. For example, other for-profit-organizations can be satisfied by setting up long-term agreements from which both sides benefit. Such agreements can be fixed amount of services/goods which are consumed on a regular basis and thus generate income that can be planned with a high degree of certainty. Another way to engage with such stakeholders is to offer them a marketing and branding possibility in order to enhance their incomes. In this case, the logistics company of and for SLFC is allowed to take pictures with the respective teams they are servicing and publish them on their social media channels. Thus, it can be shown that the logistics company is the “official” logistics partner for SLFC and their teams, which might enhance their reputation.



**Expectant stakeholders:***1. Dangerous*

- a. Police
- b. Ministry of Interior
- c. Other training camp organizations or game agents (Competitors)
- d. Game facilities

Dangerous stakeholders possess both power and urgency over SLFC. This means that their decisions can possibly have a high impact on the operations as they can force their will upon the focal organization with both a high temporal and important claim. The Austrian police force and the Austrian Ministry of Interior can influence the operations on a high scale, as they are allowed to cancel friendly games due to security threats for the respective location. Different to football federations who can do the same, those two authorities can take their decisions still shortly before the game would take place as circumstances are prone to change fast. This could mean that competing teams might be already on their way to the game and have to return to their home base because the respective game is not allowed to be played and thus cancelled by the local police.

Other training camp organization or game agents might not have such a strong timely importance or claim but their power is as strong as with the other stakeholders of this group. They take their power from controlling other teams or training facilities which might then not be available for SLFC. Furthermore, game agents might also control football teams and thus can play “political” games with them in the sense that they would not allow them to play against a team which is organized by SLFC. To put it in terms of sport business, those organizations can also be phrased as competitors which try to get the best out of every deal for their own purposes. Furthermore, game facilities also have an important claim in the operations of the case company. Especially, when previously done agreements are cancelled on a short notice – such as renting out a football pitch for a game to be played – it can leave a focal organization in jeopardy as its’ business might not be able to run anymore.

All of the mentioned actions that could be taken lack the trait of legitimacy which make these actions coercive. Thus, in order of not being taken by surprise this group – among the definitive stakeholders – need to be considered rather strongly during a decision-making or business process in order to mitigate or exclude risks.

## 2. *Dependent*

### a. Television / Media

Dependent stakeholders possess the traits of legitimacy and urgency according to Mitchell et al. (1997). This means their claims are within social norms and values and of critical or temporal importance. Television stations or broadcasters and the overall media landscape fall within this section as they are able to control the game day organization and operations. Specifically, at friendly games which are broadcasted to multiple countries broadcasters are prone to have a bigger impact onto the operations because their work is highly scheduled (due to satellite rights and tv schedules) and thus games need to start highly on time. On the other hand, they are usually not able to cancel the specific game out of their own will, which means that they lack the power trait and thus cannot enforce their will upon others.

Interestingly, among all the stakeholders only five parties possess two out of three possible traits. This implies that stakeholders in sport tourism might be either highly strong in their claim over the affected partners or that they do not have a strong claim at all. This makes this field even more complicated as the right balance between engaging with stakeholders of low and high importance needs to be found in order to keep satisfied to a certain level.

#### **Definitive stakeholders:**

1. Football team(s)
2. Team accommodation
3. Training facilities
4. Tourism boards
5. Team hosts

This group is defined as the most important group, as the stakeholders within this group possess all three attributes according to the stakeholder identification and classification system by Mitchell et al. (1997). These stakeholders have the highest influence on the ongoing operations of SLFC. Football team(s) in this context mean the actual customer who is coming to Austria to hold their pre-season camp there. Naturally they will have a degree of power, legitimacy and urgency due to the fact that within hours they can decide

whether they will come to hold such a camp or cancel it. Team accommodation has the same degree of influence over SLFC especially in terms of urgency. Timely (short-term) decisions, such as change of management, unexpected shortage of employees or natural disasters, within the accommodation could lead to either bad service levels or to closure of the hotel, which has the effect that the arriving team does not have a place to stay. Training facilities are another vital part of the stakeholder network, especially in the sense that these facilities are scarce in high quality and as such not easily to substitute within a small geographical radius or added effort concerning transporting the whole team to another facility which is nearby. Thus, the quality of the training camp might considerably change.

The degree of power, legitimacy and urgency for tourism boards might not be the highest for SLFC but they still possess all three attributes. Considering that tourism boards are usually closely aligned with the local or municipal government or mayor they can have a saying in the decision which teams are staying in their respective area or town. Therefore, it is important to keep tourism boards in the communication loop to keep satisfaction levels at a high level. Considering that tourism boards usually also refinance parts of the team stay and thus are financially viable for the focal organization, they are a definitive stakeholder. In return, they demand that the respective teams engage in (social) media work for the region to give it a boost in the respective home country.

The last group of definitive stakeholders concerns team hosts. Team hosts take care of the overall communication flow within all the stakeholders that are concerned with a specific team. Taking this into account a team host possesses all three attributes on a very high level because as such the host can decide whether to give information forward to another party or not. Logically, holding back of important information can and most likely will be detrimental to the overall quality level of the camp.

Even though the number of definitive stakeholders in this case study is only five, their needs have to be strongly considered while planning and carrying out a training camp. This is due to the fact, that as soon as one of them is not satisfied with the service it is offered, the quality level will fall as well. As an example, training facilities and their respective providers need to be respected in the way that their experience of the condition of the local facility is highly valuable. In many situations during a training camp they can predict whether the training pitch will be good enough for the teams to play on or not.

This provides an invaluable information for the organization team as it can be aligned when and which teams are allowed to practice at a given facility. If this experience is not used, it might be that a pitch could get completely destroyed due to carelessness of a team. This results in a heated and non-trusting relationship and thus, an important stakeholder might decline future business with the focal actor.

Another way to look at the wide landscape of the stakeholders surrounding SLFC is to put them in relation to each other. Such a stakeholder map can give a better overview of how many relationships exist between the different stakeholders and how they connect to each other. Figure 3 shows exactly such a stakeholder map for the identified stakeholders of SLFC.

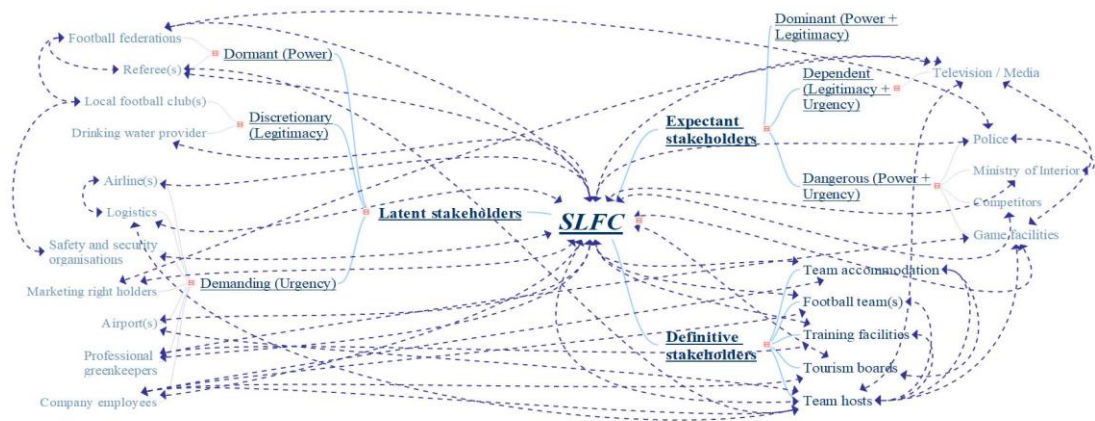


Figure 3. Stakeholder network map (Data used from CEO interview)

In general, it can be seen that this network is wide spread and a significant number of relationships between the various stakeholders are prevalent. The majority of relationships are between SLFC – as focal organization – and the various stakeholders which exist within this specific landscape.

The stakeholder with the second most relationships either to or from it, is in the group of definitive stakeholders. The team host as a coordinator between SLFC and all other definitive and various other stakeholders, though, is the second most important stakeholder within this sphere. Subsequently, it is clear to see again, that within such a specific network many different needs and traits exist, which need to be considered specifically.

Combining Table 4, Figure 3 and the work of Wäsche & Woll (2010) concerning the setup of stakeholder networks in a regional sports tourism network the research showed that the setup for this case example is a mixture of a lead organization network and a network administrative organization. The researchers explain in their work, that the lead organization network form is mostly prevalent in a business-related setup as relationships are mostly of vertical nature, meaning a top-down decision making and information-flow process. On the other hand, network administrative organizations act more like a central in which information, key activities and decisions are coordinated. Interestingly, they state that within the latter network setup usually a not-for-profit or governmental organization acts as this broker. (Wäsche & Woll, 2010.) In this context it is interesting to see that SLFC as a focal organization is clearly a for-profit organization and despite this fact acts as this central broker and coordinator of the network. Weed & Bull (1998) argue, that only a public entity is able to integrate the specific needs of all relevant actors or stakeholders without a major conflict of interest. The argumentation line of the two researchers contradicts the findings made during the stakeholder identification stage as SLFC clearly acts the focal actor within this specific network.

Considering this fact, it is interesting to find out why SLFC can engage in this role. One reason might be that all stakeholders work towards the same target which is to give the customer – in this case study the visiting football team – the best possible training camp experience. As the customer usually only looks at the overall picture of the provided service (Haugland, Grønseth, & Aarstad, 2011), it is easy to see that a high degree of collaboration needs to be present in order to achieve this target. To conclude this thought it can be argued, that even though a for-profit organization such as SLFC is working towards profit maximization it can only do that as long as all the other stakeholders are satisfied as well. This means, that the dependency between the various stakeholders is a key factor in the creation of this network. Through this setup it is possible for a for-profit organization to act as a central actor and facilitator without conflict of interests as the overall target and the long-lasting, trustful relationship with the stakeholders is too important to harm it in any way.

According to the findings of this study it is easy to see that an RST network has a high number of involved stakeholders. This goes in line with the observations and researches of Sydow & Milward (2003) and Wäsche & Woll (2010) which state that an RST network

consists of a highly divergent set of stakeholders with many different values, ideas and interests. The key challenge in this context is the management of such a network, especially considering the fact that the stakeholders try to maximize their own profit. As mentioned in the paragraph before the focal organization and all other stakeholders need to work together in order to create the best possible experience for the visiting football team thus maximization of own profit leads to a loss of profit for another stakeholder or actor within this network. This leads to the situation that trust and fairness are damaged during the course of collaboration and thus long-lasting relationships are not likely to endure. Consequently, the research shows that stakeholders within this specific network are able to maximize their profits as long as the customer experience maxim is not hurt, considering that all closely involved stakeholders gain a benefit from the organized training camps either monetarily or in form of advertising value.

The collected data indicates as above mentioned that the stakeholder network is big in size and number of involved actors. Within this study a total of 21 stakeholders were identified. As also previous research confirms, e.g. Weed & Bull (2009), a high degree of heterogeneity can be seen within this network. This heterogeneity can be confirmed for this study considering the following distribution of the stakeholder network. A third of the stakeholders derives from either a not-for-profit organization setup or from the public or voluntary sector, e.g. local football federations or the ministries. The remaining 14 stakeholders can be located either within for-profit stakeholders or internal stakeholders, such as employees. Interestingly the distribution within the sector of definitive stakeholders or most important stakeholders for SLFC is evenly allocated. Two stakeholders (football teams (as the customer) and team accommodation) can be located within for-profit entities, whereas training facilities and tourism boards lie in the sphere of public organizations.

Training facilities can be counted in this category due to the fact that they are mostly governed by the local municipality or authority, thus having a not-for-profit character even though they generate income with renting out the facilities. Tourism boards usually act as (semi-) governmental or public organizations as they try to maximize the regional benefits and mostly are funded through membership fees. The fifth definitive stakeholder – team hosts – is an internal stakeholder which cannot be placed in either one of those previously mentioned categories.

This distribution only shows the dilemma that focal organizations face when they try to balance all possible needs and values of the specific stakeholders. Savage, Dunkin and Ford (2004) conform this predicament as they state that focal organizations need to understand all the needs which lie within the stakeholder network in order to be able to consistent with them or at least try to balance them within the whole network. As those stakeholder interests can severely influence the operations of the focal organization but also other stakeholders they need to be thoroughly considered before taking a decision which might be detrimental to the overall operation and day-to-day business. (Savage, Dunkin & Ford, 2004.)

Especially, decisions that affect definitive stakeholders need to be thought through very carefully as this group of stakeholders mostly have control over (strategic) resources which are imperative for the execution of training camps. Aligning with Frooman (1999) this resource dependency can cause significant problems. Within this study it was discovered that for this specific region only one high-quality football pitch was available for the focal organization. Thus, the landlord – in this case the local municipality – was able to control whether the focal organization was able to stage a training camp in this particular region or not. To counteract the situation that this specific training facility was not able for usage – taking also short notice cancellations by the local municipality into account – the focal organization used a legal contract to align their needs and the ones of the specific stakeholder.

As with other contracts – such as labours contracts – the rights and responsibilities of each party were written down to the smallest detail. It was including high level details such as the overall fee for using the facilities and liabilities in case of damages to intangible assets down to what happens when force majeure situations arise – e.g. heavy rainfalls leading to unplayable football pitches – or how high the grass at the football pitch has to be cut. Standard contracts also exist for the visiting teams, these include the basic services that are provided by the focal organization for the team. These written documents are one-to-one given forward to all relevant stakeholders, which are mostly team hosts and team accommodation.

Using this practice, it is ensured that all contractual obligations are firstly stated, agreed upon and made official by signatures of all concerned parties and secondly act as a

framework for collaboration among the stakeholders. All services outside of this written agreement are separately agreed upon with the focal organization and the respective stakeholder in order to prevent – mostly – financial disputes. Summarized, it can be argued that contracts are one way of ensuring that stakeholders' needs and values are represented and considered accordingly. These contracts though should not be seen as a sign of mistrust or suspicion about the capabilities of the respective party but more as a document which ensures the visiting football team the best possible experience as the quote below states.

*...aber heutzutage musst du schon alles schriftlich machen. So und so ist dieses und jenes, wobei das jetzt vorab keine Meinung von einem Partner darstellen soll, sondern wenn es um Storno, Platzbenützung, Regen, Rasen mähen am Platz geht,... Das ist reine Absicherung. Weil wir natürlich dem Verein gegenüber verantwortlich sind. (CEO interview) [... but nowadays everything has to be done in a written form. This is handled like this or that, it is by no means supposed to state a (bad) opinion about a partner, but cancellations, usage of facilities, rain, mowing the pitch are agreed upon, ... It is simply protection. Because the visiting team holds us liable for potential cancellations.]*

In addition to drafting legal documents and contracts another factor has been mentioned by the CEO of SLFC which is helping the creation of long-term relationships, namely trust. Trust and other traits or soft skills will be further mentioned and explained in chapter 5.2. of this study. Shortly summarized here, trust remains a factor which ensures that stakeholders can rely on previously agreed conditions and thus do not need to be worried that these agreements might be broken.

*Frage: Es geht also auch schon sehr um Vertrauen zueinander?*

*Antwort: Absolut! (CEO interview)*

[Question: So in the end it is about trusting each other?

Answer: Absolutely!]

Zieschang (2004) aligns with the quote above that trust is one of the most important factors in creating long-lasting relationships between stakeholders and the focal organization. He furthermore states, that only trustful relationships can lead to a high-



quality overall product for the sport tourism area. (Zieschang, 2004.) As the overall quality of the training camp organization done by SLFC can be declared as of high-quality – especially seeing the number of overall camps and the number of recurring teams – a trustful and reliable relationship between the stakeholders and the focal organization can be identified.

Another important factor to ensure a high-quality product for the team is communication between stakeholders. Weyer (2000a) lays down four preconditions for successful IONs of which two are closely linked to communication and coordination between stakeholders both across different systems and cultures. The focal organization thus needs to take care that all relevant stakeholders get all information in high quality and furthermore in time to be able to either prepare in advance for different situations or to react to such. (Weyer, 2000a.) Within this case study, SLFC clearly takes the position of a coordination central for all stakeholders as the CEO of SLFC states in a quote below.

*Bevor die Mannschaften ankommen, gibt es bei uns eine Informationsstelle. Die bekommt alle Informationen, alles was dazugehört, diese Infos werden bei uns zentral gesammelt. Die bekommt alles von A bis Z und die gibt es dann an die gewissen Stellen und Zuständigen weiter. ... Dann ist im Normalfall schon alles fertig organisiert, bevor die Mannschaft eintrifft. (CEO interview) [Before the arrival of the team, we have an information centre. It gets all the information, everything which is necessary, this information is collected centrally at our office. It gets everything from A to Z and distributes to information further to the relevant actors or stakeholders. Normally everything is ready organized, even before the team arrives.]*

This quote above does not only show that such an information centre exists but furthermore states that such a central centre is apparently also important to the overall quality of the football teams' experience. This statement reveals though another factor which is that the office can only act as an information and coordination centre as long as a single point of contact (SPOC) is with the customer. To have such a SPOC, SLFC as well as the other two training camp organizations in Austria employ already mentioned team hosts or team liaison officers. As can be seen in Figure 3 these team hosts are the

most important part during a stay of a visiting team. This was also confirmed during the CEO interview.

*Den Ablauf kennst du ja eh bis hin zu den Spielen, .... Wenn das ganze Rad mal läuft, ist sicher der Teambetreuer der/die wichtigste Ansprechperson. Wenn die Mannschaft mal eingeecheckt ist, dann ist normalerweise der Teambetreuer der/die wichtigste. (CEO interview) [You know the routine anyway all the way up to game days, ... As soon as the whole picture is in place, the team host is the single point of contact. Basically, when the team is checked in at the hotel, the team host is the most important.]*

The quote above shows how important it is that a single point of contact is present at the team at all times. As from the experience made by the author of this study during training camps, it is necessary to be informed about all important happenings at any minute to be able to guarantee a high-quality experience for the team. The team hosts' task during the stay of the team is to gather all necessary information and distribute them to all relevant stakeholders. With this level of communication being directly at the customer it can be ensured that potential problems might be mitigated already before they arise and that all the stakeholders know everything they need to know at any given time of the stay. This again, aligns with Weyer (2000a) and his precondition of having sophisticated coordination among the stakeholders in order to have a high-quality sport tourism product.

Lastly, it can be stated the group of definitive stakeholders unsurprisingly earns the highest attention of the focal organization as they account to either strategic resources or as an important partner for quality creation and assurance. Furthermore, it can be said with a certain degree of confidence that not all stakeholders were mentioned during the CEO/expert interview. This is mostly due to the fact that an RST network is vast – which is also confirmed through this research – and some stakeholders such as the local population might not be considered as those which are affected heavily. This circumstance again underlines the difficulty during the stakeholder identification process as many of the stakeholders can be hidden. Even though they might be hidden, it does not mean that they could not be affected by the focal organization or other stakeholders or that they could not have an impact towards the overall operation of the RST network.

## **5.2. Quality management**

For this section, the most important or definitive stakeholders were interviewed. Definitive stakeholders in this study are “team accommodation”, “training facilities”, “team hosts”, “tourism boards” and “football teams”. For the stakeholder “football teams” it was unfortunately not possible to conduct an interview, mostly due to data protection issues and company secrets. The collected data from the remaining definitive stakeholders was clustered according to Donabedian’s (1980) dimensions for the evaluation of quality. Thus, the data was analysed towards (1) quality structures, (2) quality processes and (3) quality outcomes. This framework was used, as it has been proven successfully in different fields and thus became the standard for quality development – e.g. Röger et al., 2010 or Rütten & Frahsa, 2012. Due to the fact that several factors substantially influence the quality of and within an RST network structure, this section will lead through the factors of Donabedian’s (1980) framework which were stated by the definitive stakeholders during the interviews.

### **5.2.1. Quality structures**

As can be seen in Table 5 several factors influence the quality in terms of structural or strategic design as a first order theme. The most mentioned second order themes in this section are “Setup of the network organisation”, “Network governance (focal actor leadership)” and “System of interorganisational communication”. The reasons for mentioning these themes mostly lie within the sphere of communication, meaning that communication among stakeholders is highly important to create a high-quality environment for the customers. Especially communication with the focal organization is a determinant for high quality due to the vast amount of information that is flowing within one training camp. Subsequently, it did not come as a surprise that the interviewed parties mentioned that the setup with a focal organization is necessary to oversee the whole information flow among all stakeholders.

Another important factor that was mentioned is the prevalence of human resources and their soft skills. Considering the internationality of the incoming teams to Austria cultural differences might arise. Thus, a high degree of cultural competence should be prevalent in order to mitigate problems from the start. Furthermore, experience of the employees of

the focal organization is important considering the fact that many of them have their background in football and thus know what football teams need or want. This means, that proactive work can be done in order to satisfy the customer.

Table 5. Quality dimensions - Structure

<b>Dimensions of quality</b>		
<b>First order themes</b>	<b>Second order themes</b>	<b>Quotes</b>
Structures	Strategic concept (sport tourism strategy) 1*	"The strategy is to enhance the image of the region in terms of tourism and to bring visitors to the hotels which during summer months are not occupied completely." (Tourism board)
	Setup of the network organisation 4*	"..., especially the setup with a focal actor in the middle of all stakeholders is highly important to keep track of everything. This works really well" (Team host)
	Network governance (focal actor leadership) 4*	"SLFC acts as an information centre which distributes all the necessary information to all involved parties. This means also that all the necessary information goes to the right people, which builds a lot of trust." (Team accommodation)  "It is important to oversee the overall organization of information and the coordination between different stakeholders on a central level at SLFC" (Tourism board)
	Human resources (people) 3*	"SLFC employees were mostly footballers themselves, thus wishes and needs of teams can be foreseen easier." (Team accommodation)  "... cultural competence of people is important for the execution of training camps as many teams are international and need special care." (Tourism board)
	System of interorganisational communication 4*	"It is important to align all necessary things before the team arrives, the better the alignment, the higher the quality." (Training facilities)
	Regional infrastructure and resources 1*	"... top infrastructure in Austria to host training camps, hotels, training facilities and the possibility to have friendly games are really good." (Team host)

\* frequency of times mentioned

Lastly, “Regional infrastructure and resources” and “Strategic concept (sport tourism strategy)” were mentioned. Within regional infrastructure it was stated that the existing infrastructure at the region is important in order to attract teams to Austria. For the strategic concept a higher occupancy for the usually emptier hotels during the summer months was given as a reason for quality but was stated only once.

Analysing Table 5 it can be stated that the setup of the network organization is considered as a key performance indicator for quality according to the stakeholders. This refers to having specific traits in place in order to ensure an effective and efficient working culture which is based on a consensual and long-term basis. The most important traits are specifically a sport tourism strategy, a network of cooperation, a regional product of sport tourism and lastly visitors. (Wäsche & Woll, 2013.) Taking this setup into consideration it can be evaluated towards the setup of this specifically researched RST network. According to the stakeholders the quality of setup of this network organization can be described as high to very high. The most mentioned factor for this high-quality level is that the network of cooperation is considerably strong and working well.

*...speziell das Setup mit einer zentralen Stelle in der Mitte aller Stakeholder ist extrem wichtig, um alles im Überblick behalten zu können. Das funktioniert bei SLFC sehr gut. (team host interview) [...], especially the setup with a focal actor in the middle of all stakeholders is highly important to keep track of everything. This works really well]*

Taking the statement above into account it is clear to see that the focal actor acts as an – already mentioned – coordinator within the network. Especially, due to the vast amount of information which has to be collected, clustered and distributed it is essential to have this central actor to coordinate all of it. Without such a central coordination centre, information might be distributed to either not all or not relevant stakeholders and thus, quality creation and assurance are harmed because it is not able to trust and rely on information.

The next point in quality evaluation and assessment is closely linked to the previous one. Network governance (focal actor leadership) is as above mentioned a key quality indicator for an RST network. This leadership function – according to the definitive

stakeholders – is fulfilled on a high level. Not only does information flow through SLFC, also the importance of a focal actor is underlined by the statement of the tourism board.

*Es ist sehr wichtig, dass sich die Organisation und die Aufbereitung von Informationen für und zwischen den verschiedenen Parteien auf einer zentralen Ebene bei SLFC erfolgt. (tourism board interview)* [It is important to oversee the overall organization of information and the coordination between different stakeholders on a central level at SLFC]

This finding is aligned with the research done by Buhalis (2000) and Elbe, Hallen & Axelson (2009). In both studies it is stated, that a focal organization is a precondition for the management of interorganizational RST networks and their effectiveness. Again, the above-mentioned statement can be used to underline this preconditional status of a focal actor leadership as it is recognized even by stakeholders that a focal actor is a necessity for this type of operations.

Within this mentioned setup of the network organization only one factor was not as often mentioned as the focal actor leadership and the setup itself. A strategic concept for the operations was only stated by one stakeholder – namely the tourism board. Even though Wäsche & Woll (2013) state that a strategy is highly important for reaching long-term strategical goals, the definitive stakeholders did not seem to find it important enough to report it during the interview. The quote of the tourism board also reveals why it might be hard to draft such a strategy for all involved stakeholders.

*Die Strategie ist das Image der Tourismusregion aufzupolieren und zu verbessern und somit Gäste in die – ansonst in den Sommermonaten nicht komplett vollen – Hotels zu bringen. (tourism board interview)* [The strategy is to enhance the image of the region in terms of tourism and to bring visitors to the hotels which during summer months are not occupied completely.]

The statement indicates that the tourism board is mostly keen on enhancing the image of the region and bringing customers to their hotels, which in turn is generating income and taxes. This shows the dilemma of completely divergent goals described by Savage, Dunkin & Ford (2004) because stakeholders might only look to benefit their own cause

when they enter relationships within the network. Interestingly enough, the overall network seems to work on a highly efficient level which contradicts the importance of an overall agreed and a strategy in written form. One reason for this high efficiency level could be – even though there is no strategy and different goals in place – that the involved stakeholders work together so that the customer gets the best possible overall experience.

Flagestad & Hope (2001) mention, that the customer only looks at the overall product and the quality of such a product is only determined on how well the single pieces complement it each other. Thus, despite the little responses of stakeholders concerning a strategy there could be one strategy in place without the stakeholders even noticing it. This strategy could be described as a (subconscious) consensual willingness to give the visiting football team the best possible experience during their stay.

In terms of structure another important factor, which was mentioned strongly by the most important stakeholders, was communication and the underlying system behind it. A thorough flow of communication in both quality and quantity is highly necessary. All of the definitive stakeholders mentioned it during the interviews and one quote which exemplifies this is as follows.

*Es ist sehr wichtig alle notwendigen Dinge miteinander abzustimmen, schon bevor die Mannschaft ankommt, denn je besser die Abstimmung, desto höher ist die Qualität. (training facilities)* [It is important to align all necessary things before the team arrives, the better the alignment, the higher the quality.]

Weyer (2000a) confirms, that a holistic system of communication is a precondition to be able to work together on a high-quality level. The system within this RST network is done by having SLFC as the focal organization within the overall network and the team hosts as a SPOC accompanying the visiting team and taking care that within this sub-network the information and communication process works as it should.

For this sophisticated process of communication another prerequisite is to have the right people / human resources at the right place at the right time as the outcomes and the quality of the overall product largely depends on the quantity and the skill sets of the people which work for and with the customer (Donabedian, 1980). This is confirmed with

this study as the stakeholders reported that highly experienced people also help them to see problems in advance and are able to react accordingly without the customer even noticing, thus ensuring that quality is at a high level.

*Die Mitarbeiter von SLFC waren meist selbst Fußballer und können somit Wünsche und Bedürfnisse der Teams schon voraussehen. (team accommodation)* [SLFC employees were mostly footballers themselves, thus wishes and needs of teams can be foreseen easier.]

In terms of regional infrastructure and available resources their responses were not as plenty as with the other factors in the structures section. Only the team host stated following regarding the existing infrastructure.

*Es existiert eine Top-Infrastruktur in Österreich, um Trainingslager veranstalten zu können. Neben Hotels sind auch die Trainingsmöglichkeiten exzellent und durch die Möglichkeit gegen andere Mannschaften zu spielen, ist Österreich für Trainingslager sehr geeignet. (team host)* [A top infrastructure in Austria to host training camps exists. Beside hotels, the training facilities are excellent and the possibility to have friendly games against other teams make Austria a highly suitable place for training camps.]

As Wäsche & Woll (2013) state the regional infrastructure has to be at a certain level in order to attract customers to come to a certain location. In this case study there is clearly a high-quality product in place, otherwise football teams would not choose Austria as their location for the training camp. Taking into account the low number of responses in this section it is interesting to find out why this clearly important topic was not mentioned. One explanation might be that stakeholders take the infrastructure – such as maintained roads, training facilities, mountains, etc. – as granted because it has been existing for a long time.

Wäsche & Woll (2013) confirm with the fact that service providers mostly just take advantage of the local infrastructure without noticing that exactly this factor might lead to their success. This potentially could lead to the problem that without proper maintenance at some point the existing infrastructure might get permanently damaged.



Thinking this further a higher awareness that the local infrastructure is not “just there” has to be raised in order to ensure the longevity of the product can be assured. In this case study, it might be to support local clubs with necessary maintenance work or hiring professional help for the mostly voluntary workers.

### 5.2.2. Quality processes

Table 6 shows the themes which were mentioned within the quality dimension of processes. The most mentioned topic was “Network management process”. Network management in this case means the internal operations among the stakeholder network. Within this theme the operational side was not as much mentioned as normative values, such experience, trust and also fairness. Those were among the most prevalent topics which are highly important to be able to get a high level of quality for the end customer. Those traits are also important to ensure long-lasting and successful relationship between the stakeholders. Especially the following statement of the tourism board underlines this the importance of trust in each other and its’ effect on quality.

*... falls diese von Vertrauen geprägte Geschäftsbeziehung nicht unnötig zerstört wird, zeugt das auch von Qualität und Professionalität aller involvierten Parteien.* “*(tourism board)* [... when this trustful relationship is not wrecked needlessly, it shows the quality and professionalism of all parties involved.]

This finding aligns completely with Breuer (2004) as he states that trust among stakeholders from different social systems is a precondition for high-quality levels. The stakeholders in this example benefit from their regional proximity and their close links as they know each other already for a longer time and thus, trust each other when entering working relationships. Furthermore, Provan & Sydow (2008) identified that trust and fairness are one of the main indicators to maintenance and success of an interorganizational network. Thus, in this case the level of trust and fairness can be described as high because firstly more and more teams want to come to Austria to hold their training camp and secondly, that SLFC has been operating for a long time already. Another factor in the section of quality processes is that the regional stakeholders take the visit of a team as a possibility to create advertising value for their region. “Marketing activities” are important to the stakeholders because through such they can generate

various effects, such as airtime in the visiting teams' country, a higher reach on social media channels and subsequently higher customer numbers for a relatively cheap price. This finding is interesting in the way that it clearly highlights also the different targets which are pursued by single stakeholders. Whereas the team host did not have an opinion on this matter, team accommodation and the tourism board emphasized this matter. Naturally this comes from the fact that the latter mentioned are driven by generating income either for themselves or the specific region. This can be also emphasized by the following statement of the tourism board.

*Der Hauptgrund ist Marketing, ganz klar. (tourism board)* [The main reason is marketing, this is completely clear.]

This main reason can further be underlined by Illing (2009). He stated, that football teams sometimes receive substantial discounts on their stay as their advertising value for a region might be high. This is also the reason, why tourism boards nowadays still pay part of the stay of the incoming team. In return they have specific requirements in terms of social media marketing, newspaper or in-stadium advertising. Thus, this sponsoring of the team is paid back by means of advertising and marketing and potential new revenue for the region.

Correlating to the previous point is the mentioning of "Direct and indirect interaction with visitors". They correlate in the way that a high satisfaction level of the customer – in this case the team – will lead to better advertising value for the respective organization. Furthermore, experience was mentioned as part of the overall stay of the teams. A better overall experience might be likely to spark higher visitor numbers of fans or enthusiasts of the visiting team to the region.

The last-mentioned point within this section was "Project planning and coordination". Due to the high fluctuation of incoming teams to Austria through SLFC it is apparently sometimes hard to plan well ahead. This fluctuation is sometimes detrimental to a long-term strategy of a stakeholder, e.g. in terms of internationalisation. Considering the circumstance that some stakeholders only know a month before which teams are coming to their facilities is difficult because it could actually harm the overall strategy. This can be exemplified by following statement of the tourism board.

*Nachteil hier ist, dass wir die Mannschaft nicht aussuchen können. Das heißt wir treffen nicht immer unseren Kernmarkt und können so auch nicht gezielt planen.* (tourism board) [The disadvantage here is, that we cannot choose the team. That means, that we are not always able to get our target group / market and thus, planning ahead is hard.]

Tourism boards draft strategies to attract specific travel groups to their region and stick to that plan for a longer time. If a team from another area than the desired one comes to hold its' training camp, it might be even hurtful to this strategy. Despite this fact they try to arrange the stay of the team regardless and see it as an opportunity to attract even more people. Combining the work of Weed & Bull (2009) and Wäsche & Woll (2013), that an RST network is highly heterogenic and many different needs exist within it, it is interesting to see, that the tourism board is adapting to the given circumstances. Even though it might harm its overall strategy this stakeholder is still ready to work with teams.

Table 6. Quality dimensions - Processes

<b>Dimensions of quality</b>		
<b>First order theme</b>	<b>Second order theme</b>	<b>Quotes</b>
Processes	Network management process 4*	"Trust, fairness and adaptability are highly important to create an atmosphere in which all partners benefit from each other, if these are not prevalent, quality suffers." (Team accommodation)  "...when this trustful relationship is not wrecked needlessly, it shows the quality and professionalism of all parties involved." (Tourism board)
	Project planning and coordination 2*	"Team fluctuation prevents strategic planning within a region, project planning and coordination though is done by SLFC on a high-quality level." (Tourism board)  "It would be nice to have the possibility to be informed earlier which teams come to the specific region to enable better planning." (Team host)
	Direct and indirect interaction with visitors 3*	"...trying to give the visitors the best experience, be it a visit at the hotel or at games where also fans, media and other visitors are present." (Tourism board)  "To raise the satisfaction levels of the football teams we are giving our best to fulfil their wishes as much as possible." (Team accommodation)
	Marketing activities 3*	"... enables us to put our region in a positive light in the region of the team's origin." (Tourism board)  "Having a team at our hotel is also an opportunity for us to take advantage of a certain advertising value, as we are mentioned on social media channels of the teams." (Team accommodation)
* frequency of times mentioned		

### 5.2.3. Quality outcomes

The last determinant of quality according to Donabedian (1980) is outcomes. It is subsequently created and accordingly depending on the equality of the first two factors. As outcomes can be seen by all involved parties regardless of how much insider information someone has, it is interesting to see that within this section only second order themes with three or four mentions are existent. This means that the outcome (= quality) of the product is seen by all definitive stakeholders and every definitive stakeholder has an opinion regarding quality outcomes. First and foremost, the sport tourism product is

of essential importance to all stakeholders for reasons which are mentioned already above in Table 6.

Especially advertising value, generating income and branding are linked to a high-quality product which according to the participants of this study is in place within this case study. Even though the quality is high at the moment there is still fluctuation between the teams on how much they can alter perceived quality as the team host states that some teams are more work and never happy with whatever one does. This means that even though the overall quality is at a high degree some customers cannot be satisfied. Also, among the quality level of the sport tourism product it is important to work together and trust each other in order to make the best out of the situation.

As for customer satisfaction the participants told all the same according to their own specification. Whenever the visiting team is satisfied, they are satisfied as well because it means that the camp was executed without any or only small problems or the troubleshooting process worked perfectly. For the training facilities it is important that the football pitch is of a high standard because teams wish to practice with the best possible conditions. Thus, a praise for the facilities reflects also high customer satisfaction. This customer satisfaction plays a big role for the tourism board because of a positive image and branding. The higher the customer satisfaction, the higher the chance that the members of the visiting team will give a positive mouth-to-mouth advertisement in their respective home country, which might lead to higher overall visitor numbers in the long-run.

Reflecting the paragraphs above it can be argued, that a holistic approach to quality creation must be taken in order to create high quality. Meaning, that all stakeholders in the product creation have to work together and see the customer experience as big picture with many small parts that create it. This also goes in line with Flagestad & Hope (2001), who state that the customer looks at the experience as a whole and judges it also respectively. It shows that a high degree of collaboration and willingness to work together has to be given in order to create a high-quality product and subsequently, positive outcomes for all involved stakeholders.

Another important factor for a positive quality outcome for the stakeholders was the attitude and competence of all staff members. As mentioned already earlier, teams come from different cultural backgrounds and thus might not be accustomed to customs in Austria and as Kusluvan et al. (2010) state that, especially in tourism and hospitality human resources are one of the most important assets, it is highly obvious why skilled people are required in an RST network. This is due to the fact that tourism is based on services which usually require an interpersonal interaction between customer and employees of the respective service provider. (Kusluvan et al., 2010.) Therefore, a high degree of intercultural competence and subsequently language is important in order to be able to empathize with players or staff members whenever a question or problem arises. Additionally, other cultures also mean different working and management styles. To be able to work together properly it is important to also understand that and react to certain circumstances, e.g. ask for necessary documents – e.g. visas or other necessary travel papers – before arrival or a couple of days before. Not only intercultural competence seems to be important but also adaptability, flexibility and quick decision-making skills.

*Wenn ein Problem auftritt, ist es immer wichtig kühlen Kopf zu bewahren und eine Lösung dafür zu finden, anstatt in Panik und Verzweiflung zu fallen. (team host)*  
 [When a problem arises, it is always important to stay calm and find a solution to it, rather than panicking and falling into despair.]

As stated above by the team host, day-to-day training camp business means that a lot of changes can arise during one day, if not during several hours. Thus, one needs to be flexible in order to fulfil the demands of the teams. On one side of the spectrum it is important to think ahead one or two steps to minimize the risk of making mistakes during hasty or stressful times. On the other side it is also important to create solutions fast whenever a problem arises. In the context of this study it is clear to see, that highly skilled and experienced employees of all stakeholders are in place and working well.

For all for-profit stakeholder economic success and performance is a strong sign of quality. In winter sport regions – such as the operating regions of SLFC – it is likely that accommodations close their business for the summer. Now they have an additional source of revenue for them as for example the team accommodation states. Considering that a team usually brings around 60 people with them and the average period of stay is around

seven days, it is easy to see that this a high economic success for the hotels. The same applies to the training facilities because in the months in which professional football teams have their training camps, the local teams usually are still on summer break. This means that the training facilities can be used during this time and extra income is generated not only through the practices but also through friendly games. This income can then be invested in upgrading or renewing existing infrastructure for the next years.

The tourism board as a marketer for the region of course has the goal to enhance exactly these financial outcomes as they benefit the whole region and subsequently fulfil their own strategic targets. Combining with the research done by Wäsche et al. (2013) it is clear that economic performance needs to be given in order to survive and further improve in the future. With this economic success it is possible from the focal actor's point of view to retain existing staff, invest in and support stakeholders, and further expand the business as it is. With these actions it is subsequently possible to not only retain existing quality levels but also further improve them for the future and ensure that customer will also return over the next years. (Wäsche et al., 2013.)

The overall quality of the training camps in Austria is at a high level which is seen by the high number of teams coming to Austria to hold their camp there. This is due to the fact that above mentioned quality structures and quality processes are in place.

Table 7. Quality dimensions - Outcomes

<b>Dimensions of quality</b>		
<b>First order theme</b>	<b>Second order theme</b>	<b>Quotes</b>
Outcomes	Sport tourism products 4*	"..., high quality level at the moment, depending on the team size and origin, willingness to work together is important." (Team host)
	Competence and behaviour of all staff member 4*	"When a problem arises, it is always important to stay calm and find a solution to it, rather than panicking and falling into despair." (Team host)  "We as a hotel want the customer to feel happy, thus we also need to sometimes understand their situation and their ways of living and find the best possible solution for both sides." (Team accommodation)
	Economic success / performance 3*	"..., the usage of otherwise unused facilities during the summer months generates income for the municipality of course." (Training facilities)  "hotel occupancy is an important performance indicator especially during more quiet summer months in winter sport regions" (Tourism board)  "We are happy to have high occupancy numbers also during the summer, because otherwise we would need to have a summer break." (Team accommodation)
	Customer satisfaction 4*	"If the customer is happy, we are happy." (Team accommodation, team host)  "A happy customer means that a positive image will be taken back to their home country." (Tourism board)  "The biggest praise for us is when the teams say that they were extremely happy with our football pitch, that just reflects as a quality sign." (Training facilities)
* frequency of times mentioned		



## 6. CONCLUSION AND MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to get an overview of how stakeholder and quality management is organized within a highly cooperative environment in sport. Interorganizational networks – in this case regional sports tourism networks – are only scarcely researched within the field of sport and thus this thesis aimed to strengthen the understanding in this field of research. Only few researchers aimed to identify stakeholder networks in sport in general and in sport tourism on a micro-level. Considering this scarce research, the case company and network for this study was chosen due to the success that it has had over the last years and because of the fact that many divergent stakeholders were present within this network. Subsequently, it can be stated that a successful stakeholder management is in place as the quality of the end customer product is at a high level. Furthermore, the circumstance that stakeholders from for-profit, not-for-profit, public and voluntary actors worked together was interesting as different values and needs were present.

Firstly, the stakeholder network was investigated using a personal in-depth interview with the CEO of SLFC to identify all stakeholders that he perceived as noteworthy. This was done using the stakeholder identification model of Mitchell et al. (1997). Through this process it was possible to extract the most important stakeholders within the network from the perspective of SLFC as a focal organization within the network. Secondly, the most important stakeholders were interviewed subsequently using Donabedian's (1980) framework of quality dimensions. With this it was possible to find out which structures, processes and outcomes are present between the focal organization and the most important stakeholders. Most of the results stemming from this research were on the one hand highly interesting and on the other hand unexpected.

Taking into account the research question "How is stakeholder and quality management practiced within Regional Sports Tourism (RST) networks?", this research aimed to outline the characteristics of successful RST networks and which characteristics are undoubtedly necessary to create a well-functioning network with a high-quality product for the customer.

Firstly, the setup of an RST network is highly important as it is vital on how communication is handled and information is flowing. A focal leadership is of utmost importance to ensure that the network is governed in such way that information is collected through this central actor and further distributed to the according stakeholders. Through this practice it is furthermore possible to not only distribute the messages but also give it to the right stakeholders and partners. This means that an efficient way of communication can be exercised as the right stakeholders get the right messages at the right time in order to prepare everything necessary for the customers. In this study it can be confirmed that this focal leadership is a necessity in order to survive in such a contested field of business. Specifically, the need for information that arrives in time and sufficient quality at the right stakeholders is done in high-quality manner. Specifically, the combination of having a central department – which sole responsibility is to collect information – and team hosts on-site at the actual stakeholders – who share the information instantly – act as a catalyst for the flow of information and subsequently, quality creation.

Another reason why a focal actor is important is the heterogeneity of an RST network in whatever magnitude the network exists. As different stakeholders engage with each other in many ways in these networks it is important to align the different but clearly existing needs and targets. The alignment of dissimilar goals is only possible when there is a central actor in place which can coordinate between the different parties. During this study it was discovered that – contrary to the existing literature, e.g. Weed & Bull (1998) who state that public organizations align these needs – also private entities can act as such coordinator in order to create a common target within this specific network. Logically, it can be argued that the researched network is rather specific in the sport tourism scale because of its' aim of profit maximization and thus, might not be the ideal setup to come to such a conclusion, especially with the argument that public entities do not look at their own profit but more on the wellbeing of all without conflict of interests.

Even though this argument has merit, a private company can also act as a coordinator without a conflict of interest. This is because, a common target is in place within this specific network and all stakeholders work towards a high-quality product and the best

experience for the customer. In case such a well-functioning network and product exist, everyone has the possibility to benefit from it, thus a private entity as a central actor might be actually suited better than a public organization. This is most likely because private organizations with their business-oriented background might be able to grasp changes in their field of business faster and adapt accordingly than public organizations which are mostly dependent on either politics or their members and thus are somewhat restricted in changing their setup. This can also explain the success of this specific network and its' focal actor because the degree of adaptability and subsequently innovation is on the hand on a high level and on the other hand can be executed fast. This aligns with the existing literature by Wäsche & Woll (2013) which state that a strong mind of innovation and adaption is a key determinant of long-term success of an RST network.

Interestingly enough, this RST network does not have its' strategy written down or stated in any other way than a common oral agreement by the various stakeholders engaging with each other. Thus, the question arises whether a written strategy is needed or if it is sufficient enough to have a common target in place towards which everyone is working. The common target in this case is as above mentioned the best possible experience for the customer and thus customer satisfaction. This could mean by entering this cooperation with the focal actor the common target is also accepted at the same time and also executed as all parties gain and benefit from a satisfied customer. This implies, that even though a written strategy is not in place, a common target can always be reached and acted upon. A factor that might come in play here is, that written contracts between the focal actor and the stakeholders exist to define the rights and responsibilities of the respective parties. Subsequently, the engaging parties have a clear picture on what is expected of them and what they will get in return, meaning that all parties know what they are working towards. These contracts should though not be seen as a sign of mistrust but rather a mature way of working towards a common target.

In terms of successful networks, the last sentence about mistrust mentioned of the most important determinants. Traits – such as trust, experience, fairness, communication skills and others – are of utmost importance in order to create a well-functioning network. Logically, these traits are important but the better and the more they are lived genuinely

in a network, the higher is the chance of a long-lasting relationship of the involved parties. As the case company is operating already more than 15 years, it can be seen how important trust among stakeholders is. During the professional experience of the author of this study at this company it was clearly visible how much trust exists as many of the long-term partners already became personal friends. In order to create such a relationship, it is though important to find the right balance of engagement between the different stakeholders. This means, that firstly it needs to be seen how much attention each partner needs and secondly, there has to be a clear division of who is engaging with the respective stakeholders. Attention wise an understanding needs to be developed of how much interaction every stakeholder needs and how much attention the focal actor can give during the peak of the season. Naturally, long-term partners do not need a lot of attention during the peaks as they usually know what the visiting teams need and how the day-to-day business of training camps is handled. On the other hand, new partners need more care in the beginning to start the trust-building process which then eventually leads to a long-lasting working relationship. What both have in common is that regular personal visits – either in the down-time of the season or whenever the chance arises during the peak – are an effective tool to further build trust.

Taking this into account, it is a viable strategy to clearly divide the different tasks which arise with the business at hand. In terms of the case company the division is done so that game operations, accommodation affairs, training facilities, media relations and bookkeeping have their own responsible person which is taking care of these specific matters for each stakeholder. This ensures that the stakeholders are always in the situation of knowing to whom to talk to for specific questions. During the time of a team staying in this region the team host on-site is taking care of all these matters, as the presence on-site enables to solve problems ad-hoc. Summarizing it is possible to say that the better the engagement with a specific stakeholder is taken care of, the higher the chance of building a trustful relationship and thus having the best outcome for the visiting teams.

Another factor which is vital to a successful and long-term existence of a network is a circle of continuous improvement. As Noteboom (2008) notes, learn & probe can be a concept that might lead to a creation of a high-quality product and highly satisfying levels

of trust among stakeholders. With the introduction of new processes or projects within the network, it will firstly be needed to change certain viewpoints or ways how to work and thus, reflect on the existing processes. This reflection will likely lead to an honest opinion whether a new process might even further strengthen the relationship between stakeholders or not. (Noteboom, 2008.) A new process might range from new documents on how to bill the respective partner all the way to investments in the local training facilities which then also enable better conditions and higher satisfaction levels for the customer. Summarized, regular check-ups of existing processes and ways of working are necessary to break existing patterns and see which process might cater the common target of customer satisfaction and subsequently economic performance best.

Another way of checking whether the prevailing work is of high-quality is to execute evaluation and feedback loops. As Weyer (2000b) states such feedback loops are necessary to ensure the longevity of a network and its' business, as it enables adaptation to current and future trends in this field of business. In this case study, feedback talks were of high importance which is shown through the fact that every definite stakeholder got the chance to have such a feedback session. This means, that the focal actor was able to gather feedback from a high number of stakeholders and get a full picture of how the training camp season went. This was especially important as during the peak season it was normally not possible to visit the stakeholders personally.

Naturally, a more frequent feedback talk would be highly welcome for everyone involved in this network as it might also lead to trust building. To counteract this infrequent feedback, it is a practicable way to install the already mentioned team hosts on-site. Through this action, it is possible to gather feedback from all involved stakeholders concerning one visiting team and act accordingly. The received feedback by the team host is always transmitted upwards towards the node in which all information is gathered and further distributed to the stakeholders which might be concerned with this specific information.

Concluding, it can be summarized that as long as an overall well-governed RST network with a strong focal actor acting as a coordinator and broker of information within the network is in place, there is a strong chance to create a high-quality product for the end customer. Furthermore, the working relationships cannot be exhausted one-sided by a stakeholder but have to be of a trustful and reliable nature in order to unfold the best of each stakeholder. With the additional instalment of regular feedback and evaluation talks and tools it can be ensured, that the existing network is evolving further and thus adaptive to counteract the external pressure of the surrounding environment. This means that, long-term success is possible and likely and thus, an advance in trust-building might occur, as the stakeholders notice that the existing way of operations actually works the way it should.

Taking those things into consideration during the creation of sport tourism products, high-quality outcomes – both on the customer satisfaction and the economic success/performance side – are likely to be created as a couple of definitive stakeholders state with a relatively easy and short quote.

*Wenn der Kunde zufrieden ist, sind wir es auch. (team host, team accommodation) [If the customer is happy, we are happy.]*

In terms of sport tourism on a more general level this text provides decision-makers with an overview on what the most important aspects of a regional sports tourism networks are. Even though this text generally concerns professional football teams which to some extent might see the act of travelling to another country for training as part of a “business trip” implications for normal sport tourism can be concluded. Especially the fact that customers look on the overall product and thus every detail needs to be in place, can be used for setting up new or improving existing infrastructure, services or cooperation. It is emphasized here that the high-quality level of the examined product in this text is not coming by chance or because professional football teams might have the needed financial resources to go on training camps. It is rather emphasized that the results stemming from this research can be transferred to the field of broad and leisure sport tourism because also

in this field cooperating stakeholders need to work together in order to ensure the best possible overall picture and service / product for their respective customer.

### **6.1. Limitations of research**

During the process of this study – unfortunately – a high number of obstacles were faced and harmed the completion of it in some ways. Firstly, the data collection phase was marked by interview partners which withdrew on a very short notice without giving any reason. This led to heavy delays and the problem that new interview partners had to be found. Luckily, the new interview partners were happy to participate, as they had an own genuine interest to participate.

As already mentioned in the research methodology section the interviews were conducted by e-mail-questionnaires which led to a lower quality than hoped and expected. A way of mitigation would have been trying to use skype or other face-to-face online communication tools in order to lead the interviews and ask follow-up questions during the actual interview. In case of further research the setting of data collection should be done by using means of personal and oral communication.

The literature about training camp organizations in Austria and all over Europe was scarce and thus it was hard to find suitable information. However, the research process led to the development, that some organizations got interested in the topic and hopefully this would lead to higher recognition of sport tourism and sport economy in general.

From an academic point of view the overall evaluation of IONs requires data from all involved organizations and the long-term assessment of the effects on the total network structure and its outcomes (Sydow & Milward, 2003). Therefore, significant material resources, a considerable investment of time, and expertise in data collection and assessment are needed. Specifically, timely and monetary resources were not able to be gathered and thus a more long-term research with sophisticated tools and funding could enhance the academic field even further.

Another limitation of the study is that it only highlights a specific region within Austria and thus might not be useable for other actors within the same field as prevailing

conditions differ between different regions and countries. Taking this into account this study should be seen as a guideline, from which interested people can take ideas and recommendations. A further point of improvement would be to conduct the data collection process on a personal basis, meaning taking the interviews face-to-face rather than electronically, specifically via e-mail. With personal interviews it would have been possible to further deepen the discussions and subsequently get responses of possibly higher quality.

## **6.2. Future research**

Research of RST networks is still scarce and thus in the future more research within this field is more than justified. As this was a highly qualitative study, which aimed to find out the perceptions of the stakeholders in terms of quality management, it would be interesting to use similar setups to further investigate ties and their implications to working relationships. Another possibility to take this field further is to use the presented frameworks in this study and apply them to other fields of sport, regions or RST networks in order to work out similarities or differences.

Lastly, the study could also be used to be continued as a follow-up after the results of this study were presented to the relevant stakeholders and potential adaptations or improvements were made to see if the quality has been altered after those adaptations. Furthermore, other stakeholders - such as the group of expectant stakeholders – could be included in the data collection process in order to get a bigger picture of the network.

## **6.3. Reliability and validity**

As already mentioned, the research only takes a specific region in Austria and the respective network in place into account. This means that the sample is rather small and might not be applicable to a larger scale. To ensure reliability of the data the network could have been expanded further and thus show a bigger picture of this specific field.

Through the acquaintance of the author of this study with most of the interviewed or observed stakeholders it was easier to gather data which might not have been publicly available. Thus, information that was hidden was used for the process of coding and



making sense of the data. Logically, this data cannot be used by or is not available to other researchers and thus problems can be encountered while researching such networks.

The above-mentioned acquaintance of the author though did not lead to biased answers or opinions on either side of the interview partners. Through the genuine interest of the interview partners the gathered data is of such quality that it can be used without hesitation.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 (CEO interview)

#### 1) Hintergrundinformationen

[Background information]

a) Wann wurde die Firma gegründet und wie war die Entwicklung der Firma?

[When was the company founded and how was the development of the company?]

b) Wie viele Trainingslager wurden am Beginn durchgeführt und wie haben sich die Anzahl bzw. das Ausmaß der Trainingslager bis zum heutigen Tag entwickelt?

[How many training camps were organised in the beginning and how has the number and the extend of training camps changed until this day?]

c) Wie viele Trainingslager wurden 2016 in Österreich ungefähr abgehalten? Grobe Schätzung?

[How many training camps were organised in Austria in the year 2016? Rough estimate?]

#### 2) Stakeholder-Management/-Identifikation

[Stakeholder management/-identification]

a) Welche Stakeholder/Interessensgruppen sind normalerweise involviert, wenn SLFC ein Trainingslager veranstaltet? Gibt es Dokumente, in denen Stakeholder identifiziert werden?

[Which stakeholders are normally involved, when SLFC organises a training camp? Are there any documents, which state these stakeholders?]

b) Ausgehend von den oben benannten Stakeholdern (Frage 2a), wie verändern sich diese, wenn man zwischen NT Ungarn und Arminia Bielefeld unterscheidet? Was sind die Gründe dafür?

[If you take the above-mentioned stakeholders into account, how do they change when considering the size of teams? What are the reasons for that?]

c) Welche sind die wichtigsten Stakeholder für SLFC und warum?

[Which are the most important stakeholders for SLFC and why?]

d) Ausgehend von den oben genannten Stakeholdern (Frage 2a), wie verändert sich die Wichtigkeit dieser für SLFC, wenn man NT Ungarn und Arminia Bielefeld vergleicht? Was sind die Gründe dafür?

[If you take the above-mentioned stakeholders into account, how does the importance change when considering the size of teams? What are the reasons for that?]

3) Stakeholder-Kollaboration

[Stakeholder collaboration]

a) Wie schaut Kollaboration zwischen SLFC und Stakeholdern generell aus? Wie verändert sich diese anhand unterschiedlicher Stakeholder?

[How does collaboration between SLFC and their stakeholders generally look like? How does it change according to different stakeholders?]

b) Was sind die Erwartungen von SLFC an die Stakeholder generell und im speziellen an die wichtigsten Stakeholder?

[What are the expectations of SLFC towards the stakeholders generally and specifically towards the most important stakeholders?]

c) Was sind die Voraussetzungen für eine erfolgreiche Zusammenarbeit zwischen SLFC und einem Stakeholder? Wie verändern sich diese zwischen den Stakeholdern?

[What are the requirements for a successful collaboration between SLFC and a stakeholder? How do they change between different stakeholders?]

d) In welchem Ausmaß verändert sich die Zusammenarbeit, wenn man NT Ungarn und Arminia Bielefeld vergleicht? Was sind die Gründe dafür?

[To which extent does the collaboration change, when you consider the size of teams? What are the reasons for this?]

e) In welchem Ausmaß ist SLFC von der Zusammenarbeit mit den Stakeholdern abhängig? In welchem Ausmaß ist es für SLFC möglich, zwischen Stakeholder zu wechseln?

[To which extent is SLFC dependent on the collaboration with stakeholders? To which extent is it possible for SLFC to switch between stakeholders?]

4) Zukunftsausblick

[Future prospects]

a) Was ist der momentane Ausblick für die Zukunft für Trainingslager-Organisationen im Allgemeinen?

[How is the future prospect for training camp organisers in general?]

b) Wie verändert dieser Ausblick die Zusammenarbeit zwischen SLFC und den Stakeholdern? Warum?

[How does this prospect alter the collaboration between SLFC and the stakeholders? Why?]

c) Was sind die Faktoren, um in Zukunft noch erfolgreich zu sein? Speziell im Bereich Zusammenarbeit von Stakeholdern.

[What are the factors to be still successful in the future? Especially considering collaboration with stakeholders.]

d) Schlussbemerkungen?

[Any other remarks?]



## Appendix 2

Information to the participants (for more information, please contact the author)

Liebe/r Teilnehmer/in!

Danke vorab für die Teilnahme an der Befragung für meine Masterarbeit mit dem Thema **„Qualitätsmanagement in regionalen Sporttourismusnetzwerken anhand des Fallbeispiels SLFC“**. Mein Name ist Philipp Vejchoda und schreibe diese Arbeit im Rahmen meines Masterstudiums in Finnland im Bereich „Sport Management“. Mit ihrer Hilfe wird es mir möglich zu sehen, wie verschiedene Partner in einem Sporttourismusnetzwerk zusammenarbeiten und wie durch diese Zusammenarbeit die Qualität beeinflusst wird.

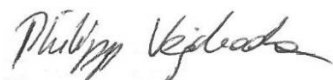
Ich bitte Sie die untenstehenden Fragen so gut es möglich ist, zu beantworten. Dahingehend muss aber nicht auf jede Frage beantwortet werden, falls damit vertrauliche Informationen verbunden sind oder die Antwort Ihrer Meinung nach etwaige Probleme mit sich bringt.

Weiters verspreche ich Ihnen, dass alle Informationen, die im Rahmen dieser Arbeit erhoben werden, zu 100 Prozent vertraulich behandelt werden und alle Teilnehmer dieser Studie anonym bleiben. Außerdem bekommen Sie natürlich eine Zusammenfassung der Endfassung der Masterarbeit (die in Englisch erscheinen wird).

Die Antworten können entweder direkt in dieses Dokument oder in ein separates Dokument (Word oder PDF-Format) eingefügt werden. Bitte senden Sie dieses dann an [philipp.vejchoda@gmail.com](mailto:philipp.vejchoda@gmail.com) oder an die Person, durch die Sie zuvor kontaktiert worden sind.

Ich würde mich an dieser Stelle gerne noch einmal für die Zusammenarbeit bedanken und freue mich auf die Antworten! Falls noch weitere Fragen bestehen sollten, freue ich mich Ihnen, diese unter der E-Mail-Adresse [philipp.vejchoda@gmail.com](mailto:philipp.vejchoda@gmail.com) oder telefonisch unter +43 (0) 664 5423625 zu beantworten.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen



Philipp Vejchoda

### Appendix 3 (stakeholder e-mail questionnaire)

Wie lange arbeiten Sie schon mit SLFC zusammen und wie ist es zu dieser Zusammenarbeit gekommen?

[How long do you already work together with SLFC and how did this working relationship come to life?]

Was sind die Gründe mit SLFC zusammen zu arbeiten? (Finanziell, Marketing, Werbung für die Region, Auslastung der Anlagen, etc.)

[What are the reasons to work together with SLFC? (Financial, marketing, advertising value for the region, using facility capacities, etc.)]

Was sind die gewünschten/geplanten Erwartungen oder Outcomes, die durch die Zusammenarbeit entstehen soll? Welche Vorteile/Nachteile ziehen Sie aus der Zusammenarbeit mit SLFC?

[What are the desired/planned expectations or outcomes, which should come through this cooperation? Which advantages/disadvantages are you gaining through the cooperation with SLFC?]

Wie wichtig ist die Kommunikation mit SLFC zur Erreichung dieser Erwartungen und Outcomes, und warum?

[How important is communication with SLFC to be able to reach the above-mentioned expectations and outcomes, and why?]

Wie sieht die Kommunikation mit anderen Stakeholdern (zB Hotel, Trainingsplätze, Match-Venues, Tourismusverbände, etc.) aus? Wird mit ihnen kommuniziert? Wenn ja, wie viel? Wenn nein, warum nicht?

[How does communication with other stakeholders (e.g. team accommodation, training facilities, match-venues, tourism boards, etc.) look like? Is communication prevalent? If yes, to what extent? If no, why not?]

Wie wichtig ist ein zentrales Organ zur Koordination des Produkts „Trainingslager“? Warum? Würden Sie sagen, dass SLFC dieses Organ in der Region ist?

[How important is a central actor for the coordination of the product “football training camp”? Why? Would you say that, SLFC is this focal actor in the region?]

Wie ist Ihrer Meinung nach der derzeitige Qualitätslevel des Produkts „Trainingslager“?  
Was ist Ihrer Meinung nach ausschlaggebend für die Qualität des Produkts?

[How high is the quality level of the product “football training camp” in your opinion?  
What in your opinion is decisive for the product quality?]

Falls man Ihrer Meinung nach die Qualität noch steigern kann, wie würden Sie diese noch steigern?

[In case the quality could be improved further, how would you improve it?]

Werden gewisse Qualitätskriterien miteinander diskutiert und in irgendeiner Form festgehalten? Wenn ja, wie und wo? Wenn nein, warum nicht?

[Is there any discussion about quality criteria and are those stated in any form? If yes, how and where? If no, why not?]

Wie wichtig sind Attribute, wie Vertrauen, Erfahrung, Fairness etc. bei der Zusammenarbeit und beeinflussen diese Attribute die Qualität?

[How important are traits – such as trust, experience, fairness, etc. – for the cooperation and do those traits influence the product quality?]

Welche Gegenmaßnahmen werden gesetzt, falls durch die Zusammenarbeit schwierige Situationen oder Probleme entstehen, die die Qualität beeinflussen könnten?

[Which countermeasures are taken, in case difficult situations or problems, which could influence the quality, arise?]

Gibt es eine langfristige Strategie für das Produkt „Trainingslager“ in der Region? Wenn ja, wie lautet sie? Wenn nein, wäre eine solche hilfreich, um die Qualität weiter zu steigern?

[Is there a long-term strategy concerning the product “football training camp” in the region? If yes, what is the wording? If no, would such a strategy help to raise the quality of the product?]

Sonstige Bemerkungen/Anregungen/etc.?

[Are there any other comments/etc.??]

DANKE für die ausführlichen Antworten und der Hilfe bei meiner Masterarbeit.

[THANK YOU for the extensive answers and your contribution and help towards my master's thesis.

Philipp Vejchoda