

NETWORK ORGANIZATIONS ON THE SPORTS MARKET – THE CASE OF WTA

Zygmunt WAŚKOWSKI¹, Katarzyna RADWAN-CHO^{2*}

¹ Instytut Marketingu, Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny w Poznaniu; zygmun.waskowski@ue.poznan.pl,
ORCID: 0000-0003-0793-3578

² International Tennis Federation; k.radwan.cho@hotmail.com

* Correspondence author

Purpose: The aim of the article is to present an example of a solution applied in economic practice in the field of the structure of the global WTA network organization, with particular emphasis on the relations between its main participants – the organizers of tennis tournaments.

Methodology: Considerations in the article, beyond the theoretical part, based on a review of the literature on the subject, were carried out with the use of the descriptive method. For the purposes of the article, available source materials from the resources of the WTA organization were used, as well as the co-author's own observations made during many years of cooperation with this organization.

Findings: The study allowed for the identification and relatively rich description of the structure of the WTA as a network organization. It explains how the WTA organization functions on the global tennis market, on which general and theoretical principles it is created, and what benefits it brings to both the WTA and its members.

Originality/value: The WTA network presented in the article and the "coalitions" of its members brings forth the diversity of the structures of network organizations. This signifies that a network integrator must skillfully shape and manage relations with emerging subgroups of stakeholders with different priorities, needs and goals.

Keywords: Network organization, network of relations, sports market, tennis.

Category of the paper: case study, general review.

1. Introduction

A look at modern management concepts leaves no doubt that the measure of success of any organization is primarily its openness to the environment, the ability to cooperate, drawing on the resources of other entities and the readiness to share one's own.

Not bilateral contacts anymore but omni-directional and multi-level networks of relations are a typical phenomenon in various industry markets, regardless of the size of an organization or its place in the value chain. For this reason, the problem of the network of relations or its functioning has become the subject of numerous studies and scientific analyzes in the world of. This article is also devoted to the issue, this time the authors focused their attention on one of the world's largest sports organizations operating in the field of tennis which is the Woman's Tennis Association. The professional sports market is characterized by conditions that are rare or unheard of in other industry markets, therefore sports organizations building networks of relations must be guided partly by different principles. This dissimilarity as well as the fact that sports market relatively rarely is explored from the perspective of the network of relations constitute an interesting case worth analyzing.

The aim of the article is to present an example of a solution applied in economic practice in the field of the structure of the global WTA network organization, with particular emphasis on the relations between its main participants - the organizers of tennis tournaments. The global circuit operates on the well-established in theory concept of a network of relations and so it can be an interesting example of the operation of a network organization in practice. Considerations in the article, beyond the theoretical part, based on a review of the literature on the subject, were carried out with the use of the descriptive method. For the purposes of the article, available source materials from the resources of the WTA organization were used, as well as the co-author's own observations made during many years of cooperation with this organization. The method used allowed for the identification and a relatively rich description of the structure of the WTA organization along with the principles of its functioning on the global tennis market.

2. Network organizations

In the literature, the concept of network has a very wide meaning, and its definition differs depending on the field of science in which it is analyzed. The ambiguity of the term can also be seen in the sub disciplines of management sciences, which results, among others, from different views on the number and types of entities forming the network, the nature of the bond, the level of control, the boundaries, the purpose of functioning and the level of analysis (Niemczyk, Stańczyk-Hugiet, Jasiński, 2012; Ratajczak-Mrozek, 2010; Światowiec-Szczepańska, Kawa, 2018). It confirms the complexity of the problem of the network of relations.

It should be noted that the term network in management sciences is most often understood as one of the two organizational forms: interorganizational network or network organization (Figure 1).

The interorganizational network is a form of a cooperation between many entities that does not result in creating a new entity. Subjects included in the interorganizational network communicate with each other or conclude agreements with varying degrees of formalization in order to implement a specific project. On the other hand, a network organization is a newly created entity whose co-creators and at the same time components remain independent while focused on achieving a common goal (Niemczyk, Stańczyk-Hugiet, Jasiński, 2012; Ratajczak-Mrozek, 2010). Due to the purpose adopted in the article, further considerations will focus on the problem of the network treated as a network organization.

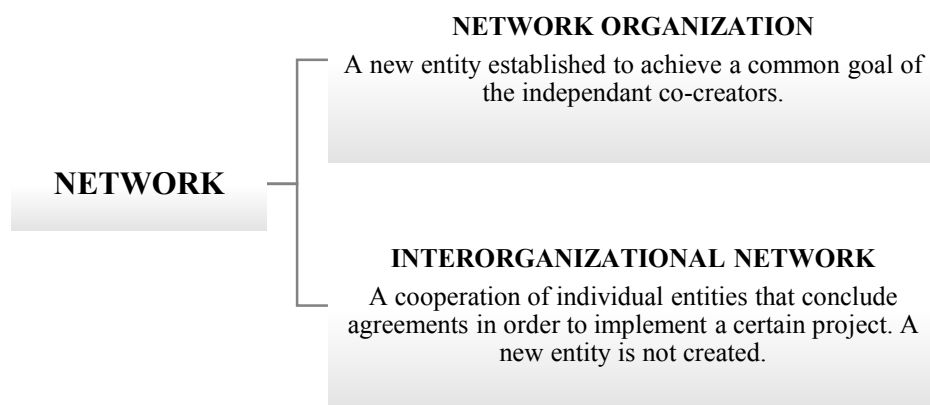


Figure 1. Organizational forms of a network.

Source: „Sieci międzyorganizacyjne. Współczesne wyzwania dla teorii i praktyki zarządzania” by J. Niemczyk, E. Stańczyk-Hugiet, and B. Jasiński. Copyright 2012 by Wydawnictwo C.H. Beck.

The interorganizational network is a form of a cooperation between many entities that does not result in creating a new one. Subjects included in the interorganizational network communicate with each other or conclude agreements with varying degrees of formalization in order to implement a specific project. On the other hand, a network organization is a newly created entity whose co-creators and at the same time components remain independent while focused on achieving a common goal (Niemczyk, Stańczyk-Hugiet, Jasiński, 2012; Ratajczak-Mrozek, 2010). Due to the purpose adopted in the article, further considerations will focus on the problem of the network treated as a network organization.

It is worth adding that network organizations have structures in which vertical coordination and formal relations have been partially or entirely replaced by horizontal links between partners, and its assets have been divided so that the creator of the end result is the network, not its individual participants (Czakoń, 2012; Hatch, 2012; Ratajczak-Mrozek, Zieliński, 2013; Rudny, 2013). The members of a network organization are in most cases economically interdependent but legally autonomous. Its goal is to achieve a competitive advantage, and what distinguishes it from other structures is a special type of relationship. The participants of a network are connected by complex and mutual ties of a more cooperative than competitive nature, which cross the boundaries of individual enterprises, and at the same time in a structural context resemble the internal relations of an organization. The way in which a network

organization operates depends on how and under the influence of what factors it was created, as well as what experience it has. Failures and conflicts can lead to disintegration, while cooperation is strengthened by positive experiences (Partanen, Möller, 2012; Sydow, Wirth, 1999; Windmill, 2003). Contrary to the common, self-emerging networks, network organizations are characterized by deliberately build structures and roles negotiated between their participants that must be managed in order to achieve the set goals (Moller, Rajala, 2007; Skowron, 2013).

On the other hand, Czakon (2012) points out that in order to be able to distinguish a network organization from others, one should focus on the features that characterize relations. Otherwise, any structure with several entities and ties between them could be called a network organization. The network organization is distinguished by vertical disintegration, i.e. a departure from the hierarchical system in favor of horizontal relations; the emergence of new entities, the so-called brokers who by taking various positions in the network, coordinate its activities; access to information instead of long-term trust building; the value and the rules for its distribution are determined by all participants; complementarity of participants leading to a synergy effect (Child, Faulkner, Tallman, 2005; Czakon, 2012; Mikuła, Pietruszka-Ortyl, 2006).

Diversified needs and goals of cooperation allow to distinguish five types of network organization (Brilman, 2002; Wiatrak, 2003):

- An integrated network is a set of dispersed entities belonging economically or legally to one economic group, created as a result of, inter alia, a merger.
- A federated network based on solidarity and cooperation resulting from the shared needs of participants. It is created as an outcome of horizontal integration and cooperation of entities with a similar nature of activity.
- A contractual network created between statutorily independent entities in order to expand their competences and reduce risk. It is based on franchise and concession agreements, but it can also arise as a result of vertical disintegration.
- A network created in an incubator such as local authorities, institutions and enterprises, technology parks or research laboratories.
- A network of direct relations that implements the strategy of penetration and occurs, inter alia, in trade, politics or religion.

Networks have been studied from different perspectives, but relatively little attention has been paid to managing the entire network. This may be due to the assumption that networking is voluntary, which traditionally means that it should not be considered in the context of hierarchy and control (Kenis, Provan, 2006). Antivachis, Angelis (2015) draw attention to different methods of network management, which depend on the nature of the network manager.

Creating new network layouts or entering existing ones enables individual participants as well as the entire network to achieve specific strategic goals. The motives of joining the network are considered by researchers in the context of the potential benefits that a participant may obtain (Brilman, 2002, Child, Faulkner, Tallman, 2005; Czakon, 2017; Grant, Baden-Fuller, 2004; Niemczyk, Stańczyk-Hugiet, Jasiński, 2012; Rokita, 2005; Shoemaker, 1990; Tubielewicz, 2013).

3. Network of relations in the sports market

It is estimated that at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, the global sports market generated annual revenues in excess of USD 400 billion (Greenwell, Danzey-Busell, Shonk, 2014). This value included the sale of sports products and services, the sale of rights to broadcast sports events, as well as fees for participation in mass sports events performed by participants acting as fans or players. Such significant financial results may indicate at least two issues. First, there is a very large number of entities on the sports market, such as: producers, distributors, organizers of sports events, the media; and secondly, there are numerous interactions or relations of a competitive or cooperative nature between them. It is confirmed by B. Mullin, who claims that one of the features of the sports market is the simultaneous competition and cooperation of entities operating on it (Mullin, Hardy, Sutton, 2000).

On the other hand, Hunt and Morgan (1995) state that the long-term development of sports organizations, which will be subject to further consideration, is determined primarily by having non-material attributes in the form of reputation, tradition, know-how and an extensive architecture of relations with the environment. Currently, market structures are characterized by an increasing number of relations between its participants, the progressive process of the disappearance of the distance between space and time, blurring of the zones of influence and interpenetration. The consequence of this is the growing importance of partnership relations and developed ties between organizations and entities that may be directly or indirectly interested in it (Eiriz, Wilson, 2006).

Nowadays, the need to build relationships is not a subject of discussion. Every organization, including sports, is assumed to be an open system that reacts to incentives sent from its surroundings, actively participates in the processes of exchange of information, services and values, is subject to the constant influence of the environment and powers its shape at the same time (Gronroos, 2011). At the early stage of creating a network of relations, the contacts of a sports organization with entities from its closer environment take an episodic, irregular, fragmented and rarely controlled form. With time, however, they gain importance, their number grows, some of them take the form of complex communication processes in which more than two entities expressing different demands and expectations are involved. In such a situation,

a need arises to consciously shape the network of relations and methodically manage this intangible resource of a sports organization (Epp, 2013).

In the sports market, the usual networks of relations between stakeholders are formed in three areas: internal, external, and networking. In the case of sports organizations, internal relations result from the relations within it and usually develop from the beginning of its existence in a vertical, horizontal, or cross pattern. On the other hand, external relations refer to contacts that an organization establishes with entities from its environment, such as suppliers, cooperators, sponsors, local government organizations, public institutions, media, etc. (Wemmer, Emrich, Koenigstorefer, 2016). Based on these interactions, because of their large number and frequent repetition, a network of relatively permanent relations will be formed of entities which, due to their competences or emerging expectations, are even more involved in the sports market. The connections existing in such networks can be described as relative links because the interactions between entities, to be effective, require the establishment of common goals, and then periodic or permanent cooperation (Ford, Hakansson, 2006).

It is worth adding that on the sports market, the links of organizations forming the network of relations may take a market (business), social (socializing) and cultural character, depending on the type of stakeholder and their position in the network or the expectations expressed towards it (Evans, Movondo, 2002). Information, financial or material streams flow between network participants in one, two or more directions, which play a key role in achieving mutual benefits and strengthening further relationships (Ritter, Walter, 2012). These ties may be permanent, but in some cases, due to the cyclical nature of organized sports events, the intensity of these contacts varies considerably over time. This phenomenon distinguishes networks of relationships in the sports market from those that can be found in other industry markets. Moreover, it is noted that even within the sports market, the architecture of relations is not homogeneous. For this reason, understanding it requires many separate studies and analyzes (Watt, 2003; Gadde, Hakansson, 2008).

4. Woman`s Tennis Association as an example of a network organization

The history of the WTA dates to the second half of the 20th century, when a group of nine players led by Billie Jean King took up the fight against gender inequality in the distribution of prize money awarded to women and men at professional tennis tournaments. As a result, in 1973, the Women`s Tennis Association (WTA) was established, which is now one of the two, next to ATP, largest global sports organizations operating in tennis (Ruth, 2021).

WTA is an example of an organization constituting a unique partnership in professional sport because it brings together two types of entities, i.e., players and tournament organizers. A consciously created structure and clearly defined roles of its individual members serve the effective management of the highest-level competitions and representing the interests of the WTA in the world of sport.

According to the strategic approach, there are networks created on a non-accidental basis, which are sets of entities with defined roles, having a common goal. In such a network organization there is a leader who coordinates and manages the activities of the entire network. To this end, it selects appropriate partners with whom it creates and then develops a network of a more formal and long-lasting nature. This does not mean, however, that there are no fewer formal relations within the network organization or that its members lose their independence. Networks of this type are based on closer cooperation of their participants, who, as already mentioned, remain independent and usually establish informal relations with each other (Brandenburger, Nalebuff, 1996; Jarillo, 1995; Möller, Rajala, 2007; Ratajczak-Mrozek, 2010).

In this understanding of the problem of the network, the WTA can be called a network organization, associating players and tournament organizers, who constitute its core and play a decisive role in the success of operating on the tennis market. Despite the formal structure of the WTA, its members, according to the network definition, remain independent market participants while establishing and maintaining informal ties with each other.

The network organization of the WTA has a dual nature, combining elements of the contractual and federated networks. It is based partly on solidarity and cooperation resulting from the common needs of participants, and partly on licensing agreements of statutorily independent entities. The cooperation of entities with a similar nature of activity allows them to expand their competences.

To obtain the membership status and become a formal participant of the WTA network, players must meet certain ranking criteria and take part in the required number of tournaments. Whereas the tournament organizer becomes a formal member of the network after obtaining a sanction for an event (WTA Tour, 2021).

It is worth adding that the most important, supreme body responsible for the management, strategic directions of WTA development and undertaking activities is the Board of Directors. It is composed of three Player Class Directors who are players' representatives, three Tournament Class Directors representing tournament organizers and one delegate from the International Tennis Federation (WTA Tour, 2021).

The WTA network is open, which means that apart from the above-mentioned, it also includes other entities that contribute to the success of the entire organization to a greater or lesser extent. Moreover, not only the number but also the variety of partners in the WTA network may change over the time. This makes the network being a dynamic structure ready to react to market signals and to take advantage of opportunities or avoid threats appearing in its environment.

The analyzed network organization in the context of its internal structure can be viewed in a narrow or a broad perspective (Figure 2). As mentioned before, the narrow perspective of the WTA network covers two main groups of its participants, i.e., WTA tennis players and WTA tournament sanction holders¹. This is complemented by the Board of Directors, representing both groups of entities in management matters.

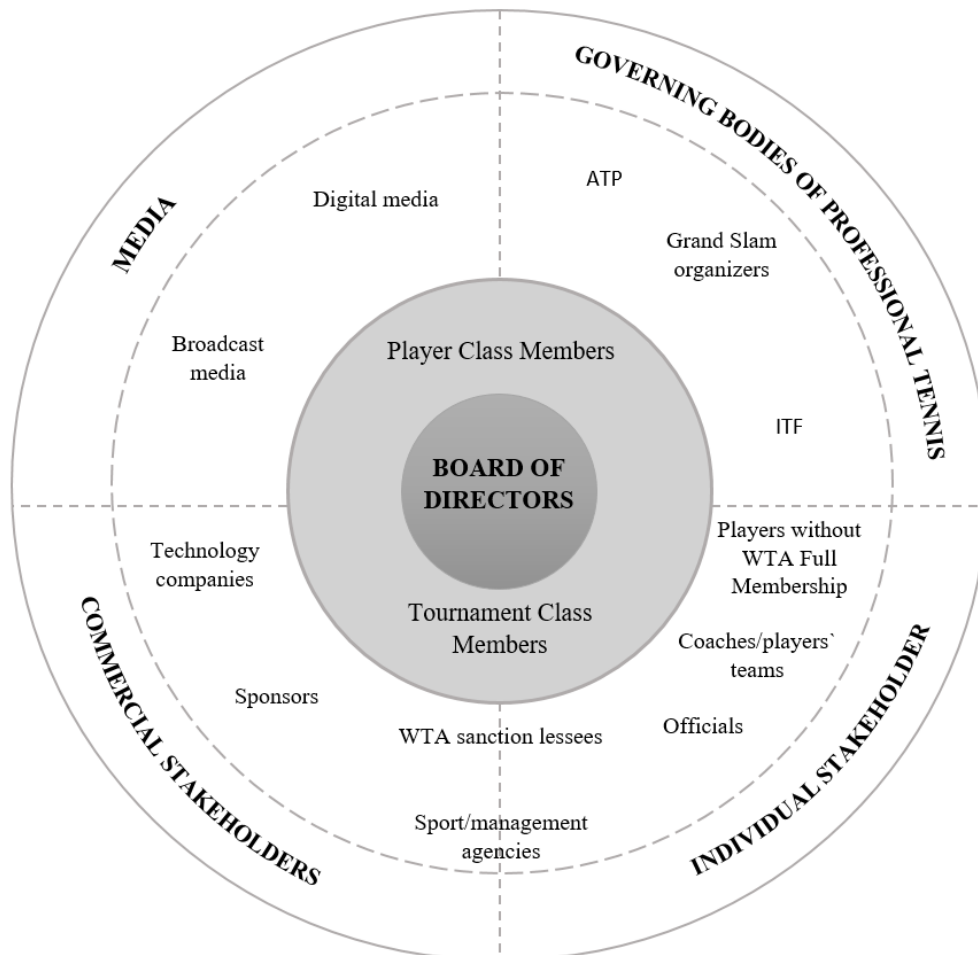


Figure 2. Narrow and broad perspective of WTA network.

Source: own elaboration.

Apart from tennis players and organizers of the tournaments, who have formal connections in the network, the WTA is supported by other stakeholders who often have a direct impact on the implementation of many sports undertakings. Stakeholders that are part of the WTA network can be broadly classified into four groups:

1. Governing bodies of professional tennis at the global level. They cooperate with each other on an ongoing basis, e.g., during the development of the tournament calendar or the regulations in force in the sport, as well as within the framework of a joint anti-doping and anti-corruption program.

¹ The WTA Tournament Class Member is the sanction holder who does not necessarily have to be the tournament organizer. The rights to organize the event may be lent to another entity.

2. Media acquiring television and digital rights. Together with governing bodies, they participate in the preparation of the annual calendar of events and schedules of individual tournaments, to obtain the most optimal schedule, considering the needs of fans watching the struggles of players in different parts of the world.
3. Individual stakeholders. These can be tennis players who have not yet obtained WTA full membership, coaching staffs and other people cooperating with the players. This group also includes the judges necessary to conduct the tournament, as well as some licensees and independent managers who do not belong to sports agencies.
4. Other commercial stakeholders. This highly diverse group includes sponsors, business partners, companies providing specialized equipment or services, agencies representing groups of players, as well as tournament organizers with WTA sanction who are not Tournament Class Members.

The WTA Tour, which is the season of professional women's tennis competitions, includes four categories of events held all over the world (WTA Tour, 2021):

WTA 1000 Mandatory is a category of tournaments in which participation is obligatory for any player who qualifies based on the ranking. There are four such events during the season taking place in the following cities: Indian Wells, Miami, Madrid, and Beijing; constituting the most prestigious WTA tournaments to which a sanction can be obtained. The WTA 1000 Mandatory tournaments offer players not only the greatest prize money, but also the highest number of ranking points.

WTA 1000 is the second-highest category of WTA tournaments, with five such events taking place a year: Doha/Dubai (they change statuses every year: WTA 1000/WTA 500), Rome, Toronto/Montreal (each location takes place every other year, changing with the ATP tournament), Cincinnati and Wuhan.

WTA 500 is a category of about dozens of tournaments that take place every year around the world, and this number changes each year. Their prestige is lower than the categories described above, and their organization is also burdened with lower WTA requirements.

WTA 250 is the lowest tournament category with the highest number of events in the season. These events are the least prestigious in the WTA Tour catalog, offering players the lowest points and the lowest financial prizes.

4.1. Tournament responsibilities and benefits to WTA

The main goal of establishing the WTA network was to coordinate women's tennis tournaments held around the world and to promote the sport. The goal defined in this way required the involvement and close cooperation of many entities, in this case mainly players and organizers. While the role of tennis players is primarily participation in sports competitions and creating spectacles for the audience, the role of the organizers is more complex. WTA sets certain expectations for them, which must be met if the organizer wants to be a formal member of the network and derive benefits from it. Each tournament organizer must meet at least the

minimum standards set out in the WTA Official Rulebook. Moreover, the expectations differ depending on the category of the tournament the organizer is running. The requirements are much higher for WTA 1000 Mandatory tournaments, and less restrictive for the tournaments of the lower categories.

Requirements of key importance to enter and then remain in the WTA network can be defined on two levels: sports and marketing.

At the sports level, requirements are strictly related to the facility and the operations of a tournament.

WTA determines how the infrastructure of the event should be prepared, including match and practise courts, lighting of the facility, WTA offices, medical space, and other operational spaces, etc. The minimum number of seats for fans in the stands is also indicated, as well as media facility.

The operations of a tournament include the processes of planning, implementing, and controlling the various stages of organizing the tournament which should result in an efficient and professional event under the auspices of WTA. In the context of WTA requirements, the key logistic elements are providing players and their teams, WTA staff and officials with hotel rooms of an appropriate standard, access to the tournament restaurant, transportation from and to the airport, as well as from the hotel to tennis facilities. The fulfillment of these conditions is verified by the WTA delegates partially prior to the start of the tournament.

On the marketing level, WTA sets mandatory and optional requirements towards the organizers. The mandatory marketing activities, distinguished in the WTA Official Rulebook, oblige a tournament organizer to undertake minimal promotional activity. However, to be successful, WTA recommends and encourages the tournament organizer to engage in additional initiatives and projects.

Mandatory activities include branding, ACES program (various activities with the participation of players aimed at promoting the tournament, WTA, or WTA sponsors), a properly equipped press center and corporate hospitality addressed to WTA or its sponsors. A tournament organizer receives remuneration from WTA for meeting the requirements for branding and corporate hospitality activities; while failure to meet them or any delays may result in a reduction in the benefit or even a penalty. Sponsorship is a separate, no less important issue for WTA. There are two main groups of sponsors: WTA sponsor, which has an agreement with WTA organization, and the sponsors of individual tournaments with which the organizers are contracting.

Optional marketing activities are undertakings that go beyond the standards set out in the Official Rulebook. Although they are not compulsory, they play an important part in organizing a tournament and may translate into its success. WTA recommends or indicates practices that work well at other events, if necessary, but an organizer may also come up with their own ideas. Optional promotional activities can be one of the factors contributing to the effective and efficient conduct of a tournament, allowing it to remain on the WTA network for an extended period. At the same time, failure to use the potential of this area can lead to a quick setback and abandonment of the network. Optional marketing activities include ticket sales system, social media activity, merchandising, selling TV rights on the domestic market, or organizing fan zones.

Membership in WTA, apart from prestige, is associated with several tangible benefits, which make the interest in belonging to the network invariably very high. The benefits of participating in the WTA network can be classified into three categories:

- Access to new resources – entering the WTA network allows for a much better cast of the tournament. The higher the category of the event, and thus the larger prize money and ranking points pool to be won, the higher-rated tennis players will want to take part in it. However, access to new resources is not limited to players. It also includes professional support from WTA experts and representatives, as well as access to more advanced technological solutions and the knowledge and experience of other tournament organizers belonging to the network.
- Increasing the marketing range – by entering WTA, the tournament participates in the international broadcasting rights pool, obtaining not only financial benefits, but also partially transferring responsibility for promoting the tournament. It is WTA responsibility to engage spectators around the world and interest them with every single broadcasted event. Thanks to WTA channels, the tournament extends its reach on a global scale and becomes a brand recognized throughout world. This translates into strengthening the image of the tournament and its brand, as well as increasing access to new business partners.
- Financial benefits – although participation in the WTA involves the costs of obtaining a sanction and organizing the tournament, each organizer can count on certain financial benefits related to the sale of international broadcasting rights and sports data obtained during the season. The tournament organizers could also count on financial support from WTA during the resumption of the tour interrupted by the pandemic in 2020. The organizers could then apply not only for an exemption from certain obligations, but also, if necessary, for financial assistance in the event of withdrawal of a sponsor.

The above-mentioned benefits not only increase the stability of each of the organizers on the market, but also increase the chance for its development and gaining even greater prestige.

4.2. Reports of the tournament organizers in WTA

Many factors influence the position of each tournament organizer in WTA network but only some of them depend on the organizers themselves. That being the case, it is reasonable to divide the position of an organizer in the network into micro and macro. Micro-position refers to the value of the developed relations between the individual participants of the network, such as gaining access to resources or creating new opportunities thanks to the existence of a given relationship. On the other hand, the macro-position reflects the role in the entire network and the ability to shape relations. It is a constellation of the internal effects of a participant's actions as well as the results achieved from cooperation with others. The position of each participant of a network is dynamic and changes not only as a result of the strategy used, but also of the actions taken by other participants (Ratajczak-Mrozek, 2010; Niemczyk, Stańczyk-Hugiet, Jasiński, 2012).

Tournaments whose representatives sit on the Tournament Council, or the Board of Directors generally have a stronger macro position in relation to the others. Nevertheless, entities with active and passive electoral rights are characterized by strong heterogeneity. WTA Full Members, i.e., license holders, have the right to vote. However, there might be agreements between licensors and licensees or third parties that assign this right to another entity. Thus, there are members on the WTA network who hold several licenses and therefore several electoral votes, but there are also license holders who have ceded their voting rights. A candidate for a Council member does not have to be actively involved in any tournament, although to be nominated, they must have the support of at least two different tournament organizers in addition to the category they represent.

Determining the exact position in the network of each tournament organizer requires a precise analysis of their relations and an analysis of the relationship between the organizer and WTA. Such an analysis, however, goes beyond the scope of this article.

Based on the general rules prevailing in WTA network, considering slightly different regulations applicable to different categories of tournaments, as well as different expectations of their organizers, an original model describing the relations between tournament organizers was developed (Figure 3). After using two variables, i.e., the tournament category and the regional location of the tournament, a four-field matrix was created, describing four types of relationships in which participants, interacting with each other, report various expectations towards the WTA network organization.

		Tournament category	
		Equal	Different
Tournament location	Same region	I. Multidimensional Cooperation	II. Regional Cooperation
	Different region	III. Horizontal Cooperation	IV. Easy cooperation

Figure 3. Types of relationships between tournament organizers in WTA network.

Source: own elaboration

Multidimensional cooperation. Tournament organizers of the same category in each region having a common representative in the Tournament Council cooperate more closely with each other than with other participants in the network. An example of this may be all the organizers of WTA 250 tournaments in Europe. They are united not only by the converging interests of the region, but also by the issue of conditions and regulations for a common category of tournaments. Their influence on the organization of the WTA and the decisions made in it is relatively the greatest.

Regional cooperation. Tournament organizers of different categories taking place in the same region, having a common representative on the Board of Directors, cooperate with each other in the common interest of the region, e.g., the organization of the tournament calendar. The influence of these organizers on WTA may be slightly weaker due to the potential divergent interests of the organizers of various categories of tournaments.

Horizontal cooperation. Tournament organizers of the same category but from different regions, cooperate with each other because they share a common interest - improving conditions or changing the rules for a given category. As mentioned earlier, each category of the tournament is characterized by different standards and conditions, and the organizers, using their position in the network, can pressure WTA to make changes favorable to the organizers.

Easy cooperation. The loosest relations are between the tournament organizers of different categories that take place in different regions. Although they share the tour and the good of WTA, the direct relations between them are weak or do not occur at all, so the impact on the organization of the WTA is also very small.

4.3. Assessment of the functioning of WTA network

Women's professional sport is quite a challenge for the bodies managing it, and WTA is a strong leader among them, associating nearly 2,000 tennis players representing approximately 85 countries. The solution in the form of a network adopted in the organization allows for the coordination of a very large number of activities, respecting the rights of all its members, and at the same time making optimal decisions. The constant flow of information, ensured by properly designed structures, the categorization of tournaments, or regular meetings of their representatives make the WTA network able to react quickly to signals picked up from both inside the network and its surroundings. Having such a strong, dominant position on the tennis market, WTA is an important partner in dialogue with other sports organizations, exerting a real influence on the development of sport on a global scale.

The weaknesses of the WTA organization include the lack of sufficient control over the fulfillment of the obligations of the tournament organizers, as well as a relatively weak influence on their behavior outside the duration of the sporting event. Too much of independence can potentially pose a threat to the image of the network, for example in a situation where its members do not care for its good name. With different positions in the network of its members, antagonisms appear and create smaller groups representing different, sometimes contradictory interests. Such conflicting situations are difficult to deal with in such a large network as the WTA.

In the opinion of the authors of the article, the organizational solutions adopted in the WTA are correct as a whole and allow it to effectively achieve the set goals. The position of the WTA in the sports market is unquestionable and too many entities from inside and from its environment care about the proper functioning of this organization. This specific imbalance of those interested in stabilizing the WTA towards its opponents, in favor of the former, means that even the existing shortcomings or risks will be jointly solved with a view to reaping further common benefits.

5. Summary

Women's Tennis Association is an example of a consciously built network organization that uses the potential and resources of its members and partners to achieve its goals. Clearly defined obligations of tennis players and tournament organizers, mutual benefits achieved by the entities involved, an efficiently functioning control system and an incentive system make the WTA network a major driving force for the development of world-class women's tennis. The WTA network organization has an open formula, which means that new members can join it, while those currently residing in it may lose this status if they do not fulfill their obligations. It is an additional element motivating that its individual members bring the value expected of them to the WTA, thus enriching the total value of the entire network. Occurring conflicts of interest, typical for the existence of any network, are resolved primarily by collegial bodies representing all network members, i.e., by the Board of Directors, Players Council and Tournament Council. This self-control mechanism allows to discharge tensions quickly and efficiently, while at the same time taking care of the interests of the entire network. It is worth emphasizing that individual members of the network, especially tournament organizers, because of extensive relationships with each other, often informal in nature, support each other by sharing their experiences, specialist knowledge, contacts with cooperators or access to the necessary resources. Therefore, it can be concluded that they benefit from two sources: one of them is the WTA organization offering several benefits, both those related to prestige, image and strictly economic, and the other source is the mutual support shown by members of the network.

The case of WTA illustrates well the principles and conditions of the functioning of a network organization. It may constitute a seed for further, in-depth research of this organization, as well as a contribution to further research devoted to the problem of the network of relations, implemented in other areas of the sports market. The more so as this market is extremely extensive, still recording high growth dynamics and still largely unrecognized in terms of the management mechanisms applicable in it.

The WTA network presented in the article and the "alliances" of tournament organizers operating within it reveal the heterogeneity of the structures of network organizations, which is very poorly emphasized in the literature on the subject. This means that the network integrator, in this case the WTA, must not only manage relations with its individual members, but also skillfully shape relations with informally emerging subgroups of members with similar interests and expectations towards the network. This finding may become a contribution to further research in the field of dependencies and forces of influence within network organizations. So far, this problem has not been the subject of both empirical and theoretical research and analysis.

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