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Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Sports Entrepreneurship

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Abstract: Sports entrepreneurship has been considered an important part of sports organisations when overcoming crisis situations. The aim of this study is to determine the impact of the crisis derived from COVID-19 on sports entrepreneurship and whether there are differences in the prediction of entrepreneurship on service quality in non-profit sports clubs. To this end, 145 sports clubs were analysed before and after the outbreak of the virus in society. Paired sample-t tests were carried out to determine the differences in variables studied before (Time I) and after (Time II) the COVID-19 outbreak, and correlations and hierarchical linear regressions were used to analyse the relationship between the variables studied in the two different stages. The results obtained show that risk-taking and innovation are significantly higher after the appearance of COVID-19, while proactivity has not undergone significant changes. Finally, the relationship between sports entrepreneurship and service quality is positive and significant in both stages but stronger before the crisis.

Keywords: sports entrepreneurship; sports clubs; service quality; COVID-19; adaptation; innovation; impact; crisis

1. Introduction

Globalisation, changing user demands, and digital transformation have been, and continue to be, some of the important challenges faced by sports organisations [1,2]. However, in recent months, this type of organisation has faced an unpredictable situation that has shaken the foundations of sport: the COVID-19 outbreak. The COVID-19 outbreak is a global pandemic still under study. It originated in December 2019, in the Chinese city of Wuhan, and has rapidly impacted, to a greater or lesser extent, all parts of the world [3]. COVID-19 has affected and continues to affect all global areas and regions [4] due to its highly infectious nature [5]. In this context and with the need to assume responsibility, the governments of most countries have been forced to undertake restrictive measures and limitations, which are necessary to contain the virus that has changed the lives of many people, organisations, and institutions [6].

The sports sector, despite being an important sector at economic, sporting, and social levels, has not been exempt from these restrictions. According to Ratten [7], “the sport sector has been especially influenced by the COVID-19 crisis in a way that has never been seen before” (p. 1). All physical activity, face-to-face, and group sports were suddenly and indefinitely restricted in many countries, often being relegated to home-based physical training [8]. As a result, sports organisations have had to reinvent themselves to offer a quality service to their users.

Major events involving masses of people can contribute to the rapid spread of the disease [9], just as physical contact between athletes and physical proximity between fans can be a danger regarding

the spread of the virus. Hence, governments have been forced to introduce and maintain social and mobility restrictions in an attempt to control the spread of the disease. In this context, the sports sector has been forced to close facilities, ban travel, and cancel sporting events and leagues [10]. In fact, it is expected that it will be some time before we return to training, competing and enjoying sport as we did before the appearance of COVID-19.

However, from a sports perspective, this change is even more important for most professional and nonprofessional sportsmen and women who compete in federated leagues or tournaments. For all of these individuals, it has been very difficult to stop sporting activities indefinitely; therefore, sports clubs have had to reinvent themselves to be able to continue with sporting and social activities. In this process of adapting to change and managing the crisis, sports clubs must focus their efforts on maintaining the service quality that they offer to their users, as well as to sportsmen and women. To this end, it is necessary to implement risky, innovative, and proactive actions. Generally, sports entrepreneurship (SE) is a vital part of an organisation's performance, and in the situation brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, such entrepreneurship has become even more necessary [7].

SE is the capacity of an organisation to identify ideas and opportunities and to develop innovative, risky, and proactive actions. Major changes can be generated through sports ventures that encourage the exploration and exploitation of existing opportunities [11]. Furthermore, this construct is widely related to the capacity to create value [12] and other final performance outcomes by the sports organisation [13,14]. However, have sports clubs changed their approach to sport entrepreneurship after the advent of COVID-19?

The attention given by academics and professionals to sports entrepreneurship in recent years has grown [15]; however, there is still a shortage of empirical studies that analyse the relationship between sport entrepreneurship and final performance variables in times of crisis. Therefore, the objectives of our study were: (i) to determine the significant differences in SE and service quality (SQ) before and after the appearance of the coronavirus in the sports clubs analysed and (ii) to determine the impact of the dimensions of SE on SQ before and after COVID-19.

2. Theoretical Framework

Entrepreneurship in the Time of COVID-19

World history has seen numerous recessions that have affected all sectors globally, and until the eruption of COVID-19, the crisis of 2008 was considered one of the most recent, longest, and most significant economic recessions in the capitalist era [16]. The main causes of crises can be very diverse, and the effects are different according to the organisation [17]. However, although crises occur cyclically, it is not easy for organisations to identify, let alone adapt to, sudden and dramatic changes [18]. It is therefore important to have the capacity to adapt by training during a normal situation. According to Pollard and Hotho [19], "scenario planning assists managers in developing wider views of the future, as it affects their organisation and provides deeper insights than are otherwise available during the analysis of the external environment".

We are currently going through a difficult stage, as the crisis resulting from COVID-19 is one of the most significant that the international sports sector has suffered in recent years [7]. According to Khandwalla [20], most organisations are affected by environmental uncertainty, environmental hostility, and complexity. Any of these environmental properties are increased during a crisis. However, although recessionary stages are related to negative effects on the economic, labour, and social spheres, from an entrepreneurial perspective, such times can also be interpreted as opportunities to reinvent oneself. According to Schumpeter [21], crises or adverse situations can offer opportunities to grow and gain a competitive advantage over competitors, known as "the process of creative destruction" (p. 81).

Due to the hostile and unpredictable situations generated by crises [22], creativity and innovation can be encouraged [23], and a recession can be seen as an opportunity to generate competitive advantage.

This can be framed by the phrase “necessity sharpens one’s wits”. In this context, organisations need to adopt innovative and proactive behaviours to create value, gain competitive advantages, and maintain pre-crisis performance levels. The influence of entrepreneurship on performance in hostile and turbulent environments was previously studied years ago by Covin and Slevin [24]. However, studies that look at the same organisation before, during, or after a crisis are scarce, perhaps even non-existent, in the sports field.

The uncertainty generated by the eruption of COVID-19 in our modern society may have consequences on the business model of organisations and on entrepreneurial behaviour. In a very short space of time, the sports sector has changed drastically [7], as have the actions of organisations that operate in this sector. Entrepreneurship is made up of the dimensions of innovation, proactivity, and risk-taking [25], and these dimensions can be developed to a greater or lesser extent by sports organisations. There is a broad consensus in the literature that the dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation should be treated separately [26]; therefore, in this study, this construct has been analysed in a multidimensional way.

“Proactiveness is an opportunity-seeking, forward-looking perspective characterized by the introduction of new products and services ahead of competition and acting in anticipation of the future demand” [27] (p. 928). In addition, a proactive organisation conducts a thorough analysis of its external and internal environment to develop strategic measures before its competition. Many authors have analysed the proactive personality and its relationship with the final performance of the organisation in times of crisis [28,29]. “A time of crisis can create market opportunities that can best be addressed with innovative and proactive postures” [30] (p. 206).

In this context, market gaps must be addressed from a creative and proactive perspective to achieve and maintain competitiveness in the sports sector [7]. In the same vein, Laitinen [31] points out that organisations that under unfavourable economic conditions have a rapid, proactive, and user-oriented response stand a greater chance of success. However, this has not been studied in non-profit sports organisations before and during a crisis, and there is therefore a gap in sports and organisational literature. Nevertheless, from the related existing literature, we can extract the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Proactivity has increased in sports clubs since the COVID-19 crisis.*

“Risk-taking is understood as the level of risk that the management of the entities is willing to assume, exposing notably own resources with the projection of achieving benefits as a return” [13] (p. 3). In this context, the “organizational risk-taking tolerance” construct, which reflects the organisation’s capacity to manage knowledge, is highlighted, allowing new opportunities to be identified and encouraging risky and entrepreneurial behaviour and attitudes [32]. Currently, there are no studies that have analysed changes in general entrepreneurship or in any of its dimensions (innovation, proactivity, and risk-taking) before, during, or after a crisis in sports organisations. However, it is possible to think that due to the need for sports organisations to take quick and proactive innovative measures, they are likely to adopt faster and riskier behaviour than they would in a normal situation. This risky behaviour can be detrimental to organisations in times of recession or uncertainty [27]. However, it may be necessary to achieve benefits that would not be achieved by conservative and passive behaviour. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *Risk-taking has increased in sports clubs since the COVID-19 crisis.*

Innovation and entrepreneurship are the engines of recovery and prosperity [21]. They can be implemented in the current crisis situation derived from COVID-19. Therefore, sports organisations must be proactive and innovative because if they are not willing to react, or do not react in the right way, it may have negative repercussions on their performance in the short and medium term [7]. The management of emotions and behaviours resulting from a crisis must be controlled quickly and channelled in a positive and entrepreneurial direction.

“Innovation is essential for competitiveness, not only but also, during economic crisis periods” [33] (p. 10). However, innovation should not be understood merely as the introduction of new products, services, or processes but also as the exploration and exploitation of resources available to the organisation to extract maximum benefit [13]. This is important since, in a crisis, perception of risk may increase due to uncertain economic effects [34]; consequently, it may be easier to identify and exploit opportunities and existing resources than to invest in new resources in the organisation. Based on the existing literature, the following hypothesis is considered:

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *Innovation has increased in sports clubs since the COVID-19 crisis.*

However, are there organisations that are more resilient in the face of a crisis? According to Lee et al. [18], organisations that have invested in capacity and resource development in normal situations can benefit from sudden change. Similarly, according to Soininen et al. [27], organisations with higher levels of entrepreneurship survive a crisis better than those with lower levels of entrepreneurship. However, according to the abovementioned authors, proactivity and innovation have a positive effect on final performance, while risk-taking has a negative effect. This can be explained by the fact that they relate risk-taking to external investments and not to entrepreneurial measures. Therefore, not only is the behaviour of an organisation in the recession situation itself important; the behaviour of an entity in a pre-recession context of normality also has an influence on performance.

Sports organisations, in normal situations, struggle with financial difficulties due to increasing competition. However, this struggle grows in times of crisis, such as the one derived from COVID-19. In this context, service quality is considered one of the most important factors in the resolution of financial problems [35]. Different authors have studied the relationship between entrepreneurship and other performance variables in the sports field [14,36,37], specifically service quality as an outcome variable [37–39]. Considering the existing organisational literature, generally, the entrepreneurial variables have a positive effect on the final performance of an organisation. Similarly, the SE–SQ relationship has been analysed in sports organisations in normal situations (not in a crisis context), and a positive relationship has been found [37,38]. From this, we can extract the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4 (H4). *SE positively effects SQ in sports clubs both before and after the crisis resulting from COVID-19.*

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Participants

The sample is made up of a total of 145 Spanish sports clubs, of which 55.2% (n = 80) are in the international-national category and 44.8% (n = 65) are in the regional-local category. Taking into account the type of financing, 27.1% (n = 39) obtained most of their financing from public sources, while 72.9% (n = 105) did so mainly from private sources.

3.2. Instruments

The instrument used in this study is composed of two different scales. The first scale measures the SE of sports clubs before and after the global pandemic. This scale was created by Covin and Slevin [24], based on Miller and Friesen [40], and is composed of eight items divided into three dimensions: risk-taking (e.g., “Our firm stresses a fully delegated policy for employees”), innovation (e.g., “Our organisation stimulates creativity and experimentation”), and proactivity (e.g., “In dealing with our rivals, our organisation typically initiates actions which they respond to”). The service quality scale used has been adapted for sporting environments from the original scale created by Vorhies and Morgan [41] and is composed of five items (e.g., “The service quality we offer

to our athletes, members and/or subscribers has improved”). The response scale for the instrument is a Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”).

3.3. Procedure

The data analysed in this study were collected through a questionnaire sent online through the University of Valencia’s own platform (LimeSurvey 2.5). The first sample (Time I) was collected between September and December 2019, and the second sample (Time II) was collected between April and May 2020. During this time, worldwide, there were limitations and restrictions derived from the COVID-19 outbreak. To obtain the sample for Time I, the questionnaire was sent to a total of 1368 sports clubs, of which 209 answered with a completed questionnaire. To obtain the sample for Time II, the questionnaire was sent to the same sports clubs as those contacted in Time I, and the questionnaire was preferably completed by the same person who completed the Time I questionnaire to obtain both a general view and an adjusted view based on the reality perceived in Time I. However, only 145 sports clubs completed the Time II questionnaire in a complete and valid manner.

3.4. Data Analysis

The analyses carried out in this study were divided into two main phases. The analysis of the descriptive data and a comparison of the means for the related samples were conducted, since the aim was to determine whether there were significant differences in sports enterprise and service quality between sports clubs before the impact of COVID-19 (Time I) and during the implementation of restrictions and limitations resulting from the global COVID-19 pandemic (Time II).

Secondly, bivariate correlations were made to determine the relationship between the variables analysed, and linear regressions were used to determine the effect of the dimensions of sports entrepreneurship (risk-taking, innovation, and proactivity) on the service quality of the sports clubs analysed. Prior to this, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was carried out to determine the normality of the sample. The statistical package SPSS 24.0 was used for this purpose.

4. Results

The scales have good psychometric properties of reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) and validity (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test and Barlett’s test of sphericity) (Table 1). All the reliability data range between 0.70 and 0.85, which are adequate values [42], while the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value is always higher than 0.50 and lower than 1 ($0.50 < \text{KMO} < 1$); additionally, for both scales, the Barlett’s test of sphericity is significant (< 0.05) [43].

Table 1. Reliability and validity of scales.

Scale	Reliability		Validity			
	Time I	Time II	Time I		Time II	
	α	α	KMO	BTS	KMO	BTS
SE						
Risk-taking	0.71	0.73	0.61	0.001	0.60	0.001
Innovation	0.72	0.70	0.63	0.001	0.57	0.001
Proactivity	0.71	0.78	0.51	0.001	0.52	0.001
SQ	0.85	0.83	0.84	0.001	0.79	0.001

Note: α = Cronbach’s alpha; KMO = Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test; BTS = Barlett’s test of sphericity.

Paired sample-t tests were conducted to compare the means in the SE and SQ dimensions before (Time I) and after (Time II) the onset of COVID-19. There was a statistically significant increase in two dimensions of SE from Time I to Time II: risk-taking (mean increase of 4.22, $t(145)$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.36$) and innovation (mean increase of 3.74, $t(145)$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.34$). However, for proactivity, there was

no statistically significant increase between the time periods (mean increase of 1.74, $t(145)$, $p > 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.16$). Finally, there was a statistically significant increase in the SQ scale from Time I to Time II (mean increase of 4.36, $t(145)$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.46$) (Table 2).

Table 2. Differences in SE and SQ in Time I and Time II.

Item	Time I		Time II		t
	M	SD	M	SD	
Risk-taking	5.08	1.25	5.52	1.04	-4.22 ***
RT1	5.20	1.54	5.55	1.37	-2.85 **
RT2	5.49	1.48	5.89	1.27	-2.59 *
RT3	4.54	1.71	5.14	1.29	-4.16 ***
Innovation	4.76	1.31	5.10	1.06	-3.74 ***
INNO1	4.54	1.67	5.08	1.40	-3.74 ***
INNO2	5.06	1.57	5.35	1.28	-1.89 *
INNO3	4.68	1.65	4.88	1.43	-2.78 **
Proactivity	4.20	1.45	4.43	1.40	-1.74
PROACT1	4.25	1.67	4.40	1.53	-0.88
PROACT2	4.15	1.62	4.46	1.57	-0.03 *
Service Quality	5.39	1.04	4.86	1.24	4.36 ***
SQ1	5.61	1.32	4.07	1.70	8.80 ***
SQ2	5.47	1.16	4.96	1.38	3.83 ***
SQ3	5.72	1.16	5.33	1.55	2.63 **
SQ4	5.27	1.16	4.85	1.57	2.60 **
SQ5	4.87	1.68	5.09	1.75	-1.23

Note: * $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$.

Before performing bivariate correlations to determine the relationships between the variables analysed, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was performed, accepting the non-normality of the data in Time I and Time II ($p < 0.05$). Hence, the Spearman correlation was carried out. The data are shown in Table 3 (upper part, Time II; lower part, Time I). There are significant positive correlations between each of the dimensions of SE and SQ both in Time I, with minimum values of 0.43 ($p < 0.001$), and in Time II, with minimum values of 0.35 ($p < 0.001$). Risk-taking has the highest positive correlation with SQ (0.56; $p < 0.001$) in Time I, while proactivity has the lowest positive correlation with SQ (0.43; $p < 0.001$) in Time I. However, in Time II, innovation is the dimension of SE that has highest correlation with SQ (0.46; $p < 0.001$), while proactivity has no significant positive correlation with SQ (0.31; $p > 0.05$) (Table 3).

Table 3. Correlation between sports entrepreneurship and service quality.

Scale	1	2	3	4
1. Risk-taking	1	0.49 ***	0.35 ***	0.43 ***
2. Innovation	0.56 ***	1	0.54 ***	0.46 ***
3. Proactivity	0.43 ***	0.57	1	0.31
4. Service Quality	0.56 ***	0.46 ***	0.48 ***	1

Note: upper part (time II); lower part (time I); *** $p \leq 0.001$.

Finally, two hierarchical linear regressions were performed to predict SQ at Time I and Time II. As seen in Table 4, in all cases, three differential steps were considered. In the first step, only risk-taking was considered; in the second step, innovation was included; and in the third step, proactivity was included.

Table 4. Hierarchical Regression Models (HRM).

Variable Predictors	SQ (Time I)			SQ (Time II)		
	R ²	ΔR ²	β	R ²	ΔR ²	β
Step 1	0.39 ***	0.39 ***		0.15 ***	0.16 ***	
Risk-taking			0.62 ***			0.40 ***
Step 2	0.39 ***	0.02		0.23 ***	0.08 ***	
Risk-taking			0.54***			0.25 **
Innovation			0.14			0.31 ***
Step 3	0.41 ***	0.03 *		0.22 ***	0.01	
Risk-taking			0.51 ***			0.25 **
Innovation			0.56			0.29 ***
Proactivity			0.19 *			0.06
Total R ² adj	0.41 ***			0.22 ***		

Note: * $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$.

Regarding the prediction of SQ in Time I, the first step of the risk-taking regression was able to predict 39% of the value variance ($R^2 = 0.39$) with a weight of 0.62 ($\beta = 0.62$; $p < 0.001$). In the second step, innovation was included without a significant change in the R^2 value ($R^2 = 0.02$, $p > 0.05$). However, the third step of the regression, in which proactivity was included, saw a significant change of 0.03 for the R^2 value and was able to predict 41 percent of the value variance ($R^2 = 0.41$), which consisted of the two dimensions with a higher weight, namely, risk-taking ($\beta = 0.512$; $p < 0.001$) and proactivity ($\beta = 0.19$; $p < 0.05$).

Considering the SQ prediction in Time II, the first step of the risk-taking regression predicted 15 percent of the value variance ($R^2 = 0.15$) with a weight of 0.40 ($\beta = 0.40$; $p < 0.001$). In the second step, which included innovation, there was an increase in the R^2 value of 0.08 ($R^2 = 0.08$, $p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$) and a factor weight of 0.31 ($\beta = 0.31$; $p < 0.001$). Finally, the third step did not produce a significant change in the R^2 value ($R^2 = 0.01$, $p > 0.05$; $R^2 = 0.22$, $p < 0.001$), with risk-taking ($\beta = 0.25$; $p < 0.01$) and innovation ($\beta = 0.29$; $p < 0.001$) having a significant factorial weight in the regression, contrary to proactivity ($\beta = 0.06$; $p > 0.05$) (Table 4).

5. Discussion

In the present study, it is shown that the COVID-19 crisis had an effect on the sports entrepreneurship of the sports clubs analysed. To flatten the infection curve and prevent the spread of the virus, governments have implemented strict measures [5], which have completely altered the course of sports, social, and professional lives. As a result, there have been planned changes undertaken by sports organisations [44] to counteract the consequences and try to maintain high levels of quality and the sustainability of the organisation. However, in this study, not all dimensions of ES were affected in the same way.

In sum, H1 was rejected as proactivity increased after the outbreak of the virus; however, this increase was not statistically significant. Proactivity is mainly composed of two elements: exploration of the external and internal environment of the organisation and the development of actions before competition [13]. Therefore, due to the special situation arising from COVID-19, the fact that proactivity did not increase significantly may be due to two main reasons: (i) the organisation's need to provide a rapid response [31] compared with the time needed to carry out a thorough analysis of the environment and (ii) the fact that many sports organisations have acted quickly and accurately, which is why the actions developed by sports clubs may not have been pioneering in the face of competition. According to Wenzel et al. [45], proactivity in times of crisis is important as opportunities may be exhausted if managers wait too long. However, it should be noted that there are many possibilities for management teams to act emotionally in a crisis situation [44]. Hence, the strategies or adaptations undertaken by sports clubs have not assessed the context in detail, and this may be a cause of the nonsignificant change in the values of proactivity during the crisis.

On the other hand, H2 was supported, since, according to the results obtained, risk-taking was significantly higher during the crisis resulting from the pandemic than it was before the virus broke out in society. According to Soininen [27], “Risk-taking describes the nature of easily venturing into the unknown, borrowing heavily, and/or committing remarkable resources to ventures in uncertain environments” (p. 928). However, in times of recession and uncertainty generated by a crisis, venturing into the unknown is innate, since the environment is highly changeable, and decisions have to be made on the basis of this dynamism and hostility.

In sports, although risk and uncertainty are endemic, risk-taking is generally considered a main objective for sports organisations and as more than a means to a competitive end [46]. However, crises provide opportunities for decision-making and action that would otherwise be unthinkable [47]. In this case, in the situation derived from the COVID-19 outbreak, it has been necessary to implement quick and effective measures and strategies in the sports field to continue offering services to clients and users.

Along the same lines, H3 was supported, since, considering the results obtained, innovation levels increased significantly in Spanish sports clubs after COVID-19 burst onto the scene. This finding is in line with what was expressed by Faulkner [48], who stated that situations of crisis or recession can stimulate innovation in organisations by focusing on new markets. “Innovating focuses on the strategic renewal of the business” [44] (p. 6). This implies a sudden change in the development of innovative strategies, the identification of new opportunities and market niches to access, and the proposal of actions that in normal situations the management team would probably not have valued. However, in line with the results obtained, Wenzel et al. [45] stated that “they most likely need excess capacities to carry out strategic renewal in response to crisis” (p. 6).

Innovation increases in times of crisis, not only in the expansion of market niches to which services can be oriented but also in the innovation and adaptation of business models [49]. Furthermore, due to the special characteristics of the situation derived from COVID-19, such as necessary limitations to and prohibitions on physical contact and mobility, digital communication has been acknowledged as one of the few accepted forms of communication between professionals and clients, even among later clients [44]. Most likely, prior to the pandemic, this innovation in communication was not used by many or had not even been considered because there was no need for it. In this sense, sports clubs, whose traditional essence relied on contact between sportsmen and women, direct and fluid communication between coaches and sportsmen and women, and contact between sports fans themselves, have had to totally change their way of acting and adapt competitions, leagues and tournaments to the “new normal”.

Finally, H4 was supported since SE has a significantly positive effect on SQ, both in the sporting context prior to the crisis arising from the pandemic (Time I) and during the crisis generated by COVID-19 (Time II). However, the predictive capacity of SE on SQ was greater in the stage analysed prior to the crisis (Time I), and the dimensions with the greatest factorial weight are also different in each period. Before the crisis (Time I), risk-taking and proactivity were the dimensions of SE that showed a significant prediction of SQ. This may be because, in normal contexts, managers and the management team do not have a need to act quickly and can thus analyse the environment to identify resources, needs, and opportunities to make better decisions before the competition. However, this environment has changed since the advent of COVID-19 (Time II), as the time to act is more limited, and sports clubs have had to make quick, innovative, and successful decisions. This fits with Bingham et al. [50], who stated that in times of uncertainty in the environment (for example, during an economic crisis), organisations begin to explore new market options and value other forms of business that they had not previously thought of. “Innovating may be increasingly valuable, if not unavoidable to sustain firm survival in the longer run if the crisis lasts for a longer period of time and heeds the exploration of alternative sources of revenue” [45] (p. 6). Similarly, digitisation and adaptation to new workflows have emerged as necessities since face-to-face communication between the parties that make up a

sports club has been limited (e.g., digital platform meetings between the management and staff of sports clubs).

Data on innovation have confirmed that entrepreneurial organisations in times of crisis are generally the same as those that were entrepreneurial in the past [51]. Therefore, encouraging an entrepreneurial attitude in situations of stability can enable the organisation to face a crisis under better conditions or with greater possibilities of success. This fits with the term “crisis capability”, expounded by Ritter and Pedersen [49], which relates to the idea that “exposure to a crisis seems to create a need to be prepared for similar events. In particular, mistakes made in earlier crises were mentioned as important for learning and for preventing similar mistakes in the face of this crisis” (p. 219). In this context, it is important to stress how important it is to prepare an organisation and its staff for unexpected situations. In addition, strategies should be used in times of crisis as a source of knowledge for similar situations in the future.

6. Conclusions

The results of our study show a change in SE in the non-profit sports clubs analysed, after the crisis generated by COVID-19. Risk-taking and innovation, two of the three dimensions of SE, were shown to increase significantly in sports clubs in times of crisis. This outcome may be logical, as organisations are forced to develop strategies and make decisions to maintain contact and service provision with their users, sportsmen and sportswomen during time of crisis. In contrast, proactivity does not increase significantly during such times. However, the data should be treated with caution, as the type of organisation and the sector of membership impact how an organisation acts in situations of uncertainty and hostility.

On the other hand, SQ is significantly lower during the crisis than before the virus appeared in society. This outcome is logical since, although sports clubs have fought to maintain contact, activity, and quality levels within their organisations, the levels of SQ are still very low.

6.1. Managerial Implications

Non-profit sports clubs are highly dependent on government funding [3], but such funding is unstable and uncertain in times of crisis. Therefore, the management teams of sports clubs need to develop innovative and rapid strategies to find funding from other sources (commercial sponsorship, increased number of users/sportsmen, etc.). A crisis can have negative consequences if the organisation is not effectively managed [52] or if it does not take advantage of the opportunities for organisational strategies offered by turbulent and uncertain times. In this context, not all organisations are proactive and innovative; therefore, in sports clubs that adapt to the situation and change their attitude, strategies and decisions will cover a wider range of markets than those that maintain a passive and traditional attitude to this situation that forces them to react and reinvent themselves.

Addressing the issue from the perspectives of the design and management of sports policy, the results show that an entrepreneurial attitude can have positive results on an organisation. However, although small organisations may be more vulnerable due to having fewer capital reserves and fewer assets, action protocols can be developed and implemented more quickly in such organisations due to their size and flexibility [53]. This can be seen as an opportunity in regional or national sports clubs. However, all of them should consider the possibility that the “new normal”, as the situation that has emerged after the initial crisis resulting from COVID-19 has become known, may not reach the levels of normality seen before the emergence of the pandemic [49]. Therefore, decisions and strategies that involve the organisation’s resources must be assessed in accordance with the current situation. The sports context offers research opportunities; however, the third sector expands the possibilities of developing strategies due to the non-profit nature of the organisations that make up the sector. Therefore, one of the challenges that sports clubs face is the development of strategies to strengthen collaboration with the regional and national federations of their sport discipline.

6.2. Limitations and Directions for Further Research

In term of limitations of the study, it should be noted that the specific geographical location of the sample analysed and the non-probabilistic sampling format force us to treat the data with caution, since these characteristics can limit the generalisation of the results obtained. On the other hand, an option for a future line of research would be to extend the stratified probability sampling and include various countries. It would also be possible to compare data obtained from different types of organisations (public, private and non-profit) in the sports sector. Finally, subjective measures are a good option when studying non-profit organisations [54]; however, these measures could be complemented with objective measures to achieve a more realistic picture.

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