

Changes in voluntary sports clubs

Author: Karsten Østerlund

Institution: Centre for Sports, Health and Civil Society;
University of Southern Denmark

E-mail: kosterlund@health.sdu.dk

Abstract keywords

voluntary sports clubs volunteering civil society
commercialisation adaption municipalities democracy

Aim of abstract/paper - research question

The aim of the abstract is to examine if and how changes in civil society discussed below have had consequences for:

1. The expectations of members and volunteers to their respective sports clubs (request for new activities, flexibility, etc.)
2. The participation of members and volunteers in the various activities (sports club democracy, social activities, etc.)
3. The willingness of members and volunteers to dedicate themselves to voluntary work (formal and/or ad hoc)

Theoretical background or literature review*

The number of participants in sport and exercise is growing – in general and specifically within voluntary sports clubs, who have more members than ever before. The number of members is still inclining, and new clubs are regularly born. Furthermore, recent studies on volunteering show that volunteerism in sport is not in decline. On the contrary, studies show a large and growing voluntary sports sector in Denmark.

Despite these positive developments, voluntary sports clubs are challenged by a number of changes in civil society. Firstly, a lot of participants – mainly adult – have found new ways of participating in sport that fit their everyday life better than traditional activities in sports clubs. Secondly, sports clubs are increasingly exposed to competition from commercially organised sport providers. Thirdly, the relationship of sports clubs to municipalities has changed with an increasing demand for cooperation and the participation of sports clubs in the goal achievement of the public sector.

Even though the above mentioned challenges have thus far not led to a declining number of participants in voluntary organised sport, recent studies on participation in sport show that a growing number of people do sport outside the world of voluntary organised sport. People are increasingly self-organised or do commercially organised sport. Hence, it seems as if voluntary sports clubs increasingly have to compete for participants in sport on what can be

characterised as a “market for sport”, even if a majority of sports clubs do not see themselves as in competition with, for instance, commercially organized sport providers.

This development has given rise to a debate concerning, firstly, whether or not voluntary sports clubs will be able to adapt to the changes in civil society described above, and, secondly, what implications such an adaption will have for the values and organizational traditions that voluntary sports clubs have traditionally been based upon.

Regarding the first debate, this abstract departs from the theoretical viewpoint that organizational populations, here voluntary sports clubs, are capable of adapting to changing environments and new requirements caused by, for instance, an increased competition on a market for sport.

Nevertheless, the population of sports clubs is diverse, and within such a population there are large differences in both the pressure to adapt and in the capacity to adapt. Hence, the level and kind of adaption will be very different.

The second debate will be the primary focus of this abstract. The main question is what consequences – if any – the changes in civil society have had for the relation between the members and volunteers and their respective sports clubs. Has there been a change in expectations, participation and willingness to do voluntary work among members and volunteers?

Methodology, research design and data analysis

The analyses of the above questions will be based on a survey study done in 30 voluntary sports clubs of different sizes and within different sports in Denmark. A total of more than 3.500 members and 800 volunteers have been asked to participate in the study, which is being completed at the moment. It is estimated that the response rate will be at least 40% for members and slightly higher for volunteers. The study will be completed April 2012, and, hence, the results will be available well in time for the conference.

Results, discussion and implications/conclusions**

Not yet available, but they will be well in time for the conference.

References – limited to 5

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