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## Federal Structures of Sports Systems

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### Abstract

#### AIM OF THIS PAPER

Sports federations are the central governing organizations in national and international sport systems. As Ferkins and Shilbury (2010, p. 253) state: "The issue of inter-organisational relationship and governing structures (...) is an under-researched area in sport and non-profit organisations alike." Mostly we find the description of a unified three-level system based upon local clubs that are part of regional federations which are themselves part of the national federations. But also national federations exist in which the local clubs are direct members and where the regional federations do not play an important role. This raises the question which different types of federal organization we can find empirically in the world of sports. Only, when we know these different types can we discuss their strength and weaknesses and formulate advice for the institutional design of the federal structure of sports systems. The aim of this paper is to explore the different types of federal organization in sports.

#### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The theoretical framework of this study draws on federalism theory. According to federalism theory the sports systems in federal states have a confederal structure. This type of structure is characterized by regional associations in their own right with their own constitutions which must not correspond with those of the national associations. In confederal systems the regional associations are typically composed of the local clubs and the national organizations are typically composed of the regional associations (cf. Coleman, 1987). This structure is a result of historical developments. Mostly the local clubs developed first and then formed regional and national associations (cf. Armingeon, 2002). Following federalism theory we also have to distinguish between the terms federalism, decentralization and democracy. Federalism "refers to a

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constitutional decision, (...) decentralization is a consequence of post-constitutional policy decisions” (Voigt & Blume, 2012, p. 238). From the terms federalism and decentralization we have to distinguish the term democracy which “refers to the election of politicians representing these tiers” (Voigt & Blume, 2012, p. 240). Empirical findings show that the most crucial topics are membership of clubs and voting power (cf. Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010).

Based on this theoretical background the focus of the study lies on membership representation of clubs in national associations and the voting power of the members of local clubs and regional associations. These topics guide the empirical research.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

In order to explore the different types of federal structure of sports systems Austria and Germany were chosen. These two countries have a common historical background and are both unitary federal states (cf. Armingeon, 2002). This selection of countries not only allows us to explore what different types of federal structure exist but also allows us to see if there are country specific differences in the federal structure of sports. The analysis takes a look at the national sports organizations in Austria and Germany (i.e. the Austrian Ski Association or the German Football Association)

The empirical analysis is based on the constitutions of the described sports organizations in the two countries. There especially the focus lies on the membership status and on the voting rights for the general assembly.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the empirical study show different types of organizational structures. The classical type is that of indirect representation. In this type the local clubs are members of their regional associations and these regional associations are members of the national association and have voting rights on the national level. From this type we can distinguish the model of direct representation where the local clubs are directly connected to the national association and have exclusive voting rights there. In the middle of these pure models several types of mixed voting models exist where local clubs representatives and regional associations have voting rights at the national level or where professional clubs and regional associations have voting rights at the national level. All these types are combined with different voting rights principles.

The central finding of this study is that different structural equivalents exist in the local-regional-national relationship in sports. The sports system is not as unified as it is often seen. Further research should focus on topics like effectiveness, efficiency or democratic responsibility of these different types of structural organization so that we can give advice for an appropriate institutional design of the local-regional-national

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relationship in sports.

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