

## A Comparative Perspective On Sports Clubs In Europe

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The idea of investigating sports clubs in Europe from an empirical and comparative perspective was initiated through the book "Sports Clubs in Europe" (Breuer, Hoekman, Nagel & Van der Werff, 2015) which comprises various country-specific information on sports clubs, but is not based on a common empirical approach. The underlying study is the first to allow a comparative analysis of sports clubs across ten European countries. The purpose of this study is to gain knowledge about the extent to which European sports clubs are socially inclusive, the extent of volunteering within sports clubs, and how sports clubs are working to recruit, qualify, and retain volunteers.

Central to the SIVSCE project are three theoretical concepts: Sports clubs, social integration, and volunteering.

There are seven features which are commonly used to characterize a sports clubs: 1) voluntary membership, 2) orientation towards the members' interests, 3) democratic decision-making structure, 4) voluntary work, 5) autonomy, 6) a non-profit orientation, and 7) solidarity (Heinemann & Horch, 1981; Ibsen, 1992).

An online sports club survey was conducted in each of the ten participating countries in the autumn of 2015. The total of 139,659 sports clubs were invited to take part in the survey. The email-invitation to the survey was sent centrally from Germany to clubs in nearly all countries (except for Flanders, the Netherlands, and Switzerland which used existing national surveys). The clubs had about two months to fill in the questionnaire which consisted of the same questions in all ten countries. The questions dealt with structural characteristics (e.g. number of members, sports), resources (e.g. paid staff, finances, facilities), goals, problems, management, as well as volunteering and social integration. A total of 35,790 clubs participated in the survey. Descriptive and analytical data analyses were applied.

Pertaining to volunteers the study shows that in clubs in Spain, Hungary, the Netherlands, and Denmark, averagely more than 20% of the clubs' members are holding a central voluntary position while in Germany and Switzerland, 13% and 14% of the members are volunteers. In line with this result, clubs in Germany and Switzerland report comparatively large problems with regard to the recruitment and retention of volunteers on the board level. Applying a regression analysis with the dependent variable "volunteers per members" shows that with increasing club size the share of volunteers decreases. This result is found in all countries and can probably be ascribed to the fact that the number of volunteers in fixed positions does not rise with more members. A further interesting result is that in Flanders, Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands the existence of initiatives to recruit and retain volunteers positively impacts on the share of volunteers. Moreover, clubs that state to be involved in long term planning in Flanders, Denmark, Germany, and Norway rather have higher shares of volunteers relative to their members than clubs that do not put high value on planning. This shows that planning and professional club management can help to increase the share of volunteers.

With regard to social integration of different population groups, there are big differences with regard to the share of migrants, the elderly (65+), and people with disabilities across countries. While in Poland, about three quarters of the sports clubs estimate not to have any people with a migration background, this is only the case for roughly every fifth club in Norway, the Netherlands, and Germany and every fourth club in England and Switzerland. With regard to the elderly, more than half of all clubs in Poland and Spain report to have no members of this age group. Contrary, only 7% of sports clubs in Germany and 11 % of Dutch sports clubs state not to have any people aged 65 or older among their members.

### References

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