

# Recruitment Strategies For Members Of The Executive Board Of German Sports Clubs

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## Introduction

Sports clubs, being built on a bottom-up membership democracy and a pooling of resources of their members, always have to deal with the problem of distribution of pooled resources and with the problem of delegation of authority to a small group of elected members. Sports clubs are (mostly) led by volunteer members who organize the production of the club goods (Vanberg, 1982) and preserve the organization itself (Michels, 1957). In order to avoid that members take the exit option and leave the club the members of the executive board have to avoid the permanent disappointment of members.

Following the "iron law of oligarchy" (Michels, 1957), we presume that members of this small group of executives are elected mainly under executive control with little power for the members (Enjolras & Waldahl, 2010, p. 216). We presume furthermore that new members of this small group of executives are elected after they have been asked by the incumbent executives whether they are willing to become a member of the executive board. At general meetings persons who were recommended by members of the executive are usually elected and for this reason elections become somewhat ritualistic.

In our approach, we try to find characteristics that are crucial for people to become recommended as a member of the executive board in their sports club. We also analyze some mechanisms of the iron law of oligarchy.

## Methods and sample

Data were collected from 29<sup>th</sup> of May 2016 to 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2016 in an online questionnaire sent to registered volunteers from German sports clubs in the Sportbund Pfalz e.V. (N = 3,067; runback = 22,62%). We focus on two types of volunteers: process-related (performer; N = 1,124) and structural-related (executive; N = 1,717; Flatau et al., 2013) and try to find out which socioeconomic parameters are characteristic for those two types. Additionally, we study the characteristics of executive board members of sports clubs (president, vice-president and treasurer) and via binary logistic regression, we identify predictors for becoming recommended and elected as a member of the executive board. We determine socioeconomic factors (education, income, age, etc.) and the fact "being asked from other board members to assume a position at the board" as important variables to become a member of the executive board.

## Prospect

Wippler (1981) subscribes the dilemma that democratic actions can lead to oligarchic structures based on unintended consequences of member's actions. Going one step further we assume that sports clubs are ruled by an "elite" (Bourguignon & Verdier, 2000, p. 287) or an intern group of authorities which we see as a club-intern-network of people, often an old-boys network, of a specific social status who shares and supports the agenda of the executive board members. This can be seen as a precondition for oligarchy (Perkins & Poole, 1996). Such an interpretation is in line with a point made by Max Weber, who argued that "[...] authority is always a minority rule [...]" (Weber, 1972, p. 20). Lipset, Trow and Coleman (1956) call this process the domination by a few and the accumulation of cliques. We identify predictors of oligarchic structures and the mechanisms of their permanent reproduction in German sports clubs. We see the specific structure of sports clubs as a kind of self-preservation against environmental influences to hold continuity (Thiel & Meier, 2004).

## References

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