Social Integration In Sports Clubs In Europe

Ibsen, Bjarne

University of Southern Denmark, Denmark

E-mail: bibsen@health.sdu.dk

Sport has the ability to bring together people in activity-based communities that can be beneficial for individuals as well as for society. There is, however, a limited amount of knowledge on the political conditions for and structural characteristics of sports clubs that promote social integration. The Erasmus+ sport project "Social Inclusion and Volunteering in Sports Clubs in Europe" addresses this limitation by collecting comparative knowledge about sports clubs across European borders.

The project distinguishes between three — interrelated — dimensions of social integration that draw attention to different aspects of the concept that are relevant to sports clubs: Structural integration, socio-cultural integration and socio-affective integration (Elling, De Knop & Knoppers, 2001; Esser, 2009). The study is inspired of theory on two levels: On the macro level the inspiration is welfare state theory and the typologies (Esping-Andersen, 1990); on the meso level the inspiration is theory and previous studies of ideal type characteristics of associations.

The study has collected data on three levels: The sports policy level, the sports club level with survey answers from 35,790 sports clubs and the member level with survey answers from 13,082 members. Regarding social integration the study has a particular focus on four groups: people with disabilities, people with migration background, elderly (65+ years) and women and girls.

The preliminary analyses of the empirical findings show remarkable large differences between countries on social integration in sports clubs but no clear and general link between sports policy priorities and programs on the one hand and the representation of and social integration initiatives taken by sports clubs on the other. But not surprisingly, sports clubs that take special initiatives to include the target group in question also has a higher proportion of members from within this target group. Social integration in sports clubs, however, also depends on a number of characteristics of the clubs. In particular, the size of the club is of great importance.

References

Elling, A., De Knop, P., & Knoppers, A. (2001). The social integrative meaning of sport: A critical and comparative analysis of policy and practice in the Netherlands. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 18*, 414–434.

Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Cambridge: Policy Press.

Esser, H. (2009). Pluralisierung oder Assimilation? Effekte der multiplen Inklusion auf die Integration von Migranten [Pluralization or Assimilation? Effects of Multiple Inclusion on the Integration of Immigrants]. *Zeitschrift für Soziologie, 38*, 358–378.