

Understanding Differences In Sport Policy And Structures Across Europe: Results From The Project “Social Inclusion And Volunteering In Sports Clubs In Europe”

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The aim of this paper is to explain differences in government sport policy and the structure of sports organisations (clubs and governing bodies) between ten European countries, and therefore the extent to which good practice in promoting volunteering and social inclusion through sports clubs is transferable between countries. The paper uses interim results from the project “Social Inclusion and Volunteering in Sports Clubs in Europe” (SIVSCE): a comparative study of ten countries (Elmoose-Østerlund & Ibsen, 2016) which builds on the previous accounts of sports clubs in Europe (Breuer, Hoekman, Nagel, & Werff, 2015). It primarily draws on results of the first work package of the project, in which experts from each country described government policies which influenced sports clubs, and the structure of volunteer led sports clubs and their representative organisations. From this, the conceptual framework of a ‘sports political opportunity structure’ is developed. This is the network of government agencies, national sports organisations, sports clubs and their members; and the relationships between these. The ‘sports political opportunity structure’ provides the context; opportunities and constraints; within which volunteer led sports clubs can act to express their aims and those of members, and within which national and local government can implement policies through sport. This structure is not deterministic, but is a balance of structure and opportunities for agency, within which clubs and members can take initiatives.

While the project took an inductive approach, differences in the ‘sports political opportunity structure’ are attributed to: historical circumstances (sometimes called ‘path dependence theory’; Anheir & Salamon, 2006); the ideological dimension of the ‘political opportunity structure’ (Esping-Andersen, 1990); and the degree of income inequality in each country (Veal & Nichols, 2017). Four contrasting countries are described to illustrate these points: England, Denmark; Poland and Switzerland. This comparison is also able to use results from the cross-national survey of 35,790 sports clubs conducted in Work Package 2 of the project. Understanding differences between countries using this conceptual framework qualifies the extent to which recommendations can be made for the transfer of government policies and the practices of sports clubs between countries. It raises questions about of the relationship between social capital at the levels of society, the club and the club members.

References

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