

Sports Clubs as a Medium for Integrating People with Migration Background and Disabilities

Nagel, Siegfried¹; Adler Zwahlen, Jenny²; Albrecht, Julia¹ and Elmoose-Østerlund, Karsten³

1: Institute of Sport Science, University of Bern, Switzerland; 2: Federal Office of Sport Magglingen, Switzerland; 3: Centre for Sports, Health and Civil Society; Department of Sports Science and Clinical Biomechanics; University of Southern Denmark
siegfried.nagel@ispsw.unibe.ch

Aim

Sports play an important role in policy debates, as they can encourage social integration of people with migration background as well as with disabilities. Here, particularly sports clubs are expected to provide valuable contributions for integrating these specific target groups in an organisational context as well as in broader society, and thus make a contribution to public welfare. In most European countries, there are initiatives of sport policy and cooperations between sport organisations that aim at enhancing social integration in and through sport for these usually underrepresented social groups. However, integration is not effected automatically and is strongly reliant on specific conditions. Therefore, the question arises to what extent sports clubs are able to integrate members with migration background as well as people with disabilities? Therefore, the degree of social integration of these two member groups are compared with all other members (without migration background and disability). Furthermore, it is interesting what role special programmes and initiatives of sports clubs play for the social integration of members with migration background or disability.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

On the one hand, sports clubs permit reducing social differences and the sense of being foreign as well as creating social networks and friendships through their various opportunities for interaction and contacts (e.g. Janssens & Verweel, 2014). The joint activities can strengthen the sense of belonging and unity between members. On the other hand, universal expectations concerning the social integration achieved by sports clubs have been doubted, pointing to the underrepresentation of these two population groups and social closure practices such as discrimination, prejudices and conflicts (e.g. Elling & Claringbould, 2005). This ambivalence is debated with regard to the social integration of people with migration background as well as disabilities. Furthermore, social integration in sports clubs is usually discussed as a multidimensional concept. The analyses in our study refer to the concept of Elling, De Knop and Knoppers (2001) differentiating between three dimensions: structural, socio-cultural and socio-affective integration.

Research Design and Data Analysis

To structure and analyse our research questions, we use a multilevel framework for analysing sports clubs (Nagel et al., 2015). The logic of our model allows to combine the social integration of certain member groups on the individual level with the club level that means the specific measures regarding the promotion of social integration. The multilevel analyses build on data from the project Social Inclusion and Volunteering in Sports Clubs in Europe (SIVSCE), which was the first to collect large-scale comparative data on sports clubs in Europe (Elmoose- Østerlund, et al., 2017). Ten countries (including Belgium (Flanders), Denmark, England, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain and Switzerland) participated in the project, and, in each of these countries, comparative data has been collected on the micro level (n=13.082 members and volunteers) and the meso level

(n=642 sport clubs). The social integration was analysed via the members' survey by measuring the following three dimensions with different items in the questionnaire (reliability analysis: α between .75 and .83): (1) *Socio-cultural integration* which means both the ability of members to know and master values and decision-making in sports clubs and the acceptance of multiculturalism. (2) *Socio-affective integration 'interaction'* that is understood as the socialisation and the formation of social networks among members (3) *Socio-affective integration 'identification'* which means the degree to which members identify with and feel emotionally connected. Since our study focus only on sports clubs' members, the structural integration, i.e. the representation of certain social groups, couldn't analysed in detail. In contrast, specific structural characteristics of the clubs (e.g. having programmes and measures to integrate certain social groups) were collected via the club survey and integrated in the multilevel analysis by controlling for possible country differences.

Results and Discussion

The results show that members with migration background as well as with disabilities are relatively well integrated with regard to socio-affective (interaction and identification) and socio-cultural integration when they are compared with other member groups. However, the social integration of those members who are not born in the respective country is somehow lower in comparison with club members without migration background. In contrast, there are nearly no differences between people with disabilities and all the other club members. Furthermore, the multilevel analyses show that special efforts to support the integration of a certain target group are relevant for the degree of social integration of members with disabilities. Yet, there are nearly no effects of specific programmes and measure for the social integration of members with migration background.

The results show that special initiatives and programmes can help to enhance the social integration of members with disabilities and migration background. However, the respective measures have to fit for a specific target group.

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