

The Role of Organisational Capacity for the Management of the Social Integration of Underrepresented Population Groups in European Sports Clubs

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Aim

Sports clubs are generally perceived as important arenas for social integration, but a number of population groups are nevertheless underrepresented. In light of this, we set out to identify organisational characteristics of sports clubs that work strategically to address the management issue of social integration. Thus, the aim of this study is to investigate which organisational characteristics play a role in the integration of three underrepresented population groups: people with disabilities, people with migration background and people on a low income, and to elaborate on similarities and differences between these groups.

Theoretical Background

Five categories of organisational characteristics were examined, of which the first four were derived from the organisational capacity framework (Hall et al., 2003; Millar & Doherty, 2016; Wicker & Breuer, 2014):

- 1) Human resources capacity (operationalised as the numbers of volunteers and paid staff and the employment of paid management).
- 2) Financial capacity (operationalised as problems with the financial situation).
- 3) Planning and development capacity (operationalised as long-term planning and monitoring).
- 4) Infrastructure and process capacity (operationalised as problems with the availability of sports facilities and four different club goals with regard to companionship and conviviality, sporting success and competitions, integration of a broad range of population groups and integration of socially vulnerable groups).
- 5) General structural characteristics (operationalised as club size, club age, single-sport vs. multisport club, and community size).

The dependent variables included describe the likelihood of clubs to offer targeted initiatives for each of the three underrepresented population groups included. More specifically, club representatives were asked to indicate whether their respective clubs 'have special initiatives (e.g. activities, teams, cooperation, reduced membership fees, etc.) to increase participation among the following population groups'. They were asked to indicate 'yes' or 'no' for each population group. The wording of this question reflects an approach to social integration as a targeted club effort.

Research Design and Data Analysis

Statistical multilevel regression analyses were conducted using survey data collected among more than 14,000 sports clubs in the autumn of 2015. The data stem from the project 'Social Inclusion and Volunteering in Sports Clubs in Europe' (SIVSCE), which has collected comparable knowledge about sports clubs, members and volunteers in ten European countries, including Belgium (Flanders), Denmark, England, Germany, Hungary, the

Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain and Switzerland. In most of the countries, representative samples of sports clubs were included in the data collection.

Results and Discussion

All of the four included aspects of organisational capacity were found to be relevant for the integration of underrepresented groups. Infrastructure and process capacity was found to be relevant especially when operationalised as club goals. Clubs that work for the integration of socially vulnerable groups were significantly more inclined to have targeted initiatives for the three groups examined.

Another aspect found to be relevant was professionalisation when operationalised as having paid employees or a paid manager (human resources) and being engaged in long-term planning (planning and development capacity). Having paid employees or management is likely to bring resources to clubs that allow for a broader scope of activities, while long-term planning is likely to be a helpful tool in building sustainable activities. It is worth noting that we also identified a positive correlation with the volunteer work force (human resources), which indicated that having a large volunteer workforce can also foster more targeted initiatives.

Next, we found that the clubs that offer targeted initiatives have more problems with finances (financial resources) and facilities (infrastructure and process capacity). We would argue that the most likely interpretation is that clubs that offer activities for underrepresented groups have a higher demand for financial resources and facilities.

Finally, general structural characteristics (here club size, club age, single-sport vs. multisport clubs and community size) were found to have a limited influence on the likelihood of clubs to work for the integration of target groups.

The results also revealed that in the main, it is the same organisational characteristics that are positively associated with the propensity of clubs to offer targeted initiatives regardless of the target group in question. The main differences exist with regard to people with disabilities. For this group, the positive associations with clubs that have a paid manager and are organised as multisport clubs rather than single-sport clubs are relatively large, when compared to the two other target groups.

Conclusion

Overall, it was, from the results of the statistical analyses, possible to conclude that organisational capacity is important as regards the propensity of sports clubs to work strategically for the integration of underrepresented population groups, while general structural characteristics were found to be less influential. Since the data stem from the first large-scale comparative study of European sports clubs, and because we find only limited variation at the country level, the findings of this study are likely to be generalisable to sports clubs in Europe.

References

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