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INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

SOCIAL INCLUSION AND VOLUNTEERING IN SPORTS CLUBS IN EUROPE

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT "SOCIAL INCLUSION AND VOLUNTEERING IN SPORTS CLUBS IN EUROPE" (SIVSCE)

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Published by University of Southern Denmark, Department of Sports Science and Clinical Biomechanics, 2016.
ISBN 978-87-93496-03-3

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Fotos:
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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication only reflects the views of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

Introduction

The idea to build up a European research project on sports clubs was born in the "Sport Organisation Research Network" (SORN), an initiative taken in context to the "European Association for Sociology of Sport" (EASS). The SORN network was formed in 2013 and consists of a group of researchers with a strong scientific interest in sports clubs and sports organisations.

The first initiative of the network was to publish the book "Sports clubs in Europe. A cross-national comparative perspective" (Breuer, Hoekman, Nagel, & Werff, 2015). In the book, central characteristics of sports clubs in twenty European countries are outlined by national authors with expert knowledge. Furthermore, the book provides an overview of central theoretical approaches to the study of sports clubs along with comparative discussions. Towards the end of the book, the editors state that the next step in building up useful knowledge on sports clubs in Europe is "*to have data that compare the situation in different European countries more exactly by using the same method and questionnaires*" (Hoekman, Werff, Nagel, & Breuer, 2015: 434). This project was set up to take this next step.

Experts from ten European countries take part in the SIVSCE-project. They were all recruited from within the SORN-network and were all authors to country chapters in the book on sports clubs in Europe. A successful project application sent in by the University of Southern Denmark on behalf of the ten countries to the "Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency" (EACEA) paved the way for the realization of the project, which is co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. The project is implemented over a three year period in 2015, 2016 and 2017.

Purpose

There is a limited amount of knowledge on the political conditions for and structural characteristics of sports clubs that promote social inclusion and volunteering in sport. Most of the existing knowledge is, furthermore, country-specific. In light of this, the project seeks to collect, analyse and discuss comparable knowledge across ten European countries, convert it into concrete suggestions for action, and disseminate this knowledge to politicians, sports professionals and sports volunteers in Europe. By doing this, the project aims to promote social inclusion and volunteering in European sports clubs.

Why sports clubs, social inclusion and volunteering?
Sport has the ability to bring together people in activity-based sport communities. These communities can be beneficial for the individuals who build up valuable social networks, but there is also a widespread belief that participation in sport can foster social integration into society. Furthermore, sports participation has a number of health-related benefits. With these benefits in mind, it can be viewed as problematic that some groups are underrepresented in sport. Women are generally less inclined than men to do sport, and ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and other socially vulnerable groups are also underrepresented (EU, 2014).

It is mentioned as a specific goal for the EU to help foster social inclusion of the aforementioned target groups (EU, 2007, 2011). In this connection, the EU emphasizes the essential role of sports clubs. This focus is justified for at least two reasons. First, because of the size of the voluntary sports sector. It is estimated that a total of 60 million Europeans are active in sports clubs (Breuer et al., 2015; EU, 2014) – a figure that underlines the potential of voluntary organized sport in fostering social integration. Second, sports clubs are believed to be the arenas for organized sport that are most conducive to social inclusion. This is due to the democratic decision-making structure of sports clubs, the social activities, and the joint responsibility of members for the day to day operation of the clubs. These elements are believed to bring members together in communities with broader significance than communities based solely on the sports activity.

In context to the joint responsibility of members for the day to day operation of sports clubs, voluntary, unpaid work plays an essential role. For the majority of sports clubs, voluntary work is the most important resource that allows them to survive. Therefore, volunteering represents the basis for the inclusion of people in the communities that sports clubs constitute, but the significance of voluntary work is even broader. Volunteering can be viewed as a form of active citizenship based on reciprocal relations between members. This makes voluntary work relevant not only as a resource for sports clubs and members, but also for society.

CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

The project is organized in seven work packages (WP's) that are implemented from 2015 to 2017:

- **WP1:** *A collection of sports club policies in the participating countries.*
  The purpose is to build up an understanding of similarities and differences in the historical roots and the national, regional and local political frameworks for sports clubs.
- **WP2:** *An online sports club survey conducted in each of the participating countries.*
  By collecting comparative data at the sports club level, we will know more about similarities and differences in how sports clubs function and how they work to promote social inclusion and volunteering.
- **WP3:** *An online member and volunteer survey conducted in at least 30 sports clubs in each country.*
  By collecting comparable data at the member and volunteer level, we will know more about similarities and differences in how members and volunteers participate in clubs and how well integrated they are.
- **WP4:** *Overall analysis of the results from the three studies conducted in WP1, WP2 and WP3.*
  The purpose is to analyse and discuss the political, organizational and individual characteristics that promote and inhibit social inclusion and volunteering in sports clubs from a multilevel perspective.
- **WP5:** *A collection of examples of best practice in relation to social inclusion and volunteering.*
  The purpose is to present examples of policies and practices that promote social inclusion and volunteering in sports clubs. The descriptions are meant as inspiration for politicians and practitioners.

How the project addresses the EU needs analysis
In continuation of the central role of sports clubs in many European countries, the EU aims to promote health-enhancing physical activity, social inclusion and volunteering through increased participation in sports clubs. In this connection, it is mentioned as a specific goal to generate equal opportunities for participation: "*The Commission believes that better use can be made of the potential of sport as an instrument for social inclusion in the policies, actions and programmes of the European Union and of Member States*" (EU, 2007: 7).

This goal is, however, faced with at least two challenges. First, sports policies across the EU member states represent a large diversity, which create dissimilar conditions for sports clubs to meet the goals with regard to promoting social inclusion and volunteering. It is highly likely that the differences in sports policies can help explain the diversity also found between European countries in the patterns of social inclusion and volunteering.

Second, the goal is also challenged by the great variation between sports clubs. There are some sports clubs with thousands of members, but most of the clubs are relatively small; some clubs primarily have activity-related

goals while others place more emphasis on the importance of sports for health, inclusion and the like; most clubs are run exclusively by volunteers, but there are also a number of sports clubs where some of the work is done by professionals. We know very little about the impact of the size, the goal, the nature of the sports activity and the management of the clubs on volunteering and social inclusion in sports clubs.

Currently we are, therefore, lacking the knowledge that can inform more evidence-based policies in the area of social inclusion and volunteering in sport. No systematic, cross-national studies with a focus on the political conditions for and structural characteristics of sports clubs that promote social inclusion and volunteering in sport has so far been conducted. This project will fill this knowledge gap and inform policies, actions and programmes of the EU and of member states in the area of sport.

- **WP6:** *Elaboration of a handbook with suggestions for sports policies, club management and the like, which can promote social inclusion and volunteering in sports clubs.*
  Based on project findings concrete suggestions for action will be elaborated in the handbook. It is meant to inspire both politicians and practitioners, whether sports professionals or volunteers.
- **WP7:** *A broad dissemination of findings and suggestions (e.g. European and national conferences).*
  The purpose is to spread knowledge from the project to politicians and practitioners at both the national and European level.

PROJECT OUTPUT

The project generates the following output:

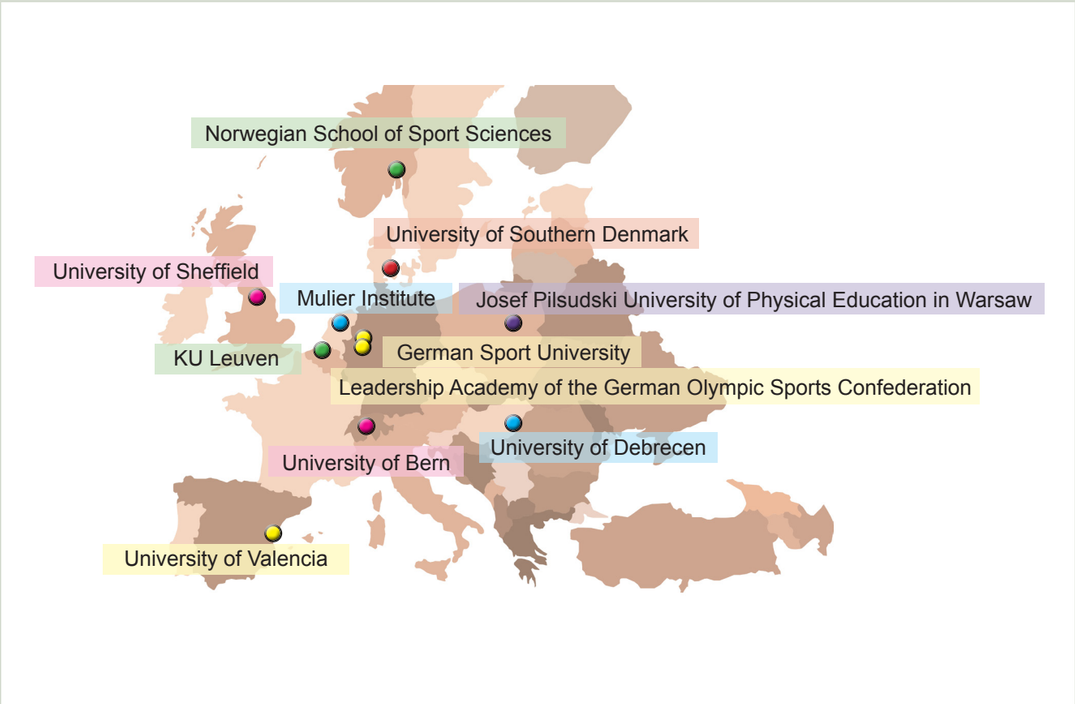
- 5 reports (one for each WP 1 to 5)
- A handbook (WP6)
- A European conference and ten national conferences (WP7)
- A number of dissemination articles presented on the project webpage

Since the project is strongly rooted in academia, it is also the purpose to generate scientific articles and/or books based on the project findings. This is not part of the project as such, but it will be a joint effort of the partners also to disseminate knowledge to a scientific audience.

Partners

The project includes eleven partners from ten countries dispersed across Europe, as it is illustrated in the map below. The broad representation of countries from different parts of Europe ensures that project findings will be of broad relevance to nations across Europe.

Figure 1. Map of partners in the SIVSCE-project



Jointly the group of partners in the project represents vast knowledge about and experiences with studies within the research field of sports participation, sports policies, sports organisations and sports clubs. Basic information about the project partners and their roles are elaborated in a table.

Table 1. Basic information about the partners in the SIVSCE-project

Country	Institution	Responsible partner(s)	Responsibility
COORDINATOR			
Denmark	University of Southern Denmark	Bjarne Ibsen Karsten Elmose-Østerlund	National data collection WP 3, 4, 6 & 7 Project management
PARTNERS			
Belgium	KU Leuven	Jeroen Scheerder Elien Claes	National data collection
England	University of Sheffield	Geoff Nichols Matthew James	National data collection WP 1
Germany	German Sport University	Christoph Breuer Svenja Feiler	National data collection WP 2
Germany	The Leadership Academy of the German Olympic Sports Confederation	Veronika Rücker Dirk Steinbach	WP 6 & 7
Hungary	University of Debrecen	Szilvia Perenyi	National data collection WP 5
The Netherlands	Mulier Institute	Harold van der Werff Jo Lucassen Jan-Willem van der Roest	National data collection WP 3
Norway	Norwegian School of Sport Sciences	Ørnulf Seippel	National data collection
Poland	Josef Pilsudski University of Physical Education in Warsaw	Monika Piatkowska	National data collection WP 5
Spain	University of Valencia	Ramon Llopis-Goig	National data collection WP 2
ASSOCIATED PARTNER			
Switzerland	University of Bern	Siegfried Nagel	National data collection

Existing knowledge

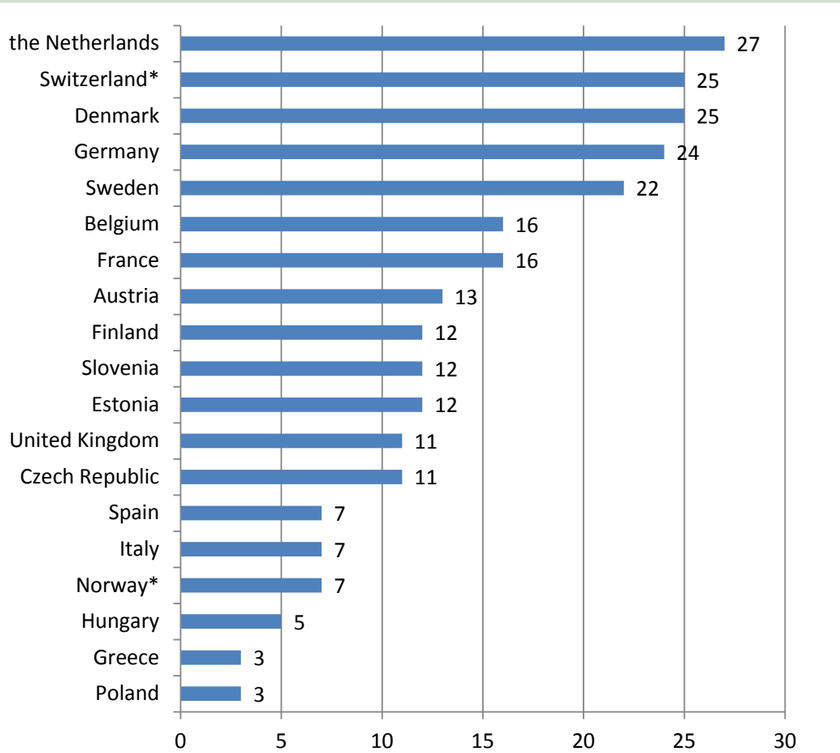
The existing knowledge on sports clubs is relatively comprehensive – particularly in the central, northern and western parts of Europe, while less data on sports clubs exist in the southern and eastern parts. This means that we know quite a lot about how sports clubs function – at least in a number of countries – but we cannot directly compare results across country borders, because data has been collected with different sampling strategies and also the questions asked differ between countries (Hoekman et al., 2015).

The only large scale comparable data we have on sports clubs stem from the Eurobarometer (EU, 2014), but this data is relatively limited with regard to the number of relevant questions asked and it also only focuses on individuals without combining this knowledge with data on clubs, national sport structures and policies. Nevertheless, it gives us an indication of the differences between European countries when it comes to the level of sports club participation and participation in voluntary work within the realm of sport.

Within the ten countries included in the SIVSCE-project, the level of sports club participation among adults is highest in the Netherlands (27%) followed by Switzerland and Denmark (25%) and Germany (24%). Conversely, sports club participation is lowest in Spain and Norway (7%), Hungary (5%) and Poland (3%).

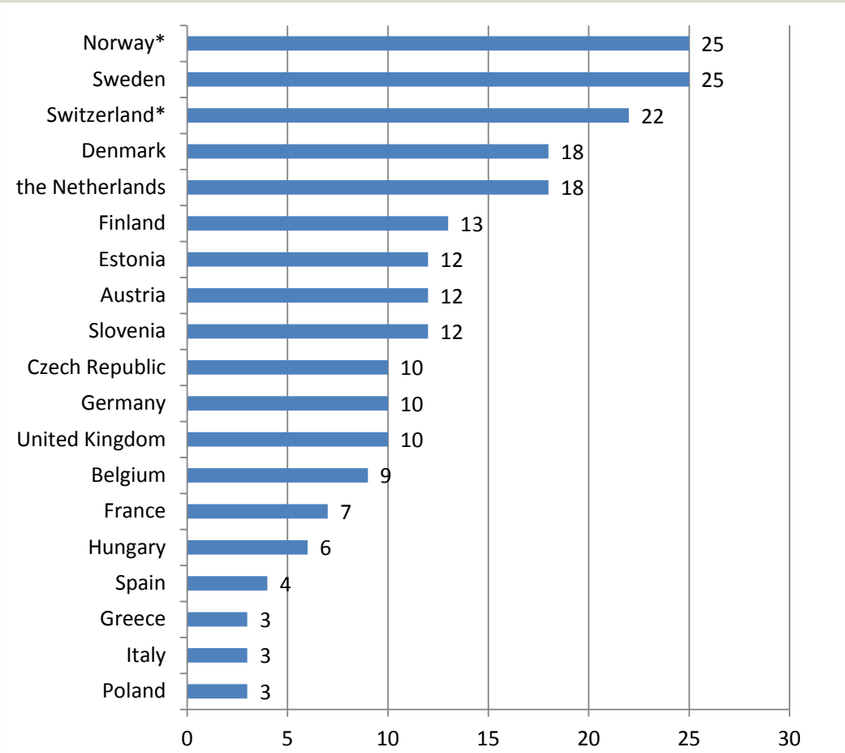
There is a general tendency that participation in sports clubs is significantly higher in the central and northern European countries than in the southern and eastern countries. Norway represents an exception from this general tendency being a country from the northern part of Europe with only 7% of adults active in sports clubs. Here it is worth keeping in mind that the Norwegian data do not stem from the Eurobarometer and, therefore, might not be directly comparable with data from the Eurobarometer.

Figure 2. Percentages of the populations (15 years and older) that are active in sports clubs



*Switzerland and Norway are not included in the Eurobarometer, so figures from national surveys have been added. They are not directly comparable to the figures for the other eight countries.

Figure 3. Percentages of the population (15 years and older) that are active in voluntary work that support sporting activities



*Switzerland and Norway are not included in the Eurobarometer, so figures from national surveys have been added. They are not directly comparable to the figures for the other eight countries.

When interpreting the figures for participation in voluntary work that support sporting activities, it is worth bearing in mind that part of this work is likely to lie outside the realm of sports clubs, and that this question includes different forms of volunteering – from occasional volunteering to regular voluntary work. This could be part of the explanation why Norway, with a strong tradition for event volunteering, is suddenly on top with 25% followed by Switzerland (22%), Denmark and the Netherlands (18%). The lowest level of participation is found in Hungary (6%), Spain (4%) and Poland (3%).

With Norway moving to the top of the list, the general tendencies proposed above are repeated and even strengthened. Participating in voluntary work connected to sporting activities is significantly higher in the central and northern countries than in the southern and eastern countries. As it was also the case with regard to sports club participation, the United Kingdom range somewhere in between the two extremes.

From the Eurobarometer data it seems relatively safe to conclude that there are significant differences in sports club participation and volunteering across countries and – it seems – also regions in Europe. Sports clubs seem stronger rooted in the central and northern countries and less so in the eastern and southern parts of Europe. Because of the relatively modest samples in each country, we can be less sure about the exact order of the countries with regard to participation and volunteering rates. Caution should therefore be taken when interpreting differences of few percentages between countries.

In the book "Sports clubs in Europe" (Breuer et al., 2015), the authors present far more nuanced national data on sports clubs from twenty European countries (including the ten countries that are part of this project). The editors use this data to paint a broad picture of the development of sports clubs in Europe. They describe general tendencies across countries, important differences, challenges and future perspectives. Their description will not be repeated here, but it touches upon a number of topics relevant to this project and has therefore served as inspiration.

Conceptualizations

Three concepts are at the heart of this project: Sports clubs, social inclusion and volunteering. Sports clubs are the central object of study, while social inclusion and volunteering are the two main topics. In order to build up a common understanding of the concepts, the definitions of the concepts that will be applied in this study are described below.

Sports clubs

Sports clubs are generally considered to be voluntary organizations and are therefore seen as part of the voluntary sector. Even though they share this common characteristic, the population of sports clubs in Europe is highly diverse on a number of structural characteristics, and it is therefore extremely difficult to present a clear and unambiguous definition. Instead researchers have suggested seven characteristics of an ideal-typical sports club (Heinemann & Horch, 1981; Ibsen, 1992).

The descriptions of these seven characteristics have been cited directly from the book "Sports clubs in Europe" (Nagel et al., 2015: 8-9). However, in an attempt to take into account the large variation in the structure of sports clubs across European borders, we differentiate between constitutive elements and typical features of sports clubs.

The following three characteristics form the constitutive elements of sports clubs:

1. *Voluntary membership*
   The members can decide individually on their entry and exit. Membership is not a birth right or subject to political, legal, or social constraints.

2. *Democratic decision-making structure*
   To realise the members' interests, democratic decision-making structures are needed that allow the members to influence the club's goals. The individual right to vote in the general assembly creates a formal power base for members, which is then regulated by the statutes of the club.

3. *Not-for-profit orientation*
   In contrast to companies, sports clubs do not pursue profit targets. This would work against their charitable status. Any financial surplus from a club's activities is not distributed among the members and must be reinvested to realise the purposes of the club.

The following four characteristics form the typical elements of sports clubs:

4. *Orientation towards the interests of members*
   Due to the voluntary nature of the membership, the clubs only retain their members through direct incentives and joint club goals and not through monetary means. Therefore, voluntary sports clubs are characterised by the effort to realize the common interests of the members (e.g., in the form of collectively organised sport activities).

5. *Voluntary work*
   The services provided by sports clubs are mainly produced by the voluntary work of club members. Although over the last years paid jobs have increasingly been instigated in sports clubs, they still play a minor role. Without payment means that there is no contractually regulated flow of money (or the wages are below a certain threshold), and voluntarily means that the voluntary engagement is not mandatory.

6. *Autonomy*
   Voluntary associations pursue their goals independently of others. Accordingly, they finance themselves primarily through internal sources of funds, mainly through membership fees. Their autonomy still allows for subsidiary promotions through public funding and the acquisition of other external resources.

7 *Solidarity*
For sports clubs, the principle of solidarity counts. This means no direct consideration in the form of rates and charges should be paid for efforts received. A flat-rate membership fee is collected. The membership fee allows for the use of all the services of the club. Membership fees also partially finance various areas of the club's work through cross-subsidization (e.g., youth work in the club), where the paying member only indirectly benefits.

The seven characteristics of the ideal-typical sports club (three of which are constitutive elements) make for a rather broad definition, but they do help in excluding a number of organizational forms from being sports clubs. A timely and relevant example is commercial fitness centres where there is no formal democratic decision-making structure, a for-profit orientation and where no tradition for using voluntary work exists. This does not mean that fitness activities cannot be organized in a sports club, since it is the organizational structure, not the activities provided, that determines whether certain sports activities are organized in a sports club or not.

Social inclusion

This conceptualization focuses on social integration rather than social inclusion because the former concept is broader. Social inclusion is narrowly focused on inclusion and/or exclusion of social units (e.g. individuals or social groups) in various social contexts. Social integration, on the other hand, also poses questions about how well integrated social units are in different social contexts (Kristensen, Obermann, & Dolmer, 2007). In connection to the study of sports clubs proposed here, a social inclusion perspective would examine whether different social groups are equally represented as members of sports clubs. The social integration perspective broadens this focus and asks questions about how well integrated members are.

Social integration is a multidimensional concept that lacks clarity. The conceptualization applied in this project builds on the general literature on social integration, but two articles have been particularly helpful in arriving at the conceptualization presented below. The three main dimensions of social integration have been derived from the article of Elling, De Knop and Knoppers (2001), while the two times two sub-dimensions are inspired by the work of Esser (2009).

The multiple dimensions of social integration applied in this project are presented below:

1. *Structural integration*
The representation of various social groups compared with the population. In relation to sports clubs, the relevant question is whether the membership in the club is representative of the community in which it is based. At an aggregate level, the focus is on whether the membership in sports clubs more broadly is representative of society, or if some social groups are underrepresented, e.g. ethnic minorities, disabled people or other socially vulnerable groups.

2. *Socio-cultural integration*
   a. *Assimilation*
   The ability of individuals to know and master dominant values and norms. In sports clubs, a set of values and norms are often agreed upon – written or unwritten – by members, and an important part of becoming integrated into the club is learning and mastering these values and norms.

   b. *Pluralism*
   The acceptance of multiculturalism. In sports clubs with members from different cultural backgrounds, there can be a multicultural climate. This requires that the co-existence of these cultures is accepted by members. If this is the case, members can be socially integrated even if they have not assimilated to the dominant culture (given that a dominant culture exists).

3. *Socio-affective integration*
   a. *Interaction*
   The participation in social life and the formation of social networks. In context to sports clubs, the degree to which members play an active role in the club can be a measure of social integration. Participation should be viewed broadly as participation in the sports activity, member democracy, social gatherings and voluntary work.

   b. *Identification*
   The degree of identification and emotional devotion. In sports clubs, the degree to which members identify with and feel emotionally connected to their respective sports clubs and the other members serves as an indicator for social integration.

The three proposed dimensions represent analytical distinctions that draw attention to different aspects of social integration that are relevant to sports clubs. In practice, the dimensions are interrelated.

It is common to distinguish between integration in sport and integration through sport. Integration in sport represents the participation and feeling of affiliation within the realm of the sports clubs. Integration through sport represents the link between the participation and feeling of affiliation within the realm of the sports club on the one hand and integration into other areas of society on the other (Elling et al., 2001).

Expectations to sports clubs with regard to social integration are often aired by politicians. These expectations can be associated both with the integration in the communities that sports clubs offer (integration in sport) and into society in a broader sense (integration through sport), most often the labour market (EU, 2007, 2011). In

this project, the focus will primarily be on integration in sport as an aspect of societal integration, but discussions will also be aired about the broader role of sports clubs in context to integration into other areas of society.

Volunteering
Multiple definitions of the concept of "volunteering" exist. Some seek to identify the defining features of volunteering by describing central characteristics of voluntary work, while others identify the defining features of volunteering by describing the values connected to voluntary work. The definition presented below focuses on the defining features of voluntary work. Following this definition, the values connected to voluntary work are briefly described.

Volunteering can be defined by five central characteristics (Ibsen, 1992):

1. *Voluntary activities*
   The activities are undertaken freely without physical force, legal coercion or financial pressure, and "retiring" from voluntary work do not threaten the livelihood of volunteers.

2. *Which are unpaid or paid for with a symbolic amount*
   Volunteers may only receive reimbursement of costs connected to the voluntary work and symbolic fees for their work.

3. *The voluntary activities must be carried out for other people than the family*
   This distinguishes voluntary work from ordinary domestic activities and the informal care for family members.

4. *For the benefit of other people*
   The value that the work done by the volunteers has for other people is a constitutive element of volunteering.

5. *And have a formal character (organized or agreed)*
   Volunteering can take place in a voluntary organization, but it can also be performed outside of voluntary organizations as long as it is "agreed upon" between the person(s) doing the voluntary work and the person(s) benefitting from it. Ordinary helpfulness of a spontaneous and informal character is, however, not considered volunteering.

In this project, the focus is exclusively on volunteering in sports clubs, which means that the form of volunteering examined has a formal character. Furthermore, the element of doing voluntary work in a club normally means that the activities are carried out for a broader range of people than one's own family and that it benefits other people than the volunteer. In sports clubs, it is very common that parents volunteer for the benefit of their child. Here, volunteering has, at least initially, a strong element of self-interest and focus on the benefits for one's own family. Normally, however, this form of volunteering still benefits other people, since the child most often is part of a team or a group that also benefits from the voluntary work of the parent.

Even though volunteering in sports clubs is generally undertaken freely, pressure might be applied to make a person volunteer. Nevertheless, the volunteer always has a choice and normally the livelihood of the volunteer does not dependent on any fees obtained from working in the club. If a person is dependent on financial income from the club, he or she would normally be regarded as a paid employee, not as a volunteer. Paid employees can be found in some – particularly large – clubs, but the vast majority of clubs are run exclusively by volunteers that meet the criteria presented earlier.

Turning to the values connected to volunteering, volunteering is often defined by an element of altruism. Furthermore, it is often considered desirable because it represents active citizenship – a willingness to take responsibility for the society one lives in. Thus, volunteering can be viewed as superior to just paying for the opportunity to take part in, for instance, sport. A mindset that place sports clubs in a superior position – from a societal perspective – relative to other sports providers. Many politicians ascribe to this viewpoint and use it to argue that public funding within the realm of sport should only benefit sports clubs.

Volunteering is, however, not only viewed as something good, but also as something cheap. This might also be part of the explanation why many politicians set high value on volunteering, and we see a tendency in some countries that the word co-production has become a buzzword in several areas of public policy.

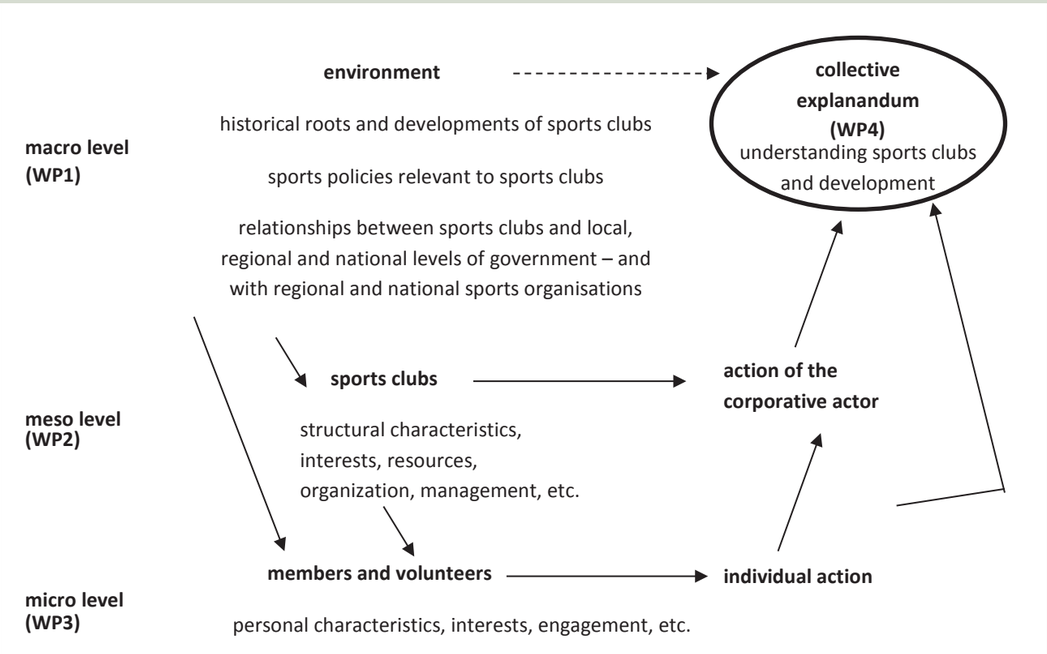
In short, volunteering is not a neutral concept, but the five central characteristics of volunteering presented above provides us with a framework that allows us to separate volunteering from ordinary helpfulness in one end of the spectrum and from paid work in the other end. With this common basis, it is possible to move on to discussions about the values of volunteering and a number of related topics that are relevant to sports clubs, such as volunteer recruitment, management, training, etc.

Theoretical framework

This project is not guided by one theoretical approach to the study of sports clubs. It does, however, subscribe to the understanding that sports clubs are themselves relevant objects of study. In order to understand how sports clubs function and why, it is necessary to study central characteristics of clubs. At the same time, sports clubs cannot be understood detached from their environment, since the environment sets the frame in which sports clubs function and develop. Finally, sports clubs have come to exist due to members combining their resources to realize shared interests, which mean that sports clubs exist primarily to serve the interests of their members. For this reason, it is also difficult to understand how sports clubs function and why detached from the personal characteristics, interests and engagement of members and volunteers.

In light of the above, this project departs from a multilevel model for the analysis of sports clubs (Nagel, 2007, Nagel et al., 2015). The multilevel model takes into account the environment of sports clubs (macro level), sports club characteristics (meso level) and the characteristics of members and volunteers (micro level) as shown in the figure. The figure is adapted from "Sports clubs in Europe" (Breuer et al., 2015: 16), and it illustrates the relationship between the three levels mentioned above.

Figure 4. Multilevel model for the analysis of sports clubs



The focus points at each level of analysis have been modified from the original figure to fit the research perspectives applied in this project. The arrows in the figure show the interplay between the different levels of analysis. It shows that understanding sports clubs and the background for the action of sports clubs can be a complex undertaking that require data collection on multiple levels of analysis.

Within the model, it has been indicated which parts of the SIVSCE-project (expressed in the form of work package numbers, WPs) that address the different levels in the model. One WP has been dedicated to each level of analysis in the figure:

- In WP1, the focus is on sports policies and the relationship between sports clubs and different levels of government as well as national and regional sports organisations. Furthermore, the influence from historical roots and developments are examined.

- In WP2, central characteristics of sports clubs are examined with a particular focus on structure, resources and management along with specific questions about social inclusion and volunteering.

- In WP3, the focus is mainly on the personal characteristics, interests and engagement of members and volunteers in their respective sports clubs.

The fourth work package (WP4) aims to gather the information collected in the three WP's mentioned above and combine them into one cross-level analysis. This is relevant because of the interplay between the three levels mentioned above and illustrated in the figure.

PROJECT PLAN

The project will be implemented over a three year period from 2015 to 2017. Extensive data collection will happen during the project lifecycle, but particularly in the first 1½ years of the project. As the project progresses, dissemination of project results will receive increasing awareness resulting in reports, handbook and conferences – along with dissemination articles connected to the respective publications.

Below is an estimated time plan for the dissemination of major project outputs:

2016 (second half)
- Publication of WP1-report
- Publication of WP2-report

2017 (first half)
- Publication of WP3-report
- Publication of WP4-report
- Publication of WP5-report

2017 (second half)
- Publication of the handbook (WP6)
- Dissemination at European conference (WP7)
- Dissemination at national conferences (WP7)

The project finishes no later than by the end of 2017.

Project progress, publications, articles and information about conferences can be found at the project website: http://www.sdu.dk/SIVSCE. In order to be kept up to date with project progress, it is possible to sign up for the newsletter at the SIVSCE-website.

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