

European Cooperation in Sports Club Research: The SIVSCE-Project in a Nutshell

OBJECTIVE

What is it about?

This Issue of Quick Facts is the first of a series of short and easy to read papers which are designed to present selected findings of the "SIVSCE-Project" to sport organisations in Europe.

The first issue provides a short introduction to the project. This includes information on the organisational background, theoretical framework and main research interest.

Selected results will be presented in follow up issues which can be found on the project website → www.sdu.dk/sivsce

CONTEXT

What does SIVSCE stand for?

SIVSCE is an abbreviation for the project's full title: *Social Inclusion and Volunteering in Sports Clubs in Europe*.

Who has initiated and implemented the project?

The project is based on research which was undertaken by a partnership of research institutes from 10 European Countries.

Following up on their previous work on sports clubs in Europe, the research group has initiated a collaborative partnership under the EU Erasmus+ programme in 2015 to implement a cross-national research project on social inclusion and volunteering in sports clubs.

The project is coordinated by the Centre for Sport, Health and Civil Society at the University of Southern Denmark.

Participating Countries have been carefully selected to provide a good representation of European Sport Systems → Fig. 1.



Fig. 1: SIVSCE Partnership

RELEVANCE

Why do we need more research on sports clubs in Europe?

There are about 700.000 Sports Clubs in Europe. An estimated 60 million Europeans spend their free time in these clubs. They play sports there, meet friends and make their contribution to the common good in many different ways. However, despite their important social role in most European countries, there has so far only been very little comparative knowledge about the work of sports clubs in Europe. By aligning their research on sports clubs, the SIVSCE partnership wants to close that gap and - step by step - create a solid database that can help to learn from the existing experience in their neighboring countries.

Why does the project focus on social inclusion and volunteering in sports clubs?

In sport, people come together in activity-oriented communities. Each individual member can build up a valuable social network in these communities. However, there is also the widespread conviction that participation in sport can also promote social integration in soci-

ety as a whole. In this context, the European Union stresses the essential role of sports clubs. This focus seems to be justified for at least two reasons:

Firstly, because of the sheer size of the voluntary sports sector (see above). The large number of clubs and members alone explains the huge potential of voluntary sports to promote social integration. Secondly, sports clubs represent a social environment in which social integration is specifically promoted. This can be attributed, among other things, to the democratic decision-making structure of sports clubs, their social activities and the members' shared responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the clubs.

Voluntary, unpaid work plays an essential role in the daily operation of the sports clubs, since members' share a joint responsibility for it. For most sports clubs, volunteering is the most important resource to get things done. But the importance of volunteering is even greater: volunteering can also be seen as a form of active citizenship based on mutual relations between members. This means that volunteer work is important not only for sports clubs and members, but also for society as a whole.

Despite the widespread acceptance of the above assumptions, the specific relationships between potentially important variables such as historically evolved structures, social values, government policies, organisational strategies or individual behavioral patterns are rather complex. It is therefore extremely difficult for politicians and sports organisations to systematically influence integration processes and volunteer activities in sport. By collecting and analysing empirical data on the individual, organisational and social level, the SIVSCE research attempts to shed light on these processes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Is the research linked to a specific theory?

This project is not guided by a specific theoretical approach to the study of sports clubs. However, it does subscribe to the understanding that sports clubs are relevant objects of study themselves. In order to understand how sports clubs function and why, it is necessary to study the central characteristics of clubs. At the same time, sports clubs cannot be understood as detached from their environment, since the environment sets the framework in which sports clubs function and develop. Finally, sports clubs have come to exist due to members combining their resources to realize their shared interests.

In light of the above, this project adheres to a multilevel model for the analysis of sports clubs. The multilevel model takes into account the social environment of sports clubs (macro level), the sports club themselves (meso level) as well as their members and volunteers (micro level). In addition attention is paid to the specific relations between these levels → Fig.2.

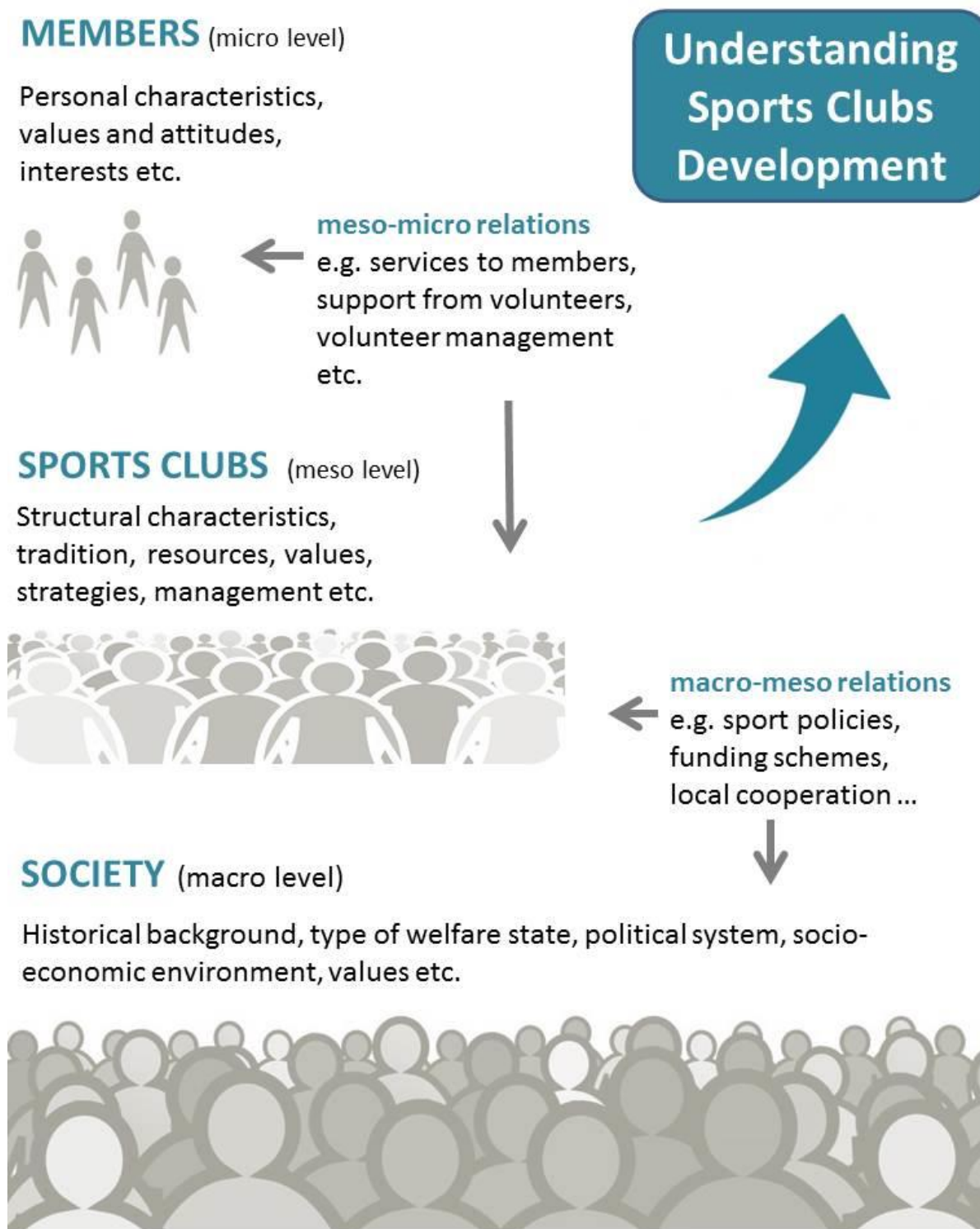


Fig. 2: Multi-Level Model

METHOD

How was the empirical data collected?

Comparative data was collected for the “*Social Inclusion and Volunteering in Sports Clubs in Europe*” - Project (SIVSCE). As part of this research two major surveys were implemented. The first one was answered by more than 35,000 sports clubs from 10 European countries. The second survey was designed as a follow-up in which more than 13,000 club members were interviewed. These club members were recruited from almost 650 clubs that were selected from the initial club survey. → Fig .3.

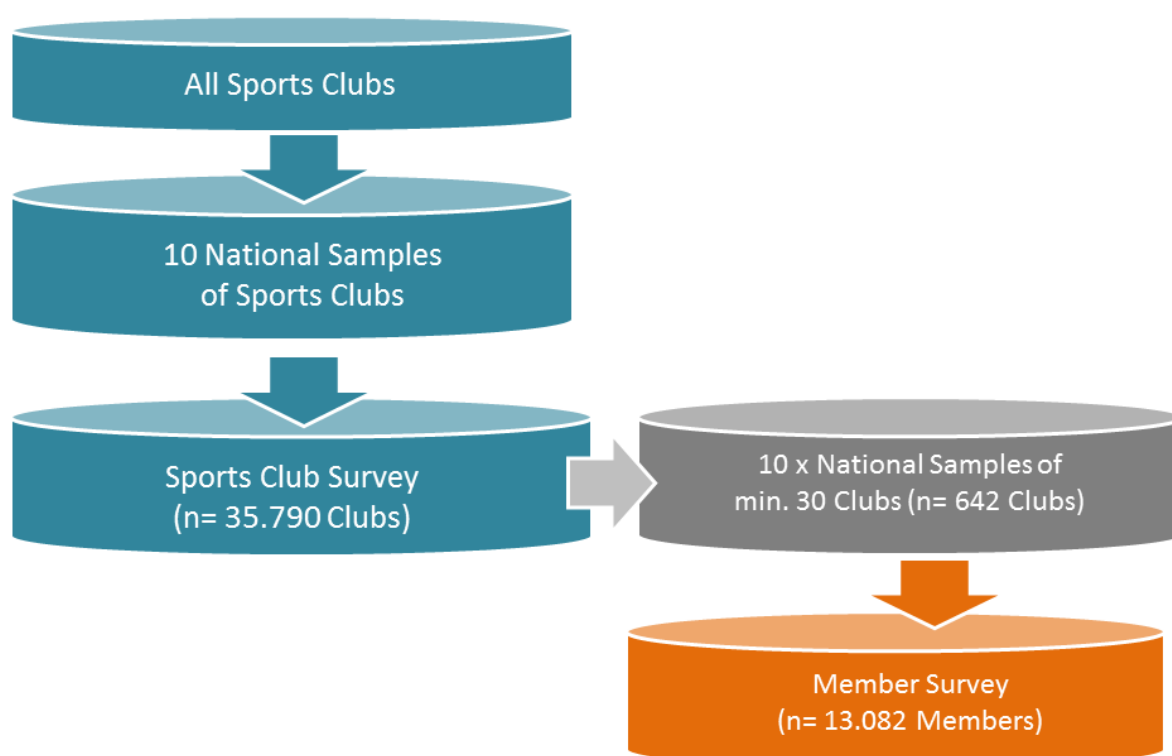


Fig. 1: SIVSCE Data Collection

The data on sports clubs was collected through an online survey conducted in the fall of 2016 in all the ten countries. Sports clubs were sampled to be as representative for the population of sports clubs in each country as practically possible.

The 10 national samples finally included at least 2,000 sports clubs each. Most of the data collection then took place through an online survey conducted by the German Sport University. However, three countries, Belgium (Flanders), the Netherlands and Switzerland, carried out their own data collection, which meant that this data had to be merged afterwards.

All Countries were using national translations of the same questionnaire. The questionnaire included questions referring to the structural characteristics of sports clubs and the main issues related to the management of them, as well as different questions about attitudes, activities and goals for social integration and volunteering in the clubs.

Regardless of who were in charge of conducting the survey, one person within each club – typically the chairperson – was contacted and responded to the survey on behalf of the entire club. Most often that person was contacted directly by sending an email invitation with a link to the survey. A very small proportion of the responses had to be collected through an open link invitation sent out with the help of sports organisations and/or municipalities.

As Table 1 shows, a total number of 35,790 clubs replied to the survey, ranging from about 600 in Norway and Poland to about 20,000 in Germany.

Tab 1: Responses and response rates to SIVSCE sports club survey

Country	Number of responses	Response rate (in %)	
Belgium (Flanders)	1,002	10	Important to note! Sports Clubs from some countries (Germany and Switzerland in particular) are strongly overrepresented in the data. This must be taken into account when the data is interpreted. However it is important to understand that average figures for all Countries were always calculated as the average of national averages and not as the average of all answers. Therefore the presented averages are not influenced by the different sample sizes.
Denmark	3,631	31	
England	812	25	
Germany	20,546	27	
Hungary	1,222	19	
The Netherlands	1,103	54	
Norway	601	31	
Poland	668	7	
Spain	870	14	
Switzerland	5,335	35	
Total	35,790	26	

At the micro level, an online survey study was conducted in the spring of 2016 among adult (16+ years) members and volunteers in European sports clubs. The questionnaire included questions about involvement and commitment, but it also asked for central characteristics of the members and volunteers.

It should be noted that the sports clubs, in which the members and volunteers were contacted, were not selected to be representative for sports clubs in Europe, but rather to represent the variation within sports clubs in each country.

In all ten countries, at least thirty sports clubs from within each country, representing a total of at least 2,000 members and volunteers, were sampled. The data collection then took place through an online survey conducted by the University of Southern Denmark. The approach to contact the members and volunteers was, however, slightly different between countries. In a

few countries, the members and volunteers were contacted directly by sending an email invitation with a link to the survey (Denmark and Norway), but in most countries (England, Hungary, Poland, Spain and Switzerland), a club-specific open link was distributed to the clubs that, in turn, distributed the link to their members and volunteers. In the remaining countries (Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands), a combination of the two methods was applied.

As Table 2 shows, a total number of 13,082 members and volunteers replied to the survey ranging from about 450 in Spain to about 3,200 in Denmark. These replies stem from a total number of 642 clubs that ended up participating in the data collection.

Tab 2: Responses to SIVSCE member survey

Country	Number of clubs	Number of responses from club members	
Belgium (Flanders)	47	762	Important to note! Sports club members from some countries (Denmark, Norway, and Netherlands in particular) are strongly overrepresented in the data. This must be taken into account when the data is interpreted. However it is important to understand that average figures for all Countries were always calculated as the average of national averages and not as the average of all answers. Therefore the presented averages are not influenced by the different sample sizes.
Denmark	36	3,163	
England	40	717	
Germany	141	2,455	
Hungary	47	716	
The Netherlands	144	1,965	
Norway	30	1,330	
Poland	61	570	
Spain	55	445	
Switzerland	41	959	
Total	642	13,082	

How “good” is the collected data?

The empirical studies as described above have been carefully conducted. However due to a variety of reasons, several methodological compromises had to be made as this is the case in most comparative large scale studies. Therefore the data provides a lot of research opportunities but also has its limitations. This must be considered when interpreting the results of the SIVSCE project. Despite these limitations, the data probably represents the best large scale comparative data on sports clubs in Europe that has been collected till date. In some of the participating countries (Hungary and Poland), it was the first time that online survey data about sports clubs and members and volunteers was ever collected. Hence, the SIVSCE project is in many ways pioneering when it comes to sports club research across national borders. As described above, the main limitations lie with the different approaches that sometimes had to be applied with regard to the sample selection and data collection procedure. However, without such compromises, in some countries it would just not have been possible to realise the complete data collection at all.

QUICK FACTS FOR SPORTS CLUBS

Research on sports clubs should also be research for sports clubs. With the "Quick Facts for Sports Clubs" series, the partners of the "SIVSCE-Project" want to take this claim into account.

Selected results of the study are represented in this series in such a way that they provide the responsible persons in the clubs and federations with a quick overview of the gained insights, and highlight the most relevant points for the sports sector.

The description deliberately follows the principles of clear language and systematic presentation and limits itself to only the most important aspects and insights.

Readers who are interested in the complete and detailed results of the study can refer to the website for the corresponding research reports, scientific publications and quick facts on other topics → www.sdu.dk/sivsce

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