

## Sports Clubs Form the Heart of the European Sports Sector

More than 60 million people in Europe participate in sports clubs, which clearly shows that sports clubs play an important role in European society. Notwithstanding trends of individualisation and consumerism, sports clubs are gaining an increasingly central role in sports policy. This is the most important message in the book '*Sport Clubs in Europe: A Cross-National Comparative Perspective*', edited by the Mulier Institute, the University of Bern and Sporthochschule Köln. The first edition of the book was presented in Brussels, at the ENGSO Forum '*The Role of Sport Clubs in Changing Society in Future*'.

Researchers from twenty different countries have joined forces in '*Sport Clubs in Europe*' and written about the development of sports clubs in their own countries, the position these sports clubs have in policy and society, and the future prospects for sports clubs. *Sport Clubs in Europe* also makes it clear that:

- Sports club membership is highest in the Netherlands (27% of the population) and lowest in Poland (3%). The European average is 12%, corresponding to 60 million Europeans who are members of sports clubs.
- Although sports clubs can count on government support in all European countries, the extent of this support and the position of sports clubs in policy vary widely.
- Northern European and Western European countries have led the way in utilizing the social value of sports clubs. More recently, this process has been followed in Southern European countries and subsequently also in Eastern Europe.
- Throughout Europe sports clubs are mainly run by volunteers and only to a limited extent by paid employees.
- Sports clubs throughout Europe are facing more competition from commercial sports providers and from the increase in options for citizens to take part in unorganised sports.
- Adequate volunteers and retaining and recruiting members are the main bottlenecks for sports clubs, followed by the financial position. In some countries, the availability and quality of sports facilities in particular are bottlenecks for club sports (Poland and Austria).
- In view of the composition of sports club members, consisting predominantly of young members, falling birth rates and the ageing population are a cause for concern for sports clubs in Europe.
- The level of knowledge concerning sports clubs in Europe must be further increased, for example by implementing a joint research agenda tying in with the policy initiatives of the European Commission.

*Sport Clubs in Europe* is an initiative of the Sport Organisation Research Network (SORN), part of the [European Association for the Sociology of Sport \(EASS\)](#).

For more information on the book, please contact the editors:

Remco Hoekman - Mulier Institute / [r.hoekman@mulierinstituut.nl](mailto:r.hoekman@mulierinstituut.nl)  
 Harold van der Werff - Mulier Institute / [h.vanderwerff@mulierinstituut.nl](mailto:h.vanderwerff@mulierinstituut.nl)  
 Christoph Breuer - Sporthochschule Köln / [Breuer@dshs-koeln.de](mailto:Breuer@dshs-koeln.de)  
 Siegfried Nagel / University of Bern / [siegfried.nagel@ispw.unibe.ch](mailto:siegfried.nagel@ispw.unibe.ch)

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