

Characteristics of voluntary sports clubs with targeted initiatives for underrepresented population groups

The role of organisational goals, resources, structure and context

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Abstract

Even though voluntary sports clubs are expected to play an important role in accomplishing the political goal to deliver 'sport for all', a number of population groups remain underrepresented in organised sport. Considering this, the aim of this article is to identify organisational characteristics of sports clubs that work strategically to integrate underrepresented population groups by offering targeted initiatives. Logistic regression analyses were conducted using survey data from more than 30,000 sports clubs in nine European countries. Factors within all the four included aspects of organisational characteristics (goals, resources, structure and context) were found to be relevant for the implementation of targeted initiatives. The results also revealed that it was mainly the same factors that were significantly correlated with the propensity of clubs to offer targeted initiatives across all three examined population groups: people with disabilities, people with a migration or ethnic minority background, and people on a low income. In particular, the existence of integration-related goals and service-oriented goals regarding long-term planning (organisational goals) as well as paid staff and paid management (organisational resources) were positively correlated with the presence of targeted initiatives. Regarding organisational characteristics and context, large, young, multisport clubs located in an urban setting were found to be more inclined to offer targeted initiatives. Having identified a number of club-related factors relevant for the presence of targeted initiatives, our study can inform policy implementation that seek to increase participation of underrepresented population groups in organised sport.

Keywords: non-profit organisations, sports organisations, socially vulnerable groups, people with a migration or ethnic minority background, people with disabilities, people on a low income, policy implementation.

Introduction

Voluntary sports clubs can play an important role in promoting social integration, but to fully benefit from this potential, the needs of underrepresented population groups must be considered. This sentence sums up what seems to be a general political approach to the role of sport in society both at a European level (EU 2007) and in national sport policy documents, where ‘sport for all’ is the main objective (Hoye and Nicholson 2008, Ibsen et al. 2016). We define underrepresented population groups as groups of people who share one or more social background traits and who – as a group – has a lower participation rate in club-organised sport. Some of the most commonly targeted population groups in sports policy documents are people with disabilities, people with a migration or ethnic minority background, and socially vulnerable groups (e.g. people on a low income, unemployed people, etc.). These groups are – to varying degrees – underrepresented in sports clubs in European countries (Adler Zwahlen, Nagel and Schlesinger 2018, Ibsen et al. 2016).

A number of studies have examined the relevance of organisational characteristics for the integration of underrepresented groups in sports clubs. However, many of them have focused on a limited number of organisational factors, on one population group, have included few clubs and/or have been limited to one country. In contrast, this study includes a broad range of organisational factors, focus on three population groups, include a large sample of clubs and integrate data collected in nine European countries. With this broad perspective, this article provides new insights that can inform political discussions and initiatives to increase the participation of underrepresented population groups in sports clubs.

More specifically, it is the aim of the present study to identify organisational characteristics (goals, resources, structure and context) of sports clubs with targeted initiatives for underrepresented population groups, exemplified as people with disabilities, people with a migration or ethnic minority background, and people on a low income. The study will identify similarities and differences between the clubs that have targeted initiatives for each of the three groups.

The article is structured as follows: First, we introduce the conceptual framework followed by a review of relevant existing literature. Then we introduce the materials and methods, before presenting and describing the results. In the final section, we provide a discussion and conclusion

that connects our findings with existing knowledge, presents implications for practice and lists potentials and limitations of our study.

Conceptual framework: sports clubs as corporative actors

To structure our theoretical considerations and integrate the relevant organisational factors for the implementation of targeted initiatives we use a multilevel actor-theoretical framework for the analysis of the development of sports clubs (Nagel 2007, Nagel et al. 2015). The basic assumption of the social theory of action (cf. Coleman 1986, Giddens 1984) is that social structures and social action are in a constant reciprocal relation throughout time (Giddens 1984). Each social structure is the result of the interaction of actors, and at the same time social acting always depends on social structures. As we specify these basic assumptions, we need to conceptualise sports clubs as corporative actors (Nagel 2008, Schimank 2005). In doing so, we can assume that the organisational characteristics of a sports club are relevant for the actions and decisions that might lead to the implementation of a targeted initiative, such as the integration of underrepresented population groups in sports clubs (Nagel et al. 2020). According to Nagel (2007; see also Nagel et al. 2015), particularly the following organisational characteristics are relevant for the introduction of initiatives for underrepresented population groups: 1) organisational goals (e.g. integration-related, social, competitive, service-oriented), 2) organisational resources (e.g. staff, financial, sports facilities), 3) organisational structure (e.g. club size, club age, single-sport or multisport club), and 4) organisational context (e.g. size of local community).

Literature review – the role of organisational goals, resources, structure and context

The literature review is structured according to the organisational characteristics that were described as particularly relevant for the introduction of targeted initiatives for underrepresented groups in sports clubs,

namely 1) organisational goals, 2) organisational resources, 3) organisational structure, and 4) organisational context.

Organisational goals

Generally, organisational goals of nonprofit sports clubs differ from goals of for-profit sports organisations such as commercial fitness centres. While the main goal of for-profit sports providers is to make profit, the main goals of nonprofit sports club are most often need-oriented, i.e. related to their members' interests (Wicker 2019). These interests can be multifaceted, including members that join the club to take part in sports offers just for fun or to keep fit, members that join to take part in competitions, and members that seek the socially integrative atmosphere of a sports club (Klenk et al. 2017). As a result, club goals are first of all related to providing sports programmes to the clubs' members but also include intangible benefits such as companionship and conviviality (Nagel 2006). The main goals of sports clubs can differ between clubs, related to the clubs' organisational identities (Stenling and Fahlén 2016). Depending on their main goals, the organisational behaviour of clubs differs, e.g. in the context of integrating refugees (Nowy et al. 2020) or setting up prevention measures against sexual violence (Rulofs et al. 2019). Therefore, the underlying study uses different organisational goals as possible explanatory factors for the implementation of initiatives for underrepresented population groups.

Integration-related goals

Integration-related club goals can for example include the aim of clubs to offer sports to as many different population groups as possible. This goal implies that clubs are open and have a 'welcome' culture, which makes them more likely to integrate different groups (Burrmann et al. 2015). In this connection, Nagel (2008) showed that clubs focusing on mass sports (goals of sport for all) tend to take up new sports activities more often than clubs focusing on competitive sports. In the same direction are the results found by Micheline et al. (2018) who find in their qualitative study that an integrative and welcoming club culture fosters the integration of refugees into sports clubs. In addition to these findings, Vandermeerschen et al. (2017) find that clubs which already have larger shares of socially disadvantaged groups, in this case people struggling with poverty, are more open to inclusionary efforts. Nowy et al. (2020)

find that clubs which follow an integrative logic are more likely to have installed concrete measures for refugees. In sum, it seems that sports clubs that pursue goals of integrating socially vulnerable groups and offering sports to many different population groups would be more likely to offer specific initiatives for underrepresented population groups.

Social goals

Social goals of sports clubs can for example include creating a pleasant atmosphere for club members through putting high value on companionship and conviviality. Prior research suggests that club goals related to social values such as conviviality or tradition might hinder integrative measures of clubs as these clubs are more reluctant to change activities or member structures (Michellini et al. 2018). No significant effect of a socially related club orientation was found by Nowy et al. (2020). On the contrary, social interaction and fun were found to be important to integrate refugees, as a case study of an English table tennis club revealed (Doidge et al. 2020). Thus, results of existing research on the effect of social goals for the propensity of clubs to socially integrate underrepresented population groups are mixed.

Competitive goals

The role of competitive goals of sports clubs with regard to the integration of different population groups has been debated in prior research. Skille (2009, 2011) has stated that the competitive element within sports clubs might rather exclude people than include them. He concludes that competitive goals and social aspects seem to be difficult to combine. In line with this argumentation is a recent case study on the potential of sports clubs to integrate refugees. The study found that sporting activities focusing on social interaction and fun are better fitted to integrate young refugees than activities focusing on sporting skills (Doidge et al. 2020). Other researchers propose that clubs which follow competitive goals might deliberately recruit people from different backgrounds to identify talent and thereby increase sporting success (McDonald et al. 2019, Spaaij et al. 2014). No significant effects of a competitive or performance focus of sports clubs with regard to the integration of refugees were found in a study that investigated sports clubs in Germany (Nowy et al. 2020). Thus, results of existing studies on the effect of a competi-

tive goal on the efforts to set up targeted initiatives for underrepresented groups are mixed.

Service-oriented goals

Service-oriented goals are related to the well-functioning management of the club, i.e. a certain degree of professionalisation. Prior research has argued that professionally run clubs might be related to a generally higher awareness for societal issues (Rulofs et al. 2019), such as integrating underrepresented population groups in the case of the underlying study. This suggestion was confirmed by Nowy et al. (2020) who found that clubs with a service-oriented focus were more likely to install any measures to integrate refugees in German sports clubs. A professionally run club often utilise long-term and strategic planning. Strategic planning was found to be particularly important for the goal achievement of sports clubs (Misener and Doherty 2009, Vandermeersch et al. 2017). For example, the prevalence of various types of organisational problems was reduced by the existence of a strategic policy (Wicker and Breuer 2013).

Moreover, research has shown that long-term planning is considered important by sports clubs (Allison 2001). However, sports organisations have also experienced problems with the development of both short-term and long-term plans with regard to the provision of sporting programmes and the recruitment of people with disabilities (Sørensen and Kahrs 2006). This might be because the majority of sports clubs are informal and operate on a day-to-day basis (Allison 2001, Doherty et al. 2014). Studies found that sports clubs and volunteers do not usually see their main task in the social integration of various population groups (Spaaij et al. 2014). However, clubs rather see the rationale for managing diversity, i.e. broadening access for different population groups, in a possible increase in organisational performance, both financially related to membership numbers as well as with regard to sporting success (Spaaij et al. 2014). Nevertheless, the focus on managing diversity is likely to be related to the identity of sports clubs, probably fixed in a formation policy, as a Swedish study found large differences with regard to the likelihood of different club identity categories to work as possible policy implementers (Stenling and Fahlén 2016).

In sum, sports clubs that engage in long-term planning and monitoring seem to be more likely to set up targeted initiatives for different

population groups because offering sports programmes to such groups requires prior consideration, engagement and planning.

Organisational resources

Staff

Both volunteers and paid staff are relevant for the running of sports clubs. Existing studies report that volunteers and coaching staff are critical factors for goal achievement (Doherty et al. 2014, Millar and Doherty 2016). Spaaij et al. (2018) found that diversity work in sports clubs in Australia is rarely initially planned, but mainly happens by chance if an individual member or volunteer takes the initiative to start working on managing diversity. Another study on voluntary sports clubs in Australia, which analysed ways in which clubs engage with inclusion policies, came to similar results. The authors found that, for the integration of people with disabilities, the engagement, interest and enthusiasm of individual volunteers was vital (Jeanes et al. 2018) since volunteers often do not see their main task in fostering social integration (Spaaij et al. 2014).

Studies also detected barriers to the social integration of people with disabilities: a Norwegian study found that integrating athletes with disabilities into sport organisations can be a complicated process as organisations rely mainly on voluntary administrators (Sørensen and Kahrs 2006). Similar results were revealed in a study on partially sighted football players at grassroots level. The study found that there was insufficient awareness of possibilities for blind footballers since the league was run mainly by volunteers (Macbeth 2009). These studies underline that volunteers in sports clubs might be overwhelmed by the increasing complexity of their tasks or that there are too few volunteers willing to work for the club (Spaaij 2013) with the consequence that organisations start employing paid staff to address such challenges (Cuskelly 2004, Sharpe 2006).

Thus, both volunteers and paid staff seem essential for the implementation of targeted initiatives for underrepresented population groups. Therefore, it seems that sports clubs with a higher density of volunteers and paid staff would be more likely to implement targeted initiatives.

Financial resources

To provide sports programmes for different population groups, sports clubs need sufficient and stable financial resources. Research has shown that German sports clubs that aim to integrate people with a migration or ethnic minority background into the club often offer special financial conditions for migrants, e.g. free membership (Breuer and Wicker 2009). It was found that similar offers existed for migrants in Australian soccer clubs where the clubs provided training equipment and charged lower registration fees (Spaaij 2013). Such measures require clubs to have sufficient financial resources to offset low fees and free equipment. As regards people with disabilities, specialised equipment or facilities might be necessary, which increases investment costs for clubs. The financial situation of clubs has constantly been found to be a challenge for clubs in different studies (Allison 2001, Lamprecht et al. 2012), and sports clubs have fewer financial resources at their disposal than other non-profit organisations (Lasby and Sperling 2007). Moreover, prior research found that costs-benefit considerations, where diversity is considered as benefits to the organisation, can play an important role when it comes to fostering diversity. If perceived costs for integration measures are too high related to the expected benefits, no action is taken (Spaaij et al. 2014). In sum, it seems that sports clubs with a better financial situation, i.e. smaller financial problems, would be more likely to implement initiatives for different target groups.

Sports facilities

Sports facilities play a major role when it comes to offering sports to many different population groups as many sports offers cannot be provided without suitable sports facilities. Facilities are often either club-owned or publicly owned or a combination of both forms. The use of club-owned and public facilities has already been applied in prior studies to reflect organisational resources of clubs (Swierzy et al. 2018, Wicker and Breuer 2013, 2014). Previous studies found that the availability and accessibility of suitable facilities was a barrier to the participation of people with disabilities (Darcy and Dowse 2013, Finch et al. 2001, Jaarsma et al. 2014, Misener and Darcy 2014, Shields et al. 2012, Sørensen and Kahrs 2006). Nowy et al. (2020) additionally found that clubs that report to have access to a sufficient availability, condition and adequacy of sports facilities are more likely to get involved in offering opportunities

for refugees to join the club. Thus, it seems that sports clubs that face problems due to the availability of sports facilities will be less likely to offer targeted initiatives for underrepresented population groups, while it seems unclear which role facility ownership (own or public) plays for the propensity of clubs to offer targeted initiatives due to a lack of research in this area.

Organisational structure

Club size

Club size is usually measured in the number of members and has been found to be an important factor in prior sports club studies (e.g., Ibsen et al. 2019, Rulofs et al. 2019). For example, the number of members was found to be relevant for the management of sports clubs. Anders (1986) showed that club size in terms of members was positively correlated with the orientation of the club towards the ideas of sport for all. Specifically, Wicker and Breuer (2014) found that larger clubs were more inclined to offer opportunities for disabled people to participate than small clubs. Thus, it is likely that large sports clubs would be more inclined to implement targeted initiatives for underrepresented population groups than small clubs.

Club age

Club age is a further structural variable which has been used in prior sports club studies (e.g. Rulofs et al. 2019). In the context of setting up initiatives for underrepresented population groups, it is likely that club age, which is expected to be related to traditions, might play a role. As explained above, clubs which put high value on traditions could be expected to be less open to change (cf., Michelini et al. 2018). Since traditions grow with club age, it is likely that younger sports clubs would be more likely to install initiatives for underrepresented population groups.

Single-sport vs. multisport clubs

Apart from club size and club age, the internal structure of the club needs to be considered. The internal structure is related to the number of sports offered, i.e. whether a sports club offers only one type of sport or has multiple sports offers. This variable has previously been used in

sports club studies (e.g., Nowy et al. 2020, Swierzy et al. 2018). Wicker and Breuer (2014) found that clubs that provided participation opportunities for disabled people were mainly multisport clubs that could cater for other population groups as well (e.g. people on a low income). Nowy et al. (2020) found that multisport clubs are more likely to offer concessionary membership fees for refugees. Thus, it seems that multisport clubs would be more likely to set up targeted initiatives for underrepresented population groups.

Organisational context

Size of local community

The size of a local community is usually integrated in sports club studies as an explanatory or control variable (e.g., Nowy et al. 2020, Wicker and Breuer 2014). In the context of this study it seems important to integrate the size of the community in the analyses since the share of different population groups, e.g. people with a migration or ethnic minority background, tend to be larger in larger communities or cities (e.g., Göttsche 2018). Thus, the potential to reach a larger group of people from a certain underrepresented group is bigger in large communities, which makes it more likely for sports clubs in larger communities to install special measures for selected population groups.

Materials and methods

The data stem from the European research project ‘Social Inclusion and Volunteering in Sports Clubs in Europe’ (SIVSCE). In the project, comparable knowledge about sports clubs was collected in ten European countries, including Belgium (Flanders), Denmark, England, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain and Switzerland. In each of these countries, comparative data have been collected on three different analytical levels, the macro, meso and micro level (Nagel 2007, Nagel et al. 2015). In the context to the subject of this article, data collected at the meso (sports club) level was applied in the statistical analysis.

Sample

The data about sports clubs was collected through an online survey conducted in the autumn of 2015 in the ten countries that participated in the SIVSCE project. The survey used national translations of an English questionnaire developed in the research group. The questionnaire included questions regarding the sport clubs' goals, resources, structure and context with a particular focus on social inclusion and volunteering. The questions developed were drawn from or inspired by national surveys previously conducted in sports clubs. Expert validations of the questionnaires were conducted by colleagues in the same research field in each country with a focus on both the content and quality of the translations. Invitations to participate in the survey were sent to one club representative who received an email containing a link to the survey. The club representative, most often the chairperson, was then asked to complete the survey on behalf of the entire club.

The sample of sports clubs taken was as representative of the population of sports clubs in each country as practically possible. Where possible the questionnaire was sent to populations or randomised samples of clubs from available databases (for more details see Breuer et al. 2017). The Swiss data was collected in connection to an existing sports club survey, and it has not been possible to obtain access to the raw data. Therefore, Switzerland was not included in the statistical analyses conducted in this article.

Table 1 provides an overview of the number of responses and response rates. A total of 30,074 clubs replied to the survey, ranging from about 600 in Norway and Poland to about 20,000 in Germany. The sample of 30,074 clubs contains answers from respondents who have completed the survey, but also respondents who have partially completed the survey or who have skipped one or more questions. As a result, the numbers of replies to the various questions vary with most replies being given to the earlier questions and the fewest to the later questions in the survey, indicating a drop-out by respondents. 17,432 clubs can be regarded as finishers in the sense that they made it past the last question in the survey. The response rate for the survey study was 24%, and the finisher rate was 14%. However, as Table 1 shows, not only the number of responses, but also the response rates vary largely between countries.

TABLE I. *The number of responses and the response rates as well as the number of finishers and the finisher rate obtained in the nine countries included in the data collected from sports clubs.*

Country	Number of responses	Response rate (in %)	Number of finishers	Finisher rate (in %)
Belgium (Flanders)	1,002	10	681	7
Denmark	3,631	31	2,815	24
England	812	25	449	17
Germany	20,546	27	10,712	14
Hungary	1,222	19	672	12
The Netherlands	1,103	54	868	43
Norway	601	31	432	22
Poland	668	7	369	4
Spain	870	14	434	7
Total	30,074	24	17,432	14

Data analysis

The purpose of the statistical analysis was to examine the organisational characteristics of sports clubs that offer targeted initiatives for under-represented population groups. When combining the dependent and independent variables in the final statistical models, the numbers of answers included are reduced to between 14,283 and 14,648. Initially, we sought to take into account the hierarchical structure of the dataset by conducting multilevel logistic regression analyses with country as second level. However, the results revealed that intercept variances at the country level were non-significant in all three statistical models. Furthermore, the number of units at the country level was in our case smaller than recommended in most of the literature on multilevel modelling (Maas and Hox 2005, Snijders and Bosker 2011). For these reasons combined, we decided against multilevel analysis and opted for regular binary logistic regression analyses.

Dependent and independent variables

The dependent variables included in the statistical analyses describe whether the clubs offer targeted initiatives for underrepresented population groups. The respondents were asked to indicate whether their respective clubs 'have targeted initiatives (e.g. activities, teams, coopera-

tion, reduced membership fees, etc.) to increase participation among the following population groups'. They were asked to indicate 'yes' or 'no' for each population group. Thus, the dependent variables are binary. Descriptive statistics for the dependent variables are reported in Table 2.

TABLE 2. *Descriptive statistics for the dependent variables.*

Dependent variables	Percent (%)	Total number of replies (N)
Has targeted initiatives for people with disabilities (yes)	16	14,299
Has targeted initiatives for people with a migration or ethnic minority background (yes)	15	14,283
Has targeted initiatives for people on a low income (yes)	38	14,648

In the survey, people with disabilities were operationalised as 'physically as well as mentally disabled people', while people with a migration or ethnic minority background were operationalised as 'people that are foreigners or at least one of their parents is a foreigner or people belonging to an ethnic minority'. No further operationalisation was given to elaborate on the third target group 'people on a low income'. What is considered 'low income' seems to vary more than would allow for a unified operationalisation across all countries.

The independent variables belong to four main categories: organisational goals, resources, structure and context. Descriptive statistics for the independent variables are reported in Table 3. Scale variables were categorised for the statistical analyses to avoid outliers and wide spectres of values.

Regarding organisational goals, seven items were included (items 1-6), which were all measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = 'don't agree at all' to 5 = 'totally agree'. Turning to organisational resources, six items were included. In the survey, the clubs were asked to report the total numbers of both volunteers and paid staff in fixed positions. Both of these figures were divided by club size and then categorised to yield the first two items that measured the density of volunteers (item 7) and paid staff (item 8) respective to members. Relatedly, clubs were asked to report whether they had a paid manager (item 9). The next two items (items 10 and 11) examined potential problems of clubs with finances and

TABLE 3. *Descriptive statistics for the independent variables (N=15,506).*

	Mean (Std. dev.)	Distribution (%)
Organisational goals		
Strives to help socially vulnerable groups (1–5)	3.61 (0.92)	
Tries to offer sports to many population groups (1–5)	3.62 (1.13)	
Sets high value on companionship and conviviality (1–5)	4.16 (0.87)	
Sets high value on sporting success and competitions (1–5)	3.20 (1.18)	
Engages in long-term planning (1–5)	3.61 (0.98)	
Monitors degree of plan implementation (1–5)	3.80 (0.90)	
Organisational resources		
Volunteer to member ratio		
–Low (less than 1/20) (ref.)		18
–Medium (1/20–1/5)		57
–High (more than 1/5)		26
Paid staff to member ratio		
–Low (less than 1/100) (ref.)		54
–Medium (1/100–1/50)		38
–High (more than 1/50)		8
Has a paid manager (yes)		8
Size of problem with financial situation (1–5)	2.16 (1.20)	
Size of problem with availability of sports facilities (1–5)	2.19 (1.36)	
Possesses own facilities (yes)		43
Uses public sports facilities (yes)		66
Organisational structure		
Club size		
–Small (0–99 members) (ref.)		39
–Medium (100–499 members)		43
–Large (500+ members)		18
Club age		
–Young (0–24 years) (ref.)		26
–Medium (25–74 years)		46
–Old (75+ years)		28
Single-sport vs. multisport club (multisport)		36
Organisational context		
Size of local community (inhabitants)		
–Small (less than 20,000) (ref.)		45
–Medium-sized (20,000–99,999)		32
–Large (100,000 or more)		23

Note: Only respondents that had replied to all items in this table were included.

facilities on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = 'no problem' to 5 = 'a very big problem'. The last two items related to organisational resources (items 12 and 13) were binary and asked for the ownership of the facilities that the clubs utilised. Regarding organisational structure, three items were included. Item 14 was club size (number of members) categorised, item 15 was club age (in years) categorised, and item 16 was whether the clubs were single-sport clubs that offered only one sport or a multisport clubs that offered at least two sports to their members. Finally, organisational context was operationalised by item 17 that examined the local context of the sports clubs by asking for the size of the community in which the clubs were located.

Results

The results from the three logistic regression analyses are presented in Table 4. Variables from all categories of organisational characteristics: organisational goals, resources, structure and context, were found to be statistically significantly correlated with the propensity of sports clubs to have targeted initiatives for the three selected underrepresented population groups. Based on the Nagelkerke R^2 -values (0.199 for people with disabilities, 0.184 for people with a migration or ethnic minority background and 0.193 for people on a low income), the regression models seem to have similar explanatory power regarding the propensity of clubs to offer targeted initiatives for each population group.

TABLE 4. Results from the logistic regression analyses. Odds ratios are presented.

	People with disabilities (N=14,299)	People with a migration or ethnic minority background (N=14,283)	People on a low income (N=14,648)
Organisational goals			
Strives to help socially vulnerable groups (1-5)	2.630***	2.097***	1.903***
Tries to offer sports to many population groups (1-5)	0.990	1.120***	1.123***
Sets high value on companionship and conviviality (1-5)	0.959	0.976	0.957*
Sets high value on sporting success and competitions (1-5)	1.030	1.161***	1.094***

Engages in long-term planning (1-5)	1.178***	1.234***	1.135***
Monitors degree of plan implementation (1-5)	1.125**	1.050	1.062*
Organisational resources			
Volunteer to member ratio			
– Low (less than 1/20) (ref.)			
– Medium (1/20–1/5)	0.996	1.092	1.232***
– High (more than 1/5)	1.127	0.886	1.181*
Paid staff to member ratio			
– Low (less than 1/100) (ref.)			
– Medium (1/100–1/50)	0.984	1.152*	1.162***
– High (more than 1/50)	1.143	1.213*	1.420***
Has a paid manager (yes)	1.980***	1.285**	1.045
Size of problem with financial situation (1-5)	1.118***	1.219***	1.167***
Size of problem with availability of sports facilities (1-5)	1.012	1.031	1.066***
Possesses own facilities (yes)	1.101	1.006	1.069
Uses public sports facilities (yes)	0.943	1.406***	1.455***
Organisational structure			
Club size			
– Small (0–99 members) (ref.)			
– Medium (100–499 members)	1.119	1.189*	1.185***
– Large (500+ members)	1.254*	1.160	1.166*
Club age			
– Young (0–24 years) (ref.)			
– Medium (25–74 years)	0.759***	0.810***	0.796***
– Old (75+ years)	0.677***	0.965	0.833***
Single-sport vs. multisport club (multisport)	1.442***	1.356***	1.302***
Organisational context			
Size of local community (inhabitants)			
– Small (less than 20,000) (ref.)			
– Medium-sized (20,000–99,999)	1.177**	0.985	1.198***
– Large (100,000 or more)	1.157*	1.111	1.330***
Model characteristics			
Constant	0.001***	0.001***	0.004***
Nagelkerke ^R ₂	0.199	0.184	0.193

Note: *P < 0.05, **P < 0.01, ***P < 0.001, checks for multicollinearity were performed, but no critical Tolerance or VIF values were identified.

Regarding organisational goals, the results revealed significant results for the integration-related goals. Sports clubs that strived to help socially vulnerable groups become integrated into their clubs were significantly more inclined to offer targeted initiatives for people with disabilities (OR=2.630, $p < 0.001$), people with a migration or ethnic minority background (OR=2.097, $p < 0.001$) and people on a low income (OR=1.903, $p < 0.001$). The same can be said for clubs with a goal to offer sports to as many population groups as possible, but only regarding the integration of people with a migration or ethnic minority background (OR=1.120, $p < 0.001$) and people on a low income (OR=1.123, $p < 0.001$) and with smaller effect sizes (ORs). Turning to the social goals of sports clubs, the clubs that set high value on companionship and conviviality were slightly less inclined to offer targeted initiatives for people on a low income (OR=0.957, $p < 0.05$). Regarding competitive goals, the clubs that set high value on sporting success and competitions were more inclined to have targeted initiatives for people with a migration or ethnic minority background (OR=1.161, $p < 0.001$) and people on a low income (OR=1.094, $p < 0.001$). As for service-oriented goals, the clubs that engaged in long-term planning were more inclined to offer targeted initiatives for all three groups: people with disabilities (OR=1.178, $p < 0.001$), people with a migration or ethnic minority background (OR=1.234, $p < 0.001$) and people on a low income (OR=1.135, $p < 0.001$). The clubs that monitored the degree of implementation of these plans were also more inclined to offer targeted initiatives, but only for people with disabilities (OR=1.125, $p < 0.01$) and people on a low income (OR=1.062, $p < 0.05$).

Turning to organisational resources, the analyses identified significant correlations between the staff density and the propensity of clubs to offer targeted initiatives. The density of volunteers was only significantly correlated with the propensity of clubs to have targeted initiatives for people on a low income (OR_{medium}=1.232, $p < 0.001$ and OR_{high}=1.181, $p < 0.05$), while the density of paid staff was significantly correlated with targeted initiatives for both people with a migration or ethnic minority background (OR_{medium}=1.152, $p < 0.05$ and OR_{high}=1.213, $p < 0.05$) and people on a low income (OR_{medium}=1.162, $p < 0.001$ and OR_{high}=1.420, $p < 0.001$). Clubs with a paid manager were found to be more inclined to offer targeted initiatives for people with disabilities (OR=1.980, $p < 0.001$) and people with a migration or ethnic minority background (OR=1.285, $p < 0.01$).

Regarding financial resources, significant correlations were identified showing that more severe financial problems were correlated with a higher propensity of clubs to offer targeted initiatives for all three groups: people with disabilities (OR=1.118, $p<0.001$), people with a migration or ethnic minority background (OR=1.219, $p<0.001$) and people on a low income (OR=1.167, $p<0.001$). Regarding sports facilities, a similar correlation was identified, but only for people on a low income (OR=1.066, $p<0.001$). No significant correlations between the possession of own facilities and targeted initiatives for any of the three groups could be identified, but clubs that used public facilities were found to be significantly more inclined to offer targeted initiatives for people with a migration or ethnic minority background (OR=1.406, $p<0.001$) and people on a low income (OR=1.455, $p<0.001$).

Significant results were also identified regarding organisational structure. Club size was found to be correlated with the propensity of clubs to offer targeted initiatives for all three groups. When compared to small clubs with less than 100 members, the medium-sized clubs with 100-499 members were significantly more inclined to offer targeted initiatives for people with a migration or ethnic minority background (OR=1.189, $p<0.05$) and people on a low income (OR=1.185, $p<0.001$). The large clubs with 500 or more members were significantly more inclined than small clubs to offer targeted initiatives for people with disabilities (OR=1.254, $p<0.05$) and people on a low income (OR=1.166, $p<0.05$).

Club age was found to be another relevant factor. Compared to clubs younger than 25 years of age, the medium-aged clubs (25-74 years) were significantly less inclined to offer targeted initiatives for all three groups: people with disabilities (OR=0.759, $p<0.001$), people with a migration or ethnic minority background (OR=0.810, $p<0.001$) and people on a low income (OR=0.796, $p<0.001$). The oldest clubs aged 75 or more years were significantly less inclined than young clubs to offer targeted initiatives for people with disabilities (OR=0.677, $p<0.001$) and people on a low income (OR=0.833, $p<0.001$). Furthermore, multisport clubs were found to be significantly more inclined to offer targeted initiatives for all three groups: people with disabilities (OR=1.442, $p<0.001$), people with a migration or ethnic minority background (OR=1.356, $p<0.001$) and people on a low income (OR=1.302, $p<0.001$).

Turning to organisational context, we found that when comparing clubs located in a small local community with less than 20,000 inhabitants, targeted initiatives were more likely among clubs located in me-

dium-sized (20,000-99,999 inhabitants) or large (100,000 inhabitants or more) local communities for people with disabilities ($OR_{\text{medium}}=1.177$, $p<0.01$ and $OR_{\text{high}}=1.157$, $p<0.05$) and people on a low income ($OR_{\text{medium}}=1.198$, $p<0.001$ and $OR_{\text{high}}=1.330$, $p<0.001$).

Discussion and conclusion

Previous studies have found a number of population groups to be underrepresented in sports clubs despite political expectations and policies to foster ‘sport for all’ through sports clubs. As a result, this article set out to identify organisational characteristics of sports clubs that work strategically to integrate such underrepresented population groups by offering targeted initiatives. Factors within all four included aspects of organisational characteristics, namely organisational goals, resources, structure and context, were found to be relevant for the implementation of targeted initiatives for underrepresented population groups when exemplified as people with disabilities, people with a migration or ethnic minority background and people on a low income. Because sports clubs are very different in terms of goals, resources, structure and context, our study predicts that they will respond differently to political ambitions and policies. Thus, our study aligns with the finding that the propensity of sports clubs to act as policy implementers are dependent upon a number of factors (Stenling and Fahlén 2016).

The results also revealed how many of the same factors regarding organisational goals, resources, structure and context were significantly correlated with the propensity of clubs to offer targeted initiatives across all three population groups. A part of the explanation for this similarity could be that clubs that work for social integration face a number of similar environmental and organisational barriers as was identified in studies concerning people with disabilities (Darcy et al. 2017) and people with a migration or ethnic minority background (O’Driscoll et al. 2014).

Organisational goals were especially relevant when operationalised as integration-related goals. Clubs that strived to socially integrate different (socially vulnerable) population groups were found to be significantly more inclined to have targeted initiatives for the three groups examined. This finding is consistent with prior research that found club goals to be strongly associated with the actions of clubs (Nagel 2008, Stenling

2014, Stenling and Fahlén 2016, Swierzy et al. 2018, Van Slobbe et al. 2013, Wicker and Breuer 2013). Interestingly, the results also revealed that competitive club goals were compatible with efforts to offer targeted initiatives for underrepresented population groups and even positively correlated for people with a migration or ethnic minority background and people on a low income. This finding indicates that it would be a simplification to split clubs into typologies according to whether they seek to promote social integration or sporting success, as has been suggested in previous literature (Stenling and Fahlén 2016). Clubs can pursue sporting success while working strategically for social integration by offering targeted initiatives. However, it could be that integration is in this regard mainly used to foster sporting success by recruiting talented players, which might as well be found among people with a migration or ethnic minority background or among people on a low income (cf. Spaaij et al., 2014).

In accordance with previous research (Nowy et al. 2020, Rulofs et al. 2019), service-oriented goals, when operationalised as long-term planning, were positively correlated with clubs having targeted initiatives for all three groups. Regarding organisational goals, it seems that policy implementation could benefit from focusing specifically on the important task of influencing the goals of clubs. In particular, it seems central to increase the likelihood that clubs view it as their goal to integrate different population groups, or, even better, to focus specifically on the integration of socially vulnerable groups.

When examining the role of organisational resources, particularly the density of paid staff and the presence of a paid manager were found to be positively correlated with the propensity of clubs to offer targeted initiatives for underrepresented groups. A likely interpretation of this result is that paid staff and/or management is likely to bring resources to clubs that allow for a broader scope of activities (cf. Misener and Doherty 2009, Vandermeerschen et al. 2017). The importance of paid staff has also been identified in the context of demanding and complex tasks (Cuskelly 2004, Sharpe 2006), such as working for the social integration of underrepresented population groups.

Contrary to what would be expected based on previous research, we found that the sports clubs with targeted initiatives for underrepresented groups have more problems with the financial situation and the availability of sports facilities than clubs without such initiatives. We argue that at least two perspectives are relevant when interpreting these results.

From a club perspective, a possible explanation could be that clubs that offer activities for underrepresented groups have a higher demand for financial resources and facilities, and, thus, experience more problems. This interpretation is in line with findings in previous research (Allison 2001, Spaaij et al. 2014) showing the importance of sufficient and stable financial resources and the access to suitable sports facilities for the functioning of sports clubs more broadly and the success of strategic initiatives. From a local community perspective, a possible explanation could be that sports clubs targeting underrepresented population groups are often located in the areas where these populations live (cf. Spaaij et al. 2014), which tend to be characterised by financial constraints that could transfer into fewer resources being available for the local sports clubs.

Finally, a number of factors describing organisational structure and context were found to be statistically significantly correlated with the propensity of clubs to offer targeted initiatives for underrepresented population groups. In short, the clubs that were most likely to offer targeted initiatives were found to be large, young, multisport and located in an urban setting. This is in line with what could be expected based on the evidence from previous studies (e.g., Micheline et al. 2018; Nowy et al. 2020; Wicker and Breuer, 2014). While the correlations between the structural and contextual variables on the one hand and the propensity of clubs to offer targeted initiatives are mainly similar, there are a few exceptions when comparing people with a migration or ethnic minority background to the two other population groups. A noteworthy exception is that while clubs in a large local community more often have targeted initiatives for people on a low income, this is not the case for people with a migration or ethnic minority background. This finding runs counter to evidence from previous studies, and we find it difficult to find arguments why this should be any different in our study. Thus, we recommend this as a topic for future research.

Implications for practice

Our study underlines the importance of organisational goals and resources in order to increase the likelihood that sports clubs implement targeted initiatives for underrepresented population groups. Thus, it seems beneficial for policy makers to focus on these two topics. Regarding resources, our findings are in line with previous literature suggesting that greater organisational resources are needed for clubs to offer

targeted initiatives (e.g. Darcy et al. 2017; O’Driscoll et al. 2014). Thus, equipping sports clubs with sufficient organisational resources seems to be key to increase the likelihood that clubs engage strategically in social integration of underrepresented population groups, especially since existing literature indicates that many sports clubs mainly focus on their current membership and do not view social integration as part of their normal practices and responsibilities (Spaaij et al. 2014). This could also help explain why only a minority of the European sports clubs examined have targeted initiatives for people with disabilities (16%) and people with a migration or ethnic minority background (15%) (see Table 2). In turn, this could perhaps also be part of the explanation for the underrepresentation of these population groups in sport, since targeted initiatives could play an important role in increasing participation.

Besides equipping clubs with sufficient organisational resources, it seems that sports clubs need to (be convinced to) view social integration as core business. However, previous research has shown that social integration of underrepresented population groups is not core business for most clubs or volunteers (Skille 2011; Spaaij et al. 2014; Spaaij et al. 2018; Stenling and Fahlén 2016). This is problematic because studies indicate that club goals are central if clubs are to work for social integration (Stenling 2014; Stenling and Fahlén 2016; Van Slobbe et al. 2013). These findings are substantiated by the results from this study, showing that clubs that have club goals to work for social integration of underrepresented population groups are more likely to offer targeted initiatives.

Overall, the findings in this and previous studies seem to indicate that in order for more sports clubs to work strategically for social integration of underrepresented population groups, they need to be equipped with more organisational resources, and they need to (be convinced to) view this as core business reflected in the organisational goals.

Potentials and limitations

Potentials

The data material applied for statistical analyses in this article contains comparable knowledge about sports clubs from nine European countries with different national contexts, sports policies, and sports systems. The limited and non-significant variation identified at the country level indicates that differences in the propensity of clubs to offer targeted

initiatives for underrepresented groups can only to a limited extent be interpreted as reflections of differences in national contexts, sports policies, and sports systems. As a result, the results from this study regarding the organisational characteristics that are relevant for the integration of underrepresented groups in sports clubs can be cautiously generalised to European sports clubs.

Limitations

Our data was collected in nine countries and concepts originally worded in English were translated into each country's language. Although the same experts who designed the survey conducted the translation, this procedure may potentially have affected the understanding of central concepts and potentially result in differences between countries that do not reflect real differences, but rather linguistic differences in how questions are understood (Van de Vijver and Tanzer 2004). In order to mitigate this, the most ambiguous words were elaborated with an explanation or an example. An example with particular relevance for this article is the question asking clubs whether they have 'targeted initiatives' for different target groups. Here, examples were given, 'e.g. activities, teams, cooperation, reduced membership fees, etc.', in order to reduce any potential bias caused by linguistic differences. In order to understand and differentiate targeted club initiatives more accurately, more details would have been required. However, due to limits regarding the length of the questionnaire and our specific research priorities, we did not include such questions, which is a limitation with regard to the topic of this article.

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