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Idrættens og civilsamfundets knaster

Kritiske samfundsvidenskabelige analyser

SYDDANSK UNIVERSITETSFORLAG

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Sports Clubs and Civil Society in Switzerland and Denmark: A Comparison

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Abstract

Sports clubs are a core element of the Swiss as well as Danish sports landscape. In both countries, sports clubs play a crucial role in civil society and are accredited with various socio-political functions. Sports clubs can promote public health, social integration and democratic decision-making, particularly through voluntary work by the members. The aim of this contribution is to compare these functions of sports clubs in the context of two different sport systems. Based on the data of the European research project, Social Integration and Volunteering in Sports Clubs (SIVSCE), we analyze differences and similarities between Swiss and Danish sports clubs with a special focus on the contribution of sports clubs to public health, integration, democratic engagement and volunteering. Our analyses show that sports clubs in Denmark focus more on health enhancing physical activity than those in Switzerland, whereas in Swiss sports clubs com-

petitive sport and conviviality as well as social integration and democratic decision-making are more important. It is argued that these differences between the two countries may be due to historical differences in the importance that non-competitive gymnastics and health promotion has had in sport clubs in the two countries; a trade-off between high participation in non-competitive sports activities in sports clubs and relatively low participation in both social activities and the clubs' internal democracy in Denmark; and that the greater participation in member democracy in sports clubs can be linked to the strong participatory democratic tradition in Switzerland

Introduction

Sports clubs are a core element in the sports landscape of European contemporary societies. This is mainly based on the considerable size and the voluntary character of the club-organized sport. In most European countries, sports clubs play a crucial role in terms of sports of the whole population, particularly in youth and competitive sports (Breuer et al., 2015). They provide a setting for well-organized sports activities in groups and teams that have the potential to foster conviviality and togetherness as well as social rules, norms and values for specific target groups (e.g., children and youths). In sports clubs, the members usually meet on a regular basis for practicing sport together which probably can have health-related effects. Since sports clubs bring people together in social groups, there is also a broadly accepted belief that participation in sports clubs can support social integration. Furthermore, sports clubs as voluntary associations are often viewed as a crucial element of civil society, which is based on the assumption that they can create social trust and contribute to schooling democracy (e.g., Putnam 2000). Here, members who engage as volunteers in a club can gain experience in active citizenship (Ibsen et al., 2019).

Particularly in Switzerland and Denmark, sports clubs are recognized as important players in civil society that contribute to public welfare and fulfill various socio-political functions (Nagel et al., 2020). The purpose of this article is to analyze similarities and differences between the two countries regarding the functions of sports clubs.

Switzerland and Denmark have several features in common and some people characterize the two countries as two of the worlds most successful societies (Aagaard, 2013; Christoffersen et al., 2014)). Both countries are very stable without major social and political changes in the past more than 100 years. They are among the richest countries in the world, with Switzerland having the 4th highest GDP per inhabitant and Denmark the 9th highest in 2021 (Source: World Bank). In international studies of life satisfaction and happiness, both countries are ranked at the very top, but life expectancy is three years longer in Switzerland than in Denmark. Both countries have a relatively large civil society and non-profit sector, which in terms of labor constitutes 6.9 per cent respectively 8.8 per cent of the total workforce (Salamon et al., 2017: 36) and the relatively high proportion of citizens who do voluntary work is almost equal.

But there are also significant differences between the two countries. Firstly, Switzerland is a much more multicultural society – both linguistically and religiously – than Denmark, where nine out of ten have Danish as their mother tongue and 85 per cent are Protestants. Secondly, the public sector is much larger in Denmark than in Switzerland, with the expenses for all major welfare services being covered by the public sector, while it is to a greater extent a private – insurance-covered – expense in Switzerland. Taxation is therefore also twice as high in Denmark as in Switzerland. Finally, Switzerland has a more citizen-oriented and direct democracy – with many referenda – and a federal government where all the largest parties are represented in relation to their representation in the federal parliament – as is also the case in Denmark when it comes to the local governments of the largest cities.

According to the theories that seek to explain the development and size of civil society, both the degree of homogeneity and heterogeneity in society, the size and tasks of the public sector as well as the history and development of civil society are possible factors that have led to the current size and societal role of organized civil society (Salamon et al., 2017). It is therefore interesting to compare sports clubs as an aspect of civil society in the two countries.

Thus, the aim of this contribution is to work out similarities and differences between Swiss and Danish sports clubs in the context of civil society and in their contribution to health promotion, social integration, democratic in-

volvement and volunteering. Furthermore, we intend to explain why sports clubs in both countries show differences in the socio-political functions.

Our analysis is based on the results from the European research project Social Integration and Volunteering in Sports Clubs in Europe (SIVSCE), which was carried out from 2015 to 2019 (Nagel et al., 2020a; for Switzerland: Nagel et al., 2020c; for Denmark: Elmose-Østerlund & Ibsen, 2020). The study followed a multi-level conceptual framework with data collection in the 10 European countries where the same instruments and standardized questionnaires were used. The following brief outline on our multi-level approach (for details see Nagel et al., 2020b) gives not only an overview of the main empirical topics and issues but also of the three different analytical levels that might be relevant for the comparative view on the results of Switzerland and Denmark:

At the macro-level, the historical roots and the embedding of sports clubs in society as a whole, and the sports policy system as an opportunity structure (Ibsen et al., 2022), are analyzed.

The meso-level comprehends the structural characteristics, goals, resources and capacities of sports clubs, particularly with regard to their potential contribution to public welfare. The sports clubs were sampled to be representative for the population of sports clubs by using databases from the national umbrella sports organizations. In both Switzerland and Denmark, a large sample of sports clubs could be investigated (Switzerland: n=5,335; Denmark: n=3,631).

At the micro-level, the personal characteristics and attitudes of the members and the volunteers as well as their sports activities, social integration, democratic and voluntary engagement are analyzed. The members in selected sports clubs were asked via an online questionnaire (Switzerland: n=959 in 41 clubs; Denmark: n=3,163 in 36 clubs). As these numbers show, the Danish clubs integrated in the member survey were larger and probably the response rates were higher than in Switzerland.

Sports clubs in Switzerland and Denmark as important players in the sport system and as part of civil society

Before the comparative analysis of the different functions of sports clubs as relevant players in civil society, we give an overview on the specific poli-

tical embeddedness and situation of sports clubs in Switzerland and Denmark. In both countries, sport clubs are voluntary associations that have a not-for-profit orientation, intend to fulfill the interests of their members, have a democratic decision-making structure and where voluntary work plays an important role. However, according to Ibsen et al. (2022), besides significant similarities, there are also differences between sports clubs and the political conditions for organized sport. These are related to the type of welfare state and political opportunity structures that characterize each country. Since Switzerland and Denmark fit different welfare types – the conservative vs. the universalist welfare state – a closer comparative look seems useful in order to obtain a detailed „background knowledge" for our comparative analysis along the following perspectives and dimensions (Ibsen et al., 2022, Elmose-Østerlund & Ibsen, 2020 and Nagel et al., 2020b): (1) Macro-level perspective: historical and legal background of sports clubs; legislation and public policies for sports clubs, particularly in the sense of expectations to sports clubs as part of civil society; public (financial) support of sports clubs; regulation and control of sports clubs; overview of the sport system, particularly umbrella federations. (2) Meso-level perspective: structural characteristics of sports clubs, e.g. size, age, sports, member development; basic information on the use of sport facilities, financial situation, volunteer engagement, paid staff.

Switzerland – sports clubs as an independent substitute for public initiatives in sports

As mentioned in the introduction, the main characteristics of the Swiss welfare state are a limited responsibility of the state as well as a small amount of redistribution. Further important features of the Swiss political system are the direct democracy as well as the principles of subsidiarity and autonomy. That means that actions and solutions to socio-political problems are undertaken, as far as possible, independently and autonomously by the voluntary sector. Consequently, the public sector in Switzerland is relatively small compared to other countries (Helmig et al., 2017), whereas voluntary organizations and sport clubs in particular play an important role. Here, associations in Switzerland have always been regarded as a substitute for public initiatives (Stamm et al., 2015), and sports clubs

and other civil society associations are, to some extent, a private – but officially encouraged – alternative to public interventions (Nagel et al., 2018). The establishment of sports clubs in the nineteenth century was a decisive milestone for the introduction of modern sports. The first gymnastic clubs (inspired by the German *Turnen*) had various social goals and considered themselves to be promoters of their members' health and education. Thus, the social relevance of sports clubs has deep historical roots, and clubs are still 'supposed to fulfil several welfare functions in the context of health promotion, the socialisation of children and adolescents and social integration' (Stamm et al., 2015: 408).

Sports clubs also played a decisive role in the historical development of sports in Switzerland because the establishment and operation of clubs was always simple and seldom opposed by the authorities (Stamm et al., 2015). Traditionally, Swiss law has few prerequisites for establishing a club: Clubs must be voluntary organizations with democratic structures where members share a common goal, and the club must be non-profit.

Despite the lack of far-reaching direct interventions, sport clubs are effectively supported by public authorities. The promotion of sport is manifested in the 'federal law for promotion of sport and exercise', established in 2012. This legal framework formulates the following main goals of sports promotion: promotion of health and physical performance of the population, integrated education and social cohesion. In this context, sport policy supports private initiatives in sport, particularly those of sport federations and clubs because of the (assumed) positive effects of sports activities. However, national government and the administrative agency responsible for the development of the national sports policy, the Federal Office of Sport (FOSPO), have no direct legal obligations to sport clubs and vice versa, apart from the national Youth and Sport programme (J+S). Within the J+S programme, the FOSPO distributes over 100 million Swiss Francs (apprx. 104 million Euro) per year to clubs engaged in the promotion of youth sports. Funding promotes courses for coaches, sport activities, events and camps for children and adolescents. Municipalities provide sports facilities and make these available to sports clubs and individuals at concessional rates. Furthermore, municipalities often pay some form of lump sum to sports clubs.

In Switzerland, nearly 19,000 voluntary sports clubs exist. Swiss Olympic – the umbrella organization of the non-profit sports sector in Switzerland – represents the interests of more than 80 national sports federations and their sports clubs. There are currently about 2.8 million out of 8.5 million people in Switzerland who belong to one or more sports clubs, and 2 million members who actively practice sport in a club (Lamprecht et al., 2017). Thus, sports clubs play a crucial role for the sports activities of the Swiss population, although the commercial sports sector has grown considerably over the last decades.

Sports clubs in Switzerland are often small organizations compared to what we find in other countries in Europe. More than two-thirds of clubs have only 100 members or fewer and only three out of 100 clubs have 500 members or more. Approximately half of the clubs indicate that the number of members has stayed more or less stable and only a minority of the clubs has a larger decrease of memberships. Sports clubs in Switzerland have a long tradition and around two out of five were founded before 1945. The clear majority of Swiss sports clubs (four out of five) offer only one sport for their members. Consequently, these single-sport clubs have not diversified their programmes in response to new trends in sports or health-enhancing physical activities. Considering the large number of small single-sport clubs, it is not surprising that the (top ten) list of sports offered by Swiss sports clubs is made up of primarily traditional sports (e.g., shooting, *Turnen* and gymnastics, track and field) as well as team sports (e.g., football, floorball, volleyball). Fitness sports activities are also quite popular in Swiss sports clubs.

Only one third of the Swiss sports clubs have their own sports facility, whereas two-thirds use public sports facilities – usually owned by the municipality. About half of the clubs that use public sports facilities have to pay a (mostly quite moderate) fee whereas the other half can use the public facilities free of charge. The majority of the clubs report no bigger problems with the availability of facilities. However, around 20 per cent of the clubs have big or even very big problems in terms of accessing adequate facilities for the sports activities of their members. In contrast, there are few sports clubs in Switzerland that have big problems with their financial situation.

Only around one out of seven sports clubs in Switzerland have paid staff and 3 per cent of clubs have a (full- or part-time) paid manager. Therefore, there is only a low degree of professionalization in Swiss club sports and the clear majority relies on the voluntary engagement of their members.

Denmark – sports clubs as both integrated and independent organizations in sport policy

The Danish welfare state is marked by a relatively large public sector with high benefits and there is a comparatively large economic redistribution based on universalistic principles (Greve & Jespersen, 2019). That means that everyone, regardless of status and finances, is guaranteed public pension, free access to education, free treatment in hospitals etc. The public sector both finances and produces most public welfare services. However, the voluntary sector is relatively large, and there is a long historical tradition of collaboration between the public and the voluntary sector, e.g. in organized sport.

The basic conditions for civil engagement and especially for sports clubs are guaranteed in the Danish Constitution of 1849. Since the early stages of organized sport in Denmark, the government has supported voluntary sports organizations and clubs as partners in civil society. Particularly from 1945 to 1970, there was a big increase in government support for sport. The financial support is combined with relatively little political involvement in the field. In 1968, the Leisure Act was passed, which instructed local municipalities to grant voluntary cultural and leisure associations – the vast majority of which were sports clubs – the free use of public facilities. Particularly, municipalities are obliged to provide support for leisure activities with the aim of promoting an understanding of democracy and active citizenship. However, in the political rhetoric, public support for sports clubs is usually legitimized by its value for health, social prevention and the learning of societal norms and values (Ibsen, 2012). Approximately 80 per cent of the total public expenses for sport come from the municipalities and these expenses are primarily targeted at sports clubs. The municipalities are obliged to support sports clubs financially, either directly in the form of subsidies or indirectly by making facilities available.

Despite the legal framework, the degree of governmental intervention is very limited. There are only few requirements for sports clubs in order to receive subsidies and get access to publicly owned facilities: The club must be democratically organized, must have a non-profit orientation in accordance with the purpose of the act, and must provide the accounts of the economy of the club. The public sector respects the self-determination of associations, even though they receive public funding. Thus, voluntary organized sport in Denmark is characterized on the one hand it is by a great independence from the state, but on the other hand is an integral part of the Danish welfare model. The lack of precise targets reflects the relationship between government and voluntary associations, which is based on respect for autonomy, but also on trust that associations will act in the spirit of integrating all members of society.

The Danish sport system comprises three main umbrella organizations for sports: the National Olympic Committee and Sports Confederation of Denmark (DIF) that developed from the English sports model, the Danish Gymnastics and Sports Association (DGI) that developed from the popular gymnastics movement, and the Danish Association for Company Sports (DFIF) that organizes sports clubs based around workplace communities. The three national sports federations receive a comparatively high percentage of the total revenues of the national lottery each year. In contrast, there is almost no direct financial support from the state to local sports clubs.

It is estimated that, in Denmark, there are around 16,000 voluntary sports clubs (including sections of sports clubs dealing with several sports), and that nine out of ten are members of at least one of the three major sports organizations, DIF, DGI and DFIF (Ibsen 2006). Sports clubs are highly diverse with many small clubs and fewer large clubs. Almost half of the clubs are small with 100 members or fewer, but at the same time, 15 per cent of the clubs are large with more than 500 members. With many small clubs, it is hardly surprising that a clear majority of Danish sports clubs (75 per cent) are ingle-sport clubs with only one sports activity. Here, football and gymnastics are offered by 15 per cent of the clubs, badminton by 13 per cent, shooting sports by 9 per cent and handball by 8 per cent of the clubs. Despite discussions about a potential membership

crisis for sports clubs, the membership development is relatively stable and positive in the majority of Danish clubs. On the one hand, two-thirds of the Danish sports clubs have existed for at least 25 years – one in four even since before World War II. On the other hand, more than one in five sports clubs were founded since the turn of the millennium.

Most of the clubs (71 per cent) use public facilities for their activities, and around one in four clubs use their own facilities. Besides this, 41 per cent of the clubs use privately owned or private non-profit facilities (Elmose-Østerlund et al., 2017). The majority of the clubs do not pay a usage fee for public facilities because they get it for free from the municipality. It is not surprising that most clubs seem unchallenged by the availability of facilities and the financial situation because of the generous funding schemes for sports clubs in Denmark. Another potential explanation for the few financial problems could be that seven in ten clubs operate completely on a voluntary basis, and that only 8 per cent of the clubs pay wages to a manager. In general, we do not find strong evidence of a more general professionalization tendency in Danish sports clubs.

Comparative Summary

The comparison of the public policy for sports clubs in Denmark and Switzerland shows many common features (Ibsen et al., 2022): A strong belief in the social value of sports and especially sports clubs; the freedom to form sports clubs independent of the state; the favouring of sports clubs in public support for the promotion of sports participation; sports clubs' access to public sports facilities on favourable terms; public support for club activities; the decentralized management of public support by the municipalities as well as the autonomy and relatively limited public control of the clubs. Furthermore, the basic elements of the policy regarding sports clubs have not changed for several decades.

However, there are also differences between the two countries' public policies for sports clubs. In Denmark, sports clubs are both 'integrated and independent'. On the one hand, it is the primary sports policy goal to promote participation in sports clubs, and this is supported by legislation that ensures clubs significant public financial support and access to sports

facilities free of charge. On the other hand, sports clubs have a great deal of independence from the public sector, the financial support is almost exclusively non-targeted, and politicians refrain from making clear demands on sports clubs.

The special feature of the Danish sports club policy is that all clubs have a statutory right to access to public facilities, reimbursement of the majority of the clubs' expenses for private facilities, and public support for activities for children and young people provided as 'basic grants' according to objective criteria. This is in line with the principles of the universalist welfare state. Welfare benefits are relatively high, based primarily on universalist principles. But unlike the major welfare areas, where it is primarily public institutions that 'produce' welfare, it is voluntary associations that do so in sports.

In Switzerland, sports clubs are a 'independent substitute' for public initiatives based on principles of subsidiarity. The promotion of sport is manifested in a federal law as a political obligation, which obliges federations, cantons and municipalities to set conditions that facilitate participation, integration and equal opportunities for all people. But it is the task of the sports clubs to realize these goals in accordance with the principles of subsidiarity and autonomy.

Sports clubs in Switzerland do not have a statutory right to public support, which is primarily 'targeted grants', but a part of the support from the local municipality is also a kind of 'basic grant', and public sports facilities are available at concessional rates. Sports club policy is implemented at the most local level possible, except for the federal J+S programme. These characteristics of sports club policy is in line with the main principles of the conservative welfare state model based on the idea of subsidiarity, the notion that non-profit organizations 'produce' welfare, and on need-determined public support.

In both Switzerland and Denmark sports clubs are attractive sports providers for many people. Yet the question arises whether sports clubs can contribute to health promotion, social integration, democratic involvement and volunteering as civic engagement. In the following section, we will take a closer comparative look at these particular functions of sports clubs.

Functions of sports clubs in Switzerland and Denmark

In the following, we present the main similarities and differences between Switzerland and Denmark from the European study on Social Integration and Volunteering in Sports Clubs (SIVSCE) along the socio-political functions' health promotion, social integration, democratic involvement and volunteering in a comparative way (see in detail Elmose-Østerlund & Ibsen, 2020; Nagel et al., 2020c).

Sports Participation and Health promotion

Health promotion is a central political objective for Danish sports clubs and the clubs are expected to contribute to a healthier population. When asking the club representatives about their agreement with statements regarding health promotion, it is apparent that most clubs (81 per cent) mainly agree that the sports offer they provide for their members is health-enhancing, while only 3 per cent mainly disagree and 15 per cent are undecided (Table 1). When asked more specifically about whether the clubs offer health-enhancing physical activity programmes, indicating a more structured approach to health promotion, almost half of the clubs still mainly agree, while 40 per cent are undecided and 11 per cent mainly disagree. Jointly, these results indicate that most sports clubs in Denmark see themselves as contributors to health promotion, but that significantly fewer work with health promotion in a more structured manner by offering health-enhancing programmes.

In contrast, one third of all sports clubs in Switzerland do not get involved in health, while 24 per cent agree and 18 per cent totally agree with this statement (Table 1). The rate of Swiss sports clubs that have integrated health promotion in their philosophy is fairly low compared to Denmark.

	Don't agree at all (%)	Don't agree (%)	Unde-cided (%)	Agree (%)	Totally agree (%)
SUI: Our club gets involved with health sports	15	21	22	24	18
DEN: Our club is committed to offer health-enhancing physical activity programmes	5	6	40	33	15
DEN: Our club feels that our sports discipline(s) is/are suitable as health-enhancing physical activity	2	1	15	46	35

Table 1: The attitude of clubs towards health-enhancing physical activity (data from the club surveys; the statements here are not an accurate reflection of the questions from the questionnaire).

Another indication of whether sports clubs can function as arenas for health promotion is connected to the opportunity of participating in non-competitive sports activities. This should not be taken to mean that competitive sports cannot be health-enhancing, but since many people are not motivated by the competitive element of sports, the need for non-competitive offers that can meet the broader demand seems evident. In that regard, it is interesting that 44 per cent of the Danish members report that they have never participated in competitions and that a further 20 per cent previously did but do not do so (Table 2). In contrast, sports participation in a Swiss club is much more often combined with competitive sports. Nearly nine out of ten club members currently participate in competitions for their clubs or used to do this previously.

Participation in competitive sports in the club	Yes (%)	No, but I used to (%)	No, never (%)
SUI	68	22	11
DEN	36	20	44

Table 2: Participation in competitive sports (member surveys).

In summary: Most Danish sports clubs see themselves as fulfilling an important role regarding health promotion – as is also the political expectation, whereas in Swiss sports clubs a focus on health promotion is relatively often lacking. As sports club members in both countries usually practice sports regularly within the club, we can cautiously assume that sports clubs can contribute to individual and consequently to public health. However, as sports have various requirements (e.g. competitive sports, gymnastics, running) the effects may be quite different, and active engagement in a sports club may not automatically improve a member's health.

Social integration

In both countries, there is a strong political belief in the potential of sports clubs to foster social integration. In policy documents, it is often mentioned that sports clubs represent an arena well suited to (1) foster integration of different population groups, especially socially vulnerable groups such as people with migration background and disabilities, and (2) to enable social networks with close social contacts and emotional commitment between the members.

The first and essential condition for sports clubs to contribute to social integration is to be open for people of different population groups so that they can become members and thus expand their social networks. In this context, it is notable that only about half of Swiss (54 per cent) and Danish (60 per cent) sports clubs clearly state that they offer sports to as many population groups as possible (Table 3). Relatively many clubs in both countries do not pursue – according to the opinion of their board – a clear philosophy of openness to different population groups and a concept of Sport for All.

Our club tries to offer sports to as many population groups as possible	Don't agree at all (%)	Don't agree (%)	Undecided (%)	Agree (%)	Totally agree (%)
SUI	6	16	25	34	19
DEN	5	5	31	41	19

Table 3: Attitudes of sports clubs towards the integration of different population groups (club survey).

When we take a closer look at the representation of selected population groups, the results of the club surveys show that 73 per cent of the Swiss sports clubs have no people with disability as members and 27 per cent have no people with migration background. In Danish sports clubs, 58 per cent of the clubs have no people with disabilities (whether physical or mental) in their membership, while 46 per cent have no migrants (1st or 2nd generation). Whether this indicates that these clubs are, in practice, not open to the groups in question, or whether it simply indicates that these groups have not sought to join these clubs is not possible to conclude from the available data. However, both in Switzerland and Denmark the sports system is characterized by structures that have specific federations for sport for people with disabilities. Regarding migrants, Denmark, has, from a European perspective, relatively few migrants, which could partly explain why many clubs have no migrant members.

In contrast, women and elderly people, who were often underrepresented in club sports some decades ago, are well represented in Swiss and Danish sports clubs today. However, there are still clubs without any women or people over 65 years and men still outnumber women by around six to four (DEN: Elmose-Østerlund et al., 2017; SUI: Lamprecht et al., 2020), indicating that there is still some way to go to achieve gender parity in sports clubs.

The figures on the representation of different population groups in sports clubs align with findings on the proportion of clubs that explicitly try to enable sports for a certain target group (see in detail Elmose-Østerlund & Ibsen, 2020; Nagel et al., 2020c). Thus, sports clubs in Switzerland and Denmark partly fulfil the ascribed ability to promote social integration of people with disabilities and migration background.

Turning to more general attitudes of sports clubs on social integration, the results of the sports clubs' surveys reveal that in both countries the majority place a high value on companionship and conviviality (Table 4), with somehow higher agreement in Denmark. Such club philosophy is crucial to members' ability to create and foster social networks and friendships with other members.

Our club sets high value on companionship and conviviality	Don't agree at all (%)	Don't agree (%)	Undecided (%)	Agree (%)	Totally agree (%)
SUI	0	2	10	31	57
DEN	1	0	3	36	60

Table 4: Attitudes of sports clubs towards companionship and conviviality (club surveys).

Although nearly all Swiss and Danish sports clubs place a high value on companionship and conviviality, the social participation of members vary (see Table 5). In Denmark, a clear majority of members are somewhat active in the social life, but a large minority of the members are not active at all: 29 per cent report to never participate in the club's social gatherings. In contrast, only 9 per cent of the Swiss club members never participate in the social event of their club.

Participation in the club's social gatherings	Never (%)	Once a year or less (%)	Once every half-year (%)	Once every three months (%)	Once a month (%)	Once every two weeks (%)	At least once a week (%)
SUI	9	27	30	18	8	2	4
DEN	29	25	25	13	4	1	3

Table 5: Frequency of participation in the club's social life (member survey).

There are similar differences when it comes to more informal social activities, such as staying behind after training, matches or tournaments to talk to other people. However, in both countries, more than half of all members regularly – at least every two weeks – meet after training or matches. Based on these findings, it is not surprising that the clear majority of all club members (SUI: nearly 90 per cent; DEN: nearly 80 per cent) indicate they have gained new friendships through participation in the club. Thus, club sports are an excellent setting for meeting other other people and for making friends. Here, it is interesting that in Switzerland three out of four members agreed with the statement that they socialize with people who they did not know before joining the sports club, whereas in Denmark only two out of five members form new social relations in the context of their sports club.

Another measure of the social integration of members in sports clubs is the breadth of socialization, measured by the number of people from the club that the members know by name. Once again, there are relatively big differences between Switzerland and Denmark. Whereas 90 per cent of all Swiss members state that they know more than 10 people in the club by name, this is case only for 70 per cent of the Danish club members.

These differences are in line with the attitudes of the members towards the social life in the club. In Switzerland, about three out of five members indicate that the club is one of the most important social groups they belong to, while in Denmark only two out of five members support this statement (table 6).

The club is one of the most important social groups I belong to	Strongly disagree (%)	Partially disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Partially agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
SUI	9	15	19	29	29
DEN	21	14	24	22	19

Table 6: Attitudes of members towards social life in the club (member survey).

In summary: There is considerable evidence that sports clubs can meet the political expectations and contribute to social integration. The majority of sports clubs have a predominant philosophy of openness and conviviality, and the majority of the members indicate that they identify with the club

and have social networks and friendships in the club. A club culture of identification, familiarity and cohesion is an important foundation for the club to fulfil social functions. However, some population groups are underrepresented in sports clubs (e.g. people with migration background or with disabilities) and not all members socialize regularly in the context of the club. Finally, it is worth noting that, on most of the presented measures, members of Danish clubs score lower than members from Switzerland. Thus, members of Danish sports clubs seem to be somehow less socially integrated although the club officials express conviviality as an important club goal.

Democratic involvement

In the context of their historical development, the idea arose that voluntary associations, particularly sports clubs, with democratic decision-making structures are schools of democracy that can counteract undemocratic and authoritarian attitudes. In both countries, democratic education is still among the primary objectives of public funding for sports clubs and other associations for children and young people. Thus, the question arises to what extent sports clubs in Switzerland and Denmark contribute to the democratic participation and socialization.

The majority of the club boards support the ideal of democratic decision-making (Table 7). In Switzerland, 81 per cent of the clubs have the philosophy that they seek to involve members in making important decisions, whereas 67 per cent of the Danish clubs agree with this statement. There is particularly a clear difference when it comes to the number of clubs that totally agree with the idea of integrating the members in decision-making (SUI: 40 per cent; DEN: 18 per cent).

Our club aims to involve members when making important decisions	Don't agree at all (%)	Don't agree (%)	Undecided (%)	Agree (%)	Totally agree (%)
SUI	1	3	15	41	40
DEN	2	10	21	49	18

Table 7: Attitudes of sports clubs towards democratic decision-making and involvement (club survey).

Do the members achieve this idea of democratic involvement and how are they integrated into discussions of strategies and long-term planning? More than half of the Swiss members participated at the last annual general meeting. This proportion of 57 per cent is clearly higher than in Denmark where less than a quarter of the members (22 per cent) attended the last annual general meeting. These clear differences also exist when it comes to members' participation in other club meetings. In contrast, there are only minor differences in more informal practices of club democracy. In both countries, about 20 per cent of the members speak their mind to key persons in the club at least once a month and the clear majority do this at least once a year (table 8).

I speak my mind to key persons in the club	Never (%)	Once a year or less (%)	Once every half-year (%)	Once every three months (%)	Once a month (%)	Several times a month (%)
SUI	23	24	16	18	10	10
DEN	32	20	13	13	10	11

Table 8: Broader democratic participation of members (member survey).

According to the results of the member survey, more than half of the members never attempted to become involved in decision-making in the club or did this more than one year ago. In contrast, nearly one-third of the members in both countries recently attempted to influence decision-making in the club. Overall, the findings show that that some of the members participates actively and regularly in decision-making whereas the rest is not interested in club policy.

In summary: On the one hand, the democratic dimension of the sports clubs is an ideal in the clubs and an explicit goal attached to the public support. On the other hand, many members do not participate in the association democracy. Here, we find differences between Switzerland and Denmark, particularly when it comes to more formal elements of club democracy. Sports clubs in Switzerland more often aim to involve their members in important decisions and more members participate in club meeting, especially the annual general meeting.

Volunteering

Since the nineteenth century and the foundation of the first sports clubs, volunteering has played an important role. Decision-making by elected volunteers who represent the interests of the members and voluntary work in general is still the most relevant resource for sports clubs in Switzerland and Denmark, although some (larger) clubs also have paid staff.

The clear majority of sports clubs in Switzerland and Denmark ascribe to the philosophy that their clubs should be run exclusively by volunteers (Table 9). However, the number of clubs that totally agree with this statement and the idea of volunteer leadership is clearly higher among Swiss (58 per cent) compared to Danish sports clubs (35 per cent). Furthermore, most clubs in both countries reject the idea of seeing members as customers who cannot be expected to contribute with voluntary work. And many club representatives point out that the members demonstrate passion, dedication and energy when volunteering for their club. These result fits well with the political belief in the importance of voluntary work, not only as a resource for clubs and other voluntary associations, but also as a type of engagement that has positive benefits for the individual as well as the society.

Our club should be run exclusively by volunteers	Don't agree at all (%)	Don't agree (%)	Undecided (%)	Agree (%)	Totally agree (%)
SUI	2	4	11	28	56
DEN	6	10	15	33	35

Table 9: Attitudes of sports clubs towards voluntary work (club survey).

Corresponding to the results on the attitudes and philosophy, Swiss and Danish sports clubs usually have at least six or more volunteers in different positions. However, there are large differences in the numbers of volunteers between clubs, which is strongly associated with the size of the clubs and working requirements in the context of the activities offered (e.g. the type of sport and the number of participants in each team or group).

While volunteers are quite important for the successful development, the clubs frequently indicate that they have problems with the recruitment and retention of volunteers. (Table 10). In both countries, more than one third of the clubs report big or very big problems with the recruitment and retention of board members. We also find similar problems for key positions in the sports sector, particularly coaches and referees. However, there are also clubs that have no problems regarding recruiting and retaining enough motivated and competent volunteers.

Problems with the recruitment and retention of volunteers on the board level	No problem (%)	A small problem (%)	A medium problem (%)	A big problem (%)	A very big problem (%)
SUI	14	22	27	22	15
DEN	11	25	26	26	12

Table 10: Problems with the recruitment and retention of volunteers (club survey).

Although numerous sports clubs in Switzerland and Denmark indicate problems with recruiting and retaining enough volunteers, more than two-thirds broadly show unchanged numbers of volunteers over the last five years. And only about one out of six clubs report a decrease. An explanation for this phenomenon might be the different measures sports clubs undertake to recruit and retain volunteers. In both countries, the clubs, for example, arrange social gatherings for volunteers, encourage and motivate volunteers with benefits in kind or install a position with the responsibility for volunteer management.

In summary: Voluntary work is still the most important resource for sports clubs in Switzerland and Denmark, and the clubs view this as an ideal. Most clubs pursue the philosophy that strategic decisions have to be made by elected volunteers. Although many sports clubs find it difficult to recruit and retain volunteers, they are generally successful and show no

signs of a decline in voluntary work. Therefore, if volunteering is viewed as a specific form of democratic participation and engagement in public welfare, the results underline the contribution of Swiss and Danish sports clubs. Thus, volunteering is not only relevant to sports clubs and members, but also to civil society, as integration in a club can lead to integration and engagement in the broader community and play an important role in terms of social trust (Nagel et al., 2019).

Summary and discussion of similarities and differences

In both Switzerland and Denmark, there is a long and strong tradition of practicing sports in sports clubs, which has roots back to the second half of the 19th century. In both countries, sports clubs are ascribed great value for both the individual member and society, with expectations that the clubs fulfill a number of central functions for democracy and welfare. While there are relatively small differences between the two countries on the politically determined framework for the sports clubs and on the distribution and organization of sports clubs (see section 2), there are significant differences on the clubs' goals and the members' participation in the clubs (see section 3). Health promotion is given much greater importance among the sports clubs in Denmark than in Switzerland, and this is also reflected in the fact that significantly more of the members in Danish sports clubs do not join in order to take part in competitions and to perform better. The social dimension of sport is given much importance in the sports clubs in both countries, but among the members of Danish clubs it is given less importance than it is among members of Swiss clubs. Sports clubs in Switzerland attach greater importance than sports clubs in Denmark to involving the members in key decisions. Members in Danish sports clubs also engage less in association democracy than members in Switzerland do, but especially in the formal membership democracy (e.g., the annual general meeting). Finally, the sports clubs in Switzerland believe to a significantly greater extent than in Denmark that the club 'should be run exclusively by volunteers'. How can we explain these differences in the socio-political functions between the two countries?

Theoretical approaches

In the following, we will discuss some of the most important similarities and particularly differences based on theoretical concepts that focus on different analytical levels (see our multi-level-approach above and Elmose-Østerlund et al., 2020):

(1) 'The economic approach' argues that the size and nature of civil society is linked to both the country's economic development and to variations in preferences in the population. Firstly, there is an assumption that the emergence of civil society institutions – like sports clubs – are related to the economic development and wealth in the specific country. Secondly, there is also an assumption that heterogeneous societies lead to voluntary, non-profit organizations that are better able to fulfil different needs and preferences than the public sector, which is better able to meet the wishes and needs of citizens in a more homogeneous society (Salamon et al., 2017).

(2) 'The social origins approach' (or path dependence theory) argues that the size and nature of the civil society – here sports clubs – can be explained historically. Organizational patterns and the political framework formed years ago therefore seem to endure even when the social conditions that led to the formation of these patterns have changed (Stinchcombe, 1965; Salamon et al., 2017).

(3) 'The political opportunity structure approach' argues that the possibilities and limitations provided for sports clubs by the political system and the public sector establish the space in which sports clubs can act and thereby heavily influence the possible actions of sports clubs. The political opportunity structure includes primarily the political goals, public subsidies and sports infrastructure (Micheletti, 1994; Seippel et al., 2018).

(4) 'The organizational theory' argues that the function of organizations – here sports clubs – partly depends on the organization's size and structure (e.g., sport activities: competitive vs. health-oriented sport).

(5) 'The organizational capacity theory' argues that the function of organizations also depends on the organization's capacity (e.g. human, financial, network capacity) (Hall et al., 2003).

(6) At the member level, factors such as motivation and democratic engagement might be relevant for the function of sports clubs.

Explanations of similarities and differences

The comparison of the sports clubs in Switzerland and Denmark shows relatively great similarities in the spread of sports clubs and in the proportion of citizens who practice sports in a club. This can be due to the fact that the countries are relatively similar in terms of economic development and wealth. Furthermore, in both countries there is a long historical tradition for sports clubs, and even though the two countries have different welfare systems, the way the public sector supports voluntarily organized sports in the two countries is quite similar, with relatively free access to sports facilities and little public governance. However, Switzerland is a more heterogeneous society – linguistically and religiously – than Denmark, and according to the economic approach and the heterogeneity theory, this should lead to a larger voluntary sector. But for two reasons it probably does not matter much. Firstly, political and religious values have much less importance for the organization of sport today than it had in the past in many European countries. Secondly, the different linguistic / cultural population groups in Switzerland live in different areas of the country (primarily in German, French and Italian-speaking regions), where the group forms a relatively homogeneous group.

We find the biggest differences between Switzerland and Denmark in the societal and social functions of the sports clubs. As described, health promotion is given much greater importance among the sports clubs in Denmark than in Switzerland. A potential explanation for this difference is the strong influence in Denmark from the Swedish gymnastics movement from the mid-1800s characterized by a strong focus on non-competitive team gymnastics, physical fitness and character building. This is the historical background for the fact that in Denmark there are many gymnastics and exercise associations where members do not participate in competitions, and a 'sport for all' organization where health promotion is one of the central goals. At the same time, it is possible that the municipalities in Denmark, which are responsible for promoting health, try to involve and influence sports clubs to work for health to a greater extent than in Switzerland. The Swiss clubs focus mainly on one sport and place greater value on competitive sports. This aligns with the fact that neither Swiss Olympic and their various sports federations nor the Federal Office

of Sport have clear policies to promote and support health-enhancing physical activities in the context of sports clubs despite the legal framework that has the promotion one of its main goals. We also find differences between the umbrella sport federations in Switzerland and Denmark. Swiss Olympic has only a small department on mass sports, while in DIF and DGI, these departments are larger and launch initiatives for mass sports in clubs and have consultants working with the development of sport for all clubs.

Another significant difference between the sports clubs in the two countries is that the members in Switzerland participate in association democracy to a greater extent than in Denmark. However, this applies especially in the formal membership democracy, e.g., participation in the annual general meeting. This difference is immediately surprising, since the purpose of municipal support for sports clubs in Denmark is to promote democratic learning, but this ideal is primarily symbolic with no political and organizational consequences. Inspired by the theory, there could be three explanations for this difference in member democracy. Firstly, there is a different democratic culture in Switzerland compared to Denmark, which in the research is referred to as participatory democracy, where citizens are more directly involved in political decisions (especially in the form of many referendas both nationally and locally). Several studies have shown a correlation between political culture and active citizenship (Almond and Verba, 1963; Putnam, 1993). Secondly, many sports club members in Denmark are members of a large sports club, particularly in the context of the member survey of the SIVSCE-project. We know that participation in association democracy decreases as the size of the association increases (Ibsen et al., 2019). Thirdly, many members of the Danish sports clubs have a weaker affiliation to the club they belong to. More Danish than Swiss members do not take part in sports competitions, do not participate in social gatherings, and have a weak sense of togetherness in their attachment to the club. All these factors are negatively correlated with the participation of members in the democratic processes of the club (Ibsen et al., 2019; Østerlund 2014).

The third significant difference between the sports clubs in the two countries is that the members of the Swiss sports clubs are more socially

integrated in their club than the members are of the Danish sports clubs, although social integration is ascribed equal value by the sports clubs in the two countries. Besides the bigger size of the Danish sports clubs in the study, one possible explanation for this finding is that a relatively high proportion of the Danish adult population is active in sports clubs (European Commission 2018). A higher participation rate could involve a trade-off with social integration. The non-competitive activities offered by many Danish clubs do appeal to a broader segment of society, but they have been shown to foster less social integration than the more traditional competitive sports (Østerlund 2014). This form of sports, however, is more popular in Swiss sports clubs and more members regularly participate in competitions.

Finally, the sports clubs in Switzerland believe to a significantly greater extent than in Denmark that the club 'should be run exclusively by volunteers'. This may be because there are many large sports clubs in Denmark with more than 500 members. These clubs have – according to the organizational capacity approach – the resources to hire paid staff, which is likely to be necessary for some clubs due to the increased complexity of management in large clubs. But the attitudinal difference regarding volunteering may also be due to the fact that some Danish sports clubs compete with other types of organizations which offer the same activities (e.g., gymnastics and fitness), but use paid coaches, and the existence of these paid positions in turn makes it difficult to recruit people to be unpaid coaches.. Finally, the difference may also be due to the fact that, as mentioned, there is a stronger grassroots democracy with strong historical roots of volunteering in Switzerland than there is in Denmark.

Conclusion

What can we learn and conclude from this comparison between Switzerland and Denmark? Obviously, the Danish clubs are more often bigger multi-sport clubs that have a health- and service-orientation, whereas in Switzerland these types of clubs are less frequent. Based on our findings, we can cautiously conclude that there is a trade-off between health-pro-

motion, exercise orientation and sport-for-all on the one hand and social integration, high identification and democratic involvement on the other. Here, an increased focus on more individual and flexible sports activities (i.e. fitness activities) in sports clubs would likely increase the participation and number of members in clubs, and thereby the contribution to health promotion, but it could come at the expense of less social involvement as well as democratic and voluntary engagement of the members.

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