

The role of team structures for social integration in Swiss football clubs

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Sport clubs are often considered as an ideal setting for social integration for people from different backgrounds. Following a heuristic multilevel model, studies have linked individual characteristics of the members with social structures at the club context (e.g. club goals) to explain social integration. However, with the organization of sport activities in teams, another social context with distinct social structures (e.g. team culture) exists within clubs, which is likely relevant for social integration as well. Therefore, the question arises to what extent team structures are relevant for social integration in VSCs.

Based on data from the study “Social integration in Swiss football Clubs” from 1515 members nested in 145 teams of 45 Swiss football clubs, social integration in the dimension of identification is analysed in a three level multi-level model, including the team context as a level of analysis for the first time.

The results revealed that teams differ considerably in the social integration of their members. Besides individual factors (e.g. education level, membership duration), a team culture of social togetherness and especially a pronounced team sociability are relevant for identification. Cross-level interactions showed that these factors play a role for members independent of their migration background. Yet, additional positive effects can be shown for members new to the club.

The analysis highlights the relevance of the social milieu of the team for social integration of football clubs. Based on these results, sport club researchers should consider including the team level in multi-level analysis.