

# Socio-cultural and socio-affective integration of sport club members in Europe

## OBJECTIVE

### What is it about?

These Quick Facts are about the **socio-cultural** and **socio-affective integration** of members in sport clubs. This means the focus is not simply placed on formal membership of selected target groups but on the qualitative aspects of the affiliation with the clubs. Hence, the question is not if someone is integrated in the club, rather how well they are integrated.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### What is socio-cultural and socio-affective integration?

Socio-cultural and socio-affective integration are aspects of **social integration**. If social integration is viewed as a process, then structural integration, which is defined by formal affiliation or membership, is the first step. However, from a qualitative perspective there are also other, more complex requirements to social integration. First, the cultural aspect, which can be described as a two way rapprochement process, where the individual member must understand the club's values and organisational culture and learn how to act accordingly (**assimilation**); and where the club vice versa, needs to be open for heterogeneous views and perspectives of its membership (**pluralism**). Last but not least, social inclusion also contains the emotional aspect, with emotional attachment (**identification**) to the sports club arising from regular participation in the club's activities and from the personal relationships to other members in the club (**interaction**) → Fig.1.

**RELEVANCE**

**Why should clubs and federations be concerned with socio-cultural and socio-affective integration?**

The recruitment and retention of members and volunteers is one of the main challenges for sports clubs in Europe.

Understanding how and why members participate in the club’s tasks and activities, what binds them emotionally to the club, or how members interact with each other, can help the organisation find new ideas and strategies to recruit and retain members.

*Aspects of Social Integration in Sports Clubs*

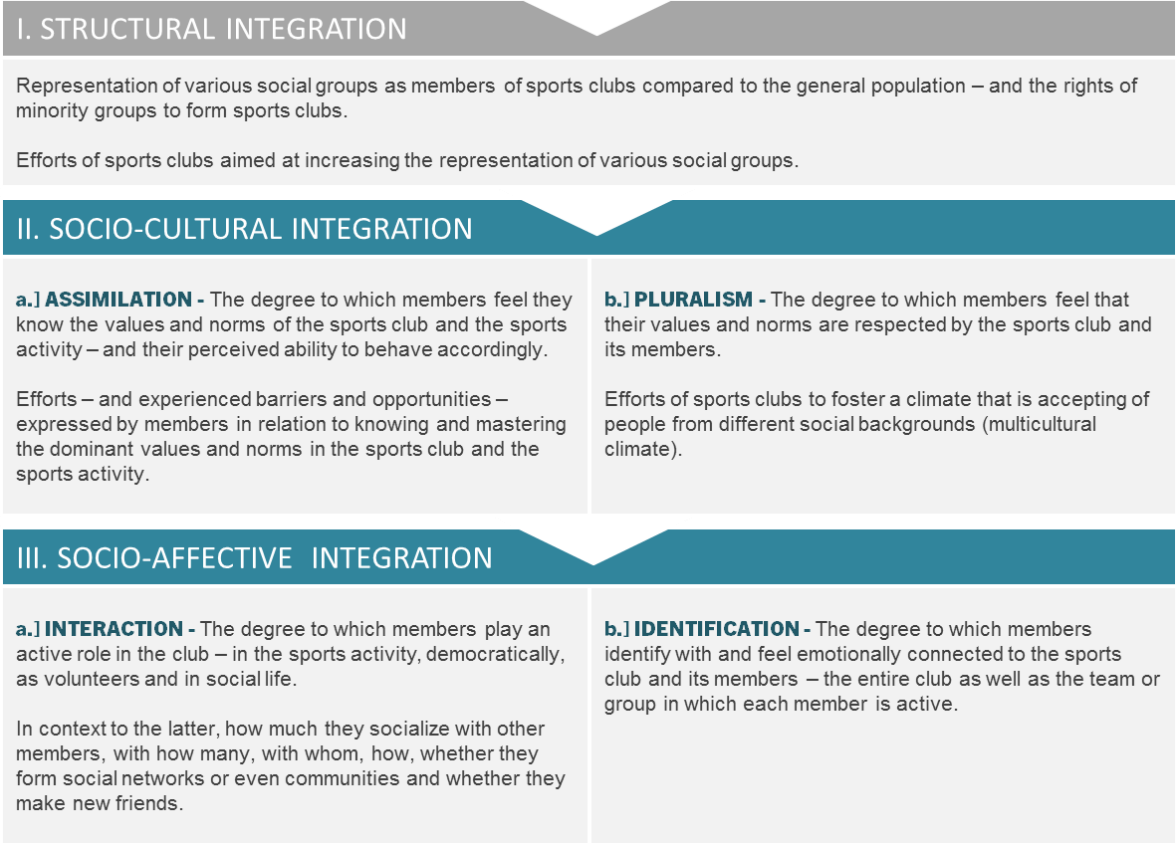


Fig. 1: Aspects of social integration in sports clubs

## METHOD

### How was socio-cultural and socio-affective integration analyzed?

Comparative data was collected for the "Social Inclusion and Volunteering in Sports Clubs in Europe" - Project (SIVSCE). As part of this research two major surveys were implemented. The first one was answered by more than 35,000 sports clubs from 10 European countries. The second survey was designed as a follow-up in which more than 13,000 club members were interviewed. These club members were recruited from almost 650 clubs that were selected from the initial club survey → Quick Facts.1.

Many questions have been used in this survey to analyze the level of socio-cultural and socio-affective integration of sport club members. However, to keep it short, only a few selected results can be presented here to outline the potential connection between the different dimensions of social integration in sports clubs in Europe → Fig. 2. The underlying evaluation logic implies that as a member you need to understand the club's value system and organisational procedures to be able to participate in the club's activities and to become part of the club's social networks, which in turn is a prerequisite to develop a sense of identification and emotional commitment to the club.

### Evaluation Logic – Socio-Cultural and Socio-Affective Integration

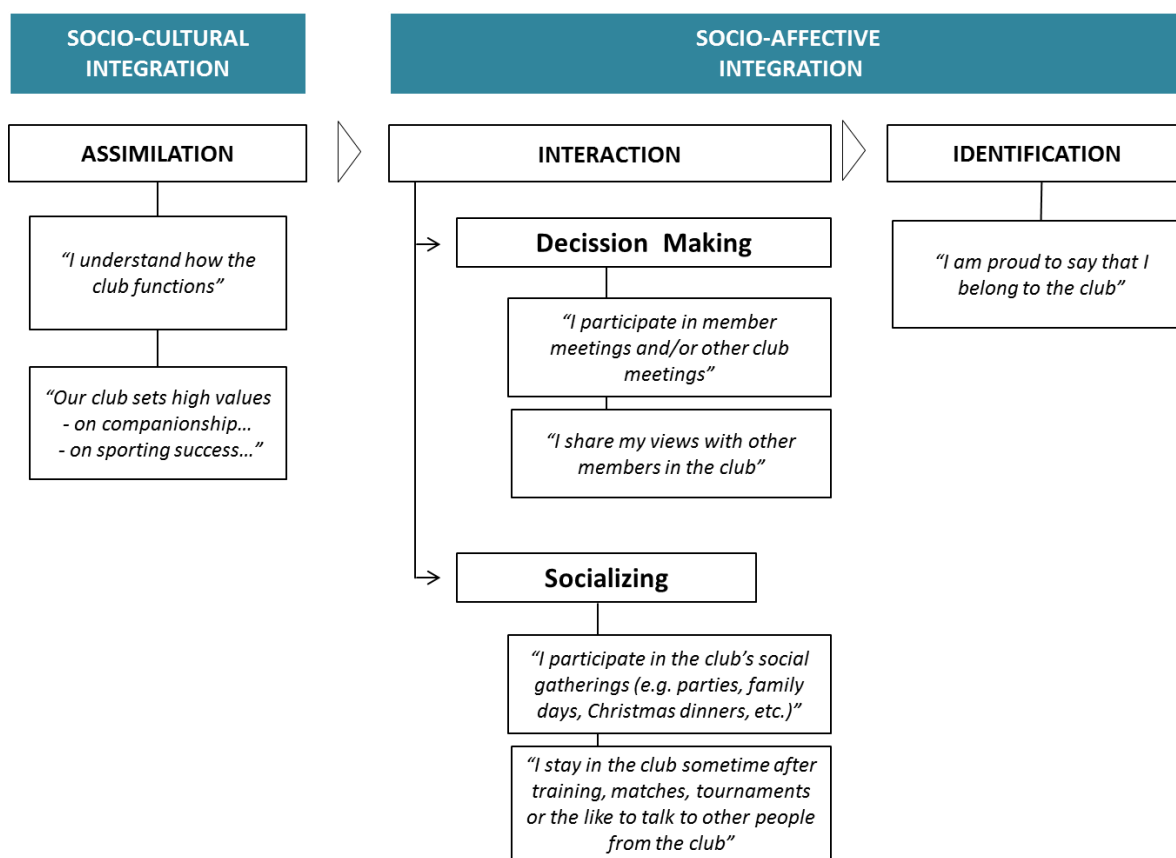


Fig. 2: Evaluation Logic – Socio-Cultural and Socio-Affective Integration

## RESULTS

### Companionship or sporting success – What is more important for sports clubs in Europe?

Like in other organisations too, expected behavior in sports clubs is determined by norms and values which can be written or unwritten and which are often only implicitly agreed upon by the club's members or volunteers. The prevalent attitudes towards *sporting success* or *companionship* are just two examples for the clubs' value systems. These values are relevant for both, organisational and individual decisions in the club. Figures 3a and 3b show that both values are still rather important in all countries, whereas companionship seems to be slightly more important in most countries → Fig. 3a and 3b.

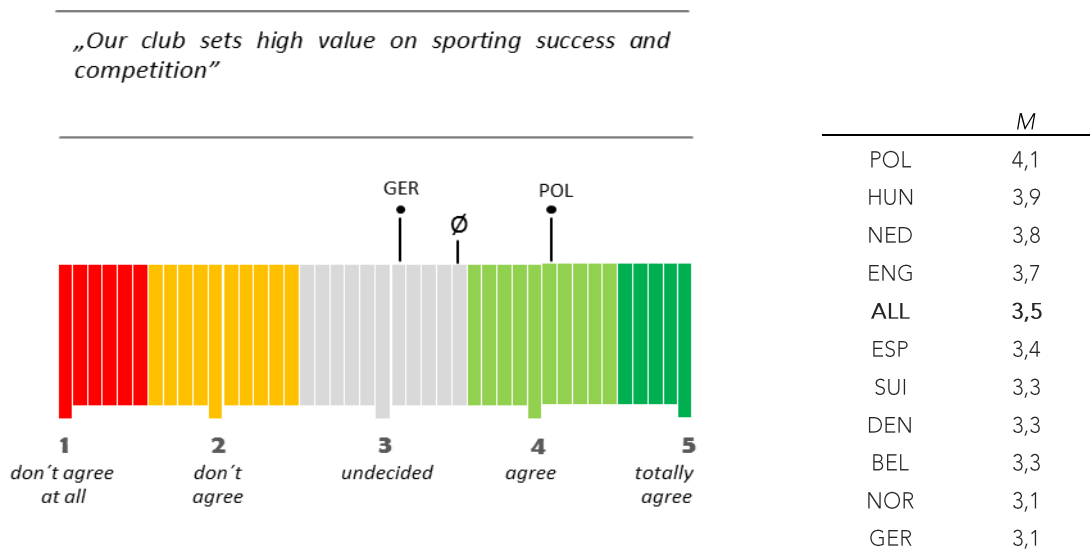


Fig. 3a: Sporting success as a value in sports clubs in Europe

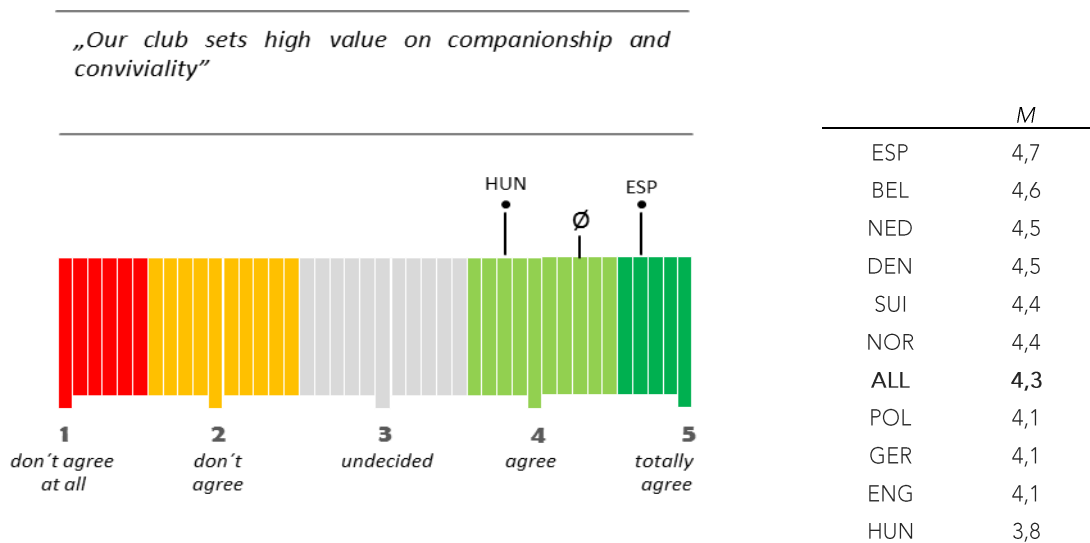


Fig. 3b: Companionship as a value in sports clubs in Europe

## Do sport club members understand “how things work” in their club?

Measuring to which degree each member understands and agrees to each of the club’s norms, values or procedures would be rather complex and costly. Therefore a more general measure of the member’s capability to assimilate to the club environment was used in the SIVSCE survey. Club members were asked if they understand “*how the club functions*”. The results show, that the majority of club members feels they know how things work in their club. The proportions of those that are not so sure about this are slightly higher in Germany and Poland → Fig. 4.

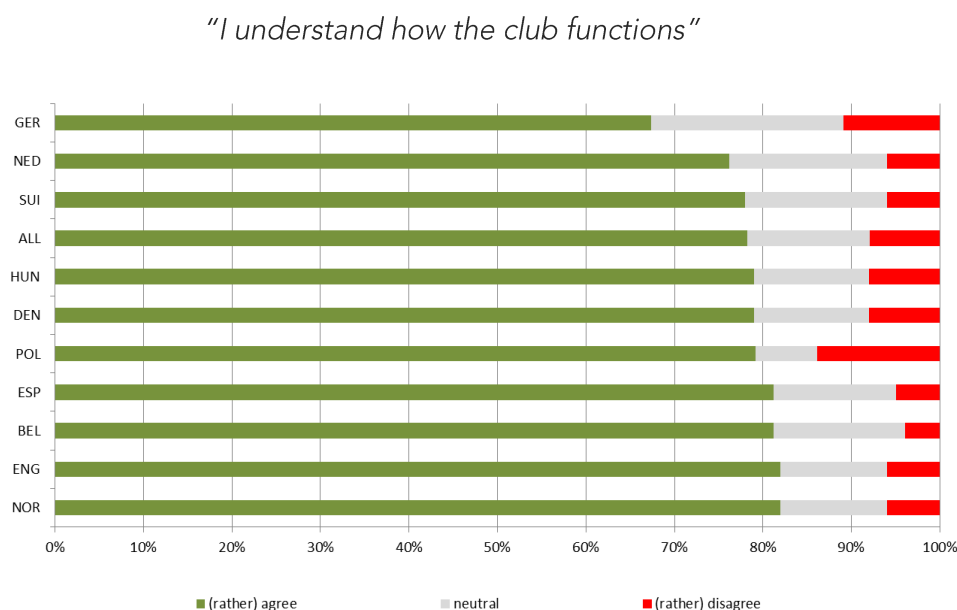


Fig. 4: Measuring members’ capability to assimilate to the club environment: “I understand how the club functions”

Besides the rather small regional differences, the characteristics of members and volunteers also exert some influence. The data for example shows that men are a bit more confident than women when it comes to understanding their club and the level of agreement also inclines with age and level of education.

Volunteers – and in particular those who volunteer regularly – are significantly more inclined to understand how the club functions and when and how to influence decision making than non-volunteers. Regardless of their form of affiliation, the duration of their affiliation also positively influences assimilation. It would seem that longstanding affiliation fosters knowledge and skills about how to participate in the member democracy.

People who were not born in the country in which they are currently a member of a sports club are slightly less in agreement with the statements on assimilation than those for whom the sports club is located in their country of origin. This could indicate that for some people with migration background, it is more difficult to know and master the skills necessary to understand decision making in their respective sports clubs.

Finally, the analysis also reveals that the ability of members and volunteers to understand and master decision making structures in their respective clubs declines with increasing size

of the sports clubs to which they are connected. This result could reflect that decision making structures perhaps seem more complex in larger than in smaller organisational units – and that the perceived distance from member and/or volunteer to the board is somewhat bigger in a large sports club.

## Who participates in formal and informal decision making in sport clubs?

A good understanding of how the club functions and in particular a good understanding of its decision making structures are important requirements to actually participate in these processes. In general, sports clubs offer various opportunities for participating in democratic decision making. They usually offer formal options like member meetings as well as informal participation opportunities such as free speech and open discussion among members.

Looking at the participation in member or club meetings (not including the annual general meeting), figure 5 points towards a more or less equal division of members into three groups. About one third completely abstains, one third only participates from time to time, while the most “active third” participates rather frequently → Fig. 5. There are remarkable differences between countries. In Spain and Poland, members and volunteers are much more inclined to participate than in Denmark or the Netherlands. It is worth noting however, that part of the explanation for the differences between countries can be explained by different traditions as to how often clubs hold these meetings.

Turning to *informal participation* in member democracy, the share of members and volunteers that are active inclines somewhat compared to formal participation. Hence, more members and volunteers are active in club democracy than what is reflected solely by looking at the turnout at the annual general meeting or at other member and/or club meetings. Close to two thirds of the members and volunteers report that they speak their mind to key persons in the club at least once every half year. Three out of four members share their views with other members in the club at least occasionally → Fig. 6. Once again we clearly find the most active members and volunteers in Spain and Poland, while the lowest proportion of active members are found in Denmark, the Netherlands and Switzerland. For instance, the proportion of members and volunteers that speak their mind to key persons in the club at least once a month is relatively high in Spain (66%) and Poland (51%), while in Switzerland (20%) and in Denmark (21%) it is much lower.

Combining formal and informal democratic participation, the members and volunteers were asked to report when they had last attempted to influence decision making in their respective clubs. A little more than two out of five (41%) report that they have never attempted this, while approximately the same percentage (42%) report to have attempted this within the last six months. Hence, the answers reflect a high degree of polarization.

*"I participate in member meetings and/or other club meetings"*

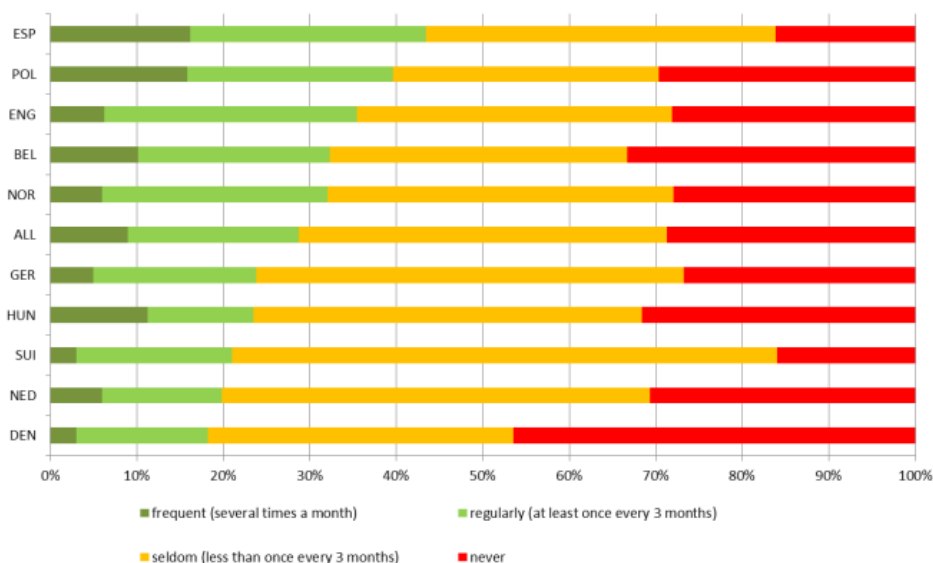


Fig. 5: Measuring members' level of interaction: "I participate in member meetings and/or other club meetings"

*"I share my views with other members in the club"*

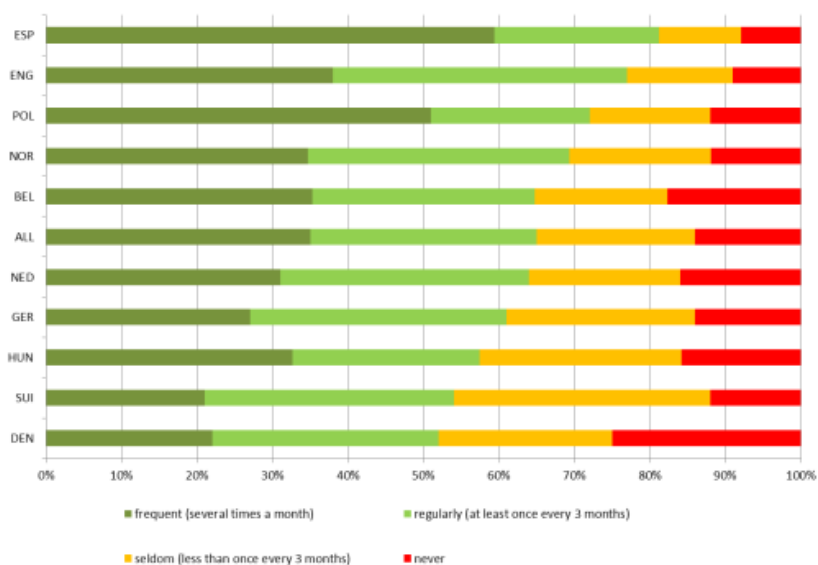


Fig. 6: Measuring members' level of interaction: "I share my views with other members in the club"

### Who participates in formal and informal social activities in sport clubs?

Sports clubs can be – and are to a large extent – settings in which members and volunteers engage socially with other people from the club. Across all countries, it is a minority of members that do not interact with other members and volunteers by taking part in the social life within clubs. Nevertheless, there is also some evidence of polarization in the sense that some members and volunteers are very active in the social life, while others participate very infre-

quently or not at all. Significant variations in the participation trends of members and volunteers exist between countries just as was the case with regard to democratic participation.

One aspect of social participation is the habit of members and volunteers to participate in their club's social gatherings. Only 14% report never to participate in such gatherings, while a bit more than one third (37%) participate at least every three months → Fig. 7. Even more frequent is the tendency of members and volunteers to 'stay behind after training, matches, tournaments or the like to talk to other people from the club'. Almost the same percentage (13%) never engages in this manner, but the percentage that informally exchanges with other members at least every three months is significantly higher (78%) → Fig. 8.

*"I participate in the club's social gatherings (e.g. parties, family days, Christmas dinners, etc.)"*

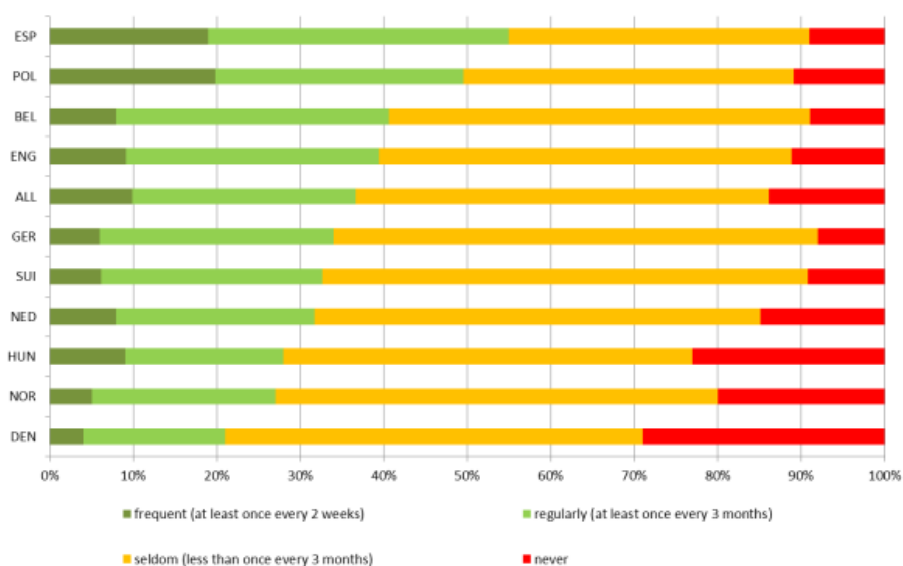


Fig. 7: Measuring members' level of interaction: "I participate in the club's social gatherings (e.g. parties, family days, Christmas dinners, etc.)"

This is particularly true for members and volunteers in sports clubs in Belgium and the Netherlands, where some 50 % report to stay behind and talk to other people from the club at least once a week. This figure is lowest among members and volunteers in Hungary (23%) and Norway (26%) while Denmark has the highest percentage of members and volunteers that report never to participate (23%).

As a very interesting result, the data shows a significant correlation between the level of understanding "how the club functions" and all of the above mentioned forms of participation. However, this is like the riddle of the chicken and egg: It is difficult to define whether members participate in democratic decision making and social interaction because they know how the club functions, as suggested in fig.2; or is it rather the other way round, and members that participate in meetings and frequently stay back to talk to other meetings develop a better understanding of how things work in their club? → Fig. 2



*“I stay in the club sometime after training, matches, tournaments or the like to talk to other people from the club”*

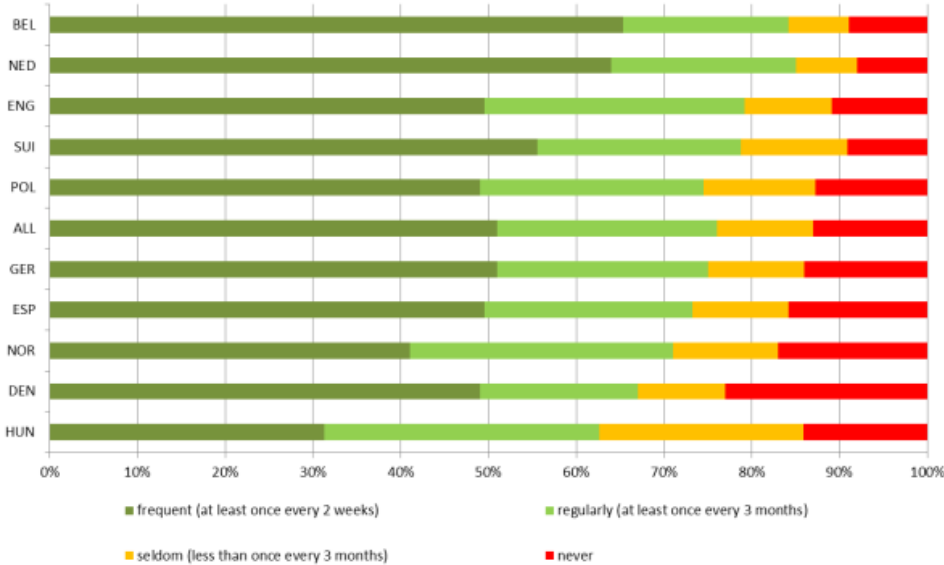


Fig. 8: Measuring members’ level of interaction: “I stay in the club sometime after training, matches, tournaments or the like to talk to other people from the club”

### How committed are sport club members to their clubs?

Across all ten countries it is evident that the vast majority of members and volunteers are emotionally committed to their respective clubs. 87% of the members and volunteers agree that there is a good atmosphere in the club. Nearly the same amount (83%) agrees that they are ‘proud to say that they belong to the club’. The highest proportion of members that are proud to belong to their club can be found in England, Hungary and Spain → Fig. 9.



Photo: Brian Nonbo/Dansk Firmidræt

*"I am proud to say that I belong to the club"*

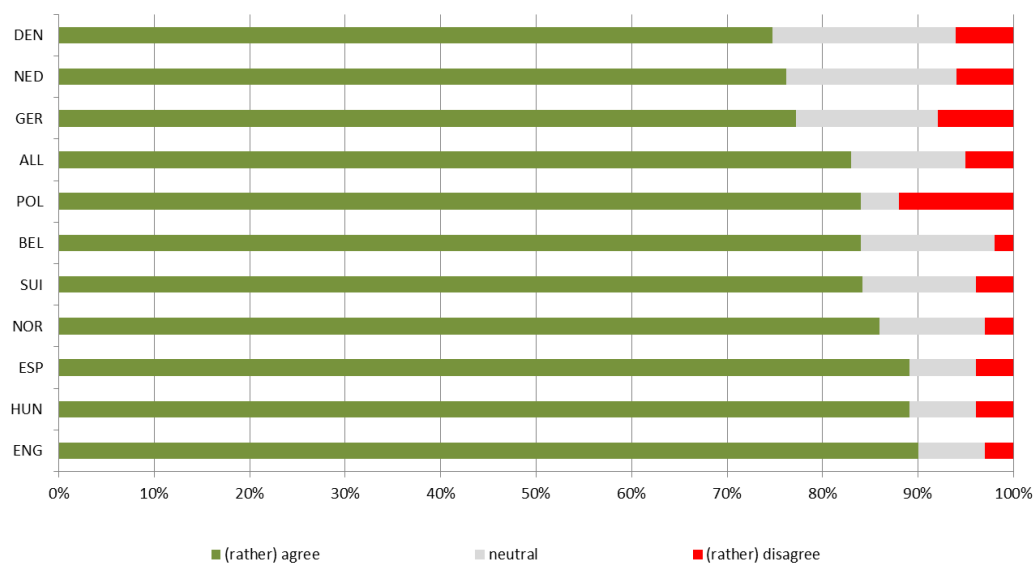


Fig. 9: Measuring emotional commitment and identification: "I am proud to say that I belong to the club"

If we look at member demographics we can see that identification with the club is slightly lower among women than men and also among people who consider themselves as part of a minority.

However, a much more significant influence derives from another variable. Members who do not understand "how the club functions" are more inclined to disagree with the statement "I am proud to say that I belong to the club", while being a volunteer on the other hand seems to have a positive influence on this kind of identification with the club.

**STARTING POINTS FOR PRACTICE**

**What are the common, practical action points that can be derived for clubs and federations?**

At this stage of the project most of the results are still rather descriptive. However the results discussed in these "Quick Facts" already point out to a few aspects that might be relevant for clubs and federations:

(1) The data shows, that a high level of social integration exists in sports clubs in Europe. The majority of sport club members have a good understanding of how their club functions; most

members participate in the club's democratic processes; members interact with each other and are committed to their club. In all countries a rather small number of members (roughly one or two out of ten) do not make use of these opportunities. In some countries this proportion is somewhat higher but there is no clear indication that any specific group is systematically excluded from any of these opportunities.

(2) Volunteering seems to have a positive influence on socio-cultural and socio-affective integration. Thus, the promotion of voluntary commitment is not only important to "get things done in the club" but also an important investment into the clubs level of cohesion.

(3) The degree to which members "understand how their club functions" correlates with most other aspects regarding their level of social integration. Therefore, sport clubs might need to consider whether it is necessary and possible to make some of the clubs' values more explicit, better explain some of the organisational procedures etc. This might be particularly important for larger clubs.



Photo: Jeanne Kornum/DIF

## QUICK FACTS FOR SPORTS CLUBS

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

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

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

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

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