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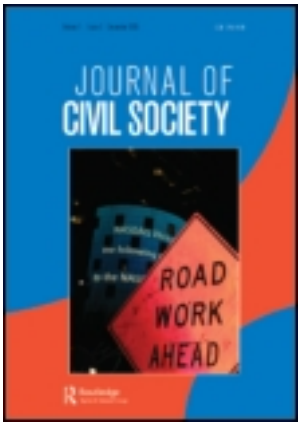

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Sport, civil society and social integration: The case of Norwegian voluntary sport organizations

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Sport, Civil Society and Social Integration: The Case of Norwegian Voluntary Sport Organizations

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ABSTRACT *Voluntary sport organizations make up the largest part of voluntary sector in many countries. Yet, in light of the renewed social and political interest in civil society, we do not know very much about how sport organizations operate and function. Accordingly, this article addresses the question of how voluntary sport organizations contribute to social integration through differences in community structures. First a theoretical framework making it possible to distinguish between various forms of community structures—strong, weak, mediated and pragmatic communities—is developed. Then, the first empirical part describes how members in sport organizations belong to such various forms of communities. Next, the article explains differences in social integration through social background, variation in participation in sports and various recruitment channels. Finally, the article explores how differences in community structures matters for the experience of sport activity, for organizational democracy and social capital (trust and political interests).*

KEY WORDS: Sport, social integration, civil society, voluntary organization

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Introduction

Scientific and political documents mostly consider participation in voluntary organizations as a social good—as a place where people meet, new social networks are formed and existing networks are confirmed or developed. Such social networks are supposed to strengthen communities, further various individual and social competencies, and generate social integration. Accordingly, civil society—and voluntary organizations as the predominant part hereof—is considered important because it is supposed to perform important social functions. This social and political desire for a strong and vibrant civil society is an answer to a classical sociological problem associated with the process of modernization understood as social differentiation, often taken to mean a lack of social integration (Tilly, 1984; Smart,

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1995; Offe, 1996; Luhmann, 1997; Taylor, 2004) and/or a failure to fulfil the promises made by the enlightenment prophets (Habermas, 1987; see also Bell, 1978; Featherstone, 1991; Lasch, 1991). In sport studies, Guttmann (1978), Morgan (1994), Bette (1999), Maguire (1999) and Cachay and Thiel (2000) have raised some of the same questions and concerns.

What is not always too clear, however, is, first, which problems are to be solved and which social functions are to be accomplished by civil society actors. Second, it is not clear how various social actors within civil society actually are to fulfil such visions Third, there is a lack of empirical data on whether, or how, these functions actually are accomplished.[1] In the case of the topic of this paper, it is also worth noting both the neglect of sport[2] in the civil society discourse, and the lack of focus upon civil society within the sociology of sport.[3] Accordingly, the aim of this paper is, first, to substantiate at a theoretical level how participation in and activity within voluntary organizations might provide an answer to one of the most frequently cited maladies of modernity: the need for social integration. Second, the purpose is to see how voluntary sport organizations actually are able to fulfil the visions of social integration appearing in this more accurate theoretical framework. The empirical part of the study is based on data on members of Norwegian sport organizations.

To achieve these aims, the theoretical challenge behind this problematic is presented: voluntary organizations as part of civil society fulfilling important social integrative functions. In this context, where the focus is on participation in voluntary sport organizations, the topic of social integration is most fruitfully introduced as a question of 'community structures'. Based on a typology of communities consisting of various structural and reciprocal dimensions, I will investigate how 'social integration' reflects different social and practical aspects and in turn this also has repercussions for various social and political factors. Following this theoretical section, the Norwegian case, data and methods are presented. The subsequent parts of the article are devoted to empirical analyses; first, a descriptive part on the various forms of community structures associated with participation in sport organizations, then more explanatory, although rather explorative, analyses of (i) what actually brings about differences in community structures; and (ii) what implications variations in community structures have for practical, organizational and political aspects. The paper concludes with a summary and theoretical discussion of the empirical findings.

Civil Society, Social Integration and Community Structures: Theoretical Framework

Current civil society discourses' questioning of modern societies' ability to provide social integration are often interesting and timely: they both point out deficiencies in recent social theory and direct attention to important actual social and political problems (Cohen & Arato, 1992; Walzer, 1992; Seligman, 1993; Hall, 1995; Taylor, 1995; Habermas, 1996; Alexander, 1997; Turner, 2001; for sport, see Arnold, 1992; Roche, 1993; Morgan, 1994; Eley & Kirk, 2002). Nevertheless, most of the principal concepts of these discourses—e.g., 'civil society', 'social capital', 'social integration', 'community', 'citizen(ship)'—do function as what Merton (1968, p. 140) once called "general sociological concepts" and what Blumer (1969, p. 147) labeled "sensitizing concepts" they give some indication of the relevance of a social field, point out some general interesting

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problems, but to only a limited degree give concrete advice on how to build fruitful theoretical typologies, how these typologized phenomena function as part of larger social and political settings, and not the least, how to approach such phenomena empirically.

Thus, with regard to theoretically fruitful empirical analyses of sport and civil society, two steps have to be taken. First, as a guidance for useful distinct theoretical analyses and concrete empirical studies, 'civil society' covers too much, and the topic of the study therefore has to be limited. Second, one also has to specify how to approach such a 'restricted phenomenon', how to classify it, how to explain its various manifestations and which causes and consequences to assign to them. In methodological terms, one has to move from the level of 'background concepts' through 'systematized concepts' to some kind of indicators (Adcock & Collier, 2001). To achieve these aims, I will commence from the concept of civil society as it commonly appears in sociological discourses and then approach what I have chosen as the more concrete topic of this article: how social interaction and relations in voluntary sport organizations might contribute to 'social integration': its manifestations, its causes and its implications.

Civil society is often understood negatively—as what it is not. Historically and unanimously, civil society is not the state. Thereafter, and still usual, civil society is not the market. Some include the family as part of civil society, but in the context of this article it seems most appropriate and fruitful to exclude the family. After excluding these three spheres of interaction, civil society comprises (operating with a very simple model of modern society) that which remains: social movements, voluntary organizations, foundations and the public sphere are the arenas mostly included. Addressing the characteristics of this sphere of action, it is possible to proceed in a similar 'negative manner' where civil society (in its more ideological forms) is free from the other institution's most burdensome characteristics. Interaction in civil society is not based on the relations of power and authority found within the political system and the state; it is not characterized by the narrow, efficient, instrumentalism found within the market, neither is it dominated by the demanding personal intimacy of the family. Interaction in civil society is assumed to involve 'whole people' not one-dimensionally pursuing narrow personal interests, acting only according to their strategic power interests or being lead by their intimate life-world relations; they are rational, but open to the many dimensions of modern rationality and the power of the better argument, compassionate, fair and emphatic, although with a sufficient distance to overly personal matters. In this way, civil society action gives both the opportunity to establish endurable, solid and obligatory social bonds of a certain 'quality', and at the same time allows 'the content' of the communication associated with these social relations to hold a certain cognitive, normative and emotional quality. As part of a larger context, these qualities of civil society—close relations, bonds, knowledge and information, competences and rationality—are understood to improve the basic preconditions for a rational social development; whole and healthy individuals, establishing social relations and networks, founding communities and a sense of belonging, empowering (groups of) people and producing cultural and social capital.

Against this common background, the presentations and problematizations found in much of recent civil society sociology on the one hand appears rather abstract and does not seem to reflect the complexity of the phenomena in question; on the other hand, they easily appear ideological. So, even though they point to important problems, such approaches to civil society makes it difficult to study how voluntary organizations actually

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operate, and to see whether they have positive or negative social functions (Berman, 1997; Tamir, 1998; Cohen, 1999; Skockpol *et al.*, 2000; Little, 2002).

For civil society studies, the empirical focus has to a large extent been on weak and vertical relations (partly through the concept of social capital), and how such links bridge between social actors and groups. There has been less focus upon how civil society might have a bonding, integrative or community building effect (Widmalm, 2005). To the extent sport has been the focus of such civil society studies, they also seem to focus upon social capital as bridging or brokerage and to assume that sport organizations are relatively poor producers of such social capital (Stolle, 1998; Paxton, 2002; Wollebæk & Selle, 2002). Yet, both bonding/closure and bridging/brokerage might have positive functions, and might even require each other to really be consequential:

> Facilitating the trust and collaborative alignment needed to deliver the value of brokerage, closure is a complement to brokerage, such that the two together define social capital in a general way in terms of closure within a group and brokerage behind the group. (Burt, 2005, p. 7)

Since there has been less focus upon the community side of this issue (closure, bonding) and the effects of community structures, these will be the main topics in this article.

Consequently, a first theoretical step towards a better understanding of social integration within the field of voluntary (sport) organizations is to focus on a more explicit question, and in this context I have started by studying how participants actually experience relations with other members of the organization to see how they take part in a social community. Thus, a first question is simply what we take a community to mean and contain, and a useful definition is provided by Brint (2001) saying that:

> I will define communities as aggregates of people who share common activities and/or beliefs and who are bound together principally by relations of affect, loyalty, common values, and/or personal concern (i.e., interest in the personalities and life events of one another). (Brint, 2001, p. 8)

This definition makes clear that communities consist of at least two important components, and a basic distinction with respect to communities is whether they are based primarily on social interaction (face to face contact) and/or mediating structures—here affective bonds.[4] In the empirical studies below, I focus on the frequency of interaction within the setting of the sport organization, and for the intermediating dimensions I will focus upon the obligations and reciprocity the members assign to others and the social relations within the sport organizations. Combining high and low values on these two dimensions, we find, on the one hand, that they might go together with high values in what we at a general level could call 'strong communities'. On the other hand, there are communities with a low level of both activity and mediation, i.e., 'weak communities'. Furthermore, there are two other possibilities: high frequency of action but low reciprocity—'pragmatic communities'—and low frequency of action but, nevertheless, obligatory social relations—'mediated communities'. As illustrated in Table 1, this gives a general typology of how people might experience the relations to others within a community.

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Table 1. Theoretical typology of community structures

		Social interaction (frequency)	
		High	Low
Emotional bonds	Strong	Strong communities	Mediated communities
	Weak	Pragmatic communities	Weak communities

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Having developed a theoretical model of community structures, a first question is how this picture reflects other societal factors. On one level, it is possible to investigate variations in community structures in light of individual characteristics—gender and age—which also reflect more general societal cleavages. Next, qualities of the sport activity itself might have implications for the emergence of communities. Finally, it is also pertinent to see that patterns of social interaction within a 'leisure community' reflect already existing social relations to a certain extent. In this paper I will include this last factor through the question of how individuals are recruited to a sport organization.

A second question is how community structures might have social consequences. Large sections of the civil society discourse—and especially the part on social capital (Putnam, 1992, 2000; Levi, 1996; Stolle, 1998; Portes, 1998; Wilson, 2001; Paxton, 2002; Wollebæk & Selle, 2002)—are devoted to the question of how social integration at one level including memberships, activity and relations to voluntary associations, has implications on an other and 'higher' level: on an organizational level or for political and societal institutions (Habermas, 1996; Cohen, 1999). Thus, an important empirical question becomes how differences in community structures might have implications for what takes place outside the sport activity itself, both in the sport organization and on other social arenas. There are three interesting ways to approach this question based on our data. First, and very directly associated with the sport activity, we might ask how the activity (sport) is experienced: What kind of meaning do the members attach to their sport activity? Second, I will question how community structures have implications for the participants view on organizational matters. A third approach, most notably related to the 'social capital' discourse, questions the social and political implications of civic participation, and again, the claim is that there is a positive relation between civic engagement and various social competencies.

The Norwegian Case

The development of Norwegian sport and its voluntary organizations share many historical characteristics with other Western nations (Hargreaves, 1986; Olstad, 1987; Heinemann, 1999). The starting point for sport as an organized activity was the rifle associations' operating in close association with the military forces around 1860. Thereafter, inputs influential in most other western countries are essential: German and Swedish gymnastics, 'English sports', the promotion of health and sanity and a period marked by class-conflict. The post-war period is characterized, first, by an enormous growth in both number of sport organizations and level of activity, and second, by a differentiation within the field of voluntary sport organizations (Skirstad, 1999; Seippel, 2002, 2004). Looking for Norwegian particulars, three factors stand out. First, a relatively large proportion of the Norwegian

population—around 30%—are members of a voluntary sport organization. Among the most central characteristics of these organizations is their size: they are small, 36% of them have less than 50 members, 54% have less than 100 members, and no more than 3% of the organizations have more than 1000 members. In two-thirds of the organizations, all work is done voluntarily. At the opposite end of the scale, in only 10% of the organizations is less than 90% of the work done by volunteers. Secondly, it seems important to point out how geography and climate has made certain sport disciplines—skiing and skating—more popular in Norway than in southern countries and such traditional and historical sports have also played a central role in the process of nation-building (Goksøyr, 1998). More recently, however, sport as a cultural carrier has been influenced just as much by global processes as national traditions (e.g., football; Goksøyr, 1994; Maguire, 1999; Miller *et al.*, 2001), and some of the traditional national particularities are about to lose their impact. The most popular sport—based on the number of organizations having the sport on their agenda—is football (34% of organizations) followed by ski and 'exercising groups' (18%), handball (14%), track and field (11%), shooting (10%) and gymnastics (8%). Thirdly, one should notice that there is a close relation between voluntary sport organizations and the state (Goksøyr, 1996; Selle, 2000).

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Data and Methods

The data applied in this article originate from The Sport Club Study 1999–2000 which is a two-level study. First, there is data on an organizational level—Norwegian voluntary sport organizations—based on a random sample of organizations from the register held by the Norwegian Olympic Committee and Sport Federation (NOC). From a population of about 7000 organizations a random sample of 549 organizations were sent a questionnaire. Two-hundred and ninety-four organizations responded, a response-rate of 54%. Compared to the size of the organizations in the population, these data fit very well (Seippel, 2002).

The data on the individual level—members of the sport organizations above 12 years—consist of a random sample of members from these organizations; 9377 members were sent a questionnaire, and 1660 answered. This gives a response rate of about 30%.[5] Several factors contributed to this relatively low rate of response. First, because we were to cover a very wide spectre of age groups without knowing the age of the members, we had to include various versions of our questionnaire and ask people to choose the right one. Second, because of restrictions given by The Data Inspectorate, several age groups needed permission from their parents (a signature) whereas some just had to inform their parents of their participation. Thirdly, the questionnaire was sizeable (20 pages at most). The important question, however, is how this response rate affects the data. The most useful available information on the population (members of sport organizations) is gender and age composition. For gender, the relevant population consists of 38% females, 62% males; our sample having 39 and 61% respectively. For age, the population has 20% in the age 13- to 16-years, 80% 17-years and more, our sample 22% and 78% respectively. Due to this very good correspondence between our data and the population, we have found it worthwhile to apply the data in spite of the disappointing response rate. Yet, it seems reasonable to assume a bias in the data, where those more interested in or devoted to sport or sport organizations have tended to answer our questionnaire. This could give a too 'positive' image of sport, a fact to keep in mind when interpreting the following analyses.

Sport and Community Structures: Empirical Overview

This section is concerned with the basic question of what kind of community structures we find for members of voluntary sport organizations, and how they might have various social implications. Yet, in light of the fact that communities must be seen as processes—reflecting existing as well as resulting from new social networks—I will commence the empirical analyses by looking at how people are recruited into sport organizations, assuming that this is of relevance for the development of community structures.

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Recruitment to Voluntary Sport Organizations

An immediate and implicit idea often seems to be that participation in voluntary associations in itself is the starting point for building a community, and if successful, the basis for social integration. But the case might just as well be that associations reflect, build on or simply extend already existing social networks. Whereas many theories on social and political mobilization state that some kind of social breakdown, specific social characteristics or lines of conflict mobilizes people, research on social movement and voluntary organizations has showed that already existing social networks are of utmost importance for recruiting people. Snow *et al.* (1980) and Diani (1995) have both found that around 70% of participants in social movements and voluntary organizations are mobilized through existing social networks. Such networks are important both because they involve specific forms of socialization, they provide the concrete relations between individuals and an organization, and they might function as that which transcends the dilemma associated with the problems of collective action (Passy, 2001).

Analysing how people were recruited to the sport organizations on a first and most general level, it is advisable to distinguish between those who get in touch with an organization on their own initiative, and those approaching the organization through already existing social networks. Next, one should distinguish between various sorts of 'already existing' networks, of which the most important are family, friends, schools and the sport organizations themselves.

On the question of how people became members of a sport organization, it is interesting to note that close to one third of the members of our organizations contend they contacted the organization themselves; that is, social networks were probably less important. Next, almost 30% started their 'organized sport career' through friends, 23% were recruited through various family relations, whereas almost 10% were recruited through institutions: school (2.4%), or the sport organization took the initiative (7.6%). This finding confirms the results from studies by Snow *et al.* (1980) and Diani (1995).

Table 2. How were you recruited to the sport organization?

My parents introduced me	15.3%
My siblings introduced me	2.7%
"Other family" introduced me	5.3%
I went with some friends	29.5%
The sport club contacted me	7.6%
I contacted the sport club directly	31.1%
I was introduced through school	2.4%
Other	6.2%
Total (*N*)	100.1 (1584)

In sum, this indicates that the social networks found within voluntary sport organizations to a large extent builds on already existing social networks. Yet, at the same time, it is worth noting that about one third does not so, and it also seems reasonable to assume that the various networks probably have different functions with respect to what kind of social networks they might support and further within the organization. For instance, it seems sound to assume that family-networks probably have a stronger socializing function than institutional recruitments (school, the association itself) which have a stronger 'coupling' function. Networking through friends might have both these functions—socializing and bridging—but, probably, to quite various extents.

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Social Interaction in Sport Organization

A common sense assumption when studying social integration is that there is a kind of social interaction going on, and the first empirical question then simply becomes: How often are people active in their sport organizations?

Adding the frequencies of 'training' and 'competition' gives the total level of activity in the sport organizations, and the index reveals, interestingly, a rather differentiated pattern of activity (Table 3). First, 18% of the members in our study are passive members; that is, never active.[6] Second, about the same proportion of the members (19%) are active less than once a week. Next, 23% of the members are active one or two times a week, and a little more than a quarter are active more than two but less than four times a week; 13% of the members of the sport organizations are active four times a week or more.

Intermediations: Reciprocity and Obligations

The other main dimension in the basic approach to social integration as community structures is the question of the mediating structures, here the reciprocity associated with the activity by the participants. As shown in the theoretical framework, a high level of activity does not necessarily have to go together with reciprocity or commitment in the relations to the other members of the organization.

The concrete analyses are based on two questions tapping two kinds of reciprocity and obligations in the relations to team-mates. The first question asks if respondents were expecting to get help, support or care in case of personal problems (social reciprocity). The second question asks if respondents would expect to get economic help if that was

Table 3. Frequency of activity in the sport organization[a]

Never	18.2%
Less than once a week	18.5%
Once to twice a week	22.7%
More than twice and less than four times a week	27.9%
Four times a week and more	12.7%
Total (*N*)	100.0 (1614)

[a]The variable is an index built on two questions: "How often do you usually exercise in/with your sport club?" and "How often do you take part in competition(s) as member of your sport club".

needed (material reciprocity). Table 4 gives the results on the social and material obligations experienced by members of Norwegian sport organizations.

Table 4 shows, first, that with respect to social reciprocity, a large proportion of members (63%) believe—either they are sure or only think so—that they would get this kind of help. But, on the other hand, close to 40% of the members do not think or know whether they are entitled to such support. Second, we see that there are differences between 'social' and 'material' support; fewer people think they would get financial support than social support: about 40% think so, almost 60% don't think so (or do not know).

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Community Structures: Complete Typology

The next step on the way towards a fruitful understanding of community structures is to combine these two fundamental dimensions and see how they may function together as a typology in the further analyses. There is no obvious way to combine the values of the two variables—activity and obligations—into a composite community typology. This implies that sound judgement is needed to conclude on where to put the 'qualitative anchors' (Ragin, 2000); where to put the limits of high and low levels of activity and obligations (see the Appendix). Assessing the meaning of the two factors, the most reasonable way to combine the two variables gives the result presented in Table 5 which yields four substantial groups corresponding to the theoretical model introduced above.

The frequencies found in Table 5 are remarkable in themselves in various respects. First, it is noteworthy to see that there actually are substantial groups related to all the categories of our typology; there are members having the pure low-low and high-high combinations of the variables as well as the less evident combinations of the two. Second, the distribution of the members in the various categories is interesting: 17% of the members seems to have a rather weak tie to the sport organization: low level of activity and weak bonds to the other members in the organization. At the other opposite, 38% of the members combine a high level of activity with strong obligations towards other members. Next, it is interesting to note that nearly half the members combine these two attributes: 17% of the members are primarily linked to the sport organization through social bonds and only marginally through activity in the organization. On the other hand, more than a quarter of the members (28%) are active without experiencing strong social ties to the other members of the organization.

Table 4. Social and material reciprocity within voluntary sport organizations

	If you got personal problems and needed help, support or care, do you think you could get this from some of the other participants in your club?	If you had financial problems and had to borrow some money, do you think you could get money from some of the other participants in your club?
Yes, surely	28.6%	13.1%
Yes, think so	34.5%	27.4%
No, don't think so	17.2%	25.4%
No, surely	6.3%	10.9%
Don't know	13.3%	23.2%
Total *(N)*	99.9 (1560)	100.0 (1553)

Table 5. Typology of community structures. Empirical results

Type of community	Level of activity (social interaction)	Level of reciprocity (emotional bonds)	Per cent
Weak	Low	Low	17.4
Mediated	Low	High	16.6
Pragmatic	High	Low	28.3
Strong	High	High	37.7
Total *(N)*			100.0 (1550)

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Explaining Community Structures

Assuming this typology captures some substantial features of the social relations within sport organizations, it is interesting to see how these types eventually depend on social and individual characteristics and aspects of the activity in question. Because of the lack of comparable studies, the following analysis is rather explorative, but conventional sociological knowledge gives some indication of what to expect. First, because young people are often in a life phase between their 'old' family and new experiences associated with work and a new family of their own, leisure activities, including sport, are important. Hence it seems justifiable to assume that there is a negative correlation between age and strong community structures. Dunning states succinctly that "... modern sport emerged as a male preserve, a fact which helps to account for the strengths of male resistance to attempts by females to enter it or develop sporting enclaves of their own" (Dunning, 1999, pp. 236–237; see also McKay *et al.*, 2000). Sport is seen to reflect the patterns of gender socialization taking place within other social institutions as family, work and sexuality: females as the caring, other-directed and subdued, males as the dominant, active and competitive (Abraham, 1998; Theberge, 2000). In line with such assumptions, one could expect females to be more oriented towards the social aspects of the sport organizations and less towards the competition associated with the activity. For sport activities, I distinguish between team sport and individual sport, and assume that team sports are more conducive to strong communities than individual sports.[7] Type of recruitment could also influence this variable, and a sensible assumption is that being recruited through friends is most conducive to strong communities. Table 6 presents logistic regression analyses where dependent variables are each of the four types of community structures, each as a dummy variable (logits), and explanatory variables are social background (gender, age) kind of recruitment and one sport variable (team *vs.* individual sport).

In effect, the basic dimensions of the community structures of the voluntary sport organizations as they appear in our study depend on social background, recruitment channels and sport activity. Looking at the two pure types of community structures (strong and weak), several kinds of variable seem to matter. For those which are highly integrated, it looks as both gender and age are important variables; girls and the younger athletes are more highly integrated. Second, there is also a tendency for specific sports—team sports—to enhance strong communities. Third, being recruited through existing networks also furthers strong communities compared to those taking the initiative on their own. For those 'weakly' integrated we have the corresponding age effect: the elderly are less integrated. For sport activity, individual sports are conducive to weak social ties. Mediated

Table 6. Community structures (dummy variables) explained by social background, recruitment and sport activity. Logistic regression. Non-standardized regression coefficients $^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{*}p < 0.1$

	Strong communities	Weak communities	Mediated communities	Pragmatic communities
Constant	−0.85***	−1.93	−1.70	−0.37
Gender (male)	−0.38***	0.02	0.53***	0.08
Age	−0.22***	0.35***	0.31***	−0.12**
Individual *vs.* team sport	0.99***	−0.71***	−1.31***	−0.12
Recruit: family	0.51**	−0.54	−0.30	−0.12
Recruit: friends	0.55**	−0.75	−0.41	−0.08
Recruit: own	0.25	−0.49	−0.37	0.10
Cox & Sbell R^2	*0.14*	*0.07*	*0.12*	*0.01*
Nagelkerke R^2	*0.19*	*0.14*	*0.21*	*0.01*

communities also appear as the opposite to strong communities: male, elderly and individual sports. Finally, for pragmatic communities very little of the variance is explained and the only significant variable is age; the younger are more keen on being active without the social reciprocity.

In sum, these analyses imply, first, that there are significant differences between the members of sport organizations when it comes to how they are integrated in the community structure of the voluntary sport organizations (bonded). Second, the analyses indicate that there is a rather complicated process behind the picture of community structures emerging; both social background, recruitment and sport activity do matter for how people actually are integrated in their sport organization.

Consequences of Social Integration

Descriptions and understandings of how various groups of people are integrated through their memberships and activities in voluntary sport organizations are of interest in themselves. However, part of the interest for this topic has to do with the implications of the existence and prevalence of various types of community structures; whether variations in social relations and bonds—social integration—are good or bad for something or makes a difference with respect to other social phenomena. The aim of this section is, accordingly, to see how differences in community structures might influence others sides of organized sport. First, the way various participants attach meaning in a more general sense to their sport activity is studied. The second question is whether and how social integration is important for how the internal decisional structures of an organization is perceived. Third, I will analyse how community structures influence interest for and attitudes towards external political democratic processes.

Social Integration and Experiences of Sport

People taking part in sport activities attach some kind of meaning to their activity. This meaning might result in specific patterns of action and social obligations towards the

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sport organization, or, might reflect the situation of social integration. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see if there are some associations between kinds of community structures and the meaning assigned to the activity in sport organizations.

There are many potential reasons for being member of and active in sport organizations. In another study (Seippel, 2005) based on the same data, I have distinguished between seven motives for being active in sport organizations. Ranked according to their importance in our sample, they are as follow: Fun/Joy (4,3)[8], to keep fit (4,3), mental recreation (3,9), social relations (3,6), achievements/competition (3,1), expressivity (2,9) and body and appearance (2,4). Again, the investigation is rather explorative, but there is reason to believe that motives of an instrumental kind are more predominant among those active but less integrated (pragmatic communities), and that social and expressive motives have a stronger position among those socially integrated (especially in strong communities, but also in the mediated communities). In Table 7, each of the motives for participating in a sport organization is explained by a set of social background variables, community structures and sport activity.

First, it is interesting to note that in an analysis including both social background, community type and sport activity as reasons for undertaking sport, all factors matter for how meaning is attached to the sport activity. Second, being part of strong and pragmatic communities goes together with high values on most reasons, but for the more 'existential reasons'—expressivity, social relations, competition—being part of strong communities seems essential. Third, and with respect to individual variables, both gender and age are important. Females seem to get more out of their sport activity for all reasons except competition. Recreation is more important for the elderly, whereas competition, social relations, expressive and joyful elements are more important for the young athletes. In sum, this analysis shows that community structures are important (potentially both a cause and an effect) for how the activity in a sport organization is experienced by its members.

Social Integration, Internal Democracy and External Politics

From a sociological point of view, a much-discussed topic is how integration in voluntary organizations might affect social and political action and orientations external to the activity in the organization itself. In this section, I will look at how social integration might affect the experience of the organizational democracy in the sport organizations and how it influences two aspects of external social and political concerns: political interest and political trust.

For organizational democracy, the dependent variable is an index reflecting four aspects of how the decision-making processes in the organization are perceived; whether there is a major conflict in the organization, whether the leaders take decisions without informing the lay members, whether there is a lack of information from the leaders and whether there is too great a distance between members and leaders.[9] The assumption is that the stronger community, the greater the satisfaction with organizational processes (in social capital terms: bonding is a prerequisite for bridging). The political variables simply measure interest in politics and trust in the political system of a nation.[10] Again, the assumption is that strong community structures further political interest and political trust. Applying these variables as response-variables in the same manner as in the last section, gives the results presented in Table 8.

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Table 7. Motives for being active in voluntary sport organization explained by social background, sport activity and community type. Multivariate regression. Non-standardized regression coefficients. $^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{*}p < 0.1$

	Fun/joy	To keep fit	Mental recreation	Social aspect	Competition/ achievements	Expressivity	Body and appearance
	4.48***	4.21***	3.99***	3.37***	2.98***	3.05***	2.85***
Male	0.00	−0.17***	−0.27***	−0.04	0.47***	−0.05	−0.19***
Age	−0.11***	0.01	0.15***	−0.07***	−0.26***	−0.13***	−0.04
Individual *vs.* team sport	0.04	−0.004	−0.22***	0.27***	0.04	−0.04	−0.13
Strong communities[a]	0.42***	0.36***	0.36***	0.53***	0.53***	0.76***	0.19*
Pragmatic communities	0.23***	0.20**	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.34***	0.08
Weak communities	−0.16	0.05	−0.06	−0.48***	−0.16	−0.33**	0.01
R^2	*0.16*	*0.04*	*0.13*	*0.20*	*0.29*	*0.14*	*0.02*

[a]Mediated communities as reference category.

Table 8. Perception of democracy in own sport organization and external social and political orientations explained by various independent variables. Multivariate regression analyses. Non-standardized regression coefficients. $^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{*}p < 0.1$

	Organizational democracy	Political interest	Political trust
Constant	16.49	4.45***	5.28***
Gender (male)	−0.15	0.35***	−0.12
Age	0.14	0.13***	0.16***
Individual *vs.* team sport	−1.84***	−0.01	0.18
Strong communities[a]	−0.02	−0.02	−0.33*
Pragmatic communities	−0.26	0.07	−0.23
Weak communities	−0.43	0.13	−0.20
R^2	*0.05*	*0.12*	*0.19*

[a]Mediated communities as reference category.

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When it comes to the first question of approval of the democratic functioning of one's organization, the only significant variable seems to be the kind of activity, which in turn might reflect organizational features. Community structures have no significant effect. With respect to the political variables, they seem mainly to depend upon social background factors. Political interest is largest among the elderly and males, whereas political trust is most prevalent among the elderly. The only significant influence of social integration in these analyses occurs when high social integration in sports seems to lower political trust. This finding could indicate that being consumed by sport distracts interest in social and political matters. In sum, community structures seem most important for the individual experiences of their sport activity, and are only marginally influential for internal and external democratic matters where personal characteristics seem more important. At a more theoretical level, bonding is not a sufficient prerequisite for bridging.

Conclusions and Discussion

Against the background of general political and scientific discourses, the aim of this article has been to shed some light on the topic of civil society through the question of social integration within a specific (and sociologically speaking, neglected) sector of civil society—voluntary sport organizations. The purpose has been both to provide an overview and description of a situation and, exploratively, to explain the situation described and to speculate on possible implications of this situation. Finally, the ambition has been to see how these more concrete and empirical studies might illuminate a theoretical discourse on civil society and voluntary organizations.

At the outset, I pointed out the vagueness of many of the concepts applied in the discourses on civil society, social integration and the like, and, consequently the need for more concrete theoretical approaches and empirical studies was pointed out. To answer the need for clearer theoretical frameworks, I focused on a two-dimensional concept of

community structures, which thereafter was applied in a larger setting; both reflecting and influencing existing individual, social and sportive factors.

At a descriptive level, I have illustrated how membership in voluntary sport organizations in practice implies very different social relations for those involved: 17% of the members are neither active nor experience social obligations towards other members in the organization (weak communities) whereas 38% are both 'very' active and do report strong social obligations towards their co-members (strong communities). There are also considerable groups of people in mixed kinds of communities: 17% with low levels of activity but rather strong social commitments (mediated communities) and 28% with high levels of activity but not conjoined with social commitments (pragmatic communities). So, in effect, on the one hand, given the high proportion of the population being member of a sport organization and the rather strong requirements for passing as socially integrated used above, one could say that voluntary sport organizations do play an important role for social integration in our late modern society. On the other hand, one should definitely not automatically conclude that being member of a voluntary sport organization implies social integration. Studying the various community types also shows clearly that both social background, recruitment and the sport activity itself influence level and kind of integration.

Next, this typology of community structures also tells us interesting things with respect to how integration in voluntary organizations affects other social phenomena. First, I have shown that, as expected, there is a relationship between how sport is experienced and community structures. More instrumental concerns are prevalent among those less integrated, whereas social and expressive experiences—sport as an existential concern—seem to require integration in the communities associated with the sport organizations. The investigation of how community structures influence the perception of decisional processes internal to organizations indicated that the most important variables were associated with patterns of activity, possibly reflecting organizational structures. For external democracy, individual characteristics stand out as the most important. To the degree that community matters, it seems to lower political trust. In short: community matters first and foremost for the experience of the activity itself (sport); social and sportive factors matter for internal and external democratic questions.

Returning to the theoretical discourses discussed in the introduction to the article, three points are worthy of notice. First, again, membership and activity in voluntary organization mean very different things: from pure passivity without obligations to intense activity and strong commitments. And finding such important differences within one field of civil society suggests that there are probably important differences both within other sectors and between various sectors of civil society. Second, diverse social groups seem to benefit differently from participation in such community structures. Hence, sport as a social good is a topic of relevance for social inequality studies. Third, the community structures found within sport organizations do not seem to matter for all the questions invoked in civil society discourses. There is convincing evidence showing that some of the goods associated with sport activity—social and expressive experiences—do require (or go together with) community structures of a specific kind. There are, however, no strong indications in our data supporting theories saying that activity in sport organizations, as such, has implications for other social aspects. For internal democracy, features of the activity are important whereas individual characteristics are more important for explaining external democratic factors.

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Again, it seems timely to distinguish between various sectors of voluntary sector and civil society to understand in which cases and in which ways civil society activities actually matter. With respect to sport, where there seems to be large differences when it comes to what kinds of communities people experience, variation in community structures have more implications for how the sport activity is experienced than for how one relates to other social institutions.

Notes

1. This critique is also valid for most studies of sport organizations: Heinemann and Schubert (1992, 1994) Ibsen (1992), Horch (1994), Slack (1997).
2. The largest part of voluntary sector in several Western countries.
3. There are at least three exceptions to this claim. First, Harris (1998) stresses the importance and potential of sport as part of civil society and the civil society approaches to sport, but her article mostly remains an encouragement for sport–civil society studies, and is less of such a study itself. Secondly, Allison (1998) studies sport as part of civil society in three nations—Georgia, Thailand and South Africa—in the light of their respective general civil-society structures. Thirdly, Jarvie (2003) addresses the question of sport, community and social capital. These studies are all, with respect to their topics, interesting analyses, yet have serious shortcomings when it comes to the questions posed in this article.
4. A very similar distinction seems common in social network studies (see Moody & White, 2003).
5. This number reflects two factors which are partly caused by the poor quality of the lists of members provided by the sport organizations. First, many of questionnaires were returned by the postal service (1149) and many communicated that they were not, and in some cases had never been, members of a sport club. Altogether we estimated that misdirected questionnaires amount to about 2000 respondents. Next, we did not know the age of most of our sample so we estimate that 1725 respondents in the wrong age group (below 13) received the questionnaire. This leaves us with 1660 answers from a sample of 5654 'valid members', which, in turn, gives a response rate of 29.4%.
6. This number is perhaps larger in reality, because it seems reasonable—and communications connected to the data collection indicates this—to assume that those not active answer such a questionnaire more seldom than more active people; both because they identify less with the club and therefore are less inclined to answer, but also because they consider themselves to be of less interest in a study like this.
7. The question of how competitive levels affect community structures is interesting and rather complex: on the one hand one should expect high competitive level to have an exclusionary effect; on the other hand it might have an integrating effect on those staying on. Since this variable (competitive level) and level of activity which is a dimension community structures are highly correlated, the variable is not included in the subsequent analysis.
8. The numbers indicate mean values on a scale from 1 to 5.
9. In detail, the four statements are as follows: (i) information from the leaders is not good enough with regard to important issues; (ii) there are important conflicts in the organization; (iii) the leaders often take decisions on their own without consulting the members; and (iv) The distance between leaders and members is to great. The answers are 'totally agree', 'partly agree', 'partly disagree', 'totally disagree' and 'don't know'.
10. In general, how interested are you in politics? How often do you read news in daily newspapers? How satisfied are you with the way democracy functions in Norway? Do you think that most Norwegian politicians are trustworthy, mostly trustworthy, or rarely trustworthy?

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Appendix. Construction of Community Typology

The variable measuring level of activity (Table 3) is cross-tabulated with an additive index built on the two variables presented in Table 4. This reciprocity-index is reduced to three values and the community typology then contains the individuals indicated by the colour codes in the table below.

	Reciprocity			
Activity:	Low	Medium	High	Total
Never	3.0%	9.2%	3.0%	15.2%
Less than once a week	5.2%	8.3%	5.2%	18.8%
1 to 2 times a week	4.0%	10.4%	9.3%	23.6%
4 to 3,9 times a week	2.2%	10.4%	16.3%	28.9%
5 times a week or more	1.3%	4.5%	7.7%	13.5%
Total	15.7%	42.8%	41.5%	100.0%

□ Strong communities ▫ Mediated communities
■ Pragmatic communities ▪ Weak communities

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