
Sport and Social Capital

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abstract: Even though voluntary sport organizations make up the largest part of the voluntary sector in many western countries, few studies have been carried out focusing on sport as part of civil society. Against this background, the aim of the article is to study how voluntary sport organizations operate and what social and political effects they might have through the concept of social capital. The theoretical part of the article identifies the most useful dimensions of the social-capital concept for this topic, lists hypotheses and suggests three relevant social mechanisms. Empirical studies show how social capital related to participation in voluntary sport organizations is distributed and the consequences this has for various forms of social capital: generalized trust and political commitments. Analyses are based on Norwegian data. The results show that being a member of a voluntary sport organization involves social capital which is conducive to generalized trust and political commitment. Yet, the effect of sport organizations is weaker than for voluntary organizations in general, stronger when membership in sport organizations goes together with other memberships (more weak ties) and stronger the less politicized the social effect in question.

keywords: civil society ♦ social capital ♦ sport ♦ voluntary organizations

Introduction

During recent decades, we have witnessed renewed interest in the question of how civil society, of which voluntary organizations form a predominant part, has a role to play within late modern societies. This topic, and the problems and questions it raises, is addressed in numerous ways. So far, the most widely discussed and debated approach is probably the one related to the concept of 'social capital'. The concept has spurred an extensive theoretical debate concerning some of the most basic questions with respect to how modern civil societies actually operate and function, both in themselves and in relation to other social institutions. There are also several interesting empirical studies related to the concept. Moreover, compared to other sociological concepts, the discussions associated with the concept have received attention from a wide public.¹ All in all, the many discourses on social capital provide fertile and important grounds (partly because of its popularity) for more elaborate and detailed studies of how social interaction in civil society operates and how it might have social and political implications for the wider society.

The largest sector of Norwegian civil society (Wollebæk et al., 2000) and of several other Western nations is voluntary sport organizations. Yet, despite this central position and the fact that some of the fascination of the social-capital concept partly stems from '... the idea that "good government comes from singing choirs and soccer clubs"' (Dekker and Uslaner, 2001: 2), there are several problems with the present social capital discourse when it comes to sports.

The first problem is that the voluntary sector as a whole – in spite of obvious internal differences – is often treated as one with respect to both internal structures and external effects. Secondly, even when studies are more multifaceted and actually do distinguish between different kinds of voluntary organizations, such approaches reflect the particularities of voluntary sport organizations to a very limited degree. Thirdly, sport sociologists have not paid much attention to questions concerning civil society and social capital.² In short, the situation is a lack of studies on sport as a specific part of civil society, a neglect of civil society within sociology of sport and, accordingly, a need for a more proper understanding of sport as part of the voluntary sector and civil society.³

Against this background, the purpose of the article is to improve our understanding of how participation in voluntary sport organizations might have social and political effects of the kinds mostly addressed in the social capital debate: generalized trust and political interest. The ambition is to improve the theoretical framework available for such analyses, and to make some move in the direction of empirical investigations. Because of the shortcomings of both social-capital discourses and sport-sociological studies, the purpose is, first, to identify and clarify the most useful theoretical approaches to the field of voluntary sport organizations found both within the social capital discourse and sociology of sport. Based on these theoretical discussions, I will extract five hypotheses to guide the empirical analyses and present three social mechanisms to substantiate the empirical findings. After a brief section on data and the Norwegian case, I analyse empirically the kinds of social capital found within voluntary sport organizations compared to other voluntary organizations. Next, I look at how variations in social capital associated with sport organizations might have implications for the social effects of voluntary sport organizations as part of a wider societal and political context. The article ends with a summary and discussion of the need for future research in the field.

Social capital as general theory

Similarly to most abstract and popular sociological concepts, the social capital concept is contested.⁴ However, the purpose of this section is not to contribute to a general conceptual discussion (Portes, 1998; Bagnasco, 2001; Putnam and Goss, 2002; Stolle, 2003; Farr, 2004), but to find a way to apply the social-capital concept productively for the specific topic of this article. Hence, I do not therefore follow the common strategy of reviewing seminal works, but instead, rather pragmatically, extract what I find useful for analyses of how voluntary sport organizations might produce social capital and how this social capital might have socio-political repercussions.

The first step is to consider the two words making up the concept. First, 'capital' is something that might give a future benefit. Capital combined with 'social' then leaves us with social relations of a special kind – containing and, potentially, generating resources – which, in the future, might have implications for actions in and postures towards other social actors or arenas. In this context, the social relations will be those emerging from participation in voluntary sport organizations; the implications are social trust and political interests.

Beyond this very basic understanding of what is implied by social capital, some of the more consequential controversies in the conceptual debate indicate what is at stake. A first consideration is whether social capital is an individual or a collective asset. Both possibilities are of potential sociological utility and interest, but in a context where the focus is on how individuals participating in one social arena differ – because of the social relations established within this arena – in their approach to other arenas (trust, interest), the most fruitful approach is to say that social capital is an individual asset based in social relations. This does not imply that the instrumentalism inherent to much individualistic sociology is uncritically adopted: becoming a member of a voluntary organization might lead to certain effects later on, but the

social capital in question is not necessarily the result of intentional investments aimed at future benefits; they are, to a large extent probably the unintended consequences of instrumental, normative and/or expressive actions.

A second issue is whether social capital involves closing of social groups or opening up of new social relations (for Putnam, bonding versus bridging; for Bourdieu, social stratification versus social mobility). Again, both approaches yield interesting analytical possibilities, but in this study I emphasize the bridging effect, i.e. the question will mainly be how social relations within one context (i.e. social capital) have implications for how members of voluntary sport organizations face specific external phenomena (whether they trust other people, whether they are interested in politics). This approach also implies a stance on a third issue. Both Coleman and Putnam are regularly accused of confusing causes and effects when it comes to analyses of social capital, and the problem is that the concept readily takes on a tautological form: social capital (social relations) produces social capital (trust) (Levi, 1996; Portes, 2000; Wilson, 2001; Paxton, 2002; van Deth, 2003; Cook, 2005; Fischer, 2005; van Der Gaag and Snijders, 2005). The reason for these apparently enduring problems is that the social capital concept often pretends to examine a rather restricted phenomenon, but actually describes a whole process. The crux of the phenomena is a (set of) social relation(s), but next, this relation depends on its consequences for passing as what it is; social relations turn out as social capital when a manifestation of a latent resource potential is fulfilled. To meet this challenge, I consider generalized trust, norms or political engagement, etc., not as social capital, but as social phenomena that might be influenced – increase or decrease – by variations in types and amounts of social capital.⁵

Among the most consequential objections to the social capital debate is the critique saying that a fruitful understanding of how social capital actually functions must move beyond simply identifying sets of black-box correlations: How, for example, does membership in a voluntary organization actually contribute to generalized trust? The challenge is to identify the generative processes behind these correlations (Levi, 1996; Stolle, 2001; Johnson, 2003; Tilly, 2005). In recent philosophy of science, this is equivalent to asking for social mechanisms (Elster, 1989, 1999; Hedström and Swedberg, 1998; Hedström, 2005). At the same time as this rightly has been pointed out as a serious weakness in social capital studies, the same debate also contains theoretical arguments that might serve as the substance of such social mechanisms. Coleman (1990) illustrates how social capital implies transformation of information, how it functions as sanctions and norms and provides authority to overcoming the free-rider problem. Lin (2001) states that social capital works in four ways: information, influence, social credentials and reinforcements of identities. One of the aims of this article is to identify the social mechanisms most relevant for our topic, and this endeavour will build on these approaches.

Social capital is a contested concept. Its two components – ‘capital’ and ‘social’ – indicate that this, essentially, is about social relations – more or less intentionally established – with a potential future reward. In sketching a theoretical framework for how social capital should be approached for sport sociological studies, I have chosen to focus on social capital as an individual asset, as one sequence of a more extended social process and outwardly bridging rather than bonding. Furthermore, I have emphasized the need for breaking down what often appears as a tautological approach to manageable analytical components: social capital (social relations) with an impending outcome (trust, political interest). Finally, I have also pointed out the necessity of identifying social mechanisms associated with these social processes.

Yet, this is still general theory at a rather abstract level, and to get closer to how members of voluntary sport organizations actually possess social capital and how it eventually works, I attempt to see how different discourses more oriented to this specific issue have actually understood these processes. I move from more general civil society perspectives through analyses of the voluntary sector, towards sport sociology, and end up with both a set of hypotheses and a list of social mechanisms.

Social capital and voluntary organizations

The most renowned contributions to the social capital discourse focusing on voluntary organizations are the works of Putnam (1993, 2000). His first seminal study is on the development of Italian regional politics, where the main finding is a positive relation between people's participation in voluntary organizations in a region and practices and attitudes towards 'established' political institutions. Later, a similar approach is applied to the United States case; showing a steady decline in most sorts of social capital in recent decades, how this is to be explained and why the question of social capital does matter. As part of the renewed interest in how civil society has bearings for a late modern society, approaches inspired by this general 'positive' view have become widespread, even though Putnam's works also give considerable attention to the 'dark side of social capital'.⁶ Stemming from these discourses, a common-sense understanding of social capital, implying positive relations between a dynamic and vigorous associational life and democratic processes, has developed. The assumption is (H-1) that those active in voluntary organizations are richer in social capital than those not active, and that this capital implies a more trusting and interested posture towards the outside world. This thesis might appear as self-evident for political sociologists in the tradition from Tocqueville through Almond and Verba (1965) to Verba et al. (1995). However, a recent study questions this common sense assumption by stating that: 'Voluntary organizations do not seem to do much, if anything, for generalized trust in most countries' (Delhey and Newton, 2003: 112). Thus the link between voluntary organizations and social capital is not as self-evident as often assumed.

Most recent contributions to the field underline that this is much too simple a way to understand the social and political implications of social capital. A first objection to this common view is the obvious fact that we find social capital in all kinds of organizations, both those with an un-welcome content in a democratic context and with a 'correct' message in a 'wrong' organizational wrapping: Being a member of Hells Angels probably involves social capital leading to a kind of external-social engagement, or being a supportive member of Greenpeace (a tertiary organization) might not involve what we consider social capital but nonetheless implies a kind of legitimate political commitment. Thus, we should be more open to the complexity both in forms of social capital in various voluntary organizations and their diverse outcomes. Accordingly, one of the most pressing challenges is to distinguish between types of organizations and to evaluate what social capital associated with various kinds of organizations actually means for social and political outcomes. A much referred distinction is between organizations based on horizontal and vertical social relations and a following conclusion that organizations containing more horizontal face-to-face interaction hold most social capital of the kind that is important for generalized trust and political interest (Putnam, 1993, 2000). Sport organizations, representing such horizontal organizations, should then (H-2) show a higher than average score on social capital than other voluntary organizations, and should, as a corollary, also produce more social and political effects.

Inspired by Putnam, Wollebæk and Selle (2002) draw a distinction between more or less political associations, explicitly questioning the hierarchy assumption made by Putnam, and find empirically that social capital from what they call political organizations is more effective in producing generalized trust and political commitment than less political organizations such as sport organizations. Paxton (2002) distinguishes between various organizations according to whether or not members have ties to members of other associations – connected versus isolated associations – and finds not only that connected associations are more conducive to democratic effects, but that being a member of isolated associations implies a negative influence when it comes to these questions. For our analysis, this is of interest because, according to Paxton, sport associations are firmly placed among the isolated associations.⁷ In an analogous way, Stolle (1998) studies various voluntary organizations in German and

Swedish contexts, and finds, basically, that organizations with weaker ties are more conducive to generalized trust (trust, cooperativeness, reciprocity) than others. On the one hand, one should then (H-3) assume that sport organizations are low in social capital. On the other hand, combining these insights, one has (H-4) to assume that people active in both sport organizations and other organizations have more weak ties, more outward directed and 'connected' relations and attitudes, and hence possess a more effective kind of social capital than those active only in sport organizations.

Social capital and sport organizations

One of only a few substantial discussions explicitly directed at sport and social capital is presented by Uslaner (1999) and is rather enthusiastically in favour of sport as an arena adequate for building social capital. According to Uslaner (1999: 146–7):

Sports build social capital because they build self-confidence and teach respect for rules. . . . Sports widen our social contact. They spread tolerance and egalitarian values on the sly. People don't play games to make themselves more moral. Morality lessons are a by-product, not the main event, in athletics.

While this is wholeheartedly a defence for sport, it also suggests what it is that actually makes sport activity contribute to social capital. Three processes are at work: building self-confidence, social contacts and morality lessons. Yet, it is not obvious that sport is more conducive to the first two processes than other voluntary organizations are, and it is not clear how moral lessons have social and political effects relevant for outcomes addressed in the social capital discourse. Consequently, compared to other voluntary organizations, no clear hypotheses emerge from this approach.

In a second contribution, Warren (2001) delivers a fruitful though rather complex theoretical analysis of relevance for this article. Warren is concerned mainly with the question of how various features of voluntary organizations matter, i.e. in how these organizations have 'democratic effects', and makes distinctions between three kinds of such effects. For the first two, and the more explicit, political consequences – 'public sphere effects' and 'institutional effects' – sport organizations are assumed (by Warren) to have only a very weak effect. When it comes to a third dimension – individual developmental effects – Warren asserts that sport organizations are weak on critical and political skills, but strong on 'civic virtues' comprising three aspects – reciprocity, trust and recognition – that are very close to the aspects of social capital emphasized by, among others, Putnam. The features of the organizations producing these effects are, to Warren, forms of membership (especially whether there is an exit option easily available), its social (non-political) and vested (internally directed) character. So, both Uslaner and Warren present accounts supporting H-2: sport organizations are well – or even better – equipped compared to most other associations to generate social capital. But, inferring from Warren's theoretical framework, one more hypothesis seems reasonable (H-5): Social capital emanating from participation in sport organizations is most relevant for the more general social commitments (e.g. generalized trust) than for the more explicit political questions (e.g. voting).

Sociology of sport and social capital

Looking to a more specific sport sociological discourse, not explicitly occupied with how social capital or civil society works or operates, we find, supporting Uslaner, arguments strongly in favour of participation in sport as conducive to various social competencies (though not very clear exactly which) that seem close to social capital and that should, by all means, have

positive social and political implications: 'Sports can teach. Sports can shape. Sports can unify. Sports can comfort. Sports can uplift' (Gough, 1997: xv), or 'Sport trains young people to become independent, self controlled, resolute, responsible, and communal in their outlook' (Papp and Prisztoka, 1995: 375). This is in accordance with a traditional upper-class view associated with 'English sport', emphasizing that sport is an activity that involves building of character through social cooperation (Elias, 1971; Mandell, 1984).

Yet, the opposite view is perhaps just as commonly offered. First, on a general societal level, based on various critical perspectives, several authors question the ability of sport to fulfil such positive visions because of its narrow and one-dimensional focus on competitive success, processes of commercialism and professionalism (Hargreaves, 1986; Lasch, 1991; Gruneau, 1993; Morgan, 1994). Still others ask if modern sport is not about to turn into the opposite of such classic ideals through cultural developments; as a place of male chauvinism, nationalism, one-dimensional instrumentalism, racism and violence (Tännsjö and Tamburrini, 2000).

If the insights from sport sociology should be given hypothetical forms besides a general pro and contra, distinctions have to be made between different aspects of sport activities: various types of activities (e.g. team sport versus individual sport), various sport, various social groups and cultures and competitive level. Our data do not allow for these kinds of analysis, so I will not proceed with such questions here, but they are important for future studies within the field.⁸

Social capital and voluntary sport organizations: three social mechanisms

The literature inspires several hypotheses to be tested in the subsequent empirical analyses. Yet, to really understand the social processes implied in these hypotheses, the social capital discourse has to identify a corresponding set of social mechanisms (Levi, 1996; Stolle, 2001; Johnson, 2003). I suggest three social mechanisms, motivated by Lin (2001: 19–20), showing how social relations within voluntary organizations might produce the social and political effects highlighted in the social capital literature. These mechanisms – information, influence and identity – are useful because they indicate how social capital operates at the general organizational level and how – as indicated in the hypotheses – differences between various kinds of organizations might influence the way social capital works.

First, social relations as social capital work by providing and facilitating *information* for the individuals involved. In the context of voluntary organizations, this could imply that members acquire more knowledge and develop stronger commitments to social and political issues. At a most general level, this simply means that those active in any voluntary organization are richer in social capital than those outside. Second, it also seems reasonable to assume that those organizations described above as connected and supportive of weak ties involve social relations that provide more social capital – more knowledge, stronger commitments – than for example sport organizations which are more narrowly focused upon their own activity. Moreover, it also seems reasonable to assume that the more active in an organization, the more information and social capital. Finally, one also has to assume that having a (formal) position within an organization implies involvement in social and communicative structures that increase the value of social capital as information.

Next, persons involved in organizational work are *influenced* by the social ties associated with their activity and positions in the organizations. Being influenced easily implies dependency, which in turn should increase the interest in knowledge of and influence on these relations. The actions thus spurred, develop individual and social skills. On a first and general level, one could assume that those active in any voluntary organization have more social capital than those outside such organizations, and the more active, the more so. Yet, this

mechanism also points clearly in the direction of individuals in connected organizations or those in specific positions within organizations as richer in social capital than those in isolated organizations or those without positions. It is also possible that those more active experience more serious obligations and responsibilities towards the larger societal system, and, thereby, possess more knowledge and interest in social and political questions than those less active.

A final mechanism is reinforcement of *identity and recognition*: The assumption is that the reciprocity inherent to social interactions within voluntary organizations – aimed at reaching a common goal – provides communicative structures and builds narratives necessary for supporting feelings of belonging and empowerment, resulting in a strong identity and thereby trust towards those involved and an interest in social and political issues. Again, more than non-members, members of a voluntary organization should be expected to be involved in these processes and have more social capital of this kind. Furthermore, the kind of capital developed in the connected organizations should be more valuable than capital stemming from isolated organizations. Finally, the amount of interaction should also be expected to increase the impact of the organizational social capital.⁹

Data and the Norwegian case

The data in this article stem from the Norwegian part of the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project (see Salamon and Sokolowski, 2004). Questionnaires were mailed to a random sample of the Norwegian population aged between 16 and 85 years of age and gave 1695 (45 per cent) valid responses. The response rate is lower than normal for mailed surveys in Norway, probably due to the length and complexity of the questionnaire. As usual for such surveys, the response rate is slightly higher for well-educated middle-aged individuals than for others, but there are no significant gender and geographical biases. Comparing weighted data with the data applied in these analyses produced close to similar results, indicating that the findings are not decisively affected by these biases. Furthermore, one could assume that those who answer a survey of this kind are more active in or positive towards voluntary organizations, but comparisons with other data sources do not indicate such tendencies (see Wollebæk and Selle, 2002 and Wollebæk et al., 2000 for more information on the data).

The development of Norwegian sport and its voluntary organizations shares several 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 connection to the military forces around 1860. Thereafter, inputs influential in most other Western countries are crucial: 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 immense growth in both number of sport organizations and level of activity, and, second, by a differentiation within the field of voluntary sport, their community structures and the reasons for being active in sport organizations (Seippel, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006a). Looking for Norwegian peculiarities, three factors are noteworthy. First, a relatively large proportion of the Norwegian population – around 30 per cent – are members of a voluntary sport organization, and this reflects a high level of activity in voluntary organizations in general (Curtis et al., 2001), and a high level of social capital in particular (Rothstein and Stolle, 2003). Among the most central characteristics of these organizations is their size; they are small, 36 per cent have fewer than 50 members, 54 per cent have fewer than 100 members, and no more than 3 per cent of the clubs have more than 1000 members (Seippel, 2002). In two-thirds of the clubs, all work is voluntary, and in only 10 per cent is less than 90 per cent of the work done by volunteers. Secondly, it is important to point out how geography and climate have made certain sports – skiing and skating – more popular in Norway than in most other countries, but also that the field of sport more recently has been influenced just as

much by global processes as by national traditions (Maguire, 1999). Thirdly, one should notice, especially for future comparative contextual studies, that there are close relations between voluntary sport organizations and the state (Selle, 2000).

Empirical analyses

Based on the theoretical discussions above, I first distinguish between variables measuring social capital and those measuring the outcome of social capital. A first measure of social capital is simply whether an individual is a member of a voluntary organization or not, and then, more specifically, whether one is a member of (i) a sport organization only, (ii) sport organization and other organization(s) (which could be seen as extending social relations implying weak ties and connected-ness) or (iii) non-sport organizations only. A final measure is the intensity of such social capital: how many hours were spent during the last four weeks on respectively the main activity of organizations and voluntary work for organizations.

Whereas the theoretical social capital debate has been fairly multifaceted, the empirical analyses have been more focused (van Deth, 2003), and as the outcome of social capital I apply two sets of measures commonly applied in social capital studies. First, I examine whether participation in organized sport matters for generalized trust.¹⁰ Second, I explore whether social capital stemming from voluntary sport organizations has implications for attitudes and activities with a stronger (though not very) political imprint: general interest in politics,¹¹ whether one votes at elections,¹² satisfaction with democracy,¹³ and trust in politicians.¹⁴ Based on theoretical assumptions and prior research, I include three variables of importance for participation in both voluntary organizations and sport activity to control for social background and social status: age, gender and education.

In the following, I first describe the distribution of various kinds of social capital in the light of participation in voluntary organizations. Next, I illustrate briefly how this distribution of capital varies with social background and social status. Thirdly, I see how social capital, especially associated with sport organizations, has consequences for different forms of social trust and political engagement.

At the first general level, social capital is measured simply by whether one is affiliated to a voluntary organization or not, and sport organizations as one among several such organizations. Next, there is the question of the amount of time spent in these organizations (see Table 1).

First, Table 1 indicates that a considerable proportion of the Norwegian population are members of one or more voluntary organizations, and thus possess social capital of various kinds. Secondly, we see that more than a quarter of the population are members of a voluntary

Table 1 *Social capital: membership and activity in voluntary organizations*

	Per cent in each category	Hours spent on activity in organization last 4 weeks, mean values	Hours spent on voluntary work last 4 weeks, mean values	Hours spent in voluntary organization last 4 weeks, total, mean values
Not member of vol. org	27.1	0.0	0.40	0.40
Member of sport org. only	11.1	6.24	5.33	11.57
Member of sport and other vol. org	17.3	8.20	9.20	17.40
Member of other vol. org	44.4	6.74	6.52	13.26
Total (<i>n</i>)	99.9 (1694)	5.11	5.19	10.30

sport organization; either sport alone (11.7 per cent) or sport along with another voluntary organization (16.8 per cent). Thirdly, at a most general level, Table 1 gives an impression of the amount of activity that actually takes place within voluntary organizations; as 'core' activity, as voluntary work and taken together; as the overall activity related to voluntary organizations.

Next, I briefly illustrate how social capital as membership in voluntary organizations is explained by the three background variables included in the study (Table 2).

First, one should note that the models explain only a modest part of the variance in 'organizational behaviour'. This indicates that it is common and not very distinctive to be a member of a voluntary organization. Secondly, we find the expected patterns where education, age and gender (maleness) are conducive to social capital (membership in voluntary organizations). Thirdly, there are interesting differences between members of various types of organizations. For sport organizations, compared to voluntary organizations in general, education is less important and has no significant effect, while age has an opposite effect, suggesting that sports are for the younger; and the pro-male gender effect is stronger than for voluntary organizations in general. Looking at non-sport organizations, the most interesting finding is that these organizations are more clearly than average for elderly people, and the gender effect is turned around; apart from sport, being a member of a voluntary organization is a female activity.

The next step analyses how social capital connected to voluntary sport organizations might have implications for various kinds of social and political commitment. The first question concerns 'generalized trust' and I apply two models to see how the two sets of variables contribute separately and together: with and without the 'organizational variables'.

Table 2 Member of voluntary organization. Logistic regression. Unstandardized coefficients

	Member of (any) voluntary organization	Member of voluntary sport organization (only)	Member of non-sporting voluntary organization (only)
Constant	-1.31**	-1.27**	-1.48**
Education	0.73**	-0.13	0.34**
Age	0.01**	-0.04**	0.02**
Gender (male)	0.26*	0.66**	-0.21*
Pseudo-R ²	0.07	0.09	0.04

** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

Table 3 Generalized trust. OLS regression. Unstandardized coefficients

	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	1.35**	1.34**
Education	0.20**	0.16**
Age	0.03**	0.03**
Gender (male)	-0.00	-0.01
Age squared	0.00**	0.00**
Member of sport org. only		0.17*
Member of sport and other vol. org.		0.32**
Member of non-sport org. only		0.30**
Activity (hours)		0.00
R ²	0.04	0.07

** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

First, it is worth heeding the fact that neither model actually explains too much of the variance in 'generalized trust' (see Table 3). Nonetheless, operating at this low level of explanation, there is a relatively large and significant rise (doubling) in explained variance when the 'organizational variables' are included in the model. Social background has, more or less, the same effect in the two models. Education and age both have a significant influence on generalized trust. Moreover, all the organizational variables have a significant effect. This means that compared to those not members of any kind of voluntary organization and controlling for membership in other kinds of organization, being a member of a sport organization still has a positive effect. Yet, compared to the effects of the other two kinds of organization, this sport effect is weaker: sport as an 'isolated organization' contains less social capital than sport as 'connected'. Finally, an autonomous 'activity variable' measuring how active people are in their organizations shows no significant effect and adds little to the membership status.

A final step is to see whether being a member in a voluntary sport organization has an effect on more political attitudes and activities. I have included four measures of this kind: political interest, whether one votes or not, satisfaction with (Norwegian) democracy and whether most (Norwegian) politicians are trustworthy or not. Again, I operate with two models, adding the organizational variables in the second step.

For the first and second of the political variables, we can see that social background variables – education, gender and age – explain 10 and 5 per cent of the variance in 'general political interest' and 'voting', respectively. All three types of membership have a positive influence on these two variables, but the increase in explained variance is relatively marginal. Consequently, being a member of a sport organization has a marginal, though significant, effect on some political attitudes and activities.

For the other political variables, 'satisfaction with democracy' and 'trustworthiness of politicians', the models do not explain very much of the variance. For 'satisfaction with democracy', the differences between the groups included in the analyses are not worth heeding. For trust in politicians, the most important variable seems to be education, but being a member of voluntary organizations – although not sport only – has a positive effect.

All in all, the analyses support previous studies and confirm that being a member of voluntary organizations in general (H-1), but also sport organizations in particular, has a positive effect on certain kinds of general social trust and some political attitudes and activity (political voting). For sport, there were two rather contradictory hypotheses (H-2 and H-3) and the result – that sport organizations contain a certain amount of social capital, but less than other voluntary organizations – is a modification of these two hypotheses (H-4): less than average, but more than nothing. The hypothesis (H-5) concerning outcomes seems to be confirmed: The effect of sport organizations is most marked and manifest for the most general

Table 4 Social capital. OLS regression. Unstandardized coefficients

	Political interest		Voting		Democracy		Trust in politicians	
	Mod 1	Mod 2	Mod 1	Mod 2	Mod 1	Mod 2	Mod 1	Mod 2
Constant	1.47**	1.42**	2.47**	2.45**	3.48**	3.45**	1.80**	1.76**
Education	0.22**	0.20**	0.06**	0.05*	0.08*	0.06	0.19**	0.16**
Age	0.01*	0.01*	0.01**	0.01*	0.02	0.00	0.01**	0.01**
Gender (male)	0.15**	0.14**	-0.03	-0.03	-0.02	-0.04	-0.04	-0.06
Member of sport org. only		0.14*		0.12**		0.14		0.08
Member of sport and other vol. org.		0.19**		0.13**		0.15*		0.22**
Member of only non-sport org.		0.19**		0.06*		0.07		0.20**
Activity (hours)		0.00		-0.00		0.00		0.00
R ²	0.096	0.11	0.05	0.06	0.005	0.013	0.03	0.04

** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

social-political effect: generalized trust. Yet, being a member of a sport organization also has a positive significant effect on voting in elections, although this effect seems to contribute less to the overall level of explained variance.

Conclusions and discussion

The aim of this article has been to see how social capital in relation to participation in voluntary sport organizations has implications for various kinds of social trust and political interest. Because of the many theoretical controversies within the social capital debate, the lack of studies on sport within the civil society discourse and few studies of civil society among sport sociologists, a considerable part of the article has been devoted to sorting out what social capital should be taken to mean in the context of voluntary sport and how social capital might have implications for various socio-political phenomena. Moving beyond the assumption of a general positive effect of membership in voluntary organizations and activity in civil society, a relatively contradictory picture emerged from the theoretical review. Some studies place sport organizations in a group of voluntary organizations having a marginal or negative effect on social and political commitments (compared to other voluntary organizations), whereas others, both Putnam and contributions to the sociology of sport, suggest a positive societal role for sport. Still others propose a more complex picture, where sport has a positive effect on attitudes towards some social but less political arenas, whereas they will have a less positive or negative effect for other social and more explicitly political arenas. Three social mechanisms – information, influence and identity – describing the generative processes behind the statistical correlations were suggested.

The empirical analyses partly confirm the complex and contradictory picture emerging from the theoretical discussions. Being a member of a voluntary sport organization seems to contribute to generalized trust; less than for members of other organizations, but, nevertheless, with a significant positive effect. There is also a positive effect of more connected relations (member of sport and other organizations) and of the level of activity in an organization. These findings also make the social mechanisms outlined reasonable. In the same manner, but with a marginal impact, participation in sport (in a voluntary organization) seems conducive to political interest and voting. For politicians' trustworthiness, membership in non-sport voluntary organizations has a small but significant effect.

What stands out as a challenge for future studies on the social and political effects of social capital as represented by members of and people active in a voluntary sport organization is both theoretical and empirical refinements. As already indicated in the theoretical part of the article, one has to produce more multifaceted theories to really get at the social processes operating in and through voluntary organizations. This implies more focused theories on the aspects of activity in voluntary organizations that are significant, and how different types of sport activity matter, which outcomes – not only socio-political as here – are affected and how. One aim should be to compare different national cases in order to better understand the effect of institutional contexts on processes where social capital is formed and developed (Tarrow, 1996; Allison, 1998; Somers, 2005). The empirical analyses of this article represent a first move in this direction in identifying some of the social and political effects of being a member of a sport organization and suggesting three social mechanisms corresponding to these effects, but such studies also have to become more complex if we really are to profit from theoretical progress. We need data designed more explicitly for sport studies, which distinguish more clearly between various aspects of organizational structures and activity, for the many possible networks emerging from a voluntary organization (van Der Gaag and Snijders, 2005) and for the specific topic of sport.

Notes

1. See Paxton (1999: 89) for a (very) short review of the reception of Putnam's work as an example.
2. There are at least two exceptions to this claim. First, Harris (1998) stresses the importance and potential of sport as part of civil society, and the civil society approaches for 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 light of their respective general civil society structures. These are in general interesting analyses, yet they have shortcomings when it comes to the questions posed in this article.
3. Furthermore, it is worth heeding the fact that the approach chosen in this article also corresponds to a demand for a more elaborate understanding of the outcomes of civil society activities (Giugni et al., 1999).
4. 'It seems fair to say that if ever there has been an "essentially contested" concept in the social sciences, social capital would be a top candidate' (Rothstein and Stolle, 2003: 2).
5. In this article, I have chosen to operate within what has become a core topic – generalized trust and political commitments in a general sense – of the social capital discourse. However, one has to be aware of the fact that other authors operate with (i) different forms of social capital (related to different kinds of social relations and contexts) and (ii) different possible outcomes from these social relations; for instance, political (Paxton, 2002), economic (Trigilia, 2001), religious (Wuthnow, 2002), local communities (Forrest and Kearns, 2001) and medical (Kawachi et al., 1999) – and that several of these approaches are of the utmost interest for sport sociologists.
6. For discussions concerned with negative impacts of civil society, see Berman (1997), Portes (1998), Rosenblum (1998) and Skocpol et al. (2000).
7. That sport actually is among the more isolated associations is confirmed in Seippel (2006b).
8. There are, however, other studies addressing the effect of taking part in respectively individual and team sports on various social factors (thought this is not the main research question). This study shows that the kind of sport (i) makes a difference for how the sport activity itself is experienced, (ii) has implications for how the organizational context is conceived, but (iii) finds no effect of kind of sport on generalized trust and political interest (social capital) (Seippel, 2005).
9. When it comes to identity and recognition, the competitive character of sport is essential because, depending on winning or losing and the kind of sport (team sport versus individual sport), it does affect the way one gains recognition through social relations and interaction. At the same time, the classic English sport ideal has it that one's competitor should be respected regardless of the outcome of competition, and so – and this is probably the core or the classic moral-educational idea of sport – one could assume that sport is more conducive to social capital with respect to these mechanisms than other (less competitive) voluntary organizations. Again, this is a question to be posed in future studies, and because of the lack of proper data, left out in this article.
10. Question: 'In general, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be careful enough in dealing with other people?' Answers: 'Most people are trustworthy', 'One cannot be careful enough', 'Don't know'.
11. Question: 'In general, how interested are you in politics'. Answers: 'Very interested', 'Rather interested', 'Not very interested', 'Totally uninterested'.
12. Question: 'How often do you vote in parliamentary elections?' Answers: 'Every election', 'Now and then', 'Usually not', 'Too young to vote' and 'Not allowed to vote'.
13. Question: 'By and large, how satisfied are you with the way democracy functions in Norway. Answers: 'Very satisfied', 'Rather satisfied', 'Rather dissatisfied', 'Very dissatisfied' and 'Don't know'.
14. Question: 'Do you think that most Norwegian politicians are trustworthy, mostly trustworthy or that few Norwegian politicians are trustworthy?'. Answers: 'Most of them are trustworthy', 'They are trustworthy by and large', 'Few politicians are trustworthy' and 'Don't know'.

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