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# Exploring the organizational capacity and organizational problems of disability sport clubs in Germany using matched pairs analysis



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## ABSTRACT

Previous research examining people with disabilities has mainly looked at participation barriers and has formulated implications for sport providers; however, the supply side has been largely neglected. The purpose of this study was to explore the organizational capacity and organizational problems of clubs that provide sport for people with disabilities (referred to as 'disability sport clubs'). The conceptual model of organizational capacity was used as a theoretical framework. Within a German sport club sample ( $n = 19,345$ ), a sub-sample of disability sport clubs ( $n = 521$ ) was identified. The idea was to compare disability sport clubs with other sport clubs; however, comparing a small sub-sample with a large rest-sample may inevitably lead to statistical significance. Therefore, a matched pairs analysis was applied. Since disability sport clubs were significantly larger in terms of members and sports and were located in bigger communities, statistical twins were identified in the dataset that were similar in size and location. The results showed that clubs providing sport for people with disabilities are not specific disability sport clubs. Evidently, these are large multi-sports clubs that have greater capacity for catering for older adults and low-income people, for strategic planning, and for establishing relationships with other institutions in the community than their statistical twins. The regression results indicated that strategic planning significantly contributed to the reduction of several organizational problems of disability sport clubs. The findings have implications for policy makers, club management, and sport management scholars.

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## 1. Introduction

The management of disability sport has received increased academic attention over the last decades and researchers have looked at it from various perspectives (e.g., [Cashman & Darcy, 2008](#); [Fitzgerald, Jobling, & Kirk, 2003](#); [Park, Turner, & Pastore, 2008](#)). The range of sports and participant numbers in disability sport has increased and an evolution from rehabilitation to competitive sport and health promotion could be observed ([McCann, 1996](#); [Page, O'Connor, & Peterson, 2001](#); [Rimmer, 1999](#)). Sport participation for people with disabilities has been formalized in the 2006 UN Convention where the rights of

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persons with disabilities in sport, physical activity, and recreation were defined (Le Clair, 2011). Despite this regulation, sport participation rates of people with a disability are still lower than those of their able-bodied counterparts (e.g., Finch, 2001). Similarly, club participation rates are lower (e.g., Finch, 2001). Thus, many people with a disability do not benefit from the positive effects of sport participation. Sport participation in general is positively associated with health and happiness (Rasciute & Downward, 2010) and also has specific benefits for people with a disability like socializing and self-development (Australian Sports Commission, 2011). It can also contribute to social inclusion (Hassan, Dowling, McConkey, & Menke, 2012) and the development of social capital; however, these positive outcomes are not automatically achieved because sport activities are not homogeneous products (Bailey, 2005).

The heterogeneity of sport products should particularly apply to programs for people with a disability and have to be considered by sport clubs which provide such programs. People with a disability have specific needs which do not allow for the provision of standard programs (Kristen, Patriksson, & Fridlund, 2002). Moreover, additional support through other people may be required in some cases and the sport facility has to be accessible and suitable for the individual's particular disability (Finch, 2001) which adds another layer of complexity to the product. While previous research has investigated sport participation of people with a disability from an individual perspective and has formulated policy implications for sport providers (e.g., Jones, 2003; Pluym, Keur, Gerritsen, & Post, 1997; Rimmer, 1999), the organizational perspective has been largely neglected with a few exceptions (e.g., French & Hainsworth, 2001; Sørensen & Kahrs, 2006). It is critical to also look at the supply side and the capacity of sport organizations that provide programs for people with a disability. For example, disability sport clubs may have other needs and problems like capacity issues with regard to sport facilities or financial resources.

The purpose of this study is to shed light on sport clubs that provide programs for people with a disability. These clubs are labeled 'disability sport clubs' throughout the article. In detail, this study explores the organizational capacity and potential organizational problems of disability sport clubs. The theoretical framework is based on the conceptual model of organizational capacity (Hall et al., 2003) and the differences in organizational capacity between disability sport clubs and other sport clubs are discussed. This study advances the following two main research questions: (1) to what extent do the organizational capacity and organizational problems of disability sport clubs differ from other sport clubs? And (2) what dimensions of organizational capacity are critical to the reduction of organizational problems of disability sport clubs? The research context is disability sport clubs in Germany where a sub-sample of disability sport clubs ( $n = 521$ ) could be identified in a total sample of non-profit sport clubs ( $n = 19,345$ ). Since comparing a small sub-sample with a large rest-sample leads to statistical significances, a matched pairs analysis is undertaken where disability sport clubs are compared with their statistical twins (i.e., clubs that share similar structural characteristics). The findings of this study have implications for the management of disability sport clubs and for policy makers. This article contributes to the body of research on sport club management by applying a methodological procedure (matched pairs analysis) that is relatively new to sport management and can inform future studies in this field.

## 2. Theoretical framework and literature review

This study is based on the conceptual model of organizational capacity that has been introduced by Hall et al. (2003). By definition, organizational capacity refers to "the overall capacity of a nonprofit and voluntary organization to produce the outputs and outcomes it desires" (Hall et al., 2003, p. 4). Thus, organizational capacity is critical to sport clubs to fulfill their mission and achieve their goals. The conceptual model of organizational capacity has already been applied in previous research on community sport clubs (e.g., Misener & Doherty, 2009; Sharpe, 2006; Wicker & Breuer, 2011). Organizational capacity is multidimensional and consists of five dimensions that are explained in the next paragraphs. Although the literature on disability sport clubs is relatively scant, the conceptual model is applied to disability sport clubs.

The first dimension is human resources capacity which is referred to as the "ability to deploy human capital (i.e., paid staff and volunteers) within the organization" (Hall et al., 2003, p. 5). This capacity is considered the key capacity because it influences all other capacity dimensions (Hall et al., 2003). The definition highlights the importance of volunteers and paid staff to community sport clubs in general. Volunteers can be divided into core volunteers and secondary volunteers. Core volunteers have a formal position in the club, while secondary volunteers only work sporadically in the club, for example in the context of organizing sport events or club festivities (Wicker & Breuer, 2011). With regard to disability sport clubs, one prior study has indicated that staff competence in particular was perceived as a barrier to participation (Jones, 2003). Similarly, a different study indicated that more competence is needed in sport organizations, and staff members need to be trained for the specific challenges of providing programs for people with disabilities (Sørensen & Kahrs, 2006). Recruiting and retaining volunteers has been identified as one of the major challenges of sport clubs in general (e.g., Allison, 2001; Taylor, Barrett, & Nichols, 2009). This capacity dimension should not only capture a club's capacity to mobilize core and secondary volunteers, but also its capacity to mobilize members. Since sport clubs not only provide sporting opportunities, but also provide social events, the club's capacity to mobilize members for such events can be critical to social cohesion within the club and thus to the overall functioning of the club (Wicker & Breuer, 2013).

The second dimension is financial capacity which is the "ability to develop and deploy financial capital" (Hall et al., 2003, p. 5). Previous research has indicated that grassroots sport clubs have notoriously low financial resources (Sharpe, 2006). The club's annual revenues should be a good indicator for the club's overall financial capacity because the figure shows how much money is available to finance sport and other programs (Wicker & Breuer, 2013). The financial situation and financial

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