

Understanding commercialisation of amateur sport – the Danish history

Based on PhD dissertation - see (Kirkegaard, 2012).

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Research question

How can the historical development of the fitness culture be understood and what is the significance of the commercial fitness culture for the organisation of amateur sports in general in Denmark?

Theoretical background

The first part of the research question takes a historical approach, aiming to closely examine the roots of the fitness culture, its organisational structures, as well as a number of central individuals, events, periods, places, products and concepts. The historical approach is primarily a qualitative insight into the history of the fitness culture entitled 'From pumping iron to popular movement'. The second part of the research question leads to a more analytical sports-political perspective, addressing questions about the fitness culture as a number of commercialisation trends within amateur sports in general, by which the commercialised market of the fitness culture has a 'flow-on effect' to the logics of the non-profit organisation of sport. This could be called 'the commercialisation of amateur sports in general – from amateur club to professional business'.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

The dissertation has been written on the basis of the science-theory and philosophical beliefs of pragmatism and neo-pragmatism. It takes into account that pragmatism is the belief that the rationality of history is primarily an expression of the sender's interest in and desire to construct and present history in a specific way.

The overall need is to be able to maintain a constructive yet meaningful and cohesive narrative about 'me and society'. This means that history cannot be seen as an objective discipline as it is a retelling of an event influenced by a psychological thought processes and an aspiration to find stability and cohesion. The history of the commercial fitness culture should therefore also be understood in the context of this theoretical framework.

Results, discussion and implications/conclusions

The history of the fitness sector can be described briefly as this development, or transition, from the man's fascination and focus on muscle development to the woman's desire to be physically active and exercise. In other words, there is a transition from pumping iron to a popular movement.

A number of male-dominated sports and body cultures in the early 1900s in particular prevailed over the fitness

culture of the time. This meant that clubs established for physical exercise rapidly became filled with sportsmen, while those who trained in order to achieve a well-toned and shapely healthy body were left with little space to carry out their exercises. In addition, contemporary body-builders did not have the same need for organisation in club life, which seems to explain why they did not fight as hard to safeguard their political interests as sports clubs and associations did in general.

However the process of commercialisation and its increasing influence on the club/association-dominated culture of sport enabled a fledgling concept and product development with a close relationship to new body-aesthetical health orientations. These activities primarily included basic training, bodybuilding, fitness and weight training on machines, aerobics and spinning. The organisation and sale of these products led to a commercial breakthrough for the fitness culture in the 1980s. As a result of this, the male focus on muscle mass became increasingly overshadowed by female keep-fit enthusiasts. Today women are the largest group of and most satisfied customers in commercial exercise facilities within the fitness culture (Kirkegaard, 2009).

The second focus about 'the commercialisation of amateur sports in general – from amateur club to professional business', addresses a number of analytical and political ideas and perspectives regarding the status and trends in amateur sports. The focus is on the logics and rationales of the commercial fitness culture that fundamentally questions many of the basic values of traditional non-profit club sports. Today both the national sport organisations and many of the local non-profit clubs are facing a number of choices: Either to copy the successful fitness culture, or to maintain focus on its own traditions, history and the principle concerning voluntariness. In the shadow of this development the two various sports traditions and organisations come into conflict with each other in the struggle for market share (members), political goodwill, and the future organisation of amateur sport.

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