

# BEYOND COMPETITIVE SPORTS CLUBS? MAPPING ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY CATEGORIES IN SWEDISH SPORTS

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## Abstract keywords

Policy initiatives, wider societal goals, institutional analysis, self-identification

## Aim of abstract - research question

This abstract reports on a study in which data are to be collected during the spring of 2013. If accepted, the results of the study will be presented during the 2013 EASM conference.

Sports organizations are increasingly being targeted in various policy initiatives. Especially sports clubs are expected to organize activities which are to contribute to the fulfillment of wider societal goals, such as public health, ethnic and social integration, and crime prevention, inherent in such initiatives (Coalter, 2007). These activities are often expected to have non-members as target groups, in line with the widespread sport-for-all-ideals. While Swedish sport itself claims to contribute to such goals, research show that sports clubs primarily organize competitive sports activities, aimed at their own members (e.g., Stenling, 2013). However, this research builds in large parts on small empirical bases, in terms of number of sports clubs investigated. By drawing on a larger empirical base we aim to (1) describe the possible variation among sports clubs (i.e., is there anything beyond competitive sports clubs?), and (2) describe the distribution of various types of sports clubs within the population of sports clubs affiliated to the Swedish Sports Confederation. In doing so, the purpose of the present study is to understand the role and function of sports clubs in Swedish society, in terms of their propensity to contribute to the fulfillment of various societal goals. And, reversely, to understand how developments in the Swedish society are reflected in the self-understanding of sports clubs.

## Theoretical background

The study employs an institutional view on organizational identity construction (Glynn, 2008), a process in which organizations are constituted as social actors in part because society treats organizations as if they were individuals. In this process, organizations draw on cultural “raw material” supplied by their institutional environment in order to answer the identity-defining question ‘who are we as an organization?’ While originating from Albert and Whetten’s (1985) definition of organizational identity as a set of claims on the central, enduring and distinctive attributes of the organization, an institutional view on organizational identity holds that the question ‘who are we as an organization’ is answered, not in terms of an essence, but rather in terms of an organization’s perceived membership of a social category. Since organizations act according to a logic of appropriateness, i.e., they are guided by the constitutive rules of their perceived membership of a social category, a mapping of sports clubs’ organizational identity constructions will help us fulfill the purpose of the study.

## Methodology, research design and data analysis

To meet the purpose of the study, we intend to construct social categories, or, organizational identity types, by investigating how sports club representatives (i.e., chair of the board) describe who we are and *what we do* as an organization (Navis & Glynn, 2011). From the population of approximately 20 000 sports clubs registered with Statistics Sweden, 200 sports clubs have been drawn using a simple random sampling. At the time of writing, data collection is about to commence wherefore it is still unclear how many sports clubs it will take to reach saturation, i.e., whether it will be necessary to investigate all clubs in the sample. Data will be collected by short, albeit qualitative, telephone interviews, to allow for the respondents’ own descriptions of who we are and what we do as an organization, operationalized as the core purpose and practices of the organizations (Navis & Glynn, 2011). The data will be analyzed using a mixture of predetermined and emergent codes. Results will avail for discussions on the character of the activities in Swedish sport and how they are aligned with political and societal expectations.

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