

The Conventions of Norwegian Sport Clubs – Enabling and Constraining the Implementation of State Sport Policy

Eivind Skille, Hedmark College, Norway, eivind.skille@hihm.no

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Abstract

Aim

This paper departs from an interest in state sport policy and its relationship to voluntary sport organizations. On the one hand, the state sport policy points out societal values as health and upbringing as important for involvement into sport. On the other hand, the implementation of state sport policy depends on the system of voluntary sport clubs organized under the umbrella of the Norwegian Olympic Committee and Confederation of Sports (NOC), which are primarily based on voluntary work and can therefore be considered as more or less autonomous. In that respect, the aim of this paper is to identify the conventions of Norwegian sport clubs, in order to discuss the possibilities and constraints for the implementation of public policy through sport clubs.

Theory

The theory of convention is rooted in the paradigm of social science of which Bourdieu and Giddens are leading figures, where social structures are conceived as produced and reproduced by individual actions, which in turn are enabled and constrained by the individuals' resources (Enjolras, 2006). Convention refers to (i) the individual's cognitive structure about the world, and (ii) the conform interaction between people sharing the same norms. The point is that the creation and sustaining (in sum, the constitution or institutionalization) of sport clubs must, according to the convention approach, build on some shared ideas of what sport is, further, based on these ideas, people interact and develop conventions which may be observed as individual meanings as well as social structures.

Methodology

To observe meanings and structures in Norwegian sport clubs, three sport clubs were studied, and three methods were applied (Yin, 2003). Based on former research into sport club characteristics, a strategic sampling was made: a football club, a cross country ski club, and a multi sport club were included in the study. In addition to the sport specific variations the sport clubs varied with regard to characteristics related to size, organizational structure, economy, and leadership. What is common for the sampled clubs is their focus upon youth, as the main target groups also for state sport policy. Data was gathered by document analysis, observation, and interviews. The

documents analyzed were meeting reports and strategy documents produced by the sport clubs. Observation took place in 10 board meetings in the football club over the period of one year (2007). From each of the sport clubs, all board members were interviewed, 8 from the football club, 6 from the ski club and 4 from the multi sport club (n = 18). The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the analysis was done in a hermeneutic procedure.

Results, Discussion and Implications

First, the document analysis and the observations clearly revealed that the main convention of the sports club was related to sport development. Except for administrative and economic issues treated in documents and discussed during board meetings, almost everything which was written or said was related to and reckoned by a competitive attitude, achievement orientation and development of (single) payers (in sum: sport development). In that respect, there seems to be a mismatch between state policy making of sport and the potential implementers' conventions. Second, however, interviews revealed that the sport club representatives considered themselves and the sport club as societal valuable, due to values similar to those of the state's sport policy. Especially upbringing of young people was underscored, and to some minor extent, health. Strikingly, sport development, and to some extent health, were rather absent topics during the interviews. It could be discussed, then, whether there is, in addition to a material side of conventions which appear as the practice and structures of the sport clubs, a symbolic side of the sport club conventions which may appear as expressive action (Enjolras, 2006). That is, what is expressed is based on the availability of legitimate conventions, which may be – for sport club representatives – the same as the societal values of state sport policy. If this analysis is valid, it leads to some implications for the relationship between sport policy makers and implementers, namely either that the state looks for other implementers of its 'physical activity and health' policy, or that the sport organizations adapt more to the state policy.

References

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Yin, R. (2003): *Case study research* 3rd ed. London: Sage.