

# **Organizing the Self-Organized – A Government Policy for Incorporating Spontaneous Sport in Club Sport**

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## **Abstract**

This paper reports on an analysis of government policy as manifested in the new 'Sports for all'- programme in Sweden and is concerned with the mismatch between the motives for the programme and its realization and implications.

## **Background**

The programme was launched in 2003 when the Swedish parliament decided to grant the Swedish sports movement an additional financial support of EURO 100 million for a four year period. (Riksidrottsförbundet, n.d.). Knowing that large groups of children and youth are physically inactive and not engaged in organized sport the Swedish sport movement was commissioned to more actively work towards so called new groups.

## **Aim**

This paper focuses on the government's initial concern for physically inactive children and their health on one hand and the programme design and activities for reaching those children on the other hand. The purpose of the study was to explore one local initiative for engaging physically inactive children and youth in physical activity and sport.

## **Theory**

The study was made with institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and the ideas of design archetypes (Greenwood & Hinings, 1988) and dominant logics (Bettis & Prahalad, 1995) as a conceptual framework. The conceptual framework served as an analytical model, explaining how institutions originating from various actors influence, gain force and spread throughout the field of the Swedish sport movement.

## **Methodology**

Findings are based on an analysis of the programme documentation, local sport and leisure policies, regulations of funds and subsidies, and on interviews with organizers, participants and their parents. With a case study approach one club was chosen to function as an object of study (Yin, 2003). The club was chosen based on the fact that it had recently launched and received programme funding for an initiative aiming at providing "self-organized" physical activity and sport to non-members in general but

more specifically to so called inactive groups. The basic idea behind the initiative was to offer youth in the ages 13-20 recreational activities without any insistence on duration, continuity or performance.

## Results, Discussion and Implications

Preliminary results show that while the activities were supposed to be spontaneous and self-organized, activities tended to be incorporated in the club's regular activities. And while the initiative announced that the purpose was to engage former members and non-members in activities on their own conditions, goals and preferences, the participants were forced to become members in the club in order to participate at all. Conclusions drawn so far are that there is a mismatch between the motives for the programme and its realization and implications. Previous research (Fahlén, 2008) has shown that one of the primary barriers for participating in organized physical activity and sport is the organization of the activities itself. Insistence on duration, continuity or performance works discouraging for former members and non-members in general but specifically for so called the physically inactive groups.

The overall impression is that the forms for the distribution of the grant contributes to the problem with reaching children and youth defined as physically inactive and not engaged in organized sport. The government's concern for physically inactive children and their health is not in sync with the programme activities insofar as was intended. While the basic idea behind the programme was to stimulate new groups of children and youth to physical activity and sport, the activities are partly designed to recruit more members to the sports movement. Certainly many activities can also stimulate new groups to activity. But when the underlying purpose for sports clubs to arrange these activities is to attract new members and incorporate their activities in the club's regular activities, the activities themselves tend to be focused on the competitive dimension rather than on the government's public health dimension and self-organized/recreational play for inactive children and youth.

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