

From acceptance to defiance: the municipality of Ängelholm and elite football's stadium requirements

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Aim of the study

During the last couple of years, sport governing bodies' more detailed and extensive stadium requirements in relation to for example the Olympics have made public authorities allocate billions of public funds in order to comply with the requirements (Alm, Solberg, Storm, & Jakobsen, 2014). The same tendency is apparent at local level in Sweden. Municipalities, that to a large extent own the elite sports facilities, have made large investments in order to meet the requirements from the national sport governing bodies. Historically, there has been a benignity from the municipalities to meet the stadium requirements, and especially to fulfill the wishes and demands from the local major male team's club (Sjöblom & Fahlén, 2010).

However, not all Swedish municipalities have shown this benignity. In 2013, the municipality of Ängelholm stated that they were not going to comply with stadium requirement from the Swedish FA and construct a new stadium for the second division team Ängelholms FF. Why?

The aim of this study is to, from an institutional perspective, understand why a municipality chose to resist and not implement the Swedish FA's stadium requirements. Why did the municipality act as they did? What factors should be at hand to be able to go against the requirements? The case of Ängelholm is interesting as they go against the conception of how a municipality should and have been acting in relation to the stadium requirements from elite football.

Theoretical background

In the perspective of the municipalities, the stadium requirements from the Swedish FA is standards. Standards constitute rules about what those who adopt them should do and are per se optional (Brunsson & Jacobsson, 2005). To understand why the municipality acted as they did in relation to the standards from the Swedish FA, I have used the conceptions of identity and situation (Brunsson & Jacobsson, 2005). As power is apparent, I have furthermore chosen to use the second and third faces of power (Lukes, 1974) and also the concept of exit and voice (Hirschman, 1970).

Methodology

To answer my aim, I have chosen a qualitative approach where I focus on municipal documents and interviews. The documents that form the basis of the analysis have been elaborated by the municipality in relation to the stadium and/or the club. The document consists of e.g. records of decisions, minutes of meetings, presentations and investigations. I did interviews with six persons. Four interviews with representatives from the municipality, one politician and three public officials that all had a prominent role during the process. One interview with a club representative and one with an official from the Swedish FA.

Results

Firstly, there has been a blind adherence from the municipality in relation to how the standards' inherent power influence the local sport policy. Secondly, municipalities as recipients of elite footballs' standards do not have the possibility to influence the format of the standards. Thus, the policy options for a municipality are few. Where the municipality of Ängelholm tried to use the option of voice, adopted the option of exit, but ended up refurbishing the old stadium in order to comply with the stadium requirements. In summary, it is possible to conclude that it is very difficult to resist a standard although they are optional and although many logics that indicate a non-implementation are in place. Thus, standards are a central form of governing – also at local sport policy level.

References

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