

Governance of Local Sports Policy: A Swedish Case Study in the Post-NPM era

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Aim

The aim with this study is to analyze the governance of public resource allocation to sport in Stockholm city 1985-2017. The research questions are as follows:

- How are the resources distributed? How much and what resources? In what ways? To whom?
- Which principles are the basis for resource allocation? What are the guidelines of the decision makers and what are the underlying norms?
- How are the guiding decisions taken and how are they implemented?
- Which actors participate in the decision-making processes, who implement the decisions and what structures affect them?

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

The analytical approach starts within historical and political science and research of societal governing. Three forms of political social governing are scrutinized: hierarchic governing, discursive governing and interactive governing. The concept governing is stipulated *as a long-term impact that brings on certain specific effects*.

The changes during the last three to four decades that have influenced sport policies on a national level has been thoroughly described. From the beginning of the 1990s, sport scientists discern a gradual change in the stately view of the sport movement's societal role. They refer among other things to new general principles regarding the governing of aims and results in Swedish administration, and also to more cooperation and trust between governmental actors and to a rapidly growing element of aimed public project funding. At the same time though it is pointed out that "the greater part of sport support today lies within the appropriation of 'common nature' that RF has at its independent disposal", and that "the state /.../ has avoided political pressure regarding regulation and normative development of sport clubs and federations".

The centralized attempts to control have, as earlier on in history, mainly been in form of expressed wishes and interests – not regulations and sanctions. The matter of a new basis for negotiations and its penetration in practice can thereby only be settled empirically.

Research Design and Data Analysis

The method is a case study of Stockholm city. The empirical data is collected from meeting minutes and decision protocols from the public sports authority, contemporary literature and recorded and transcribed interviews with representatives of politics and public administration. The interviews are qualitative and semi-structured.

The data consists of leading decisions, i.e. those decisions that – in retrospect – can be seen as indicative on how the public sport resources should be (and have been) used. It could be long-term policy decisions or more direct, acting decisions. Mainly it is decisions and acting on support for sporting facilities and sport clubs that is being analyzed. The concept of support refers mainly to financial support.

Results and Discussion

The survey about the governing forms and practices indicates, that a lot of different shapes and practices have been used for a long time working parallel as a complement to each other rather than succeeding (replacing) each other. Primary results regarding the accomplished sport politics, i.e. the sport policy and administration-effects and consequences, are in the first place that the allowance of public funds to sports has increased during the period. Secondly that the resources are distributed in mainly the same ways (channels) as before and that there are mainly the same physical activities, organizations and social groups as before that are favoured – while others in comparison are disadvantaged. This is a fact in spite of that the politicians since quite a long time are fully aware of which groups have been neglected when it comes to physical activities, what kind of new desires citizens have today, and that there are many new initiatives from public authorities time and again to bring about a change.

Conclusion and Implications

The conclusion reads that the structural elements economy, tradition (worked up systems and routine procedures) and culture (standardized behaviours) have influenced the shaping of sports policy after 1985 more than individual actors and their articulated interests and expressed values. A fact is also that politicians and civil servants have a main responsibility regarding the implemented policies, but that they at the same time are forced to take into consideration the investments already done and the economic reality that reigns here and now. Interestingly enough international research often come to similar conclusions. Obviously there is local sports policy with high ambitions all around Europe. At the same time economic ideas, established structures and strong traditions often set more or less distinct limits of what could be done. The contribution this article provides concerns details on how the leading decisions are taken, by whom and why. The article also elaborates on the routines that make the setting for the civil servants in the local public sport administration and the cultures that influences the representatives in the public sport authority as well as the employees in the administration.

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