

The Progress of Ice Hockey in Light of Economic and Political Influences

Convenors: Jyri Backman, Aila Ahonen and Bo Carlsson

The Difficulties of Modernization: The Case of Swedish Bandy

Andersson, Bo Torbjörn

Malmö University, Sweden
torbjorn.andersson@mau.se

Aim

The aim of the paper is to address the problems of bandy's modernization process in contrast with the more modern sport of ice hockey. How can bandy stay relevant in Swedish society?

Background and Literature Review

The Swedish sport of bandy (on ice) is one of the country's oldest team sports. The rules and the size of the playing field is similar to football. The men's final has been played since 1907 making it the oldest regular major sporting event in Sweden. Bandy came to Sweden from England in the late 19th century and was soon deeply associated with the country becoming the second biggest team sport after football. The royal court and upper classes, women included, played the game, and after world war one it spread rapidly to the working classes. It was a strictly amateur sport played with elegance and for the love of the game. The season was short, sometimes only January and February, and nature was a permanent threat: mild winters stopped many matches and too much cold or snow was a constant problem. Usually the final was played at the Olympic Stadium in Stockholm with crowds of around 25 000. Modernization was slow as artificial frozen pitches only became more common in the 1960's and indoor arenas in the 2000s. The development of arenas has been hastened due to the warmer climate in Sweden.

When ice hockey appeared in Sweden in 1920 bandy got competition from a fiercely modern, commercial and Americanized winter sport. Bandy was seen as doomed but has none the less managed to survive at some places. The final is still a major event, now filled with nostalgia for an old Sweden.

The sport of bandy has hardly been researched at an academic level in Sweden or elsewhere (Ericsson 2004). In comparison Swedish ice hockey, not least its fast modernization process, has been far more studied (Stark 2010; Backman 2012). The paper is based on the current ongoing work of Torbjörn Andersson which will result in the first academic monography on bandy, planned to be published in 2019. Bandy has got similarities to major sports in other countries – not least baseball and cricket – characterized by its connection to nature and nostalgia. These sports and their modernization processes will be compared to that of bandy.

Theory and Method

The seven characteristics of modern sport in Allen Guttman's sportification process will be complemented by three more concepts: commercialization, globalization and medialization. The total of ten characteristics are seen as being part of an Americanization process typical of

modern sport (Guttmann 2004; Alm 2002). The modernization processes of bandy and ice hockey will be compared through this theoretical perspective. In the case of bandy, a periodization of pre-modern, modern and late-modern will be applied based on when the game was played on natural ice, artificial frozen outdoor ice (from 1956) and in indoor stadiums (from 2004).

The study is qualitative and mainly based on national, local and sporting newspapers. All finals, male's (from 1907) and female's (from 1973), have been studied in 4 to 6 papers for about roughly a week each in the period around the games. This material is mainly complemented with around 10 interviews of key figures in the bandy culture and with observations at around 20 games. More or less all literature on bandy (biographies, yearbooks etc.) have been read.

Result and Implications

The sport of bandy had from the start pre-modern elements – often played on lakes and many matches never being completed – and was early on filled with a nostalgic worldview. These characteristics of the sport was strengthened when the more modern ice hockey appeared in the 1920s. Bandy had problems to modernize and there were many predictions of its imminent extinction. Bandy's problems deepened through its unwillingness to commercialize, its lack of globalization not being part of the Olympic movement and the difficulties of seeing the fast little ball on television. The climate changes has also been a disadvantage compared to the indoor game of ice hockey. Still the game has survived and the final has stayed attractive through its relative lack of modernity and its atmosphere of nostalgia. Nostalgia has become bandy's trademark. The way forward for bandy is to find a middle way between tradition and modernity. If bandy gets too modern it will risk to lose its originality – if it stays too traditional it will risk losing its relevance.

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