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Governance of local sports policy: A Swedish case study in the post-NPM era

Aim

This study is about the distribution of public sport resources in Sweden since 1985 on the local level. A motive is that earlier research has not univocally been able to show if the socioeconomic transformations in society, the change of ideas about how to arrange and govern it, and implemented policy has made any difference for the actual outcome of sport policies. Another related motive is, that it is the municipalities in Sweden that still are in charge of the lion's share of the public funds regarding sports and that little research is done on the local policy level.

Swedish historical research on local sport policy and politics shows that the main direction was distinctly marked out already from the very beginning, i.e. from the origin of the first public sport authorities in the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s and 1950s.¹ The argument for the politics regarding, first and foremost, sport facilities and associations/clubs was that it promoted public health and the bringing up of responsible and productive citizens; sports working as a sociopolitical and economical instrument.² Earlier research also establishes, that the increasing local public sports resources during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s were mostly concentrated where they were expected to give the most physical activity per each crown invested, i.e. the interest was not so much what activities were carried out.³ The greater part of the public funds, built mostly on tax revenues and public loans, went to large, well organized and strongly locally established sports directed towards competition.⁴

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

- How is the resources distributed?
 - o How much resources and what resources are distributed?
 - o In what ways are they distributed?
 - o To whom are they distributed?
- Which principles are the basis for resource allocation?
 - o 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?

¹ Sjöblom, 2013a, p. 165-174.

² Sjöblom, 2015a.

³ Sjöblom, 2015b, p. 86-93; Sjöblom & Fahlén, 2008, p. 7-12, 82-90.

⁴ Andersson, 2008; Book, 2008a; Book & Carlsson, 2008; Carlsson, 2008; Carlsson & Normark, 2008; Normark, 2008; Sjöblom, 2006, p. 485-508.

- How are the decision-making processes designed?
- Which actors participate in the processes?
- Who implement the decisions and what structures affect the implementation processes?

Theoretical background

The analytical approach starts within historical and political science and research of societal governing. The concept governing is stipulated *as a long-term impact that brings on certain specific effects.*

In literature there are usually three forms of political social governing under discussion: hierarchic governing, discursive governing and interactive governing. Within the hierarchic form of governing the actors trust in legitimacy and authority. The formally appointed representatives are those who govern, anyway on paper, because with that comes all the informal executives of power who influence the decisions at different levels and on different scales.⁵ This may happen directly, but also indirectly. From a modern actor-oriented perspective governing is seen as a complex system with a variety of actors who are working within a parliamentary framework with many different agendas and aims.⁶

The state and its governing may also be seen out of a structural perspective. Then the state constitutes an institutional structure; a collection of framed and informal principles, rules and decision making procedures that influence and is being influenced by the actors.⁷ In the discursive form of governing the theoretical starting-point is taken from a structural view where the language is essential. To form a discourse is to exercise power through creating notions of a specific way of comprehending the world; what is most important to achieve and what are suitable targets and lines of action to get there.⁸

Governmentality is one example of a discursive perspective on governing that focuses normative processes. This has its aim in governing through putting thinking and acting together with different conceivable standardized behaviors, normalizing what is necessary to do in order to deal with comprehended society problems.⁹ In the political practice however, it has been seen that the elected politicians are not always sure of what the problem is and how to deal with it, which opens a space of action for the employees in the public

⁵ Hall, 2015, chap. 1; Stoker, 1998; Sundström, 2014; Svava, 2006.

⁶ Sundström, 2016.

⁷ Clegg, Courpasson & Phillips, 2006, chap. 5.

⁸ Doolin, 2003; Montin & Hedlund, 2009a, p. 205; Rose, O'Malley & Valverde, 2006.

⁹ Clegg, Courpasson & Phillips, 2006, p. 109; Foucault, 1991; Montin & Hedlund, 2009b, p. 7.

administration.¹⁰ But even they are sometimes uncertain, often due to lack of experience or specific competence. Besides they are also taking part in different connections and dialogues where they are likely to be influenced.

Political science shows that big organizations, with mutual interests, during the postwar period have been able to create such connections/dialogues where politicians and public servants have been influenced by an interactive form of governing.¹¹ This is usually described in terms of “corporativism”, a culture of co-operation directed towards common solutions on perceived societal problems.¹²

Some social scientists maintain that the influence on the political decisions from about mid-1980s has been shifted from the government authorities and the organizations (of common interest) to more loosely connected groups of interests within so called partnerships and – often yet even more informal – networks.¹³ These researchers have described a growing “stateless society-government”, where powerful parties, either because of their expertise or their economy or both, have been able to establish and keep a capacity for governing regardless of the state.¹⁴ Others mean that the governing capacity of the state has not at all been hollowed, but that the government authority instead has adjusted and changed from having an authoritarian role to a role as co-operative partner and coordinator. They maintain that what at first seems to be a stateless society governing is actually “governing from a distance”, as the state within the limits of the cooperation at the same time has cut down the capacity of action and autonomy for their partners.¹⁵

Does the contemporary history of local sport policy point to the growth of a stateless public governing or is the municipality still a vital actor who adapts to new conditions and governs from a distance? In that case, how does it more specifically govern and what more actors are involved?

¹⁰ Sørensen, 2006.

¹¹ Montin & Hedlund, 2009b, p. 26-28; Pierre & Peters, 2000, p. 65-66.

¹² Heckscher, 1951, p. 176, 265-270; Kommunalforskningsgruppen, 1975, p. 140, 158; Lewin, 1992, p. 22-23, 62-71, 92, 101-107, 128; Maktutredningen, 1990, chap. 5; Micheletti, 1994, p. 138-148, 169-181; Rothstein, 1992, p. 16-17, 59, 345; Rothstein & Bergström, 1999, p. 27-35, 150.

¹³ Montin, 2006.

¹⁴ Bache & Olsson, 2001; Jessop, 2004; Jordan, Wurzel & Zito, 2005; Rosenau, 2004; Sundström, 2016.

¹⁵ Cashore, 2002; Howlett, 2000; Sørensen, 2006.

Literature review: The development of Swedish sport politics

Sport has for a long time been, and is still, mostly an unregulated sphere in politics free for the municipalities to support.¹⁶ This merely signals that sport is comprehended as less important than other regulated municipal activities.¹⁷ At the same time sport has been given extensive public resources. Some evaluators estimate the local sport support in total during the 2010s up to close on 15 milliard SEK annually.¹⁸

Swedish public sport policies have had as a vision to bring about “sport for all”.¹⁹ From the very first regular annual sport contributions during the 1920s, 30s and 40s the fundamental motives for support has been about organized sport as furthering public health, societal construction and entertainment, even though the main point has shifted from time to time.²⁰ Regarding municipal sport policies specifically, things have been even more pragmatic than they have been regarding national sport policies. It has been about achieving increased economic production and “putting the municipality on the map”. Growth, creating jobs and marketing have been as important locally to the public sports support as public health promotion, integration and good entertainment.²¹

Thus it is not sport for its own sake that the state has been interested in supporting, but the comprehended added values of advantage to the whole society (that sport has been expected to create). Particularly RF has been looked upon as the foremost representative of organized sport used as service to society in Sweden, and by that has obtained the lion’s share of the sports support. RF has been described as a “deputy sports authority”. An implicit agreement with its starting-point in the assumption of service to the society and the motto “sport for all” has regulated a state of dependence, where, from the state, RF has been given the responsibility of distributing the directed sport funds in exchange for leading and working for increased sport participation, particularly among children and youth.²² This informal contract still applies, even if the demands for social benefit and a great variety of sports has been refined and increased during the last 30 years.²³

It should be added that the described development does not only have validity in Sweden. International research indicates that this

¹⁶ Premfors, 2003; Svenska kommunförbundet, 2004, p. 94.

¹⁷ Andersson, 2008; Book, 2015, chap.7; Sjöblom, 2015b, p. 56-62.

¹⁸ Englund & Nathanson, 2011, p. 10-11, chap. 3; Idrottsstödsutredningen, 2008, p. 149-185; Riksidrottsförbundet, 2017; Sveriges kommuner och landsting, 2013; 2016.

¹⁹ Idrottsstödsutredningen, 2008, chap. 4; Norberg, 2004, chap.14; 2011, p. 319-322; Sveriges riksidrottsförbund, 2009.

²⁰ Norberg, 2004, chap. 14.

²¹ Sjöblom, 2015a.

²² Norberg, 2004, chap. 14; 2011; Sjöblom, 2006, chap. 11; 2015b, p. 86-93.

²³ Norberg, 2016a, chap. 7.

development touches upon, or anyway in many respects is similar to, what is going on in other comparable nations. Several European countries have had “sport for all” as a vision or motto, the motives for public support have been the same, and the interest from the governments has primarily been in added values of advantage to the whole society.²⁴ That is why we also have much to gain in reference to larger comparative research projects on procedures and outcomes of public sport support.

The changes during the last three to four decades that have influenced sport policies on a national level in Sweden 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 the administration, and also to more cooperation and trust between different governmental actors and to a rapidly growing element of aimed public project funding.²⁵ 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”.²⁶

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.

Literature review: The development of Swedish public administration

During the conservative period of office 1976-82, 1991-94 and 2006-14, the collective solutions within Swedish public administration were supplemented or sometimes even replaced by market solutions; a competitive challenge and partly privatization took place.²⁷ These so-called rationalization measures had already begun during social democratic management. The unification of municipalities 1952-1974

²⁴ Bairner, 2010; Bergsgard & Norberg, 2010; Eichberg, 2012, p. 23-56; Gratton & Henry, 2001; Houlihan, 2011; Houlihan & White, 2002, p. 111-163, 206-231; Rafoss & Breivik, 2012, p. 157-171; Rafoss & Troelsen, 2010.

²⁵ Centrum för idrottsforskning, 2013b, p. 19-42, 153-173; Fahlén, Wickman & Eliasson, 2017, Fahlén & Karp, 2010; Fahlén & Stenling, 2016; Norberg, 2011; 2016a, p. 205-206. Österlind, 2016; Österlind & Fahlén, 2015.

²⁶ Norberg, 2004, p. 453; 2016a, p. 206; Carlsson, Norberg & Persson, 2011, p. 305.

²⁷ Bäck, 2000, p. 7-8, 12-13; Fölster, 1998, p. 19-20; Gustafsson, 1988, p. 116-128; Hall, 2012, chap. 2; Tropp, 1999, p. 17-38, 53-91, 235-272.

was a clear example. The purpose of the fusions was to obtain the advantages of large-scale management.²⁸

The rationalization measures were displayed in two government investigations at the beginning of the 1990s, who both established that the welfare state model was in a critical situation. Sweden was in need of a more flexible system, where the collective and governmental solutions were replaced by individual and private ones.²⁹

In the year 1991, accordingly by way of a new municipal law, delegation and decentralization as an administrative principle for authorities was carried through. The power of decision was to be brought downwards in the hierarchy.³⁰ At the same time new management ideas were implemented. They were fetched from the neo-classical economic theories and economic industrial life, so-called New Public Management. Aim- and result-control and customer execution-models were introduced with arguments for effective means of control and use of resources.³¹

The efficiency improvements, now with a so-called quality insurance as a complement, went on during the beginning of the 21th century when the account systems were refined and indicator systems were introduced to measure the effects of the political decisions.³²

Political science research has analyzed the changes of public administration described above and come to the conclusion, that the processes of rationalization among other things resulted in municipal administrative services becoming less united and that the influence over the directed decisions was spread out on to more actors. But the conclusion also reads, that it is hard to say something more generally applicable about those who governs. The real questions about power “/.../ can only be settled within every specific policy- ad administrative field, often only in each individual case.”³³

Research design, methodology and data analysis

The method is a case study of Stockholm city, the capital municipality in Sweden. The empirical data is collected from meeting minutes and decision protocols from the public sports authority, contemporary

²⁸ 2014 års demokratiutredning, 2016, p. 27-51; Almqvist, 2006, chap. 1; Premfors, 2009, chap. 13; Svenska kommunförbundet, 1996, p. 2-3; 2004, p.89; Utredningen om bidrag till ideella organisationer, 1993, p. 9.

²⁹ Ekonomikommisionen, 1993; Maktutredningen, 1990.

³⁰ Styrutredningen, 2007, p. 11-27.

³¹ Almqvist, 2006, chap. 1-2; Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 2000; Hall, 2012, chap. 1; Hallgren, Hilborn & Sandström, 2001, chap. 1; Verschuere, 2009.

³² Almqvist, 2006, chap. 7; Brannan, John & Stoker, 2006; Montin, 2006; Svenska kommunförbundet, 2004, p. 89.

³³ Ingelstam, 2006, p. 131-145; Montin & Granberg, 2013, p. 144-150; Östberg & Andersson, 2013, p. 486-489.

literature and recorded and transcribed interviews with representatives of politics and public administration. The interviews are qualitative and semi-structured.³⁴

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.

The investigated period is 1985-2017. A period with significant upheavals in the Swedish society especially regarding the development of sport and sport activities and the development within public administration.

Findings 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. Or differently put: More people in Stockholm get the opportunity to take part in day to day sport activities in the new millennium, but the distribution of resources is uneven and favours those who are already very active and well organised. 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.

Interestingly enough international research shows many similar results. Some scientists describe for instance rigid forms of distributing subsidies, where local governments go on just like they have always done in order not to spend too much time, effort and resources trying to change the situation by getting involved in struggles with stakeholders.³⁵ Others come to the conclusions that there are certain

³⁴ Dalen, 2008, p. 9, 30-39, 84-85; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 17, 87-88, 118; Vetenskapsrådet, 2002, p. 6, 14.

³⁵ Collins, 2008; Ibsen, 2009, p. 269-288; Rafoss, 2009, p. 29-52.

social groups who are continually favored by the implemented policy in spite of an expressed wish to reach earlier marginalized citizens.³⁶

Conclusion and contribution

The conclusion reads that the structural elements economy, tradition (worked up systems and routine procedures) and culture (normed/standardized behaviours) have influenced the shaping of sports policy after 1985, or rather influenced and shaped the effects and long term outcome of the accomplished sport politics, more so 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.

Also regarding my general conclusions there is much to gain by comparisons with other countries. Research shows that there is local sports policy with high ambitions all around Europe, but economic ideas, established structures and strong traditions often set more or less distinct limits of what could be done.³⁷

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 makes the setting for the civil servants in the local public sport administration and the cultures/traditions that influences the representatives in the public sport authority as well as the employees in the administration.

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³⁶ Hylton & Totten, 2008; King, 2009, p. 231-247; Rommetvedt, 2002.

³⁷ Bramham, 2008; Downward, 2011; Eichberg, 2012, p. 243-274; Girginov, 2008; Ibsen & Jørgensen, 2009, p. 5-27.

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