



<http://www.diva-portal.org>

## Postprint

This is the accepted version of a paper published in *International Journal of Sport Policy*. This paper has been peer-reviewed but does not include the final publisher proof-corrections or journal pagination.

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

Fahlén, J., Eliasson, I., Wickman, K. (2014)

Resisting self-regulation: an analysis of sport policy programme making and implementation in Sweden.

*International Journal of Sport Policy*

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2014.925954>

Access to the published version may require subscription.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:umu:diva-93414>

# **Resisting Self-regulation: An Analysis of Sport Policy Programme Making and Implementation in Sweden**

Josef Fahlén<sup>\*</sup>, Inger Eliasson and Kim Wickman

*Department of Education, Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden*

Political programming of sport has become the new orthodoxy in many countries where the strive for a more healthy and civically engaged population is intertwined with an ambition to encourage and make responsible individuals and organisations for meeting societal goals. Although much effort has been put into studying this phenomenon, there is still a shortage of understandings of how, why, and with what results sport policy programmes are made and implemented. To address this shortage this article reports on a study of the largest government intervention in sport in Sweden with the purpose of exploring processes of responsabilisation and self-regulation at play in the relationship between the government and sport as well as between sport organisations on different levels. Results show how sport has received a more salient position on the government agenda, where more instrumental goals have been accompanied by increased resources to aid in their attainment. This process has assisted in the ambitions to modernise sports organizations by encouraging development through self-regulation. The sports organisations involved have embraced the new goals and resources. However, instead of self-regulating in the desired direction, each organisational level in the sports system has forwarded the responsibility for development to the next level below. This process has left the sports clubs with the full responsibility of meeting the government goals, a responsibility they have not accepted. Understandings of these phenomena and processes are discussed by pointing to the specific institutional landscape and tradition of Swedish sport.

**Keywords:** government involvement; national sports organisations; power; sports clubs; sport governance

---

<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author. Email: josef.fahlen@pedag.umu.se

## **Introduction**

An increase of government involvement (Houlihan and Green 2008) and use of New Public Management technologies in the governance of sport has been well documented by scholars studying sport governance in Australia (Sotiriadou 2009), New Zealand (Sam and Jackson 2004), Canada (Green 2004a), and the United Kingdom (Green 2004b). It has also been contended that these technologies and the policy ideas behind them are spreading throughout the western industrialised world (Green and Oakley 2001) by mechanisms of policy learning (Green and Houlihan 2005), policy transfer, and lesson drawing (Green 2007). But, as Houlihan notes, “the impact of non-domestic influences consequently depends not just on their specific characteristics, but also on the particular pattern of institutional arrangements, both organisational and cultural, at the domestic level” (Houlihan 2009, p. 7).

Since little is known about possible increased government interest in sport and its consequences outside the English-speaking contexts, this paper aims to provide an empirical example of a pattern of institutional arrangements differing in organisation and culture from those that have been explored in the literature thus far by exploring processes of responsabilisation and self-regulation at play in the relationship between the government and sport as well as between sport organisations on different levels. The need for such knowledge is reflected in another quote by Houlihan: “For a number of countries, especially the more neo-liberal, the international ideological environment will appear far less alien than for countries where the commodification of services is more limited, as in the Scandinavian countries...” (2009, p. 7). Therefore, it is our intention to show how neo-liberal ideas

on the governance of sport are carried out in one of the Scandinavian countries, Sweden.

What makes Sweden especially interesting is recent data presented by The Heritage Foundation, that placed Sweden in first place on a list ranking the liberalisation speed of OECD-countries (The Heritage Foundation 2012). Since 1995, no other OECD-country has experienced more rapid processes of liberalisation, deregulation, and privatisation, which makes an interesting case against the background of the increased government involvement in sport observed internationally. This development has taken Sweden from being, perhaps, one of the most typical social democratic regimes in Esping-Andersen's (1990) typology to a country that is now internationally renowned for its deregulated school, railway and, pensions systems; television and radio broadcasting, domestic aviation, postal service, telecom market, employment agencies, motor vehicle inspections, and pharmacy market.

This development of the general political landscape makes Swedish sport particularly interesting. Especially in relation to a more neo-liberal international environment since Swedish sport is often described as being part of the Scandinavian sports model, with its particular patterns of institutional arrangements, hallmarked by large national voluntary sports organisations with almost a monopoly on competitive sports (Bairner 2010, Bergsgard and Norberg 2010, Bergsgard et al. 2007, Fahlén and Karp, 2010, Norberg, 2011, Seippel, 2010). These specific characteristics and recent developments form the background of our aim to increase understanding of how government interest in sport impacts on the delivery of sport policy by exploring processes of responsabilisation and self-regulation at play in the

relationship between the government and sport as well as between sport organisations on different levels.

In order to reach this aim, this article utilizes data from a large-scale evaluation (performed by the authors and colleagues) of the latest sport-for-all programme, The Lift for Sport, launched by the Swedish Government in 2007 (similar ventures have also been launched in the neighbouring countries Denmark and Norway as reported on by Ibsen 2002 and Skille 2009) . In the programme, the Government commissioned the umbrella organisation for sport, the Swedish Sports Confederation (RF), to develop activities for more children and youth and develop activities so they choose to be active in sport longer. The programme was funded with an investment of € 200 million from 2007-2011. The basic idea of the programme was to stimulate development work in national sports organisations (NSOs) and to let sports clubs apply for funding for projects aimed at working towards the ambitions in the programme manifesto corresponding to the guidelines in the RF-policy programme (Riksidrottsförbundet n.d.a). In this text, we take this programme as a token of an internationally noted increase in government involvement (e.g., Norberg 2011), in an approach resembling the one taken in the work of Keat and Sam (2013).

Government actions in sport, similar to the one described above, have been scrutinized by sport policy writers, such as Green and Houlihan (2006), Green (2009), Keat and Sam (2013), and Phillpots, Grix and Quarmby (2010). Their contributions have furthered our understanding of how sport issues have gained higher priority on government agendas, how sport has come to be used increasingly as a political means to achieve sports-external (and also sports-internal) ends, and how these processes have worked in modernising sports organisations through

impositions of business practices. They have also taught us that the means for modernisation is self-regulation, meaning organisations involved in the delivery of policy are encouraged to, and made responsible for developing their organisation, management and practice in order to be better equipped to meet government demands connected to the funding they receive. In contrast to previous hierarchical governing mechanisms, governing by self-regulation aims to empower recipients (sport organisations, schools and individuals) by providing them with autonomy to decide how they should develop. However, as previously mentioned authors have shown, self-regulation is but an illusory freedom since goals and the monitoring of results are as effective regulations as any of the previous hierarchical governing mechanisms. In contrast, we have come to know such governing mechanisms also imply several contradictions in the relationship between the governors and recipients, one being the promotion of entrepreneurial and autonomous recipients on the one hand and the ambition to control, coordinate and align recipients on the other hand.

Furthermore, and specifically useful for the purpose of this paper, these contributions have shown how sport policy development, sport policy making, and sport policy implementation can, at first sight, take on a unified appearance, but after in-depth study, take on another (see also the review of approaches for studying policy implementation in general by deLeon and deLeon 2002). It is specifically in this regard, our analysis can add to existing knowledge. By studying a policy process from start to finish (figuratively speaking), we can contribute knowledge on policy making and policy implementation. Before presenting the details of this process, we begin with an outline of the institutional arrangement of Swedish sport.

### **The institutional arrangement of Swedish sport**

As mentioned in the introduction, the institutional landscape of Swedish sport is hallmarked by one large national voluntary sports organisation, RF, which has enjoyed annual government support since 1913 (€ 170 million in 2010, Norberg 2011) and has, since 1970, a government mandate to “act on behalf of the government” in distributing government funds to sport organisations (Norberg 2002). Acting on behalf of the government, RF is trusted to administer Swedish sport towards the objectives of public health, civic education, growth, and entertainment (Sjöblom and Fahlén 2010). This arrangement has remained stable for more than a century. The basic organising idea builds on the notion of the sporting individual partaking in sport as a member (some 3 million in total out of a population of 9.5 million) of a local sports club (some 20,000 in total).

Politically, Sweden has traditionally been seen as being characterised by a strong belief in the welfare state, built on social democratic tradition where public authorities have strong positions and wide-spread support (Seippel et al. 2010). For sport, the Scandinavian welfare policy model has been paramount to its growth and development since the Scandinavian idea of welfare has not been limited to health care and schools, but has also included citizens’ access to recreation and leisure activities in which sport has been given a leading role (Bergsgard and Norberg 2010). This role, together with the government mandate to “act on behalf of the government,” has assigned RF a double function in the Swedish society— the highest authority in voluntary organised sport and a public authority in sport policy (Norberg 2011). The role of government has traditionally been limited to decisions on the extent of the funding and its over-arching goals, while RF has had the mandate to decide on the means for reaching goals. This state-RF relationship, which the Swedish sports historian Johan Norberg (2004) has termed “the implicit

contract,” has enabled the government to control its expenditure and RF to preserve its self-determination in a corporative collaboration.

But during recent decades, the long standing practice of letting sport mind its own business, as long as it acts in the service of the state, has changed (Bergsgard and Norberg 2010). Norberg (2011) even asks if the implicit contract is on its way to being terminated or at least renegotiated to the benefit of more government control. Norberg (2011) points to recent societal reformations as explanations for this renegotiation, such as EU membership, economic recession, non-social democratic governments, and increasing liberalisation in the state administration focusing on target-setting, audits, and evaluations in both its own administrative units and external organisations. For sport, the increase in government control has taken forms of reformulated policy goals focusing on inclusion and integration during the late 1980s, a national sports commission suggested closer control of the funding to sport in the 1990s, and another sports commission in the 2000s suggested an annual external audit of the government support for sport (Österlind and Wright 2012).

More specifically, and in the focus of this paper, the increase in government intervention has taken the form of an increase in sport funding through the first government-funded sport-for-all programme, The Handshake, in 2002. In this programme, € 100 million was added to the annual government support with the explicit aims of opening doors to sport for more children and youth, keeping fees low, investing more in girls' participation, preventing drug use, and intensifying cooperation with schools (Riksidrottsförbundet n.d.b). The programme was followed by another in 2006, alluded to in the introduction of this paper, adding an additional € 200 million of support, which further strengthened the impression of an increase in government intervention in sport. In the results, we will look at this development and



its consequences more in detail. But before doing so, we will outline the theoretical arguments framing our understanding of Swedish policy-making and delivery.

### **Theoretical framework**

Theoretically, our understanding is framed by the combination of concepts put forward by Goodwin and Grix (2011). They suggest a greater role for structures and institutions alongside the ideas, culture, and belief of actors in explanations of societal developments. They take their departure in critiquing the governance narrative, which, they argue, with due support from other political science scholars (e.g., March et al. 2003), exaggerates the decline of state power. Their support for bringing the structures back stems, theoretically, from the ideas of Chris Skelcher (2000), who argues that network governance—self-organising networks of mutually resource-dependent actors—are in fact centrally governed by the state in its capacity to establish, sustain, and finance networks and partnerships. In doing so, central governments can retain authority over other actors and limit the authority of rival sources of power while still instilling actors with a sense of freedom. The value of taking influence from the decentred approach (Bevir and Richards 2009), which Goodwin and Grix support, lays in its attention to diverse and conflicting beliefs among agents in all political processes. However, as Goodwin and Grix also point out, a decentred approach can be combined with an acknowledgement of structures and institutions as emphasized by March et al. (2003).

However, involving ourselves in the governance debate is not primarily about positioning ourselves between “those that seek to emphasise the role of institutions and structures... and those that attempt to focus attention on the beliefs and ideas of the actors” (Grix 2010, p. 160) on an ontological level. It is, from our perspective,

more of an epistemological issue of going beneath “surface observation [which] is usually enough evidence to confirm a shift from big ‘government’ to more autonomous governance by networks and partnerships involved in policy-making and delivery” (Grix 2010, p. 160). In other words, the understanding of policy-making and implementation offered in this text is not primarily dependent on where we position ourselves on the structure-agency continuum, but more on our ability to capture what appears on the surface and uncover what happens beneath (no linear account intended). While this surface-beneath distinction may lead thoughts towards the notion of policy being made at the top and implemented at the bottom, we have in, our approach, tried to be sensitive to the argument put forth by scholars involved in policy-implementation analysis that policy-making and policy implementation are difficult to separate and that policy (both making and implementation) is constantly being made and remade (Kay 1996). On that particular note, we have paid attention to the policy-implementation debate referred to by O’Gorman (2011). In that debate, the merits of synthesizing elements of top-down and bottom-up approaches, focusing on both the structure of a policy and the actions of implementers, are advocated (see also the synthesis of the two approaches for studying policy implementation in general by Sabatier 1986). We will in the following expand on how this approach has been taken in our study.

## **Methodology**

This article utilizes data from a large-scale evaluation (performed by the authors and colleagues) of the latest sport-for-all programme, The Lift for Sport, launched by the Swedish Government in 2007. In the evaluation, the authors and colleagues were commissioned to review the programme in terms of how NSOs perceive the

commission from RF and the government, how NSOs relate the commission to their regular activities, which strategies and methods NSOs use to reach the government's aims (and whether those aims change over time), how NSOs' goals, strategies, methods, and results correspond to the guidelines in the RF-policy programme and to the ambitions of increasing gender and class equality, the results of the programme. For these purposes, data were collected from four main sources:

(1) The government missive to RF formulating a supplementary policy for Swedish sport; the programme manifesto formulated by RF as guidelines to NSOs, Regional Sports Organisations (RSOs), and sports clubs for the implementation of the policy programme; and the NSO development plans RF commissioned as more detailed implementation plans where each NSO should document a situation analysis, vision for the policy programme, strategies for and priorities in the programme implementation, plans for increasing gender and class equality, plans for cooperating with regional organisations, an analysis of perceived bottlenecks and barriers for a successful delivery of the policy programme, and a description of how success would be measured.

(2) Interviews with 27 key personnel involved in distributing the programme funds in five NSOs (Swedish Budo & Martial Arts Federation, Swedish Floorball Federation, Swedish Gymnastics Federation, Swedish Ski Association, and Swedish Sports Organisation for the Disabled and the Swedish Paralympic Committee). The selection of NSOs was made by RF for the purpose of the programme evaluation. The five NSOs assemble 642,300 out of 3,291,000 members in Swedish sport (Riksidrottsförbundet 2010). Interviewees were selected on the basis of their assessed ability to provide facts and experiences from both strategic and operative levels in the NSOs. For that purpose, we chose to interview the NSO chair person or

another member of the board, the secretary general, the programme administrative official, and a few other administrative officers deemed central (by each NSO) to the execution of the programme (such as programme directors, chief accountants, and administrative directors). The interviews were semi-structured (Friis Thing and Ottesen 2013) in nature and consisted of questions about the commission from RF and the government, the relationship between regular day-to-day operations and programme operations, goals, development plan, strategies and methods, results, follow-up, and change.

(3) Project applications made by sports clubs for programme funding (n=2563). The programme was designed so the total programme budget was distributed to the NSOs according to the size of their activities. A large portion of these funds was ear-marked to let sports clubs apply for funding for projects aimed at working towards the ambitions in the programme manifesto. In the evaluation, all accepted applications from sports clubs in the five NSOs during the programme's first (2007-2008) and third (2009-2010) year were collected in order to examine the applying clubs' and granting NSOs' general ideas about development, how programme aims were to be reached, and how project ideas corresponded to the guidelines in the RF-policy programme. Using an instrument developed by Karp, Olofsson and Söderström (2007), project applications were categorised in five aspects: scope, main content, methods, approach, and focus.

(4) Questionnaires filled out by representatives of the sports clubs applying for funding (n 486). In the programme evaluation, an electronic questionnaire was sent out to representatives of the sports clubs' who had applied for funding in 2011 (n 1026, response rate 47%). Through the questionnaires, we gathered the applying clubs' experiences of taking part in the programme. The questionnaire consisted of

56 questions with five themes: a) general experiences of the programme, specific experiences of the distribution of programme funds, and the project design chosen as means for reaching the programme aims; b) experiences of the NSO development plan, criteria for granting funds to projects, support and follow-up; c) facts on implemented projects; d) results of implemented projects; e) experiences of the projects as means for development.

For the purpose of this article, we have treated the first two data sources (government missives, programme manifesto, NSO development plans; and interviews) as structures, institutions, and surface observations. Consequently, the last two data sources (project applications and questionnaires) were treated as ideas, culture, beliefs, and actions of implementers. With this approach, we have recognized both “structural and institutional path dependency whilst accounting for the beliefs and ideas of the actors...” (Grix 2010, p. 165). We have also paid attention O’Gorman’s (2011) encouragement to explicitly address the phenomenon of sport policy and programme implementation. O’Gorman calls for more thorough analyses of implementation in general, but, specifically, for more theoretically informed analyses that can enhance the understanding of “how and why sport policies and programmes have been implemented in the way they have, but also how we come to make assumptions and propositions as to their impacts and relative successes and failures” (O’Gorman 2011, p. 87). In heeding O’Gorman’s concomitant analysis of the shortcomings in existing sport policy implementation research, we have utilized the framework laid out previously to offer understandings of how and, more specifically, why increased government interest in sport impacts the delivery of sport policy as it does. While acknowledging that our design might give the impression of a top-down approach, our argument for beginning this

description of methods used and the later following presentation of results is that “the sport policy system is essentially top-down in practice” (Kay 1996, p 242).

## **Findings**

The findings are arranged as follows. First, we outline the structures and institutions underpinning the policy programme as expressed in government missives, programme manifesto, NSO development plans, and interviews. Second, we use data from project applications and sports clubs questionnaires to sketch the contours of ideas, culture, beliefs, and actions of implementers.

### ***The surface of the policy programme***

Our analyses of the evaluation data from the surface show how an increase of government involvement has taken form. In Government Decision 1 (Regeringen 2007), the government decided how the surplus from AB Svenska Spel (the state gambling company) should be allocated and to what ends. The decision stated that € 50 million per year over a period of four years was to be divided between a) developing NSO and RSO operations (€ 4 million); b) developing NSO and RSO organisations (€ 8,2 million); c) special projects, (€ 9 million); d) evaluation of effects (€ 0.8 million); e) sports club development projects (€ 28 million). The overarching aim for the programme was put forth as the following:

Support and encourage NSOs and sports clubs to open the doors to sport for more children and youth and to develop their activities so that they chose to participate longer. NSOs are given resources to develop their sports, for intensifying their work by developing strategies, identify needs, assist with facts and competence, evaluate and spread good examples. Further efforts are to be made to increase recruitment and

development of leaders and cooperation with schools. All work should consider gender and class equality. (Regeringen 2007)

It is evident that the government ambition is to govern sport in a specific direction, both in terms of content (widened recruitment) and in terms of governing per se (NSOs are provided with resources to develop themselves). In addition, the government formulated key performance indicators:

An account shall be made assessing how many more girls and boys have begun to engage in sport and exercise as a result of the programme and how many have continued to participate. The account shall also describe efforts made to strengthen NSO activities and management. Finally, the account shall describe efforts made to intensify the cooperation with schools, improve access to sport and to develop leaders. (Regeringen 2007)

This quotation shows that accountability is key to the process and that evidence, in terms of numbers, is the way of keeping scores. For the more detailed steering of the programme, RF formulated some additional guidelines for NSOs, RSOs, and clubs:

An annual report shall be made to RF in three parts: Reporting the total amount of activities, divided by gender and age. These numbers are to be collected from NSOs, RSOs and clubs. In addition, the report shall contain a description of NSO work based on the development plan and an account of how key performance indicators have been met. Regarding cooperation with schools, the number of schools and the school years participating shall be accounted for. The annual report is a condition for the continuation of the regular support. (Riksidrottsförbundet n.d.a)

The responsabilisation of the recipient, evident in the relationship between the government and sport, is clearly expressed also in the relationship between RF and the NSOs. NSOs are expected to provide data to an overall programme evaluation and to account for how they plan to follow up on their development plan. NSOs are responsible for the appropriate use of allotted resources and for monitoring club activities by establishing contracts with clubs receiving project funds. The contracts shall regulate project conformity with programme aims and accounts from receiving clubs. Should contracts be broken, funds are to be returned to the NSO. NSOs shall also report to RF how funds are used for the development of NSO and RSO management and operations.

In a memo from RF to the NSOs dated 8 April 2009 (Riksidrottsförbundet 2009), the disciplining and self-regulation of NSOs is further explained and more guidelines are added. In the guidelines, the NSOs' responsibility for monitoring club project conformity with programme aims is further highlighted. This monitoring should focus on ensuring that funds are not distributed to clubs without children or youth as members, prohibiting clubs from securing project funds from more than one source, ensuring that fund for projects involving more than one club are evenly distributed, collecting qualitative (not only quantitative) information about projects, and reclaiming funds from projects that have not been realized.

Our analyses of evaluation data from the surface, in terms of NSO development plans, show that the NSOs have also taken up the governing principles in the above mentioned relationships—pushing the responsibility for development further down the chain of command. However, they have not regulated themselves as desired by the government and RF, i.e. identifying their own specific needs and developing their own specific strategies to address those needs. Instead, aims are



mirror images of the general ambitions formulated by the government and RF (expansion, i.e., more leaders, facilities and clubs, which, in turn, are expected to result in more participants that will participate longer), even if the issue of facilities for example is not a problem for the NSO in question. A quote from one NSO's development plan is provided as an example:

NSO affiliated clubs shall be able to initiate special ventures in accordance with the basic ideas of "The Lift for Sport", and thereby: a) expand, especially in pressing areas – such as in locations with short supply of attractive activities for teenagers or in locations with special needs and important target groups such as youth in general and girls in particular, and groups within these groups which are especially hard to reach with club activities; b) develop, especially with regard to competence among the club's most active and promising young members – both regarding their sport specific skills and their ability to contribute to club activities with instruction and leadership in the future. (Swedish Budo & Martial Arts Federation 2007)

The NSO development plans show how the NSOs reproduce the model used by the government in its governing of RF and, in turn, by RF in its governing of the NSOs, implying that the governing body relinquishes the responsibility for the design of the programme to the governed one. This is illustrated by a quotation taken from the Swedish Floorball Federation's development plan:

Decisions concerning "The Lift for Sport" are to be made by the NSO-administration, but we want commitment and development locally. This will be reached by stimulating RSOs to develop clubs. Quality assured development and growth are keywords in our development. Therefore, [local] leaders' competence is key, both coaches' and board members.' (Swedish Floorball Federation 2007)

In the development plans, it is noticeable how the processes of autonomisation and responsabilisation continue with the NSOs as senders and the sports clubs as recipients. Club commitment and development, together with local leaders, is the means by which programme aims are to be reached.

Signs of these processes also become visible in the analyses of the 27 interviews with key personnel involved in distributing the programme funds in the five NSOs. In these analyses, it appears that the programme is a much welcomed initiative despite that it might be conceived as a break with the implicit contract referred to earlier (Norberg 2004). The NSO representatives are receptive to the demands, direction, and follow-ups inherent in the programme:

On the contrary [to being conceived as a break with the implicit contract], it is all good.

In the same way as it is an exclusive prerogative for the sender of grants to distribute them [as they please], it is their exclusive prerogative to attach a system for control and follow-up as they see fit. (Secretary general, Swedish Ski Association 2010)

This quotation shows that governing in terms of checks and balances is perceived by the NSOs as a natural part of the development and something that must be expected as part of these types of directed grants. Their own explanation of that is the experienced concordance between programme aims and the NSOs' aims for regular activities, here symbolized in a quotation by the chairman of the board of the Swedish Gymnastics Federation:

We have made it our cause to see it [“The Lift for Sport”] as a part of the development work we ought to do anyway. With these resources we can do more and better...It [“The Lift for Sport”] is part of the commission we already have...This is what is tricky

with our statistics, you cannot isolate this specific effect from another. (Chairman of the board, Swedish Gymnastics Federation 2011)

The quotation simultaneously shows how programme aims are merged with the NSOs' aims for regular activities, thereby making it possible for NSOs to tone down expectations and relieve themselves of some of the responsibility laid upon them for reaching key performance indicators. A similar way of negotiating this responsibility is to view programme funds as extended regular state support as expressed by the Secretary General of the Swedish Sports Organisation for the Disabled and the Swedish Paralympic Committee:

It would not have mattered [whether funds had been part of the regular state support or earmarked as "The Lift for Sport"]. We had already begun a development process...where we prioritized our most important development areas...We were fortunate to start that process simultaneously as "The Lift for Sport" was launched...It has provided us with resources to work with issues we were already working with. (Secretary General, Swedish Sports Organisation for the Disabled and the Swedish Paralympic Committee 2010)

In sum, our main impression, in terms of governing from the analyses of government missives, programme manifesto, NSO development plans, and interviews, is that government steering has increased, new modes of governing have been imposed (explicit goals, responsabilisation and evaluation of key performance indicators), and these new modes of governing work in passing the responsibility for reaching programme goals to the next organisation in line.

### ***The underneath of the policy programme***

Our analyses of evaluation data from beneath, in terms of project applications for programme funds, reveals a slightly different picture. Certainly, the projects that clubs seek funds for are in the broad outlines aligned with overall government aims, RF guidelines, and NSO development plans. However, many of the guidelines in the RF-policy programme are conspicuous by their absence in the analysed project applications. When categorising the contents of the project applications in relation to the RF-policy programme guidelines, we find very few applications explicitly expressing ambitions relating to *promoting respect for others* (0,3% in year one and 0% year three), *considering participants' views* (0,3% in year one and 0% year three), and *promoting fair play* (0,6% in year one and 0,1% year three). These proportions can be compared to those of *developing leaders* (20,2% in year one and 24,6% year three, *developing facilities* (12,6% in year one and 11,4% year three) and *developing rules and policies* (22,8% in year one and 22,1% year three).

The processes of self-regulation and responsabilisation observed between the government and RF and between RF and the NSOs are also in play between the NSOs and the sports clubs. However, the processes have not resulted in the self-regulation and accepted responsibility aimed for, at least not by judging from the content in the applications for programme funds. When left free to formulate project ideas, sports clubs conform to the main ideas of the programme (expansion, i.e., more leaders, facilities and clubs, which, in turn, are expected to result in more participants participating longer) rather than tailoring projects to their specific needs. As a result, some aspects of development agreed on in the RF-policy programme are unattended. Another example of that is visible in our analysis of the focus in the applications in relation to the overall aim of increasing gender and class equality. Very few applications explicitly express ambitions to *increase gender equality* (3,3%

in year one and 1,2% year three), *increase class equality* (3,6% in year one and 2,0% year three), or *increase gender and class equality* (0,4% in year one and 8,3% year three).

Our analyses of evaluation data from beneath in terms of the 486 questionnaires filled out by the sports clubs representatives applying for funding also show how the alignment with overall government aims, RF guidelines, and NSO development plans is high, at least in broad outlines. But only half of the respondents actually know about the content of the NSO development plan (53% fairly poor knowledge/very poor knowledge/no knowledge [n=486]). This result suggests that half of the programme activities arranged are designed without regard to the programme aims even if many activities show concordance per se. The result also lends further support to the previous analysis, suggesting that the self-regulation and responsibility handed down from the NSOs is not acted upon by the sports clubs.

In our analysis of target groups for project activities, the impression gained from the analysis of the applications' focus is strengthened. *Children and youth in general* represent the main target group for 68% of the studied projects while *children with immigrant backgrounds* (19%), *children with disabilities* (19%) and *children from low income households* (13%) are targeted less (n=486). This result shows that the overarching aim of the programme, that "all work should consider gender and class equality," is not a high priority for the sports clubs. The sports clubs' priorities are also visible in the analysis of their experiences regarding the programme as a means for club development, which was another overarching aim of the programme. This analysis shows that the programme has, to the least extent, contributed to *increased class equality* and *increased gender equality*. A similar impression is gained from the analysis of perceived results of project activities. This

analysis shows that sports clubs representatives perceive *recruitment of children from low income households* and *recruitment of leaders from low income households* to be the least visible results of arranged programme activities. Taken together, these analyses of questionnaire data show, albeit with small differences, how sports clubs prioritise and how they have not accepted responsibility for some of the specific features in the programme ambitions, handed down from the government via RF and the NSOs.

While these results might not be surprising they can be understood through our analysis of questionnaire data showing sports clubs' notions on who should have influence on the development of sport. Club representatives rated their own influence highest and in falling order thereafter NSO, RF, and the government. This result implies that, in the sports clubs' notions, the question about how sport is best developed is not a matter for the government, but for the sports clubs themselves to decide on. Our analysis suggests that the ambitions in this programme are hazardous to expectations as long as they are formulated at the top of the system.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

Returning to our original ambition, which is, to show how neo-liberal ideas on the governance of sport are carried out in Sweden, our analyses show how the making of sport policy in Sweden bears many features similar to those observed in the English-speaking contexts. Our analysis of government missives, the programme manifesto, NSO development plans, and interviews with 27 key personnel involved in distributing the programme funds in five NSOs show how The Lift for Sport as the latest and largest government intervention in sport, has brought with it more specific and more instrumental goals for sport to attain. This development has been observed

also in Denmark and Norway (Ibsen 2002, Skille 2009). It has also involved new governing instruments such as the introduction of key performance indicators. Key features in this process have been responsabilisation, demands on accountability, and self-regulation. These features are visible in the communication between the government and RF, RF and the NSOs, and the NSOs and the sports clubs. However, only small signs of wanted self-regulation are as of yet visible. Instead, each organisation in the chain of command is forwarding the responsibility for development, accountability for results, and demands on self-regulation to the next organisation in line. These are our conclusions when looking at the surface.

When looking beneath the surface, our analysis of project applications and questionnaires shows how this forwarded responsibility for development, accountability, and demands on self-regulation is, to a large extent, disregarded also at the club level. The Lift for Sport has made little impression on club activities. Although applications adhere to some of the main ideas of the programme, many of them are left unattended. Ironically enough, many of the guidelines left unattended are the ones considered most important by the Swedish research community (SOU 2008), government (Regeringen 2011) and RF (Riksidrottsförbundet 2005) in addressing many of the problems Swedish sport is facing, such as unhealthy pressure from coaches, peers, and parents; drop-out in early years, and poor recruitment from underrepresented groups. Questionnaire results reinforce that impression. Project results are, when looking at them from a distance, reported to be in line with programme aims. However, from closer examination, it is apparent that when it comes to recruitment, children and youth with immigrant backgrounds, disabilities, and/or from low income households are neglected, so is the focus on increasing gender equality. Our analysis of project applications and questionnaires shows how

central governance issued by the government and mediated by RF and the NSOs fails to exert authority over the implementing actors, the sports clubs, in terms of stimulating development through self-regulation. It is evident that neither government missives, programme guidelines and NSO development plans, nor additional and earmarked resources have been able to stimulate development through self-regulation and, in the end, to secure envisioned effects. On the contrary, it seems the power and informal authority to govern the grass-roots activities in sport remains in the hands of the implementers: the sports clubs. Our main conclusion of the beneath-surface analysis is that policy fails to survive the journey from top to bottom because the sports clubs have been unwilling or unable to self-regulate in the desired direction. But, as some data indicate, it can also be a result of the poor knowledge about the desired direction in detail.

Returning to our initial aim to increase the understanding of how government interest in sport impacts the delivery of sport policy, we want to move beneath surface explanations, such as “policy implementation in the end comes down to the people who actually implement it” (Lipsky 1980, p. 8) and “sport policy [is] a ‘weak’ policy area” (Grix 2010, p. 169). Instead, we propose that RF and the NSOs, on one hand, are, in their capacity as representative organs, more concerned with acting in accordance with official politics and dependent on the legitimacy connected with that compliance. The sports clubs, on the other hand, are, in their capacity as membership-based organizations, more concerned with the needs and wishes of their existing members (and dependent on their resources), rather than with answering to political expectations regarding recruitment of new participants and equality (Stenling 2013). We argue that it is easier to align oneself with organisations higher up in the hierarchy when the costs for alignments are low (i.e., RF and the NSOs can



align their operations by simply rephrasing policy documents and guidelines) compared to when they are high (i.e., sports clubs actually have to change the basic idea of their activities from we-for-us to us-for-them). Similar to the findings reported by Keat and Sam (2013), we claim that if costs appear too high, the risk of sports clubs opting out increases.

A similar understanding of these findings is that the implicit contract referred to in the context description (Norberg 2004) becomes more implicit the further it travels from the actual agreeing parties. Stated another way, by pushing responsibility further down the chain of command, RF and NSOs can shield the implicit contract and still protect sports clubs' autonomy and self-determination, which more hierarchical governing mechanisms would not allow (Stenling 2013).

Agreeing with Grix (2009), we see that the direction of accountability is altered by the modernisation agenda, but the alteration is not uniform across all organisations in the system. This proposition is lent weight from the sports clubs' own understanding of their role in the policy process: They should have the main influence on the development of sport. The main obstacle for effective programme implementation seems to be that the implementers pay attention to the main underlying notion of the programme, recruiting more members, but they do not observe, understand, or concur with the method for reaching that aim, to self-regulate.

When relating these findings to recent developments in the general political Swedish landscape noted in the introduction, we see that instead of a deregulation of sport, state regulation increases. At the same time, though, influence from grass-roots agents (implementing sports clubs) over core activities seems unaffected (cf., Grix 2009, discussion on the opposite effects of increased state intervention). We suggest

that this deviance (see Goodwin and Grix 2011, discussion on the deviant sport and education policy sectors in the UK) is associated with the Scandinavian and Swedish pattern of institutional arrangements, organisational and cultural, hallmarked by large national voluntary sports organisations with almost a monopoly on competitive sports. In contrast to Norberg's (2011) suggestion that the implicit contract is on its way to being renegotiated to the benefit of more government control, we argue that the component of voluntariness inherent in RF's part of the contract trumps the government's stake in providing resources. As long as the government depends on voluntary efforts for reaching more instrumental goals, power will remain with sport. This argument also resonates with the findings reported in the studies of the Danish (The Sport Policy Idea Programme) and Norwegian (The Sports City Programme) counterparts to The Lift for Sport, showing that the voluntary based institutional arrangement in the Scandinavian countries still provides a stronghold against top-down initiatives with external goals differing too much from sports clubs' core activities (Ibsen 2002, Skille 2009).

To conclude, in addition to providing an understanding of the gap between policy-making and policy implementation, the observations made in this text form support for the notion held by Goodwin and Grix (2011) that understanding of development processes is dependent on both structures and institutions on one hand, and on ideas, cultures, and beliefs on the other. It also lends backing to the arguments posited by Grix (2010), Kay (1996), and O'Gorman (2011), albeit in other words, that policy analysis should focus on both surface and underlying power relations and resource dependencies, both structural and institutional path dependency and beliefs, and ideas of involved actors, both elements of top-down and bottom-up approaches, and both the structure of a policy and the actions of implementers simultaneously. In

order to further this understanding of sport policy development, sport policy making and sport policy implementation, we call for more research that focuses on the whole sequence of events, from policy-making to policy-implementation, in order to avail both surface and beneath observations. Such ventures would also need to be sensitive to the fact that project activities are not necessarily the same as regular activities. In order to reach a more fine-grained understanding of policy-implementation we need research focusing not only on specific policy initiatives but also on the daily activities in sports clubs. We would also like to call for more studies to be done in other countries outside the English-speaking contexts, with different institutional landscapes to continue the contextual modulation of current knowledge.

## References

- Bairner, A., 2010. What's Scandinavian about Scandinavian sport? *Sport in Society – Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics*, 4 (13), 734–743.
- Bergsgard, N.A., Houlihan, B., Mangset, P., Nødland, S., and Rommetvedt, H., 2007. *Sport policy: A comparative analysis of stability and change*. New York: Elsevier.
- Bergsgard, N.A., and Norberg, J.R., 2010. Sports policy and politics – the Scandinavian way. *Sport in Society – Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics*, 4 (13), 567–582.
- Bevir, M., and Richards, D., 2006. Decentring Policy Networks: A Theoretical Agenda. *Public Administration*, 87 (1), 3-14.
- deLeon, P., and deLeon, L., 2002. What ever happened to policy implementation? An alternative approach. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 12 (4), 467-492.
- Esping-Andersen, G., 1990. *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Fahlén, J., and Karp, S., 2010. Access denied: The new sports for all – programme in Sweden and the reinforcement of the sports performance logic. *Sport & EU Review*, 2 (1), 3-22.

- Friis Thing, L., and Ottesen, L. (2013). Det individuelle kvalitative interview [The individual qualitative interview]. In: L. Friis Thing and L. Ottesen, eds. *Metoder i idrætsforskning*. København: Munksgaard, 74-89.
- Goodwin, M., and Grix, J., 2011. Bringing structures back in: The ‘governance narrative’, the ‘decentred approach’ and ‘asymmetrical network governance’ in the education and sport policy communities. *Public Administration*, 89 (2), 537-556.
- Green, M., 2004a. Changing policy priorities for sport in England: the emergence of elite sport development as a key concern. *Leisure Studies*, 23 (4), 365–385.
- Green, M., 2004b. Power, Policy, and Political Priorities: Elite Sport Development in Canada and the United Kingdom. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 21 (4), 376–396.
- Green, M., 2007. Policy transfer, lesson drawing and perspectives on elite sport development systems. *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*, 2 (4), 426–441.
- Green, M., 2009. Podium or participation? Analysing policy priorities under changing modes of sport governance in the United Kingdom. *International Journal of Sport Policy*, 1 (2), 121–144.
- Green, M., and Houlihan, B., 2005. *Elite sport development: policy learning and political priorities*. London: Routledge.
- Green, M., and Houlihan, B., 2006. Governmentality, Modernization and the “Disciplining” of National Sporting Organizations: Athletics in Australia and United Kingdom. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 23 (1), 47-71.
- Green, M., and Oakley, B., 2001. Elite sport development systems and playing to win: uniformity and diversity in international approaches. *Leisure Studies*, 20 (4), 247–267.
- Grix, J., 2010. The ‘governance debate’ and the study of sport policy. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 2 (2), 159-171.
- Grix, J., and Phillpots, L., 2011. Revisiting the ‘Governance Narrative’: Asymmetrical Network Governance’ and the Deviant Case of the Sports Policy Sector. *Public Policy and Administration*, 26 (3), 3-19.
- Houlihan, B., 2009. Mechanisms of international influence on domestic elite sport policy. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 1 (1), 51-69.
- Houlihan, B., and Green, M., 2008. *Comparative Elite Sport Development – systems, structures and public policy*. Oxford: Elsevier.
- Ibsen, B. (2002). *Evaluering af Det Idrætspolitiske Idéprogram* [Evaluation of The Sport Policy Idea Programme]. København: Københavns Universitet and Institut for forskning i Idræt og Folkelig Oplysning.

- Karp, S., Olofsson, E., and Söderström, T., 2007. *I skuggan av fotbollen. Handslagsprojektens betydelse för de mindre idrotterna* [In the shadows of football. The significance of the Handshake projects for smaller sports]. Stockholm: Riksidrottsförbundet.
- Kay, T., 1996. Just do it? Turning sports policy into sports practice. *Managing Leisure*, 1 (4), 233-247.
- Keat, R.A., and Sam, M.P. (2013). Regional implementation of New Zealand sport policy: new instrument, new challenges. . *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 5 (1), 39-54.
- Lipsky, M. (1980). *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- March, D., Richards, D., and Smith, M., 2003. Unequal Plurality: Towards an Asymmetric Power Model of British Politics. *Government and Opposition*, 38 (3), 306-332.
- Norberg, J.R., 2002. Idrottsrörelsen och staten. In J. Lindroth, & J.R. Norberg, eds. *Riksidrottsförbundet 1903-2003* [The Swedish Sports Confederation 1903-2003]. Stockholm: Informationsförlaget, 181-231.
- Norberg, J.R., 2004. *Idrottens väg till folkhemmet. Studier i statlig idrottspolitik 1913-1970* [Sport's road to the welfare state: studies in Swedish government policy towards sport, 1913-1970]. Stockholm: SISU Idrottsböcker.
- Norberg, J.R., 2011. A contract reconsidered? Changes in the Swedish state's relation to the sports movement. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 3 (3), 311-325.
- O'Gorman, J., 2011. Where is the implementation in sport policy and programme analysis? The English Football Association's Charter Standard as an illustration. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 3 (1), 85-108.
- Phillpots, L., Grix, J., and Quarmby, T., 2010. Centralized grassroots sport policy an 'new governance': A case study of County Sports Partnerships in the UK – unpacking the paradox. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 46 (3), 265-281.
- Regeringen, 2007. *Regeringsbeslut 1* [Government decision 1]. Stockholm: Kulturdepartementet.
- Regeringen, 2011. *Regeringsbeslut 15* [Government decision 15]. Stockholm: Kulturdepartementet.
- Riksidrottsförbundet, n.d.a. *Idrottslyftet – riktlinjer* [The Lift for Sport - guidelines]. Stockholm: Riksidrottsförbundet. Retrieved May 12, 2009 from <http://www.rf.se/Vi-arbetar-med/Politiskafragor/Idrottslyftet/>

- Riksidrottsförbundet, n.d.b. *Handslagets programförklaring* [The Handshake – sports for all programme manifesto]. Retrieved April 20, 2007 from <http://www.rf.se/t3.asp?p=77127>
- Riksidrottsförbundet, 2005. *Idrotten vill* [What sports wants]. Stockholm: Riksidrottsförbundet.
- Riksidrottsförbundet, 2009. *PM angående förhållningssätt samt plan för internkontroll* [Memorandum on approach to and plan for internal control]. Stockholm: Riksidrottsförbundet.
- Riksidrottsförbundet, 2010. *Idrotten i siffror* [Sports in numbers]. Stockholm: Riksidrottsförbundet.
- Sabatier, P.A., 1986. Top-Down and Bottom-Up Approaches to Implementation Research: A Critical Analysis and Suggested Synthesis. *Journal of Public Policy*, 6 (1), 21-48.
- Sam, M.P., and Jackson, S.J., 2004. Sport Policy Development in New Zealand: Paradoxes of an Integrative Paradigm. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 39 (2), 205-222.
- Seippel, Ø., 2010. Professionals and volunteers: on the future of the Scandinavian sport model. *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics*, 13 (2), 199-211.
- Seippel, Ø., Ibsen, B., and Norberg, J.R., 2010. Introduction: sport in Scandinavian societies. *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics*, 13 (4), 563-566.
- Sjöblom, P., and Fahlén, J., 2010. The survival of the fittest: intensification, totalization and homogenization in Swedish competitive sport. *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics*, 13 (4), 704-717.
- Skelcher, C., 2000. Changing Images of the State: Overloaded, Hollowed-out, Congested. *Public Policy and Administration*, 15 (3), 3-19.
- Skille, E.Å. (2008). State Sport Policy and Voluntary Sport Clubs: the Case of the Norwegian Sports City Program as Social Policy. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 9 (1), 63-79.
- Sotiriadou, K., 2009. The Australian sport system and its stakeholders: development of cooperative relationships. *Sport in Society – Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics*, 12 (7), 842–860.
- SOU 2008:59. Föreningsfostran och tävlingsfostran En utvärdering av statens stöd till idrotten [Democratic fostering and competition fostering. An evaluation of the government support to sport]. *Betänkande från Idrottsstödsutredningen*. Stockholm: Fritzes.

- Stenling, C., 2014. Sport programme implementation as translation and organizational identity construction: the implementation of Drive-in sport in Swedish sports as an illustration. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 6 (1), 55-69.
- The Heritage Foundation, n.d. 2012 Index of Economic Freedom: Graph the data – Sweden. Retrieved November 5, 2012 from <http://www.heritage.org/index/visualize>
- Österlind, M., and Wright, J., 2012. If sport's the solutions then what's the problem? The social significance of sport in the moral governing of 'good' and 'healthy' citizens in Sweden 1922-1998. *Sport, Education and Society*, DOI:10.1080/13573322.2012.726217