

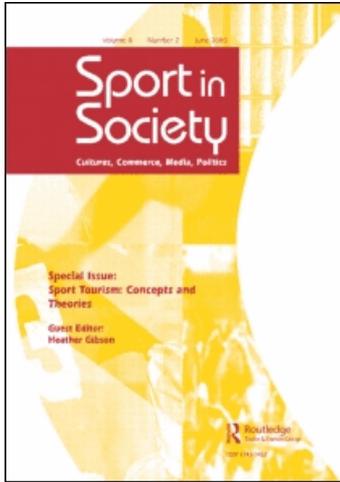
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Voluntary organized sport in Denmark and Norway¹

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Sport organized through voluntary organizations is widespread in the Scandinavian countries, and voluntary organized sport in Denmark and Norway is the topic of this essay. The two cases are compared along a set of dimensions: voluntary sector in general and voluntary sport in particular (organizational structures, level of participation, type of activity and ideology, resources and relations to the public sector). Having described the two cases, we try to understand and explain similarities and differences between them. We end the essay with a discussion of some future challenges for voluntary organized sport in the Scandinavian countries.

Introduction

Sport in the Scandinavian countries is characterized by three factors. First, the level of participation in sports and physical activity is, compared to most other countries, high. Second, a high proportion of sporting activities are organized by voluntary sports associations.² Third, there is a high level of interaction and interdependence between voluntary sport organizations and public authorities at national, regional and local levels. Whereas the topics of ‘Sport and physical activities’ and ‘sport politics’ are covered by other essays in this issue of *Sport in Society*, the aim of this essay is to provide a better understanding of the way sport is organized in voluntary organizations in the Scandinavian countries, with a particular focus upon the Danish and Norwegian cases. The purpose of this essay is then threefold. First, we want to compare the two cases – similarities and differences – in their present day situation. Second, we will present a set of explanations: Why is sport organized by voluntary sports associations to such a large extent in Scandinavia, and, as an extension of this, why are the two cases so similar? Finally, we discuss some of the future challenges facing the Scandinavian approaches to voluntary-sector organized sports.

Sports clubs in Denmark and Norway: similarities and differences

In this section, we will first present some general characteristics of the voluntary sector in Denmark and Norway. Next, we go on to look more closely at the present situation of sports associations, looking for differences and similarities; we will, based on previous studies on sports, organizational theory and the voluntary sector³ address four aspects of voluntarily organized sport in Denmark and Norway: (a) structure and size; (b) activities and ideology; (c) resources; and (d) relationship to the public sector.

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Sport in the voluntary sector

Comparative analyses of the voluntary sector reveal that the sector is larger in the Nordic countries than in most other countries – especially when measured by the number of associations, members and volunteers.⁴ Comparing the voluntary sector in Denmark and Norway there are, however, also some significant differences. In the first instance, there are relatively more associations in Norway than in Denmark. A survey of all types of associations in one region of Norway (Hordaland County) in 2000 showed that there was one association for every 53 inhabitants.⁵ A similar survey in a Danish region (Funen County) in 2004 showed that there was one per 82 inhabitants.⁶

Secondly, there are differences when it comes to the occurrence of different types of organizations. Cultural, leisure and sports associations make up half of all associations in both countries; work-related associations (trade unions, industry associations and professional associations) encompass some 10% of the total; associations involved in the local community (especially housing associations) also make up approximately one in ten of the total; and associations involved in politics, legal aid and similar types of advice (advocacy) make up just under 10% in both countries. The most significant difference is in the religious sector, which constitutes no less than 17% of the associations in Norway, compared to 1% in Denmark. Conversely, there are more associations in Denmark involved in social issues (education and training, social support and health), an area dominated by the public sector in the Nordic countries. In Denmark, associations operating in these areas of society make up 13% of the total, compared to 4% in Norway. Finally, there are relatively more sports associations in Denmark, with 25% of the total primarily engaged in sporting activities, compared with 14% in Norway.⁷

Norwegian surveys show that from 1980 to 2000 there has been a net growth of 49% in the number of associations.⁸ The Danish surveys similarly point to a strong increase in the number of associations. In the above-mentioned 2004 survey, one in four associations reported that the association had been formed after 1990.⁹

This growth in the number of associations is followed by a strong increase in the number of members in associations in general, and in sports associations in particular. The most recent surveys of the population's sporting habits in Denmark show that 35% of the adults and half of all schoolchildren are involved in exercise or sport in sports associations.¹⁰ In Norway, 31% of the adult population were affiliated with a sports association in 2003.¹¹

Structure and size of sports associations

One of the central characteristics of voluntary sports associations in the Scandinavian countries is their democratic legal structure, meaning that associations act according to democratic principles and formal (written) rules. In the Scandinavian countries, this usually implies that the association has an executive board which is elected by the members at the annual general meeting, and that the rules for both the board and the annual general meeting (AGM) are laid down in written statutes that can only be amended at an AGM. Nine out of ten sports associations in both Norway and Denmark respond that they have an ordinary board and a general meeting. However, even though they are legally (by Norwegian Olympic Committee and Confederation of Sports [NOC]) required to formalize, many of the Norwegian sports associations report a rather informal organization, as 31% say that they do not have written statutes, compared to only 4% in Denmark.¹² In Norway, 16% of sports associations do not hold general meetings or similar members' meetings, while this formal form of influence is found in almost all associations

in Denmark.¹³ In addition to the AGM, at which the members select the association's board and determine over-arching affairs, the members typically have influence on the teams and groups in which they are involved.

A second typical characteristic of sports associations is that they are small. Half of the clubs in both countries have less than 100 members (Table 1), and the studies from Denmark show that the small sports clubs' share of the total number of clubs has increased over the last 20 years. This means that the many small clubs represent a low proportion of the total membership, whereas the relatively few large clubs have a large proportion of the members.

A third characteristic is that the majority of the associations are 'single sports associations', and this type makes up a growing proportion of the associations. Two out of three of the associations in Denmark only offer one sport to their members. In Norway the corresponding number is about 70% single sports associations.¹⁴

Finally, there is a significant difference in the organizational structure at the national level between the two countries. In Norway (and Sweden), sports have been united in one national sports organization since the Second World War, when the Workers' Sports Federation amalgamated with the Norwegian National Federation of Sport (today Norwegian Olympic Committee and Confederation of Sports). In Denmark, voluntary sport is organized in different umbrella organizations as a reflection of two different sports cultures: one with its roots in rifle shooting and gymnastics going all the way back in the 1860s, with its main bastion in rural Denmark and with the primary objective to strengthen sport for all in associations (today Danish Gymnastics and Sports Associations); the other has its roots in the sport that originated in the 1880s urban bourgeois environment (today The Danish Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee). Half of all sports associations in Denmark are members of both organizations.¹⁵ Besides these two organizations The Danish Federation of Company Sports organize sport in associations connected to companies and the workplace.

Activity and ideology

Sports associations are first and foremost established to organize sport activities, but they do sometimes also have wider objectives linked to these basic sport activities. Here we will look at four aspects of activities and ideologies of the sports associations in Denmark and Norway and ask: (a) Which sport activities do the associations have on their programmes?

Table 1. The size of sports associations in Denmark and Norway, 2004. Percentage of association with the respective number of members.

Number of members in a club:	Norway ^a	Denmark ^b
Less than 50	31	29
50–99	19	21
100–149	12	12
150–199	8	9
200–249	5	7
250–299	4	4
300 and more	22	18
Average number of members per association	214	181

Notes

^a Data from the Norwegian Olympic Committee and Confederation of Sports, 2004

^b A representative investigation of sports clubs in 2004 (Ibsen, *Foreningsidrætten i Danmark*)

(b) Which form of sport – competitive or exercise – do the associations practise? (c) What are the objectives and values of the associations? (d) What social role do the sports associations play?

(a) If we look at the sports in which the associations are involved, there are several features common to Denmark and Norway, but also major differences that are related to differences in sport and movement culture. In Denmark, sports associations involved with football were the most numerous – 21% according to a 1997 survey. The other major sports organized by associations in Denmark were badminton (19%), gymnastics (19%) and handball (17%). However, an increasing proportion of the sports associations are involved with a growing number of relatively small sports.¹⁶ In Norway, the most popular sports based on the proportion of associations organizing the activity are football, which 34% of the associations offer, follow by skiing and exercise (both 18%), handball (14%) and track and field (11%).

(b) Sport organized by associations is often linked to competitive sport, unlike sport under other forms of organization where people do not necessarily participate in competitions and meetings. Three out of four sports associations in Denmark take part in tournaments, meetings or championships, but the proportion of the associations that do not participate in competitive sport is growing. In 1985, 10% of sports associations responded that they were exclusively involved in sport as exercise, without taking part in competitions and meetings. By 2004, this number had grown to 24%.¹⁷ However, even though the majority of the sports associations participate in competitive sport, surveys in both countries show that the vast majority of associations prioritize ‘participation and social interaction’ above ‘competition and good results’.¹⁸

(c) The sports associations’ values and legitimacy have widely been associated with assumptions about sport’s benefits for health, social integration, sense of community, etc.¹⁹ However, the associations’ own responses – which must be assumed to express their self-image – show that welfare and health-oriented objectives play a modest role. A Danish survey shows that it is first and foremost ‘social interaction’ and ‘interest in a particular sport’ that the associations wish to promote. In other words, the goals are predominantly introverted. Thereafter follows more extroverted welfare-policy goals such as ‘creating a healthy leisure activity for young people’ and ‘getting as many as possible involved in sport’. In light of the sometimes great expectations placed on sports, and especially the sports associations’ role in promoting health, it is remarkable that only one in every four associations responds that its purpose is to promote ‘health and well-being’. However, it is also only every fourth association that aims at the other side of general expectations about sports associations, which is that they are primarily involved in order to ‘achieve positive sporting results’.²⁰ In a Norwegian context this introvertedness is confirmed both in a study of motives for being active in sports associations where the clearly most important motive is to have fun and enjoy the activity,²¹ and in a study of social capital showing that even though members of sports associations were more trustful and politically interested than the general population, they were less so than members of other voluntary organizations.²²

(d) The last part of the ideology aspect concerns the associations’ role in society. When these associations really gained momentum in the second half of the nineteenth century, they were often linked to the larger political, social and religious movements of the time. This was also often the case for the sports themselves, which emanated from over-arching values and objectives such as amateur and fair-play ideals, popular ideals, Christian ideals, Socialist ideals, etc. This is expressed by the fact that sport in the Scandinavian countries is often seen as part of more a contentious popular or social movement. However, several

surveys in the Scandinavian countries have revealed that there has generally been a tendency for associations to become more introverted and non-contentious.²³ This is particularly true of the sports associations; analysis of their role in society, based on identical questions in surveys in both Norway and Denmark, shows that sports associations are on average the least 'oppositional' and 'society oriented' type of association.²⁴ In a study of overlapping membership between voluntary organizations, it is also documented that sports associations are among the least embedded types of voluntary organizations, that is, members of sports associations are not affiliated to other associations to the same extent as member of other associations.²⁵

Resources

One of the characteristics distinguishing voluntary organizations from political and market actors is the importance of specific resources, and in our cases the two dominant resources are member-generated (money) incomes and voluntary work. The most important sources of income in sport clubs in both countries are membership fees and income from activities conducted by volunteers (e.g. through flea markets), while public-sector funding and sponsors only account for between a third and a quarter of total income, on average. Public-sector funding constitutes a significantly larger proportion in Denmark than in Norway, where revenues from sponsors and other commercial activities make up a larger share (Table 2). In general, there seems to be more variation in Norwegian municipalities' policies towards voluntary sport, where some give general economical support, often an amount per member below a specific age (e.g. 18) and others not.

That there are differences in public-sector support is probably true, even though it is difficult to establish exactly how significant these differences are because there are also more indirect ways for obtaining financial support, e.g. the extent to which local-authority-owned sport facilities are at the disposal of the sports associations at low costs or free of charge. These types of differences are hard to detect in the associations' financial accounts. Besides a general increase in the revenues of the sports associations in both countries, it is difficult to trace specific shifts in the finances of the associations, with the exception of one factor – an increase in the number of associations with commercial sponsors. Contributions from sponsors do not make up significant resources for most voluntary sports associations, but a growing number of clubs, including smaller ones, receive income in this way. As far as the use of the income is concerned, the Danish surveys show that expenditure on competitions, meetings, etc., has more than halved since the mid-1980s, from 21% in 1985 to 10% in 2004, while wages and expenses have risen from 18 to 31%.²⁶

Table 2. Distribution of different income sources in sports associations in Denmark and Norway (average for the associations) (%).

	Norway 2000 ^a	Denmark 2004 ^b
Fees and income from activities in the club	64	72
Income from sponsors and advertising	28	11
Public subsidies	8	18
N =	250	3097

Notes

^a A representative investigation of Norwegian sports associations in 2004 (Enjolras and Seippel, *Norske idrettslag 2000*)

^b A representative investigation of Danish sports associations in 2004 (Ibsen, *Dansk idrætspolitik*)

This confirms (see above) that traditional competitive sport in Denmark occupies a less central position in sport organized by associations than it used to occupy.

However, the most important resource for the associations is voluntary work. In almost all sports associations, voluntarism – i.e. work in the association as a coach or a leader, on the board, in committees or to raise money which is unpaid or paid for with a symbolic amount – is indispensable. In Norway, activities are run exclusively by volunteers in 67% of the associations; in Denmark, the figure is 80%. And even among the associations with employees (i.e. the larger associations), a clear majority of the work is carried out by volunteers (Table 3).

Studies in both countries also show that there are significant differences between the sports associations in terms of the scope and importance of the voluntary work. Voluntary work is most important to small associations, those associations with a homogenous membership, associations involved in relatively small individual sports, associations without commercial activities, and associations with a high degree of autonomy in relation to the public sector and the market.²⁷

Despite the importance of voluntary work, the general impression is that voluntarism in sport – and in society as a whole – is in decline, that it has become more difficult to recruit volunteers and that more and more work is paid work. When the leaders of the sports associations are asked to identify the most pressing challenge facing their association, the prevailing answer is, in one form or another, the lack of volunteers. However, a comparison of the results from several studies conducted in Denmark since the mid-1980s shows that the scope of the voluntary work in the sports associations has grown, and that the problem of recruiting new volunteers has not increased. The share of the sports associations who respond that they often encounter difficulties in finding new volunteers for the board and committees remains constant (25%). At the same time, both the Danish and the Norwegian studies show that the scope of professional paid work in the associations is on the increase.²⁸ Thus, on the one hand, it seems as if the amount of voluntary work put into Danish and Norwegian sports associations is larger and more extensive than ever: voluntary work is without doubt the most important resource for voluntary sports associations. On the other hand, the associations themselves see volunteers as the most significant hindrance to improving their activities, and professionals are strengthening their positions within the field of voluntary sport

Table 3. Voluntary work in sports associations in Denmark and Norway.

<i>Proportion of total number of working hours that are reported as 'voluntary'^a</i>	Denmark 2004 a)	Norway 2004 b)
	<i>Percentage of the clubs</i>	
< 50%	9	4
50–90%	8	7
90–99.9%	4	20
100%	80	69
N =	297	349
	<i>Hours</i>	
Voluntary work per week		
Average	39	32
Median	14	14

Notes

^a Danish study of the associations in Funen County in 2004 (Ibsen, *Foreningsidrætten i Danmark*)

^b Sport Club Study 2004 (Seippel, *Norske idrettslag: 1999–2007*)

organizations. These contradictions between overall facts and local experiences do probably have several explanations, but among them is the finding, from Norwegian research, that increasingly more people are involved in voluntary work but each individual contributes less, thereby making it harder to recruit volunteers since so many have to be mobilized.²⁹

Relationships to public sector

To understand what is going on in the world of voluntary sports associations, it is necessary to understand their context, and for the Scandinavian cases, an understanding of public policy towards sport is of utmost importance. A basic feature of both Danish and Norwegian sport policies is that they are mostly aimed at sport organized by voluntary associations. Almost all of the public-sector funding in both Denmark and Norway goes to sports associations and organizations. In conjunction with this economic 'favouring' of sport organized by associations, various governments have striven to make it slightly easier to establish an association by relaxing or removing obstructive aspects of general legislation. By way of example, in Denmark there are favourable rules for tax-free expenses for voluntary coaches and managers, and VAT exemptions for voluntary, non-profit associations and organizations. A consequence of the sports associations' 'monopoly' on public-sector funding is that a corporate character has developed in sport policy in both countries, i.e. the central decisions are agreed upon between the central sport organization and the many local associations, and are predominantly implemented by the same organizations and affiliated associations. Another characteristic of sport policy in the Scandinavian countries is a relatively high degree of public funding. In 2004, the total public funding for sport in Denmark was DKK 3,531 million (494 million Euro), which corresponds to approximately 0.45% of the overall public expenditure and approximately 0.25% of GDP. Since the mid-1970s, local-authority funding for sports associations has consistently constituted approximately 25% of their average income (see above). If the value of public expenditure on sport facilities is included, then public-sector funding accounts for approximately half of the associations' income.³⁰

Political control and public administration in the Scandinavian countries is relatively decentralized compared to other countries, and this is also true of sport. Approximately 80% of the total public funding for sport in Denmark is direct and indirect (e.g. free use of local authority sport facilities) funding from the local authorities to the local sports associations' activities, and the local authorities themselves are largely empowered to decide to what extent they wish to support the sports associations and how they wish to do so. As a result, there are also big differences in terms of how much and how often the local authorities fund the sports associations. In 2005, the local authority with the highest expenditure per capita on sport and leisure spent more than ten times as much as the local authority with the lowest expenditure.³¹

Despite the basic public funding of sport, there is relatively weak political control of sports associations. In Denmark, the funding of the sports associations takes the form of basic funding, i.e. it is left up to the individual association to determine how the money is spent. Local-authority halls and facilities are made available free of charge to the associations, or the local authority pays two-thirds of the cost of privately owned premises. Subsidies are allocated per member, without specific instructions on how they are to be spent. The law contains a number of regulations stipulating that local authorities must respect the individual association's uniqueness, i.e. its activities, purpose and basic

concept, how the activities are organized, who the association uses as manager and instructor, how local-authority funding is used, etc. Although local authorities exert a key influence on the construction of sport facilities, the building of new facilities traditionally takes into account the wishes of the associations.

In Norway municipalities contribute financially to various extents directly to the associations. Yet, local sports receive public funding in two other ways. First, the publicly available resources for the construction of sport facilities are granted in a rather complicated process whereby local actors have to apply for grants. All applications have to be approved by the municipality which then passes them on to the county authorities, where they are collected, prioritized and sent to the Ministry of Culture and Church. As a rule of thumb, public grants are supposed to cover one third of the construction costs, and the remainder is expected to be covered by local actors – e.g. the sports association (through economical resources or voluntary work) and/or municipalities. Thus, the whole arrangement is based on local initiatives, cooperation and action unfolding within a relatively open policy framework. This gives certain autonomy for the local actors even though the overall framework is set up by the central authorities. Second, since 2000, 10% of the total public funding for sport is channelled directly to local sports. Together, the picture of financial support for local sport becomes rather complicated and difficult to overview.

Which similarities? Which differences?

This comparison of sports associations in Denmark and Norway shows that even though there are significant differences between the two countries, similarities dominate. In both countries, associations are still the overwhelmingly dominant means of organizing sport, and even though commercial forms of organization are becoming more widespread and very many people exercise for themselves ('unorganized'), the number of sports associations has grown continuously in recent decades. Both the form of organization and the size of the associations are almost identical in the two countries.

A common defining characteristic of Scandinavian sport associations is that they are democratic and led by volunteers elected by the members. Most sports associations in both countries are also characterized by being relatively small, and there are only tiny differences in the average size. In both countries, the majority of the sports associations are involved in competition and performance sport, but despite this, studies from both countries show that 'participation and social interaction' are prioritized more highly than 'competition and good results'. However, this interest in a social dimension reflects a rather introverted orientation, and it is this type of association that is the least 'oppositional' and 'society oriented'.

In both Denmark and Norway, associations are absolutely dependent on member-generated-resources – partly in the form of members' dues and income from activities organized by volunteers, and partly in the form of voluntary work. In both countries, the voluntary work (on average) is equivalent to slightly less than an ordinary (i.e. salaried) working week. There is a weak tendency for the number of paid workers to increase, but this does not seem to be at the expense of the amount of voluntary work. There are also many common characteristics between the two countries in terms of the relationship between the associations and the public sector. The sports associations in both countries almost have a monopoly on public funding for sport in leisure time, and public support is relatively large, especially when including the value of the sports facilities that public authorities help fund and place at the disposal of the associations at low cost or free of

charge. But in spite of this, local authorities place relatively few demands on how the funds are used and how the associations function.

However, the comparison also highlights some differences. Firstly, there are relatively fewer sports associations in Norway than in Denmark, where there are also relatively more people who participate in sport via an association. Secondly, the sports associations in Denmark seem more formalized than in Norway. In addition, there are significant differences in terms of the activities in which the associations are involved. In Norway, there are – for natural reasons – far more associations involved in winter sports such as skiing and skating than in Denmark. On the other hand, Denmark has far more associations for gymnastics and exercise (i.e. non-competitive associations). A fourth difference is that local-authority funding constitutes a larger share of the associations' income in Denmark than in Norway, where revenue from sponsors and other commercial income is relatively greater. Finally, the relationship between sports associations and the public sector is more legally regulated in Denmark, where the local authorities are obliged to fund activities and make their facilities available free of charge for activities for children and young people. The majority of local authorities in Norway do the same, but are not obliged to do so by legislation.

Why the particular organizational features of Scandinavian sport?

To explain the particular organizational features of Scandinavian sport and the differences between Denmark and Norway, we apply a theoretical framework where we understand the phenomena we address as consisting of actors with different beliefs, interests and goals, facing different opportunity structures.³² The interaction of the various actors with their interests and goals and with the cultural, political and economic opportunities – in many cases representing specific national institutions – prepares the ground for the interactional dynamics that will help understand and explain our findings. We will first discuss why the voluntary association is (still) the dominant organizational form for Scandinavian sport. Thereafter, we will try to understand why the cases are so similar, but also why there actually also are significant differences.

Why voluntarily organized?

The continued dominance of associations in sport and their specific character in the Scandinavian countries is linked to historical and institutional relationships. According to institutional theory, the character of voluntary sport and the differences between countries can be attributed to the roots of the sports movement and the institutionalization of this part of society – i.e. traditions in different types of sport and physical activities, traditions in specific organizational solutions in this particular area of society, legislation, public support, etc. Organizational forms and types have a history, and this history determines important aspects of the present structure of organizations of that type. The standard term for describing this argument is 'path dependency',³³ meaning that the basic structure and pattern tends to remain relatively stable – partially because the forms can function effectively despite a changing environment, and partially because there is a certain 'organizational inertia' when organizations become institutionalized.³⁴

In both Norway and Denmark, sports-association-friendly opportunity structures have developed, of which the most important aspect is a continuous public policy focusing upon the construction and maintenance of sports facilities.³⁵ This has obviously lowered the threshold for participation and made it easier to organize sports locally and to take part in

sports in an association. According to the special legislative act on support for sport, culture and leisure activities in Denmark, local authorities are obliged to support voluntarily-organized sport, whereas Norwegian local authorities are not obliged but nevertheless do so in most cases. The result of this situation is significant differences in local sport policies in the Norwegian case. In Denmark, this support is given to associations partly in the form of a subsidy for expenses connected with sports facilities, and partly as a direct financial subsidy for the associations' activities for members under the age of 25. The local authorities also subsidise sport by building halls and playing-field facilities, and by providing these free of charge to local sports clubs. Individual citizens cannot therefore require a municipal authority to provide particular forms of leisure-time activity, but if a group of citizens wishes to organize a physical activity, then their association has the right to obtain council funding, irrespective of the income of the citizens concerned or their ability to finance such activities themselves. In both countries there are also positive cultural climates towards this way to organize sports, and there are relatively strong normative expectations telling people to take part in the organizing of sports – i.e. voluntary work – when they or their children are active in an association. The same high standing of voluntary sports also make for at least some sponsorship, often from local business, also at a low sport level.

Why so similar?

There are relatively small differences between voluntary organized sport in Denmark and Norway, and we suggest two possible explanations for this similarity. First, in terms of efficiency factors we know that, across national boundaries, different organizational forms are best suited to different social areas. For instance, family-owned property forms are most common in agriculture, for-profit players dominate in capital-intensive fields and cooperatives dominate food industries, whereas non-profit forms are the normal organizational type in much welfare work and in leisure and sports. The dominant organizational form in sport across completely different societies is the voluntary organization. On the basis of this approach, the relatively great uniformity of the sports associations in the two countries seem to reflect the fact that they both adopt a form of organization that in general is the most suited to this type of activity and the objectives and values associated with it.³⁶ On the other hand, these efficiency factors cannot explain why there are also significant variations between relatively similar societies in organizational pattern and the distribution of the different organizational forms in specific social areas. In Germany about 30% of the population are members of approximately 80,000 sports associations, which are relatively large and organized in one umbrella organization; in England, it is estimated that about 10% of the population are members of the approximately 120,000 sports associations, which are much smaller and more informal than in Germany, and where the central organization is relatively weak. Therefore, we need other explanations to account for the relatively small differences between Norway and Denmark.

The second explanation arises from the degree of homogeneity between the two countries – both cultural and political. This explanation is based on the idea that the organizational system and the tasks, functions and structures of the voluntary organization are greatly determined by the frame of reference set by history, culture and the political system, e.g. the extent and boundaries of the state's responsibility, the political legitimacy of and financial support to the voluntary sector, and the degree of public regulation and control linked to the various institutionalized forms of support. These political and state

structures and cultures largely define the practical and ideological space in which voluntary organizations have to act. The 'cultural and political opportunity structures' in the two countries are mostly similar. Both countries have a long tradition of democracy in which all types of organizations have easy access to the political decision-making process; a culture of 'consensual democracy', where problems are solved by discussion, debate, compromise and controlled conflict; they both have a strong tradition for decentralization, self-regulation and opposition to regulation, and a large public sector that seems to be more legitimate than in other European countries because, among other things, the public sector is to a greater extent created from the bottom up.³⁷

The future of Scandinavian voluntary sports

In conclusion, we look at the challenges facing sport organized in associations in the Scandinavian countries, and we see three central challenges. Firstly, an increasing share of the population is now involved in sport and exercise in new ways. Secondly, changes are taking place in the public sector, especially at local levels. Finally, sports associations face increasing competition from commercial sport and exercise.

New social groups moving into sports

Over some decades, major changes have occurred in the population's sporting and exercise habits. Firstly, middle-aged people are involved in almost as much sport and exercise as youngsters, and senior citizens (i.e. those aged 60 +) are approaching the same level of participation. In the past, sport was mostly reserved for youngsters, i.e. those at their physical peak. These days, youngsters make up a far smaller share of those actively involved in sport, while young children and especially adults are far more heavily involved than 40–50 years ago. Even though the strong growth in participation in sport among those aged over 30 also makes its mark on many sports associations, studies show that the proportion of people actively involved in sports associations falls as people grow older.³⁸

Secondly, since the 1970s there has been a move away from team sports with fixed training times to activities that allow for training alone or in small groups at self-appointed times. This is probably a result of people increasingly wanting to decide for themselves how to exercise, when and with whom, and does not necessarily mean that people do not want to participate in sport with others. This is, to varying degrees, possible in the sports that have made most progress in the last three decades (even though some are again suffering losses of support); these include badminton, tennis, golf, aerobics and similar forms of training, weight training/fitness, swimming, jogging, bowling, cycling and roller skating. Organizing this type of sport and exercise places totally different demands on the sports association.

How do sports associations meet these challenges? Associations would obviously prefer more members, but only a few seem ready to introduce new activities that small numbers of people might want to pursue. As such, associations are only minimally oriented towards 'the market' for sport and exercise. This is one possible interpretation of the associations' responses to a question posed in a 1997 Danish survey, wherein the associations were asked which of two statements they most agreed with. Only 30% agreed that 'the sports association must adapt to the population's needs and interest in sport and exercise, and compete with others who offer sport', while 70% mainly agreed that 'each sports association should concentrate on the sports and activities its members are interested in'.³⁹

New local politics?

Many sports associations depend economically, directly or indirectly, on public authorities for their existence and activities. Funding by public authorities is often granted without specific requirements, expectations and monitoring of the associations. However, it is conceivable that shifts to public policies and priorities will change the sports associations' relationships to public authorities. Firstly, public authorities in both Denmark and Norway will probably face expenditure squeezes. On the one hand, they will not raise taxes, while on the other, more and better services are increasingly expected with respect to childcare, elderly citizens and schools. This can force central and local authorities to prioritize their funds to a greater extent than they have in the past, and may impact upon areas that they are not obliged to look after to the same extent, e.g. the funding of associations and operational costs for sports facilities. However, it is also conceivable that local-authority budgets will spur efforts to make citizens to take responsibility for collective tasks to a larger extent and hence pass on more tasks to civic society in the form of associations.

Secondly, in the future, local authorities will have to look after preventative health initiatives to a greater extent at the same time as health has obtained a higher political priority and plays a greater role in public debate. As the sports themselves – and the national organizations in particular – are legitimized by the health benefits of physical activity to a much greater degree than previously, an obvious conclusion is that local-authority funding is determined by health objectives. The health objectives can be at the expense of social, cultural and democratic objectives, and can exert influence on which organizations – whether traditional voluntary associations or commercial fitness centres – receive funding and under which conditions the funding is granted.

The third change consists of new forms of control and administration in the public sector. 'New Public Management' is the generic term for new thinking about control of spending that, for example, stresses explicit targets for public activities and funding, quantification of whether outcomes are achieved, the use of financial incentives, and competition for the right to organize the activities. The aim is a more flexible, result-oriented and cost-effective public sector.⁴⁰ The central point about this administrative culture is that the public funding is determined by political objectives and priorities, i.e. funding is reserved for tasks that address issues about which there is a political desire to do something. This is unlike public funding in the leisure and cultural sectors, which to a great extent is determined according to the principle of self-government, where it is the people who take the initiatives, who decide upon the activities' goals and content. This contract culture has still not penetrated funding for sport, leisure and cultural associations, perhaps because public-sector support is often indirect, as for example in the form of free use of facilities owned by local authorities. However, some local authorities have entered into contracts with sports and exercise associations for specified purposes, especially in preventative health work.

Finally, the fact that local authorities gradually seem to formulate more explicit sports policies may affect the sports associations. As a rule, this is done in close cooperation with the sports associations and without major conflicts, but this development might indicate that local authorities are trying to find their own feet in relation to sport. So far local authorities have predominantly reacted to wishes and initiatives of sports associations. Now, some local authorities have started to take independent initiatives, which in some cases have been heavily criticized by the associations. One such example is the building of sports facilities that are primarily designed for self-organized sport, and only to a limited extent suitable for competitive sport.

'The market' gains ground

A third major challenge facing sport organized by associations is the growing competition from commercial sport and fitness, and the 'market logic' that is making its mark in certain places. However, only a small number of sports associations face competition from commercial outfits, as most forms of sport are best pursued as part of an association. As an example, the gymnastics associations have found themselves having to compete for the attention of those looking for an opportunity for exercise. The competitive environment has certainly been one of the reasons why many of these associations have instigated new activities, e.g. aerobics, Pilates and fitness training, as well as more flexible forms of participation, but it has also forced associations to use paid coaches to a greater extent than previously. The growth of fitness centres has the potential to affect the overall conditions for sports associations, because it raises wider questions about how reasonable the associations' public funding is – partially because commercial exercise and sport will exert pressure to achieve equal terms, and partially because politicians will perhaps think that if so many people are willing to pay three to five times as much to exercise in a fitness centre than as a member of a sports association, then there are good reasons to let adults pay for their own use of local-authority sports facilities. And at the same time, commercial fitness centres and private physiotherapy clinics in some sectors are perhaps better equipped to reach agreements with the local authority about promoting physical activity among particular groups. As invitations to submit tenders become more common, it is not inconceivable that in the future local authorities will sign agreements with commercial dance institutes to offer dance classes for children.

Another aspect of this challenge from the commercial sector is a 'market logic', which in some associations is slowly superseding an 'association logic' – i.e. financial calculations are replacing ideals and sporting objectives, and the people actively involved in sport are increasingly considered to be 'customers' rather than 'members'. The traditional association ideal is still dominant, but the question is whether a 'market logic' will slowly penetrate associations, partly because commercial principles are much more readily acceptable in society today than they were 20 to 30 years ago, and partly because many associations are located in a grey zone between the voluntary sector and the commercial sector. A few associations run elite professional sports, some have large exercise departments that closely resemble commercial outfits, and many associations have commercial activities designed to earn money for the association's other activities. From organizational theory, we know that there are two contrary tendencies for organizations working in the same areas, and who compete for the same members or customers: they might end up resembling one another,⁴¹ or they might end up differentiating by looking for different kind of niches to survive.⁴² How the organizational field for sport and physical activity might develop is for the future to decide.

Notes

- ¹ The authors would like to thank Pasi Koski and Berit Skirstad for useful comments on a previous draft of this essay.
- ² We have chosen the term association to describe what we could have called organizations or clubs. None of the terms are wrong or directly misleading, and we have chosen association both because it gives some correct connotations (local, democratic, voluntary) and because this is closest to the term most often used in the two countries involved (*forening, lag*).
- ³ Ibsen, *Frivilligt arbejde i idrætsforeninger*; Slack, *Understanding Sport Organizations: The Application of Organization Theory*; Wollebæk and Selle, *Det nye organisasjonssamfunnet*; Wollebæk, Selle, and Lorentzen, *Frivillig innsats*.

- ⁴ Curtis, Baer and Grabb, 'Nations of Joiners'; Salamon and Sokolowski, *Global Civil Society*.
- ⁵ Wollebæk and Selle, *Det nye organisasjonssamfunnet*.
- ⁶ Ibsen, 'Foreningerne og de frivillige organisationer'.
- ⁷ Based on a separate comparative analysis of data from the Norwegian study of associations in Hordaland from 2000, and the corresponding Danish study of the associations in Funen County in 2004. Boje and Ibsen, *Frivillighed og nonprofit i Danmark*; Wollebæk and Selle, *Det nye organisasjonssamfunnet*.
- ⁸ Wollebæk and Selle, *Det nye organisasjonssamfunnet*.
- ⁹ Ibsen, 'Foreningerne og de frivillige organisationer'.
- ¹⁰ Bille *et al.*, *Danskernes kultur*; Larse, *Idrætsdeltagelse og idrætsforbrug i Danmark*; Ottesen and Ibsen, *Idræt, motion og hverdagsliv*.
- ¹¹ Seippel, 'Sport in Civil Society'.
- ¹² One of the reasons for this difference might be, that the local sports associations in Norway must abide to the statute norm of NOC, which means that if they have no own written rules the NOC statute norms will be their rules.
- ¹³ Based on a separate comparative analysis of data from both countries: Wollebæk and Selle, *Det nye organisasjonssamfunnet*; Boje and Ibsen, *Frivillighed og nonprofit i Danmark*.
- ¹⁴ According to NOC, 2001.
- ¹⁵ Ibsen, *Foreningsidrætten i Danmark*.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ Enjolras and Seippel, *Norske idrettslag 2000*; Ibsen, *Foreningsidrætten i Danmark*.
- ¹⁹ Ibsen, *Frivilligt arbejde i idrætsforeninger*.
- ²⁰ Ibsen, *Foreningsidrætten i Danmark*.
- ²¹ Seippel, 'The Meanings of Sport'.
- ²² Seippel, 'Sport and Social Capital'.
- ²³ Ibsen, *Frivilligt arbejde i idrætsforeninger*; Ibsen, *Dansk idrætspolitik*; Selle and Svåsand, 'Cultural Policy, Leisure and Voluntary Organizations in Norway'; Wollebæk and Selle, *Det nye organisasjonssamfunnet*.
- ²⁴ Ibsen, *Foreningsidrætten i Danmark*; Wollebæk and Selle, *Det nye organisasjonssamfunnet*. The analysis is based on answers from the associations to identical questions in a questionnaire as part of the two nations' participation in the 'Johns Hopkins University Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project'. To illustrate the associations' role in society, their own self-reported position with regards to the two attitude dimensions was studied. In the first dimension, a differentiation is made between whether the association primarily concentrates on its own members (member-oriented), or whether the association works for wider groups or society as a whole (socially-oriented). In the second dimension, a differentiation is made between whether the associations are primarily a form of collective activity with other people who share the same interests (consensus-oriented), or whether looking after and fighting for interests and values are, to a particular degree, the objectives of the associations (conflict-oriented).
- ²⁵ Seippel, 'Sport in Civil Society' (2008).
- ²⁶ Ibsen, *Foreningsidrætten i Danmark*.
- ²⁷ Enjolras and Seippel, *Norske idrettslag 2000*; Ibsen, *Frivilligt arbejde i idrætsforeninger*.
- ²⁸ Ibsen, 'Foreningerne og de frivillige organisationer'; Seippel, 'Sport in Civil Society' (2008).
- ²⁹ Wollebæk, Selle and Lorentzen, *Frivillig innsats*.
- ³⁰ For more on public funding of sport, see essay by Bergsgard and Nordberg, this volume.
- ³¹ Ibsen, *Dansk idrætspolitik*.
- ³² Hedström, *Dissecting the Social*.
- ³³ Peters, *Institutional Theory*.
- ³⁴ Stinchcombe, 'Social Structure and Organizations'.
- ³⁵ Goksøyr, *Kropp, kultur og tippeskamp*.
- ³⁶ Hansmann, 'Economic Theories'.
- ³⁷ Gundelach, 'Er protesterne og bevægelserne forsvundet?'
- ³⁸ Ottesen and Ibsen, *Idræt, motion og hverdagsliv*.
- ³⁹ Ibsen, *Foreningsidrætten i Danmark*.
- ⁴⁰ Eikås, 'New Public Management'; Klausen and Ståhlberg, *New Public Management i Norden*.
- ⁴¹ DiMaggio and Powell, 'The Iron Cage Revisited'.
- ⁴² Carroll and Hannan, *The Demography of Corporations*.

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