Sport and Welfare Policy in Denmark

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**Introduction**

Over the past 10 – 20 years, researchers studying welfare have expanded their focus from an almost exclusive interest in the welfare state to a greater interest in the welfare society and the distribution of welfare tasks between state, market and civil society. In addition, the concept of welfare has expanded from being primarily concerned with material security and health to also including the empowerment and social networks of citizens and their integration into society. This means that attention has also been focused on leisure and cultural life – including sport. This paper reflects a shift in the political and scientific debate from a concept of welfare society which primarily encompasses social security, health and education to a broader concept of the welfare society which also includes culture, leisure and sport.

The institutionalisation of sport, and any changes in this, are linked to the institutionalised structure of society in general, i.e. the legitimacy of the various logics of society (‘State’, Market’ and ‘Community’) and the different sectors (‘public’, ‘commercial’, ‘informal’ and ‘voluntary’), both in general and within the individual social areas. The structure of sport is thus a result of the development within all four sectors and the legitimacy they possess in this area of society. In this paper, I will however concentrate on the relationship between the character of the welfare state and the institutional structures of sport, primarily because the development and specific character of the welfare state in individual countries is of crucial importance to the significance that is assigned to sport, the way it is organised, etc. Amongst other things, this includes analyses of the nature and structure, in principle, of the welfare state – such as the distinction between the liberal corporative and institutional welfare states – including the extent and boundaries of the state’s responsibility (i.e. the tasks which the public sector regards as its particular responsibility); the political opportunity structure, including legislation, the public sector’s direct and indirect financial support for specific social areas and the degree of public regulation and control linked to the various institutionalised forms of support, and the culture, ideals and principles of the public sector, e.g. the extent to which it is consensus-oriented or more conflict-oriented, and the degree of decentralisation, internal competition and market control in public administration, etc. (Micheletti 1995).

These political and state structures and cultures largely define the space, both practical and ideological, within which the various organisational forms must act. There are, however, great differences from social field to social field in the relationship between the state and the voluntary sector. As a result, the insight gained from research in the core areas of the welfare state (the social and health fields) cannot be transferred as a matter of course to sport, which has a completely different position in the Nordic welfare societies.

The point of departure of this study is “the importance in politics of institutional conditions. By ‘institutional conditions’ are meant, in this context, various formal systems of rules, such as constitutions, systems of taxation, and – critically for this analysis – social welfare programmes. These are not to be seen merely as rule-stems determining which strategies of action are rational, but also as established normative arrangements. According to this view, political conditions result in more than just rules, such as those specifying the mechanisms of political decision-making; they also have an influence on which values are established in a society, such as belonging, trust, and solidarity” (Micheletti 1995: 16-17) (...) Bearing in mind that policies have effects on political support as well as the other way around, this implies that the development in these different systems has been path-dependent. Path-dependency, however, is not just another way of saying that "history
matters”; the idea is that (a) small, early changes in institutional arrangements, whether or not they are deliberate and rational, can have great implications at much later stages; (b) that certain courses of action, once established, are almost impossible to reverse; and (c) that cause becomes effect which, in the next historical sequence, strengthens the "original” cause. The idea of path-dependency is how I understand that independent and dependent variables sequentially change places. That is, depending on your ideological preferences, the development of these different political equilibria in social policy is to be understood as a result of history at certain "formative moments” changing track into virtues or vicious circles (…) we must capture the ongoing logic of the relation between its type of policies and its political and moral support” (p 29)

Historical roots of Danish sport policies

This paper does not devote space to a detailed description of the history of Danish sports policy. Accordingly, I will make do with a brief examination of three phases in its development (Ibsen and Eichberg 2006).

During the first period, which stretches from the rise of modern sports in the mid-nineteenth century until the middle of the twentieth century, there was very little political interference in sport. In this period of almost a century, sport was of far less social significance than it is today. The constitutional provisions of 1849 concerning "freedom of assembly" and "freedom of association" created, however, the basic foundation for the development of sport which was not supervised by the state. Whereas shooting and gymnastics attracted political attention at an early stage, and received state financial support from the beginning, other sports were not seen as having the same value; it was not until 1903 that the Sports Confederation of Denmark received a small state subsidy. Despite a great deal of goodwill towards sport in the first decades of the 20th century, the political will did not exist to devote more money to sport via the annual state budget.

The second period, from 1945 until around 1970, saw the enactment of the two laws which have since provided the most important basis for state subsidy of sport in Denmark; however, the state remained uninterested in much of the sport that took place in leisure time. The welfare state as we know it today took shape after the Second World War, and was characterised by a rapid growth in the public sector and the dissemination of the universalist principle – that all citizens are entitled to the same services irrespective of income, social background, etc. – to ever more reforms and areas of society, e.g. the introduction of old age pensions for all in 1956. Both aspects of the welfare state came to influence the leisure legislation adopted at the end of the 1960s. It is in this period that the two most important laws for association-based sport were adopted: the Pools Act secured economic support for the national sports organisations, and the Leisure Act opened the way for municipal support for local sports clubs. But aside from this, the state showed little interest in leisure-time sport, which was still regarded as an area in which the state should not get involved. Sport had no ministry with responsibility for the area, and with the exception of the debates in connection with amendments to the Pools Act, there was no political debate on the subject of sport.

In the final period, from the beginning of the 1970s until the present day, the political system was pressured by organised sport to become more and more involved in sports affairs. The level of political interference grew throughout this period, thereby placing pressure on the traditionally strong self-determination of association-based sport. This period differs from the first two in that the state involved itself to a far greater extent with sport. Firstly, sport was subjected to several
analyses via political initiatives in the form of white papers on 'sport and open-air activities', 'elite sports' and 'popular sports' as well as political debates. Secondly, the two most important laws – the Pools and Lottery Act and the Leisure Act – were amended several times, in most cases giving sport better conditions without seriously challenging the autonomy of the sports clubs and the national sporting organisations. Thirdly, the state took on a greater role through the establishment of a number of state and semi-state institutions, all of which were intended to develop sport: Team Denmark (elite sport organisation), the Danish Foundation for Culture and Sport Facilities, the Research Foundation for Sport, Culture and Civil Society (now the Danish Ministry of Culture's Sports Research Committee), Anti Doping Denmark, the Danish Institute for Sports Studies, the National Council for Public Health and various development funds aimed at promoting sport for particular groups, including the Sports Policy Idea Programme. Fourthly, the relationship of the sports clubs and sporting organisations with the municipalities and the state, respectively, became altered. Demands were made to a greater extent than before, and corporative structures were established, and closer contact between the organisations, the Minister for Cultural Affairs and the popular educational committees in the municipalities.

What are the characteristics of Danish sports policy?

I now turn to analyses of the sport system in Denmark in modern times, in the context of the Danish welfare society. What is the disposition of Danish welfare society, and what are the corresponding dispositions of sport?

In comparative social analyses, the Danish welfare model has been termed called “the Scandinavian model”, “the social democratic model”, “the universalist model” or “the institutionalised welfare model” (Timmuss 1974. Alestalo & Kuhnle 1987. Esping-Andersen 1990. Boje and Olsson 1992. Rothstein 1996). The central characteristics of the institutionalised welfare model are:

a) a large public sector (financed by taxes) with generous and redistributional schemes (as opposed to the more status-safeguarding continental European schemes),
b) universal and egalitarian welfare schemes, i.e. schemes which in principle apply to the entire population irrespective of income or employment status, and schemes which are based on the rights associated with citizenship (the allocation of benefits or services without the application of economic means-testing)\(^1\). As ideal type, this means that benefits and services are intended to apply to the entire population throughout their various stages of life, on the basis of uniform rules (Rothstein 1996: 18)
c) close co-operation between the various sectors of society, including a strong voluntary sector,
d) relatively high political consensus concerning the core principles of the welfare model, and
e) a strong degree of decentralisation.

To what extent can the concepts and ideals of sport and the organisation of sport in Denmark be described and explained as expressions or mirror images of the Danish welfare culture? (Ibsen and Ottesen 2003. Ibsen and Eichberg 2006)
**Fragmented sports policy**

Sports policy in Denmark is not concentrated in a single act or ministry. The only major act which directly benefits sport, the Elite Sports Act, is the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture; the Adult Education Act (or Leisure Act) is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and is now an act which regulates all club-based leisure and cultural activity; the Pools and Lottery Act belongs under the Ministry of Taxation, and although it was originally a 'sports act', it has developed into an act relating to national voluntary and humanitarian organisations; and in parallel with growing awareness of the importance of sport to health, the Ministry of the Interior and Health has acquired growing significance for sports policy ideas. To this must be added the fact that sport has an interest in environmental policy, schools policy, social policy and in recent decades also industrial policy. While most areas of society and social groups have interests in various ministries and pieces of legislation, sports policy in Denmark differs both from other policies and from other countries in that the two most important pieces of legislation for sport – from an economic point of view – are not administered by the ministry with formal responsibility for sport.

Another aspect of this fragmentation is the division between municipal support, which goes only to sports clubs at municipal level, and state subsidies, which almost exclusively go to support national organisations, without any liability to pass on this state support to the local level (as the Norwegian Olympic Committee and Confederation of Sports, for example, is obliged to do). The consequence of this is that the two organisational levels are relatively independent of each other economically, apart from the dependence of the national organisations on the membership of the sports clubs in order to benefit from the pools and lottery funds. This means that the sporting organisations must on the one hand conform to the expectations of the state and at the national political level in order to legitimise themselves, and on the other hand must also be interesting and important to the sports clubs, in order to retain their membership.

There may be several reasons for this fragmented sports policy. Firstly, it could be explained by the fact that the Pools and Lottery Act and the Leisure Act were adopted before the Ministry of Culture became the ministry with responsibility for sport. Secondly, it may also relate to the fact that sport is seen as being very useful in the promotion of various aims, such as popular education, social integration, health and economic growth. Thirdly, the explanation may simply be that it is a consequence of the fact that there is not a single form of sport but rather many different varieties and reasons for practising sport, which would be difficult to concentrate and accommodate in a single act and a single ministry.

**Policy via voluntarily organised sport**

The institutionalised welfare model is often said to be associated with a very dominant state and a large public sector. The true picture, however, is far more complex. Firstly, the countries that lean towards this welfare model are overwhelmingly capitalistic, with a large commercial sector. There are major differences between the Scandinavian mixed-economy social model, in which industry, agriculture and many services are privately run and commercially organised, and the communist social model, under which the state is responsible for most production and services. This difference is well-known and will not be further elaborated here.
Furthermore, the development in welfare services has entailed a greater mix in those who deliver and finance the services. Denmark has opened up much more for market-based social services. To a greater extent than previously, welfare policies are, therefore, epitomised by liberal, free-market principles such as deregulation, flexibility, privatisation and reduced state involvement. The application of market principles has become more legitimate, both in the political sphere and in public opinion, amongst other reasons because of the decline of state communism and the falling productivity of the command economies. This change has influenced the organisation of welfare: firstly, there is a greater degree of “free choice” for the citizen between, for instance, different public schools and different hospitals, one of the consequences of which is increased competition between public institutions. Secondly, the public sector is more open to market-based services (private hospitals, kindergartens, day-care centres, etc.). In general we find an increasing separation of the different “roles” in the public sector: the public sector is still responsible for the regulation (legislation, rules, etc.) and financing of the traditional welfare areas, but there is an increasing tendency to make private sector companies or voluntary organisations responsible for the actual provision of the welfare services.

This development has included a growing awareness of the role played by the voluntary sector in the welfare state society. Despite the major role played by the public sector in the Danish model, the voluntary sector is just as large as it is in most other countries, irrespective of whether its size is measured in terms of the sector’s share of GDP, the proportion of the population who are members of an organisation, or the level of individual participation in voluntary work. Recent surveys also reveal that the voluntary sector has been very dynamic and has grown rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s (Ibsen 2006). Over the last thirty years the legitimacy of the voluntary sector has increased considerably in the political sphere. In the 1970s, both the left wing and the right wing of the Danish parliament supported a strong public sector in the social field without any “space” for voluntarism. During the 1990s, all the political parties supported increased economic subsidies to the voluntary organisations in the social field, and expressed very positive attitudes to voluntarism.

Danish sports policy is almost exclusively directed at sport organised by sports clubs and voluntary organisations, mainly the three national organisations (the National Olympic Committee and Sports Confederation of Denmark, the Danish Gymnastic and Sports Association and the Danish Company Sports Federation) and the approximately 16,000 local sports clubs. The other recipient is the provision of physical education and exercise in evening schools, which has had to operate as voluntary organisations since 1991. In fact, it was spelt out in an amendment to the leisure legislation in 1991 that public funding allocated in accordance with this law may only be spent on local authority initiatives if the sports clubs do not take up the full allocation. The exceptions to this “rule” are certain sporting activities for young people organised by local authority leisure institutions (continuation school, after-school clubs and youth clubs) and swimming in local authority swimming pools. Since the mid-1980s, however, the state has funded a number of new initiatives and projects for the development of sport in a wider sense; a state foundation (the Foundation for Culture and Sports Facilities) was for example set up in 1994 to support new and alternative sporting and cultural facilities. Among its initiatives to date have been a series of outdoor ice rinks for the general public. Furthermore a new state programme was initiated in 1999 (the Sports Policy Idea Programme) with aim of Sports Confederation of Denmark “developing the cultural dimension of sport policy and to strengthen diversity, quality and freedom of speech in Danish sport”.

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In parallel with this 'favourisation' in the legislation of club-based sport and leisure time activities, various governments have attempted to relax or remove difficult legislative rules. This applies for example to

- the favourable rules governing tax-free compensation for expenses for voluntary instructors and sports leaders, which the Liberal Party has even proposed improving,
- the freedom from VAT for voluntary, non-profit associations and organisations – under certain conditions (adopted in 2002) – and
- the relaxations in the rules regulating the possibility of persons receiving unemployment benefits or early retirement pensions to participate in voluntary work (adopted in 2004).

As a consequence of the 'monopoly' of the sports clubs on state subsidies, corporative features have evolved in Danish sports policy, i.e. policies in which key decisions are made with the organisations concerned and are mainly put into practice by the same organisations and their sports clubs.

A large public sector

The institutionalised welfare model is characterised by a large state/public sector and the dominance of the state in the financing and production of social welfare (only very limited social and health services are market-based: the primary health system, dentists) as opposed to being financed by labour-market contributions and/or insurance, as in Germany. This welfare model is also characterised by high taxation, a relatively high level of social services (economic support, free services, etc.), as well as more redistributional schemes due to proportional taxation, while most benefits are either flat-rate or have a ceiling (as opposed to the more status-safeguarding continental European schemes), and a high degree of solidarity in the society (ideological). In general, the role of the state in Denmark and the other Nordic countries seems to be seen as more legitimate than in other European countries, amongst other things because the public sector is largely created from the bottom up (Gundelach 1994).

The financial role of the public sector is also apparent in sport, which has a relatively high level of statutory public funding. Comparative European surveys show that the level of public-sector funding for sport in Denmark is higher than in any other country in Europe (Council of Europe, 1994). At the local authority level, the financing and running of sports facilities represents the most important kind of funding available to sport. Today, there is a sports hall for every 4,000 people, swimming baths for every 12,000 and a soccer pitch for every 1,000. Public subsidies make up just over 9/10 of the income of the national sports organisations and about 1/4 of the income of the sports clubs. In addition, the sports clubs mainly use municipal facilities and parks, which are made available free of charge. If the value of public expenditure on sports facilities is included, public subsidies to sports clubs now constitute about half the income of the clubs. At national level, the sporting organisations and the elite institution TEAM DENMARK are funded by the profits from the football and lottery pools, which are controlled by a state monopoly. The total public funding of sport, including the value of facilities and premises placed at the disposal of the clubs free of charge, amounted to approximately DKK 2.5 billion in the late 1990s, corresponding to just under DKK 5,000 per member of the population.

Despite growing public support, the financial dependence of the sports clubs on the state has not increased since the 1970s. Comparable surveys of sports club finances undertaken in 1984, 1989, 1997 and 2004 indicate that municipal support for the sports clubs has remained constant, at approximately one-quarter of the average income of the clubs (see research note on voluntarily
organised sport: Ibsen 2006. www.idan.dk). If the value of state expenditure on sports facilities is included, state support to the sports clubs comprises approximately half of the clubs’ incomes.

Consensus, autonomy and self-regulation

It is characteristic of the Danish model of democracy and welfare that the most important social reforms were implemented in an alliance between the Social Democrats and the non-Socialist parties. Denmark and the other Nordic countries are sometimes described as "consensual democracies"; countries which, more than other societies, solve problems and conflicts by negotiation, debate, compromise and controlled conflicts, and where all types of organisations have easy access to the political decision-making process and are included in it at an early stage. Moreover, the relationship between the public and voluntary sectors is also predominantly characterised by consensus, partnership, division of labour and interdependence. To a great extent, the welfare state has developed through pressure from the voluntary organisations for increased and improved public welfare schemes (Klausen and Selle 1995), and the voluntary sector has not been "colonised" by the state as the welfare state has grown.

But despite a close relationship between the public sector and the voluntary sector, and despite legislation and heavy financial dependence on the public sector in several areas (e.g. the private and free school area in Denmark and Norway (Eikås 1995)), the organisations involved have retained a high degree of autonomy. In this context it is interesting to note that although the Nordic countries are heavily regulated by legislation, only Finland has an actual Association Act. Freedom of association is one of the legal areas that the legislators have left alone (Gjems-Onstad 1995). In general, Denmark has to a greater extent than the other Nordic countries been characterised by liberal attitudes and opposition to regulation (Knudsen 1991. Buksti 1993). The labour force is thus mainly regulated by agreements between employers and strong trade unions which have a considerably higher membership than outside the Nordic countries. The private commercial sector has been subjected to relatively little state intervention. For many years, the agricultural sector was regulated by agreements between the relevant groups without direct official intervention. Furthermore, in the educational field, there is a strong tradition for friskoler (private schools), efterskoler (private boarding schools for children aged 14 to 16), and folkehojskoler (examination-free residential educational institutions for young people, based on the idea of "popular enlightenment"), which despite large public subsidies enjoy very great autonomy.

This is also the case in sport. Even with this very high level of economic support, the autonomy and "freedom of action" of the sports clubs is very high. The public-sector funding has always been allocated according to the principle that the state and local authorities are responsible for the overall financial and physical framework for sport, while the role of the clubs and organisations is to fill out that framework.

Both the Pools and Lottery Act and the Adult Education Act are constructed so as to give great autonomy to the national sports organisations and the sports clubs, respectively. The Pools and Lottery Act determines the proportion of the profits of the Danish Pools and Lottery Company which is to be distributed to the sporting organisations. The amount due to the organisations is thus not the subject of annual negotiations with the Minister for Cultural Affairs, nor how the money should be used – apart from relatively vague agreements to make special efforts in particular areas, by arrangement with the minister – and the distribution of funds is not subject to the approval of the Danish Parliament, unlike the Ministry of Culture's share of the pools and lottery funds. It is true
that the Adult Education Act (Leisure Act) provides for the possibility of the municipalities to determine how much they will spend on popular educational activities (including sport), and how the money is to be distributed between adult education and activities for children and young people, but the specific implementation of the reserved funds is left up to the popular education committee, in which the politically-elected representatives normally play a rather subdued role. Just as importantly, the Adult Education Act contains a number of provisions stating that the municipality must respect the individual character of the clubs, i.e. their activities, purpose and fundamental concepts (on condition that their activities have a popular educational purpose, but this is given a very broad interpretation in all municipalities), as well as how their activities are organised, who the clubs may choose as managers and instructors, how the municipal subsidies are utilised, etc.

As the vast majority of public subsidies for sport are required to comply with the two laws, the state and the municipalities have relatively few funds with which to undertake special initiatives. In 2005, the Danish Ministry of Culture received DKK 270 million of the profits of the national pools and lottery, of which DKK 41 million went to sports-related activities, corresponding to one percent of the total state subsidies for sport. In addition, a part of these funds goes to independent (state) sports-related institutions and committees (Anti Doping Denmark, the Danish Institute for Sports Studies, the Danish Ministry of Culture's Sports Research Committee) over which the Minister for Cultural Affairs exercises relatively little influence. In Norway, by contrast, several of these tasks are concentrated in the Norwegian Ministry of Culture, where the minister has an opportunity to exert a significant influence over which types of sport the state wishes to support and promote.

The municipalities have in principle greater power to implement specific policies, partly due to the structure of the municipal subsidy schemes for popular educational activities, and partly through the construction of sports facilities, which in the vast majority of cases is a municipal policy decision, irrespective of whether the facilities are municipal or belong to a club or independent institution (e.g. in the form of protection against loss or a statement of willingness to cover parts of the association's expenses towards the hire of the sports hall, cf. the provisions of the Adult Education Act). There is however a tradition for the construction of new sports facilities to be harmonised with the wishes of the club.

The political control also seems to be limited by the fact that the state administration and most municipalities possess only a small administrative unit with responsibility for sport. At the Ministry for Cultural Affairs, sport is the responsibility of "the office for sport, copyright and international affairs", which in 2006 had only four staff members concerned with sport. This means that the ministry has far fewer resources and less professional expertise in sport than the sporting organisations, which makes it difficult to maintain an independent policy. There are also several examples of sports organisations or research institutes practically functioning as 'external sports offices' for the Minister for Cultural Affairs.

The limited political control is however not only due to institutional factors, but is also associated with a lack of general political will to control sport, cf. the former prime minister Poul Schlüter's remark on this subject during the first debate on sport in the Danish Parliament in 1976. Despite the fact that the sporting organisations receive the majority of their income from the state, and despite the fact that the municipalities supply most of the expenditure on sports facilities, the dominating political view of sport is that it is a task which lies in the domain of civil society, and as such must not be subjected to political control. Furthermore, although all politicians speak in positive terms about the importance of sport, and many are happy to use sport to get themselves a little attention,
very few Danish politicians, particularly in Parliament, are really interested in the subject. First of all, sport is a low-status political area when the political fields of responsibility and spokesperson posts are being distributed. Secondly, very few of the politicians elected to Parliament have held central leadership posts in sporting organisations; by contrast, many key parliamentary politicians in Finland hold or have held important posts in sport. (The most prominent of these was the Finnish president, Urho Kekkonen, who before embarking on a political career was chairman of the Finnish Athletics Federation.) Neither is there any tradition in Denmark of former sports stars creating political careers. At the municipal level, a somewhat larger overlap exists between sports leaders and politicians.

I have argued that there is relatively little political control of sport in Denmark; however, there seems to be a tendency towards greater management and regulation of matters which were formerly left up to the sporting organisations themselves. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, municipal subsidies to sports clubs were increasingly directed towards specific purposes (for example, instructor training, salary for instructors, special events, etc.). The greatest control, however, has been through the state experimental and development programmes. The state established these programmes at the beginning of the 1980s to promote social purposes, strengthen local communities and promote innovation, etc., and to "coax" clubs and other local initiatives to develop and change - a "soft" central regulation to replace the traditional centralised control by means of rules (see above).

State and municipal support is, however, still not conditional on any special requirements towards content, standards or professional qualifications, and in general, the expectations are very broad and vaguely formulated. In contrast with the area of social welfare and international aid, where state subsidies are provided only on application and on condition of compliance with particular standards for staffing, etc., state support for the sports clubs and organisations has much less influence on the clubs' activities.

Universal and egalitarian welfare principles

An important characteristic of the institutionalised model is that many of the welfare services are characterised by universal and egalitarian welfare principles: schemes which in principle apply to the whole population regardless of income and contact with the labour market, and which are mainly based on the rights associated with citizenship. All citizens, irrespective of their income, employment status, or social background, thus have a statutory right to free education (in recognised institutions), health care (by qualified professionals), economic help in the case of illness or unemployment, old age pensions, etc.

Universalist and egalitarian principles are also clearly expressed in the legislation. According to the special legislative act on support for sport, culture, leisure activities, adult education, etc. (the Leisssure Act), the local authorities are obliged to support voluntarily-organised sport. This support is given to clubs partly in the form of a subsidy for expenses connected with sports facilities, and partly as a direct financial subsidy for the clubs’ activities. However, the local authority is only obliged to support activities for members under the age of 25, while the requirement to provide funding for adult leisure activities is mandatory only in the case of leisure time courses of instruction. The local authorities also subsidise sport by building halls and playing field facilities, and 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 organise teaching in one subject or another, or to organise leisure activities for children or young people, then their association has the right to obtain council funding irrespective of the income of the citizens concerned or of their ability to finance such activities themselves.

The universalist principles in the sport policy are associated with the legitimisation of sport. Since 1972, when Denmark signed the 'Sport for All' charter of the Council of Europe, the overall goal of sports policy in Denmark has been precisely that: "sport for all". This began as a highly diffuse and non-mandatory goal, but in the 1980s and 1990s the goals became more specific, and a small portion of the public funding for sport was earmarked for the handicapped, the elderly, refugees, the cities, etc. Until the early 1980s, there was general political agreement that public funds should go to non-professional sporting activities and that professional sport had nothing to do with the public sector. However, in 1984 all the political parties changed their position and voted to set up a state-financed institution (TEAM DENMARK) to promote Danish elite sport in a “socially acceptable way.” But although public support for sport is usually justified on the basis of its value in terms of health and social values, sports organisations and politicians have always made a virtue out of regarding sport as a part of cultural life and/or popular education in general. In 1976, sport was transferred to the Ministry of Culture, indicating that culture is about more than just art and highbrow cultural pursuits. Since then, the various ministers of culture have treated sport as part of the overall cultural policy and its goals. However, in general, this has consisted more of empty rhetoric than actual endeavours to support and develop sport according to cultural policy dimensions. First and foremost, politicians have justified public-sector funding for sport by reference to its value for health, social prevention and the inculcation of society's norms and values. Sport has been considered a good means to these ends, but it has not been considered legitimate to support sport for its intrinsic value, which is precisely what distinguishes sport from culture in the traditional sense. The ratification of the "sport for all" concept introduced, however, a new area of sports discourse to Denmark, which has a long tradition of "sport for the people".

The health-related legitimisation of sport is currently in the spotlight. This has always been an important part of the justification for state support of sport in Denmark, although this aspect has perhaps been slightly less to the fore here than in, for example, Norway, where the key concept of 'public health' has played a dominating ideological role since as far back as the 1940s. But over the last two decades, the idea of sport's health-promoting value has been assigned growing significance in parallel with an increasing political concern about overweight in the population, welfare diseases, the increasing cost of the health system and, especially, children’s lack of exercise (Klarlund Petersen/Saltin 2003, Nabe 2005, Lüders/Vogensen 2005 and Folkesundhed 2005) Whether sport in the form supported via the Ministry of Culture's sports policy really contributes to solving society's health problems is, however, an open question (Forebyggelsesrådet 1984). There is, at any rate, a challenge inherent in the paradox that the population's health problems are growing, despite – or in parallel with – the rise in the proportion of children and adults practising sport (Larsen 2003 a and b).This is probably also the reason why discussions of health policy and health research have increasingly moved away from the word 'sport' and towards words like 'exercise' and 'physical activity', while the sporting organisations continue to argue even more emphatically for health policy support for their respective kinds of sport.

In parallel with the health policy legitimisation of sport, the "other arm" of the welfare political legitimisation of sports policy has occupied a strong position, namely the role of sport in social integration. Sport contributes, it is maintained, to the integration of various social groups across the boundaries of class and ethnicity, thereby helping to combat criminality and other undesirable forms
of social behaviour. Here, too, however, it is far from obvious whether sport in itself, or as represented by sports policy, in fact lives up to the desired social policy 'functions'.

In relation to the above-mentioned welfare policy goals, older legitimisations of the national political type have gradually slipped into the background, but have not disappeared. When the public authorities first began to support sport in the 19th century – shooting and gymnastics, at the time – this was with an eye to national integration and the acquisition of military skills. While the military aspect has since become marginalised, the national political value has acquired renewed significance in the form of the nation's international prestige, which today justifies state support of elite sport: "Denmark must be placed on the map." The desire to 'raise Denmark's profile in the Olympic family' plays, for example, an important role in bringing international sports events to Denmark. Recently, this kind of representational interest has played an ever greater role in municipal support of elite sports, with talk of the "lighthouse effect" and "putting the municipality on the map".

The current focus of sports policy on the health aspects prompts the question of whether the area would not be more suitably located under health policy and administered by the Ministry of Health. This applies in particular to sport in municipal policy. A health policy location would, however, be difficult to unite with the policy's strong focus on elite sports, and would not harmonise with the close link emphasised in municipal policy between sport and 'comradeship'. Neither does the health aspect dominate in the actual motivations of sports participants to an extent which could justify such a political restructuring. The tension between sport's 'health' and 'cultural' aspects, as well as between sport's 'health' and social qualities, relates rather to a general tension between the utilitarian relationship of politics to sport, and sport's own existence as popular activity in civil society.

The universalist welfare ideals have had a powerful influence on the ideals of sport in Denmark and on the legislation governing it. Nonetheless, the level of sports participation in Denmark does not equal that of other countries with a similar economic level and similar welfare systems, even though the amount of public funding of sport in Denmark is greater and has a more universalist character than in these other countries. This indicates that the evolution in sports participation cannot be explained by reference to the involvement of the welfare state alone, but must be understood in the context of more general social changes. There appears, for example, to be a clear correlation between the equal participation of men and women in sports in Denmark and the relatively equal level of involvement of men and women in the Danish labour market.

Decentralisation

The final core characteristic of the Danish welfare society is decentralisation. Over the past 30 years, Danish welfare society has become more decentralised: many tasks, services and decisions have been decentralised a) from the state to the municipality and local community, b) from the municipal administration to the public institutions (public schools, kindergartens, etc.) and c) from professionals in the institutions to democratic user group boards (e.g. parents). Moreover, a change has occurred from rule-regulation (regulation by specific rules) to regulation by aim and economic instruments: less detailed laws (i.e. more freedom for the decentralised authorities and institutions to use different measures/instruments to reach their political aims), reduced state subsidies for the expenses of the municipalities and more general economic support from the state to the

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2 Minister for Cultural Affairs Brian Mikkelsen, 9.8.04, press release
3 This link has been documented in historical surveys: Mortensen 2004
municipality. Today, most of the public services are handled by the municipalities, which enjoy great autonomy. Among the tasks performed by the municipalities are the administration of social security benefits, social assistance, social medical care, children’s dental services, home health services, home nursing, domestic help, kindergartens, institutions and homes for the elderly, primary education, youth schools, leisure-time education, public libraries, the provision of support to cultural activities and sports clubs and the building and operation of sports grounds. The municipalities employ about three-quarters of all public manpower. Has this decentralisation influenced the sport system in Denmark?

Around 80% of the total public funding for sport is channelled by local authorities to the activities of local sports clubs. As far as central government is concerned, sport comes under the formal jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture, but the most significant law regarding sport - the Education Act – falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Culture employs only 2-4 civil servants to look after the state administration of sporting policy and to advise the minister, and the ministry has only around DKK 50 million at its disposal to fund new sporting initiatives, research, etc. Because of the extreme degree of decentralisation in the public funding of sport, there are major differences between the amounts that various different municipalities spend in this area, as well as in the number of sports facilities they possess, etc.

Conclusions and explanations of the Danish sports model

In conclusion I shall present a summary of the analysis presented in this paper and briefly discuss what can explain these characteristics. What is the main characteristics of Danish sport policy?

Firstly, the level of state subsidies for sport in Denmark is relatively high in comparison with the countries with whom Denmark is often compared. However, sport is distinct from the main areas of society for which the welfare state has taken responsibility – education, health and social services – inasmuch as the role of the public sector is limited to securing the framework for sporting activities, i.e. making facilities available and partially financing the activities, while the actual organisation of sport is left up to voluntary organisations and clubs.

Secondly, universalist and egalitarian principles may be traced in the most important sport legislation (the Adult Education Act), while welfare political goals and ideals characterise general sports policy ("sport for all" and "elite sports in a socially and societally responsible way").

Thirdly, sports policy has been dominated by the same close and relatively conflict-free co-operation between the state and sporting organisations, and between the municipalities and the sports clubs, that we also find in other areas of society. Over the years, this co-operation has acquired corporative features in the form of "contact committees" and "sport summit meetings" at national level, and "popular education committees" and "sports collaborations" which undertake administrative tasks at municipal level.

Fourthly, the sports clubs and sporting organisations enjoy relatively high autonomy, despite a relatively large degree of financial support from the state and municipalities. In this respect, sports policy in Denmark clearly contrasts with, especially, Norway, where the level of state control is greater. In Denmark, the "popular culture ideology" seems to have set its stamp on legislation, in
harmony with the relatively high level of autonomy enjoyed by the folk high schools, the free schools and in voluntary adult education.

Fifthly, the management and financial support of sport is characterised by a high degree of decentralisation, which we also find in the other welfare areas. From the 1980s on, however, a certain tendency towards centralisation could be detected, which has become reinforced since 2001.

Sixthly, there is a political consensus on sports policy in the same way that political consensus has existed towards all major welfare reforms in Denmark and the central principles of the Danish welfare model. At the same time, there also a large measure of agreement between the values and goals which guide the work of the sports clubs and organisations and the sporting goals and values promoted by the state and the municipalities. Recent surveys, however, indicate that the vast majority of the sports clubs are not willing to further instrumentalise sport in the form of greater emphasis on its social and health-related preventive value (Ibsen 2006 b).

What can explain these characteristics of Danish sport policy?

The first explanation is historical, in the sense that the legislation, institutions and legitimisations within this political field can be traced back to principles, institutions and legitimisations established several decades ago. Significant principles from the 1948 Football Pools Act and the 1968 Leisure Act are for example continued in the existing legislation. Despite the considerable changes which have occurred in sport, with much greater public participation, the growth of other forms of sport and exercise, different organisational forms, increased professionalisation and much greater commercialisation of parts of sport, only minor alterations have been made in sports policy. Perhaps the area of sports policy is characterised by greater inertia than is the case in other political fields? Over time, a number of particular interests become associated with the existing structures, and a number of institutional factors 'protect' a particular policy. This applies for example to the power allotted by the existing legislation and subsidies to particular organisations, and to the legitimacy associated with particular organisational ideals (the sports club as ideal).

The second explanation may be found in a blend of two key cultural and social characteristics of Danish society, namely 'the concept of popular culture' and 'the universalist welfare model'. The explanation of why the most important legislation for sport belongs under the Ministry of Education, as well as why the activities must in principle have a popular educational purpose, and why the municipality must respect the association's individual character (particularly its fundamental concept) is that large parts of Danish sport have previously been interwoven with the ideology and practice of popular culture, as institutionalised and organised in the free congregations, the co-operative movement, the free schools and folk high schools, the evening schools and the widely-branching association activities of the shooting and gymnastics clubs. Concepts such as 'the whole person' and 'living interaction', the emphasis on community and independence of the public sector, as well as a number of educational and organisational ideals came to exert a strong influence on cultural life, and can also be traced in the legislation.

This ideology of popular culture is mixed with the ideals and principles of the Danish welfare model as it developed from the beginning of the 1930s. The core of this model, which especially developed in the Nordic countries, consists of a) a large public sector which is involved in many aspects of society, b) universalist, egalitarian and redistributive welfare schemes, from which all citizens in principle can benefit irrespective of income, status or employment status (i.e. based on
citizenship rather than employment status, as is the case in, for example, Germany), c) close co-
operation – often including corporative features – between the state, business and voluntary sectors,
d) a high degree of decentralisation, and e) a high degree of political consensus concerning the most
important principles of this welfare model (Titmuss 1974, Esping-Andersen 1990, Rothstein 1998).
These principles came to influence policies in many areas of society. From the 1930s on, initiatives
were launched which in their totality comprised a kind of welfare culture. The health-related
("popular hygiene") aspects, popular educational aspects and to an increasing extent preventive
aspects came to influence the cultural measures. The concept of "culture for the people" came to
encompass more and more areas of life, from the Nature Conservancy Act to the holiday company
Dansk FolkeFerie, from parks to "sport for all", from the evening schools to the opening up of
access to the universities – while at the same time, the actual cultural struggle was subdued.

The sport policy in Denmark thus corresponds in general to the model of institutionalised welfare,
but both its management (relevant legislation and public administration) and its organisation
(production) differs in comparison with that of a number of other areas of society in the typical
institutionalised welfare state.

Firstly, legislative and political control of sport is not very prominent in Denmark. The kind of
general sports legislation that exists in a number of other countries has no Danish parallel. As
mentioned earlier, special legislation does exist for elite sports, setting out a number of precise
requirements for the receipt of public funds, but besides this, public funding of sporting activities
falls within the orbit of more generalised legislation governing leisure and cultural activities (since
1991, it has not been permitted to provide economic support to activities organised at municipal
level) and economic support for national voluntary organisations (the Pools and Lottery Act). Both
these acts are far more concerned with defining aims and frameworks than with specifying details,
and so it is to a large extent left up to the sports clubs and organisations to decide for themselves
how the money is to be used.

Secondly, it is typical of sport in Denmark that the public sector remains more or less uninvolved in
the organisation of sporting activities, if we disregard compulsory sport in primary schools and
various courses of education for young people. Sport is thus in the vanguard of a trend that we have
been able to trace in recent years, and which many people believe will come to characterise the
future development of the institutionalised welfare model, namely the transfer of the "production"
responsibility for welfare tasks from the public/political arena to private companies and voluntary
organisations, leaving the state to concentrate on (partly) financing these welfare services and on
setting out their goals and requirements.

The extent to which this mixture of "popular culture ideology" and "welfare ideology" has
influenced sports policy will be the subject of future analyses.
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