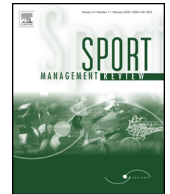




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The emergence of a new logic? The theorizing of a new practice in the highly institutionalized context of Swedish voluntary sport



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to contribute to the understanding of the emergence and change in institutional logics by analyzing the theorization (e.g., Greenwood, Suddaby, & Hinings, 2002) of a new and distinctly “different” practice in Swedish voluntary sport: drive-in sport. The article builds on data from 29 interviews with key actors involved in the organizing of drive-in sport in four municipalities. The findings show that two problems were constructed to legitimize drive-in sport: norm-breaking behavior displayed by youth during weekend nights, and organized sport’s failure to live up to a sport-for-all ideal. The findings also show that it is perceived that in order for drive-in sport to be the solution to both these problems, the activities need to be arranged in a particular way. The findings are discussed in relation to recent developments in Swedish organized sport as an institutional context. Additionally, the discussion puts forth the value of the theorization concept in terms of furthering our understanding of the social-constructionist interpretive processes that underpin the broader processes of change documented in previous sport-related studies of change in institutional logics.

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1. Introduction

Institutional logics, the socially constructed organizing principles for institutionalized practices in social systems (e.g., Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008), is a well-used concept in sport management research (e.g., Cousens & Slack, 2005; Gammelsæter, 2010; Nite, Singer, & Cunningham, 2013; O’Brien & Slack, 2003; O’Brien & Slack, 2004; Paramio-Salcines & Kitchin, 2013; Skirstad & Chelladurai, 2011; Southall, Nagel, Amis, & Southall, 2008; Southall, Southall, & Dwyer, 2009). However, as noted by Washington and Patterson (2011), the examination of institutional logics in sport has seldom focused on the mechanisms connected to change in logics. Based on their review of the use of institutional theory in sport-related research, the authors therefore urge for studies on the antecedents of shifts in logics. Furthermore, and, on a related note, Washington and Patterson call for studies on “the emergence, stability, or decline of sport related institutions” (p. 10). This study addresses both these topics by focusing on the initial and necessary stage in the emergence and change of institutional logics: the theorization of a new practice (e.g., Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012; Nigam & Ocasio, 2010).

Based on the conceptualization of institutional logics as having both a material and a symbolic element, the latter being essential to the emergence and change of logics, theorization denotes the process through which the symbolic constructions (i.e., systems of meaning) of a new practice are created (Thornton et al., 2012). In particular, theorization refers to the

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interpretive work that goes into legitimizing a new practice, thereby facilitating the spread of its use and, in the end, its institutionalization (e.g., [Strang & Meyer, 1993](#); [Strang & Soule, 1998](#); [Tolbert & Zucker, 1999](#)). The concept, therefore, connects to what [Washington and Patterson \(2011\)](#) as well as scholars in the general field of organization studies (e.g., [Hasselbladh & Kallinikos, 2000](#)) claim is a foundational, though often neglected, concern of institutional thinking: the social construction of meaning and the production, maintenance and change of institutions ([Greenwood, Suddaby, & Hinings, 2002](#)).

[Greenwood et al. \(2002\)](#) argue that the theorization of a new practice is especially acute in highly institutionalized settings, such as the centennial Swedish sport movement. Accordingly, this study focuses on the interpretive work connected to the emergence of organized spontaneous sport—drive-in sport—in Swedish voluntary sport. The activities provided by Swedish voluntary sport clubs (VSCs) are often described as being directed at the organizations' own members, led by voluntary leaders, and competitive in character (e.g., [Fahlén & Karp, 2010](#)). This is similar to many other countries, such as the UK ([Adams, 2011](#)), Denmark ([Ibsen & Seippel, 2010](#)), and Norway ([Skille, 2010](#)). In sharp contrast to this, drive-in sport activities are targeted at non-affiliated youth, led by remunerated leaders, and conceptualized as “undemanding” and “fun” (cf. [Smith & Waddington, 2004](#), for a treatment of similar initiatives in the UK). A typical drive-in sport session takes place in a pre-booked sport hall during a weekend night, and during the session youth are allowed to come and go as they wish, participating in, for example, soccer.

Arguably, in order to become legitimate, such a distinctly “different” idea as drive-in sport requires a large amount of interpretive work. The emergence of drive-in sport, therefore, lends itself to the examination of theorization. Drawing on data from 29 interviews with representatives of local authorities [LAs], Regional Sport Federations [RSFs] and VSCs in four Swedish municipalities, the purpose of this study is to contribute to the understanding of the emergence and change in institutional logics by analyzing the theorization of drive-in sport. [Strang and Meyer \(1993\)](#) and [Greenwood et al. \(2002\)](#) conceptualize theorization as involving two key tasks: the specification and legitimization of problems for which a new practice is the solution; and the elaboration and justification of the innovation. Building on this, this study aims to answer the following research questions: What problems are constructed to legitimize drive-in sport? How is drive-in sport elaborated and justified as a solution to these problems? In order to answer these questions, this article provides an outline of the conceptual framework guiding the study, a description of the Swedish sport system as the context in which the theorization of drive-in sport is situated, an account of the research methods employed, the findings, and, finally, a discussion. It should be noted at the outset that the purpose is to analyze processes which might lead to the emergence of a new logic in Swedish voluntary sport; not to show that a new logic has, in fact, emerged.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1. The institutional logics perspective

The introduction of the concept of institutional logics is most often credited to [Friedland and Alford \(1991\)](#). Subsequent work building on their ideas has brought forth an entirely new approach to institutional analysis, positing institutional logics as the meaning and content of institutions ([Thornton & Ocasio, 2008](#)). Institutions, in this context, are commonly understood as shared systems of meaning coupled with associated prescribed behavior patterns (e.g., [Scott, 2008](#)).

In their seminal article, [Friedland and Alford \(1991, p. 248\)](#) argued that each institution has “a central logic—a set of material practices and symbolic constructions—which constitutes its organizing principle.” Later on, some of the most frequent users of the concept, [Thornton and Ocasio \(1999, p. 804\)](#), defined institutional logics as “the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality.” Thus, connecting the perspective to the often-neglected social constructionist (e.g., [Berger & Luckmann, 1966](#)) and phenomenological (e.g., [Schütz, 1967](#)) roots of institutional analysis, a core assumption of the institutional logics perspective is that institutional logics have mutually constituting material (i.e., structures and practices) and symbolic elements (i.e., ideation and systems of meaning). The element in focus in this article—the symbolic—is important, since without it there is no possibility to theorize change ([Thornton et al., 2012](#)). This is because, as argued by [Strang and Meyer \(1993\)](#), practices cannot travel; only theorized models—the meaning of material practices—can.

2.2. Institutional logics in sport management research

In sport management research, two strands of research applying the institutional logics concept can be discerned. One of these strands explores the institutional logic perspective's conceptualization of society as an inter-institutional system (e.g., [Thornton et al., 2012](#)). This strand of research has demonstrated that the organizing of sport is indeed a context characterized by multiple, and at times contending, logics ([Gammelsæter, 2010](#); [Nite et al., 2013](#); [Skirstad & Chelladurai, 2011](#); [Southall et al., 2008, 2009](#)). However, given the focus of this study, a more informative line of work is the strand of research which focuses on the dynamics connected to change in logics ([Cousens & Slack, 2005](#); [O'Brien & Slack, 2003, 2004](#); [Paramio-Salcines & Kitchin, 2013](#); [Skirstad & Chelladurai, 2011](#)).¹ For example, in their “twin articles,” [O'Brien and Slack \(2003\)](#) analyzed

¹ It should be noted that [O'Brien and Slack \(2003, 2004\)](#) and [Cousens and Slack \(2005\)](#) respectively drew on [Bettis and Pralahad's \(1995\)](#) and [Scott et al.'s \(2000\)](#) concept of institutional logics. However, I believe that the results of these studies are applicable for the current study as well.

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